The influence of urban guerrilla theories developed in other countries during the past several decades on would-be terrorists in the United States is considerable. To understand the development of urban guerrilla activity in this country, it is necessary to examine its historical and geographic antecedents. This examination helps focus on the peculiar nature of this genre of revolutionary activity as it is practiced here and illuminates some of the dilemmas encountered by the urban guerrilla in the United States.

Such an examination requires, first, a definition of terms, although the media uses “terrorist,” “urban guerrilla,” and “revolutionary” almost interchangeably. In the context of today’s political world, urban guerrilla warfare can be defined as criminal conduct for revolutionary purposes. Terrorism, on the other hand, is usually violent criminal activity designed to intimidate for political purposes. The distinction is in goals sought, and only sometimes in methods used. The guerrilla is working toward revolution. The terrorist acts to focus attention on a particular grievance.

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A word on the distinction between urban and rural guerrillas: While the difference would appear to be simply geographic, there exists an argument between proponents of the two types of guerrilla warfare. Part of this dispute lies rooted in interpretations of Marxist theory and it has not affected advocates of guerrilla warfare in this country nearly so much as have the practical considerations that (1) power of all types—governmental, political, economic—lies primarily in America’s urban centers, and (2) most of those who have become guerrillas in the United States are individuals with urban backgrounds. They would be “fish out of the sea” operating in a rural area. Rural communes have been used as guerrilla hideouts in this country, particularly by New Left-type revolutionaries, but these rural commune dwellers have not mounted their guerrilla operations in rural areas.

While the primary difference between the terrorist and the guerrilla is in the accomplishment sought—overthrow of the government in the case of the guerrilla or a more limited political goal, such as discouraging support for Israel by attacking targets believed supportive of Israel on the part of the Arab terrorist—the distinction is sometimes confused when urban guerrillas use indiscriminate terror as a tactic. Bombings are historically the most common instrument of the terrorist, as the unsuspected bomb, especially when used against civilians, is well calculated to instill fear. Witness the worldwide letter bomb campaign against Israeli officials and sympathizers that followed the XX Olympiad, and then the letter bomb campaign directed against British establishments, part of the Northern Ireland situation.

Robert Moss, who has written extensively on the topic of urban guerrilla warfare, put it succinctly: “The terrorist has a political tool; the urban guerrilla has a strategy for revolution. . . .” 1 The matter of violence is sometimes of assistance in delineating terrorism and urban guerrilla warfare. Terrorism almost always involves violence; bombings, assassinations, kidnapings, and airplane hijackings all involve force or the threat of force. But the urban guerrilla can use almost any activity, violent or not, that is designed to disrupt the functioning of government or the “establishment.” The tactic of supporting revolutionary activity through expropriation has been used as justification by some Weatherman types in this country for various frauds involving traveler’s checks and stolen credit cards. Without violence, the “establishment” is still disrupted—through “ripoffs.”

The expropriation tactic itself may serve to indicate whether terrorism or urban guerrilla activity is involved. The urban guerrilla must be indigenous to create a revolution. But his tactics are not those of the orthodox Marxist revolutionary, thus he does not receive financial support from Marxist countries and must rely on expropriation, or other usually indigenous assistance, for funds. The political terrorist is often involved in third country operations, is not physically present in his ultimate target country, and often receives support from still other countries or individuals sympathetic to his aims.

Dr. Stefan T. Possony, however, would include urban guerrilla warfare as defined here within an overall concept of “strategic terrorism” on the part of revolutionaries aiming to defeat a hostile state. Private terrorism is then differentiated as criminality.2 Dr. Possony later notes that there are distinct forms of strategic terrorism—described in this article as urban guerrilla warfare and political terrorism—and that the planner needs a typology of the distinct forms in order to counter them.

Urban Guerrilla Activity in the United States

While this country has not seen sustained or unified urban guerrilla activity on the scale of the Tupamaros of Uruguay, nonetheless there have been a significant number of attacks
on police, bombings, and expropriations by revolutionaries of this type in the past 3 years. Two primary movements have been involved in these activities—the Weatherman-type revolutionary of the New Left and the Panther-type black extremist.

The Weatherman group grew out of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), itself reorganized in 1962 at the height of student civil rights activity in the South. Involved in the early stages of the antirwar movement, the organization began moving toward a violent revolutionary posture in 1967. An SDS member was convicted of attempting to bomb ROTC facilities and another was charged with sabotage in dynamiting power transmission lines. An SDS faction, calling itself the Weatherman ("You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows" was a line in a then-popular song), split from the parent group in 1969 over the advocacy of revolutionary violence.

In February 1970, the Weatherman group closed its national office in Chicago, discontinued its newspaper, and went underground into collectives and communes. The group’s strategy was proclaimed in a letter to the press, received on May 21, 1970:

“Now we are adapting the classic guerrilla strategy of the Vietcong and the urban guerrilla strategy of the Tupamaros to our own situation. . . .”

A series of bombings followed, claimed by the Weatherman group in letters or calls to the news media, including the March 1, 1971, bombing of the U.S. Capitol Building and the May 19, 1972, bombing of the Pentagon. Other groups with revolutionary goals, and outlandish labels such as the Purple Sunshine Clan, the Proud Eagle Tribe, the New Year’s Gang, the Perfect Park Home Grown Garden Society, the Quarter Moon Tribe, and the Smiling Fox Tribe, also claimed bombings directed against the “establishment.” In 1974, the Weatherman group claimed bombings in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

But this half of the guerrilla movement in this country remained:

“structurally fragmented, decentralized, loosely organized, with little direct leadership. Among its components (were) the origin! Weatherman elements, bolstered by occasional recruits. Then there (were) Weatherman-type individuals and groups not organically linked with the Weatherman but allied in mood and motivation.”

New Left-type guerrilla warfare in the United States is seen as part of a “clearly discernible trend” in the world. Edmund Demaire described the phenomenon of:

“highly educated, occasionally highly gifted, middle class and upper-middle-class intellectuals slowly succumbing to a revolutionary mystique that incites them not only to condone violence as a means of political struggle but also to participate personally in terrorist actions. . . .”

Indeed, the first Tupamaro manifesto, issued in 1965, justified a Montevideo bombing as a protest against U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

The other half of the urban guerrilla movement in this country is the Panther-type black revolutionary—also a fragmented and loosely organized movement. In February 1971, the Black Panther Party split into two factions, one headed by Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton and the other by Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, a fugitive then residing in Algiers. The Cleaver faction quickly took the lead in advocating violence, especially violence against police officers. The Newton faction, to distin-

...
practice. The difference between the Black Liberation Army and the aboveground politico-apparatus, the Black Panther Party is that the Black Panther Party (is) organizing and politicizing in the open by whatever means necessary and advantageous and the Black Liberation Army moves in a military manner to carry the politicizing to its logical extension—action.

One of the newest urban guerrilla groups, the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), has claimed credit for the November 6, 1973, murder of Oakland, Calif., school superintendent Dr. Marcus Foster and for the February 4, 1974, kidnapping of Patricia Hearst. The group demanded ransom in the form of a multimillion dollar food giveaway program in California. Leaders of the Symbionese Liberation Army were identified in an April 15, 1974, California bank robbery; some of these leaders died in the subsequent shoot-out with authorities in Los Angeles.

The apparent catalyst in forming this “army” was visits to black prison inmates in California by revolutionary white youths. The group’s strategy is set out in its “Declaration of Revolutionary War” which calls on “all revolutionary black and other oppressed people within the Fascist United States to . . . fight in the forces of The Symbionese United Liberation Army.” Specific goals of the group, taken from this declaration, include: Destruction of the capitalist state; control of industry by the “people”; formation of communes; children to be the “responsibility of the community”; destruction of the prison system; seizure of state and capitalist-owned land, to be given to the “people”; total destruction of the rent system; and “destruction of racism, sexism, ageism, capitalism, fascism, individualism, possessiveness, competitiveness.”

**Marighella’s Influence**

Carlos Marighella’s “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla,” called the “Holy Writ” of modern guerrillas by one writer, has had as much influence on the theories and tactics of urban guerrillas in this country as any writing in the field. An early indication of this is seen by comparing Marighella’s statement that “[t]he principal object of the ambush tactic is to capture enemy arms and punish him with death” with Stokely Carmichael’s writing. Carmichael, who lectured to American college audiences on urban guerrilla warfare in 1970 before he traveled to Africa as the late Kwame Nkrumah’s protege, cited Marighella’s tactic on capturing weapons in his talks and included it in his book in this form:

“... when the guerrilla kills a member of the occupying army, he not only takes the gun that’s around his waist, he opens up the door and he takes a 12-gauge shotgun.”

This tactic was adopted by the Cleaver faction of the Panthers. Right On! (February 15, 1972, p. 10) called for urban guerrilla units to act as “Revolutionary Executioners of the gestapo pigs (police) mainly to capture weapons from the enemy . . . .”

But there are no immutable laws in urban guerrilla warfare tactical manuals. When Panthers in the Black Liberation Army took weapons from officers they killed, they found these weapons a deadly link in a chain of evidence tying them to the slayings. Soon, guerrilla notes were found that advised:

“We do not need to take weapons from iced (killed) pigs, specially those that have been rightly baconized. There are better places to rip-off weapons—not where they can be linked to butchered hogs.”

Marighella was a longtime Marxist. He held office in Brazil as a member of the Communist Party after World War II. By the 1960’s, Marighella was a top leader of the orthodox Communist Party of Brazil, but his theories of urban guerrilla warfare finally led to a break with the Party. His view of the class struggle holds to the necessity of armed struggle by the urban guerrilla, with two primary objectives:

a) the physical liquidation of the chiefs and assistants of the armed forces and of the police;  
b) the expropriation of government resources and those belonging to the big capitalists . . . with small expropriations used for the maintenance of individual urban guerrillas and large ones for the sustenance of the revolution itself.”

And these primary objectives—a “disposition” to kill police as Marighella calls it, and financing guerrilla activities (especially for the maintenance of individual guerrillas) through expropriation—have been adopted in toto by the Panthers and their Black Liberation Army. On February 15, 1972, the Panther newspaper Right On! (page 10) called for “ . . . armed revolutionary violence. . . . [r]ipping off money from banks. . . .” and executing police. Members of the Black Liberation Army have ambushed and killed police officers and have robbed banks—and messages from these guerrillas have boasted of these activities. “Communique No. 1,” published in Right On!, April 5, 1971, page 17, signed by the Attica Brigade of the Afro-American Liberation Army, claimed those who threw a hand grenade under a New York City police car on December 20, 1971, were on a mission to “rip off funds for the Afro-American liberation struggle.” Marighella’s primary objectives were most succinctly expressed in a “Message from the Black Liberation Army,” pub-
lished by Right On!, April 5, 1972, page C: “The police have the guns and the banks have the money.”

The act of expropriation is, of course, not a new technique. The Bolsheviks used robberies of Czarist banks to finance their activities; Joseph Stalin gained an early reputation in Russia as a bank robber for the communists. But Marighella’s overall theory of revolution differed from that of orthodox Marxists. Instead of an uprising by politically indoctrinated masses led by an indigenous communist party, the urban guerrilla’s theory of revolution is to demonstrate that the government is incapable of fulfilling its primary purpose, that of providing a stable, orderly society. If this basic function of government is eroded in practice, then the masses will reject the government in power. Rejection will come about through revolution, which will come to fruition when the most visible symbol of government, law enforcement, is shown to be impotent in battling the guerrilla. Hence, the primary objective of attacking police officers: If the police cannot protect themselves, how can they protect the citizenry—their basic function?

The “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla” has been extensively circulated in this country, by the Panthers and by other guerrilla groups. It has been included in most of the collections of revolutionary literature found in the possession of Black Liberation Army members and other revolutionaries. It has served as a textbook for formal “political education” classes. Excerpts have been serialized in the Panther newspaper Right On! and portions of the “Minimanual” have appeared in the so-called underground press. Field Marshal Donald Cox, a Panther fugitive who joined Eldridge Cleaver in Algerian exile, dedicated his pamphlet “On Organizing Urban Guerrilla Units” to Marighella. Cox freely quotes Marighella ir. his “little red book” on guerrilla tactics and weapons.

The Symbionese Liberation Army may have followed three of the “action models” set out in the “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla”: Execution, kidnapping, and expropriation—tactics common to Latin American and other guerrilla groups. Marighella defined execution as the “killing . . . of a fascist personality in the government involved in crimes and persecutions against patriots.” “Communique No. 1” from the Symbionese Liberation Army, in which the group claimed the murder of Dr. Foster, was in the form of a “warrant” from the “Court of the People” which accused Dr. Foster of “taking part in crimes committed against . . . the people.” (These “crimes” were the proposed production of guards and identification cards into Oakland schools.)

According to the “Minimanual,” the kidnaping of well-known, but apolitical, persons “can be a useful form of propaganda for the revolutionary . . .” The ransom in this case included a demand for the publication of several Symbionese Liberation Army propaganda tracts, and the media was warned that “attempts to confuse the public by withholding or omitting sections of the tape or S.L.A. documents jeopardizes the prisoner.” But this type of kidnaping differs from that of a political personality or a police agent, according to Marighella. It must be “handled so that the public sympathizes with it and accepts it.” Hence, the ransom demand of food for others rather than cash for the kidnappers.

Following the example set by Algerian rebels, the Weatherman group, the Black Liberation Army, and the Symbionese Liberation Army in this country, have used the now classic guerrilla term “communique” for their message. The Symbionese group has posted its message (“Communique No. 1” in a different format) on telephone poles and has sent it to a variety of community organizations, both techniques recommended in the “Minimanual.” A copy of Marighella’s book was among the urban guerrilla documents found in a Symbionese Liberation Army pad.

As an organizational outline and a tactical handbook, Marighella’s book has gained him a measure of immortality in guerrilla circles. He was killed in a gun battle with police in November 1969, just a few months after the appearance of the “Minimanual.” The biographic note in the 1970 New World Liberation Front edition (copied from the Tricontinental translation, January–February, 1970), notes that the “Minimanual” will become “one of the principal books of every man who . . . takes the road of armed rebellion.” It has.

**Differences in New Left Strategy**

The Weatherman type of New Left urban guerrillas has not opted for Marighella’s theories to the degree that black extremists have. Expropriations, yes, even bank robberies, but these primarily white revolutionaries eschew the “macho” masculinity syndrome evident in Panther gunfights with police. The anarchist’s bomb is their weapon, and the “establishment” in general (and law enforcement only as a part of the establishment) their target. While Weatherman members (later called Weatherpeople, or collectively, the Weather Underground, in response to male chauvinism charges from the ranks) advocate revolution through urban guerrilla warfare, in common with other such revolutionaries around the world they have not presented specific ideologies to replace the structures of government they would topple.

Robert Moss highlighted this lack of a “single coherent statement of
ideology” on the part of any urban guerrilla group:

“along with an indifference to the normal forms of political agitation and a virtual silence about social conditions, that makes most urban guerrillas ‘Bla-

quist’ in the sense that Lenin defined the term: military conspirators with a tactic rather

than a political philosophy.” 12

Mr. Moss notes that Marighella’s “Minimanual” comes closest to formu-

lating a strategy, yet it “offers more instruction about simple weaponry than about the kind of society he wanted to create.” 13

Kwame Nkrumah does present a strategy and specific objectives—

“Nationalism, Pan Africanism, and Socialism” 14—along with basic tech-

niques of guerrilla warfare. But, although Stokely Carmichael has re-

cently propagated Nkrumah’s objectives in lectures at various U.S. col-

leges, Nkrumah was not an urban guerrilla, nor have Panther-type urban
guerrillas in this country yet adopted his philosophy. In this respect, one
could say none of the urban guerrillas in this country have any strategy much beyond revolution for its own sake. Still, there are theoretical antecedents for New Left-type urban guerrillas. These are primarily the military writings of Che Guevara, Regis Debray, Stalin, and Lenin.

Guevara, for a time a folk hero to many members of America’s com-
mune society, was a rural guerrilla. He wrote that the countryside is the battleground in underdeveloped (Latin and South America) and that a “suburban guerrilla band,” if one developed, would be subordinate to direction from rural guerrilla chiefs. Glossing over this element of Gue-

vara’s philosophy, the New Left seized upon his thesis that “[i]t is not neces-
sary to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist; the insur-

rection can create them.” 15 Despair-
ing of recruiting masses of U.S. “workers,” or even a significantly large number of U.S. students, as required by Marxist doctrine then ex-
tant, this “foco” theory was the denouement sought by the elitists of the New Left. Instead of organizing the masses as a whole, per Marxist dictates, they decided that “a small group of armed insurgents . . . can act as a focus for the various dis-

contented elements . . . ,” in the words of Brigadier Kitson, the British Army counterguerrilla expert.16

“Foco” is used in a second sense as the first, and leadership, unit of

the “liberation army.” In the “classic” guerrilla mode, as explained by Regis Debray, the military pyramid of the liberation forces in Latin America “tends to be built from the apex down—the permanent forces first (the foco), then the semiregular forces in the vicinity of the foco . . . .” 17 This
dualistic use of “foco,” both as a theory of revolution and as the name of an initial guerrilla group, has not facilitated the grasp of the concept and in this country “foco” has become a glib catch phrase for the intellectual fringe rather than a working guerrilla concept.

This Cuban, or Guevara, influence also extends from the theoretical
down to the tactical level. A diagram showing how to launch a Molotov cocktail from a rifle or shotgun, on page 55 of the Vintage Books edition of “Guerrilla Warfare,” was copied on page 99 of “The Anarchist Cookbook,” by William Powell (New York, 1971). “The Anarchist Cookbook” (the title stems from the chapter on
recipes incorporating marihuana or hashish) covers guerrilla organization and technique, and has become quite popular among student revolutionaries here. Another “how to” book for guerrillas, emanating from Cuba, is “150 Questions for a Guerrilla” by General Alberto Bayo, “The Man Who Trained Castro.” A detailed

manual on sabotage and explosives, “150 Questions” was circulated by New Left groups in this country as early as 1968. General Bayo was a Marxist veteran of the Spanish Civil War, who, like Abraham Guillien, set-
tled in South America and drew on his experience in Spain to write on guerrilla warfare. Guillien, author of “Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla” and other works, may have had considerable influence on Carlos Marighella.

“Armed propaganda” is another concept adopted from abroad by urban guerrillas in this country. As Regis Debray explains it:

“The destruction of a troop transport truck or the public execu-
tion of a police torturer is more effective propaganda for the local population than a hundred speeches.” 18

Debray claimed that during at least one 2-year period of warfare, Castro did not have any political rallies in his zone of operations. This tactic, added to the “foco” theory, was ideally suited to U.S. revolutionaries whose speeches, after some initial successes on the campuses, took on some of the irrelevance of other periodic campus fads. Action, or propaganda of the deed, would replace the sterility of revolutionary oratory.

And “Propaganda of the Deed” was even the subtitle of “Under-
ground Manual Number 3,” one of the first handbooks of guerrilla military
techniques to circulate in the United States. (There were no manuals num-
bered one and two.) This booklet was first circulated by the New Left and was then picked up by the under-
ground press. The material on home-
made explosives, booby traps, and incendiaries, such as thermit and napalm, was also irresistible to the Panthers. They circulated the pam-
phlet, too, but in an unusual gesture of circumspection, cloaked it in an

FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin
innocuous cover, that of a Department of Agriculture bulletin. But the Panthers, as popularizers of the slogan “pig” for police officers, picked a bulletin on processing pork for their cover.

Part of armed propaganda, according to Debray, includes the tactic of demonstrating the vincibility of law enforcement, similar to Marighella’s “disposition” to shoot police:

“In order to destroy the idea of unassailability—that aged-old accumulation of fear and humility vis-a-vis the . . . policeman . . .—there is nothing better than combat.”

This element of armed propaganda was an obvious early success of the Panthers, who gained much stature in some circles with their armed invasion of the California legislature. Indeed, the initial armed Panther confrontations with police were designed to show their ability to stand up to, and face down, law enforcement officers.

Certain writings of Lenin and Stalin were used extensively, if selectively, in a thesis advocating urban guerrilla warfare on the part of the recently disbanded Venceremos group, itself a splinter of the Revolutionary Union, a national Maoist organization. This “military strategy” paper presents the dilemma of “dual errors of adventurism” (premature action) and “social pacifism” (agreeing to armed struggle, but only at some distant time in the future). A sophisticated political document, the Venceremos statement recognizes the split aborning among Marxists over the “foco” theory, revolution from the apex of a sociological pyramid, with its emphasis on the gun, or propaganda of the deed. It is interesting to note that a sociologist author of a fictional scenario of urban guerrilla revolution in America (who describes himself as a democratic radical) feels that “[a] revolution cannot be artificially induced. . . . To attempt to induce it prematurely . . . is adventurism . . . .”

The Venceremos paper uses certain of Lenin’s writings—“The Black Hundreds and the Organization of an Uprising,” “From the Defensive to the Offensive,” “To the Combat Committee of the St. Petersburg Committee,” and “Tasks of Revolutionary Army Contingents”—written during the 1905 Revolution as evidence of the need to “begin military action as soon as possible.” Even Stalin’s “Political Report of the Central Committee to the 16th Congress of the CPSU” is used to support the thesis that the time is right for organized urban guerrilla warfare. Parenthetically, the primarily white Venceremos group recognizes the divergent courses taken by white and black guerrillas here, and calls the problem “white chauvinism.” Venceremos notes: “Somehow, white skins are assumed to be too valuable to sacrifice to a pig’s bullet, while Black and Brown minds are seen as unable to cope with the theory of Marxism-Leninism.”

Conclusion

Without question, Carlos Marighella, Che Guevara, and Regis Debray are among the primary lineage progenitors of the urban guerrilla theories and tactics practiced in the United States today. Their influence on causation of this phenomenon in this country is rather more within the purview of the sociologist/historian, however. Behind Marighella and company is more than a century’s development of Marxist doctrine, for these theorists of urban guerrilla warfare were first Marxists. The non-Marxist observer may delineate them as the first of a new breed, their philosophy a climactic in the development of Marxist revolutionary thought. The orthodox Marxist sees them as “adventurists,” and repudiates them. The lack of true communist uprisings in recent history, as opposed to “revolutions” with the Soviet military as surety, coupled with the Cuban experience, would seem to weigh toward the judgment that perhaps the “wars of the flea” in urban settings are, indeed, the wars of the future.

In the United States, of course, we have just the embryo of such a war, and an unorganized embryo at that, though deadly to Marighella’s first target, the policeman. While recent history has shown that not all urban guerrilla campaigns succeed, it could be argued that the disruptions of even embryonic urban guerrilla warfare may be a self-generating catalyst, leading to further serious revolutionary activity. One interpretation of Marxism takes just such a view. However, the irregular pulsation of urban guerrilla activity in America during the past half decade almost defies anything better than an “if, then” prognosis, tempered by a multitude of economic and sociological factors.

Footnotes

8 Marighella, Minimanual, p. 6.
9 Ibid., p. 30.
10 Ibid., p. 31.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 53.
19 Ibid., p. 52.