Rothbard (1999) argues that morality and utility require a guerrilla defense of libertarian societies, an assessment shared by many libertarian thinkers. This paper reviews the literature on guerrilla warfare to consider whether guerrilla forces alone, wielding small arms and light weapons, could successfully defend anarcho-capitalist territory. Despite the romance that surrounds them, the expert consensus is that 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 the 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.

Introduction
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.” 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

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1 Guerillas tend to be relatively small and decentralized paramilitary units that rely on mobility, elusiveness, and surprise (Department of the Army, 1961, 8).
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
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.² 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.³ 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
to such Confederate raiders as John Hunt Morgan, John S. Mosby, William T. Anderson, and

² 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.”
³ 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 conven-
tional tactics, as at Lexington in 1775.
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 offensive strategy. Yet libertarians need not look only to the past. Although soldiers and civilians were more evenly matched in the 18th and 19th 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 reconsider 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. 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. Since modern weapons require significant financial capital, an underdeveloped economy will restrict anarchists to the use of small arms and light weapons, some of which may even have to be provided by a sponsor.

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

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4 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 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.”

5 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).

6 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.
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 section 3 I briefly address the shortcomings of guerrilla warfare in the American Revolutionary War and Civil War. In section 4 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 5.

**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. This continued with the emergence of 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 19th 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.

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

8 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 pro-
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 the enemy, cause damage to supplies and utilities, and hinder and delay enemy operations” (FM 31-21, 1961, 105). They defeat the enemy through physical or psychological attrition by accumulating many small victories over time (Jones, 2001, 681). 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). Guerrillas 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).

Despite their weaknesses, guerrillas possess several advantages. General T.E. Lawrence “of Arabia” believed imperialist powers were “eminently defeatable” by guerrillas given appropriate

9 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 whither. 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).

10 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.
“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).\(^\text{11}\) Much modern weapons technology is also well-suited for fighting a guerrilla war. According to Townshend (2001, 385), guerilla warfare in the 20th 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).\(^\text{12}\) 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 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).\(^\text{13}\) It is also argued that guerrillas must have

\(^\text{11}\) 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.”

\(^\text{12}\) 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 guerilla 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).

\(^\text{13}\) Bases also provide organization and supplies and more people. In the Vietnam war, this was North Vietnam. In the war in Afghanistan it was Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden was found and assassinated in 2011. In Algeria, the FLN used Morocco and Tunisia as a rear base (Melnik, 1964, 124).
the support of the masses (Hart, 1991, 367). Favorable public opinion is an important pillar of guerrilla warfare, one which the anarchists will presumably enjoy in their own lands.

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). 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 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).

Despite 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

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14 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 the 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).

15 Absent mass support for the movement, guerrillas 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). Guerrilla movements that fall back on terrorism are more likely to end quickly (Connable and Libicki, 2010, 99).

16 “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).

17 Weaknesses of the Mujahideen included ingroup fighting, lack of unified leadership and strategic planning, limited communications and limited firepower (U.S. Army, 1989, 6).
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. They faced 40,000 British personnel (Townshend, 2001, 385).

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 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. Although the US has largely been free from invasion in its history, in the next section I briefly discuss the experience of Americans fighting as guerrillas.

The Early American Experience
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.

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18 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, there will be charity including volunteering and providing one’s own weapons. The charity of rich may supply more expensive weapons, or large fees or donations. Some guerrilla groups like the 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 involved locally grown opium poppy (Jones, 2008).

19 The Battle of Thermopylae shows what a greatly outnumbered force is capable of with discipline, strategy, and favorable terrain (see Herodotus, 2003, 487-497).
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.\(^{20}\) 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).\(^{21}\)

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 unable to fully exploit the efficiency of specialization and they developed a reputation

\(^{20}\) The Hessian officer, Captain Frederich 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).

\(^{21}\) 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 sap their strength, buy time, and wear down the morale of the enemy (Hart, 1991, 26-27).
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 experience of the American Civil War further exhibits guerrilla warfare’s strengths and weaknesses. 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. Libertarians are right to argue that the Southern leadership was misguided to oppose guerrillas, and indeed the Union was effective in deploying guerrilla fighters against the Confederate population. However, guerrillas were most effective as complements to the regular army rather than as substitutes for one (see Newhard, 2022). The success experienced by guerrillas in the Civil War does not imply that Confederate guerrillas alone could have fought more successfully. It is a leap of faith that guerrillas alone could have defended Richmond as successfully as General Lee did for so long; or defend Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Vicksburg, or Atlanta; or prevent Sherman’s March to the Sea.

Guerrilla warfare requires that one conduct the war on one’s own territory which is extremely costly. Citizens of the South suffered starvation, confiscation, economic destruction, evictions, mass rapes, and massacres, while the North was almost entirely spared the destruction of the war (ibid). If the South had been able to take the fight to the North, their appetite for war and their support for Lincoln would not have lasted as long. Taking the fight to the North, although unsuccessful, was determined by General Lee to be his best hope for victory in the war; the Confederate economy was much smaller than the Union’s, rendering a protracted war unwinnable. Instead, Lee hoped that victorious battles on Northern territory might draw Europe into the war or even strike a knockout blow to the Union (McPherson, 1999, 32). Crossing over into Maryland would also allow Lee to feed his troops there instead of in Virginia, and potentially recruit volunteers for the Army of Northern Virginia (Hattaway and Rafuse, 1999, 131). Since guerrilla warfare has evolved over time, with the technological gap between regular armies and civilians only growing over time, in the next section I modern guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency in a modern setting.
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).  

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 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 American Civil War.

Libertarians who call for a strictly guerrilla defense of free societies should suspend their preoccupation with the American Civil War where the technological gap between citizen and soldier was smaller and consider what a modern conflict with a major power would look like.
like. The history of US interventionism yields many case studies including its conflicts in the Philippines, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, not to mention various additional paramilitary groups supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). 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 guerrilla 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 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.23

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 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 distinctly 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

23 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).
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 airstrike 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 be difficult to achieve because guerrillas do not hold fixed positions. This is the benefit of the guerrilla strategy when facing a superior enemy:

[Enemy-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).24

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24 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?
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 side of greater size and resources, and the size of this advantage is proportional to the power differential. Even if the rebels are self-sufficient in food production, resources like fuel and munitions will run dry.

**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, 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 (e.g., the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam in 1968). 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. In support of my above assertions, I cite a number of scholars such as Townshend (1997, 157) who observes that irregulars can weaken but cannot

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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. 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 generally belong to the members of the armed forces.
defeat a powerful enemy; Townshend (1997) and Boot (2013) who argue that guerrillas are most effective as complements to regular forces; 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.

War for the anarchist society would risk becoming a total war, requiring the mobilization of the entire population and their resources (see Bicheno, 2001, 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. 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 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, antiaircraft 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 for guerrillas 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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