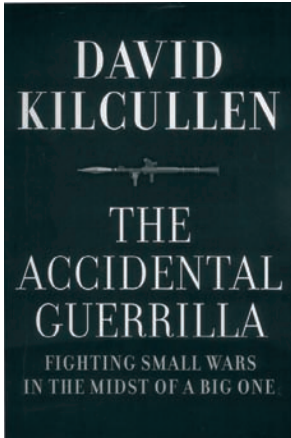


THE ACCIDENTAL GUERRILLA: FIGHTING SMALL WARS IN THE MIDST OF A BIG ONE

KILCULLEN, David. Oxford University Press, USA, 2009, HC, 384 pages, \$27.95, ISBN-13: 978-0195368345

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This book is a must-read for those seeking a fresh, well-informed perspective on the war in Afghanistan, as well as the war on global terrorism as a whole. David Kilcullen served as counter-insurgency advisor to General David Petraeus during the Surge in Iraq in 2007. He is a former officer of the Australian Army, having served twenty years, and reaching the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel before he was seconded to the U.S. State Department in 2004. He is presently the State Department's chief strategist for counterterrorism. His field experience in the Australian Army included peace operations in Cyprus and Bougainville, and he commanded a company in East Timor during the 2002 intervention. He holds a doctorate in politics from the University of New South Wales. His thesis concerned the effects of guerrilla war on non-state political systems in traditional (i.e. primitive) societies. He employs the methods of ethnography, and for his thesis performed extended fieldwork in Indonesia and East Timor. His training

in the Australian Defence Force School of Languages helped him communicate directly with tribesmen in Indonesia. He also commanded military advisory teams to the Indonesian Army. His qualifications, both academic and practical, to write this book are as extensive as they get. The book contains 584 endnotes.

Kilcullen's most important observation is that the Islamic world sees what we in the West call Jihadis as Takfiris. The difference between a jihadi and a takfiri is that a jihadi is respectable and a takfiri is not. A person engaged in jihad is engaged in a struggle that is right and proper in the eyes of Islam, whereas takfiri disobey the Koranic injunction against compulsion in religion. Takfirim is a heresy within Islam, and was outlawed in the 2005 Amman Message. Al-Qaeda is takfiri. Those engaged in the struggle against Al-Qaeda ought immediately to refer to them not as jihadi or as engaged in jihad, but as takfiri engaged in religious compulsion and heresy. Referring to Al-Qaeda as takfiri rightly wrong-foots them in respect of their central claim—the primacy of Islam.

Kilcullen sees the war on terrorism from a global and local perspective. Al-Qaeda and its predecessors have been at work globally for over twenty years. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and elsewhere takfiri operatives have been ingratiating themselves in weakly governed areas throughout the Muslim world. Their aim is to exploit local people and their grievances in furtherance of Al-Qaeda's ultimate aim, hence, the term "Accidental Guerrilla." The local people, while Muslim, are also tribal or traditional, and for many of them Islam is a religion and a cultural marker, but not a cause for world revolution. Their concerns are local; Al-Qaeda's are global.

In furtherance of its aim of the establishment of a world-wide Caliphate, Al-Qaeda needs to exhaust the United States militarily and financially. Al-Qaeda observed that the United States makes war in a spectacular and expensive way. By drawing the United States to intervene in Islamic countries around the world, the intervention will trigger a local guerrilla war, and enough of these will exhaust the United States. Kilcullen separates the process of starting a local guerrilla war and the creation of accidental guerrillas to four phases: infection, contagion, intervention, and rejection. Al-Qaeda infects the populace, and spreads its influence until it becomes dominant. Al-Qaeda provokes a response by

government, which invariably over-reacts—the intervention—and the population in turn responds by rejection and general violence. The accidental guerrilla is created in the rejection phase, and an American military intervention is invariably big enough to create a rejection. Local people, who couldn't care less about Al-Qaeda's global ambitions, are drawn into a fight which they see as defensive with the aggressor, America. Kilcullen sees the fight against Al-Qaeda as multi-generational, to last between 50 and 100 years, which is why the West has to treat the war as a marathon, not a sprint.

The book is quite readable, and shows that the author is fully conversant with all the theoretical work on counter-insurgency and guerrilla war. There is no one more qualified to write it. His style reflects that of a trained ethnologist: he seems to be always taking field notes, and there are the 584 references in the book. For purposes of the work, he adopts the ethnologist's philosophical position of moral relativism; that is, nobody is right or wrong but merely actors in the grand play, each with their own history and motivation. While this is scientifically respectable, it leads the author into subtle contradictions none of which matter to policy-makers. The book deserves a careful and thoughtful read by anyone searching for a better understanding of the war in Afghanistan, and the problems in Pakistan.