

# THE GUERRILLA WINS IF HE DOES NOT LOSE

**KEVIN CRESSWELL PRESENTS AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE**

THIS IS ANOTHER TYPE OF WAR, NEW IN ITS INTENSITY, ANCIENT IN ITS ORIGIN... IT PREYS ON ECONOMIC UNREST AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS... THESE ARE THE KINDS OF CHALLENGES THAT WILL BE BEFORE US IN THE NEXT DECADE IF FREEDOM IS TO BE SAVED, A WHOLE NEW KIND OF STRATEGY, A WHOLLY DIFFERENT KIND OF FORCE, AND THEREFORE A NEW AND WHOLLY DIFFERENT KIND OF MILITARY TRAINING.

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, WEST POINT ADDRESS CLASS OF 1962

The IED is the favoured weapon of choice in irregular warfare and will be for years to come. It threatens the safety and security not only of combatants, but increasingly of the welfare of the general population within the area of conflict and at home. It can leverage an

advantage against a superior, conventional opposition and have a destabilizing effect.

The IED is often an anonymous weapon that can have significant strategic, political, operational and tactical effects. Threat networks use IEDs because they are cheap, easy to build, composed of readily available

dual-purpose components and are extremely effective. Terrorists and organized crime syndicates are clever, crude, and increasingly low tech. An adamantly determined adversary deploying easily concocted or procured, untraceable, mouldable explosives makes for explosive mobility and crafty concealment.

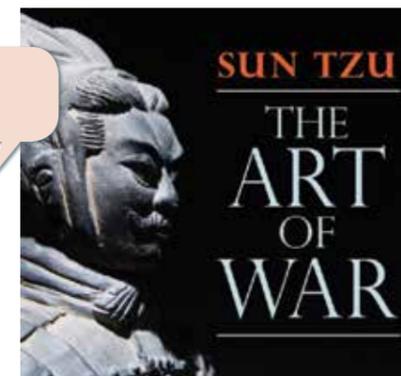
PRETEND TO BE WEAK, THAT HE MAY GROW ARROGANT. ATTACK HIM WHERE HE IS UNPREPARED, APPEAR WHERE YOU ARE NOT EXPECTED.

SUN TZU, 500 BCE

## ISIS - terrorists at war

As a terrorist group like ISIS - Daesh - loses territory, it shifts geographically and tactically. We saw this in Raqqa in 2017, when the large-scale attacks and conventional fighting devolved into insurgency actions. The group began relying more on using IEDs in over 80% of its attacks in Syria.

Asymmetric attacks by 'lone wolves' inspired by the poisonous ideology of Daesh also increased in Western capitals. We also saw them removed from Syria and Iraq



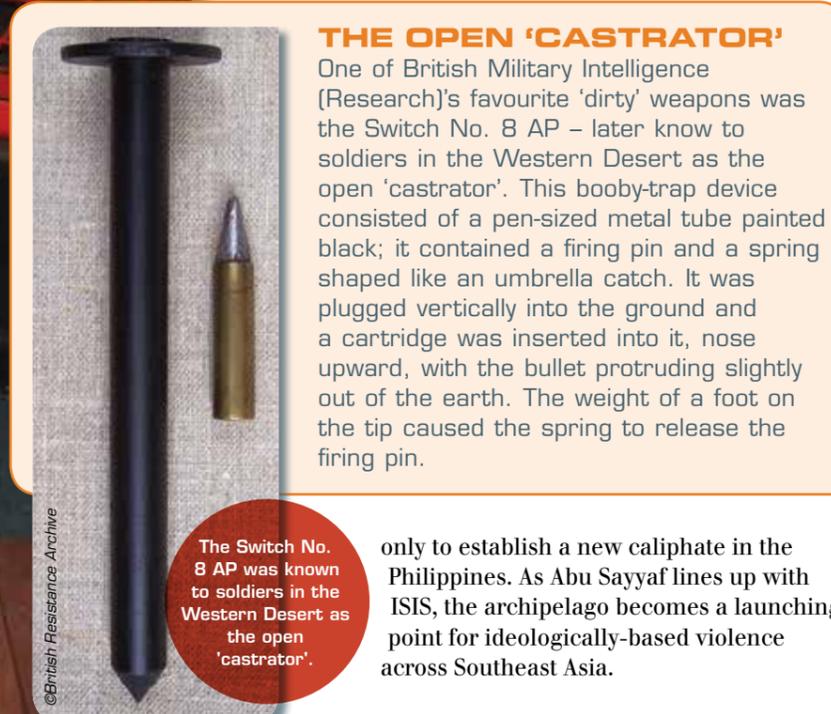
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Internet. But chiefly they learn from each other, they share information within the global melting pot of terrorism. The Internet and social media has made this so much faster. The IRA worked its way through every available bandwidth from model aircraft controllers to cell phones. It took them 30 years. But Iraqi insurgents with the Internet along with legacy munitions managed the same evolution in just 18 months.

## Deadly ingenuity

As Andy Oppenheimer, editor of this publication and author of *IRA: The Bombs and the Bullets - A History of Deadly Ingenuity* (2008) explains, the Provisional IRA had one of the most intensive R&D programmes, exporting their ingenuity worldwide. They pioneered mobile phone initiation - but decided not to use it. They assisted the Basque group ETA with GPS technology, used for vehicle-borne IEDs. The IRA supported the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) for many years, exchanging arms from Al-Fatah for bomb-making instruction. Multiple IRA Mark 18 mortars (simply two gas cylinders welded together with a payload of HME) were used to attack the presidential palace in the Colombian capital, Bogotá.

Training was also exported to Cuba, Iran and Libya for which the IRA received shiploads of arms and Semtex explosives from Libya. In recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan command wire, disguised devices and trigger devices with hallmarks of IEDs from 1980 were deployed tactically - straight out of the IRA handbook.



©British Resistance Archive

## THE OPEN 'CASTRATOR'

One of British Military Intelligence (Research)'s favourite 'dirty' weapons was the Switch No. 8 AP - later known to soldiers in the Western Desert as the open 'castrator'. This booby-trap device consisted of a pen-sized metal tube painted black; it contained a firing pin and a spring shaped like an umbrella catch. It was plugged vertically into the ground and a cartridge was inserted into it, nose upward, with the bullet protruding slightly out of the earth. The weight of a foot on the tip caused the spring to release the firing pin.

The Switch No. 8 AP was known to soldiers in the Western Desert as the open 'castrator'.

only to establish a new caliphate in the Philippines. As Abu Sayyaf lines up with ISIS, the archipelago becomes a launching point for ideologically-based violence across Southeast Asia.

## The versatile adversary

Our deterrence generally presupposes a rational adversary. The number of ways an asymmetric adversary can attack you is limited only by your imagination. What they can do to us is far greater than can ever be defended against. Not only will the insurgents keep inventing new bombs and techniques, they're also capable at any time to re-use older IEDs and combine explosive with pathogens.

Generally, terrorist groups start out with limited technical competence with acquisition of knowledge and skills from varying sources - from actual training camps to homegrown knowledge - some of it faulty - off the

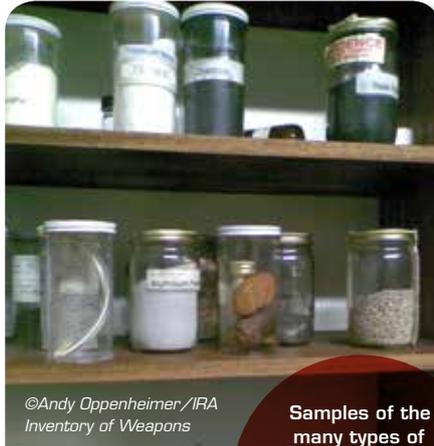
This 'barrack buster' mortar was typical of Provisional IRA weapons improvisation.

"...THE ESSENTIAL POINT IS TO AIM AT KILLING BY SPLINTERS NOT BLAST... ANOTHER VERY GOOD METHOD IS TO USE AN OLD MOTORCYCLE CYLINDER FILLED WITH GELIGNITE. THE FINS FLY VERY WELL."

THE COUNTRYMAN'S DIARY (1939)

## Dirty tricks

The dirty tricks of irregular warfare were not lost on Winston Churchill who, in 1939, formed his ‘secret army’ tasked with causing havoc behind enemy lines, had the Nazis invaded Britain. This small asymmetric force hid bomb-making manuals in plain sight, disguised as a book called *The Countryman’s Diary* – sponsored by ‘Highworth’s Fertilisers’, a fictional company named after the Wilshire town near



©Andy Oppenheimer/IRA Inventory of Weapons

Samples of the many types of explosives seized from Provisional IRA stocks and since stored in the IRA Inventory of Weapons, Dublin.

rule-book. He said: “total war is a very cruel business indeed.” Churchill agreed, referring to them as his “Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare.”

Despite the many technological advantages of the military, insurgents throughout history have proven their resilience in large-scale campaigns. Their military innovation curve is much faster by necessity. We knew to expect this on a global scale, 20 years ago. Insurgents now use new combinations of available commercial technologies to great military effect.

In the future, combatants



Even toys are used in terrorist IEDs, such as this booby-trapped teddy in Iraq.

©Iraqi Army EOD Training Centre



©Iraqi Army

ISIS drones could carry a payload of explosive as well as be used for reconnaissance.



MORTAR TAIL FINS IED WEAPON FACTORY IN EAST MOSUL

©Noe Falk Nielsen via Facebook

to where the units trained. Its cover promised “agricultural fertilizers that “do their stuff unseen until you see results.” Open it up and a comprehensive guide on explosive recipes, booby traps and IED tactics is revealed.

They also received mines designed to burst tyres – disguised as lumps of coal or horse manure and able to hold about at least two ounces of HE and a detonator. These along with a standard explosives kit containing copper tube igniters, Nobel’s explosive and a variety of switches, detonators and timers

allowed some freedom of expression in the design and deployment of IEDs.

## Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare

This early force formed the model for Special Operations Executive (SOE), led by the father of modern guerrilla warfare, Colin Gubbins – a dapper Scottish Highlander and a self-taught master of sabotage. Gubbins had brought together five like-minded experts who believed, like him, that the Nazis would only be defeated by tearing up the

armed with IEDs in commercially available drones, remote controlled boats, sea mines, and robots could easily deny the conventional force the staples of low-intensity conflict – such as small-boat and helicopter operations – in a strategic manner. Just one chem-bio dispersal bomb deployed once makes the threat of further attack enough to panic millions around the world. Weaker belligerents have used tactics and methods to readdress the balance of symmetry throughout history. Little is new – so why should we be surprised? ✨

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