Introduction
Mr. Boot based his talk on his latest book, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*. He noted that his book might be considered audacious or even foolhardy for trying to put 5,000 years of history in one book. However, for the Rethinking Seminar he was going one step further and trying to do the same in 25 minutes of talking, which would be a speed of 166 years per minute. Mr. Boot explained that he would be talking about:

- The origins of guerilla warfare
- Changes in guerilla warfare over the years
- Possible responses to guerilla warfare
- Why understanding guerilla warfare is important in the future

Origins of Guerilla Warfare
Often asked: What was the first guerilla war?

- Tribal wars were essentially guerilla wars – lacked uniforms, army structures, significant logistical support
  - Most battles involved darting into enemy territory to raid
  - Bottom line: guerilla wars have been around since there were people to fight
- Conventional warfare with mass armies is relatively recent phenomenon – about 5,000 years
  - Must have nation states first to support the armies with logistics, etc.
  - Started in Mesopotamia with the first states
  - Even then most of their battles were against insurgents from within or raiding nomads from the outside
- Looking at this history shows that common thinking about guerilla warfare is confused
  - Guerilla war is the way people have always fought wars – not a new phenomenon
  - It will remain the way people make war – the dominant form of warfare

The last conventional war was the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia

- Not very significant or impressive
- Since then thousands of people have died all over the world in irregular wars
- US is not the only country trying to deal with irregular warfare
The most powerful army of the ancient world, the Romans, eventually did fall

- Rome was a superpower without any peers but surrounded by enemies it called Barbarians
  - Barbarians lacked the elaborate structures of the Roman army and basically fought guerilla wars
- In 370AD Rome faced the Huns, who were fierce archers
  - A 4th century historian wrote that they would act quickly with surprise and then disperse and scatter in irregular formations avoiding forts and entrenchments
    - This is still a good description of guerilla fighters
  - Eventually, the Huns led by Attila brought down the Roman Empire

**Significant Changes since the Romans Fell**
- Politics
- Propaganda
- Public Opinion

The conflict that symbolized the arrival of these elements of warfare was the American Revolution

- American fighters at Lexington and Concord used methods of fighting that were considered ungentlemanly by the British Redcoats
  - This guerilla style fighting was important in New Jersey and South Carolina since there was no significant Continental Army presence there
- Stories about the Revolution usually end with Yorktown in 1781
  - But there were still tens of thousands of British troops in North America, the Caribbean, and more could be hired from Europe
  - With this sort of force the Romans would not have given up the Colonies
    - They would have fought on despite losses until they could capture and crucify the leaders
    - But the British faced the Three P’s above in their warfare effort forcing them to permit independence
- First uses of the term public opinion appears in 1776
- The American Revolution was not won on the battlefield but in the British House of Commons
  - In February, 1782, a very close vote called for the suspension of offensive operations in North America
  - Decision was a big blow to Lord North who had to resign, bringing in Lord Rockingham who moved toward reconciliation with the Americans
- It helped a great deal that the Americans understood the power of propaganda
  - Efforts went beyond Thomas Paine’s pamphlets and the Declaration of Independence
  - Americans basically performed information operations in Britain, France, Europe
  - This propaganda campaign was decisive for American independence
- The British gave in when public opinion turned against them
- Since then many imitators have used the same methods, often against the US
  - Mao was especially adept, writing by candlelight his classic Essay on Protracted Warfare
  - Mao also said that the people were like water and the soldiers were like fish
    - He stressed the need for his troops to stay connected to the people
    - He called on his soldiers to be polite and courteous
  - Attila the Hun would have not used such thinking
    - Mao understood the changes of the 20th century
• Need to build bases and acquire food for the troops
• Must stay on the side of the peasants
  ▪ The people can be persuaded either by good relations or brute force

Terrorists are by definition weak – can only hope to succeed with a few spectacular acts of violence
• This is what turns public opinion
• No terrorists before the 19th century since lacked the technology to get their word out
• Osama bin Laden wrote that the media war was 90% of the jihad

Most of the *Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare* is history but moves into social science near the end
• A compendium provides a database of guerilla wars since 1775
  o Before 1945 guerillas won about 20% of those wars
  o Since 1945 guerillas won about 40%
  o One reason for the increase is the spread of weapons with massive impact
  o The most important influence has been the increased use of public opinion ops
• Should not put too much into this increase – guerillas still lose 60% of their wars
• Since 1945 there has been a trend of deifying insurgents, making the 10ft tall
  o Mostly from some spectacular wins by Mao and Ho Chi Min
  o Just as very few businesses become Microsoft, very few insurgents become the Red Army
• Some of the most revered insurgents did not win; prime example: Che Guevara
  o Decorated dorm rooms for decades after his great success fighting with Castro against the US-supported Batista regime
    ▪ But Batista had little legitimacy in Cuba
    ▪ People were willing to put up with the Communists to get rid of Batista
  o Then Che began to suffer from hubris
    ▪ He thought he could do the same in the Congo and Bolivia
    ▪ But Bolivia had a popular president who had already instituted land reforms which were all that the Communists could promise
    ▪ Che brought in to fight only outsiders who could not speak the local language
    ▪ The CIA and US Special Forces helped the Bolivians find/kill Che in 1967
  o Bottom line: If the most famous insurgent can be captured and killed, any insurgency can be defeated
  o Problem: How to do it

**Counter Insurgency (COIN)**

Two European powers ran a controlled experiment on COIN nearly simultaneously in the 1950s
• France fought an Algerian insurgency using the mailed fist/brute force method
• Britain fought for the hearts and minds of the Malaysian people with a population centered approach

**The French Method**
• Best way to see what the French faced and did is the movie *The Battle of Algiers*
• The insurgents were setting bombs that killed many civilians and visiting Europeans
• France sent in their elite special forces
  o They grabbed thousands of Algerians and interrogated them harshly
  o Used techniques involving devices to give electric shocks and waterboarding
• One newspaper editor survived and told his story including the deprivations of being locked up, tortured, and made to listen to the screams of others
• Disproved the oft-heard concept that torture doesn’t work – prisoners ratted out each other
• France rolled up all the insurgents by 1957 – a tactical victory leading to a strategic defeat
  o Writers started telling what had happen to them and others in Algeria
  o The French people were horrified by what was being done in their name on the doorstep of Europe
  o Support for the war decreased dramatically until the French government was forced to grant independence to Algeria by 1962

The British Method
• Sir Gerald Templer was sent to become the British High Commissioner in Malaya after his predecessor was assassinated in 1952
  o The Communists were blowing up trains and killing leaders
  o It would be understandable if he had used terror to control the situation and put down the terrorists
  o He understood the need to control the population not through terror but through persuasion
• Templer built hundreds of new villages for the Chinese immigrant squatters giving them land for the first time and lessening the influence of the Communists
  o Villages had health, sanitary and school facilities but were fenced and guarded so the people were cut off from insurgents
  o Aircraft flying over insurgent areas dropped leaflets urging fighters to surrender
    ▪ Sometimes equipped with speakers that called people by name to surrender
  • Spooky but effective tactic
• Templer also ended jungle bashing – sending huge forces thrashing through the jungle hoping to flush out the insurgents
  o Same tactic used by the US early in the Vietnam war
  o Instead sent in special operations and intelligence forces to track leaders and send in pinpoint raids on them
  o Brought in headhunters from Borneo to help guide his forces to the insurgent leaders
• Templer was famous for saying that the shooting side of the battle was only 25% of the effort while building support of the people made up 75%
• Templer also said they could not win with jungle attacks but by winning the hearts and minds of the people
  o Not first use of term but concept caught on after Templer said it
  o Concept is often misunderstood – not just showering the people with goodies to win their affection
• Templer was hard-headed and recognized twin elements that still can be seen in operations:
  o Security – from pinpoint raids and cutting off people from the insurgents
  o Legitimacy – too hard to keep down the whole population for the long run at the point of a bayonet
    ▪ Established legitimacy by offering the people of Malaysia a deal: If you help us defeat the Communist insurgency, we will give you independence
    ▪ This gave them a reason to fight on the British side because it got them what they wanted
Importance of the Twin Tenets – Security and Legitimacy
- France wanted the Algerians to fight on their side but only offered a continuation of French colonial rule – an offer that lacked legitimacy
- Can argue that these twin tenets have had the most impact on nearly all successful insurgencies
  - Can go back to Roman times for proof
  - More recently can look to the Iraqi surge of 2007-08, El Salvador, and Columbia

Why Does Understanding this Matter?
- Often hear in Washington that COIN doesn’t matter anymore since we will go back to fighting conventional wars
- But adversaries are not likely to agree and will plan to use irregular warfare on the US
  - Could even see more of it in the future since no conventional peers for the US military
  - Example: Although bin Laden is dead, Al Qaeda lives on but in a very dispersed way, in more countries and could become even more dangerous in the future

What has changed?
- The destructive power of individuals has increased exponentially in the last few years
  - Now there are AK-47s and the makings for bombs all over the world
  - 100 years ago conventional armies fought insurgents who only had bows and arrows and maybe a few muskets
- In the future it is possible that insurgents could obtain nuclear weapons
  - If that happened, a terrorist cell of 20 or so would have more firepower than a non-nuclear military like Germany or Brazil

What could be the result of terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons?
- *International Journal of Health Geographics* provides charts showing potential destruction area including one for a 20 Kiloton (smaller than the Nagasaki) bomb detonated in Manhattan
- Estimates are that over 600,000 would be killed instantly and 1.6 million more would be injured
Conclusion
It is very possible (especially given nuclear tests in N. Korea, advances in Iran’s nuclear program, etc.) that terrorists someday could get hold of nuclear weapons

- They would be more powerful than any terrorists anyone had faced before
- Must remember that the mighty Romans fell to the Barbarians
- Our first line of defense is to understand the elements apparent in the history of insurgencies and counter insurgency
  - The purpose of Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present is to present that history

QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

Re: Implications for COIN Policy
Book does not advocate any policy but it is trying to tell a story not well-recorded previously

- Recommendation: Don’t repeat the 1970s when the US threw out hard-won experience gained in Vietnam which was not available for Iraq and Afghanistan
- US Army & Marine Corps are now the best COIN forces because of the last decade’s experience
  - Could lose that edge in part from the likely severe cutbacks
  - Must also fight the military’s cultural predilection for conventional war and against messy, difficult COIN
- Despite cuts and predilections, US military must be ready because it will continue to face insurgencies

Re: Religion vs. Ideology of Adversaries
Do not see it as a difference since religion is an ideology

- Big difference in history is the switch from nomadic guerillas who just fought because that is what they always did
  - Not until the 17th or 18th century did guerillas fight for an ideology
  - Even up to the 1890s the US fought Indians who were apolitical guerillas
- Changes occurred as ideology rose with the growth of propaganda and public opinion
  - 19th century: Liberal nationalism was the dominant ideology sparking the Haitian revolution, Italian unification, development of the US after its revolution, etc.
  - 20th century: Shift toward leftist ideologies including Marxism and Communism as the driving force
- Since 1979 the Left has been fading while jihadism is rising and becoming the most dangerous ideology
  - More similarities than differences between jihadists and ideological warriors who came before – both are driven by the power of ideas
  - Very different than the earlier apolitical nomadic warriors

Re: Information Availability
Autocratic governments can try to limit information getting in to their people and out from their countries to the outside world – both very hard to do these days

- Libya could not hide what Quadfi forces did in Benghazi which then rallied the outside world to come together to topple him
- In Syria today government atrocities are known both inside and outside the country
- China tries very hard to control the information flow but even it will not succeed in the end
• Internal concerns get further when they have outside support

**Re: A National Proclivity toward Insurgency**

Insurgencies are sometimes thought of as Oriental in nature where Western conflicts are more often conventional – but there is little evidence to support this

• Look back at the Chinese terra cotta warriors who represented massive army structures
• Terrorism is the last resort of those who have no other power – the war of the weak
• There are no eternal competences either
  o Brits did well with COIN in the 50s and 60s but not in Afghanistan and Iraq
    ▪ They believed they could handle the situations better than the US could
    ▪ However, they did have the complication of their political marching orders
  o US military tends to do badly early in COIN situations, e.g., beginning of Vietnam and Iraq
    ▪ Once they get their act together can do superbly

**Re: Future of the Service Roles**

• Cannot say that conventional wars will not happen in the future
• US will need to deter China and that will be a Navy and Air Force task
• Ground forces will be needed to handle COIN and there will be few armored battles to fight in the future

**Re: Insurgent Groups Cooperating with One Another**

Previous insurgent groups did not know each other existed – e.g. the Sioux and the Zulus were fighting about the same time but more than an ocean apart

• British and American forces did compare notes at times
• Balance has shifted given the communications and technologies available
• Three waves of terrorists look differently
  o 19th century anarchists – had no structure, hierarchy by definition
  o 1970s Leftists – primarily used a small cell structure
  o Now there are insurgencies waging war in multiple countries and using cyber space for command and control, funding, recruiting, etc.
    ▪ Means countries must cooperate more amongst themselves to fight problem
    ▪ But people doing the fighting are in physical spaces, not avatars
    ▪ If country has good governance, it should be able to employ classic COIN methods to control the situation
• Another modern phenomenon is the waning importance of leaders in insurgencies
  o Now not as hierarchical with single leaders like Mao but multiple scattered elements
  o Offers both potential and pitfalls to be so segmented
    ▪ Such forces can’t pull together for something like a Tet Offensive
    ▪ But always hard for COIN to wipe out all the elements
  o Also means that a decapitation strike might not work as well as hoped
    ▪ Can’t end an insurgency with a single drone strike

**Re: US Proclivity for Depending on Technologies in the Military**

Using drones for a decapitation strike can be useful if it is part of an overall plan

• 2003-2007 JSOC took out large numbers of leaders using drones but with little strategic effect, some Al Qaeda outfits even grew
Only had an impact after being married up with other COIN efforts

- Bottom line: We can’t depend on drones to do the whole job
  - Best to use drones where there is no other choice, where no hope of a robust COIN strategy
  - Example: Pakistan where can’t put boots on the ground and the government won’t act

Re: Outside Support of Guerrillas

Guerillas units are more effective if they can work in connection with main force units

- They need logistical support which must come from outside
- This outside support can make or break the success of the guerilla movement
- Exceptions exist: Castro in the 1950s had no such support
- It is rare that a guerilla group can expand into an army
  - Mao’s forces needed the outside intervention of the Japanese invasion to propel it beyond guerilla status
  - The US needed the support of France in its revolution
- Hard to deal with such combined situations
  - US found that out in Vietnam where units could act either as guerilla units or as main force armies that would scatter after attacks
  - Problem: Making a decision to concentrate forces to hold off main force attacks
    - Then don’t have enough to hold the entire region
    - But if scatter own troops might not have enough protection of small groups

Re: Insurgencies in Weak/Failed States

Insurgencies always happen in countries with weak, corrupt governments

- You don’t see insurgencies in Switzerland
- Might see small group activity but not liberated territory or terrain controlled as under the Taliban
- Insurgency always a function of bad governance
- Need to improve governance first to overcome insurgencies
  - First duty of a state is to provide security to its people
  - Doing massive projects like huge dams might not help
- Need to ensure that the government offers legitimacy
  - Need to reduce horrendous levels of corruption as a start

Re: Technological Changes that Change Warfare

Technology may change the form of wars but not the essential elements

- The Romans suffered massive losses but not to any new technology but due to ambushes
  - Troops are always vulnerable to ambushes but there are always ways to counter them
  - Most recently, IED attacks are being countered but adversaries always invent new ways
- Guerillas are the most resistant to technological changes
  - There have been many more tech changes in conventional warfare
  - Guerillas fight in ways designed to negate the superior firepower of their enemies

Re: Nuclear Weapons in the Hands of Guerillas

- Guerillas acquiring WMDs could be a game changer to some extent
- However, even if they did use a 20kt nuclear weapon on Manhattan there would still be 300 million Americans left
Would be devastating but US would then pulverize those who carried out the attack

- Guerrilla access to WMD opposes the military’s cultural predilection for conventional warfare
  - COIN was considered less important since only something like the Red Army could present an existential threat to the American homeland
  - Access to WMD and cyber technologies elevates the importance of their threat to the homeland

**Re: Totalitarian Governance**
Type of government that gives rise to insurgencies are those that might be dictatorial but not very effective
- Batista led a rather ramshackle government that created conditions for Castro’s insurgency
- North Korea and other more effective dictatorships leave little room for insurgents to operate
- Effective government does not equal good government

**Re: Importance of Outside Support to Insurgencies**
If an insurgency has sanctuaries, external support, or connections with a main force, then it becomes much more difficult to eradicate – example: Columbia
- Has had great success over the last decade against its insurgency
- Instituted a COIN 101 strategy to take and hold safe regions
- Bogota is now safe to visit but the FARC still hold some territory
  - FARC still getting help from Chavez in Venezuela
  - May not be possible to get rid of the FARC completely

**Re: Legitimacy**
Throughout history to overcome insurgencies governments must prove their legitimacy
- In 18th century the growth of nationalism began the questioning of the legitimacy of colonial leaders
- In the 19th century concepts spread independence movements throughout North and South America and even Australia
- In the 20th century nationalism reached Africa
- Today, it is not considered legitimate to be a colonial power
- US faces this problem in Afghanistan where it does not want to be seen as a colonial power but also needs the very corrupt Afghan government to act responsibly
  - So try to set up/support good local governments so can’t be seen as doing the right thing only for the benefit of the US
  - Doing COIN by proxy is that much harder but necessary in the modern world

**Re: Population Centric COIN**
Successful COIN does require various elements
- Can’t completely ignore terrain or the need for decapitation strikes at times
  - But should be wrapped into an overall population centric plan
- General Petraeus in Afghanistan understood what was needed
  - Multiple lines of operations
  - Go after the logistics support and go after the leaders
- Use large scale efforts to clean out Al Qaeda fighters but need to be careful how it is done
  - Nazis would eradicate villages in retribution for partisan attacks on their facilities
    - Their tactics pushed villagers into the resistance
o Nazis used search and destroy tactics to control an area since could not send in enough troops to maintain control
  ▪ Still failed despite tremendous efforts that would go well beyond what a current day liberal democracy could allow itself to do
• In an early 20th century insurgency in Morocco, a French COIN expert stated that it all depends on having the right man on the spot who understands the local situation