

History 12 IB – Guerrilla Warfare in Guinea-Bissau

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To what extent was the guerrilla warfare in Guinea-Bissau successful?

The guerrilla warfare in Guinea-Bissau was successful in that it was able to oust the Portuguese and gain its independence. Indeed, Guinea-Bissau was the *first* Portuguese colony to achieve its independence in Africa. Although the entire guerrilla warfare concept was relatively new to the African continent, Amílcar Cabral, influenced by popular principles of previous guerrilla warfare theorists such as Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, was able to launch and execute a successful political cum military struggle for the independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC).

One of the most effective practices employed by guerrilla warfare activists in Guinea Bissau was to garner support from the local people, in order to gain supply and intelligence. This is true of almost all asymmetric warfare cases: guerrilla warfare principles can rarely be put into execution without the support from the local population. In Guinea-Bissau, guerrilla tactics were based primarily on ambush and sabotage, and success was ensured by destabilizing the Portuguese imperial forces through long, low-intensity confrontation, who without much knowledge about the Guinean people, their society and culture had no choice than to retreat. In September 1959, the PAIGC called on Guineans and inhabitants of Cape Verde to unite in anti-colonial resistance. In just three years, Cabral thought it necessary to hold free elections in liberated areas, which led to the formation of a popular National Assembly. Just a year later, on September 24, 1973, the 'democratic, anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist republic of Guinea' was proclaimed.

The guerrilla warfare in Guinea-Bissau had interesting, not to mention positive, repercussions. Two months after the installation of a republic in the nation, the UN General Assembly recognized Guinea-Bissau as an independent state. Post-war reconstruction led to enormous economic development, which is conventionally unexpected of guerrilla warfare. The leader of the guerrillas in Guinea-Bissau, Amilcar Cabral, was assassinated in Conakry, Guinea in February 1973, supposedly by disgruntled Portuguese agents.

Guerrilla warfare techniques, tactics and strategies can be contagious because each leader leaves a trail for future guerrilla-supporting theorists to follow and learn. This is specifically illustrated in Cabral's case as he left many books and studies on the struggle for freedom in the African colonies.