

## Book Review

– *Latin American guerrilla movements. Origins, evolution, outcomes*, by Dirk Kruijt, Eduardo Rey Tristán, Alberto Martín Álvarez. Routledge, 2020

This book presents an analysis of the most significant guerrilla movements in modern Latin American history. It offers an in-depth examination of the Cold War period's complex and politically tense situation in the region, in which suppression, political and social exclusion, authoritarian regimes and military state terror radicalized young people and drove many into rising in arms to trigger regime change. This struggle was shaped by the aspiration for liberation, and it was influenced by Socialist ideologies, such as the cases of Colombian Marxist–Leninist movement FARC and Peruvian Maoist guerrilla Shining Path.

The book argues that we should understand the Latin American guerrilla movements discussed as a far-reaching revolutionary wave between the 1950s and 1990s in the region, a point the book does convincingly in my view. Throughout the volume, the authors go even further in offering a structured and easy-to-understand account of how guerrilla movements were established, developed, and in most cases came to an end. The analysis complies well with providing the necessary historical context of the complex political circumstances in which these movements unfolded.

The volume divides the historical development during this period into three 'ripples': In that way it provides a well-organised and logical presentation of a phenomenon characterised by a myriad of complex and multi-layered aspects affecting the evolution of these movements, while accounting for the individual characteristics within their areas of operation. The book's chapters provide a country-based account, each chapter authored by different scholars with their specific expertise, and might be used in an encyclopaedia-like manner for students who wish to read a brief and detailed account of specific movements and the context in which these emerged and developed.

The book highlights the crucial role of Cuba in this context of emerging and evolving guerrilla movements. The Castro regime and Che Guevara, the latter both during his life and post mortem, acted as a driving force and strong supporters both ideologically, politically, and to a certain degree militarily for many of the region's guerrilla movements and leftist political factions. Cuba acted as

a de facto spiritual leader during all three ‘ripples’ in question, advocating for the use of violence by the revolutionary Left to take state power and to subsequently carry out an anti-capitalist transformation of society. In this way, Cuba contributed in altering the modus operandi of the resistance effort vis-à-vis what had been done in earlier periods of Latin American history. Both the introductory chapter and the second chapter provide a thorough account of Cuba’s multifunctional importance for the guerrilla movements during the Cold War, evidencing the island’s key importance during this era. Throughout the book’s pages, it becomes evident that the far-reaching revolutionary wave was full of frustration, deaths and continuous set-backs on the political and military arenas for both regimes and guerrillas, where the main victim in this hybrid war between the authoritarian regimes and those raised in arms, were the local populations.

Furthermore, besides providing the historical context and a fairly detailed account of the guerrilla phenomenon, the book offers perhaps one of the most interesting nuances in the scholarly debate, namely the internal complexities these movements faced in waging war against their proclaimed adversaries. It is of particular interest to read how internal political and ideological conflicts occurred, as well as how tension arose by contradictory views on how the struggle should be orchestrated on the battlefield, including tactical and operational matters, for those raised in arms. To this should be added other issues, such as personal aspirations, local power-struggles, opposing ideological views and interpretations, as well as approaches to and willingness to adapt guerrilla warfare strategies to different circumstances. The book addresses these issues for most cases to a satisfactory degree.

That being said, there is a noticeable difference in content and insight between the different chapters. Some contain more insight combined with extensive discussion of the political and historical context in which such experiences unfolded. This is the case with the chapters concerning ‘special cases’ such as Colombia. While others, in particular several chapters included in the book’s first part regarding Venezuela, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia, are of less detail and offer relatively less elaborated accounts of the national contexts. Also, referring to the aspects addressed in the aforementioned paragraph, these chapters offer less insight concerning local power-plays and other internal issues within the movements. One example is the chapter on Bolivia, which lacks a broader contextualization of the movement scrutinized, as well as a more thorough analysis of how the on-the-ground developments unfolded. It is a well-narrated analysis, but as a reader you might get the sensation of wanting more, particularly since this is where Che Guevara spent his last days. In other words: the Bolivian case has an added symbolic significance which merits more attention.

As a scholarly source this book is of great value, a recommendable read of a highly significant phenomenon during an eventful historical period, with contributions from some of the most pronounced scholars in this field. Each contribute with their own welcomed expertise in the different chapters. Noteworthy is the

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contribution from Professor Dirk Kruijt with two chapters and valuable reflections in the main introductory and conclusive parts of the volume. The book gives insight in how injustice, exclusion and state terror lead to radicalization of those suffering in Latin America, and the consequences this have had throughout the region. With its logical structure and much insight, the book is a highly recommended reading for both students and scholars of modern Latin American history.

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