

What Determines Success in Guerrilla Warfare?

Description

Episode 143 examines what enables guerrilla and insurgent forces to develop military effectiveness on the battlefield.

Our guests discuss why ideological cohesion, social ties, and material resources are insufficient for insurgents to successfully implement guerrilla strategies. Drawing on historical examples and a detailed analysis of the Taliban's evolution in Afghanistan, they argue that success depends on the professionalization of the force. This includes the recruitment, training, and empowerment of skilled small-unit combat leaders. These leaders enable effective planning, realistic training, adaptation, and task-oriented cohesion. The conversation explores broader implications for understanding insurgencies, counterinsurgency challenges, and security force assistance programs.

[General \(Ret.\) Stan McChrystal](#) is a retired U.S. Army four-star general, former commander of Joint Special Operations Command and International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, founder of the McChrystal Group, and author of multiple books.

[Dr. Alec Worsnop](#) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Modern War Institute. His research focuses on insurgent military effectiveness. This episode is based on his recent book titled [Rebels in the Field: Cadres and the Development of Insurgent Military Power](#) published by Oxford University Press.

[Kyle Atwell](#) and [Alisa Laufer](#) are the hosts for episode 143. Please reach out to them with any questions about the episode or IWI.

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All views expressed in this episode are the personal views of the participants and do not represent those of any government agency or of the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project.

Intro music: "Unsilenced" by Ketsa

Outro music: "Launch" by Ketsa

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