

# **On the Use of Guerrillas in Defense of Stateless Territory**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rothbard (1999) argues that morality and utility require a guerrilla defense of libertarian societies, an assessment shared by many libertarian thinkers. This paper considers whether guerrilla forces alone, wielding small arms and light weapons, could successfully defend anarcho-capitalist territory. Despite the romance that surrounds them, guerrilla wars are fought only out of necessity by relatively weak powers. They are protracted wars of attrition fought on one's own territory and as such are highly destructive of defending homelands. If the enemy does not distinguish between military and civilian targets, as is likely to be the case in a war with anarchist citizen-soldiers, defeat is almost assured. Guerrillas are most effective as complements to regular forces rather than as substitutes, and a strictly guerrilla defense should be employed only as a last resort in the event of a collapse of the regular army or an inability to raise an army.

A major issue in anarcho-capitalist thought concerns the provision of effective national defense in a voluntary setting. Worldwide, states have monopolized national defense, raising standing armies which they fund via taxation, monetary expansion, and plunder. Often, these armies are staffed through conscription and commanded by sociopaths with imperialistic designs; the state refers to its war apparatus as “defense” only as an Orwellian euphemism. Yet most economists continue to hold that state provision of public goods such as defense is necessary because voluntary provision results in a less than efficient level of output due to free-riding. Since the nonaggression principle precludes statist methods, a growing body of literature considers whether a voluntary society can produce an effective national defense force and what form such a force would assume.

Some anarchists believe that a professional standing army is essential. However, generating a level of revenue sufficient to raise one presents a challenge in the absence of taxes and inflation. A consensus has emerged that in a voluntary society, insurance companies would be well-positioned and incentivized to provide national defense. Tannehill and Tannehill (1970) speculate that insurance companies would sell policies indemnifying clients for losses due to foreign aggression. Since they would then have a significant financial interest in reducing such losses, the fees generated from such policies could be used to provide defense services directly, or to outsource this responsibility to private defense companies. Rothbard (2006[1970]) subscribes to this view, as does Hoppe (2003) and Murphy (2010). Yet this funding mechanism may be insufficient to build an army. Since national defense is largely territorial defense, the potential for free-riding will still exist. This is especially true for large populations where coordination costs impede the arrangement of unanimous contracts, as Friedman (2014) notes. Additionally, if the anarchist society is relatively poor or has a small population, then even in the absence of free-

riding no method of social organization will successfully raise a modernized, conventional army. Lastly, in a debate hosted by the Tom Woods Show, Todd Lewis challenges Robert Murphy on the notion of insurance company-provided national defense, arguing that insurance markets are fundamentally incapable of working in the manner proposed by anarchists (Woods, 2017).

Anarchists also consider the possibility that guerrillas alone could effectively defend a free society. Rothbard (1999, 24) argues that “guerrilla war would be the libertarian way to fight a war... [as well as] enormously more effective,” citing the American colonists’ victory at Concord in 1775. A guerrilla war, he writes, rests on “individual responsibility, mobility, and surprise,” is less expensive than conventional war, relies on part-time soldiers instead of professional ones, and entails “virtually no central bureaucracy or centralized confiscation of property to finance the war.”<sup>1</sup> He concludes, “Both moral principle and utility therefore require the choice of a guerrilla war” (ibid, 25). Rothbard (1999, 443) continues,

As a people’s war, [the American Revolutionary War] was victorious to the extent that guerrilla strategy and tactics were employed against the far more heavily armed and better trained British army—a strategy and tactics of protracted conflict resting precisely on mass support. The tactics of harassment, mobility, surprise, and the wearing down and cutting off of supplies finally resulted in the encirclement of the enemy... As it was, all their victories were based on guerrilla-type concepts of guerrilla war, while all the American defeats came from stubborn insistence by such men as Washington on a conventional European type of open military confrontation.

He echoes this sentiment in Rothbard (2006, 337-338), where he writes that guerrillas must “spare civilians from harm and pinpoint their activities solely against the State apparatus and its armed forces,” relying on “voluntary methods to staff and finance their struggle.”

Rothbard is not alone. Hulsmann (2003, 395-396) argues that “[o]f all forms of military organization, [guerrilla warfare] best harmonizes with the principles of civil society” given its

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<sup>1</sup> Guerillas tend to be relatively small and decentralized paramilitary units that rely on mobility, elusiveness, and surprise (Department of the Army, 1961, 8).

voluntary and decentralized organization; thus it is “particularly well-suited to prepare the advent of a purely voluntary society.” In his essay “What Must Be Done,” Hoppe (1997) endorses guerrilla warfare, and one suspects that he does not merely speak metaphorically.<sup>2</sup> Hummel (2001) extols the “volunteer militia” not only as the system of national defense most consistent with libertarian principles, but also as a more effective one than state-run militias. Friedman (2014) similarly recommends a volunteer militia whose members are responsible for their own weapons and training.

Some anarchists call for guerrillas only as complements to conventional forces.<sup>3</sup> Long (2007, 156-160) calls for a three-pronged defense: “a regular high-tech military defense ...an armed citizenry, organized into decentralized militia... [and] organized nonviolent resistance.” As he warns, heavy reliance on a militia means having to fight wars on your own territory, which Newhard (2017; 2018) also strongly advises against. Like Long, Murphy (2017, 223) foresees guerrillas, saboteurs, and propagandists emerging as “sole proprietors” to contribute to the war effort, possibly alongside regular forces, although Murphy (2018) suspects that “large standing armies [will] not be a profit-maximizing outcome... I don’t think there would be standing armies.”

Following Rothbard, libertarians often invoke the successes of guerrilla warfare in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War where pitched battles in conventional formations sometimes brought defeat to the rebels. Murphy (2017, 223) laments that guerrilla tactics were not embraced to a greater extent by the Confederacy in the Civil War. Stromberg (2003, 225-226) criticizes the Southern strategy of “offensive defense,” noting instead the success that guerrilla tactics brought

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<sup>2</sup> Hoppe writes, “One’s strategy must now be that of a bottom-up revolution. And instead of one battle, on a single front, a liberal-libertarian revolution will now have to involve many battles on many fronts. That is, we want guerrilla warfare rather than conventional warfare.”

<sup>3</sup> Irregular soldiers and guerrilla tactics are often complementary, but not necessarily so. Professional soldiers can adopt guerrilla tactics, and have transitioned to this mode of warfare since the Korean War, while irregular soldiers can mimic conventional tactics, as at Lexington in 1775.

to such Confederate raiders as John Hunt Morgan, John S. Mosby, William T. Anderson, and William Quantrill. He also criticizes the Confederates for taking the fight into enemy territory instead of effectively defending their homeland (ibid, 225). Hummel (1996) is likewise critical of the Southern strategy. Yet libertarians need not look only to the past. Although soldiers and civilians were more evenly matched in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and elsewhere demonstrate that even modern guerrillas can frustrate the greatest military powers.

There are additional practical concerns that should cause anarchists to consider the effectiveness of a guerrilla defense. One is the risk that a standing army could turn against the people, a concern shared by some of America's founders.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a conventional army can be overwhelmed and annihilated, rendering guerrillas the last line of defense. Lastly, anarchists may have to rely on guerrilla tactics out of necessity if their economy is small and a modern standing army is beyond their budget constraint.<sup>5</sup> Since modern weapons require significant financial capital, an underdeveloped economy will restrict anarchists to the use of small arms and light weapons<sup>6</sup>, some of which may even have to be provided by a sponsor.

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<sup>4</sup> In the Virginia Declaration of Rights of June 12, 1776, George Mason writes, "standing armies, in times of peace, should be avoided, as dangerous to liberty." The matter of standing armies is discussed throughout in the Federalist Papers and the Anti-Federalist Papers; Brutus (1986 [1788], 287), thought to be the pen name of Robert Yates, writes "[t]he liberties of a people are in danger from a large standing army;" whereas James Wilson (1986 [1777], 185) observes, "I do not know a nation in the world which has not found it necessary and useful to maintain the appearance of strength in a season of the most profound tranquility... no man who regards the dignity and safety of his country can deny the necessity of a military force."

<sup>5</sup> A conventional army is more expensive. A labor-intensive army merely requires that a large number from the population is mobilized, whereas a capital-intensive force requires stockpiling a diverse collection of weapons which may soon be obsolete (Parker, 2005b, 7). The cost of weapons rose significantly after the development of gunpowder, and "the cost of military hardware rose to such a degree that only a centralized state could afford to buy" (Parker, 2005b, 7). Additionally, the poorer the country, the more difficult absorbing the costs of modern war becomes, as was the case in WWI where France devoted twice the proportion of its budget on the war as Germany yet spent only half as much (Parker, 2005b, 8).

<sup>6</sup> Small arms include pistols, shotguns, rifles, machine guns, submachine guns, and so on. Many are readily available in the United States in semiautomatic configurations in calibers up to .50. Light weapons include heavy machine guns, some anti-aircraft guns and mortars, grenade launchers, shoulder-launched missiles, and portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems. In guerilla operations, these are manned by relatively small units traveling in lightly armored or unarmored vehicles. As we have seen in Syria, rebel units will likely travel in pickup trucks, SUVs, and Jeeps with missiles or machine guns affixed. Cannons and howitzers would be valuable but will be more difficult to acquire, as will more robust anti-aircraft systems and radar, which will also be vulnerable to attack from conventional forces.

Whatever the relevant constraints, this paper analyzes the efficacy of defending stateless territory with guerilla forces alone. Despite libertarian optimism, the prospect is bleak. Guerrilla warfare necessarily rules out taking the conflict to enemy territory to spare one's own homeland from destruction and precludes achieving quick and decisive victory through massive firepower. Instead, protracted wars of physical and psychological attrition are fought at home and civilians are exposed to violent reprisals by a frustrated enemy. Guerrilla wars cause the tremendous loss of life and property at home and a precipitous decline in living standards for survivors. Guerrillas are most effective as complements to regular armed forces and standing alone, they have a high rate of defeat against conventional armies. Therefore, a strictly guerrilla defense should be employed only out of necessity, and guerrillas should otherwise serve only as complements to regular forces.

In the following section, I briefly summarize the theory of guerrilla tactics. In sections 2 through 5, I address conventional and guerrilla tactics in the American Civil War. Libertarians who advocate for a strictly guerrilla defense of free societies are chiefly informed by the experience in that war. I retort that they take the wrong lessons from the war and overstate the effectiveness of guerrillas. Sections 2 and 3 briefly recount the conventional campaigns and draw several conclusions, respectively. Sections 4 and 5 do the same for the guerrilla campaign. In section 6 I address the merits of guerrilla warfare in the modern era as well as the threats posed by counter-insurgency campaigns. I conclude with a discussion of the future of guerrilla warfare in section 7.

## **1. Guerrilla Warfare**

Guerrilla warfare originated in ancient times when small tribes of nomadic warriors relied on ambush, mobility, and dispersal in combat. Lacking the wealth to support professional soldiers, a large proportion of tribesmen participated in battle.<sup>7</sup> This continued with the emergence of

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<sup>7</sup> The military advantages of nomads included their superior ability to survive in harsh environments, their higher proportion of population mobilization, and leadership positions accruing to those with skill and experience rather than

agrarian societies. For example, Greek hoplites were fulltime farmers and part-time soldiers, but “turned out so regularly for battle in their phalanxes that they perfected a high degree of combat effectiveness” (Parker, 2005b, 2). Landowners provided their own armor and weapons including shin protectors, helmet, breastplate, shield, spear, and sword (ibid, 19). They could not afford to abandon their farms for long, but adopting a raiding strategy, this system sufficed due to the brevity of conflicts. Yet following the invasion and defeat of Greece by Persia, the remaining city-states of Sparta and Athens fielded professional hoplites (ibid, 25).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, guerrilla tactics “were seen as symptoms of inferiority, the only possible response of undeveloped societies to the overwhelming power of European armies, difficult and exhausting to deal with, but a nuisance rather than a real threat” (Townshend, 2001, 384). Nevertheless, famed military theorist Carl von Clausewitz devotes a chapter to the subject (*Volksbewaffnung*, “arming the people”) in his magnum opus *On War*. Clausewitz (2000[1832], 777-779) likens “people’s war” to a “slow, gradual fire,” a “nebulous vapor,” and a mist that should “form threatening clouds from which now and again a formidable flash of lightning may burst forth.” In his view, such fighters are auxiliary but vital.<sup>8</sup>

Guerrilla warfare inverts conventional military wisdom. Conventional armies concentrate forces to pursue a quick and decisive victory, but guerrillas disperse to avoid direct confrontation with their more powerful enemies (Townshend, 2001, 383). They adopt the tactics of ambush and sabotage, a necessarily slow and diffuse process. Guerrillas “wear down and inflict casualties upon

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political considerations; Their many successes against powerful empires sheds light on how the weak can defeat the strong in war (Boot, 2013, 10-11).

<sup>8</sup> In response to an expected German invasion in WWII, Britain raised the Local Defence Volunteers, later called the Home Guard. It included 1.5 million people who for various reasons were unable to serve in the regular forces who were provided by the state with armbands and surplus rifles; they supplemented their arms with private firearms and formed themselves into over 1000 battalions (MacKenzie, 2001, 411). “Military authority was gradually imposed on the force” and they were provided with better weapons and training (Ibid); ultimately, their greatest impact was in freeing up 100,000 regulars by manning anti-aircraft sites. Similarly, in 1944 the Volkssturm was created as a home guard in Germany, made up of conscripted males who were not already in the Wehrmacht.

the enemy, cause damage to supplies and utilities, and hinder and delay enemy operations” (FM 31-21, 105). They defeat the enemy through physical or psychological attrition by accumulating many small victories over time (Jones, 2001, 681).<sup>9</sup> In the early stages of a guerrilla campaign, “Activity is generally limited to information-gathering, recruiting, training, organization, and small-scale operations” (FM 31-21, 1961, 11). Guerillas are free to conduct these operations at will, choosing the time and manner of their attacks, ranging from ambushing road columns or attacking small detachments to engaging in sabotage (Luttwak, 2001, 153).<sup>10</sup> Being of inferior strength, guerrillas direct their energy toward “small, isolated garrisons and weakly guarded supply depots and convoys... [and] unprotected logistic installations, like bridges; they can then retreat quickly and blend in with civilians” (Jones, 2001, 680). Invaders facing guerrillas must engage in “point defense” of vulnerable, high-value assets susceptible to raids with numerous small detachments (Luttwak, 2001, 154).

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<sup>9</sup> There are two main methods for guerrillas to impose their will on the enemy: a strategy of annihilation and a strategy of erosion. The latter targets the will of the enemy (MCDP 1, 24-25) and describes guerrilla resistance. There is a delicate balance between the concentration and dispersal of forces. Concentration allows them to focus combat power against the enemy, but exposes them to enemy fire (See MCDP-1, 10); “A guerrilla movement that puts safety first will soon wither. Its strategy must always aim to produce the enemy’s increasing overstretch, physical and moral” (Hart, 1991, 366). Aside from guerrilla tactics, the resistance movement might distribute propaganda, instigate factory slow-gos or noncooperation, gather intelligence, disable or interrupt enemy communications, sabotage railways, and impede troop movements, although these tend to carry a high toll (see Caddick-Adams, 2001, 771-772).

<sup>10</sup> The emphasis is on “interdiction of lines of communication, key areas, industrial facilities, and military targets” (FM 31-21, 1961, 106). This is more easily attained in difficult terrain that restrict a conventional enemy (ibid, 104). Offense can entail raids and ambushes, mining and sniping. Guerrillas must maintain their momentum through continuous action since static intervals give the enemy needed rest and an opportunity to win hearts and minds (Hart 1991, 365). Dispersion is essential so that no large target is presented to the enemy. Additionally, “to best cope with the uncertainty, disorder, and fluidity of combat, command and control must be decentralized” (MCDP-1, 1997, 78). The process of target selection is determined by comparing criticality, vulnerability, accessibility, and recuperability (FM31-21, 1961, 111-114). High value targets include railroads and highways (including bridges and tunnels), waterways (including dams and electrical installations), airports, communication systems, power systems, water supply systems, and fuel supply systems (ibid, 132-137). Rather than seizing and holding terrain, guerrillas seek temporary area superiority through surprise, maneuver, and mass (ibid, 103) in attacks of short duration. Operations consist of centralized planning and decentralized execution (ibid, 108). Raids are surprise attacks on enemy assets characterized by stealth, brief violence, rapid disengagement and swift withdrawal (ibid, 114) to destroy, capture, or kill personnel.



Despite their weaknesses, guerrillas possess several advantages. General T.E. Lawrence “of Arabia” believed imperialist powers were “eminently defeatable” by guerrillas given appropriate “mobility, security, time, and doctrine” coupled with their natural advantage in intelligence gathering due to fighting at home (Townshend, 1997, 161). He argued that time was on the side of the guerillas (Townshend, 2001, 384). Some disadvantages accrue to the enemy: longer supply lines, a hostile population, vulnerability to raids, and eventual exhaustion (Stromberg, 2003, 223). Guerrillas have no permanent installations to defend and thus have greater freedom of action, as opposed to conventional forces which must defend their bases, communication lines, economic assets, government buildings, and infrastructure (Kilcullen, 2010, 8-9).<sup>11</sup> Much modern weapons technology is also well-suited for fighting a guerrilla war. According to Townshend (2001, 385), guerilla warfare in the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals that

Technological development favored the guerrilla rather than the counter-insurgent forces. The whole tendency of modern weapons was to make firepower more portable. The grenade launcher, for instance, transformed the striking power of small fighting groups; plastic explosives like Semtex were a similar boon. As against these, the stupendous increase in the destructiveness of air power has been of limited utility in guerrilla war. The USA was able to inflict appalling collateral damage on Vietnam, but not to inflict a decisive check on the Vietcong.

However, guerrillas also see some disadvantages. Although mountains and forests facilitate security and surprise attacks, supply routes are hampered and key objectives are more distant (Hart, 1991, 366).<sup>12</sup> Dispersion, which undermines combat strength, is essential due to an inability to compete with the superior strength of the enemy’s large conventional formations. Larger groupings

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<sup>11</sup> Townshend (2001, 385) cites the success of Zionist military groups that fought the British government in Palestine in the 1940s and the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters in Cyprus in the 1950s as evidence that “declining imperial regimes could be persuaded to quit by relatively small threats.”

<sup>12</sup> Galula (2006, 23) argues that a country isolated by natural barriers like sea or desert, or hostile neighbors, is favorable to counterinsurgents; size, configuration, terrain, and climate also play a role, with mountains, swamps, and jungles more favorable for guerrillas. Longer international borders and a more dispersed population also aid the guerrilla cause (Ibid, 24). “Because they provide suitable areas for the security of operations, mountains, swamps, large forests or jungles nurture over or guerilla type resistance,” as opposed to cities or flat plains which are more conducive to underground resistance (FM 31-21, 1961).

could strike against small detachments, but this also makes them more vulnerable to attack (Luttwak, 2001, 155). Guerrillas often leave valuable areas and assets unguarded (see Galula, 2006, 10). Guerrillas also require a secure base for rest and recuperation, a place for retreat, and a source for food, fuel, and ammunition so that the search for resupplies need not dominate their missions (Jones, 2001, 680-681).<sup>13</sup> It is also argued that guerrillas must have the support of the masses (Hart, 1991, 367).<sup>14</sup> Favorable public opinion is an important pillar of guerrilla warfare, one which the anarchists will presumably enjoy in their own lands.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps their supreme weakness is that guerrillas are highly exposed to reprisals against the civilian population; “their emotional tie to the civilian population from which they derive is a potential weakness, which ruthless occupation forces can exploit in their own relational-maneuver response,” leading guerrillas to refrain from assassinations, raids, ambushes, and other effective guerrilla activity (Luttwak, 2001, 153).<sup>16</sup> Their freedom of action depends on what kind of enemy they face, on whether they can rely on his self-restraint or instead face a more aggressive power that engages in violent reprisals against civilians, including the guerrillas’ friends and families. In the conflict that gave guerrilla warfare its name, resistance to French occupation in the Peninsular

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<sup>13</sup> Bases also provide organization and supplies and more people. In Vietnam war, Vietminh it was North Vietnam. In war in Afghanistan it is Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden was found and assassinated in 2011. Algeria, FLN use Morocco and Tunisia as a rear base (Melnik, 1964, 124).

<sup>14</sup> Such protracted wars rely on tremendous national spirit to carry on (Townshend, 1997, 156). Galula (2006, 11-16) writes that prerequisites for success includes a cause that rallies popular support. Guerrillas rely on the surrounding civilian population for security and stealth and requires their support. Thus, the importance of propaganda and routine attempts by governments to label them as terrorists either way the distinction between combatants and civilian is eroded, exposing the population to “formless and uncontrolled violence (Townshend, 1997, 169).

<sup>15</sup> Absent mass support for the movement, guerillas seem to devolve into terrorists, as with the PLO and the IRA in the 1970s. This strategy is adopted to prevent public opposition and deny information to occupying forces (Townshend, 2001, 386) including assassination of traitors and spies (Parker, 2005a, 433). IRA Arson, bombings, and assassinations of police and civil servants Civilians were caught up in the middle, targeted by both sides. Boot 258 Guerrilla movements that fall back on terrorism are more likely to end quickly (Connable and Libicki, 2010, 99).

<sup>16</sup> “When each guerrilla assassination results in the execution of several innocent civilians held hostage for just that purpose; when each successful ambush is followed by the annihilation of the nearest village; and when each raid on a headquarters or depot is followed by massacres, not many guerrillas will feel free to ambush, assassinate, and raid whenever opportunity offers,” (Luttwak, 2001, 153).

War resulted in massacres of Spanish and Portuguese civilians. The reprisals of German forces in World War Two rendered impotent guerrilla resistance to the German occupation in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Greece (Luttwak, 2001, 153). In the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet army bombed nearby villages in response to insurgent attacks and rounded up and executed fighting-age men; over time, areas with insurgent activity were depopulated as civilians moved to Pakistan and Iran, eroding the guerrillas' vital base of support (ibid, 156).<sup>17</sup>

For all their weaknesses, irregular forces need not be a majority of the population to achieve their objectives. Only 10% of the Hutu male population over age 13—about 50,000 people—massacred up to one million Tutsis in Rwanda; similarly, irregular forces in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia were relatively small and few in number but terrorized a disproportionately large number of people; the Tigers were about 1000 strong with a core group of 200 men, yet may have murdered thousands and enjoyed significant plunder (Parker, 2005b, 432). The National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) who sought to liberate Cyprus from British rule had 1,250 members at its peak but was supported by the government of Greece with arms, funding, and propaganda.<sup>18</sup> They faced 40,000 British personnel (Townshend, 2001, 385).<sup>19</sup>

Overall, guerrillas have worse than even odds of achieving victory. Over a 200-year period, the weaker actor in asymmetric conflicts were victorious only 30% of the time but won with

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<sup>17</sup> Weaknesses of the Mujahideen included ingroup fighting, lack of unified leadership and strategic planning, limited communications and limited firepower (U.S. Army, 1989, 6).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Dach (1965, 90) calls for the securing of funds through counterfeiting, laundering, recruiting bank and postal employees to help steal funds, and raids on enemy resources. In a libertarian cause, only the last is permissible. Otherwise, charity including volunteering and providing own weapons, charity of rich who supply more expensive weapons, fees or donations. Some guerrilla groups like Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia generate income from drug activity, kidnappings, and extortion, generating revenue to establish pipelines for heavy machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and ammunition (Rabasa and Chalk, 2001, 32-35). In Afghanistan, insurgents received support from external states like Pakistan, and drug activity as a major source of opium poppy (Jones, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> The Battle of Thermopylae shows what a greatly outnumbered force is capable of with discipline, strategy, and favorable terrain (see Herodotus, 2003, 487-497).

increasing frequency over the years (Arreguin-Toft, 2001, 96). It is thus generally not advisable that a defending power rely on guerrillas alone if they have other options. Townshend (1997, 157) writes, “Irregulars could weaken but not decisively defeat a strong and determined enemy; to achieve victory they must act as auxiliaries to conventional forces.” Guerrilla warfare also tends to be protracted. A brief survey by Singh and Mei (1971, 94-95) find an average length of 7.8 years, including the 22-year conflict in China from 1927-1949. That is a long time to be at the mercy of an imperialist power especially when food supplies are disrupted.

A great deal of the violence of the American Civil War took the form of guerrilla warfare, a lesser-known but extremely brutal side of the war. Since libertarians invoke the Revolutionary War and Civil War in support of guerrilla warfare, it is worth revisiting the historical record in depth. In the next four sections, I address the flawed libertarian mythology surrounding the Civil War, arguing that the guerrilla campaign was extremely costly and largely ineffective. There was no stopping the Union war of attrition with guerrillas alone, and in principle it was not a strategic error for the South either to raise a conventional army or to invade the North.

## **2. The Confederate Regular Army**

Libertarians are highly critical of the Confederacy’s conventional campaign in the Civil War. Murphy (2017, 223) decries the “foolishness of the Confederate forces in the Civil War, which surely could have lasted much longer by relying on guerrilla tactics... but instead marched their own (outnumbered) men into Union cannons.” Hummel (1996, 178-179) argues that a strictly defensive war could exploit the South’s “high morale, knowledge of the terrain, and interior lines” and “would have entailed leaving the bulk of Southern manpower scattered about in guerrilla units.” Stromberg (2003, 225) criticizes the Southern strategy of “offensive defense,” in which the South organized large regular forces to meet the Union armies directly and invade the North. He

writes that this conventional strategy “likely sacrificed natural Southern advantages... [such as] a large interior, favorable terrain, a population familiar with firearms able to live off the land, existing militia infrastructure, and popular support.”<sup>20</sup> Below, I challenge the prevailing libertarian views that the conventional campaign was misguided, that invading the North was a mistake, and that a guerrilla campaign alone could have prevented the destruction and defeat of the South.

Following the election of President Abraham Lincoln, South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 20, 1860. Within two months, several Southern states joined the rebellion and the Confederate States of America (CSA) was founded. The war formally commenced in Charleston on April 12, 1861 when Lincoln attempted to provision Fort Sumter, leading Confederate General Pierre Beauregard to open fire with cannons (see Dilozenzo, 2003, 118-122). With no fatalities on either side, the South captured the fort. Lincoln immediately raised an army of 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion. This act of war provoked several more states to join the Confederacy. Realizing that the Confederacy was too large to bring to submission through occupation, Lincoln implemented the Anaconda Plan devised by General-in-Chief Winfield Scott. He intended to strangle the South by seizing control of the Mississippi River and imposing a naval blockade from Texas to Virginia; within a year, higher prices and shortages resulted (Thornton and Ekelund, 2004, 29). The Confederacy responded to the blockade with an embargo of “King Cotton,” hoping to harm textile workers in the North and in Europe and draw the European powers into the war. Since Anaconda alone would take years to succeed, Lincoln also planned to invade.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Reid (2001, 38) also writes, “the terrain favored the tactical defensive in the two major theatres, Virginia and Georgia, and the war had demonstrated that the defensive was growing in potency.”

<sup>21</sup> Great Britain and France sympathized with the South but did not want to enter the war without evidence that the South could win on its own effort, “and that meant winning a battle on northern soil” (Reid, 2001, 37). The North had a significant advantage in population size and industry; Massachusetts and Pennsylvania alone had more industrial output than entire Confederacy (Reid, 2001, 35). Reid (2001, 37) identifies three central theaters of operations: western Tennessee and Mississippi, for control of the Mississippi basin; eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, with a focus on Chattanooga; and northern Virginia, home of the CSA capital city of Richmond; with a particular emphasis on railway junctions in all three.

Excluding the ideologically-divided border states, the Union held a massive numerical superiority with over 19 million people versus 9 million in the South, of which 3.5 million were slaves; by 1865, half of the military-aged white men in the North will have fought in the war versus 80% of them in the South (Hummel, 1996, 177). The Union also boasted a larger economy, with 90% of the country's manufacturing output coming from the Northern states in 1860; this "was particularly pronounced in key war-related sectors, such as textiles, boots and shoes, iron, and firearms," and the North produced only 50% of the country's corn but 80% of its wheat (Gallman, 1999, 136). Northerners owned 75% of the material wealth in the US, and their per capita income was higher (Hummel, 1996, 177). The North's industrial superiority allowed it to supply its armies with the private sector while the South turned to establishing nationalized factories, its relatively meager economic position exacerbated by the Northern blockade. The North was able to fund the war with taxes and bond sales, whereas the South, with an inferior financial market, relied heavily on monetary expansion, harming the economy and provoking food riots.

By the summer of 1861, the Union raised an army of 300,000; the Confederacy, 200,000. In the erupting war, the Confederacy had several advantages, identified by Hattaway and Rafuse (1999, 129):

To win, the North had to conquer vast territories and break the will of the Southern people. Furthermore, the railroads that made it possible to supply the large military forces it would take to occupy and conquer the South restricted the strategic flexibility of Union commanders. Finally, Southern armies enjoyed the advantage of operating in sympathetic and supportive territory.

Expecting a short war, the Union army invaded Northern Virginia in July, 1861 seeking to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. Instead, it suffered a defeat at the First Battle of Manassas and retreated to Washington. A Union program of reorganization and training followed before advancing on the South again in the spring of 1862, at which time several successful attacks were

carried out along the Carolina coast. Pushing westward, Nashville fell to the Union in February followed by New Orleans in April and Memphis in June. The invaders harassed Southerners, confiscated and destroyed property, and often made enemies of otherwise neutral or loyalist Southern civilians.

In the Revolutionary War, General Washington had been able to adopt a Fabian strategy due to the lack of an indispensable political or commercial center to defend. According to Hattaway and Rafuse (1999, 131), this would not work against the Union: “The location of the Confederacy’s small industrial base and vital agricultural areas in the upper South” required defending, and allowing Union armies to march across the South at will would have tested the widespread belief “that as a point of honor the Confederacy should defend every inch of its soil.” Nor was a pure defensive posture an option: Generals Lee and Jackson “recognized that if the Confederacy remained wholly on the defensive and continued to concede the strategic initiative, it would inevitably be crushed by superior numbers,” and so “decided to seize the initiative by assuming the strategic and tactical offensive” (ibid). According to Hattaway and Rafuse (1999, 131),

It has been argued that Lee’s aggressive strategy led him into tactical blunders and high casualties that bled the Confederacy white. Clearly, in retrospect, the ultimate objective of an offensive strategy, the destruction of the opposing army in battle, was a practical impossibility given the size and firepower of Civil War armies. Yet Lee recognized that that if the South could only frustrate Northern military operations until the 1864 elections, the Northern public might replace the Lincoln administration with one more amenable to Southern independence.

In Lee’s first three months of command, he led several counter-offenses, with victories shifting the battle from Richmond to the outskirts of Washington. After the Confederate victory at Second Manassas in August 1862, Lee crossed the Potomac River into Maryland, hoping to feed his army there instead of in Virginia, recruit men from Maryland for the Army of Northern Virginia, and win a decisive victory over the Union on its own soil (Hattaway and Rafuse, 1999,

131). Such a victory, Lee hoped, could bring Europe into the war or even “strike a knockout blow that would force the Lincoln administration to sue for peace” (McPherson, 1999, 32). On September 17, the Battle of Antietam took place which remains the bloodiest day ever on American soil. It was a strategic victory for the Union in causing Lee to abandon his invasion and retreat to Virginia. After this, “The war in the east returned to a state of stalemate, with the two armies engaging in a war of maneuver that produced no major results” (ibid, 133). By late 1862, the Army of the Potomac fortified Washington, D.C. and otherwise harassed Lee’s army which prevented him from sending detachments out west to support Confederate armies there.

Another Union push to take Richmond culminated in the Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia in December. On the fifth day, the Union withdrew from yet another failed invasion after suffering over 12,000 killed, wounded, or missing through 14 frontal assaults versus over 5,000 casualties for the victorious Confederates. “We might as well have tried to take hell,” remarked one Union soldier. Yet another Union push into Virginia resulted in the Battle of Chancellorsville in May, 1863, another Confederate victory despite Lee being outnumbered more than two to one. According to Reid (2001, 38), the confederate victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville “almost brought Lincoln to knees.” After the latter victory, Lee argues that the situation could be best redeemed by invading the North rather than by relieving Vicksburg (Bicheno, 2001b, 361). This time, Lee invades Pennsylvania, leading to the Battle of Gettysburg in July, 1863. Still seeking a decisive victory, Lee attacks the Union army but suffers severe losses and is repelled and returns to Virginia. Although both sides were almost evenly matched, the Confederates lost about 40% of their forces to the Union’s 25% (ibid). One day later, Vicksburg falls to Grant’s army, splitting the Confederacy in two. Meanwhile, the Union Army of the Cumberland under Gen. William S. Rosecrans captures East Tennessee in August before pushing into Georgia by way



of Chattanooga. A victory by the Confederate Army of Tennessee at Chickamauga in September under Gen. Braxton Bragg pins Rosecrans down in Chattanooga, but the siege ends in November when Grant's army arrives.

With Lee countering Grant's moves, the Union adopts a strategy of attrition (see Hattaway and Rafuse, 1999, 133; Reid, 2001, 38). In the spring of 1864, the Army of the Potomac led by Grant commences its 6<sup>th</sup> campaign into Northern Virginia. He crosses the James River in June, setting out to bypass Richmond and instead capture Petersburg and the railroads. In thrust after thrust, numerous soldiers die. Simultaneously, the Union marches on Atlanta under General Sherman, reaching the outskirts in July 1864. Confederate General Johnston pursues a Fabian strategy against Sherman, preferring to protect the existence of the army over defending territory, but accomplishes little. He is replaced by General Hood on July 9 for his constant retreats. Hood then attacks Sherman's supply lines north of the city, hoping to draw Sherman in pursuit and fight him on favorable ground. Nonetheless, Atlanta falls to the Union in September.

Realizing that he lacks the resources to simultaneously chase the Confederate army, garrison territory, and defend his supply lines, Sherman instead wages total war against civilians, declaring that "We are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war, as well as their organized armies (Hummel, 1996, 276). He commences "large-scale raids using army-sized forces," realizing that "Southern civilians and their resources were as important as Southern armies in sustaining the rebellion" (Hattaway and Rafuse, 1999, 134). His army destroys what it cannot confiscate, asserting that "the utter destruction of its roads, houses and people will cripple their military resources" (Hummel, 1996, 277). He burns Atlanta to the ground and then commences a scorched earth campaign in his March to the Sea, cutting a path of destruction sixty miles wide from Atlanta to Savannah,

encountering little resistance as he burns homes, confiscates or destroys food and livestock, destroys rails, rapes women, and tramples fields. Afterwards, Sherman turns north towards Columbia, stating that the army desired “to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina,” while Grant meanwhile orders that the Shenandoah Valley be ravaged (Hummel, 1996, 281).

During Sherman’s March to the Sea the Confederate Army of Tennessee under Hood moves north into Tennessee instead of following Sherman and is defeated by the Union Army of the Cumberland in Nashville in December. The diminished Confederate Army of Tennessee is rebuilt and reorganized as part of the new Army of the South under Johnston which marches east in early 1865 to oppose Sherman in the Carolinas. Shortly after, Grant captures Lee’s supply line in the Battle of Five Forks on April 1, 1865. Richmond is evacuated and captured by the Union when Lee leaves to unite with Johnston’s army, but Lee surrenders at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. Johnston follows suit days later.

### **3. Lessons from the Conventional Campaign**

Some important lessons emerge from the conventional war described above. Although I do not endorse such tactics as marching conventional formations of men into cannons and muskets such as in the costly frontal assault of Pickett’s Charge, the strategy of defending Southern territory and invading Northern territory with regular armies was sound given the circumstances. It would have been a very different war if the South succeeded in taking Washington and arresting Lincoln at the start before the capital was heavily fortified, or if it forced Northerners to share in the suffering of the war they initiated by burning Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston to the ground. Above all, libertarians place too great an emphasis on avoiding the mistakes of the South when they should instead seek to emulate the success of the North. The war demonstrates

the importance of developing a strong economy and a powerful military so that wars need not be fought from a position of relative weakness while surrendering the strategic initiative.

### **3.1. The Regular Army**

Stromberg (2003, 225) is critical of the South for building large regular armies that met Union forces directly. Yet the Confederacy achieved victories at Manassas, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga, Cold Harbor, the Seven Days Battles, and successfully defended Richmond for several years, all despite being outnumbered. The South suffered fewer killed and wounded at Shiloh, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, indeed most of the large battles of the war even though they were often outnumbered 2 to 1 or more. They inflicted significant damage to the Union armies even in battles they lost or drew, such as over 13,000 Union casualties (killed, wounded, or missing) at Shiloh, another 13,000 at Stones River, over 17,000 at the Battle of the Wilderness, and over 18,000 at the Battle of Spotsylvania. Despite the tactical blunder of Pickett's Charge, the North and South lost an equal number of men at Gettysburg. Even despite the economic and military missteps of the Southern leadership, it was a potentially winnable war.

Murphy (2017, 223) writes that the Southern effort could have lasted longer with guerrilla tactics alone. The trenchant question is: at what cost? How many years of the destruction of Southern infrastructure should they have suffered while guerrillas harassed and frustrated—but never defeated—Union armies bent on attrition? The Confederate armies were certainly capable of fighting beyond the spring of 1865, but being heavily outnumbered, it would have meant more of the same destruction they had already suffered. The hope that a pacifist president would replace Lincoln in 1864 failed to materialize, and Southern morale had collapsed. Fighting a guerrilla war instead would have changed nothing and may have made the situation worse, exposing the population to greater long-term deprivation and morbidity given the protracted nature of a guerrilla

defense. Guerrillas could do little to prevent the large mass of Union troops from destroying city after city and seizing rails and rivers as they marched across the South at will, especially since Grant demonstrated that he did not care how many Union troops died to achieve victory. Throughout the Civil War, 25% to 50% killed or wounded was common (Hummel, 1996, 188). The immense size of the Army of the Potomac allowed General Grant to pound Confederate forces repeatedly, refusing to retreat but attacking to destroy Confederate strength, suffering 60,000 casualties in a single month (Hummel, 1996, 274).

Could guerrillas alone have defended Richmond against a conventional army? One of the features of a guerrilla defense is that guerrillas fight near their homes but defending Richmond and other cities required recruiting and organizing partisans from far away to achieve a sufficiently large defending force. Where were the guerrillas to defend Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans while Lee successfully defended Richmond with his army? Facing a pure guerrilla defense, the Union would have taken Richmond right away before marching on Columbia and Atlanta or Charleston.<sup>22</sup> The Union invasion was not a "gentleman's war" in which rebels could just ambush the enemy, kill a few men, and then retreat, over and over until the north tired out. The north was seizing cities, destroying rails, controlling rivers, and strangling the South with Anaconda. There was no stopping the Union march across Tennessee, or across Georgia, with guerrillas alone. At most, guerrillas could pick off a few thousand soldiers along the roads as the Union destroyed their homes and killed their families. The South needed to meet mass with mass and that meant building a large mass of regular soldiers and coordinating their efforts.<sup>23</sup> The Confederate armies lacked the

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<sup>22</sup> Long (2007, 151) writes on Alexander the Great who attacked and conquered cities one by one; if the cities organized a collective defense, they could have defeated him; "Instead, the cities faced Alexander one by one, each confident of its own unassailability. And one by one they fell."

<sup>23</sup> In the midst of World War Two, Bertrand de Jouvenel (1993[1945], 4) wrote, "Germany was employing in her design of world conquest all her national resources, and there was no restraining her by other countries with only a part of theirs... In like manner, the enemy who, to render its bodies more docile, mobilizes the thoughts and feelings

manpower to defend Atlanta or stop Sherman's army, so there was no stopping this force with mere guerrillas.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.2. Defending Southern Territory**

Hummel (1996, 179) laments that the Confederacy "massed armies along all its borders in an effort to protect every inch of ground," apparently as opposed to letting Southerners close to the border be harassed or killed by Union soldiers while the industry of Virginia and Tennessee was looted or destroyed. It should be the policy of a free society to defend its entire territory, for fairness and to attract capital. Arguing for a more passive resistance, Hummel (1996, 179) writes, "Although much of the South would have remained exposed to invasion, Union willpower would have been patiently worn down through insurmountable logistical obstacles, continual hit and run harassment, and the countryside's implacable hostility." Yet harassing soldiers with guerrillas is not the same thing as defeating them, and reprisals against Southern civilians greatly undermined such efforts. The Confederacy needed to defend its rivers in particular, denying the Union their use for shipping and for troop and supply transport. Superior to railroads, steamboats could carry 500 tons of supplies (Hummel, 1996, 184). It was estimated that 40,000 soldiers with 18,000 horses required 250 tons per day, resulting in supply columns of 25 to 35 wagons per thousand soldiers (ibid). Although the rebels failed to defend their rivers, large armies were their best chance.

It was easy for the North to march at will across large parts of the South. Why was there so little guerrilla resistance? Hummel (1996, 278) argues that there was a lack of military-age males around due to the losses of the Confederacy's "Napoleonic strategy" of offensive defense.

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of men, must be copied by the other side, who will otherwise fight at a disadvantage. Thus it comes about that, just as duelists follow each others' thrusts and feints, nations at war copy each other's "total" methods. Likewise, Adolf Hitler is reputed to have said, "The great strength of the totalitarian state is that it forces those who fear it to imitate it."

<sup>24</sup> Hess (2008) challenges the popular belief that small arms outpaced tactics in the war, citing the lack of training, terrain issues, and close distance of most engagements.

Otherwise, guerrillas “could have turned Sherman’s march into the same kind of military debacle that British General John Burgoyne suffered during the American Revolution when he invaded the colonies from Canada and was then forced to surrender after the battles of Saratoga.” I am not convinced that guerrillas could have stopped Sherman’s or Grant’s armies save for the recruitment of Southern citizens into the Confederate armies, especially in the earlier months of the war.

Bicheno (2001a, 221) argues that a proper Southern strategy would have been to use the armies to seek a quick decision in the east (“Confederate railways, industry, officers, and trained soldiers [were] concentrated in Virginia”) while maintaining a “resolute defensive posture” in Tennessee where industry and infrastructure were second only to Virginia, inflicting “punishing delays on the Union’s Anaconda Plan,” rather than dissipating forces from the western theater on “ill-conceived counter-invasions.” He also blames the loss on the poor leadership of Jefferson Davis and argues that commanding the bulk of pre-war officers undermined the Southern cause given their commitment to “extreme orthodoxy” in war. The Confederacy fielded only 1.1 million men to the Union’s 2.8 million, yet remarkably 50% more Union soldiers died in combat and twice as many Union soldiers were wounded; the Union also saw twice as many non-battle fatalities (Bicheno, 2001a, 221). At least 600,000 Americans died in the war.

### **3.3. Invading the Union**

Hummel (1996, 178-179) and Stromberg (2003, 225) are both critical of the South’s offensive campaigns since a defensive war brings tactical advantages such as interior lines and knowledge of the terrain. Invading the North did lead to Lee’s defeats at Antietam and Gettysburg and Bragg’s failed Kentucky Campaign, but they were worth the risk, and the defeats were arguably due to faulty tactics rather than an improper strategy. If northern cities and industry also shared in the blood of the war, there would have been increased pressure for Lincoln to end the

war. Instead, the northerners were spared its destruction and could carry on this distant war with impunity, much like the Americans of today. At Antietam, Lee hoped to rally Maryland to the Confederate cause. Maryland, a slave state, had many Confederate supporters but was effectively occupied by federal troops. Lee also knew he couldn't fight a protracted war and sought a decisive victory early on.

The lesson for libertarians to take from the Confederacy's failures is not to avoid the pursuit of decisive victory, but to build a strong economy and military so that decisive victory is a feasible alternative when war comes. Under no circumstances should anarchists refrain from building a conventional army if they are able to build one. It was the North that took the battle to the enemy's homeland, and was rewarded for it, as the South saw most of the destruction of the war while the North was spared. New York, Philadelphia, and Boston never saw any combat despite providing so many soldiers and resources for Lincoln to seize or destroy Nashville, Vicksburg, Memphis, New Orleans, Atlanta, Savannah, Columbia, and Richmond.

### **3.4. Emulate the Union**

Libertarians are preoccupied with learning from the mistakes of the Confederacy, the losing side. I prefer to focus on what the North did right as a guide to how to win a war, rather on what not to do. The Union won by building a conventional army and taking the fight to enemy territory. Their conventional armies were able to march on the South more or less at will with the exception of being turned back several times by Lee's army and being hampered by guerrillas in the West (Hummel, 1996, 186). As a result of being able to take the fight to the South, most of the North was spared the ravages of war, even as they gleefully reelected their war president in the wake of the annihilation of Atlanta. In the Civil War, victory went to side with the larger population, greater industrial capacity, and most robust financial system (Reid, 2001, 40). The war should convince

anarchists of the necessity of developing a strong economy, allowing them to build a powerful military, and if they fail to do so then they should hope to never be drawn into a war. It is always better to take the fight to the enemy rather than fight on one's own territory.

#### **4. The Confederate Guerrillas**

Republicanism is strongly associated with citizen-soldiers who have the right and obligation to take up arms and defend their communities and countries against foreign and domestic enemies. Largely inspired by Whig antimilitarism, citizen-soldiers gained currency in the American colonies in the wake of the Boston Massacre when public opposition to a standing army reached new heights (Callahan, 1999, 119). The militia system had already emerged in the colonies due to insufficient military support from the crown. Most able-bodied white men were obligated to serve in autonomous local units that elected their own leaders and typically ignored the orders coming down from capital cities (see Cooper, 1999). The colonies, traversed by the Appalachian Mountains and blanketed in thick forests, provided an ideal environment for these units to practice guerrilla warfare.

Colonial guerrilla warfare dates to the French and Indian War in which colonists mimicked Indian battle tactics (see Chiaventone, 1999, 306). In the Revolutionary War, citizen-soldiers implemented guerrilla tactics to good effect beginning with the victory at Concord. State militias engaged in “suppressing loyalist uprisings, gathering intelligence, and impeding enemy movements” (Boot, 2013, 68). The capture of Ticonderoga, the victory at Cowpens, and Greene's campaign in the Southern states were all guerrilla achievements (Chiaventone, 1999, 306). A force of 1000 volunteer guerrillas defeated the loyalists at King's Mountain in 1780. In British-occupied New Jersey, militiamen harassed small groups of foraging and scouting British soldiers, leading British General Sir William Howe to order his soldiers to travel in large convoys (Boot, 2013, 68-



69). The British were particularly vulnerable because the guerrillas could blend in among the other colonists, hiding their rifles in the brush and shooting British or Hessian soldiers when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>25</sup> As for the continental army, General George Washington largely pursued a Fabian strategy, relying on and cooperating with the militia and even detaching regular soldiers to harass British troops alongside the militia (Boot, 2013, 69).<sup>26</sup>

According to Boot (2013, 77-78), the Revolutionary War offers several important lessons on the nature of guerrilla warfare. First, taking on a superpower imposes a heavy toll on the defenders. In this war the colonists suffered over 25,000 fatalities due to combat and disease, representing 1% of the population. On a per capita basis, this loss of life is second in American military history only to the Civil War. Second, victory depended in part on outside support—namely, France. Third, the war demonstrates the importance of guerrillas working in cooperation with a regular army. Guerrillas prevented the British Army from concentrating its forces against the continental army, and their constant harassment weakened British forces until colonial regulars could achieve a decisive victory. However, it is doubtful that guerrillas alone could have thrown off the British crown. It was the continental army that defeated the British, not timid, undisciplined militias, which served as useful auxiliaries at best. In fact, General Washington lamented the lack of discipline and poor battlefield performance of the militia, who he blamed for the loss of Manhattan and Long Island (This Day in History, 2018). As part time soldiers, the militia were

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<sup>25</sup> The Hessian officer, Captain Frederick von Muenchhausen wrote, “It is now very unsafe for us to travel in Jersey. The rascal peasants meet our men alone or in small unarmed groups. They have their rifles hidden in the bushes, or ditches, and the like. When they believe they are sure of success and they see one or several men belonging to our army, they shoot them in the head, then quickly hide their rifles and pretend they know nothing... Everyone in our army wishes that the rebels would do us the favor to take their chances in regular battle. We would surely defeat them” (Boot, 2013, 69).

<sup>26</sup> Under a Fabian strategy, pitched battles and frontal assaults are avoided in favor of a war of attrition. It is a strategy of refusing battle where one evades the enemy (Hart, 1991, 14). Fabius refused to meet the superior army of Hannibal head-on, but harassed and retreated quickly, to wear down their strength and buy time and wear down morale of the enemy (Hart, 1991, 26-27).

unable to fully exploit the efficiency of specialization and they developed a reputation for fleeing the well-trained professional British soldiers (Ayres, 2018). This view is at odds with Rothbard (1999, 443) who attributes the victory in that war to guerrilla warfare. Ultimately, America gained its independence in the war, but an uneasy peace between the free states and the slave states was destined to erupt into the bloodiest war in American history.

The Confederates relied heavily on irregular warfare to resist the Union invasion and occupation. One Southern guerrilla wrote to his wife that “it does not require many men to harass a considerable army” (Sutherland, 2013, 16). Edward Ruffin, who organized a home guard of guerrillas in Virginia, wrote “It is only necessary for the people generally to resort to these means to overcome any invading army, even if we were greatly inferior to it in regular military force” (ibid, 2). As with the first hoplites, these Southern guerrillas were volunteers who furnished their own weapons. In Arkansas in May 1861, Thomas C. Hindman recruited several guerrilla companies, telling them they had to arm themselves and would only be compensated for subsistence, but could fight the enemy on their own terms. He encouraged them to create chaos and destruction, to “cut off Federal pickets, scouts, foraging parties, and trains, and to kill pilots and others on gunboats and transports” (ibid, 16). Hundreds of unpaid volunteers in Virginia formed guerrilla units armed with their own guns, hatchets, and knives. In Tennessee, Lt. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest “raised a mounted unit at his own expense,” eventually causing such damage to Grant’s communications and Sherman’s rear that Sherman declared that Forrest “must be hunted down and killed if it costs ten thousand lives and bankrupts the Federal treasury” (Holmes, 2001, 307).

With an eye for the defense of their families and communities, Southern guerrillas tended to operate near their own homes. The supportive civilian population provided them with supplies

and safe houses (Sutherland, 2013, 30). Southern guerrillas worked to undermine the government by destroying post offices and court houses, burning public records, attacking sheriffs and tax collectors, and intimidating judges. Wherever the union army marched, roads were infested with “bushwhackers” that picked off soldiers from a distance and then disappeared into the brush, their camps and movements concealed by the foliage that returned each spring.<sup>27</sup> The regular confederate army at times worked in concert with the guerrillas. After the fall of New Orleans in 1862, Confederate General Mansfield Lovell supplemented his forces with guerrillas, seen as necessary to “contain the enemy in New Orleans and protect the state from his ravages” (ibid, 22). Unfortunately, much guerrilla violence was also directed at civilians.<sup>28</sup>

Southern guerrillas effectively frustrated the enemy. One South Carolinian who raised a guerrilla company of 100 asserted, “[we will] do more effective service by hampering the enemy than could 1000 men by the usual mode” (Sutherland, 2013, 4). One Union officer confessed that he did not know how to effectively combat guerrillas (ibid, 16). According to Fisher (1997, 172), “Conventional troops were superior in discipline, tactics, and resources, but partisans nullified these advantages by their unconventional methods, their knowledge of the area, and their ability

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<sup>27</sup> Southern guerrillas used their own territory as a base—North Carolina and Georgia—and raided pro-union East Tennessee at night, killing union loyalists or taking them prisoner (Fisher, 1997, 83). In 1864, confederate guerrillas killed a number of citizens of East Tennessee who had taken the oath of allegiance to the Union. Secessionist guerrillas frequently attacked Cades Cove, killing men and taking away inhabitants’ food supply (Fisher, 1997, 85). Forests and mountains of east Tennessee and western North Carolina provided the ideal environment for guerrilla warfare. The mountains, forests, and streams of East Tennessee provided an ideal environment for guerrillas of both sides, such that “bushwhackers can conceal themselves in good rifle range of a road and fire into a column of cavalry with perfect impunity,” lamented William Sloan (Fisher, 1997, 76). With foliage gone in winter, guerrilla operations were limited to scouting and some raiding. Mostly, they were to “observe the enemy, try to discern federal intentions, collect information from the citizenry, or investigate the possibilities for gathering supplies and horses” (Sutherland, 2013, 33). They would strike only when resistance would be at a minimum.

<sup>28</sup> The guerrillas beat, plundered, stole, burned homes, raped women, attacked children. Guerrillas often destroyed train tracks and burned trains, destroyed wagons carrying supplies, intercepting express shipments of money. Private railroads hired guards to protect tracks and bridges from guerrilla saboteurs. Confederate guerrillas committed brutal acts of violence against civilians. Quantrill’s raid on Lawrence, Kansas being a well-known example (see Breihan, 1959). Union troops did the same, sometimes even masquerading as confederate bushwhackers impersonating Union troops (Fellman, 1989, 30). Union militia units dressed in civilian clothes and used this to their advantage in their attacks on civilians (Ibid, 31-32). In the pro-Union region of East Tennessee, guerrilla violence erupted mostly targeting civilians. Secessionists vs loyalists. Thefts, beatings, shootings, hangings, arson (see Fisher, 1997).

to hide their identities.” Fighting guerrillas was “fatiguing, tedious, frustrating, and brutalizing” (ibid, 95). Union regulars detested the guerrillas and slurred them as cowards. Due to guerrilla ambushes, the North was forced to tie up resources that otherwise would have been used to attack Southern troops and civilians. Union Generals McClellan and Rosecrans assigned thousands of men to protecting telegraph lines and railroads. In Georgia, Union General Sherman assigned tens of thousands of soldiers to protect the railroads and supply depots that supported his army as rebel guerrillas attempted to disrupt the supply line from Chattanooga to Atlanta (Sutherland, 2013, 93). In the Vicksburg campaign, Grant left most of his soldiers behind to protect the rear (Hummel, 1996, 185). In all, up to one half of the North’s soldiers were taken from the front lines for such tasks (ibid). This surely saved Southern lives.<sup>29</sup>

However, the inability of Union troops to control the situation led to increasingly brutal reprisals against civilians. Since they could not track down guerrillas, and they had no reservations about killing civilians, Confederate raids invited attacks on the very populations they were attempting to defend. Writes Sutherland (2013, 94),

Alabama Confederates had the same love-hate relationship with their guerrillas that had developed elsewhere. On the one hand, guerrillas were often the only defenders to whom communities could turn. On the other hand, it was their very successes against the Federals that had brought retaliation upon the people, not to mention renegade guerrillas who preyed on the citizenry.

In retaliation for attacks on the North Missouri Railroad, Union General Pope ordered that all residents within a five-mile radius pay for the destruction of bridges and tracks. Union soldiers

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<sup>29</sup> “Bloody Bill” Anderson’s guerrilla band of 80 men defended the people of Missouri from Union troops and opportunistic criminals. One day they executed two dozen unarmed Union soldiers at the train station. A Union patrol then happened upon the scene; Anderson joined forces with some other bands and a total of 400 rebels slaughtered all 115 Federals, who were then mutilated and scalped (Sutherland, 2013, 74-75). Around the same time, the Union commander in Little Rock remarked that he did not understand why 230 troops could not keep the peace in Clarksville. In northwest Arkansas, the 1<sup>st</sup> Arkansas Cavalry under Col. Harrison, unable to protect local Union loyalists or telegraph lines, burned local homes and mills. Union strength had to be split to defend telegraph lines, foraging parties, and supplies.

arrested civilians without cause and ransacked their homes (Sutherland, 2013, 38-30). Union commanders came to believe that retaliation against the local population was the only way to crush the guerrillas. Along the Mississippi river, where Southern guerrillas hid on riverbanks and fired on warships and soldier transports and captured coal barges, river banks were shelled by the Union regardless of the presence of civilians. Entire rebel communities were targeted in response to guerrilla attacks. According to Sutherland (2013, 45),

Villages and towns suspected of harboring guerrillas were fined, pillaged, or simply leveled... When, in September 1862, guerrillas almost captured a packet boat on the Mississippi River near Randolph, Tennessee, Gen. William T. Sherman sent a regiment to destroy the town. He justified his action by saying, "It is no use tolerating such acts as firing on steamboats. Punishments must be speedy, sure, and exemplary" When local rebels ignored his warning, he leveled other guerrilla haunts and expelled families from communities where Union shipping was endangered."

To one woman he remarked, "In war it is impossible to hunt up the actual perpetrators of a crime. Those who are banded together in any cause are held responsible for all the acts of their associates" (ibid, 45). Similarly, Admiral David D. Porter "assessed collaborators at 10 times the value of plundered or destroyed Union property, and burned whole communities," asserting that "This is the only way of putting a stop to guerrilla warfare" (Sutherland, 2013, 45). Union General Ormsby M. Mitchell allowed his soldiers to destroy rebel property in Alabama in retaliation for guerrilla resistance. Robberies, rapes, and murders spread and towns went up in flames. By the autumn of 1862, large parts of the South were destroyed (ibid).

By 1863, the Union's pursuit of guerrillas was more organized and soldiers were assigned to guerrilla-hunting full-time. Expeditions continued to punish communities along the important tributaries of the Mississippi River, destroying cotton gins and all personal property and stealing livestock. Union Admiral Porter told his men, "There is no impropriety in destroying houses supposed to be affording shelter to rebels... Should innocent persons suffer, it will be their own

fault, and teach others that it will be to their advantage to inform the Government authorities when guerrillas are about certain localities (Sutherland, 2013, 55). One specialized unit of guerrilla hunters called the Mississippi Marine Brigade, a team of 1035 men, patrolled the river and burned mills, stole cotton and livestock, and burned several cities to the ground *ibid*, 55). Union General Edward R. Wild led a three-week raid in December 1863 destroyed guerrilla camps and burned homes. North Carolina's Governor Zebulon Vance condemned these attacks and feared that Southern victory would require a "protracted guerrilla war," turning all of the country into the conflagration seen in Missouri and Kansas (*ibid*, 61). According to Sutherland (2013, 93) by the time Atlanta fell, the rebel guerrilla activity was significantly reduced; Sherman had ordered that suspicious persons be imprisoned and many were hung, and more homes were burned, including entire towns.<sup>30</sup>

All this destruction took its toll on the Southern population. There was mounting frustration that Southern lands suffered the brunt of the war while the residents of the industrial North were spared despite supporting the war and reelecting Lincoln. When John Hunt Morgan led 2000 men into Indiana and Ohio to destroy rails and ravage towns, he asserted, "We intend to live off the Yanks and let them feel (like the South has felt) some of the horrors of war" (Sutherland, 2013, 58). One of the most devastating rebel guerrilla attacks was led by Quantrill in Lawrence, Kansas on August 21, 1863. He led 450 men and burned the city, murdering 150 males. Motivated by revenge for years of jayhawker attacks, they "dragged defenseless men from their

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<sup>30</sup> Many of the rebels were no better. Colonel Richardson's 1<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Partisan Rangers, in addition to attacking Federals, also destroyed railroads, captures forage trains, burned cotton, rounded up draft dodgers, harassed Union sympathizers, extorted money, and stole cotton and livestock. Unlike Union attacks, these were not sanctioned by the Confederate leadership, which revoked his commission and placed the regiment under new authority. The Confederate Congress also reduced the number of rangers, preferring "volunteer companies for local defense" (*ibid*, 56). Most of the rangers were transferred to the regular army as cavalry. In the chaos and brutal violence of the civil war also attracted opportunists who exploited the conflict for personal gain as criminals, loyal neither to the Union nor the Confederacy.

homes and shot them in their front yards, often with wives or daughters still clinging to their loved ones.” Dead bodies lined the streets, and the burned remains of homes and shops burned for days (Ibid, 59). Following the raid, Union General Thomas Ewing issued an order forcing 20,000 civilians out of 4 counties.

Kentucky also saw significant guerrilla action as both sides vied for the support of the neutral border state. Control of the Ohio river was also seen by both sides as essential. As Kentucky was engulfed by guerrillas, the Union stationed guards and militia companies along the Ohio River to prevent raids into the Midwest. The Union also deployed gunboats in the river. In Iowa, Confederate guerrillas robbed banks, burned homes, and stole horses, the mode of transportation for all guerrillas. Quantrill led a force of 200 men to defend Confederate citizens in Missouri from Kansas jayhawkers. Confederate citizens in Arkansas would have been left defenseless in 1862 if not for local militias and guerrilla bands who harassed the Union army.

## **5. Lessons from the Guerrilla Campaign**

I take several lessons on the proper role of guerrilla warfare from the American experience in the Civil War coupled with guerrilla experiences around the world, especially in the past century. First, guerrillas are not effective substitutes for a regular army, but serve most effectively as complements. Second, it is best to take the fight to the enemy, but this is difficult to accomplish with guerrilla fighters alone. Third, again, the chief lesson of the Civil War is to emulate the Union—the winning side—which was able to wield guerrillas against the Southern population much more effectively precisely because they were complementing the regular army as it marched across the South.

## **5.1. Complements Not Substitutes**

The resistance to guerrilla warfare was just one aspect of the war bungled by the Southern leadership. According to Sutherland (2013, 17-18), those trained at West Point were never comfortable with guerrilla warfare, which seemed to them to be a waste of manpower and difficult to coordinate and control. Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis both looked down on guerrillas. The leaders “could see no greater danger to their own authority or to Southern ideals of honor and manhood than an uncontrollable irregular army of backwoodsmen and crackers” (Sutherland, 2013, 18). There was also concern of how guerrilla warfare would look to potential allies in Europe. They also did not comprehend that the widespread adoption of rifled long guns “gave an overwhelming advantage to forces operating on the tactical defensive and rendered traditional assault tactics obsolete” (Hattaway and Rafuse, 1999, 129). Consequently, the Confederacy attempted to limit guerrillas by discouraging the formation of guerrilla companies in the Deep South and by rejecting companies of less than 64 men or those who were not willing to enlist for 12 months. The Confederate Congress passed the Partisan Ranger Act which gave the President the power to authorize guerrilla units, subjecting them to the same regulations as regular soldiers. Secretary of War George W. Rudolph stated that “To have two independent armies, conducting two independent systems of warfare in the same field, would lead to inevitable confusion and disaster (Sutherland, 2013, 20). Despite this, many soldiers attempted to leave the regular army to join guerrilla units. They preferred to be back home defending their own families and communities. The Confederacy responded by barring men eligible for the draft from joining the rangers, imposing a minimum age of 35 for ranger service, and forbidding the organization of rangers in districts that did not meet quotas for the volunteer army. In the end, Sutherland (2013, 87) attributes the defeat of the Confederacy not only to its “outnumbered and ill-equipped armies” but to the



“response of the Federals to irregular warfare, the faltering commitment of the Confederate government to its guerrillas, the escalating retaliation, and the addition of a genuine outlaw element to the mix.”

According to Townshend (1997,158) “In the end, this grim irregular war remained marginal to the final military decision; and attempts to use guerrilla action as a direct auxiliary to regular action, such as Sterling Price’s invasion of Missouri in late 1863, proved ineffective. Recognizing this, the Confederacy formally disbanded all its partisan forces and disclaimed all other guerrilla action (denounced by Robert E. Lee as ‘an unmixed evil’) in April 1864.” Yet the libertarians are right to criticize the Southern leaderships’ resistance to guerrilla warfare, as guerrilla units were and are an important aspect of modern warfare. In the Civil War, Confederate guerrillas successfully confounded Union troops. Stromberg (2003, 226) praises the Southern guerrillas for tying down Union troops and harassing them on horseback. Hummel (1996, 186) notes the successes of guerrillas in the Western theatre. However, the effectiveness of guerrillas in the war does not prove that a strategy based entirely on guerrilla warfare would have been superior. Their effectiveness depends on serving as complements to regular armed forces. Alone, guerrillas harass and frustrate but do not defeat the enemy. Even in the Revolutionary War, guerrillas tied up resources and weakened the British army, but this ultimately enabled the Continental army to achieve victory. Without the Continental army, British occupation of the colonies would have continued indefinitely. The lesson from past wars is not to eliminate regular armies, but to retain both regular forces and guerrillas as complementary fighting forces.

## **5.2. Take the Fight to the Enemy**

A pure guerrilla defense means fighting in one’s own homeland for an extended period and suffering the full destruction of the war. Southerners paid a terrible price for allowing the North to

do its fighting in the South including the widespread carnage and destruction of property. Residents suffered from guerrilla attacks, the loss of men who joined the armies, economic dislocation, destruction, confiscation (see Fisher, 1997, 87). Shortages of food lead some to turn to plunder to survive. The Union's total war reduced Southern wealth, health, and well-being long into the future. Damage to the Southern economy was significant. Capital in the South fell by 46% during the war while the North's grew by 50%; The Confederacy held 30% of US wealth in 1860 but only 12% in 1870 (Reid, 2001, 39). In addition to hundreds of thousands of deaths by combat and disease, "tens of thousands of survivors carried physical, emotional, or psychological scars" and the South "incurred hundreds of billions of dollars in physical damage at modern valuation" (Sutherland, 2013, xi). In response to Quantrill's raid, Union General Thomas Ewing, Jr., issued General Order No. 11, evacuating Confederate sympathizers from four counties ("the burnt district") and implementing a scorched earth policy in Missouri. Pringle (2010) estimates that towns affected by the Union's General Order No. 11 are still less developed than surrounding areas to this day. The war destroyed one third of the South's wealth (not including the emancipation of slaves) and large cities like Richmond, Atlanta, Columbia were destroyed; 4.5% of the white population of the South was dead (Hummel, 1996, 282). In the end, the war produced 50,000 Southern civilian casualties, but few for the North; 200,000 Southern refugees were created, the Southern railroads collapsed, and food shortages emerged (Hummel, 196, 279).

To the extent that the Civil War foreshadows government conduct in future insurrections, rebels may expect the confiscations of crop, livestock, and other commodities; the wanton slaughter of livestock; the burning of homes, buildings, churches, and entire cities; the taking of civilians as hostages; the summary execution of civilians; vandalism; the bombardment of cities;

evictions from homes; raiding of cemeteries; and the mass rape of women by soldiers (DiLorenzo, 2003, 176-199; also see Cisco, 2007).<sup>31</sup>

### **5.3 Emulate the Union**

Union and Confederate guerrillas terrorized most of the country, from Kansas and Missouri to Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, Iowa, and Ohio, perhaps sparing only the northeast. Yet the Union won the war and did it with a combination of regular and irregular forces. Clearly the Confederacy was significantly weaker than the Union, making it impossible to fight the Union on equal terms, but I question whether a purely guerrilla effort would have been sufficient to overcome Anaconda or prevent the destruction of rails, the seizing of rivers including the Mississippi, or the taking of Richmond, Nashville, and other major cities and their industry. To emulate the Union strategy today, the anarchists must work to develop a strong economy with a large population and high output per capita. To attract capital, capitalists must believe that their property will be protected from destruction. This requires a modern military in a world where empires can destroy billions of dollars of capital in an instant with missiles launched from thousands of miles away.

A lot has changed in warfare since Civil War, especially in weapons technology. Even if a strictly defensive posture fought by guerrillas was the right strategy in 1861 as the libertarians assert, it does not follow that this is the best strategy for defending a free society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a very different thing ambushing soldiers on horseback and retreating into the untamed wilderness versus attacking armored vehicles in city streets beneath helicopters and drones. It is difficult to achieve concealment in the mountains and forests in a population-dense country where

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<sup>31</sup> Union General Benjamin Butler ordered “that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture or movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable as a woman of the town plying her avocation” (Fleming, 1999, 152). Lincoln also suspended the writ of habeas corpus. Prominent dissenters were imprisoned including John Merryman, even after U.S Supreme Court Justice Roger Taney ordered his release; dissenting Ohio congressman Clement L. Vallandigham was also arrested (Gallman, 1999, 137). Lincoln also arrested draft resisters and dissenting newspaper editors while shutting down dissenting several newspapers (ibid).

the state possesses thermal imaging and satellites. The power differential between the state and individuals is greater now than it was 150 years ago when soldiers and civilians had access to the same technologies. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the effectiveness of a guerrilla defense today, even if the libertarians are right that a pure guerrilla defense would have increased the chance of a Confederate victory in the 1860s.

## **6. Modern Counterinsurgency**

What is a guerrilla campaign for the anarchists will be a counterinsurgency campaign for the enemy. As summarized above, guerrilla warfare is a protracted form of war that exposes defenders to an extended hostile occupation (Jones, 2001, 688). Their endurance depends on popular support which enables concealment, movement, attainment of weapons and supplies, intelligence gathering, and conducting operations unimpeded. Therefore, defeating the guerrillas depends on denying them access to a base of popular support: insurgents are to be pinned, either remerging into the open where they may be destroyed, or staying quiet and remaining cut off from their base (Kilcullen, 8-10). This is the essence of counter-insurgency (COIN).<sup>32</sup>

A survey by Boot (2013, 559) finds that despite an improving record since World War II, guerrillas still lose most conflicts. Since 1945, guerrillas have won 40.3% of the time, or 25.5% going back to 1775. His survey reveals that most insurgencies are long-lasting—fourteen years on average since 1945 (ibid, 564-565). Yet he also finds that the duration of the conflict is not correlated with victory and that risky strategies to achieve a quick victory usually backfire for

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<sup>32</sup> COIN usually involves targeting the base area from which guerrilla supplies are drawn, and by inhibiting the raiding strategy through a “persistent combat strategy” of direct combat engagement and by blocking communication routes and paths of retreat and setting up fortifications in the territory (Jones, 2001, 688). COIN tactics physically isolate the insurgents from the population they rely on for concealment, supplies, and recruits through checkpoints and ID cards, and control of borders to prevent movement of people and supplies (Sepp, 2005, 10-11). Boots on the ground then establish martial law. From the US Army’s field manual on counterinsurgency, population controls include curfews, travel permits, restricted areas, ID cards, licensing for jobs, immigration restrictions, and registration of firearms and automobiles, and trade restrictions, all of which US citizens have been or are already subjected to (FM 3-24.2, 3-26).

guerrillas. Boot (2013, 566) finds that guerrillas are most effective when they have outside support providing funding, weapons, training, and a safe harbor to retreat to. He writes that of particular importance is that guerrillas fight in tandem with complementary regular forces:

This keeps a conventional army off balance. When it masses to fight main force units, it leaves its lines of communication vulnerable to guerrilla attacks. When it disperses to focus on the guerrillas, it leaves itself vulnerable to attack by the main force.

This is the strategy that we observe in the Revolutionary War, and to some extent in the Civil War.

Libertarians who call for a strictly guerrilla defense of free societies should suspend their preoccupation with the Civil War and consider what a modern conflict with a major power would look like. The history of US interventionism yields many examples including its conflicts in the Philippines, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. The guerrilla wars in particular generated tremendous death tolls. Following the US annexation of the Philippines in 1899, Filipinos initially fought in conventional formations but soon adopted guerilla tactics given the ensuing heavy losses (Boot, 2013, 198). Yet despite the advantages of defending mountains and jungles, only 4,234 Americans were killed (mostly of disease), while 16,000 Filipino soldiers died fighting as did 200,000 civilians, mostly of disease (ibid, 199). These losses likely far exceed what most anarchists would consider acceptable when abandoning the relative safety of their homes in the West to forge a new civilization.

In Vietnam, the Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars fought in tandem and saw some overlap in membership. Vietnam offers an ideal environment for guerrillas with its thick jungles of rubber trees concealing the ground and cu chi tunnels built below. Bamboo is plentiful and easily used for the construction of booby traps, spears, and punji sticks; the dense natural growth makes it easy to camouflage pit traps. In the daytime, peasants worked in the rice fields, but at night they picked up their weapons and attacked as

guerrillas (Singh and Mei, 1971, 53). Throughout the war, the North provided a seemingly inexhaustible supply of fighters and supplies to the South along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The American approach to counter-insurgency in Vietnam was through massive firepower. Their planes dropped more bombs in the Vietnam War than in World War II, mostly on South Vietnam. However, noisy aircraft signaled to the VC that an attack was incoming, allowing them to slip away, and they were rarely trapped and destroyed (Boot, 2013, 418). America fought a war of attrition in Vietnam, where as Luttwak (2001, 114) puts it, “the enemy stubbornly refused to assemble in conveniently targetable mass formations (despite concentric “search and destroy” actions to induce involuntary concentrations).” Lacking the technology to detect the enemy, the US relied on intelligence and played whack-a-mole with bombings, complemented by such CIA and US special forces operations such as the Phoenix Program that sought to destroy the VC through infiltration, capture, interrogation, and assassination, and Operation Wandering Soul, a psychological operation. The US also sprayed Agent Orange on 5.5 million acres of forest and farmland in South Vietnam in Operation Ranch Hand to deny the VC food and vegetation to hide in, exposing millions including US soldiers to the dangerous herbicide. Strategic bombing produced many casualties and refugees, alienating the civilian population, while the military notoriously inflated the body counts of the VC and NVA in their reports. In the end, twenty Vietnamese die for every one US soldier killed in action. Up to two million civilians died in the war as did over one million fighters on both sides combined.<sup>33</sup>

The Gulf War began with a campaign of “aerial decapitation” to destroy air defenses. Early warning radar was destroyed and air defense systems were no longer integrated. Forty-eight hours after the air offensive began, communications were destroyed and each air force base was on its

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<sup>33</sup> The Tet Offensive, which failed to provoke an uprising throughout the south, achieved a political victory: the escalating violence shocked the American public and undermined support for the war (Wirtz, 2001, 907-908).

own (Luttwak, 2001, 186). Saddam Hussein could not broadcast to his subjects or communicate to his military leadership and “in Baghdad the population at large was left without electricity, telephone service, public transport, piped water, or sewer disposal” (ibid, 185). The destruction of roads and bridges impeded ability of the army to supply food, water, fuel, and ammunition to forces in Kuwait. Civilians were also killed, as “bombs rarely kill deployed troops. It is their natural dispersal that protects ground forces so well, even if not deeply dug-in, as most of the Iraqis in and near Kuwait (or the Yugoslavs in Kosovo) were not” (ibid, 193).

There was no ground campaign at all in concert with NATO’s bombing of Kosovo in 1999 (Luttwak, 2001, 199). The bombing began with symbolic attacks on air defenses, but when Slobodan Milosevic failed to capitulate, in the following month “the bombing became distinctively heavier and focused on weapon factories, depots, bases, and barracks” (Ibid, 77). Civilian targets like bridges and power stations were destroyed to undermine public support for Milosevic. NATO carried out eleven weeks of bombing in the attack on Serbia-Montenegro, “the first war victory ever won by air power alone, with no fighting whatever by ground forces” (ibid, 76).

The ongoing war on the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) probably sheds the most light on likely present-day military operations against an anarchist society. US airstrikes and close air support have played a significant role in the annihilation of ISIS, combined with US supplies to Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi Special Forces. US ground troops have also supplemented Kurdish forces, primarily in an advising role. In Operation Inherent Resolve, the US has carried out almost 25,000 strikes in Iraq and Syria as of August 9, 2017 (see U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). More strikes were carried out under Operation Roundup in support of Syrian Democratic Forces. The US military is also exceeding efficient at irregular warfare. In Spring 2018, the main stronghold of ISIS in Afghanistan was captured, killing 170 of them with not a single fatality

among the 600 Green Berets and three companies of Afghan special forces (Fedschun, 2018). In 2006, the US implemented a counterinsurgency strategy of securing base areas of Iraqi insurgents and Al-Qaeda terrorists (Parker, 2005b, 420). The strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan entailed “a rapid twenty-four-hour cycle of intelligence-led strikes, described as “counternetwork operations,” that focuses on the middle tier of planners, facilitators, and operators rather than on the most senior leaders” (Kilcullen, 2010, 4). To the West, ISIS in Syria and Iraq have been all but destroyed with air strikes and close air support. In Afghanistan, the Taliban maintained a long-term insurgency despite being outnumbered 11-1 and being outspent by a factor of 50 by COIN forces (Jones, 2012, 1). The recent history of US counterinsurgency warfare suggests numerous debilitating airstrikes and close air support for special forces on the ground, the strategy that annihilated Islamic State. Guerrillas can expect any intervention to be heavy on air strikes, yielding the inevitable collateral damage. The most effective defense in wars of this nature is a modern air force that maintains air superiority over anarchist territory.

Wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Kosovo have demonstrated that guerrilla forces cannot be destroyed from the air alone (Parker, 2005a, 433). However, given the large budget, advanced weapon systems, and highly trained military personnel of the state, it is extremely unlikely that empires can be defeated or successfully repelled by the rebels as long as the state maintains full commitment to the mission. If media coverage is less of a concern, the state may adopt rules of engagement similar to those employed at the standoff at Ruby Ridge where agents were given the authority to shoot belligerents on sight whether they were armed or not. Their chief target is rebel communications (Hart, 1991, 366). This can difficult to achieve because guerrillas do not hold fixed positions. This is the benefit of the guerrilla strategy when facing a superior enemy:

[E]nemy-focused strategy, which seeks to attack the guerrilla forces directly, risks dissipating effort in chasing insurgent groups all over the countryside, an activity that can



be extremely demanding and requires enormous numbers of troops and other resources. Counterinsurgents who adopt this approach risk chasing their tails and so exhausting themselves, while doing enormous damage to the noncombatant civilian population, alienating the people and thus further strengthening their support for insurgency.” (Kilcullen, 2010, 9).

Technology is less important in a guerrilla conflict, where tactics “are designed to negate the firepower advantage of conventional forces” and has seen the US and the USSR suffer defeat in guerrilla conflicts despite their nuclear arsenals (Boot, 2013, 567).<sup>34</sup>

It is less draining on one’s resources when war is concluded quickly rather than protracted over long periods. The rebel’s resources will be exhausted in a protracted fight. The troops will also become demoralized. The enemy also has an interest in resolving conflict quickly but may prefer to impose a slow death instead by merely cutting off all trade routes and allowing the rebels to die of strangulation—such a strategy requires an anarchist navy to break the blockade. An extended conflict shifts the advantage to the power of greater size and resources and the size of this advantage is proportional to the differential. Even if the rebels are self-sufficient in food production, resources like fuel and munitions will run dry.

## **7. Present and Future**

This paper studies the feasibility of defending an anarchist society with irregular guerrillas. History shows that guerrilla wars are protracted and extremely costly wars that impose a significant death toll on the guerrillas and civilians alike. Industry, infrastructure, and homes are destroyed,

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<sup>34</sup> Sun-Tzu assesses the relative strength of two opposing armies on the basis of seven traits, which are: Which has popular support? Which commander is of greater ability? Which has an advantage of climate or terrain? Which army has greater discipline? Which army has superior strength? Which has better training? Which is more unwavering in its rewards and disciplines? Claims Sun-Tzu, “On the basis of this comparison, I know who will win and who will lose.” In the case of a war between irregular guerrillas and a regular army, hopefully the terrain favors a guerrilla resistance and enjoys strong popular support. However, the regular arm is likely to have the advantage in the other five areas. Professional soldiers are better due to specialization. We live in a world of specialization. Those who possess a comparative advantage in warfare join the military. Those who do not will remain in the private sector as civilians. The tragedy of civilian resistance is that it invariably pits these relatively peaceful men and women who lack the training and proclivity for battle against those who do. There is no question that the personality traits and training that favor superior battle tactics belong to the members of the armed forces.

new capital investment collapses, food shortages arise, morbidity spikes, fertility rates fall, and living standards plummet. This holds true even in victory, as exemplified by the Vietnam War. A guerrilla victory also depends on the self-restraint of the enemy, especially with respect to reprisals against civilians, but this self-restraint is often absent. A guerrilla defense is not very effective in most homeland defense scenarios as indicated by its high rate of defeat. A protracted war of attrition heavily favors larger, conventional forces who can be defeated only by losing the will to win. For these reasons, guerrilla wars are fought only out of necessity by relatively weak powers for whom professional armed forces are insufficient or nonexistent. Nations with the resources to build proper conventional armed forces invariably do so. If a future anarchist society is wealthy then it would be a mistake for them not to raise an army, especially since wealth will also make them a more attractive target. Yet libertarians often argue *ex ante*, before we can know what the anarchist economy may look like, that they should defend their society with guerrilla warfare, even if an organized conventional military is attainable. This reveals a misguided apprehension of the usefulness of guerrilla warfare.

Since the libertarian preference for guerrilla warfare is largely informed by the American Civil War, I challenge some of their criticisms of the Southern strategy. I argue that it was not a mistake for the Confederacy to raise a regular army and meet Union mass with mass in defense of its population centers, ports, rails, rivers, and industry. The libertarians overstate the effectiveness of a strictly guerrilla defense, but the effectiveness of guerrillas alone cannot be easily deduced from conflicts in which they fought alongside regular forces. To the extent that the guerrilla campaign was effective, it depended on the existence of the regular army because guerrillas are most effective as complements, not substitutes. I also agree with the Southern sentiment that every inch of Southern territory deserved to be defended, although this was not feasible given the

Confederacy's large size and modest resources. However, it was not a mistake to attempt to take the fight to the North, which was almost entirely spared the destruction of the war it initiated, given that a protracted war would favor the North with its greater resources. Instead, the South mostly fought on its own territory and suffered the destruction of its farms, homes, and entire cities, the death of countless civilians, and countless more made refugees.

In support of my above assertions, I cite a number of experts such as Townshend (1997, 157) who observes that irregulars can weaken but cannot defeat a powerful enemy; *ibid* and Boot (2013) who argue that guerrillas are most effective as complements to regular forces; Hattaway and Rafuse (1999, 131) who argue that a Fabian strategy was inappropriate for the defense of the Confederacy; Bicheno (2001a, 221) who argues that the Confederacy should have sought a quick decisive victory in the eastern theatre; and Boot's (2013) findings that guerrilla wars impose a heavy toll on guerrillas, last a long time and still result in defeat most of the time. Even Sutherland (2009, ix), who believes that guerrillas were decisive in the Civil War, doesn't propose that the Southern effort should have relied on guerrillas alone. Instead, he believes that their use was not optimized, writing that "History had shown that guerrillas could not win wars on their own, but rebel leaders knew not how to make them part of some broader plan."

Overall, I find an excessive libertarian preoccupation with what the Confederacy did wrong at the expense of learning from what the Union did right. It raised a regular army, took the fight to enemy territory, sparing itself the destruction of the war, and waged a conventional war (complemented by guerrillas) that successfully captured rails, rivers, and cities to achieve a relatively quick and decisive victory. There is something to be said for emulating the winning side in war rather than only studying what not to do. The relatively meager resources of the South constrained its ability to overwhelm Union forces, but this reveals the importance of developing

and maintaining a strong economy. Southern leadership bungled their economic policies in numerous ways (see Thornton and Ekelund, 2004) but the anarchist society, lacking centralization, will be immune to such errors.

War for the anarchist society would risk becoming a total war, requiring the mobilization of the entire population and their resources (see Bicheno, 2001c, 915-916). The length of war is generally longer under a guerrilla defense, and anarchist populations which highly value production and peace may have a low tolerance for the level of death that we see in warzones today. Mao advocated a deliberately protracted guerrilla war strategy, building up a conventional force in time and eventually taking the offensive. Newhard (2017; 2018) recommends that anarchists build conventional and nuclear forces including a peacetime standing army combined with a strategic doctrine of disproportionate force to achieve quick and decisive victory when attacked. If anarchism produces rapid capital investment and growth, then a standing army should be attainable. If it resembles a modest agrarian republic, then this approach must be abandoned; the community of citizen-soldiers will be responsible for their own guerrilla defense.<sup>35</sup> Since capital is attracted to regions where property rights are secure and the risk of war is low, the provision of an effective national defense force will be key is achieving a critical mass of support for any emerging anarchist society. Anarchists should thus work to develop a proper military before a credible threat emerges. The history of imperialism reveals that a mere guerrilla defense is not an effective deterrent to invasion. Anarchists must build a proper defense capable of deterring aggressors rather than a mere token defense force incapable of tackling likely invasion scenarios. Deterrence is ideal, but when it fails, wars must be quick to save lives and spare as much

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<sup>35</sup> This permanent military readiness will have profound psychological effects on society as they become a martial society. I think of the Spartans and of the Hitlerjugend, where the individual is cog in the military machine, as parents raise their children to be soldiers, this being the basis of what it means to be a good citizen.

capital from destruction as possible. Paramount to success is the defense of land and sea trade routes that allow importation of food, fuel, and weapons, as well as exports of domestic output. The guerrilla defense is not a path to this outcome. The anarchists may also need to develop a permanent armaments industry since beating plowshares into swords in wartime, and the sentiment “When the enemy comes we fight, when he goes away we plough” (Stromberg, 1979, 45) is not workable in the twenty-first century.

Although much combat now is urban warfare, the days of large armies and battles are not over. The invasion of Kuwait was carried out by almost 1,000,000 troops, most of whom were American. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was carried out by a coalition of 380,000 troops. Anarchists will also need to acquire or develop cutting-edge weapon systems. Murphy (2010, 59, fn. 59) claims that anarchist weapons “would be designed for defensive use,” but most weapons that are useful for defense are also useful for offense. This is easy to see in small arms, but even long-range weapons like ICBMs and SLBMs play a role in defense and, more importantly, deterrence. The United States Marine Corps concludes that “there exists no clear division between the offensive and defensive. Our theory of war should not attempt to impose one artificially” (MCDP-1, 1997, 35).

Does the fact that guerrillas armed with Kentucky rifles defeated redcoats armed with the Brown Bess musket suggest that guerrillas armed with AR-10s could defeat soldiers supported by drones, gunships, and satellite surveillance? The spread between the firepower of guerrillas and state armies grew significantly in the twentieth century and continues to diverge. There is still a role to be played by guerrillas, but only as a supplement to conventional forces. Even such necessities as rockets, anti-aircraft missiles and artillery imply at a minimum a well-trained, semi-professional army, even more so for modern fighter planes or tanks. We must also consider that

the morale of the soldiers is tied to the quality of their weapons and the quality of their training (du Picq, 1921, 124). Morale will be low if anarchists are defending their society against a major power with small arms alone.

In contrast with the experts who observe the rising importance of guerrilla warfare in the modern world, I fear that the era of guerrilla warfare may be waning. When the enemy has drones and satellites, helicopters that can spot the enemy in the dark or under cover of forests, energy weapons, and mechanized warriors, technology is rendering guerrilla resistance obsolete because there is nowhere to hide, and it is difficult to strike back. Technological improvements in weapon systems have enabled US forces to pick off their enemies in the Middle East in small groups from several miles up with Predator drones and AC-130 gunships. For most ground operations, special forces will be deployed against anarchists, similar to the ongoing US operations in Africa. Guerrillas have been influential in the past several centuries but technological advancements in warfare, most of which are beyond the reach of all but the richest governments due to their high costs, may render guerrilla resistance obsolete in the coming centuries or decades. When individual combatants can be monitored in real time from the sky and annihilated from an unseen, unmanned drone with no warning, resistance may be futile.

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