"No More Mr. Nice Guy:” U.S. Adapting to Unconventional Warfare

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1. Thesis Statement: The U.S. opposes guerilla warfare against other countries, a policy that makes the U.S. vulnerable to those countries.

2. Discussion: The U.S. espouses the Laws of Land Warfare, follows the guidelines of the Geneva and Hague conventions, and tries to protect non-combatants. While this way of thinking is righteous, it creates a dilemma for our Armed Forces in dealing with guerillas and insurgents. While some troops, like Special Forces, train in depth for unconventional warfare, we don’t effectively train Combat Support (CS) and Combat Service Support (CSS) soldiers in counterinsurgency tactics which lead to casualties. Iraq is evidence of that.

3. Conclusion: We must prepare all our troops and our public for a change in strategies to deal with guerilla warfare.

4. Haines Award: We request that the Haines Award Selection Board consider this paper for the General Haines Award for Excellence in research. Writing Research Papers, Ninth Edition by James D. Lester is the guide used in the preparation of this research paper.
Outline

Thesis statement: The United States opposes guerilla warfare against other countries, a policy which makes the U.S. vulnerable to those countries.

I. Defining guerilla warfare
   A. Guerilla conduct and motives
   B. United States unconventional warfare
   C. Fighting the guerillas’ fight

II. U.S. Vulnerabilities to Guerilla Warfare
    A. Questions which define U.S. dilemma
    B. Positive aspects of U.S. counterinsurgency tactics

III. Identifying the enemy
     A. Lessons from Afghanistan
     B. Selection of proper military force
     C. “Knowing the enemy”

IV. Winning Public Opinion Wins Unconventional Warfare
    A. Guerilla warfare as part of world wide trend called 4GW
    B. Guerilla warfare’s effect on public opinion
    C. How to sell new U.S. tactics to public

V. Summary
Guerilla Warfare 1

No More Mr. Nice Guy:
U.S. Adapting to Unconventional Warfare

The U.S. opposes the use of certain guerrilla warfare tactics against other countries, a policy that leaves the U.S. vulnerable against countries that employ those types of tactics.

What is "guerrilla warfare"? Guerrilla warfare is a form of unconventional warfare that according to Chairman Mao Tse-tung, is employed when fighting a conventional war will result in defeat. Mao believed that in a war of a revolutionary character, such as the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, guerrilla operations are necessary. He also believed that:

Guerrilla warfare has qualities and objectives peculiar to itself. It is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment may employ against a more powerful aggressor nation. When the invader pierces deep into the heart of the weaker country and occupies her territory in an oppressive manner, there is no doubt that terrain, climate, and society offer obstacles to his progress (Mao).

To Chairman Mao, ambush and sabotage are the foundations of guerrilla warfare. The purpose is to destabilize an authority through long, low-intensity conflict. It can be quite successful as the guerillas may increase the cost of maintaining an occupation above what the occupiers may wish to bear. This cost not only concerns loss of life for the invader, but also political implications for the invader both at home and in the international community. Guerrillas tend not to attack civilians as a primary target; however, guerillas target and kill citizens identified as collaborators. Guerillas often take off their uniforms to mingle with the local population. In this situation, the question then becomes "Who are the noncombatants?"

The intermingling of cultures throughout the world, "brainwashing" techniques, religious fanaticism, and other factors combine to suggest that the future assassins are not professionals, but rather ordinary people. Women and children have become the couriers of death.
The founders of the United States believed that all men are equal and that each man has an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The American military has trained on the conduct of combat in a conventional manner and has not prepared its forces for unconventional warfare in a situation where the enemy is a 12-year-old girl.

Guerrilla forces violate accords of the Geneva and Hague Conventions, both of which were significant factors in the formulation of the U.S. law of land warfare. The law of land warfare is the moral, ethical, and legal compass for the conduct of war. The battle with Iraqi guerrillas has taken a turn for the worse with the introduction of the guerrilla’s most effective weapon, the car bomb. It requires no constituency. It does not require popular support. It requires only one person who knows explosives and another who is willing to drive and perhaps to die with the bomb. It is the nuclear weapon of guerrilla warfare. The guerrillas in Iraq would like to affect a crushing massacre of Americans, which would spark intense debate in the U.S. about withdrawal and would demoralize both the troops on the ground and the Iraqi people supporting the United States (Krauthammer).

U.S. Army Field Manual 3-05.201, Special Forces Unconventional Warfare Operations, states, “Guerrilla warfare consists of military and paramilitary operations conducted by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces against superior forces in enemy-held or hostile territory. It is the overt military aspect of an insurgency.” It goes on to state, “A successful insurgency is the most important political power in a newly liberated country. Guerrillas, existing and fighting under conditions of great hardship, develop extremist attitudes and become very jealous of their prerogatives to determine the postwar complexion of their country. These attitudes may make it difficult or impossible to establish a government that is sympathetic to U.S. national interests” (1-1). These aspects alone makes it easy to understand the motivation of those conducting
guerrilla operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. They would like to have influence in the new government and perhaps their goal is to force the U.S. to sue for peace.

The U.S. supports the conduct of guerrilla warfare within both military and political limits, but it has not always been that way. The United States, prior to World War II, did not have an organization established to specifically conduct guerrilla warfare. During WWII, President Roosevelt established the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). It was initially created on July 11, 1941 as the Office of Coordinator of Information, and prior to 1942, it was renamed OSS. The initial purpose of the OSS was to establish U.S. doctrine for the conduct of psychological and unconventional warfare. In December 1942, JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) Order 155/4D gave OSS the responsibility for the organization and conduct of guerrilla warfare. It specified that personnel employed in guerrilla warfare be limited to organizers, instigators, and operational nuclei of guerrilla units. The U.S. had three primary unconventional warfare units during the Korean War, named Wolfpack, Kirkland, and Leopard. These units were comprised of a handful of U.S. officers and enlisted men and several thousand partisan North Koreans and operated primarily behind North Korean lines (Dockery, 186). Today, the U.S. has a very specialized approach to unconventional warfare, as its elite units such as the Army’s Special Forces are prepared to execute unconventional warfare as a normal part of U.S. military operations. As evidenced, the U.S. does not oppose guerrilla warfare as a component of total war. However, the U.S. does not condone tactics that are in violation of the legal principles applied to the conduct of warfare and outlined by Field Manual 3-05.201.

There are seven basic legal principles forged from The Hague and Geneva Conventions, the International Declaration of Human Rights, and the customary laws of war govern all U.S. military operations, which are outlined in FM 3-05.201. They are as follows: observance of
fundamental human rights and U.S. soldiers will report human rights violations when they become aware of them, civilians shall be treated humanely and may not be used to shield military operations, Enemy Prisoners of War and civilian detainees will be treated humanely and IAW the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, U.S. soldiers are entitled to similar humane treatment should they fall into the enemy’s hands, orders to commit war crimes are illegal and must be disobeyed, superiors and soldiers who violate the law of war will be held responsible for their actions, and weapons, munitions, and techniques calculated to cause unnecessary pain and suffering are forbidden (D-1).

Unfortunately, there are always people who disregard the ethical and moral guidelines mandated by U.S. and international law. Examples of this in Vietnam are the My Lai massacre, the 1968 slaughter of Vietnamese villagers for which Lt. William L. Calley Jr. was convicted, and the 1971 killing of 21 women, children and old men in a raid by a Navy SEAL team led by Bob Kerrey, later a U.S. Senator. Unfortunately, many more despicable actions from that conflict have come to light. These actions involved the wholesale slaughter of Vietnamese women, children, and elderly men. There are reports of American soldiers using the ears and scalps they had executed for souvenirs. Three members of the unit that was accused of these actions contended that it was common tactics for American ground forces throughout Vietnam to burn huts, shoot civilians and throw grenades into protective shelters. This particular unit was a reconnaissance platoon of the 101st Airborne Division. Named “Tiger Force,” it was created by David Hackworth (now a retired Colonel) in 1965 to fight guerrillas using their tactics.

"Vietnam was an atrocity from the get-go," Hackworth said in a recent telephone interview. "It was that kind of war, a frontless war of great frustration. It was out of hand very early. There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted."
Colonel (R) Hackworth claimed that he had rotated out of Vietnam when these atrocities occurred. The Army conducted a criminal investigation that lasted over four years, but no charges were preferred (New Vietnam). Although no reports of atrocities have been reported in Afghanistan, there have been reports of misconduct in Iraq by U.S. forces. A Battalion Commander was relieved of duty, received nonjudicial punishment, and forced to retire for firing a weapon near a prisoner's head to coerce him to talk. Although a far cry from the atrocities of Vietnam, how much would it take for U.S. soldiers to act in a manner similar to their counterparts almost 40 years earlier? This type of conduct is eerily reminiscent of German actions in World War II. When guerrillas attacked Germans, the Germans would retaliate by mass executions of civilians to strike a blow to the guerrilla's motivation (Luttwak, 156). The U.S. must ensure compliance with established legal standards to prevent that type of action.

The problems with guerrilla warfare in Iraq are exacerbated by changes in U.S. Army training necessary to accommodate the mission in Iraq. For example, the 1st Battalion, 6th Armor, 4th Infantry Division had to train soldiers to combat the guerrilla tactics employed by insurgents once the major portion of the war ended. A tank battalion is typically not trained on the tasks necessary to accomplish the mission that they had now assumed. Training was vital to the unit to prevent further loss of life due to the guerrilla tactics employed in Iraq (McCarthy). Recent insurgency operations and their outcomes in Iraq are direct indicators of U.S. vulnerabilities to unconventional or asymmetric warfare.

In Iraq, since the war began there have been 550 deaths. Over 400 of these deaths have occurred since an end to hostilities was declared on May 1, 2003. Many of the deaths are the result of insurgents and guerrilla tactics. The numbers of soldiers killed and wounded (2,600) in
Guerilla Warfare

Iraq, when compared to the large numbers of casualties in Vietnam (58,000 killed), is quite small, however, they are still unacceptable.

In 1955, the North began infiltrating and conducting guerrilla warfare against South Vietnam. Also in 1955, the United States began its support for South Vietnam, and would be in South Vietnam for eighteen years, leaving in 1973. Then in 1975, two years after the United States pullout, South Vietnam was invaded and defeated by North Vietnam, thus completing the unification of the two Vietnams (Pimlott, 59-60). In an Executive Summary prepared by Retired Marine Major Johnie Gombo, he infers that, “One of the reasons the United States left South Vietnam was the United States’ inability to stem the guerrilla warfare, which was being waged by the South Vietnamese guerrillas - the Viet Cong” (Gombo).

The current situation in Iraq requires us to re-look the basic concepts of how we deal with insurgents and guerilla-type tactics. We are currently implementing counterinsurgency doctrine in Iraq. Historically, it appears that counterinsurgency operations by large external powers in larger operations have not had very positive conclusions. The situations that developed in Vietnam and Afghanistan are obvious examples. While counterinsurgency operations may not have been successful in some places, there have been cases where small-scale insurgencies have been contained.

The United States has been a leader in the support of human rights and the humane treatment of protected people and places. While this way of thinking is righteous, it creates a dilemma for our Armed Forces in dealing with guerrillas and insurgents.

As for the human rights issues and supporting the Law of War, consider the following questions put forward by David A. Kellog in an article he wrote about guerilla warfare:
1. How do we mount tactically effective counter-insurgency operations against enemies who deliberately sabotage the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate military objectives?

2. (And,) Have our soldiers hang on to their honor and humanity in the face of enemies who have thrown theirs to the wind for (sometimes significant) tactical and propaganda advantages?

3. (And,) Not make sacrifices of them before an unscrupulous adversary?

It is very easy for a insurgency force to use the propaganda advantages of guerilla warfare against a force they know is legally and morally bound to protect human rights and support the Laws of War. Our predicament is how we accomplish a successful campaign against insurgents while protecting the population and our soldiers.

Another problem is our tendency to train only specialized forces in the art of counter-insurgency operations. In Iraq, with our current mission leaning towards occupation, rebuilding the country and stabilizing the population, the combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) troops are prime targets for insurgency and guerilla and terrorist tactics. While these soldiers’ missions would not normally require them to conduct counter-insurgency operations, prior training in this area could save lives, reduce casualties, and reduce the destruction of equipment. Additionally, current doctrine in the area requires soldiers who find themselves under attack, to pursue their attackers and to try to subdue them. While these soldiers in general can effectively fire their weapons and have some basic combat skills, CS and CSS soldiers and their leaders simply do not have training in this area of operations.

The U.S. identified the need for counter insurgency training long ago. In 1962, in a National Security Actions Memorandum, the President approved training objectives for officer
grade personnel who may have had role to play in counter-insurgency programs as well as in the entire range of problems involved in the modernization of developing countries. These objectives included the historical background of counter-insurgency, study of departmental tactics and techniques to counter subversive insurgency, and instruction in counter-insurgency program planning (Bundy). Yet, current objectives for our noncommissioned officers, in most specialties, do not address counterinsurgency training.

On the other hand, casualties in Iraq have been significantly lower than previous large-scale conflicts in which we were subjected to insurgency and guerilla tactics. We have implemented training on improvised explosive devices (IED) and have raised the awareness of our soldiers on guerilla and insurgency tactics. Security check points and road blocks which initially saw frequent casualties as a result of car bombs and personnel bombs have shown significant reductions of occurrences since improved training and awareness by U.S. Forces. Units in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 2 and OIF 3 will use lessons learned from the war itself and from OIF 1 and applied them to training scenarios prior to deployment to Iraq.

The dilemma facing the United States in Iraq is how to surgically remove the guerrilla force from the population without generating a political backlash that will fuel a long-term insurgency regardless of levels of attrition. This is much easier to say than to do. The heart of the matter is intelligence--to deny the guerrillas intelligence about U.S. operations while gathering massive intelligence about the guerrillas. The only way to win the war is to reverse, at the earliest possible phase, the intelligence equation. The guerrillas must be confused and blinded; the Americans must maintain transparency of the guerrillas.

New methods for counterinsurgency tactics are developing as we gain experience in this ever-changing theater. The guerilla force in Iraq finds it easy to collect intelligence on U.S.
movements and everyday operations. Dressed in civilian attire, their forces can easily observe our movements and plan actions against us in this “target-rich” environment. We on the other hand, find it difficult to gain intelligence on the insurgents because of their ability to blend into the friendly civilian population. The only way to turn this around will be to deny the insurgents intelligence on our operations in every way while at the same time exploiting every possible means of collection on them that we can employ. While reducing our search and seizure operations we have stepped up the collection of intelligence, both from human and technological sources. We will have to see if this method will cause a reversal of insurgency actions directed at us. With the unreliability of local human sources, it will take a great deal of experience and expertise on the part of the U.S. to effectively interpret human intelligence and combine it with our advanced technologies to make our counterinsurgency operations effective. The success of our combination of increased training, application of lessons learned and our ability to flexibly deal with the changing insurgent tactics will remain to be seen.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Government knew its enemy: the Al Qaeda Terrorists led by Osama bin Laden. Government officials didn’t hide the fact that they were going to retaliate against the terrorists or any government that harbored them. The challenge was in the tactics. Al Qaeda was known for its unconventional warfare and the Afghanistan countryside served them well in fighting off the larger, more sophisticated Russian forces during the 1980s. Because the U.S. had an obligation to respond quickly to the terrorist threat, it did not have the luxury of building forward support bases in the area. In addition, the regional government was uncooperative and became a target along with the trained Al Qaeda terrorists. The United States needed a highly trained and agile force to fight a dispersed enemy in Afghanistan.
Many unique conditions surrounding this conflict existed. To name a few, a large percentage of Afghans hated the Taliban government and Al Qaeda and did not assist them during the conflict. Infighting and factional competition between tribal groups allowed Al Qaeda leaders to escape capture because local Afghan leaders could not negotiate surrenders in a timely manner (Cordesman). A third condition, and key to the coalition’s success, was the efficient manner in which the counterinsurgents were able to adapt to the environment and geography in pursuit of the insurgents in Afghanistan.

In his study, Cordesman states, “the ground forces involved could not have functioned as they did, without highly specialized training and expertise in special operations, mountain warfare, and highly mobile combat.” The U.S. had to rely on its Special Forces and light combat units to fight in Afghanistan. The steep mountain terrain provided an ideal environment for the Al Qaeda fighters to operate in and provided them numerous options for escape. The elite U.S. forces were able to adapt to their surroundings and improvise to create coalitions with Afghan forces and enlarge their fighting force. They skillfully included various factions in their operations and kept rivals apart from each other in order to focus on the common enemy: Al Qaeda and Taliban forces (Cordesman).

Some could argue that the decision to allow Special Forces personnel to wear traditional Afghan clothing to “blend in” with the population was a guerrilla warfare tactic. Afghanistan, without any formal military, didn’t have any official uniform. Taliban, Al Qaeda and Northern Alliance soldiers all wore traditional tribal garb, with the exception of facemasks worn by Al Qaeda members.

Military planners make every attempt to predict the types of conflict U.S. military forces will be involved in so that the equipment and skills of the soldiers will match the conflict’s
requirements. Unconventional warfare as part of the national strategy was viewed as a low priority during the 1990s because threat scenarios requiring these skills seemed unlikely (Jogerst, 98-102). Success in Afghanistan can only be contributed to Defense leaders’ ability to pick the best of their fighting force and insert them where they were needed. It could be argued that the success in Afghanistan could be attributed to the Afghan forces assisting the elite Special Forces personnel. The Afghans were conditioned for the extreme and grueling environmental conditions.

The decision to “assist” the Afghan Northern Alliance and allow Afghan countrymen to participate in the conflict reduced the appearance of an invasion by U.S. and Coalition forces. With the indigenous people against the Taliban and Al Qaeda network, their cities and populations could not be used to deceive the coalition forces with guerrilla tactics. Once the Taliban government crumbled, Al Qaeda members were isolated and retreated to their hiding places and other countries.

Small combat teams were a success in Afghanistan. Their ability to synchronize land and air power was an extraordinary innovation and an example of unlimited capabilities with joint operations (Satellites). There is a great amount of criticism concerning communications capabilities in the field. There were countless occasions when the infantry soldiers did not have enough or the right kind of radios to properly operate in Afghanistan. As with the Special Forces teams, it is imperative for each leader to be able to “direct fire power on the correct objective” (Hardwick).

Because our enemy doesn’t follow a prescribed doctrine, it is imperative for the survival of U.S. forces for them to “know their enemy” (French). Understanding what is important to them and not imposing U.S. ideals on the local population will increase the success of future
combat operations. U.S. soldiers must remember that local citizens may be surviving under current conditions and if given opportunities, would quickly revolt. The use of small combat teams and unconventional warfare in Afghanistan allowed the United States and its allies to incorporate these factors to their advantage. A larger conventional force might not have the time or interest in interacting with the local populations and miss opportunities to achieve success faster.

By adapting unconventional warfare and integrating these tactics into military training, the U.S. military can level the combat field. Given today's media pressure however, the United States may not be able to afford to exercise guerrilla tactics even if tempted.

Since Vietnam, the U.S. public has become highly sensitive to casualties, particularly in military operations perceived as peripheral to the nation's core security interests. During the U.S. intervention in Somalia in October 1993, irregulars associated with Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed killed 18 American soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu, stripped a dead soldier's body, and dragged it behind a truck in view of press cameras. These horrifying images aroused U.S. public opinion against the intervention and precipitated a rapid pullout. Given these precedents, a cunning adversary might take advantage of the "CNN factor" to weaken the resolve of U.S. policy makers undertaking or merely contemplating a military intervention (Tucker).

Such guerilla techniques are part of an emerging warfighting trend that retired Lt. Col. John R. Boyd calls "fourth generation warfare" (4GW): all forms of conflict in which the other side refuses to stand up and fight fair. 4GW practitioners attack not so much the enemy's military capabilities but directly at the will of the enemy to continue the fight. There was a 4GW
component to the Vietnam War – the ultimately successful campaign by North Vietnam to turn U.S. public opinion against the war (Boyd).

A potentially effective form of information warfare in this context is an enemy’s manipulation of the mass media to influence American public opinion, thereby restricting the U.S. Government’s ability to employ its overwhelming military superiority. During the Vietnam War, the enemy’s use of asymmetric guerilla tactics and its ability to endure massive firepower while continuing to inflict American casualties gradually turned public opinion against the war and undermined the political will of policy-makers to sustain the conflict (Tucker).

Once this was accomplished, and the U.S. withdrew, the South could be finished off by conventional means. Similarly, the goal of the mujaheddin in Afghanistan was not to defeat the Red Army in some decisive battle, but to persuade the Soviet leadership to withdraw it. In this type of warfare, winner of public opinion takes all (Boyd).

Thus, a major part of any new U.S. strategy to deal with guerilla warfare must include a campaign to convince the American public we have to fight as unfair as our hit-and-run adversary; at least until we can draw them into a decisive conventional battle.

Vietnam War hero, Roy P. Benavidez made this observation about Vietcong unconventional tactics in his novel Medal of Honor, A Vietnam Warrior’s Story:

Those of us who were acting as advisors to the Vietnamese in 1965 knew that a tragic mistake had been made when, on the eighth of March of that year combat troops of the 3rd Marine Division (Battalion Landing Team 3/9) landed on Red Beach, just north of the port city of Da Nang. They arrived prepared for a conventional war that was not to be. Even NCOs such as myself realized that this conflict could best be assisted by our observer duties because green recruits from
the states were destined for slaughter in such a military action (Benavidez, 169-170).

In the end, wars are still won by conventional armies. Until recently, “guerrilla-type” operations more often harassed the enemy than decided battles. They were just “sideshow”s in wars fought mainly along conventional lines. Examples could include operations by colonial militias and guerrillas during the Revolutionary War, Nathan Bedford Forrest’s cavalry raids, partisans during WWII, and the tactics practiced in the early stage of most “national liberation” wars in the 20th Century, including Vietnam. In all of these examples, conventional forces delivered the final, deciding blows.

The problem still remains: dealing with the enemy’s frustrating guerrilla tactics in the meantime. The motive of such tactics is to turn the superior force’s public opinion against the conflict. That makes it crucial the U.S. take away the enemy’s motive by first winning public opinion to the idea that we must match guerrilla tactics blow for blow. We must change the perception that America’s public is soft on unconventional or asymmetric warfare. Then the enemy is either forced to fight on more conventional terms or surrender.

Skeptics have argued that military scenarios focusing on asymmetric threats tend to overstate the vulnerabilities of the United States, and that merely identifying theoretical windows of vulnerability does not necessarily mean that real-world adversaries could climb through them (Tucker). Besides, The U.S. Army of the twenty-first century, still the most deadly ground force in the world, will take advantage of everything technology can offer in its quest to respond to crises all over the globe. It will be capable of deploying forces rapidly and it will be able to sustain itself with a manageable logistical tail. It will have flexible forces that can be quickly tailored to meet specific threats (Nelson, 344).
While technology is important, and may provide options, the fact is that lack of suitable technology cannot explain our less-than-stellar track record in so-called “fourth generation warfare” (Boyd). The challenge is not the lack of available defenses but rather the will of government, industry and the public to invest in and approve of them (Tucker).

In summary, U.S. doctrine prohibits certain tactics in warfare. The U.S. has no second thoughts on the use of guerrilla warfare in certain situations. Evidence has demonstrated that U.S. commanders and troops violated the law of land warfare in both Vietnam and Iraq. The U.S. has a record of accomplishment that highlights the sponsorship of insurgency forces in third world countries for half a century (Luttwak, 156). However, the only U.S. forces trained in unconventional warfare are the Special Forces units. Most U.S. units have a section in their mission training plan that touches on counterinsurgency operations, but very little training is conducted that addresses that aspect.

In the current conflicts, the U.S. forces that are facing the guerrillas are not Special Forces. They are units that have not been trained to fight the guerrillas on their terms. The lack of specific training, along with the tenets of the law of land warfare, imposes limits on what type of actions the commander on the ground may take. Being unable to take what some would consider drastic action to prevent the use of horrendous tactics by guerrillas in Iraq leaves the U.S. vulnerable to the use of these tactics.

The U.S. Armed Forces must be able to adapt to the unconventional warfare tactics used by smaller, less sophisticated military foes. Because it has historically trained to fight conventional armies, the U.S. military is now faced with an ethical dilemma: whether to practice standards of wartime conduct or apply its technological superiority to unconventional warfare and use guerrilla tactics against its enemies.
Works Cited


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