

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



.טל. טובי, טובי (Tovy, Tal). טובי טל טל. / (Gerilah yeha-milhamah negdah: morashto ha-tseva'it shel Ma'o). Yerushalayim: כרמל (Karmel), 2010. 216 pp. \$27.00 (paper), ISBN 978-965-540-069-4.

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Published on H-War (April, 2012)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

In this fascinating book, Tal Tovy (Bar-Ilan University) offers much more than a mere Hebrew translation of Mao Zedong's original book *On Guerrilla Warfare*.<sup>[1]</sup> The book makes a timely and comprehensive addition to the expanding literature on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. The main argument that Tovy advances is that states and groups that understood Mao's guerrilla doctrine or Sir Robert Grainger Ker Thompson's counterinsurgency approach (see Tovy's 1996 book *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam*) prevailed while those who failed to understand lost.

The book is divided into six main sections. In the first part, Tovy offers a historical contextualization of Mao's philosophy. He proceeds to outline the foundations and theoretical principles of his guerrilla doctrine. The next part, which constitutes the main part of the book, is the first Hebrew translation of Mao's book. Tovy then embarks on an interesting endeavor in which he offers an analysis of Mao's influence on the Indo-China War (1946-54). Next, he discusses the evolution of the Western counterinsurgency doctrines and illustrates their principles through an exploration of the British experience in Malaya (1948-60) and the guerrilla war in the Philippines (1946-55). Finally, Tovy explores the emergence of Palestinian guerrillas in the late 1960s and the Israeli response to them.

The gist of these approaches is that success in both guerrilla and counterinsurgency campaigns depended on a much broader perspective than a mere military one. The significant elements that effective campaigns had in common were political, social, and economic ties with civilian populations. Both the insurgents and the counterinsurgents worked tirelessly to cultivate these ties. Israel's two main rivals over the last two decades have been

Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. Both are highly sophisticated groups that have rooted themselves within their respective societies and at the same time gained significant experience in guerrilla warfare and terrorism tactics. Both groups have become highly prominent political actors. Meanwhile, their main rivals, Amal in Lebanon and Fatah as well as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Palestine which did not follow Mao's doctrine, grew weaker. In several instances Israel made attempts to follow Thompson's approach but it never turned it into official doctrine. Tovy's conclusions shed new light on Israel's long lasting conflicts with non-state actors and suggest that the road which has not been taken yet could have led to different outcomes.

I applaud Tovy for his decision to publish the first edition of the book in Hebrew rather than in English. This volume must be read by Israeli policymakers and the sooner the better. Upon its translation to English, the book should be read by policymakers in the United States and the United Kingdom as well. I believe that it would lead to an interesting debate. Some readers will conclude that the undoing of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq was an outcome of successful counterinsurgency or counterinsurgency policies. Others will argue that more than an American success, it was actually Al-Qaeda's failure to cultivate ties with its constituents. This debate is crucial for those who shape the current counterinsurgency policy in the fight against the Taliban, which seems to follow Mao's doctrine almost to the letter.

In sum, this is an excellent book, one of the very best that I have had the privilege to read in a long time.

Note

[1]. For the English translation, see Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

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**Citation:** Ami Pedahzur. Review of טובי, טל. טובי (Tovy, Tal), *נגדה והמלחמה גרילה : מאו של הצבאית מורשתו : נגדה והמלחמה גרילה* / (*Gerilah yeha-milhamah negdah: morashto ha-tseva'it shel Ma'o*). H-War, H-Net Reviews. April, 2012.

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