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# The Comparison of Guerilla Warfare Framework of Mao Tse-Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara

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## Abstract

Small war became popularly used in irregular warfare when a more considerable force dominated the opponent. Small wars but troublesome opposing forces are known as guerrillas. Since war architects popularized the guerrilla theory, it has also been frequently used in wars between forces. The psychological impact of most of the war's success can influence both state and group leaders to apply this model. It has been practiced and applied for a long time in various parts of the world until today. The very popularity of this model of warfare has prompted the author to produce an article that aims to compare the three guerrilla architects' frameworks from the point of view of a comprehensive strategy, tactics, and social aspects using the method of collecting data through document study. The results show that the framework of Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara about guerrilla warfare has its characteristics and perspectives.

**Keywords:** Guerilla, Framework, Mao Tse-Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, Che Guevara

## 1. Introduction

Starting from the history of violent conflict that occurred in the history of human civilization, war strategies are continuously studied by scholars. From the history sheet, almost all countries in the world have experienced wars. Quoting the report of B. Jongman and J. Van der Dennen, which said that, included in this finding, since 3600 BC., the world only knows 292 years of peace. During this period, there were 14,531 wars, big and small, in which 3,640,000,000 people died (Dennen, 1988). So significant is the incidence of war in the historical period and the casualties it caused, causing many countries to implement and develop their defense and war strategies to win them. The development of war from time to time changes according to the period. The world's war period has the characteristics of theory, mechanism, strategy, equipment, and communication that more specifically adjust the era or period.

The war's quality and method have continued to develop over time, better known as the war period's generation of war. All-powerful countries pay attention, observe and understand the context of the period and generation of war that occurred. From the side of the war generation, at first, it was better known as the first war generation reflecting

the smoothbore rifle era tactics, line and column tactics. These tactics were developed in part in response to weapons' technological factors that maximized line, rigid drills required to produce high fire rates, etc. (Lind, 1989). The current generation of warfare has entered the fourth generation; extensively, fourth-generation warfare is likely to be widespread and largely undefined; the difference between war and peace will blur to a vanishing point. It will be nonlinear, perhaps to the point that no battlefield or front can be determined. The distinction between "civilian" and "military" may disappear (Lind, 1989). This fourth-generation war element has more in common with guerrilla warfare, namely that it is not great, widespread, civil-military assimilation. The famous guerrilla warfare and many references occurred in the Sino-Japanese war, the Vietnam-France-US war, the Cuban revolutionary war.

Although much literature describes guerrilla warfare from various versions until now, no one has discussed guerrilla warfare's comparative architects in detail. Through comparisons, the evaluation, development, and improvement of guerrilla thinking can be obtained. As Kruglansky said that, in particular, social comparison is primarily understood as a process involved in fulfilling basic needs such as self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-improvement (Roese, 2000). The guerrilla's successful application in modern warfare in three countries made its architects popular with international war analysts. Within two decades of "guerrilla warfare," Mao Tse Tung's revised new version could lay the foundation of his power and form the axis on which China turned from Nationalist to Communist (Fuller, 2014). Meanwhile, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietnamese armed forces architect, who never attended a formal military academy, became a legend both in Vietnam and abroad for his military victory against the French at Dien Bien Phu 1954 (An, 1980). Meanwhile, Ernesto Che Guevara's success is stated in his memoir that, "The victory of the Cuban people over the Batista dictatorship ... demonstrated the ability of the people to liberate themselves through guerrilla warfare from the government that oppressed them" (McCormick & Berger, 2019).

#### Guerrilla Warfare Theory.

According to historians Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, guerrilla warfare was historically viewed as ... mass war, people's war. Guerrilla groups [have] become the armed nucleus, the vanguard of widespread fighting. Guerrilla drew great power from the masses of the people themselves. Guerrilla warfare [has] been used by parties supported by the majority but has a much smaller number of weapons to defend against oppression (Hughbank, 2009). Guerrilla is a war that involves small elements against a more extensive and more pervasive element of force. In practice, many groups/countries involved in violent conflict face opposing forces who have large armaments and troops and adopt this strategy to win their battles.

The practice of warfare that adopted a guerrilla architect was introduced by Chinese leaders Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap from Vietnam, and Che Guevara from Cuba. This paper describes the incoherence characteristics of guerrilla warfare conveyed by Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap from Vietnam, and Che Guevara, who look the same but have different characteristics. The aim is to analyze the concepts in the guerrilla warfare strategy's focus, the tactics of its minor war aspects, and the social aspects of warfare created by the three architects of war. The three war architects have a unified concept of strategy, but their characteristics are different.

#### War Strategy Theory

The war strategy brought up by the architects of war had a general element of the purpose of war. Strategy, as mentioned as the strategy model of Army War College Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., with its ends, ways, and means, as the core of this theory (Yarger, 2012). The content of the theory states that there is content in the strategy directly containing a goal to be achieved, using the means and ways used. The "Ends, Ways, Means" strategy model emerged as the dominant strategy model in the US Army (Webb, 2019). The strategy model developed in the 1980s is widely used in United States doctrine. Meanwhile, globally, according to Clausewitz, the strategy is to use combat to win the war (Čajić, 2016), which indicates the purpose of a battle to win the war. Aspects of the two theorists' goals can be said to prioritize a direction, the purpose to be carried out.

It is fascinating to reveal because the three architects of war apply the principles of guerrilla warfare. Therefore, the author wants to broaden the concept of the three architects of guerrilla warfare. This article aims to analyze the guerrilla warfare framework, namely Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara, by comparing a comprehensive strategic, tactics, and social perspective of warfare. Furthermore, this article will explain the differences in the three architectural figures' thoughts in implementing guerrilla warfare. The explanation simultaneously answers the comprehensive strategy used, the tactics applied, and the social aspects of the war taken.

### Theory of War Tactics

Sun Tzu stated that, in war, practicing deception will bring success (Giles, 2012). Sun Tzu's thinking means that tactics in battle are a way of deceiving opponents who are full of trickery, which was always different in its application of battle. To execute war tricks that use known geography (a situation, terrain, weather)—knowing the geography known to him in a continuous time series of various developments. Deception against an opponent means knowing precisely the condition of the opponent in battle. The opponent's condition can be seen from the number, position, weaponry, mental psychology, habits, or social character. Executing deception directs the troops to trick the opponent by surprise, luring the opponent, weakening the opponent, which requires the art to conduct it. It may seem like the injustice of battle at first sight, but all skills are being used to win the war, taking into account the logic of pragmatic thinking.

### The Theory of Social Aspects of War

The theory of war, which is an act of violence to force our enemies to do what we want (Clausewitz, 1989), shows an imposition of using violence through social and material means to achieve victory from the conflict. Clausewitz pointed out that conventional warfare involves actors from a social perspective of violence through conflict as the trigger, which is further detailed in discussing the involvement of the state/war determinants, military/coercive action, the people/users of power (trinity). In a recent study, violent actors' involvement in conventional warfare studied and developed a review of the war from a social perspective that leads to functionalism and conflict. The functionalist theory states that war and peace reacted with each other, developed from each other, one in the group, and the relationship between groups (Park, 1941). Further discussion of the theory is related to Weber's conflict theory, which sees that armed conflict is considered war only if it involves clashes between organized coercion methods, with at least one fighting being characterized by the armed forces and state apparatus, which are organizationally different (Kestnbaum, 2009).

## 2. Methods

The discussion in this paper uses the library research method, or literature, a variety of activities related to how to collect data using libraries, reading, taking notes, and processing research materials. It also means as a way of collecting data and several sources related to the research theme. Expectations from using literature studies will later be able to obtain theoretical references from various sources. The theory obtained will be used as a basis for research practice. Furthermore, secondary data collection, which becomes supporting data, comes from the literature that takes from credible journal articles, books, and internet sources. The data obtained were then analyzed to get a conclusion by comparison analysis.

## 3. Results

### Comprehensive Comparison Strategy

Sun Tzu coined guerrilla warfare in the sixth century, but guerrilla naming was not understood. Sun Tzu only provided a frame of mind; hence, when we can attack, we look like we are not capable; when using our powers, we must appear inactive; when we are close, we must make the enemy believe that we are far away; when far away, we have to make them believe that we are close (Giles, 2012). This frame of mind was used in the Sun Tzu

era's war tactics and was applied to the Spanish and Portuguese people who succeeded in defeating Napoleon in the 19th century. Guerrilla taking the term guerrilla from the small form *Guerra* means war in Spanish, and the guerrillas are named *Guerrillero* and *Guerrilla*. This form of guerrilla warfare's growing popularity is because it has a reputation for producing many victories. More and more groups are developing in several aspects. When viewed from the content in guerrilla warfare characteristics, it can be analyzed from various angles, starting from the strategy used to deal with the forces it is fighting against.

Strategies are often applied in planning patterns of action to deal with problems to achieve the desired goals that contain a goal to be achieved, using the means and ways. In Mao Tse Tung's thought, the strategy used was to deal with Japanese aggression, which had more weapons, complete with troop forces prepared using people's power as the method and confiscating weapons and regional support/logistics means (Ghandhi, 1965). The 1937 pamphlet *Yu Chi Chan* or Mao's guerrilla warfare clearly describes that the war of revolutionary character in guerrilla operations is necessary. Especially in the war waged for the emancipation of the people who inhabit a vast nation. China is such a nation, a nation that is technically underdeveloped and with poor communication. He found himself faced with a strong and victorious Japanese imperialism (Tse-Tung, 1989). Although in principle, Mao carried out his operations based on Sun Tzu's theories, which were claimed to be a powerful strategy.

By carrying out his strategy using guerrilla operations as the means, the guerrilla operations should not be considered an independent form of war. It is only one step in total war, one aspect of the revolutionary struggle. The goal appears to be that Mao prioritizes operations and does not prioritize the grand strategy, including national objectives in general, or tends to be in the national military strategy scope. Its comprehensive strategy only has elements of the strength of the red army he leads, even though it has the political power of the Communist Party.

Indeed, to earn a quicker victory, it requires a broader strategy containing the following elements: support from the international environment, strategic, political, economic, and informational policies. Strategies, according to its scopes, are running comprehensive, mutually supportive, and closely related. Art Lykke argues at a strategic level; it is sequentially supporting each other from the smallest scale, namely theatre strategy, national military strategy, national security strategy, national interests, external environment, as illustrated in the following picture:



Illustration of Comprehensive Strategy (Yarger, 2012)

Mao has realized the illustration as above in guerrilla operations as support for a larger level of strategy. However, running this operation requires a focus of thought. Therefore, Mao has never claimed that guerrilla operation was the only determinant in a state's political control struggle. Nevertheless, it is a possible and requisite development that has to be done in an agrarian-based revolutionary war (Tse-Tung, 1989). Further explanations that a guerrilla operation is a form of national struggles and other struggle operations, and it still needs to be carried out in the political struggle of a state.

In his fight on facing external forces, Vo Nguyen Giap was deeply inspired by Mao Tse Tung's thought of an operation. The war against the Vietnamese people's foreign forces was divided into two periods—first, resistance

against French military power from 1945 to 1954. Second, the period of resistance against the military power of the United States after 1954. In his memoirs, Mao Tse-Tung's military thinking contributed significantly to our Party's leadership in the Resistance War (Giap, 1964). Vo Nguyen Giap still sees that his national strategy is influenced by and influences the international revolution. His strategic thinking on the geopolitical constellation of the region is more influential so that the implementation of a guerrilla strategy against opposing forces is more convincing to gain victory.

Vo Nguyen Giap stated that the resistance war's success and Dien Bien Phu was inseparable from the favorable conditions prevailing in the international situation's evolution (1964). In Art Lykke's strategy illustration, Giap's national military strategy thinking is more comprehensive with a global impact. In his mind, if there were a battle against colonialism, the international world would react. The spirit of anti-colonialism surfaced after the end of the second world war. The superpowers' power was divided in two, and the victory of Russia and China as supporters seemed to encourage them to face the war against colonialism.

Meanwhile, Che Guevara did not consider a strategy in carrying out his guerrilla fighting in his mind. Che Guevara only relied on the spirit of resistance, a smaller comprehensive strategy based on Art Lykke's theory, namely the theatre strategy or tactic scale. In his memoir, Che Guevara stated that a general strategy would emerge as the struggle develops. The prediction of the struggle's character is supported by analyzing each society's strengths but does not exclude its independence (Guevara, 1964). The thinking of the strategy nationally was unthinkable beforehand, due to the absence of national/regional support and even weakening the guerrilla warfare being held. In its history, Che Guevara did not adopt the version of guerrilla warfare by Mao Tse Tung or Vo Nguyen Giap, only the principle of warfare equates it, namely a small military force facing a more significant and more potent military force. Compared to the three guerrilla architects, it will appear that the guerrilla strategy at each level, Vo Nguyen Giap has more strategic thinking concerning geopolitics' resistance on a regional/international basis. Simultaneously, Mao Tse Tung reflects more on a national military strategy, and Che Guevara ignores the national strategy/generally. However, the strategic component's thinking has the same goal of fighting the enemy and winning the battle, using community groups/small groups, farmers/residents in a guerrilla way. A comprehensive comparison of the strategies of the three war architects are showing in the table below:

Table 1: Comparison of Comprehensiveness Strategy

Comprehensive strategy	Mao Tse-Tung	Vo Nguyen Giap	Che Guevara
External Environment		The national strategy influenced and was influencing the international revolution.	
National Interest	Agrarian based revolutionary war.		
National Security Strategy			
National Military Strategy/Theater Strategy			A general strategy will emerge as the struggle develops.

#### Comparison of the Tactic of War

In the history of war, the use of strategy was implemented in combat tactics. Tactics connote the art of deceptive warfare, as in Sun Tzu's thought, which suggests the application of deception to get a victory that needs to be considered in war (Dimovski et al., 2012). From Sun Tsu's thoughts, Mao Tse Tung got more inspiration in his guerrilla thinking. Sun Tzu's thoughts are very relevant to Mao's guerrilla thinking because both use the same

background of Chinese society's social character, and both tend to discuss war operations that do not discuss broad war strategies.

In his journey to lead the guerrilla operation, the tactics ran by Mao Tse Tung were pure war tactics that prioritized seven main actions: acts of sabotage and terror that were disseminated, relying on comprehensive intelligence data, designed to benefit from disruptive actions, avoiding fierce resistance, disturbance. Furthermore, shock and high mobility, fierce and short duration incursions using small troop units (1965). Small operational units involved in guerrilla attacks were carried out to encircle the main forces' significant battles. In particular, Mao's method was pointed out by Guofangbu shizhengju, Chen Haoliang, Wang Tongluo, and Liu Liqin that, encircling an isolated force and attacking its reinforcement (*weiyuan dadian*) and attacking isolated forces and delaying reinforcement (*zuyuan dadiari*) is a combination of siege and defense. Within the framework of the car war (Cheng, 2005). The methods of siege and defense he applies are none other than the concepts of Sun Tzu's yin and yang tactics. Of all the Sun Tzu tactics adopted by Mao, not all were applied in guerrilla combat. Only the same perception was used in the battle.

Vo Nguyen Giap's thought of applying war tactics looks more at the broad strategy (grand strategy) so that the tactics carried out are more flexible and structured, and modern. Vo Nguyen Giap saw the war he led at a macro level, which was inspired by the victory of the red troops led by Mao Tse Tung during the Long March incident. The spirit of national fighting was incited by a leader who had the support of his people. This moral factor implemented guerrilla tactics more successfully. The national elements work together from the political elements (representatives of the government) who work, the people, and the military.

Vo Nguyen Giap's preparations were carried out by building independent companies and concentrated battalions broadly, a combination of political and combat work, the division of the front area of the confrontation and the rear area of the rally, planned battle zones across the rear of the enemy, small attacks involving three or four guerrilla platoons. This small group consists of 20 to 30 people led by 2-3 people in a guerrilla team (O'Dowd, 2013). The tactics employed are designed to take advantage of disruptive actions, surprise attacks, and sporadic sieges combined into simultaneous open confrontation warfare that selects a relatively weak enemy zone. The concentration of the absolute advantage of the deployment of force can weaken the enemy's position and apply the principles of dynamic troop movement, initiative, mobility, and speed of decision making. As an example of combat operations, Giap summarizes the use of four main 'blocks' of its troops to attack the enemy on four different battlefields, namely East Cochin, Central Highlands, Region Lima, and Tri Thiên (Pribbenow, 2008).

The tactics adopted by Che Guevara did not adopt Mao Tse Tung's or Vo Nguyen Giap's thoughts; instead, it is based on the thoughts of Marxism and Leninism without the spirit of nationalism. His guerrilla warfare thought led to the development of a sect that adhered to proletarian internationalism, and it proved that Che Guevara led the guerrilla warfare in the failed rebellions in Congo and Bolivia. As a guerrilla architect in Cuba, he got great success, supported by Castro's political factors. Guerrilla tactical patterns are more directed at the movement of small troop groups to gain an advantage at the point chosen to disrupt the opponent's strength who takes advantage of the battlefield conditions. Small troop groups that have fast and agile movements can focus on resistance, known as *foco*. Guevara even counted the number of guerrillas needed to form a *foco* and start an armed struggle (Childs, 1995). The comparison of the three war architects of war tactics are showing in the table below:

Table 2: Comparison of War Tactics

Mao Tse-Tung	Vo Nguyen Giap	Che Guevara
- Sabotage and disseminated terror	- Disruptive actions	- Small troop group movement
- Intelligence data	- Sudden attack combination open confrontation	- Excellence at selecting points
- Avoid fierce resistance	- Sporadic sieges combined into open confrontation	- Disruptive
- Distraction and surprise	- Simultaneous attack selects a weak enemy zone	- Fast and agile
- High mobility	- Absolute advantage concentration	
- Sudden attack	- Dynamic movement	
- Short duration	- Initiative	
	- Mobility and speed of decision makings	

### Comparison of the Social Aspects of War

The social aspect of warfare discussed highlights two things about social in its function of war, commonly known as functionalist, and social conflict. The functionalist explanation that war can create a stronger sense of social bond and solidarity because a common enemy can have the same goal live together and build a sense of unity and a spirit of struggle. Such a structure helps to form resistance forces with tighter and firmer social ties and solidarity, shown by their fighting spirit, discipline, and hand in hand. The enemy who has armed strength is stronger than the resistance force. Thus, Clausewitz placed great emphasis on the enemy's armed forces as a "center of gravity" - an emphasis that dominated his entire work (Atkinson, 1974), which defined the enemy's armed forces as a center of gravity be destroyed, through various actions.

As Mao stated, the emphasis on political education is the most fundamental to inculcating "iron" discipline. Political education is the political mobilization of society, as the most fundamental condition for winning the war (Edward L. Katzenbach, 1955). Political education and community mobilization through its Red Army. When the Red Army fought, at the same time turning the people into a political force of the revolution through armed and organized propaganda. Political mobilization has two inherent meanings. First, win public sympathy to agree with the flow they are forming, which eventually forms the group-that has a revolutionary spirit against its enemies. Mao succeeded in mobilizing the community through his propaganda to unite to form an anti-Japanese invasion group. Second, arouse people's reactions to resistance against the invasions of other countries. It can be said that Mao used his method to win public sympathy and arouse people's reactions to fight against his enemies. Ceng and Gitting's post states that, during the war against Japan, Mao maintained his regular troops, so that by June 1944, roughly three-quarters of the combined Communist force of 475,000 were regular troops and only a quarter were guerrillas (Grice, 2018). Its troop strength increased from the support of more than 2,200,000 militias, which are officially estimated to number 5,500,000 (2018). The number of regular troops and its fantastic build-up fueled propaganda.

To attract the sympathy of the community and raise the enthusiasm of people from various regions, Vo Nguyen Giap utilized mass communication methods using existing social media. Vo Nguyen Giap and Nguyen Chi Thanh have waged a "war of words" through communist journals and newspapers on the right balance of guerrilla warfare and "major fighting" (Pribbenow, 2008). Even though many opinions say Vo Nguyen Giap adapted Mao's concept, he succeeded in mobilizing his people to join forces against the enemy they faced by opening insights and understanding of the people. Understanding as a united group using violence can fight enemies who have more complete weapons and can even win it—the formation of groups that launched the Giap resistance action categorized into several forms. In the book *People's War People's Army*, it is revealed that the Vietnamese armed



forces, which were formed under the command of Giap, are categorized into regular units, regional forces and guerrilla units, or para-military organizations (Forgács, 2019). The troop category he formed led to a significant collectivity. A significant increase was reflected in the number of troops. The Vietnam National Army consists of 350,000 men, which detailed 240,000 of the regular army and the rest of the militia and provincial guards (Stanley, 1954). Its reinforcement is supported by more than 1,200,000 communist party members from various workers associations (Khanh, 2015). The People's War and the People's Army became Vo's thought that a group used acts of violence that were manifested through a combination of regular troops and militia forces to carry out attacks very effectively. It is said to be more effective because of regional troops and regular units designed according to their territory, plus local militias who already know the area's terrain and social conditions.

In the beginning, Che Guevara, who worked as a guerrilla doctor, increased his reputation as a guerrilla leader by only accepting the formation of existing organizations. Much of the guerrilla's success in Cuba he led was based on mass organizations stemming from the peasants' politicization of some urban regions formed by the genius of Fidel Castro (Petras, 1998). In the years that followed, Che had experienced forming guerrillas in Congo and Bolivia but failed to establish a broad and robust structure. Having this contrasts with the guerrillas' social structure formed by Mao Tse Tung and Vo Nguyen Giap. They succeeded in mobilizing the community to form resistance on a wide scale. Che does not have the perspective of mobilizing Latin America's socio-cultural structure in the form of defense (Rich, 2017), but understands that the revolution's conditions can be created from an uprising (Kalyanaraman, 2003). The comparison of the social aspects of the three war architects are showing in the table below:

Table 3: Comparison of the Social Aspects of War

Mao Tse-Tung	Vo Nguyen Giap	Che Guevara
- Propaganda	- Mass communication	- From existing organizations.
- Political education for mass mobilization	- The understanding of the period "Unified groups can face strong enemies."	- Non-broad mass mobilization.
- The composition of the regular troops and militia	- The composition of regular, regional, and guerrilla / para-military forces	- Militia
- 475,000 regular troops	- 350,000 regular and militia	
- 5,500,000 militia	- Supported by 1,200,000 members of the Communist Party	

#### 4. Discussion

Although the comparison results of the three war architects have differences, when evaluated in-depth, it can be seen that the similarities are in the application of the theory used. In short, it can be said that the comprehensive theory of strategy, war tactics, and social aspects of warfare are the key to the successful application of more effectively guerrilla warfare. The limited literature in this study requires further research to determine other elements that significantly influence the practice of guerrilla warfare. Furthermore, the results of this comparison of guerrilla warfare can be used as a reference for military and non-military agencies to understand the behavior of this warfare model. The warfare model which remains relevant is applied by a group/ country from time to time and can be developed as a guerrilla counter or a counter over a guerrilla counter. The comparison of guerrilla warfare in Mao Tse Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara from strategy, tactics, and social warfare can disclose their different thoughts. The guerrilla warfare framework of these three war architects/experts adjusts to the developing politics, local socio-cultural character, and battlefield conditions. The three of them explained that the practice of guerrilla warfare could be applied to their respective situations and conditions. It takes a more elaborated, planned, and fully-fledged thought to practice guerrilla warfare so that it becomes the only final alternative to facing a superior opposing force.

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