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NATIONAL VALUES REGARDING WAR CAPTIVES
AND THEIR USE AS POLITICAL PAWNS

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11 October 1972

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BY

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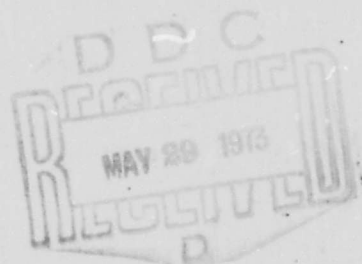
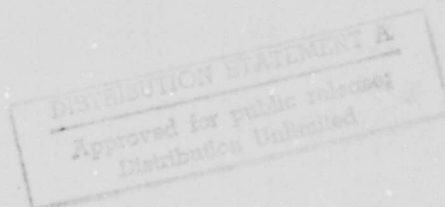
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AND THEIR USE AS POLITICAL PAWNS

by

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I

AUTHOR : Daniel R. Boenne LT. COL., INF. USAR
TITLE : National Values Regarding the Use of War Captives as
Political Pawns
FORMAT : Essay

An understanding of the political values that some of the present world powers have placed on the loss or gain of captives in recent wars might help to shed some light on how these nations might act in future international negotiations during the "Cold War". Since the armed forces of the United States are involved directly or indirectly in defending large portions of the globe, American servicemen become military targets and when captured often become pawns in the great game of international politics. This paper will show from experiences in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War as well as some other recent conflicts that political use of war prisoners is on the increase and that attitudes toward these prisoners are related closely to a nation's attitude toward its own people.

II

BACKGROUND

A clear understanding of the political values that some modern nations place on the loss or gain of war captives might help to shed light on future negotiations with these nations. This paper will show from experiences in recent conflicts that political use of war prisoners has increased and that national attitudes toward these prisoners relate closely to attitudes that various governments take toward their own people. To understand the origins of these values one must take a close look at history.

Early man had no need for his victims in a conflict, and he simply killed them and sometimes ate them. When he adopted a more settled way of life and his means of conflict was more organized, he found it useful to spare the lives of his adversaries and enslave them, thus freeing himself from the burden of regular work.¹

Values toward war prisoners differ because cultures differ. In modern Indonesia and Malaysia for example there is a sharp distinction between the common criminal and the prisoner of war. The PW is not regarded by his captors as having been removed from the conflict. Upon surrender he ordinarily assists his former enemy rather than be killed by his own people if he returns to them.²

The Turks, on the other hand, treat an enemy captive as a common criminal with no claim to rights. Their own soldiers, however, who are enemy captives are respected if they have fought well.³

1 C.W.W. Greenidge Slavery (1958), p 15

2. Lucien Pye, "Indonesia" Prisoner of War Study VIII D (1969) p17

3. Fred Frey "Turkey", Ibid., p 20

In Black Africa the culture again plays a major role in attitudes toward prisoners of war. According to Cervenka:

The notion of a faceless antagonist who kills without animus or personal motivation in the service of an abstract principle is totally foreign to African thinking. Armed conflict in the Congo is, thus, not depersonalized. The soldier is not merely an agent of his government, he is a man who may have just attempted to kill his captor and who must be dealt with accordingly. The prisoner of war is not even a "political" enemy in the Western sense, but a personal enemy entitled to retribution. An enemy captured in an intertribal or international conflict -- thus occupies a lower status than a person detained under municipal criminal law or custom.⁴

Prisoners of war throughout most of modern history have been identified primarily with battlefield activities and forced labor and not with political activity and propaganda. In some of the recent wars prisoners were offered certain material advantages if they accepted employment even for work in connection with military operations. For example in World War II over 800 000 Russian prisoners worked as labor for Germany.⁵ Other examples of this were the French prisoners in Germany who were transformed into civilian workers and the Italian prisoners in Allied hands who were asked to accept various forms of work to help the Allied war effort.⁶

In spite of these apparent economic considerations, in most wars of this century political considerations have managed to

⁴ Zdenek Cervenka, "The Congo & Central Africa" Ibid., p22
⁵ Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia 1941-1945 (1957) p 427
⁶ Rene-Jean Wilhelm, "Can the Status of Prisoners of War Be Altered" Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge (July-Sept 1953)

creep into the situation. The detaining authorities quite often have created "collaborating" governments such as the Vichy Government in France in 1940 and the Badoglio Government in Italy in 1943 which claimed jurisdiction over war prisoners from a previous government. These puppet governments, in order to win approval of the conquering armies, encouraged prisoners to make special agreements with the detaining power. This type of agreement had been specifically prohibited by the Geneva Convention, because it deprived the prisoners of the protection afforded by their military status.⁷ The point in question is the intention of the detaining power. Would much greater profit for the war effort be derived from these transformed prisoners than from civilians ? Was the greater autonomy offered these prisoners a form of political bribe to modify their alienation and encourage political support for the puppet regime?

Other modern attempts to use prisoners of war as pawns in international politics have been associated with minority groups who were forced to fight for the state in which they resided. In most cases initial objectives aimed at minorities involved creating dissension in the armies on the battlefield. As movements among prisoners grew, however, they often developed into outright political agitation at home. In World War I for example the Germans sought to win Arabs or Mohammedans of the

⁷ Ibid., p 19

Indian Army by appealing to the holy war declared by Turkey to weld all Mohammedans into solidarity. ⁸

The story of the Katyn Forest Massacre in 1940 of 15000 Polish soldiers by the N.K.V.D. is another example where prisoners of a minority group were exploited politically. The Germans were the first to cast light on the incident in 1943 and, by placing blame for the massacre on the Russians, hoped to crack the unity of the Allies.⁹ The Soviet response was that these prisoners fell into the hands of "German-Fascist hangmen".¹⁰ The fate of the Polish prisoners was thus exploited by both the German and Soviet propaganda agencies in hopes of winning Polish national sympathy to their side.

This discussion leads up to the inevitable questions: Can a nation's attitudes towards its own and its enemies' prisoners be measured beyond the military effects on the battlefield? Are some nations today more humanitarian toward their own people than other nations? Do national values change? Are political goals more important than humanitarian? To attempt to answer these questions requires an analysis of the experiences of some of the major powers in recent wars. These experiences reveal certain national trends which might be of importance some day to our own planners of the future who might more easily detect possible courses of action of future antagonists.

⁸ Clarence Johnson Prisoners of War Social Science Series 22(1941)
⁹ J.K. Zawodny, Death in the Forest (1962)p 15 / p 18
¹⁰ Ibid.

THE SYSTEM OF VALUES OF THE UNITED STATES

In its handling of prisoners of war, the United States Government has placed great emphasis upon proper treatment in accordance with its responsibilities under international law, and its desire to insure equal treatment of its own personnel captured by enemy forces.¹¹ Sympathy for the lives of American military and their allies has meant much to Americans, and in recent times the United States Government has been willing to barter to save these lives. In 1962, for example, the United States, which had a moral obligation to the Cuban Brigade after the failure of the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, ransomed from Castro some 1179 members of the brigade in exchange for 55.9 million dollars worth of medical supplies, drugs and infant food.¹² In similar manner, after Commander Lloyd M. Bucher's purported confession for North Korean propaganda purposes that the USS Pueblo was a spy ship, the United States Government eventually ransomed the 83 crew members by an admission (which was later recinded) to the truth of these statements.¹³

There appear, however, to be limits in political concessions to which the U.S. Government will go in order to free war captives. The U.S. appears willing to pay high monetary prices as in Cuba or admit minor guilt even for the benefit of enemy pro-

11 Department of State, "Prisoners of War" Vietnam Information Notes # 9 (August 1967) , p 1

12 Harbridge House, Prisoner of War Study Vol II Ch. VII (1969) p6

13 New York Times "Texts of Purported Confession and Pentagons Reply" 1/25/1968 p 14

paganda, but she has refused during the last few years the far greater concessions demanded by North Vietnam for the release of American prisoners of war. This is a clear-cut case of war prisoners being used as pawns of international politics. North Vietnam's point has been that there could be no progress on this subject until the United States withdrew all of its military personnel from South Vietnam.¹⁴ In addition early in the war it appears that North Vietnam coerced some prisoners to make anti-war statements for purposes of propaganda. The United States has countered that North Vietnam is not offering humane and lenient treatment.¹⁵ In any case the United States has indicated that there are limits to which she will go to free these prisoners.

American policy toward enemy prisoners of war has not always been completely free from political influence. During the Korean War, according to Bradbury and Myers:

A program of civil information and education (CIE) was also initiated in the camps, only part of which was clearly in fulfillment of the spirit of the (Geneva) Convention's Article 38.¹⁶

The purpose of this program (CIE) according to the Chief of the Field Operations Division of the CIE Program in 1951 was :

To provide an ideologic orientation towards an orderly, responsible, progressive, peaceloving, and democratic society. -- We would also like to see develop a support of an independent, democratic, unified Korean nation.¹⁷

Communist elements in the compounds naturally objected to the content of the program and claimed that the United Nations

¹⁴ U.S. Congress -House Comm. on Foreign Affairs Hearings 91st Cong.
"American Prisoners of War in Vietnam" (Nov. 1969) p 7-11

¹⁶ William Bradbury, Samuel Myers & Albert Biderman Edit.
Mass Behavior in Battle and Captivity (1968 p 218

¹⁵ American Enterprise Institute The Prisoner of War Problem (1970)

¹⁷ Bradbury etc. Ibid., p 219

authorities were attempting to make propaganda out of the program.¹⁸ Support for this argument is brought out by Bradbury and Myers when discussing the twenty-three CIE teachers who worked with the Chinese prisoners on Kojedo Island. According to the findings of these two :

The evidence is strong that some of these teachers acted as vigorous propagandists for the idea of repatriation to Formosa rather than to the Communist-held mainland.¹⁹

In other recent wars there is some evidence of American political influence upon war captives. As previously mentioned in this paper, during World War II in Italy, when Marshal Badoglio replaced Mussolini, many Italian war prisoners held by the Allies were authorized parole if they collaborated against their former allies.²⁰ In Vietnam the picture is not documented completely or clear, but if the newspaper reports are correct, certain re-orientation programs for Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers have taken place. How much of this is controlled by the South Vietnamese Government and how much by the American is not clear. In any case our Korean War experience in this type of program would indicate that we have not changed our policy.

18 Ibid., p 288

19 Ibid., p 292

20 Wilhelm, p 20

THE SYSTEM OF VALUES OF THE SOVIET UNION

Any attempt to predict the attitude today of the Soviet Union toward enemy prisoners of war or toward its own prisoners in enemy hands is highly speculative. For any kind of an appraisal one must project past attitudes and practices into a hypothetical conflict situation. Although the evidence of these attitudes and practices stems primarily from World War II, it must not be overlooked that from the Imperial Period Russian has relied on massive land armies as its principal weapon and has undertaken a leading role in articulating principles for the treatment of war prisoners.²¹

Future Soviet attitudes may be difficult to estimate because they will tend to fluctuate and not remain consistent. Although ideology and historical experience may influence these attitudes, most important will be the attitude at that particular time of the Soviet Government toward a nation whose soldiers have been captured.²² In addition domestic political conditions may affect the Soviet treatment of these captives. According to Berman and Butler:

Accounts given by Soviet citizens imprisoned in labor camps very similar to prisoner of war camps show that the camp administration was sensitive to changes in purge policies.²³

21 Harold J. Berman and William E. Butler, "Soviet Treatment of Prisoners of War in Future Conflict" Prisoner of War Study Volume II Part VIII (1969) Harbridge House p 4

22 Ibid., p 6

23 Ibid., p 7

The Soviet Union has become highly sensitive to the notion of reciprocity. During the early months of the German occupation of Russia in 1941, the treatment of the Soviet prisoners by the German Army was atrocious. This neglect and abuse continued throughout the war and reached such extremes that of the total 5,160,000 prisoners captured only approximately 1,371,000 survived. (1,981,000 died in P.W. Camps, 1,303,000 were not accounted for, 819,000 worked for the Germans and 1,053,000 survived in camps)²⁴

The Soviet Government had no faith in the intention of Nazi Germany to observe international law as evidenced by these excesses and consequently retaliated by refusing to respect the rights of German war captives. According to Dallin :

In spite of continuous efforts to obtain permission to inspect P.W. camps in the U.S.S.R. or to exchange lists of captured troops or even to send material aid to prisoners held in the Soviet Union, the Soviet reply was invariably in the negative.²⁵

Another aspect of Soviet thinking that must be considered is that of its own humiliation when excessive masses of its soldiers have been captured with ease by the enemy. Government leaders do not desire to draw world attention to Soviet soldiers who willingly surrendered to the enemy. An example of this was early in World War II when Stalin made the following statement:

²⁴ Alexander Dallin, German Rule in Russia 1941-1945 - A Study of Occupation Policies (1957) p 426-427
²⁵ Ibid., p 420

There are no Russian prisoners of War. The Russian soldier fights on till death. If he chooses to become a prisoner, he is automatically excluded from the Russian Community. ²⁶

As a result of this policy the fate of these prisoners of war was so underplayed at the Nuremberg Proceedings that observers wondered whether human life meant anything at all to the minds of Soviet officialdom. ²⁷ Again and again during the war this callousness of Soviet officialdom revealed itself. Even in 1942 when the Germans agreed to allow the Swiss Red Cross to distribute parcels from neutral countries to Russian prisoners in Germany, Molotov turned down the proposal because the Soviets did not feel that it was important enough to transfer any currency to pay for it. ²⁸

The Soviet legal system is strongly partial to the notions of "confession, sincere repentance and rehabilitation", according to Berman and Butler. ²⁹ During World War II the Russians singled out German military elite and by giving them preferential treatment and re-education, created a new pro-Soviet German leadership for purposes of postwar policy in Germany. ³⁰ More recent evidence that the Soviet leadership still thinks in terms of repentance for political and propaganda purposes was illustrated by the confession of the United States U-2 pilot, Gary Powers, before a Soviet court. ³¹

In future wars the Soviet might deviate from international practices in crimes they consider to be against humanity and might try military leaders in a civilian court. Political indoctrination for propaganda purposes might also be employed.

²⁶ Gerald Reitlinger, The House Built on Sand (1960) p 101

²⁷ Ibid., p98 ²⁸ Ibid p 100

²⁹ Berman & Butler p 8-9

³⁰ & ³¹ Ibid.

THE SYSTEM OF VALUES OF COMMUNIST CHINA

The Chinese do not reject general international law and its rules pertaining to prisoners of war, but they prefer rather to modify it with policies toward prisoners that fall within the general framework and rhetoric of international law. According to Cohen:

Peking's general foreign policy line at any given time is a critical factor in determining its attitude toward international norms governing prisoners of war. ³²

Evidence from the Korean War indicates that the attitudes of the government of The Peoples Republic of China toward United Nations prisoners of war fluctuated. Before the armistice negotiations all PW's were treated as war criminals who could be shot but who would be treated generously in exchange for demonstrated "repentance". Those who resisted were punished. By mid-1951 when the PRC had decided to enter into armistice negotiations, it began to observe some of the standards in the Geneva Convention, and the overall treatment of the UN prisoners generally began to improve. As the negotiations progressed during the next several years the treatment would vary with the varying attitudes that the captors developed toward these negotiations. ³³

Domestic factors reflect on the treatment of war prisoners as much as they do on the treatment of Chinese and foreign prisoners in domestic Chinese jails. For example, in 1956 when

³² Jerome A. Cohen, "National Attitudes and Legal Standards: Communist China", Prisoner of War Study Harbridge House Vol. 2 Part VIII C (1969) p 6

³³ Ibid.

there was a general "thaw" in law enforcement under the Communist regime, lenient treatment for Japanese war criminals was first announced.³⁴ Clearly this illustrated that inconsistency in internal government policies reflects inconsistency in the treatment of prisoners of war.

The Chinese "thought reform" (brainwashing) program for war prisoners was not, according to Cohen, a part of the old Chinese penal system but :

- is a Chinese Communist contribution that was in part perfected during the Chinese Civil War by its application to captured Nationalist troops after the Communist victory in 1949. Its techniques were applied to the population as a whole, but with special emphasis upon the population of prisons, labor camps and other detention places.³⁵

It is a concept of "leniency" for those who repent and severity for those who resist. Certain war prisoners may even get privileged treatment if the Chinese Communists believe that this policy of generosity will win political support. This outright conversion of prisoners of war to Communism was, according to Kinkead, one of the three aims of the well-planned Chinese Communist program for war captives that was employed during the Korean War.³⁶

Another aim of this program that was employed during the Korean War was that of disseminating propaganda that was favorable to the Communists and unfavorable to the United Nations. To implement this the Chinese screened outgoing letters for use in radio propaganda broadcasts. Photostatic copies of these letters were then distributed in order to disrupt prisoner morale.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid., p 3

³⁶ Eugene Kinkead In Every War but One (1959)

³⁷ Ibid

Often in the "thought reform" program the Chinese use confessions for purposes of propaganda. The classic example is the interrogation and forced confessions in 1952 during the Korean War of captured American pilots. The Communists believed or wanted the world to believe that these pilots flew planes that carried bombs for use in bacterial warfare. Over thirty-eight confessions were used for propaganda purposes. The confession speeches were polished for western consumption by the two British Communist journalists Wilfred Burchett and Allan Winnington. In order to obtain these confessions, coercion was used on some of the pilots by relays of interrogators and months of solitary confinement. The first to break, Lieutenants Enoch and Quinn, according to White, stated that:

They were war criminals who would be tried and convicted and never see America again. But if they cooperated, each would be a "People's Hero", entitled to the Lenient Treatment Policy.³⁸

Communist Chinese attitudes toward her own soldiers who are enemy captives seems to fluctuate as much as her attitudes toward enemy captives in her own hands. The Korean War gives illustrations of this attitude quite clearly. During the early part of the war the Chinese were quite indifferent toward their own soldiers who had been taken prisoner by U.N. forces. Once the truce talks began, however, the Chinese Communist propaganda organization began to make use of these prisoners. According to Bradbury :

³⁸ William L. White, The Captives of Korea (1957) p 167- 168

The principal prisoner of war disturbances were not explosions of pent-up fury and frustration, stemming from captivity but collective actions planned by highly disciplined men for objectives which far transcended the prison situation itself. To create these mass disturbances, the Communist leaders had to incite their men, not merely channel or organize existing discontents. ³⁹

The Chinese were thus using prisoner discontent as an assertion of political power to influence the political outcome of the truce talks. It was also used to counter the activities of the anti-Communist movement directed at the Chinese prisoners of war by the United Nations forces. ⁴⁰

The Chinese have thus shown that they are not completely insensitive to world opinion or to the desire for humane treatment to prisoners of war who are not "reactionaries". They regard westerners with grave suspicion and any effort to improve their treatment of prisoners of war must be viewed in the broader context of the need to create more trust between the hostile parties. ⁴¹

³⁹ Bradbury, Myers & Biderman

P 293

⁴⁰ Ibid. p 293-294

⁴¹ Cohen p 28-29

THE SYSTEM OF VALUES OF OTHER COUNTRIES

In some of the smaller wars since World War II certain nations , after hostilities had ceased, continued to hold military prisoners and use them as pawns for a better political settlement. This policy had considerable political merit, particularly if one side had many more prisoners than the other. The level of humanitarian values that a nation hold for its own soldiers who had been captured weighed heavily in the degree of political concession that nation might make.

The recent India-Pakistan conflict in Bangladesh is an excellent example of this practice. At the present time India holds 73 944 Pakistan soldiers as captives while Pakistan holds only 620 Indian Army prisoners.⁴² These prisoners have become pawns in a high-level political controversy between the two countries. Indian officials make it clear that POW repatriation depends on other issues: Kashmir, a peace treaty, disputed borders, and restoration of diplomatic ties. In addition India is using these Pakistani prisoners as a lever to force Pakistan to recognize the newly independent nation of Bangladesh.⁴³

How far Pakistan will concede to have the prisoners returned is not known at this time. The Pakistanis regard a soldier as an instrument of government who is simply performing his duty and should not be regarded as a personal party to the conflict.

⁴² U.S. News and World Report "Playing Politics with 93000 Pakistan Captives" September 18, 1972

⁴³ Ibid.

There is no disgrace attached to surrender, and the prisoners would be accepted at home upon release or repatriation.⁴⁴ Unfortunately Pakistan is a totalitarian style state with political control in the hands of a few, and too often government policy does not consider the attitudes of the people.

* * * * *

The Vietnam War has shown that the policies of Hanoi toward war prisoners are quite similar to those of China. By holding American military captives as pawns with the requirement that both military and political settlements must be reached before their release, the North Vietnamese have placed themselves directly into American domestic politics. In short the prisoners have become political pawns for which Hanoi has set very high stakes.

The North Vietnamese, since they do not consider themselves at war with the United States, consider the captured pilots as criminals in the way that the Chinese did during the Korean War. The broadcasts from Hanoi portray the U.S. air raids on North Vietnam as criminal attacks on a country that is not engaged in a conflict with the United States but is simply a victim of American aggression. The downed American airmen, under these terms, are subject, therefore, to criminal prosecution.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Myron Weiner, "The Indian Subcontinent" Prisoner of War Study Vol II Part VIII D (1969) p 10

⁴⁵ New York Times, "Prisoners Made Pawns in War" 7/24/1966 p E 1

The North Vietnamese have over the years probably determined that these captives are more valuable to them alive than dead. They have made use of forced confessions for propaganda purposes such as that of Commander Stratton in 1967 in much the same manner that the Chinese and North Koreans used American pilots during the Korean War. 46

Why these prisoners were not tried and executed is not known. Perhaps Hanoi had some understanding of American values and reasoned that these pilots were far more valuable alive than dead. President Lyndon Johnson in 1966, when asked what the United States would do if the fliers were tried and executed, replied:

I think the people of this country would find this action very revolting and repulsive and would react accordingly. 47

By thus keeping most of the prisoners alive, Hanoi has been able to use them as pawns in the great game of international politics. By 1972 these prisoners have become a major political issue in the United States presidential election. 48

46 New York Times, "U.S. Fears Hanoi is Brainwashing American P.O.W.'s" April 4, 1967 p 1

New York Times, "He Acted Like a Robot" 4/9/1967 p E 2

47 New York Times "Prisoners Made Pawns in War", 7/24/66 p E 1

48 U.S. News & World Report, "War Prisoners Center of a Political Fight", 28 Aug. 1972 p 20-21

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show the values that some of the major nations of the world have placed on prisoners captured in recent wars. Humanitarian values differ from nation to nation as do political goals. The deeper causes of these differences go back to the origins and cultures of the nations themselves which is beyond the scope of this paper. What has been quite evident in the conflicts since World War II is that the Communist nations, particularly those in Asia, place a great deal of emphasis on war crimes against humanity. Thus in the undeclared wars that have taken place during this period of the "Cold War", military men have been forced to make confessions for purposes of propaganda, and some have even been tried as criminals in civilian courts.

All nations, including those of the West, consider political indoctrination of military captives as important. They also believe that those who cooperate and assist the captor's war effort may be given certain privileges. Most of these nations do not admit that they are engaging in these practices, and the degree to which they will go will vary, but the evidence from World War II and Korea will support this contention.

National pride may at times take priority over humanitarian values. There are many examples of this, but one of the

most documented is that of the Soviet Russian indifference toward the vast numbers of their own soldiers who capitulated to the German Army during the early phases of World War II. Somewhat similar was the unwillingness for moral purposes of the United States to force the Chinese and Korean prisoners in their custody during the Korean War to return to their homes in Communist China and North Korea against their will. According to Admiral Turner Joy, the primary American negotiator at the time, this refusal did much to delay by several years the freeing of American prisoners from Communist hands.⁴⁹

As a general rule the treatment of P.W.'s has been relatively consistent by the United States but rather inconsistent by the Communist countries. The reason for this is that the United States attempts to abide by the rules of international law. The Communists, on the other hand, although trying to stay within the framework of the law, tend to react to their own internal domestic struggles as well as to changes taking place in international relations.

The importance of war prisoners as political pawns appears to be on the increase throughout the world today. It is hoped that this paper has shed some light on the various national attitudes toward the treatment of war prisoners as well as on some of the conditions under which these prisoners are used as pawns. By understanding these differing attitudes, American policy makers may be better prepared for possible future conflicts.

⁴⁹ Cohen, p 28

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