



The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One

David Kilcullen

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David Kilcullen is one of the world's most influential experts on counterinsurgency and modern warfare, a ground-breaking theorist whose ideas "are revolutionizing military thinking throughout the west" (*Washington Post*). Indeed, his vision of modern warfare powerfully influenced America's decision to rethink its military strategy in Iraq and implement "the Surge," now recognized as a dramatic success. In *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Kilcullen provides a remarkably fresh perspective on the War on Terror. Kilcullen takes us "on the ground" to uncover the face of modern warfare, illuminating both the big global war (the "War on Terrorism") and its relation to the associated "small wars" across the globe: Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Thailand, the Pakistani tribal zones, East Timor and the horn of Africa. Kilcullen sees today's conflicts as a complex interweaving of contrasting trends--local insurgencies seeking autonomy caught up in a broader pan-Islamic campaign--small wars in the midst of a big one. He warns that America's actions in the war on terrorism have tended to conflate these trends, blurring the distinction between local and global struggles and thus enormously complicating our challenges. Indeed, the US had done a poor job of applying different tactics to these very different situations, continually misidentifying insurgents with limited aims and legitimate grievances--whom he calls "accidental guerrillas"--as part of a coordinated worldwide terror network. We must learn how to disentangle these strands, develop strategies that deal with global threats, avoid local conflicts where possible, and win them where necessary. Colored with gripping battlefield experiences that range from the jungles and highlands of Southeast Asia to the mountains of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to the dusty towns of the Middle East, *The Accidental Guerrilla* will, quite simply, change the way we think about war. This book is a must read for everyone concerned about the war on terror.

The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One Details

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From Reader Review *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* for online ebook

Corto says

This is the book I've been waiting 8 years to read. To date, this is the most clear and concise assessment of our current conflict environment told through the eyes of an anthropologist, counterinsurgency theorist and soldier.

The analysis and prescriptions are reality-based and anyone wanting to gain real insight into the wars we're fighting would profit by reading this book. When I was about halfway done with the book I complained to a friend (a Vietnam Vet who'd served in a Marine CAP platoon) that I'd "heard it all before", to which he responded "Yeah, but with COIN, the devil is in the details." -and this is where Kilcullen excels. He does an excellent job of integrating theory and reality with ground-level specifics learned during his time in each of our military theaters.

In addition to being an academic, Kilcullen is also a practitioner who has had a seat at the table along with the strategic architects of our current force posture in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though some things have changed since Kilcullen finished writing this book, Operation Khanjar seems to have his (and the "COINdinstia" set's) fingerprints all over it. It's nice to see that finally the DoD has given some primacy to COIN theory.

He is not a pollyanna, and his recommendations would cause much pain and grief in Washington (not to mention in Iraq and Afghanistan)- and accordingly, they will probably never be implemented. Regardless, I hope that some of his more visionary remedies find traction in DC.

As a country we should be ashamed that we diminished the respectability of our COIN experts after Vietnam, only allowing them to exist in some wooded corner of Ft. Bragg, and that it took an Australian to set us straight. (Apologies to Dr. Krepinevich...)

Peter Stuart says

A complex and multi layered work. A brilliantly written anthropological study of the psychology, drivers, outcomes and behaviors caused by "modern" conflicts at the tribal and personal level.

Whilst conflict throughout history has always likely driven by a few of extreme views that result in masses following. The ease and prevalence of modern communication and enforced "one world globalization", makes the spread of minority ideas into a wider audience easier to instigate than ever before.

Clearly articulates and provides the authors held insights and opinions into the challenges that "The War on Terror" presents to us all. On both sides of a conflict.

The author was one of the key architects and on ground executers of "the surge" strategy of Iraq 2007, which applied sage theory and experience of generations in the modern world. This, the author openly acknowledges and references an array of individuals working on, and engaged with, the western nations in their attempts and approaches to effectively execute counter insurgency and responses to guerrilla warfare in the world of the mid and late 2000's.

The work re-enforces the age learned result that when individually challenged we are all likely to raise arms in defense of our own immediate others.

One mans terrorist remains another mans freedom fighter remains another mans defender. It remains dependent on your situation how others see and react to you in the majority unless you are the instigator of the conflict.

Trish says

Faced with unsuccessful military interventions in several conflicts, some of our own making, the U.S. military leadership seconded Lt. Col. David Kilcullen of the Australian Army to work with them on devising a and testing a new strategy that might allow them to withdraw from their engagements without complete failure. Kilcullen is a military officer, but also an anthropologist. This book is his attempt to explain his thinking on the worldwide Islamic insurgency and the best methods to try and counter it successfully. Kilcullen thought the U.S. intervention in Iraq was an extremely serious strategic error, but tried, as assistant to General Petraeus in 2007, to devise a method to stabilize the population, reduce violence, and establish governance so that U.S. troops could effectively withdraw and leave Iraq to the Iraqis.

Kilcullen thinks globalization and anti-globilization, and overwhelming U.S. military dominance are drivers to conflict in the 21st century—that citizens of countries around the world become involved in conflicts not of their making when warring groups enter their “space.” They choose the least foreign “side” and fight for their group. In this book, Kilcullen first introduces successful attempts to reduce violence and increase local participation in governance and stabilization in Afghanistan, then sheds light on the conflicts in Iraq, and then discusses East Timor, where he earned his credentials as part of the U.N. peacekeeping force in the 1999. He then discusses Thailand, Europe and Pakistan. Trying to understand an ongoing conflict is extraordinarily difficult, but Kilcullen draws on his experience, research, and natural bent to establish a framework he insists can, will, and is working in various conflict theatres around the world.

I instinctively *like* what Kilcullen is saying and have an affinity for his natural respect for cultures living out their lives in remote areas of the world. He and I would agree that globalization and U.S. cultural dominance is not only unappealing to much of the world, it is central to many conflicts we become involved in. He suggests that American military power is so out of proportion to every other nations' military expenditures and capabilities that an American military presence creates its own weather: it creates resistance and backlash because it gets in the space of other groups, cultures, nationalities. He suggests there may be times when we *might even eschew overt military retaliation* to a direct attack when the target is difficult to eliminate without killing innocents or involving a massive military presence, which would increase local distaste, distrust, and hatred. He instead suggests relying on generous aid and assistance, developing a relationship of trust and cooperation, working through local tribal leaders, deferring to local customs and

keeping a small footprint so as not to create a larger backlash than necessary.

This line of thought is already central to our military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has proponents, and detractors. In important ways, it is still theoretical, and needs to be discussed and tested over and over because each conflict and set of objective circumstances is so different. But it is a remarkable change of mindset for military men and women, and places value and weight on different skill sets than has traditionally been recognized in our bureaucratic corps. It almost seems as though I can actually *see* a generational changing of the guard with the ascendancy of Kilcullen's theories on counterinsurgency. Perhaps we are actually evolving as a species.

I listened to the audio--twice--after trying to read this years ago. I knew then it was important, I just couldn't concentrate on the reading. The audio was *so* much easier for me to get the main points, I went back for the details.

Bucky McMahan says

The author warns the reader that the book is too informal for the academic and too academic for the layman. I found that to be accurate; my interest in the content didn't survive the demands on my time and attention, alas. Still, his main point, about how precarious the balance of loyalty can be--do the locals shoot at us or join us in "protecting" them--is fascinating and revelatory.

Murtaza says

I read this in conjunction with Akbar Ahmed's "The Thistle and the Drone," and found it to be a thoughtful take on the War on Terror that combines both a military and anthropological perspective. The central thesis is that the United States is fighting many people around the world who are simply at war with them because they have intruded on their territory, thus making them "accidental guerillas." While this seems like a pretty obvious conclusion to me, it's refreshing to hear from a military official, albeit an Australian one. A hardcore group of Bin Ladenist revolutionaries has found ways to hide out in traditional tribal networks whose cultures are based on providing hospitality to guests in danger. As a result the United States has attacked these networks for being "sanctuaries" and made enemies out of huge numbers of people whose only motivation for fighting is to be left alone. Drone strikes, raids and other violent assaults have helped break down the traditional social structures of these tribes and given rise to unprecedentedly nihilistic modern phenomena like suicide bombings and the deliberate killing of children by tribesmen.

The book was written in 2009 and many of its sections recap the author's work in Afghanistan, Iraq and Southeast Asia. Some of his most interesting arguments are about the United States' current structural inability to fight "small wars." Because of its cultural history and possession of a massive military industrial complex, the United States' socioeconomic response to global problems has a bias towards warfare. But this is specifically warfare of an interstate type, on the scale of B-52 bombers and battleships. Hardware like this also happens to be very expensive, and its production is core to the U.S. economy.

This might be fine if the U.S. military found itself in the unlikely position of fighting a war against China or Russia. However, the war that the United States actually faces today requires different tools, including soft power ones, that can't be manufactured in factories and correspondingly are in short supply. The U.S. needs

to stabilize ungoverned regions, win local allies to act as its partners and understand diverse regions of the world where it is operating. It does not need the F-35 aircraft that it is currently building and maintaining, although such hardware happens to support a lot of jobs. Meanwhile special operations forces, aid workers, information warfare specialists, linguists and diplomats, tools that are not very expensive or labor intensive to create, actually are needed. But exactly because they're not expensive the United States creates much less of them. As a result there is a crippling imbalance between strategic needs and what resources America actually has on hand to fight against amorphous hybrid warfare operatives hiding out within population centers. The military non-military balance of relevant government employees is massively lopsided, forcing military officials to often undertake roles that they are entirely unsuited for. The U.S. thus finds itself constantly using a sledgehammer to try deal with an ant problem. In addition to being ineffective, the massive collateral destruction of such an approach outrages people around the world and helps create more and more "accidental guerillas" who want to kill Westerners. The only thing saving the U.S. from having a much larger global insurgency in my opinion is that the guerillas themselves are so fractious and unappealing that they are unable to mobilize any critical mass of support. Nonetheless they have managed to capitalize on American errors to a stunning degree.

Kilcullen is one of the smartest military officials writing for the public today and I always look out for his writings. Having said that, I'm kind of amazed at how badly these smart ideas have floundered in the face of a very low-tech and disorganized adversary. To cite Andrew Bacevich, it might really be true that Islamic insurgents of all stripes have found a way to hack Western military superiority and inflict defeats on what is technically human history's strongest military. Eight long years after this book was written the U.S. has yet to come up with a framework to defeat the hybrid war tactics it is facing. In fact, things have unraveled considerably with new groups like ISIS successfully mobilizing attacks all over the planet. Towards the end of this book, Kilcullen predicts a generational conflict that may rage on for another 50 to 100 years, a conclusion he also makes in the 2016 book "Blood Year" without putting a set number of years on it. Given the floundering incompetence of the current administration, I think we could be looking at something even longer and more consequential for global society. While the United States might not "lose" this strange conflict, at least in the traditional sense, it is hard to see any kind of victory on the horizon either.

Perhaps it would be helpful to redefine the fight against terrorism from a "war" into something more systemic, like a long-term effort to reduce drug crime or other public health dangers. Such a framework would also incentivize the creation of a more holistic and less purely violent means of tackling the problem, which may offer a way out of our current impasse.

DoctorM says

A fine introduction to the basic concepts of counterinsurgency warfare by one of its leading theorists--- a former Australian Army officer with a PhD and combat experience in East Timor as well as Afghanistan and Iraq, the man who was a key player in the restructuring of the American war effort in Iraq. Kilcullen offers a non-technical introduction to COIN as well as a thoughtful tour of some of the world's insurgencies.

The bulk of the groups fighting against American and allied forces, Kilcullen theorises, are not hard-core Islamist fighters, but "accidental" combatants enraged by Western intrusion into traditional tribal spaces in pursuit of groups such as al-Qaeda. Kilcullen looks at most Afghan fighters not as Taliban supporters but as "antibodies" activated by outside intrusion. To successfully pursue the hardcore enemy, Kilcullen argues, the Western footprint must be light, Western power applied indirectly and sparingly. He emphasises that the local population must be the focus of all COIN efforts--- that the local population is a prize to be won, not

treated as an alien and faceless mass that's merely in the way between the terrorist hardcore and Western firepower.

His advice would've been familiar to many a British political agent in the same terrain a century ago--- or to a Roman proconsul in Hispania or Britannia, and it's still worth repeating in the Year Eleven. Kilcullen offers no quick prescriptions, and he's deeply aware about the limitations of Western attention spans and patience as well as resources. But his books are likely to be key here in the new century, where (even after American forces leave Iraq and Afghanistan) violence is likely to remain endemic from the Maghreb through the Northwest Frontier.

Marks54 says

This is an Australian who combines a career as a military officer with that of an anthropologist. He is one of the Ph.D.s in General Petraeus' brain trust that was assembled to implement the new counter-insurgency strategy put in place to save the US from defeat in the second Iraq War -- the "surge". The point of this book is to come up with a theory of insurgency that explains how new "global" terrorist groups such as al-Qaida can prosper and link up with more conventional national liberation groups. The point is that they come to insinuate themselves into a local movement, through a combination of marriage, favors, and threats and then try to provoke foreign intervention through terrorist acts. When the intervention occurs, it must happen in some local and thus ends up tying the local group to al-Qaida (or some other global group) through the violence of the retaliation. In developing this idea, the basic ideas of counter-insurgency, especially the Petraeus version, such as in the new Army co-in manual, are developed clearly. The book is noteworthy for providing some actual theory regarding how these terrorist groups can be effective and, by implication, what needs to be done to combat them. This book reads well along with books such as those by Thomas Ricks of the Wash Post -- "Fiasco" and "The Gamble". One of the very best thought books on counter-insurgency out there, including classics such as Nagl's "How to eat soup with a knife" or good histories, such as Horne's "Savage War of Peace". This was a memorable book, as well as the first that I read on my iPhone based Kindle reader.

Terri says

While some may say that Kilcullen's theories on the Accidental Guerrilla are not revolutionary, I believe that to the date of the book being published they, in a manner of ways, were.

In fact the author himself says "*The ideas are not new; implementing them effectively would be*". And that is what this book is all about.

Implementing conceptual frameworks that quantify best practise in the field of Accidental Guerrilla syndrome (ad hoc fighters with little interest in Jihadic motivations) and in counter insurgency.

Not an easy thing to do, I expect, in an unstable environment torn apart already by ethno sectarian violence and war. Where these very counter insurgency best practice approaches revolve around an enemy which is constantly adapting, evolving and applying pressure.

His words on Western led globalisation and its hand in straining resentment among less wealthy cultures is of particular interest, or should be of particular interest to anyone observing the shifting tides of allegiance and disunity in the Middle East.

He points out that relative deprivation can be a fire in the tinder box of anti Western sentiment. That we have

so much and they have so little, and that they want what we have and we won't give it to them, makes us 'Accidental Supremacists' (my term not his) of a sort. A source of resentment. We think we are supremely better because we are spoilt and nobody likes a spoilt brat with an attitude of intolerance towards lessors, do they?

And this is why Vietnam War style Psych Wars have been replaced by the 'winning hearts and minds' ethos instead. Give a kid a Football, don't give a kid a leaflet.

Protecting the population is key to the hearts and minds ethos.

It is also the key to successful counter insurgency. But the downside to that, is that this means bringing war to where the people are concentrated, as David Kilcullen himself states; *"You win or lose it a village at a time, and you secure villages and gain access to the people by controlling valleys, roads, and heights that overlook them, in order of that priority."*

Hard to keep local populations clear of collateral dangers when the fight is in their backyards.

Western led Military Forces must also help to connect that local population to the government and not to the military.

It is all very complex and unlike any war we have fought before. Or tried to fight before.

There is a great quote in the book by Sir Olaf Caroe (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olaf_Caroe) that speaks to that complexity. *"Unlike other wars, Afghan wars become serious only when they are over"*

That is something I think we can all see, no-one more so than those on the ground trying to micro manage population protection in the face of looming troop withdrawals.

According to Kilcullen and his peers, hiring hundreds of local security and local peoples to help build roads and other infrastructure projects plays a crucial role in protecting populations. Hire local people, and those people are more likely to defend their projects against outside insurgents. Or if not defend, at least pass information on to those who can, Western led Military Forces and their representatives.

I cannot help but wonder however, whether hiring hundreds of 'locals' indiscriminately for local security is one of the reasons why there is an increase in local security turning on soldiers and western contractors and gunning them down. But, I suppose there will always be those kinds of dangers when dealing with an enemy that must resort to unethical or unorthodox methods to fight back.

I was surprised to learn in this book that the counter insurgency efforts in the South of Afghanistan have become, in many ways, counter narcotic in nature moreso than anything else. I did not know that, but it was one of many things that I learned from this book.

The book itself is interspersed with the author's own field notes, which was good and he mixed in a few of his combat experiences also.

He goes into detail regarding 'the Surge' in Iraq and expounds upon those informed approaches and tactics that helped him contribute to the Surge strategy.

In all, this is an excellent book in my opinion. It is the only one of its sort that goes into this kind of detail on counter insurgency and the Accidental Guerrilla.

I did not find it dry at all. I found it sat halfway between candid and academia in flavour. Which is where I like a book like this to be.

FiveBooks says

Professor Mary Kaldor of LSE has chosen to discuss *David Kilcullen's The Accidental Guerrilla* on FiveBooks as one of the top five on her subject - War , saying that:

“... Kilcullen was really the thinking behind the “surges” in Iraq and now in Afghanistan. He thinks we face a global insurgency of Takfir terrorists, basically Al-Qaida, who are trying to attack the West. They infiltrate areas like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, marry locals and both intimidate and bribe people in order to mobilise them to fight on their side. These are the accidental guerrillas of the book's title. ...”

The full interview is available here: <http://five-books.com/interviews/mary-kaldor>

Phoenix says

This book has much merit by adding to the existing base of knowledge. While Kilcullen's model is unique and well worth further investigation it is not possible to automatically apply it automatically to other insurgencies, since each insurgency is unique in the variables which compose it. David, much to his credit, seemed to be seeking the common core or the unifying thread within the composition of insurgencies as an phenomenon. The idea of comparing terrorism with a plague (infection, contagions, etc) is interesting but some critics might consider it a leap and that it seems rather simplistic in regards to such a complex phenomenon. This is a well founded piece of scholarly research. The descriptive knowledge on the ground, was what I found perhaps the best part of the writing. There are a few parts which, quite frankly, did not seem logical to me, at first in the face of the current threat. This observation, however, is only normal given the rapidly changing strategic landscape and the evolution of events. It must be borne in mind that the title is already dated and the situation (in Iraq, for instance) has already altered the strategic environment. Many of the authors most pertinent points are summarized in the final chapter. As an employee of the State Department, Dr. Kilcullen's position and strategic outlook and overall perspective becomes very clear through his writing. The "Accidental Guerrilla" syndrome is a fascinating concept for further exploration and development, however it is not a "one-size-fits-all," silver bullet recipe to understanding the complexity of insurgent 5th generation warfare. While portions of it may aptly apply to OIF and OEF (operations Iraqi/Enduring-Afghanistan Freedom), the application of said theory to a broader spectrum is less feasible. Notwithstanding this minor point, the *Accidental Guerrilla*, makes interesting reading and David Killcullen places the reader in the heart of the action. The book makes an interesting and major contribution to the literature in the field and comes highly recommended to anyone interested in the topic.

Grey says

Although LtCol/Dr. Kilcullen has his detractors -- mostly those with no actual experience or cogent arguments -- this book ranks as one of the most important at this juncture in our several wars.

He starts with an overview of the "accidental guerrilla" phenomenon. Explained this way, many seemingly anomalous events start to make sense. It's just a thesis, but I think he's onto something. See, too, Steve Metz's work on the psychological vs political roots of insurgency. Reading Kilcullen's book, Metz's taxonomy of insurgent motivations make more sense.

Kilcullen's analysis of events in Kunar Valley a couple of years ago is fascinating and provides some interesting insights into what works. I have similar tales of successes, admittedly on relatively small scales, from returning soldiers who organized local councils and sat in endless shuras. Unfortunately, our "long stare" has wavered and it appears Kunar has once again descended into chaos. Could also be due to the number of militants being pushed out of Swat...

I didn't find his analysis of Iraq as interesting, perhaps because so much has been written about it and I am, admittedly, looking elsewhere. But his careful contrast of Iraq vs Afghanistan reminds us that every insurgency and area of operations is essentially different.

His overview of several other historical examples is interesting, but I found most interesting his quick look at militant Islam in Europe. (Islamist infiltration and subversion of Western societies is one of my current interests -- q.v., www.committeethepresentdanger.org.) His suggestion that young Muslims in Europe are victims of Islamists rather than the actual enemy bears further exploration.

I found his conclusions rather weak, but I think that may just be the nature of trying to wrap up a book rather than provide specific policy guidance for a specific situation.

A must-read for anyone interested in insurgency, the on-going wars, or countering the Islamist threat more generally.

Chris says

The Accidental Guerrilla is indeed not an easy read, but is rich with the life experience and thoughtful analysis of one of the world's foremost counterinsurgency experts. Kilcullen meanders from Iraq to Afghanistan to Timor to Thailand, stuttering and stopping to share insights on counterinsurgency best (and worst) practices. He then moves on to Europe to explore how best to understand (and engage) disconnected Muslim communities. The US Army advisor does not limit himself to an assessment of counterinsurgency tactics, however. Bare with Kilcullen through his many stories -- sometimes entertaining, other times academic -- and you will find that The Accidental Guerrilla presents not only counterinsurgency best practices, grand military strategy, and the underpinnings of a new military doctrine, but also a 21st foreign policy agenda. Once again, depending on your background, you may get lost in the depths at some points. If so, skip ahead to the conclusion of that section and move on -- you can always come back to it. I have read a few of this genre and this is the best of breed in my opinion.

For those unaware, Kilcullen regards the initial invasion of Iraq as incredibly foolish and strategically unwise, and continually reiterates how difficult and resource-intensive counterinsurgency is, even when done well. As such, the author is interested in civilian rather than militaristic international engagement, whenever possible. Kilcullen recognizes an unhealthy imbalance in our current capabilities; for example, the size ratio of the US armed forces to US diplomatic/aid agencies (State Dept/USAID) is 210:1, while in most Western democracies the ratio is around 9:1.

Ultimately, Kilcullen aims to reorient the foreign policy discussion. Under the past administration, hunting down terrorists was portrayed as a decisive strategy. The author points out that: "Killing or capturing terrorists is a strictly secondary activity, because it is ultimately defensive (keeping today's terrorists at bay) rather than decisive (preventing future terrorism). Conversely, programs that address the underlying conditions that terrorists exploit (thus preventing another crop of terrorists from simply replacing those we

kill or capture today) are ultimately decisive."

Within military operations, COINdinistas like Kilcullen are interested in finding the most effective way to accomplish the mission of asphyxiating the insurgency. Kilcullen builds off his field knowledge and explains where counterinsurgency in particular and military operations more generally should fit into a greater foreign policy, which is proactive, yet fully cognizant of the costs (in terms of resources and secondary effects) of armed intervention.

There are too many worthwhile nuggets to catalog (e.g., US Special Forces sought to emulate the UK's OSS, yet "the OSS was an interagency body with a sizable civilian component," which obviously was lost in translation), so I will leave you with selections from the later chapters that condense some of Kilcullen's strategic takeaways:

"Planners should select the lightest, most indirect and least intrusive form of intervention that will achieve the necessary effect. Policy-makers should work by, with, and through partnerships with local government administrators, civil society leaders, and local security forces wherever possible. Wherever possible, civilian agencies are preferable to military intervention forces, local nationals to international forces, and long-term, low-profile engagement to short-term, high-profile intervention. If this approach is not feasible due to the scale of the problem, then policy-makers should carefully weigh the risks of nonintervention against the costs and benefits of intervention.

...

In the environment I have described, there are likely to be two key mission sets (or clusters of similar types of tasks) that both military and civilian agencies will need to be able to perform if they are to remain strategically relevant. One of these is defensive, the other offensive (or, perhaps, "decisive"). They are strategic disruption and military assistance. Strategic disruption aims to keep today's enemy groups off balance, prevent the emergence of new terrorist threats, disrupt takfiri safe havens, and defeat enemy propaganda. This is defensive, not offensive. Superficially it looks offensive, because it involves direct action against terrorist targets, strikes against safe havens and the kill/capture of extremist and insurgent leaders. But it is actually strategically defensive, because it deals only with today's threat and does not contribute to preventing the next crop of enemies from emerging. To paraphrase the Arab proverb, an approach to the takfiri threat that solely involved strategic disruption would be akin to sweeping the sand out of our house without first closing the door. Over the long term, therefore, strategic disruption is necessary but not decisive, and will probably only amount to 10–20 percent of the military's role in countering terrorism, and perhaps will remain primarily a special operations forces task. It is of course critical, and the military has to be proficient at it, but it is not ultimately decisive. The ultimately decisive mission set is what we might call "military assistance." This set of tasks aims to restructure the threat environment over the long term so that we hardwire the enemy out of it, deny them a role, reduce the recruiting base, and attack the conditions that generate the threat. This is the truly decisive activity, even though, as noted, we must clearly bear in mind the limits on our ability to shape events, and recognize that we will probably never be able to do more than give them a gentle nudge in our preferred direction."

For those that would like to read a solid formal review, see this article:
<http://www.terraplexic.org/review/200...>

Chris says

Reads like a dissertation at times. Only got to page 37. The type of book the boss will have someone do an

executive summary on it as he is too lazy to read it. If I were on active duty or deploying I would read it and reread it. Good to know they finally started listening to the author.

Simon says

Review Part 1

The nice people in the G7 Branch at the Army's HQ Land Training and Doctrine Group loaned me a copy of David Kilcullen's *Accidental Guerrilla* to read on the promise that I would give them a book review in return – fair trade, I think, and one which provides me an opportunity to assess the actual time required to review and read a book for future jobs. I missed David Kilcullen's briefs when he visited NZ in October '09, having been required to attend another commitment in the UK that week. While I enjoyed that professionally and personally, I would much rather have had the afternoon listening to him talk...

First impressions of *Accidental Guerrilla* are that the author has not been well served by his editor...the sections where he talks about his own experiences flow very well; where he launches into more academic discourse, he becomes verbose and complex – if in doubt, use short sentences and don't be shy to bullet lists – some parts so far (have just finished Chapter 1) are like playing literary Where's Wally? when trying to filter out key points and themes. I've noticed the same in the other book I am struggling with at the moment, Brain Taafe's *The Gatekeepers of Galatas*, a great story that deserves to be told – but told better than Taafe does...I track a number of writing blogs and I think it was John Birmingham who couldn't emphasise enough not only the importance of a top editor but also the need for writers to retract their egos and take aboard the value an editor provides to a successful product...

I have no problem with the concept of the accidental guerrilla but do debate that it is anything new – almost by definition most guerrillas are accidental, born when the outside world, usually brutally, intrudes into their lives...the little people = the little war...Nor is the concept of global terrorist/guerrilla networks that new either...as far back as the American Revolution, global communications have been adequate to support international networks and the Great Game of international espionage and intelligence has been played across the known globe since that time. I agree with Rupert Smith that there are those who might be best described as the 'franchisers of terrorism' who target the disaffected and essentially sell their brand of terrorism, with commensurate training, networks and support. These are the people who need to be tracked and targeted a la Michael Scheiern's 'individual-based tracking' concept – manage them and you open up a range of alternate approaches to mitigate potentially accidental guerrillas.

One of the problems I have with *The Accidental Guerrilla* to date is that it describes Al-Qaeda as an aberration, an exception, to the rules of guerrillas and terrorism, but keeps drawing upon AQ-based examples to support arguments in the book. While it is true that Islamic terrorism has a firm base in the tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan that includes strong family links as well and that this extends back over a number of generations, I think it is a big leap to state this as standard practice for these type of organisations. This weakens the Infection, Contagion, Intervention, Rejection cycle that Kilcullen proposes, again relying on an AQ example.

I agree with the takfiri model and think this would be a better one to promote over specific groups like Al-Qaeda – more so since his definition of takfir lends itself to causes beyond those based upon an interpretation of Islam...takfir holds that those whose beliefs differ from the takfiri's are infidels who must be killed. Takfir might apply to ANY hate-based xenophobic cause around the planet and if *The Accidental Guerrilla*

achieves nothing else beyond bringing this phrase into more common usage, it will have achieved something.

Review Part 2

Well, that did get better as it progressed...I found the first two chapters close to interminable, loved Chapter 3 on Iraq and the last Chapter on the way ahead; I didn't like the chapter of allegedly supporting case studies: nothing annoys me more than someone flogging a dead horse of a model when the evidence in the case studies simply doesn't supply the model, in this case, that of the Accidental Guerrilla.

I agree that foreign fighters and Rupert Smith's 'franchisers of terror' are significant forces in the irregular activity world, however I simply do not accept that national guerrillas become such 'by accident'. Opportunist, reactive or responsive would be better adjectives for national guerrillas in that they react to and/or seize an opportunity presented by the actions of national or international interventions (civil and/or military).

The other major factor that detracts from *The Accidental Guerrilla* is its over-fixation on Islamic terrorism, instead of upon more general terrorism and insurgency. By labouring the Islamic angle, the author may be going some way to further the rift between Islamic communities and the rest of the world.

Similarly, the whole concept of 'hybrid warfare' just grates...war is by definition is a complex activity that resists simple definitions - one which also tends to punish those who fail to respect this fact. To postulate that hybrid war is either new or different from any other form of war is illustrative of a concept inability to consider and learn from history. Another contribution to the global game of buzzword bingo...

David Kilcullen writes very well when recounting his own experiences, and considerably less well when trying to support his theoretical model. To get the most out of *The Accidental Guerrilla*, read the preface, Chapter 3 *The Twenty-First Day*, and Chapter 5 *Turning an Elephant into a Mouse* in conjunction with Jim Molan's *Running the War in Iraq*. It's probably entirely coincidental that both books are written by Australian Army officers - or maybe not - maybe that slight aspect of distance from US and NATO issues provides an subtle but important difference of perspective. These readings will give a reader from most backgrounds a firm grounding in issues and approaches for the complex environment. I have a dozen or so pages of notes and will write a more detailed review in the next week or so...

The bottom line on *The Accidental Guerrilla* is that it is worth reading as the preface, Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 outweigh the slog through the other chapters...

Jack says

I gave this one four stars since I disliked the Accidental Guerrilla aspect of all the discussion. It summarized to a fine point...if you are in someone else's country...you are going to piss him/her off. That someone may wind up shooting at you. Yep, been there done that. Hence you have accidentally created a guerrilla.

Ok let's get onto the next aspect. The author is very spot on with many of his discussions.

Over-response. AQ/Hezbollah/Mahdi Army/Radical Freaks want to cause some damage to us to provoke an over-response. We get bombed. We lose a couple of people. We respond by hitting targets and, hopefully not, causing collateral damage. Collateral damage...a nice way of saying we hit civilians. Now we have more

angry people to deal with. Yes, that is true.

AQ/Hezbollah/Mahdi's/Radical Freaks know how to cause conflict amongst the civilians. What does that mean? The Golden Mosque of Sammara was bombed. The bombing of a Holy Shia mosque created massive bloodletting between Sunni and Shia. Now we have an Islamic civil war going on. Yes, the insurgency is very smart on how to create tension making it hard for us (coalition good guys) to deal with an already problematic environment.

Cash. They strike the US, the bleed cash. Yes we bleed. And bleed some more. During my time in Iraq I noted military officers throwing around millions as if there was an avalanche of cash. Problem was...there was indeed an avalanche in cash. Money was thrown at problems with the expectation of something green causing things to become better. Money As A Weapons System (MAAWS) was actual reading in Iraq. AQ/Hezbollah/Mahdi's/Radical Freaks hit us and yes we bleed the US dry of cash. This indeed was their strategy. It worked and is still working. I remember discussing \$3 million a piece police station construction (all 58) and \$20-\$30 million battalion sets. The numbers swelled and our economy and taxpayers will never get this back. ISIS owns most of the areas that I built by the way.

It's all about the Sheiks. Tribal leaders get things done. Everything I did, resulted in sitting down and drinking chai tea and eating with a Sheik. Beware that food by the way. Get with the local tribal guy and you are good. The Sheik has inroads into the city council, mayor, and local military commanders (sometimes they may even be the same guy...makes it easy on the travel situation). Grease the skids with the chief and you are good to go. If you do not, now you have a local population that is against what you are doing. Be careful.

Radicalization. The AQ/Hezbollah/Mahdi's/Radical Freaks are good at creating homegrown insurgency. Unfortunately this older book seemed to be peering into the future warning us of Fort Hood, Boston, London, and many others that we invited into our lands only to have them turn on us. Syrian refugees (or are they??) are now paying the price of cautious nations harmed by a radicalized minority within an indigenous Muslim population. They feed off of a minority Muslim populations poverty, lack of voting rights, and low prospect for upward social mobility. European nations could be swamped by millions of Muslims so they hold these rights back, creating a dangerous population. A dangerous population becomes radicalized and now we have homegrown terrorists. A Catch 22 where no one wins.

Last but not least (yet the worst). Years. Fighting The War On Terrorism. What does that mean? When does the war on terror end? Will it? Or is this a harbinger of WWIII? The Cold War technically started when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Romanov Dynasty in 1919. The Cold War really ended in 1992. Post Colonial Era Wars started in 1945 and ended in the 1980s. We started fighting terrorists in the 80's but really dubbed the War On Terror after the 9/11 bombings. In other words our children's children will be fighting this war.

We are fighting a hodge-podge of Terrorist organizations across the world. They are a core of elites moving around, from country-to-country, visiting local bodies of terrorist cadres. The Marines in Iraq showed me many neutralized Chechens, Iranians, Syrians, and others that came in to lead the local disenfranchised Sunni's. With the Surge and better focus on population security and Sunni engagement, the Sunni Awakening occurred during my IA. The Sunni Awakening was very good to see and then read about many years later. I was fortunate to see the Sunni's turn on AQI and begin the push against them.

I saw the author focus on the Accidental Guerrilla syndrome but move off base a few times into other Counter-Insurgency areas. I also felt the ending was very rushed to explain his fixes.

A good book overall.
