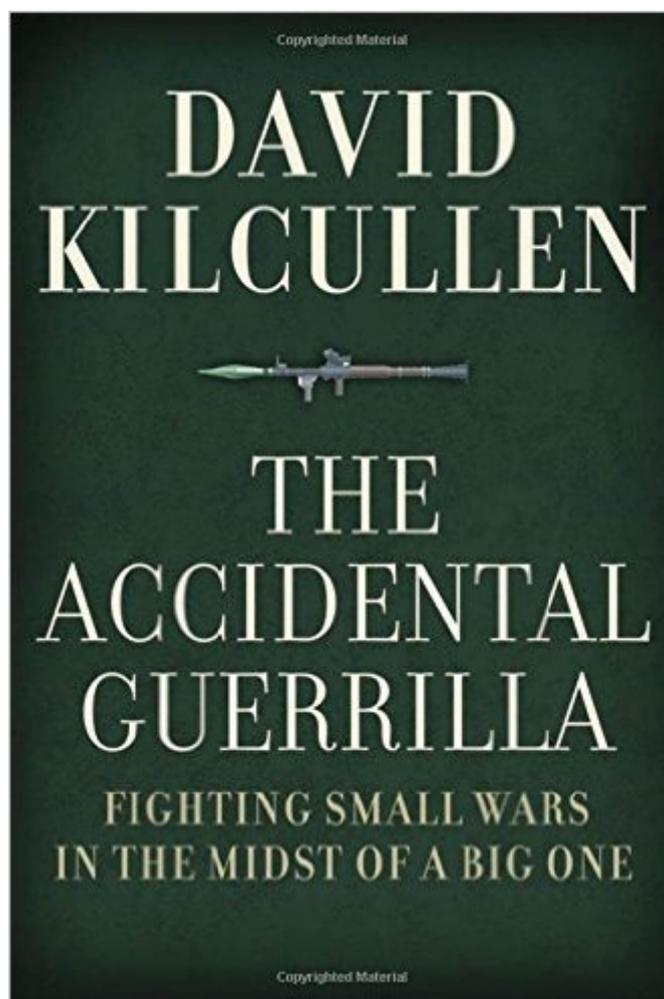


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The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars In The Midst Of A Big One



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

David Kilcullen's book "The Accidental Guerrilla" is a dense read and requires you to have an intense interest in the subject. It is not for the faint of heart but is well worth the investment of reading in order to understand the subject - our safety. For those of us not involved in the military this book opens the curtain on a world we never see. I have far more respect (and disrespect in some cases) for the people who work so diligently to keep us safe and think about how to protect us from evolving threats and enemies. David points out that while many US Military leaders were congratulating themselves on the supremacy of US strength and overwhelming dominance new hybrid threats emerged, ones we at first denied and now struggle to adapt to. While the US maintained that no major land war would ever occur again because of our massive armaments, the Chinese, for example, were developing the idea of unrestricted warfare. Colonel Qiao, said, "the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden." Turns out that there are more wars and violence, not less, despite US dominance. The author offers four possible models for understanding why this situation exists and what responses can be taken. These localized wars could be 1) a backlash against Globalization 2) Insurgency has been globalized, i.e. funded and used by large interests that exceed national boundaries such as religious forces 3) a civil war within Islam, and 4) asymmetric warfare, that security should be understood from a functional and capability standpoint leaving the politics out of the evaluation and response. Great book if you want to understand the dangerous world in which we live and why simplistic answers no longer work.

One warning up front: if someone quotes this book, *check them*. This is a brilliant and comprehensive discussion of the current global environment, but has a lot of provocative comments that could be taken out of context. Starting with two major case studies (Afghanistan and Iraq) and a few smaller ones (East Timor, Thailand, Pakistan, and the European Union), David Kilcullen builds several arguments. The most salient point to me were the need to identify both overarching patterns (like the movement of Al Qaida money and people) and to develop a refined understanding of each insurgency or movement in isolation. Also important are the concepts of the relative nature of "foreigner", "outsider", "invader" etc. and the absence of absolutes in counterinsurgency. The case

studies are well constructed and rapidly convey the complexity of the cultures and the implications of those complexities, as well as clearly identifying tactics and strategies for gaining the upperhand in the strategic sense. The central point, that many "insurgents" are locals who feel threatened operating with 'outsiders' (who threaten the locals) against other 'outsiders' (who also threaten the locals), is an old lesson of World War II Balkans, the British intervention in Malaysia, the French in Indochina and later the U.S. in Viet Nam. As far as I can tell, the reason it is forgotten is that Western militaries want to focus on big budget, big contract, high tech, maneuver warfare, and diplomats don't want to discuss conflict at all. Guerrilla warfare fits neither world view. Part of the strategic solution to these conflicts is address the issues that are exploited by "foreign fighters" (a.k.a. Al Qaida, but Communists in the past, and who knows what movements in the future).

First, the bad points. Kilcullen writes in a very complex style, uses big words and long paragraphs. In short, it is not an easy-read, listen-to-the-radio, relax by the fire type of book. Reading it requires concentration-I couldn't really read more than 40 pages or so at a single sitting without taking some time to digest the info. My only other criticism is it is not clear what the target audience is for this book. It is certainly not a mass-market paperback-I would guess the casual reader stops at page 20. But it seems a little light for the diplomatic/intelligence crowd. Rather it is more like an executive summary (albeit a large one) of a 10,000 page CIA analysis. Now the good points. First, subject to the above caveats, Kilcullen writes very well. His writing is logically constructed, concise, and has excellent grammar. This is a man who knows what he is talking about. Kilcullen has advised General Petraeus in the "surge", has first hand knowledge of various insurgencies around the world, and is capable of well-reasoned analysis. I am by no means an expert in the subject, but after reading this book I feel that I know more about low-intensity warfare than most of the world's population, and half its politicians. Kilcullen approaches the subject from the bottom up. Why are people fighting, who are they fighting, what do they believe in, what resources do they have, what are they willing to risk. Only when those questions are answered, does it make any sense to talk about strategy and tactics. The large powers of the world always seem to get this wrong, both today and in the historical cases cited in the book.

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