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CHIAPAS, ZAPATISTAS, AND THE "M" WORD

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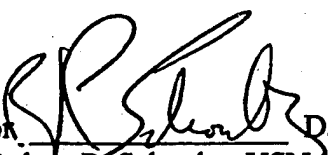
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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

CHIAPAS, ZAPATISTAS, AND THE "M" WORD

As of this writing the armed phase of the Zapatista insurgency is well into its third year. The Government of Mexico continues to negotiate, offer concrete concessions, and pump unprecedented amounts of federal money into Chiapas and neighboring states. Yet the EZLN refuses to give up their arms and join the political process. Why? Because the insurgents are not, nor were they ever, interested in political compromise. They seek total power and their means to this end is protracted politico-military warfare relying on the time-tested Maoist model. That is to say, the present-day Mexican insurgents are Zapatistas in name only.

How might the United States react to a Mexican government request for counterinsurgency assistance, the likes of which goes beyond mere Foreign Military Sales? Assuming a positive U.S. response, a combined Mexican-U.S. operational planning staff would be smart to steer clear, at least initially, of the EZLN base camp in Chiapas, its famous sub-comandante and other armed defenders, as these tangible and inviting targets are in actuality far removed from the guerrillas's true strategic center of gravity.

CHIAPAS, ZAPATISTAS, AND THE "M" WORD

"In reality the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection; if it were, the masses would be always in revolt."

Leon Trotsky¹

When asked to comment on the ideology and objectives associated with their movement, the Zapatistas usually respond with something like this:

We as representatives of the poor are determined to pick up and carry forth the unfinished social cause of Mexican folk hero Emiliano Zapata and, if necessary, continue armed struggle until the Federal government focuses resources on a long-neglected, specific region of the country and its inhabitants, most of whom being indigenous peoples.

The guerrillas's pat explanation is sophisticated for its simplicity; particular audiences on both sides of the Mexican-U.S. border might even find the message romantic. The carefully selected words have served well the rebel cause since January 1, 1994, the date of their highly publicized, initial armed action in the southernmost Mexican state of Chiapas.

Unfortunately, the Zapatista message is a half-truth only. A critical analysis of the insurgency reveals a sinister lie deliberately obscured by the guerrilla leadership in the public version of their Party line. The more complete story is that the Zapatistas do not adhere to the principles of their Mexican namesake, but to those of Mao Tse-tung. Indeed, mounting circumstantial evidence and historical connections suggest that the Zapatistas's ultimate aim is nothing less than the overthrow of the Government of Mexico by way of a violent Maoist revolution and the establishment of some form of a people's republic whose interests would be inimical to those of its northern neighbor.

The guerrillas's true ideology and hidden agenda are among their best kept secrets, and, at this not so inchoate stage of insurgency, the most important weapons in their arsenal. The rebel leadership long ago recognized that all of Mexico falls within the sphere

of U.S. security interests. Consequently, for the past 20 or so years, the insurgents have painstakingly avoided alarming the United States by word or action. Examples of this heretofore successful strategy have been the conspicuous absence of the "M" word in the guerrillas's public lexicon and, since New Year's Day 1994, the sparing of the many thousand, super-vulnerable U.S.-associated targets located throughout Mexico.

The insurgent hierarchy accurately concluded that because of "larger" issues such as immigration, the drug war, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement and the peso's dependency on U.S.-led foreign investment, the United States in the end must side with the Mexican government and eventually take action against their Revolution. Accordingly, the guerrillas recognize that U.S. intervention in some form of counterinsurgency security assistance is inevitable. By masking their true ideology, intentions, and numbers, the guerrillas hope to postpone U.S. support for Mexico City for as long as possible in order to gain precious years for enlarging and hardening their clandestine infrastructure. By the time the United States finally does get involved, the guerrilla leadership anticipates, the insurgency will have reached advanced stages and be unstoppable, if not in a military sense, at least in a (more important) political sense.

After revealing the Zapatistas's true ideology and intentions, this article offers an offensive politico-military course of action for consideration by a hypothetical combined (Mexican-U.S.) operational planning staff. Assumed is a positive U.S. response to a Mexican government request for counterinsurgency assistance, the likes of which would go beyond mere Foreign Military Sales yet would preclude the presence of U.S. forces on Mexican soil. Also assumed is a mutually agreed upon desired end state: The politico-military defeat of the present-day Zapatista insurgency.

The Masquerade in Chiapas

Today the Zapatistas are active in many Mexican states, not just in Chiapas. By late 1993 a number of different regions of Mexico had been effectively organized by secret guerrilla cadres and were under consideration as the possible launch point for the Zapatista

Army of National Liberation (EZLN)'s first armed action.² Chiapas was selected as the venue for the opening shots for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was a conscious decision on the part of the guerrilla leadership to keep the violence as far as possible from the U.S. border. Still embryonic from a purely military perspective, the Zapatistas wanted to avoid frightening the U.S. citizenry and possibly provoking hasty U.S. government involvement.

The establishment of a guerrilla base camp in Chiapas provided the movement a prize of multi-dimensional value; however, as the base camp and the guerrillas defending it are tangible effects, Chiapas cannot be the guerrillas's strategic center of gravity.³ Among other purposes, the guerrilla-controlled area of Chiapas serves as a distraction for the Mexican political and military establishments. The insurgents have taken advantage of their enemy's preoccupation with this one remote location to step-up and consolidate their invisible political work in other regions. For clandestine organizations like the EZLN, deception and denial are central to survival. An accurate depiction of the armed Zapatista in Chiapas was offered thirty years ago by Robert Taber: "The guerrilla is a political insurgent, the conscious agent of the revolution; his military role, while vital, is only incidental to his political mission."⁴

Chiapas is but one of several different fronts upon which the Zapatistas are fighting, and, because it is at least partially visible, is ironically one of the least threatening to the Government. Because the insurgency's definition of victory is national power, and not just autonomy or independence for a specific piece of land, other regions of Mexico may well experience EZLN-sponsored political violence in the future. No one should be surprised when this happens.

For the guerrillas, the harder phase of their struggle--years of silently recruiting, proselytizing, and organizing cells--is nearly completed. Converting political ideas into political violence is the easier task. It takes but one month to teach a highly motivated member how to use a revolver, to ignite a fuse even less.

Taber sums it up:

"Revolutionary wars are generally, of necessity, wars of long duration. The seeds of revolution are slow to germinate; the roots and tendrils spread out silently underground long before there is any sign of sprout or bud. Then suddenly one day, like new wheat springing up in a cultivated field, there is a blaze of color, an overnight growth: the rebels are there and everywhere."⁵

Years before the initiation of the armed phase of their struggle, the Zapatista leadership reached a strategic decision regarding the formation of their clandestine, political infrastructure. Were their traditional supporters such as university faculty and students, human rights and anti-war activists, leftist intellectuals, leftist media, and select members of the petty bourgeoisie more valuable teaching ideology and printing propaganda leaflets in guerrilla base camps or as secret organizers in Government-controlled territory? The guerrillas did not hesitate in choosing the latter role for their political cadres and in so doing underscored the true nature of the conflict.

This Mexican insurgency is a shadow war, a dimly visible politico-military contest whose key terrain has never been the Lacandon Jungle but the "four inches between the ears" of those who comprise the insurgency's vanguard.⁶ The recent lack of military activity by the EZLN should not be considered a sign of guerrilla weakness. Doing so would amount to a dangerous misinterpretation leading to an underestimation of the enemy.

Armed guerrilla actions always take place in the realm of the tangible, at a critical point where abstract theory becomes concrete and where the battlefield, previously slanted in favor of the secret political warrior, must begin to level off. It is an ageless paradox of political warfare that regardless of the outcome of any given attack, the guerrilla will always lose, even if just a little, some of the source of his strength: That is, his clandestinity. For example, even in the bloody aftermath of a successful guerrilla assassination, bombing, or ambush, at a minimum we are left with an impression, however

fleeting, of the insurgent's arsenal, modus operandi, tactics, and ideas regarding targeting. If the guerrilla would ever chose to remain on the surface, the conflict would turn conventional and the insurgent's defeat would be all but guaranteed. Too crafty to fall into such a trap, the Zapatistas plan to remain below for some time.

It is in the sub-surface world of intangibles--the true level of public support for the guerrillas, degree of competency of the guerrilla leadership, the guerrillas's will to fight, their true ideology and true desired end state--that represents the more serious threat. The sub-surface world is home to the guerrillas's strategic center of gravity, that abstract crucible where the war will be won or lost. The events of January 1, 1994, and the surprise they precipitated in Mexico City and other capitals around the world, are evidence that the Zapatistas are capable of, and comfortable with, this kind of fight.

Despite the internal focus of their Revolution, the guerrillas are not ignorant of the outside world. The insurgent leadership pays close attention to "external" factors such as Mexico's civilian-military relationship, the stability of the peso, larger U.S. and Mexican bilateral issues (drugs and immigration), ethnic and racial tensions around the world, and possibly even China's emerging status, as any one of these dynamics could take a turn, and through interaction, serve to benefit the Revolution.

As of this writing the armed phase of the insurgency is well into its third year. The Government of Mexico continues to negotiate, offer concrete concessions--many of which are unilateral--and pump unprecedented amounts of federal money into Chiapas and neighboring states. Yet the EZLN refuses to give up their arms. Why? Because the insurgents are not, nor were they ever, interested in political compromise. They seek total power and their means to this end is protracted politico-military warfare relying on the time-tested Maoist model. The guerrilla's grow stronger with the passing months; by not losing they are winning.

The "M" Word

"Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril."

Sun Tzu⁷

One might question categorizing Mexico's Zapatista movement as fundamentally Maoist when prevailing U.S. counterinsurgency theory cautions against that urge, typically American, to categorize all people, places and things. We are also taught that no two situations are identical and "forcing" past lessons learned on current insurgencies of differing dates, places, cultures, and circumstances can be counterproductive. Finally, and perhaps most dangerous of all, the analyst runs the risk of losing intellectual respectability by being labeled a relic of the Cold War--when the bunching of political parties and rebel movements into ideological camps made analysis less challenging.

The short answer is because it is so very damaging to the guerrillas. As a secret organization, their unmasking represents the first nail in their coffin. But there is more. Theory and analysis are pursued in the interest of practice. For the subject at hand, this means formulating counterinsurgency strategy and planning operations against concrete and, more importantly, abstract guerrilla targets in Mexico. As prophesized by Sun Tzu, to the extent possible we must learn who the enemy really is and what he truly wants. When confronted by a shadowy, non-state, deception-driven organization like the EZLN, the challenge is daunting.

However, while the Zapatistas may have effectively masked their words and disguised their true intentions, they have not been able to hide all of their actual activities or keep buried the totality of their roots. A critical analysis of these latter factors reveals remarkable similarities between the Maoist model of insurgency and what is happening in Mexico today. The same analysis suggests that Emiliano Zapata and the EZLN would have been at odds over a number of key issues.

Birds of a Feather--Mao and the Zapatistas:

- Whereas both Marx and Lenin turned mostly to urban factory workers for support, Mao looked primarily to the peasantry. The Zapatistas's decision to follow Mao and concentrate on the countryside was not one of last resort. Urban Mexico too represented potential fertile ground for radical or revolutionary activity but was eschewed by the Zapatistas in favor of the rural population. Mao championed agrarian reform and relied on "elites" to lead the "less cultivated" masses; the Zapatistas are doing no different.
- Mao was initially determined to bypass workers, petty-bourgeoisie, and intellectuals and use his overwhelmingly peasant army to first control the countryside and later strangle those more difficult to convert inhabitants concentrated in the cities. In other words, Mao, like his followers in Mexico today, was prepared to carry out the revolutionary agenda with only peasant support. Emiliano Zapata, on the other hand, made deliberate attempts, oftentimes on the verge of pleading, to wed his largely peasant army to what we would regard today as urban blue collar.⁸
- Mao postulated three phases of revolutionary struggle: defense, stalemate, and offense. No doubt Mao himself would have been impressed with the duration of the Zapatistas's defensive phase--20 some years and counting. The Zapatistas realize that the strategic stalemate phase is still years away, but apparently they are willing to wait.
- Questioning the viability of "roving" guerrilla units, Mao developed the theory and practice of establishing guerrilla base camps, physical locations known as the "rear" from where the insurgency could spread. Mao also recognized the political and psychological value of base camps in that they served to "arouse" the population. After a mere two weeks of low intensity fighting in January 1994, the Zapatistas won a base camp in Chiapas state and through the manipulation of dialogue have been able to consolidate their position.

- More than any other characteristic, it is the deliberate protraction of the conflict that sets the Maoist model apart from other insurgencies. This was Mao's strength and so it is for the Zapatistas.

This last point requires some elaboration, primarily because it so decisively separates the present-day Zapatista insurgency from Emiliano Zapata's way of war, and, secondly, for the dread it brings to the American psyche. Where Sun Tzu and Clausewitz stressed the need to keep wars to a short duration, Mao knew that both theorists were writing primarily about inter-state, conventional warfare.⁹ Forced to fight an intra-state conflict against a conventionally superior enemy in the form of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army, Mao adopted the unconventional strategy of deliberate protraction. The Zapatistas, who are convinced that they are engaged in a civil war of their own and obliged to confront the Mexican military's overwhelmingly superior conventional order-of-battle, found the parallels to the Chinese Civil War irresistible.

In deep secrecy, the EZLN began to build their political foundation some twenty years ago in classic Chinese Communist Party (CCP) fashion. Similarly, the current armed phase of the insurgency by design will be long and drawn out, consisting of a seemingly endless string of inconclusive armed incidents and skirmishes. Emiliano Zapata never engaged in such seed work. He and company spontaneously jumped on an overt revolutionary bandwagon which already had been set in motion thanks to Francisco Madero. Although they may admire and respect Emiliano Zapata's legacy and share some common goals such as land redistribution and peasant rights, the fact of the matter is that the present-day Zapatistas have copied little from their namesake. There is one glaring exception of course: The name Zapata provides excellent cover for the guerrillas's true ideology and intentions.

At the end of his Long March in October 1935, Mao established the remote "Yenan area" as his base camp and CCP and guerrilla army headquarters. Yanan was a temporary stop for the Communists along their path to national power. Never did Mao

consider compromising with his enemy by settling for a "Free Yenan" or some other part of China in the form of a Red independent state and leaving the rest of the country for the Nationalists. The Zapatistas regard Chiapas much in the same way Mao used the "Yenan area." Mao was not satisfied with merely a "Liberated Yenan," nor would the Zapatistas be content with only an "Autonomous Chiapas."

Due to their geopolitical misfortune, the Zapatistas must consider the United States in all of their strategic decisionmaking. Not lost on the Zapatistas are the antipathetic views held by the U.S. military and U.S. public in general regarding possible U.S. involvement in potentially drawn out, inclusive, and unconventional wars--lingering Viet Nam stigmatizations. These sorts of wars, in fact, grate against U.S. strategic and operational doctrine which, having considerable faith in Clausewitz, finds relying on vastly superior numbers and firepower to achieve quick and decisive victory (with minimal casualties) the optimal way to wage war. Also key, the Zapatistas have embraced Mao's belief that "legislative bodies simply cannot take a war of attrition, either financially or, over the long run, psychologically."¹⁰ Of course both Mexico D.F. and Washington D.C. are homes to exactly the types of "legislative bodies" Mao had in mind.

But the evidence which leads to the classification of the Mexican insurgency as Maoist is based on more than the foregoing analytical comparisons. Separate, corroborating proof is provided by Stanford University Professor George A. Collier, who maintains that the Zapatistas's roots can be traced back to a 1960's-70's era Maoist students movement known as "Politics Popular" (PP) which was led by a Mexican National Autonomous University economist by the name of Adolfo Orive Berlinguer. Members of the PP apparently hailed from northern states and they probably were neither peasant nor Indian in background. Some twenty years ago PP cadres began "moving" to Chiapas in order to organize the locals along radical (read leftist) political lines.¹¹

The PP's Maoist roots and the timing of the Party's apparent inception are remarkable in that they coincide with the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s Cultural

Revolution (1966-76). Despite the internal focus, it was during these most radical and bloody years that the PRC aggressively exported Chairman Mao's model for insurgency and communism by inviting scores of Third World revolutionary leaders to China for schooling in "Mao Tse-tung Thought" and guerrilla warfare training.¹²

One key characteristic of the Maoist model which so far has not manifested itself as a Zapatista *modus operandi* is the wide scale use of "terror" (Mao's word) as a matter of policy. Mao believed that his guerrillas were justified in using "terror" to further the Revolution and, in order to right past wrongs, "going too far" was adopted as policy.¹³ A manifestation of this policy repeated thousands of times over the Chinese countryside was the brutal beating or public execution of defenseless landowners by Mao's cadres. The Zapatistas now have the tactical intelligence and reach, manpower and weapons necessary to carry out selective attacks against any number of Mexican landowners, but why the guerrillas have yet to engage in such bloody operations is not clear.

The reason may rest with continuing efforts by the insurgents to win over public support, or, at a minimum, a desire not to make enemies. Of course in the eyes of the United States increased violence attributed to the Zapatistas would establish the insurgency as a "threat on our very border," a designation the guerrillas have been keen to avoid. Alternatively, perhaps the EZLN does not want to provoke a Mexican army incursion into their Chiapas base camp. In any event, if the Zapatistas remain true to the tenets of their imported ideology and method of warfare, the chances for stepped-up violence in the future are excellent.

Turning Theory into Practice:¹⁴

"The reasons for their [the U.S. military in 1962] mistaken optimism lay elsewhere. It is now clear they were receiving very inaccurate information from the South Vietnamese, who tended to report what they believed Americans wanted to hear...Like many people, the U.S. commanders also indulged, to some extent, in wishful thinking. Moreover, they--as did I--misunderstood the nature of the conflict."

Robert S. McNamara in 1995.¹⁵

Mexico's Indians, like most of the world's downtrodden, might be wretched but they are not necessarily revolutionary. As has happened on numerous occasions since the Conquest, the indigenous population today is being manipulated by politically motivated, urban-bred mestizo elites. Many analysts in the United States and elsewhere who during the Cold War hastened to look for a foreign sponsor behind every violent political uprising in the Third World now attempt to link the Zapatistas to the drug cartels. Given the high profile engendered by this issue, it is understandable all sides will be tempted to use narcotics as a potential red herring. However, there is no public evidence which indicates that the Mexican guerrillas are involved in the narcotics business.

Similarly, the insurgents are not receiving lethal or non-lethal material support from abroad. The EZLN's primary imports have been a political ideology and a military doctrine. And finally, the Zapatista movement is not a "clash of civilizations" between "Latin America" and the "West," with the latter being represented by the United States, in the sort of post-Cold War conflict foreshadowed by Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington.¹⁶

To repeat, what the Zapatistas are doing is conducting an old-fashioned Maoist insurgency, employing classic guerrilla warfare tactics in an attempt to achieve their political aims, notably total national power through violent revolution. Fortunately for any future binational counterinsurgency effort, following closely behind the Zapatistas's lofty goals have been some serious miscalculations. The EZLN has fallen into the same trap as have many of America's opponents over the years. Specifically, they have underestimated the guile and agility of the U.S. national security apparatus. We have much more in our arsenal than Seawolfs and B-2's. In countering the Zapatistas, the United States can rely on at least four tremendous advantages, which if properly exploited, would remove the guerrilla threat and deliver the desired end state to both Mexico D.F. and Washington, D.C.:

1) Based on decades of experience, U.S. military and security officials know how to counter a Maoist insurgency--although sometimes we trick ourselves into believing we do not.

2) The United States knows Mexico and Mexicans--although we should recognize that Mexico's indigenous population represents a separate culture within a culture, one perhaps another layer or two removed from our own.

3) Americans know that Mexico is on our border. Many foreign policy issues seem to be of concern to U.S. elites primarily; not so for drugs, immigration, and jobs (trade). The American people would support their Government's efforts to contain and defeat the Zapatista insurgency, especially once the guerrillas had been unmasked and their true ideology and intentions revealed.

4) The United States need not send troops, as the desired end state would be attainable through collaboration with the Government of Mexico and the employment of exclusively Mexican forces.

The objective of the first combined operational planning session would be to persuade our Mexican partners that the solution to the Zapatista "problem" is not military but politico-military. Indeed, the current Mexican government policy of cease-fire and dialogue suggests that this notion is already understood. The second, and perhaps more challenging objective of the initial planning session, would be to convince the Mexicans that the insurgent's strategic center of gravity is not the EZLN base camp in Chiapas, nor Sub-Comandante "Marcos," nor his armed subordinates. The real enemy strategic center of gravity is comprised of two secret intangibles: the insurgent leadership's true ideology and their true intentions. Fortunately, both are within striking range of a prudent counterinsurgency strategy consisting of four separate, but complementary, offensive operational plans.

Taking the fight to the guerrillas:

1) U.S.-trained and -equipped Mexican light infantry would begin sustained patrolling of select regions of the Mexican countryside.¹⁷ Their mission would not be the destruction of tangible targets such as armed guerrilla columns nor the command and control cell of a specific rebel comandante. Rather, the troops would be in pursuit of a more intangible objective: The disruption of any possible plans the EZLN may have of establishing additional physical base camps in selected areas of the countryside. Since the Zapatistas are Maoists, we know that the establishment of rural base camps is central to their strategy. Where specifically to patrol is of course key and fortunately for the counterinsurgents, there is but a finite number of areas in Mexico whose terrain would lend itself to the formation of a guerrilla base camp, despite the country's considerable land mass.

Basic relief and elevation and topographical maps will indicate the areas which meet the severe terrain (jungle or mountain) qualifications. By overlaying these now marked maps on an up-to-date demographical map depicting concentrations of indigenous peoples, the Mexican-U.S. planners will have a visualized target list for their patrols. In sum, indigenous populations living on or near tough terrain equals a potential guerrilla base camp (see Appendix A). The list should be sufficiently short to permit the Mexican army with its current force structure to handle the assignment.

Key to the success of the operation is the need to conduct patrolling even over those areas on the list which appear totally void of insurgent activity. With the previously mentioned McNamara quote in mind, the patrolling operations might be better served by setting aside, at least temporarily, HUMINT-derived intelligence reports. Although the guerrillas might not presently be active in a given area (which would account for the lack of intelligence reporting), their leadership may in fact intend to use these decisive points at some future date. An idea can become a plan which in turn can become an activity. We would be attacking the Zapatistas's ideas, which we know will be based on, or at least

influenced by, Maoist doctrine. The EZLN's reasons for hiding their subordination to Mao's ways are not limited to political and psychological concerns alone. The mission of friendly forces would be in essence victory-denying, as opposed to outright military victory, while other instruments of binational power are brought to bear.

2) While the Mexican army conducts their political patrolling over the countryside, U.S.-trained Mexican investigative police would move subtly to disrupt the insurgent lines of communication (LOC). The objective here would be to influence rather than dominate the operational environment. Guerrilla cadres masquerading as faculty members and students at rural state universities are important members of the Zapatistas's clandestine political infrastructure. These learning centers provide excellent cover for predominantly mestizo Party commissars to interface with large numbers of Indians, peasants, and other inhabitants of the countryside who, if not already serving the EZLN in one capacity or another, are prime targets for recruitment. Ever since the controversial and bloody events of 1968, Mexico's military and security services have been *personas non grata* on state university property--a security breakdown exploited to the hilt by the Zapatistas and probably a missing piece to the puzzle explaining why the events of New Year's Day 1994 were not anticipated by Mexico City.

The previous juxtaposition of the geographical and demographical maps can be used again to complement a study of a third map depicting the locations of Mexico's rural state universities. While all state universities would deserve some attention, our foci would be those state teacher's universities and institutes located within commuting distance (maximum four hours one way by foot, bike, donkey, scooter, or bus) to any one of the potential guerrilla base camps. The roads and paths leading to schools represent guerrilla LOC's along which surreptitiously flow personnel, supplies, information, intelligence, money, and instructions (again see Appendix A). Over time the careful monitoring of these LOC's by investigative police would reveal anomalies upon which deeper investigations could be launched.¹⁸ With their LOC's now vulnerable to interdiction, the guerrillas's

ability to coordinate nationwide activity would be minimized, along with any strategic threat they may have represented.

3) In concert with the above operations, U.S.-trained and -equipped Mexican light infantry would deploy to Chiapas and retake all the territory previously held by the EZLN. From the outside the operation may appear to be a poorly executed, purely military endeavor--conventional and plodding, wasteful and counterproductive, exactly what a counterinsurgency operation should not be, seemingly counter to this article's thesis, etc.--but since in reality the objective would be highly political, the operation would represent a pointed dagger in the heart of the insurgency, an assault upon their abstract, strategic center of gravity.

The Army would make public the date and location from where the counteroffensive would begin and a limited number of domestic and international press, human rights representatives, and members of the clergy would be invited to accompany the troops with the objective of demonstrating strict Armed Forces adherence to the Law of Land Warfare. Inclusion of non-military members on the operation would thwart any possible, nay predictable, guerrilla attempts to cry torture, rape, pillage, clandestine mass graves, etc. Also beforehand, the Army would announce that their primary objective was to retake land--not to kill, wound, or capture guerrillas. Some counterinsurgency specialists might take exception to a Chiapas counteroffensive operation by pointing out that land means little or nothing in guerrilla warfare. This argument would be valid if the insurgency at hand were not of the Maoist variety. The operation would accomplish several other important political objectives:

a. Most counterinsurgency analysts agree that when the guerrillas are not losing they are winning; the Army's Chiapas counteroffensive would disrupt the perception of the EZLN as "winners."

b. The existence of the base camp in Chiapas could imply that the Zapatistas already have established the "strategic stalemate" stage of Maoist insurgency, at

least with regards to one region of the country; the Army's Chiapas counteroffensive would prove that the Mexican insurgency was not as mature nor as successful as some analysts had suspect.

c. Much of the mysticism surrounding the Zapatistas would evaporate and those Mexicans sitting on the ideological fence might be less inclined to jump off on the guerrillas's side. That is to say, the EZLN bandwagon would be to a degree derailed.

4) Finally, the combined Mexican-U.S. team, speaking through the Mexican government, would undertake a carefully planned but aggressive media operation designed to cut into the lead the Zapatistas have built up in the arena of information. The Government's psychological operation and propaganda efforts would benefit from two strengths--the plain truth and legitimacy--which the opponent simply cannot match. The guerrillas's Maoists roots, tactics, and ideology would be exposed to the glare of a very bright public spotlight as would their political designs on total power.

In a calculated gamble, the Government would prove to the population of Mexico and the world that the Zapatistas's are manipulating the ongoing dialogue and that the EZLN has no intention of arriving at a political solution. Under the current game rules, the talks provide the guerrillas with a win-win-win situation: 1) the Zapatistas gain psychological and political points by appearing to be of "equal status" with the recognized Government; 2) the cease-fire prevents the Army from retaking guerrilla-controlled territory; and, 3) while the Government is distracted by the negotiations in Chiapas, the Zapatistas continue their secret political work in other parts of the country.

In order to turn the tables on the guerrillas, the Government would offer the Zapatistas a surprisingly attractive, concrete concession in exchange for an agreement from the guerrillas to turn-in their arms. A Government proposal akin to the land reform used so effectively by Magsaysay in the Philippines against the Huk insurgency in the 1950's would add credibility to the operation.¹⁹ But the guerrillas inevitably would reject the offer--and in doing so their bluff would have been called in public. As a consequence,

national and international opinion would begin to tilt away from the Zapatistas and towards the Government. The timely attitude shift would complement the more physical operations outlined above.

Conclusion:

What the Zapatista guerrillas currently lack in tangible lethal capabilities they compensate for with intangible lethal intentions. Herein lies the guerrilla threat to Mexican and U.S. interests and the thrust of this article. Capabilities vs. intentions is an old fight for the policymaker and military analyst alike. This paper has attempted to add weight to the intention side of the equation with regards to Mexico's guerrillas.

In the view of this writer, circumstantial and historical evidence leaves little doubt that the Zapatista leaders have read Mao and that they are carefully following the Maoist way of political warfare. The EZLN hierarchy cannot, however, acknowledge that they are to the core Maoists, nor can they reveal that their ultimate goal is total power. Admitting to one or the other would involve the guerrillas with an opponent for whom they are not yet ready. In the meantime, those Zapatistas in the know who need to refer to the "M" word among themselves will continue to do so in a whisper.

Those who might find the above conclusions and recommendations alarmist or exaggerated need only to consider that any reporting from the 1992-93 timeframe which indicated that an outbreak of insurgency in Mexico was even remotely possible would have been considered farfetched in the extreme. If that lesson were not enough, then doubters should also ask themselves: Today, would the average Mexican peasant, stumbling upon a six-person, armed guerrilla patrol on a remote jungle or mountain path, later report what he or she saw to Government authorities? We are obliged to consider a negative response. Indeed, the peasant's reaction, with all its socio-political and security ramifications, repeated hundreds of times in varying forms by other peasants throughout the country over a period of years, underscores the complexity and seriousness of the challenge.²⁰

ENDNOTES

¹John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker, The Cambridge History of China (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), p. 653, footnote 46. Trotsky is quoted from Arthur L. Stinchcombe's Theoretical Methods in Social History, n.d., p. 34. Note also on p. 653 of The Cambridge History of China Alexis de Tocqueville: "Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men's minds."

²"EZLN" could very well be a pseudonym and smoke screen. An insurgency is first and foremost a political dynamic subordinate to a political leadership, the latter almost always taking the form of a political party. That the EZLN claims to be an "Ejército" and not a "Partido" or "Frente" should raise an eyebrow.

But maybe this is more cunning phraseology on the part of the Zapatistas. The provincial Indians who make up the guerrilla columns must find rallying to an army "in being" a more attractive alternative than joining up with just another mestizo-led, self-styled Indian rights political party, the sorts of which come along every few years. The value of including Zapata's name in the organization's title has as much to do with deception as it does with winning folkloric and peasant support. The actual name of the Party must be a deeply kept secret.

For clarity "EZLN" and "Zapatistas" will be used interchangeably throughout this article to refer to the present-day Mexican insurgents, the writer's suspicions notwithstanding.

For an opposing view on the relationship between the party and army see Regis Debray's Revolution in the Revolution? (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). On p. 116, Debray argues that "The people's army will be the nucleus of the party, and not vice versa."

³Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 595-6. As defined by Clausewitz, the enemy's center of gravity is that "...hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed." Clausewitz recognized that a center of gravity can in fact take an abstract form. In an elaboration of his concept, and one which coincidentally was particularly well suited to the theme of this article, Clausewitz explained that with regards to "popular uprisings" the enemy center of gravity is the "personalities of the leaders and public opinion." On War p. 596.

⁴Robert Taber, The War of the Flea (New York: Lyle Stuart 1965), p.152.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶John D. Waghelstein, "Ruminations of a Pachyderm or What I Learned in the Counter-insurgency Business," Small Wars & Insurgencies, Winter 1994, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 367.

⁷Sun Tzu, The Art of War (London: Oxford University Press 1963), p. 84. On p. 88 of the Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung, Mao quotes the 5th century B.C. Chinese military strategist: "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat."

⁸Robert P. Millon, ZAPATA, The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary (New York: International Publishers 1969), pp. 105-113.

⁹In his military writings, Mao quotes often from Sun Tzu's The Art of War. It is debatable whether Mao actually read Clausewitz's On War. In any event, Mao was introduced to the early 19th century Prussian theorist's key themes by reading Lenin's Socialism and War. Clausewitz's most famous line, "War is the continuation of politics by other means," is contained in the Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung, p. 227.

¹⁰T.N. Greene, LTC U.S.M.C. ed., The Guerrilla-And How to Fight Him (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 18.

¹¹George A. Collier with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello, Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas (Oakland: Food First), pp. 70-74.

¹²Revolutionaries from cultural backgrounds as diverse as Jonas M. Savimbi of Angola, Abimael Guzman R. of Peru, and Pol Pot of Kampuchea, traveled to China for training at the height of the Cultural Revolution. The significance is that the lessons the foreign students took with them model Chinese communism in its most extreme form. The coincidence begs the question: was a Mexican, perhaps a founding member of the EZLN, among the foreign revolutionaries trained in the PRC?

¹³Fairbank and Feuerwerker, p. 752. See Mao's oft-quoted 1927 "Report On An Investigation Of The Peasant Movement In Hunan" for more on the "justification" of terrorism as a "legitimate" revolutionary weapon. Sadly, more than a few revolutionary leaders from around the world have relied on Mao's very words to "justify" violent terrorist actions such as car bombing commercial centers (Peru's Sendero Luminoso) or attempts at social genocide (Kampuchea's Khmer Rouge).

¹⁴This article assumes a democratic and capitalist Mexico is in the U.S. national interest. Also assumed is a strategy and desired end state mutually agreed upon by both governments which calls for inducing, if necessary coercing, the EZLN to give up their armed struggle and join the political process. The focus here is on a security-related response to the problem; recognized is that other instruments of binational power involving political, social, economic, and humanitarian means might be at play, either singly or in concert. The underlying causes of the insurgency and degree of legitimacy associated with the guerrillas's grievances are beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁵Robert S. McNamara, In Retrospect (New York: Random House 1995), pp. 47-48. In this writer's opinion, McNamara's quote is particularly relevant to the Mexican insurgency, i.e. one should always be wary of one's sources, especially if the source thinks he or she always knows better.

¹⁶Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49. Huntington's reference to "Latin American" civilization is ambiguous. Does he mean all of Latin America or just indigenous peoples?

¹⁷Due to political sensitivities, this traditional Internal Foreign Defense mission would be better served if Mexican military officers and NCO's underwent light infantry, small unit leadership, and counterinsurgency training tailored to the anti-Maoist model in the United States as opposed to U.S. trainers deploying to Mexico. Human rights naturally would be part of any U.S. curriculum for our Mexican guests. In addition to a review of the legal and moral justifications for respecting the letter and spirit of the Law of Land Warfare, the students should be reminded that human rights violations do not make sense from a tactical perspective either, e.g. torture might win you a battle but never a war.

¹⁸Police as opposed to army units would be better suited to this role due to the daily

contact with the civilian population the assignment would require. Furthermore, since the insurgents would be operating under the cover of university students or faculty, and therefore presumably possessing some degree of sophistication, a police officer in his late 20's or early 30's would stand a better chance of detecting deceit or otherwise unusual behavior or activity along the LOC's. The police should be on guard for two time-tested Latin American guerrilla deception tactics: 1) the use of the fairest-skinned, least Indian-looking members to carry out the most sensitive operations because in the eyes of the police they "do not look like guerrillas" and are less likely to be challenged by Indian soldiers, or mestizo police or army officers, and 2) once detained, every Indian or peasant secret EZLN member inevitably will play the role of "dumb Indian" or "dumb peasant" which works so well to lower suspicions by satisfying the superiority complex of the mestizo in uniform.

¹⁹Edward G. Lansdale, In The Midst of Wars (New York: Harper & Row 1972).

²⁰T. E. Lawrence says: "Rebellion...must have... a population...sympathetic to the point of not betraying rebel movements to the enemy. Rebellions can be made by two percent active in a striking force, and 98 percent passively sympathetic..." Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, Jr., The RAND Corporation, Rebellion and Authority. (Chicago: Markham, 1970), pp. 11-12, quoted from T.E. Lawrence, "Encyclopaedia Britannica," 1950, Vol. X, 953.

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ZAPATISTA BASE CAMP AND LINE OF COMMUNICATION

