



Tilting at Windmills: Colonialism, Communism, and the Limits of Coercion.

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the
School of Advanced Air and Space Studies
in partial satisfaction of graduation requirements for the
School of Advanced Air and Space Studies Course.

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June 2014

APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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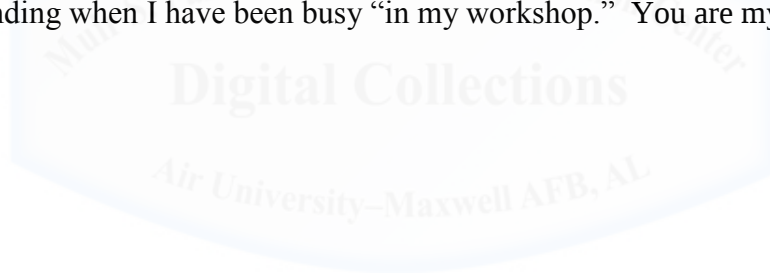


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SAASS has been a watershed personal development event, however, I would never have found my way to Maxwell AFB without Group Captain Tom Burke. Through his mentoring, insight and gentle coaxing of the personnel assignment process, Group Captain Burke helped me find an environment in which I might continue to thrive. Tom, thank you for fostering my curiosity to understand the nature of the game that we are in.

While all of the faculty members at SAASS are exceptional, I would like to single out a few stellar performers. First, Drs Kiras and Forsyth have been extremely kind with their time, and generous with their patience, in helping me when I was still searching in the dark. Similarly, they have both guided me through a program of learning that I have been extremely fortunate to receive, and have helped me to switch the lights back on. Secondly, I would like to thank Drs Winton and Hughes for acting as writing mentors and for helping soften the blow on my early arrival at SAASS.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to acknowledge the Faculty and Service support without recognizing the foundation that all of this has been built upon. My wife and children are a daily source of amusement and vigor and have been very gracious and understanding when I have been busy “in my workshop.” You are my inspiration.



ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the question *why military interventions fail?* to propose solutions for future military activity. The author assesses the way in which two strategic problems were framed and subsequent operations conducted. Specifically, the paper deals solely with interventions into foreign states and not wars between states, and seeks to highlight the essentially political, and not military, nature of internal battles for legitimacy.

By undertaking an assessment of the relationship between power and violence, the author posits that to act legitimately, a state must appreciate the beliefs and behaviors, or moral and rational norms, a society will accept. This social set of norms is then termed a framework of authority and is the basis of state power. The author then examines two case studies in intervention, Palestine and South Vietnam, to demonstrate the connection between the way in which the problems were framed and the operational approaches to problem resolution undertaken. Of specific relevance is the relationship between the amount of violence used and its social acceptance. In both case studies the author highlights the importance of moral authority, or a “right to rule,” over a legalistic imposition of authority.

In conclusion, the author recommends that to ensure the efficacy of military intervention, a greater appreciation is necessary of the social tapestry of a state, to both understand the accepted framework of authority and the relative power of disparate social groups. By better appreciating the accepted role of violence in a state, the author argues, we are more likely to apply force effectively in a complex social contest.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Just then they came in sight of thirty or forty windmills that rise from that plain. And no sooner did Don Quixote see them that he said to his squire, "Fortune is guiding our affairs better than we ourselves could have wished. Do you see over yonder, friend Sancho, thirty or forty hulking giants? I intend to do battle with them and slay them. With their spoils we shall begin to be rich for this is a righteous war and the removal of so foul a brood from off the face of the earth is a service God will bless.

Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

In execution, our concept of war has been shown to be flawed. Despite the spending of the United States Department of Defense equaling the cumulative total of the next 11 nations, seven of whom are major allies, the United States has proven incapable of shaping events to its meet its policy objectives through the use of military force.¹ The debacles of Iraq and Afghanistan present a simple question: *why do our interventions fail?*

Like Athens's mission to Sicily during the Peloponnesian War, our recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have exacted a significant human, financial and reputational cost. In an era of global interconnectedness, the humbling of the world's greatest power by disparate sub-state groups may in time be seen as having a similar psychological boost to revolutionary elements as the collapse of the British Army did at the hands of the Imperial Japanese in 1942. In an attempt to negate possible future strategic repercussions, I will posit an explanation for our military failures and pose a series of recommendations for future interventions.

While much has been written during and since the Vietnam War on the importance of domestic popular support for intervention, little or no attention has been paid to the "target state." When we consider the foreign policy failures of major powers during the period of the Cold War, two common explanations are offered. The first is

¹ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2013/04/daily-chart-9>, accessed 25 April 2015.

wars may be limited for major powers, but were total for their adversary, and we could not therefore bring the necessary military power to bear due to political restraint (the so-called “stab-in-the-back” narrative).² Alternatively, one might contend we just did not have the domestic support to see a long and costly war through to its conclusion and domestic popular support was eroded. Regardless of which narrative one chooses, the explicit assumption is our overmatch in power *should have* been decisive.

I contend there is an alternate narrative largely ignored as a partial explanation for our failed interventions that shows why our overmatch in military capability was irrelevant: military force and power are different things. As the interventions were in sovereign states, our model for military intervention should not be one of *state on state* but should be based upon the domestic political and social legitimacy *within a state*.

Our strategies have failed because the model of the state we have applied is flawed. By assuming a Rational Actor Model of the state, we have failed to address the connective tissue between government and society and have only targeted the tip of the iceberg.³ The significant domestic body-politic that lies below the waterline of international politics has gone unaddressed, therefore, when we have attempted to enforce politics from the barrel of a gun, we have failed to present a concept that matches the “ground truth.” In using force to bolster failing colonies, nascent states, or fractured dictatorships, our grand strategic narrative may have resonated with political elites in each nation’s capital, but has not accounted for the gritty reality of local political governance *within* those states. As an intervention is an attempt to enforce norms within a sovereign entity, our posture and strategy must conform to the legitimate norms of that state to gain popular approval.

² Ahmad, Eqbal. “Revolutionary War and Counter-Insurgency.” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, issue 1 (1971): 26.

³ The Rational Actor Model is a tool of political scientists used to describe the decision making calculus of the state. The critical implications are that the central actor is an individual or small group of individuals, and that they will consistently seek to attain outcomes, based upon rational choice of expected benefit, which value maximizes. For a greater explanation of this model see Allison, Graham T., and Philip Zelikow. *Essence of Decision : Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York ; Harlow: Longman, 1999, 13-54.

As the issue at stake was governance, the application of force from an external state could not be the answer. In assuming that states are monolithic actors we have denied agency to their domestic populations. By holding a mechanistic and increasingly complex model of the state as a “system of systems,” we have whittled away the human component in warfare and politics. Rather than addressing the question of legitimate authority, where consent to govern is granted by a population, we have assumed that we can compel a foreign people to accept our will through the imposition of authority. By denying agency to a foreign population, we have assumed that coercion alone is sufficient to govern and have failed to accept that authority requires some form of popular consent.

There is one caveat to apply: the brutal subjugation of a population and therefore rule by force is a mechanism of popular control. The second half of the 20th Century is littered with examples of regimes, both communist and nationalist, which ruled by repression. The “killing fields” of Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge and the “disappeared” in Argentina’s Dirty War are examples where control could be exerted through the application of extreme violence to suppress dissent. These methods, however, were not available to the leading military nations in the West as they run counter to International norms for the use of violence, and would be domestically unpalatable. Where Western states projected power abroad, the use of violence would have to be moderated to be in line with that which a representative polity might accept. Therefore, recognizing the boundaries placed upon the application of violence in a client state, a closer appraisal of military interventions since 1945 accentuates the importance of recognizing legitimate authority and its contextual and consensual components.

Leveraging Legitimacy

To substantiate this thesis, it is essential to establish a common language before attempting to demonstrate its validity. As the terms *power*, *authority*, and *legitimacy* are central to my argument, it will be necessary, in Chapter Two, to clarify the lexicon that I shall use throughout, primarily to ensure there is a baseline understanding of key terms. Having established a common language, my aim in Chapter Two will be to explain the role of violence in attaining authority or legitimacy within a state, and to introduce the

concept of a *framework of authority*, founded upon rational and affective criteria. I will then apply this framework to two case studies.

While I do not intend to establish a new theory, it is my intent to demonstrate where our current understanding is lacking by determining the heuristic importance of an independent variable—legitimate governance—by using a structured and focused comparison. To do this, in Chapters Three and Four I will look at two distinct yet dissimilar cases studies to measure the importance of legitimate governance in two conflicts: the Jewish Insurgency in Mandatory Palestine (1944-48) and the US support of the government of South Vietnam (1954-64). I have intentionally selected two separate case studies, rather than one developed study, to demonstrate the general rather than specific applicability of my contention.

To answer the question, *why do military interventions fail?* I intend to tackle a series of sub questions to tease out the relevant issues:

1. What was the strategic context and how did the intervening power frame the problem?
2. How was governance exercised?
3. Did contesting actors use force, and if so, how?
4. How did the framework of authority match the expectations of the population?

By breaking my main question into four sub-questions, my aspiration is first to set the contest of arms into its recent historical and international context rather than simply considering the conflict in a vacuum and risk analytic myopia. In assessing the broader context my intent is not to consider the misperception or bias generated in its own right, but to ascertain the world-view of the Great Powers to better explain their behavior in affairs within adversary states.⁴ With the broad canvas painted, I intend to layer an appreciation, from the top down, of the tapestry of control within the state to articulate the disconnect between our strategy and the reality of governance. Finally, with an

⁴ For a clear and definitive analysis of State problem framing and its effects see Jervis, Robert. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

appreciation of the disparity between our conception of the state and the actual delicate exercise of control, the role of the local perception of legitimate governance, or the *framework of authority*, will be clear.

Like the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, quoted in the epigraph, we have socially constructed our adversaries and therefore determined a role for military force that has not matched our experienced reality. In the case studies, both the United States and the United Kingdom, the dominant military powers of the Western world at respective times, failed to execute military strategy to meet the policy goals set due to a failure to appreciate the problem presented. Our confusion over the nature of power, and its relationship to violence, has led us to believe that we can compel compliance of a foreign population. I contend that this conception of power is flawed and is based upon a faulty model of the relationship between a state and its society that denies agency to a population. In resorting to violence, based upon a false appreciation of the context, we resorted to *tilting at windmills*.⁵ To address this shortfall, it is the linkage between politics and the legitimate use of violence that we must now turn.

⁵ As Cervantes Don Quixote resorts to charging the windmills with a lance, the phrases *tilting at windmills*, a reference to jousting, and *quixotic* have entered the English language as idioms for a futile exercise.

Chapter 2

Legitimacy and the State

The most powerful single force in the world today, is neither communism nor capitalism, neither the H-bomb nor the guided missile—it is man's eternal desire to be free and independent.

Senator John F. Kennedy, 1953.

Military Myopia¹

Our understanding of our environment is reflected in both doctrine and theory. Both show how we think the constituent components of the world interrelate. To the Western military professional no concept is more central than Clausewitz's maxim that "war is the extension of politics by the addition of other means."² There is a political imperative for the use of force to drive a problem towards a desired solution, and there is an expectation that deftly orchestrated violence can be used to meet our political ends. In concept, the political machinery of a state is coupled with its military instrument of power to achieve a military conclusion serving political ends. In practice, this mechanistic view of war has often failed to achieve the desired political ends as it has too often overlooked the human dimension in warfare.

As Thomas Kuhn articulated in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the majority of the work conducted in the field of the physical sciences is in "mopping-up" the anomalies and the boundaries of our understanding in accordance with our generally held and unchallenged paradigm of thought. In doing so we often ignore that which we do not value and seek to explain it away with our current conception of reality. In this thesis I contend we have done the same thing with our application of force under the umbrella of Colonialism, in the containment of Communism and finally, during the post-Cold War interlude of America's reign as the sole superpower. In the absence of a

¹ A term used by J F C Fuller in his persuasive and influential *The Foundations of the Science of War*. London: Hutchinson & Co, 1926, 43.

² Clausewitz, Carl von, Michael Howard, Peter Paret, and Bernard Brodie. *On War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, 617.

strategic debacle that has necessitated a fundamental change in our thinking, we have conducted a process of military “mopping-up” based on two critical premises.

First, the paradigm for the application of force used has been one that divorces military affairs from politics. The refrain of Western military professionals is that politics should set the framework for a military campaign.³ Once this framework is established, as George Bush observed in the wake of the Gulf War 1991, politicians should stand back and let the military fight without “one hand tied behind their backs.”⁴ In homage to Helmut von Moltke the Elder, rather than the writings of Clausewitz, we have advanced the belief that politics should cease when the guns start firing.⁵ While the limited conflicts fought during the Cold War necessitated restrictions upon the use of force to prevent the escalation of conflict between the major powers, the advice coming from the Pentagon was purely military—political caveats were the business of elected officials. While flawed, this premise would be routinely enunciated as an explanation for military failure to achieve its projected ends in Korea and Vietnam.⁶ Our restricted conceptual consideration of the role of military force has led to a very narrow view of war that does not adequately capture its true nature.

³ Loosely described as the American Way of War, both Colin Grey and Jeffrey Record make similar assessments of the preferred operational approach of the US military as observed in practice. For a distilled appreciation see Record, Jeffrey. *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*. Potomac Books Inc., 2007, 103-111 and Gray, Colin S. *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006, 11.

⁴ Ironically, this is a lesson that President Bush drew from Vietnam and vowed not to repeat. Contained in Hagopian, Patrick. *The Vietnam War in American memory: Veterans, Memorials and the Politics of Healing*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2009, 409.

⁵ Von Moltke the Elder was an extremely influential Prussian General and strategist in the mid to late 19th Century. A combination of his personal theory of war and the personal style of his monarch, led to the morphing of Clausewitz’s dictum to assume that policy ends continue to be pursued, but politics ceases for the military officer when war begins.

⁶ This approach to the Vietnam War is often termed the “Revisionist” school, largely populated by former participants, they argued that political meddling had restricted the use of force and hence negated America’s ability to win. For a similar treatment of the war in Korea, see Clodfelter, Mark, *The Limits of Air Power: the American Bombing of North Vietnam*. Free Press, 1989, 25-37. While not a Revisionist (indeed he claims that Linebacker II was actually successful) the section on Korea and its aftermath presents their argument succinctly.

Colin Gray makes an interesting differentiation between war and warfare that sheds some light on the military propensity to myopia. War is wholly the preserve of the state at the grand strategic level as it is a contest between two states to achieve arbitration through all means including violence. In addition, war is conducted using the armed forces of a state, but also includes the use of diplomatic and economic means to achieve the ends of policy.⁷ As an example, while the Napoleonic Wars are remembered by the great battles fought at Borodino, Austerlitz, or Waterloo, a significant element of the contest was Napoleon's Continental System and the interweaving of Napoleon's grand ambitions with other European powers through marriage. Warfare is the military element of war, and comprises the battles and military strategy alone. Unfortunately for military professionals, the study of their art tends to dwell on the operational and tactical history of warfare—to focus on battle—and neglects to nest warfare within war. While this may seem wholly pragmatic for junior officers learning to ply their trade, it denudes them of an appreciation of the wider context of their efforts and their very *raison d'être*. The study of warfare through military history is, therefore, well-suited to finessing battlefield tactics and leadership. This thesis, however, suggests the wider appreciation of war as a social and political phenomenon should be the business of all officers. War is more than warfare, as our recent strategic miscalculations have demonstrated.

The second critical premise is the conception of war the United States military has constructed, and therefore most of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partners have adopted, is a mechanistic one in which the adversary is an inanimate system. By viewing the adversary in an overly deterministic manner, and reducing the complex mechanisms of the state at the operational level to a simple targeting model, we have clouded the judgment of both the military planner and the elected statesman by introducing abstract and de-humanizing terms to a wholly human, organic and observable phenomenon.⁸ By using performance metrics well-suited to a production line, and by

⁷ Gray, Colin S. *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006, 11.

⁸ While much has been achieved in the study of Operational Art since 1991, particularly using constructs such as Systemic Operational Design, in practice Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom's early phases maintained this proclivity. For further opinion see Kagan, Frederick W. "War and Aftermath." *Policy Review* Aug/ Sep 2003,

describing the state as a series of concentric rings or critical nodes to be isolated and struck, we have removed the human element from the practice of governance and have reduced the structure of society to a targeting template. This reductionist perspective led to the generation of theories for the employment of airpower by theorists such as Giulio Douhet and Hugh Trenchard that completely disregarded the moral component in warfare and focused solely on out-flanking the adversary using the air domain. The reductionist theory of the state eradicated the line between combatants and non-combatants and bred theories of success that eventually led to the fire bombings of Dresden, Cologne and Tokyo.⁹

A view of the state through this flawed lens has accelerated the development of high technology solutions to strike the key vulnerabilities within the state structure. Whether this is as a result of a distinct “American Way of War,” as Jeffrey Record and Colin Gray have argued, or through strategic necessity, to counter the threat posed by successive echelons of Soviet manpower and armor, is open to debate.¹⁰ What is clear is the United States has pursued technological advancement and stand-off firepower as its preferred pathway to success in warfare. Although stand-off precision munitions and high tempo warfare undoubtedly give modern militaries the ability to out-maneuver and out-gun their opponents tactically, the question that this poses to the strategist is: To what end? Tactical super-lethality, devoid of an accurate grand strategic conception of its application, has been a contributing factor to the failures of NATO and the “Coalition of the Willing” in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Culminating in conflicts in Iraq (2003-8) and Afghanistan (2001-14), the Western model for war fighting has come unstuck. The failure to convert the enormous military power of the West to achieve its policy ends against militarily weak opponents necessitates a frank and objective reassessment of our core understanding of the efficacy

Issue 120 3–27, where he describes the US approach as “an attempt to simplify war to a targeting drill,” 4.

⁹ See Sherry, Michael. *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon*. Yale University Press, 1987, xi. Sherry actually argues that the desire to perfect the technology offered by Air Power drove strategies to meet institutional (Air Force) needs vice the political ends.

¹⁰ Record, Jeffrey. *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*. Potomac Books Inc., 2007, 108.

of military force. Despite doctrinal and technological advancements that have delivered the very high tempo, parallel operations and information superiority that the West has sought, it has failed to connect these adequately to the ends of policy. In concept and in practice, our paradigm has been proven to be incommensurate with our surroundings.¹¹

Regaining Perspective

My intent is not to play sideline critic and lambast the performance of well-intended action but rather to propose a lens that will sharpen military acuity. In attempting to take a different perspective on the problem of intervention military officers may view our operational approach to state intervention as in need of revision. In doing so we may challenge a number of our assumptions. Perhaps the anomalies cannot be adequately explained by our current paradigm. Perhaps a more careful examination of the theory underpinning our application of force might highlight a deficiency in our appreciation that will necessitate a re-examination of our strategic decision-making and planning processes. While distinguished scholars such as Martin Van Creveld or Mary Kaldor have argued that the era of Clausewitzian trinitarian war are now a thing of the past, I would counter that what is in fact need instead is a more objective re-reading of Clausewitz.¹² The issue is not with Clausewitz's theory but with our interpretation and subsequent application of his thoughts.¹³

While Clausewitz has been critiqued as the "Mahdi of Mass," and his theory categorized as the rationale behind the destruction on the Western Front in World War One, at the heart of *On War* lies the over-quoted and under-analyzed assessment that

¹¹ One approach to recalibrating our perspective on the role of the military in foreign intervention, mirrored in this paper, is contained in Mary Kaldor's "Principles for the Use of the Military in Human Security Operations," within McIvor, Anthony D. *Rethinking the Principles of War*. Naval Institute Press, 2013, 389-399. Critically, Kaldor advocates that the purpose of "the mission," because of the changed strategic environment, should be to enable local law and order vice compellence.

¹² Creveld, Martin Van. *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*. Free Press, 1991, 57 and Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era, Third Edition*. Stanford University Press, 2012,

¹³ For a further contemporary assessment of Clausewitz's applicability see Simpson, Emile. *War From The Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

“war is the continuation of politics with the addition of other means.”¹⁴ While *On War* was written in an era of war between major states, central to Clausewitz’s theory is the recognition of the change in context that Napoleon’s *levée en masse* brought to war. War might be waged between states but it was fought by societies; warfare might be the pursuit of the destruction of an adversaries fighting force, what air power theorist Robert Pape would term a “strategy of denial,” but war was the enveloping competition between states to mobilize their populations to resist or compel.¹⁵ It is here that we have made our first grave error: in conceptualizing war as a duel on a grand scale, we have constructed a unitary model of the adversary state, and have pursued strategies that best meet that model.¹⁶ In doing so we have, like Mary Shelley’s fictional Dr Frankenstein, created a wholly grotesque facsimile of a portion of reality.

While our model for war may be highly effective if the contest is between states, as the British demonstrated in the Falkland Islands or the US-led Coalition proved in Operation Desert Storm, the problem that we have faced is that this model has failed to provide favorable strategic outcomes in wars *within* states. In a litany of British, French, and American interventions since 1945 the balance sheet of wars that have been executed to their stated policy ends is poor.¹⁷ The primary reason, I argue, is the misapplication of Clausewitz’s dictum that war is “the continuation of politics with the addition of other means.” As politics is the determination of who gets what and when, it makes sense that in the international arena that decision, where it cannot be arrived at through arbitration might be conducted through the contest of arms. Below the state, however, that logic does not apply.

¹⁴ The *Madhi of Mass* and the *apostle of total war* were two nicknames attributed to Clausewitz by the British Strategist, and advocate of the Indirect Approach, Sir Basil Liddell Hart. For direct reference see Shy, John “Jomini” in Paret, Peter ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Missile Age*. Oxford University Press, 1986, 181.

¹⁵ Pape, Robert. *Bombing to Win: Air power and Coercion in War*. Cornell University Press, 1995, 69.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 76.

¹⁷ Merom, Gil. *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, 4.

The continuation of politics below the state is not synonymous with the conduct of international affairs. Each domestic polity is different, the fragmentation and division of power and resource is therefore unique, and historical traditions and domestic law have determined a legitimate framework for the exercise of power and authority. In assuming that the state is a monolithic actor as is the case with the Rational Actor Model, we have ignored the role of society, denied agency to the citizens of a state, and assumed away the complexities and dynamics of power relationships within a given state. To widen our aperture and seek to better appreciate the efficacy of force, I shall explore an opportunity for cross-disciplinary synthesis.

Social constructivism offers a unique lens to contemplate military failure as it intentionally does not delineate between disciplines as political science or economics might, and offers a holistic image of a society as comprising both normative behaviors and physical institutions. As I have already contended, if we wish to understand war and warfare more clearly, it is essential that we place them in their social context. Put differently, if we wish to understand war or society better, it is essential that we do not study *either*, but *both*.¹⁸ As there is nothing epistemologically distinct about military affairs, an attempt to apply an alternate approach may shed light on our recent failures.

Throughout the rest of this paper I shall use the terms “social” and “society” interchangeably, and will draw upon the definition offered by the sociologist Thomas P. Hughes of society as “the world made up of institutions, values, interest groups, social classes, and political and economic forces.”¹⁹ Perhaps by conceiving of our challenge as a contest for legitimacy rather than a trial of strength, and by considering more carefully the mechanism for social control within a state, we can start to ascertain the root cause of our failures in both Iraq and Afghanistan: a misconstructured model of society and therefore a false mechanism for affecting change. To succeed in fractured states, or to

¹⁸ Bijker, Wiebe E., and John Law. What Catastrophe Tells Us About Technology and Society in *Shaping Technology / Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change (Inside Technology)*. The MIT Press, 1994, 11.

¹⁹ Bijker, Wiebe E., Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor Pinch. *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. The MIT Press, 2012, 102.

defeat an organization such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a different conceptual model for wars *within* states is essential.²⁰

A Framework for Authority

The model of the state as a monolithic rational actor may be of utility in International Relations theory but has been misapplied by military practitioners and statesmen in war. Inspiration can be found in many places, and while it may seem antithetical that the genesis of an idea of societal interaction should come from Ken Waltz, the father of Structural Realism, his *Theory of International Relations* was carefully built upon a solid theoretical foundation which explains the importance and role of structure in crafting a theory of international relations. In drawing his theory together, Waltz recognized that a focus on structure “requires ignoring how units relate with one other (how they interact) and concentrates on how they stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged or positioned).”²¹ By focusing on structure, Waltz could explore a theory that was predicated upon the hierarchy of components in a system at the expense of their interaction. Similarly, by adopting a structural view of the state, we have constructed an abstract model that does not account for the interaction of politics or people in the governance of the state.

The image of the state as a centralized hierarchical structure is extremely useful for the development of theories based upon rationality as the driving principle in interaction. As an abstract and reductionist model, the conception of the actor as rational, in the economic sense that the 18th century Scots economist Adam Smith proposed, allows a useful insight into behavior that seeks to consistently value maximize. However, theories of social interaction, such as Mancur Olson’s *The Logic of Collective Action*, offered insight into human decision-making that challenged the orthodoxy of individual

²⁰ An excellent attempt to capture this is contained in Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Recognizing the challenge of providing a universal theory to explain the instrumental nature of violence, Kalyvas dissects the function of violence in civil wars and demonstrates that there is a distinct pattern in its application rather than the common perception of indiscriminate killing.

²¹ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. Waveland Pr Inc, 2010, 80.

motivation in groups and organizations.²² Similarly, advances in the study of human cognition, such as the work of psychologists like Daniel Kahneman, has made us reassess the utility of the Rational Actor Model in decision making in domestic politics.²³

As demonstrated in Allison and Zelikow's *Essence of Decision*, an analysis of the decision making processes and actions of the United States government and military leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Rational Actor Model fails to account for the interplay of politics and the institutional biases prevalent in a system of governance.²⁴ A realistic model of the state, one that might hold utility for military strategists, must do more than highlight the structure of the state but must show the interplay between actors and the pressures upon those actors. Thomas Carlyle's view of the heroic unitary actor at the helm of state may be an attractive source of inspiration for a nation growing young men to govern the British Empire, but it fails to account for the actual exercise of governance in modern states. There is more to states than rational statesmen, therefore, a more complete model of the state is necessary for the strategist. To do this, we must unpack our understanding of the state and its relationship to society.

The economist Douglass North's definition of the state as "an organization with a comparative advantage in violence, extending over a geographic area whose boundaries are determined by its power to tax constituents" provides a useful starting point for us to construct a more useful model of the state as it demands an exploration of the meaning of *authority and power*.²⁵ While a student of structure or realism would be placated by North's definition as it conceives of the state as an organization that wields an advantage in violence, the first critical facet in this definition that I wish to expand on is the notion that the reach of the state is determined by its ability to tax constituents.

Taxation is a critical interaction between the state and its citizens because it represents an exchange; the state provides specialist public services such as security,

²² Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

²³ Daniel Kahnemann, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

²⁴ Allison, Graham T., and Philip Zelikow. *Essence of Decision : Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York ; Harlow: Longman, 1999, 4.

²⁵ North, Douglass C. *Structure and Change in Economic History*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1982, 20.

which would be prohibitively expensive for any one individual to provide. Having provided a public service or good the state and citizen enter a social contract that involves the establishment of an acceptable burden of taxation. The cry of “no taxation without representation” in Great Britain’s 13 colonies of America in the 1770s is a clear example of an uneven relationship between the state and its citizenry that should necessitate a contractual change. For this reason, consent is crucial to effective governance; by acquiescing to societal norms the individual minimizes the costs of enforcement by the state, and in return, gains public services and a predictable social environment.²⁶ The state may hold a comparative advantage in violence but it does not want to have to exercise it routinely; government by consent rather than coercion is a much more cost-effective practice. The recognition of legitimate authority means the automatic and unquestioning recognition of established norms and confers power upon the state. For this reason, the ability of the state to tax its citizens will be a common theme throughout this thesis as a metric for legitimate authority. With consent comes a critical lever to governance: power.

Power is a resource of the state but is only present as a dynamic force. In line with the work of the French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault, I will advocate that power is “exercised rather than possessed.”²⁷ A state, or more specifically a government, is powerful if it can mobilize the support of its population and harness their collective skills. While we often think of power as an ability to make people do something that they otherwise would not, or talk in terms of power to influence, these are in essence the same thing: power *to*. Power is invested in and transmitted through society as a mechanism *to* maintain order and exercise control.

Leaders are only powerful in that they are empowered i.e., they hold the popular mandate, or they have the backing of extremely strong elements of the state. Even in the instance of an autocracy, such as Bashar al-Assad’s Syria, power is not the domain of the individual but the collective. If the despot relies upon the security apparatus of the state,

²⁶ North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*, 53.

²⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, 1995, 26.

then he must invest significant resource in maintaining his regime through the provision of sinecures and favor to his supporters to maintain their acquiescence.²⁸

To relate power and legitimate authority, we can say that a government is powerful because it is deemed legitimate. By holding the unquestioning consent of a population a regime is empowered and is in control. A state demonstrates its power by exercising it, but it does not hold power in reserve as a commodity. Institutionalizing and bureaucratizing the administration of the state invites cooperation through all strata of society while guaranteeing the perpetuation of agreed norms and practices.

Power maintains order and is founded upon the principle of legitimate authority. To expand a little more on legitimate authority, I shall turn to one of the most influential writers on state formation in the 20th Century: Max Weber. Authority, in Weber's view, could effectively be broken into two distinct types: those founded on affection (which I shall interchangeably call moral) and those founded upon reason.²⁹ For clarity, and as we shall be drawing upon these concepts repeatedly, a simple diagram is shown at Figure 1.

Authority founded upon reason can be further subdivided into norms based upon the law and those upon principle, or "natural law:" those norms that we have codified or accepted as traditions but hold as essential truths. Examples of authority of reason might be the US Code or Federal Court structure, and largely relate to the practice of law and execution of government. Similarly, examples of authority founded upon principle in the United States might be the ideas of "liberty and justice for all" or *e pluribus unum* ("one from many"). Critically, authority founded upon reason will undoubtedly be associated with punishment by the state as it often relates to the maintenance of order within a society and the direct exercise of governance. To challenge rational authority is to challenge the laws and norms used in the exercise of control.

²⁸ Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1970, 50.

²⁹ Spencer, Martin E. "Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority." *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, No. 2 (1970), 133.

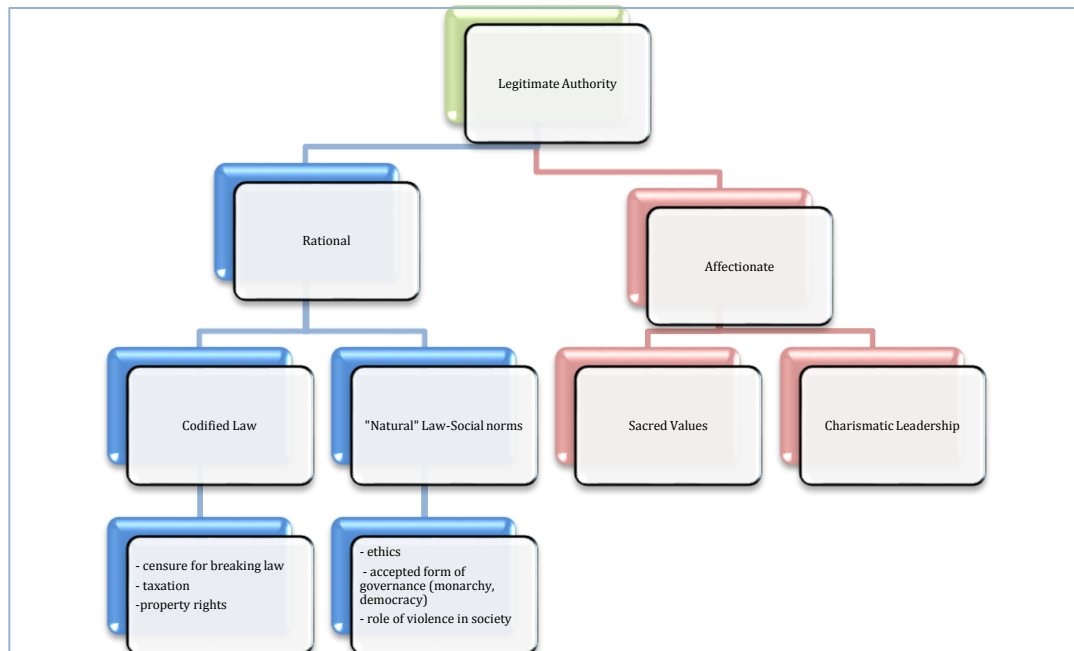


Figure 1- Weber's Forms of Authority.

Source: Spencer, Martin E. "Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority." *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, No. 2 (1970), 132.

The second form of authority, affectionate, is based upon charisma and deeply-held values. As wholly subjective criteria, moral authority is based upon emotion and religious beliefs and will undoubtedly attract group censure but not state punishment. Examples might include preferred leadership styles, expected interpersonal courtesies, familial roles, or accepted societal stratification. Our moral authority effectively represents social ethics and values, while our authority based upon reason determines the exercise of politics within the state. What is clear, however, is the inter-relationship between these forms of accepted authority. I have broken them into distinct columns to clarify Weber's classification of the forms of authority, but these are in fact what he would have described as *ideal types*.³⁰ In practice Weber's forms of authority are heavily intertwined and a more realistic appreciation of authority is attained by viewing it as a unitary entity of sub components, as Figure 2 below depicts.

³⁰ Weber used the term ideal type to describe a polar position, like a model in political science, as a mechanism to engender further understanding not as an attempt to capture reality as he recognized that we construct realities and they are therefore subjective.

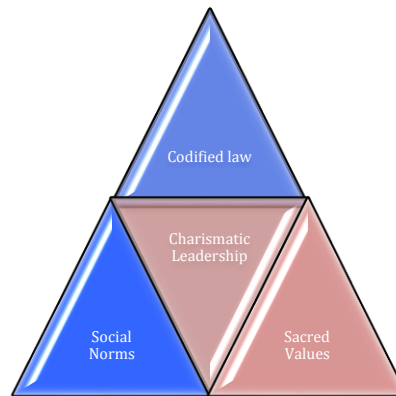


Figure 2- An Holistic Model of Sources of Authority.

Source: author's original work.

A framework of legitimate authority is composed of rational (blue) and affectionate (red) forms that are heavily based upon social norms and sacred values.³¹ While codified law may be the most easily recognized articulation of authority within a state, it is wholly based upon traditional values and accepted practice. For example, a law relating to physical assault is a deterrent to an assailant and sets the boundaries on the accepted use of violence in conflict resolution between individuals. However, it is clear that this law has not been created in a vacuum but is the codification of a traditional acceptance of violence between citizens, undoubtedly has developed from previous legal precedent, and owes something to the balance in a society between liberty and justice. The interplay between codified law, social norms, and sacred values means that while Weber's typology has explanatory benefit, its complexity is of little utility to this discourse. I shall not return to Weber's nuance routinely but shall instead rely upon the recognition of rational and moral appeals as twin components of authority.

A framework of authority is not universal but contextual and necessitates local knowledge. Societal values and social norms relating to religious expression, the rights of the individual and role of community are all obvious subjects that have rational and

³¹ For a brief, accessible summary of the "sacred values" in the context of political violence, see Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 373-401.

affectionate manifestations and help build the framework of authority that binds the society together. Even states with significant historical and cultural ties, such as the United States and Great Britain, have markedly different conceptions of what is legitimate. Furthermore, this disparity in conception is translated directly into the formation of policy and law. For example, were a handgun to be used in self-defense in the United States the story would probably not even make it into a local newspaper; were the same thing to happen in the United Kingdom it would make front page news on national newspapers. A glance at disparities in policing, governance structures, and even healthcare, are instructive in determining the social norms and sacred values that make up each nation.

As the framework of legitimate authority is founded upon norms of reason and morality, we must return to the question of the exercise of power to address the mechanisms that a state can use to rule legitimately, as this question will be critical to my assessment of British and American performance in military interventions. While my earlier description of authority orbited around the contract between a state and its citizens, it is obviously critical to ascertain the means that the state employs to exercise power. In the social conflicts that I will examine in the Palestinian Mandate and South Vietnam, a fundamental grievance becomes the divergence between the behavior of the state and that which its population will accept as legitimate.

North's earlier assertion that a state holds a relative advantage in violence is important, as it is this advantage that dissuades external rivals from seeking to supplant the rule of the state. The threat of violence is a critical capability for the state to deter other state actors from aggression and does play a role in establishing internal control, however, violence within states is a demonstration of the breakdown of power. As Mahatma Ghandi's social movement against British rule in India (1921-1947) demonstrated, deliberate social disobedience is a mechanism for civil society to show its power and demonstrate the arbitrariness or illegitimacy of the state.³² While the leveraging of popular support through the provision of public and club goods is the

³² For specific details of Ghandi's campaign, see Peter Ackermann and Jack Duvall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 61-113.

primary mechanism for social control within a state, coercion will also play a role. In coercing its population, the state follows Thomas Schelling's bifurcated model of coercion, by balancing compellence with deterrence.³³

The framework of authority is upheld primarily through deterrence, such as a light police presence on a city's roadways to enforce speed restrictions, or neighborhood patrolling to deter antisocial behavior. However, when the laws are broken, or a popular grievance takes the population to the streets in protest, the security apparatus has a role in compelling compliance with the laws of the state. Critically, the framework of authority imposes norms and restrictions on both the protestor and policeman; the protestor must adhere to the law of the state or face punishment, and the policeman must behave in accordance with an accepted and codified proportionate response or face a popular backlash.

Authority is conferred upon the security apparatus of the state but it also constrains its behavior. The state may hold a comparative advantage in violence, but its power is predicated upon its ability to maintain consent, not to coerce. Where civil disorder breaks out, such as the mass public protests observed in the Arab Spring of 2012, power is "stripped" from the government and authority is absent. By overstepping the behavioral norms applied to state delivered violence, civil disobedience—or a violent citizenry—are popular mechanisms to demonstrate the withdrawal of consent.³⁴ A critical component of governance is the maintenance of the social contract between the state and its citizenry. To break the contract leaves the state only one option: to compel.

Violence is a mechanism for the imposition of state control in that it can command obedience, however, it undermines the very authority which the power of the state rests upon- consent. Waltz's argument about the role of violence in the international arena resonates equally in domestic affairs: power is the non-recourse to force.³⁵ As John Keane argued in *Reflections on Violence*, violence is involuntary, and involves the violation or desecration of the individual; echoing Hannah Arendt's 1970 classic work *On Violence*, he argued violence "cannot be a legitimate tool of the state to persuade its

³³ Schelling, Thomas. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*. Yale University Press, 2008, 69.

³⁴ Arendt, *On Violence*, 49.

³⁵ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. Waveland Pr Inc, 2010, 185.

citizens” on moral and rational grounds.³⁶ As power is exercised and not held, a state is powerful if it can leverage popular support without relying upon coercion. Where it has to command compliance through violence, a state’s authority is not legitimate, as people do not see its commands as binding but as imposed.

To return to Weber’s two pillars of legitimate authority, reason and moral authority, where a state loses the consent of its population it has to operate beyond the agreed norms of reason and therefore loses the moral authority that it held. State repression, or suppression of a populace by an external actor, is deemed illegitimate by the citizenry because the “right to rule” is no longer recognized.³⁷ In this case, the state or intervening power has no legitimate moral authority to persuade and can only coerce. As I have argued up to now, a form of rule by violence and terror may be possible, but it will not be in accordance with a legitimate framework of authority that a population can accept and therefore cannot be sustained indefinitely. As in the tale of the courtier Damocles, “since those who rule by the sword potentially die by the sword, those who govern, or have designs on government, are best advised to seek means other than violence through which to command the allegiance of their subjects.”³⁸ Violent coercion may have short-term appeal, but does not have long-term prospects for success, unless it can be suppressed and converted into moral authority.

The monolithic state, acting on rationality alone, is not therefore a useable construct for military strategists, as in practice the state’s power is contained within the fabric of its society. Mao’s dictum that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun” is valid, in that once the state provides for the security of a population it can govern through leveraging support.³⁹ However, coercion alone is not a sustainable form of governance. The question of who sets the rules in a state is largely a contest between the government and its society to find common ground on key issues that both can accept.⁴⁰ Rule by coercion can compel compliance and punish but cannot gain popular support. A

³⁶ Keane, John. *Reflections on Violence*. Verso, 1996, 67.

³⁷ Ahmad, Eqbal. “Revolutionary War and Counter-Insurgency.” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, issue 1 (1971): 15

³⁸ Keane, *Reflections on Violence*, 44.

³⁹ The original quote is contained in Mao Tse-Tung, “Problems of War and Strategy,” in *Selected Works*, Vol. II (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 224.

⁴⁰ Migdal, Joel S. *Strong Societies and Weak States*. Princeton University Press, 1988, 26.

population can be forced to comply to meet their basic survival needs, however, the state will be open to subversion by a political entity that can better match the subjective wants of its population and gain moral authority. For a Western nation seeking to intervene militarily, as compelling compliance is bloody work and necessitates long term, large scale commitment, it is not a viable operational approach.

Any model of the state used by military planners must recognize what I have called the *framework of authority*, founded on reason and morality, which constitutes the legitimate order that a society will support. Critically, the framework of authority both confers legitimacy on the state and constrains its actions through established norms, particularly related to the use of violence and the burden of acceptable taxation. In order to enable the achievement of policy ends through the use of force, it is a re-assessment of our appreciation of the role of coercion and its linkage to legitimate authority that must be achieved.

Strategy to Tactics

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking: neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.

Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*

To develop my thesis further it will be necessary to demonstrate that a British and American inability to appreciate the framework of authority within sovereign states has been a crucial component to our failure in interventions. To do this I will explore two case studies of intervention, in differing contexts, to demonstrate the void between our strategy and our tactics. Because we have confused the relationship between power and violence, when we have intervened militarily we have alienated, rather than ameliorated the grievances of, indigenous populations.

The transformation of strategy into practice is an art that appears akin to the application of the blindingly obvious but in practice is more like the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into a butterfly. The challenge for the strategist is that he works between

two domains: the conceptual and the physical.⁴¹ On the one hand, the strategist is wrestling with an abstract or developed theoretic concept while on the other he is presented with data or activity, in the real world. The challenge of bringing these two worlds together, or the metamorphosis of concepts into concrete, actionable plans is the essence of my thesis and represents the failure of the great powers involved.

The initial task for the strategist lies in accurately conceptualizing the problem. From a false starting point, subsequent deductions and mechanisms for resolution will be flawed, and may hinder rather than help to achieve policy ends. To problem frame, he must bound the problem presented conceptually then consider the application of different mechanisms, and the potential risks, associated with each path to conflict resolution. Interaction with the conflict environment is therefore critical to deepen the strategists appreciation of the problem; the complexity of the environment may subsequently be reduced to a concise and simple problem, but one must distill from complexity not apply an overly reductionist theory to the real world.

In accurately framing a problem the strategist is presented with the nagging pressure of personal bias. Such biases may include accepted world-views such as colonialism, or liberalism, and also societal norms for conflict resolution, such as the relative predilection to use violence as a mechanism for change. To accurately frame a problem, it is critical therefore that he embraces complexity and heterogeneity and gets to “the ground truth.”⁴² While the temptation may be to use grand strategic policy rhetoric such as “Containment” or “Deterrence,” these strategic approaches must be established upon a firm grasp of actual political conditions, local and international context, and realistic mechanisms for implementation. The point is clearly noted by Graham Greene in his critically insightful novel *The Quiet American*, published in 1956 after Dien Bien Phu but before the commitment of major US combat units to South Vietnam. In describing the folly of increasing American involvement in Vietnam, the pragmatic British journalist tells his friend from the CIA “thought is a luxury. Do you think the

⁴¹ Simpson, *War From The Ground Up*, 39.

⁴² For a more detailed exploration of this concept see Simpson, *War From the Ground Up*, 1-14.

peasant sits and thinks of God and Democracy when he gets inside his mud hut at night?...Isms and ocracies. Give me facts.”⁴³

It is perhaps at this stage that I must insert a note of caution and reach to the insight that the school of sociology known as Social Constructionism offers, as it may appear that the facts speak for themselves. The work conducted by Bijker and Pincher on the sociology of technology provides an interesting parallel to Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in articulating the barriers to understanding and the formulation of knowledge. In their analysis of the social pressures evident in shaping the development of technology or physical artifacts, Bijker and Pincher explain a process of building a schema which applies directly to the strategists challenge in problem framing and is evident in the case studies presented later.

Social constructionists demonstrate that there are two steps inherent in the development of understanding in social groups: interpretive flexibility and closure.⁴⁴ Interpretive flexibility describes the multiple paths open to a social group for understanding a phenomenon, such as the nature of the state, or the role of force in problem resolution. Competing groups within a society or government articulate their perspectives and offer differing pathways to resolving the problem at hand. The process of closure is akin to Kuhn’s formulation of a paradigm, in that it represents the understanding that a social group attaches to an artifact. In our case, this represents the schema that the strategist is forced to work within, or the lens that he will apply to problem solving. What Social Constructionism warns us is that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that we apply social norms and values to problems that may limit our ability to see problems holistically.

As the strategist must undertake a metamorphosis of policy to activity, move from concept to action, he must understand the gritty reality of his environment. A failure to understand “the ground truth” is akin to building infrastructure without a survey of the

⁴³ Graham Greene in, S, James, and Roberts Olson, Randy. *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945-1995*. St. Martin’s Press, 1996, 60.

⁴⁴ For a more complete appreciation of this process, see Pinch, Trevor J. and Bijker Wiebe E., *The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other* in Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch. *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, 12-44.

land, and therefore laying a template upon a two dimensional picture of the world and failing to appreciate the complexity of the terrain. It is my contention that this is the root cause of our *quixotic* mistaking of windmills for giants, or mistaking social movements for adversaries that necessitated a military response.

An Outline of the Paper

To answer the question, *why do military interventions fail?* the two case studies presented will follow a standard format, essentially a series of subordinate questions, as a mechanism to unpack the context in which policy decisions were made. In order to avoid the text becoming too broken and mechanical, these questions will be implicitly addressed in the flow of the document, rather than explicitly stated. The astute reader should clearly be able to follow the audit trail of these questions, within the case studies, from the simple expansion below.

The first question that I will ask is *What was the strategic context and how did the intervening power frame the problem?* My intent in answering this question is to attempt to situate the strategic quandary in its grand strategic political context, specifically, to highlight the biases and baggage that would have narrowed the aperture of the great power actor involved. In Social Constructivist terms, this assessment will enable an appreciation of how closure was reached in building an understanding of the strategic quandary.

Having ascertained the grand strategic context, it is my intent to “step down” a level and consider the national politics at play. The second question that I shall ask is *How was governance exercised?* The aim of this question is to appreciate the framework of authority that the government exercised to address the social challenges it faced. In attempting to understand the nature of governance it will be critical to ask the related question of *did contesting actors used force, and if so, how?* as coercion is a recognized tool of governance, but must only be used at a level deemed socially legitimate. It is at this stage that the instrumental value of violence used by the state can be questioned. As we have stepped from the grand strategic to the tactical level, we can now appreciate more fully the reality of the political context in which policy is being enacted and violence is being employed.

The crucial final question is *how did the framework of authority match the expectations of the population?* It is perhaps this question that has attracted so little attention from military strategists, as the assumption that is often made is that the population is a client of the state. However, if we can conceptualize the population as not simply an agent, but as a body who confers authority upon the state, then this becomes the crucial stage of analysis.

As an earlier analogy referred to the importance of undertaking a survey of the terrain, in order to demonstrate the link between tactics and strategy, then the aim of this final question is to recognize that the terrain that we must measure is human. With an appreciation of the disparity between our conception of the state and the actual delicate exercise of control, the role of the local perception of legitimate governance, or the framework of authority, will be clear.

What is apparent in both of the case studies presented was the necessity for Great Britain and America to act.⁴⁵ For both nations there were significant geopolitical imperatives, in the form of great power rivalry, to induce action. To not accept the Mandate in Palestine would mean ceding a significant strategic node to France or Tsarist Russia. Similarly, for the United States, to not support Diem's South Vietnam would mean to allow the unification of Vietnam under a Communist Ho Chi Minh. In both cases, allocating resource was a demonstration of commitment and would have been a significant message to their competitors of their resolve. While I therefore do not contest the strategic ends that both Britain and America pursued, what merits examination is the way in which policy was interpreted and executed. The focus of this thesis is not upon *whether* to act but *how* to do so.

⁴⁵ The British case is articulated in Chapter 3. For a more complete argument for US participation see Lind, Michael. *Vietnam the Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict*. Free Press, 1999.

Chapter 3

An Iron Wall and an Iron Fist- The British Mandate in Palestine.

The harvest of inevitable tragedy was not long in ripening
Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*.

*And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to
secure a man at all.*
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

The British Government's (subsequently referred to as His or Her Majesty's Government, or HMG) performance in its Palestinian Mandate from 1922-48 is an excellent demonstration of the propensity to seek strategic ends without recourse to appreciating the local political context.¹ Similarly, Palestine evinces our proclivity to military myopia at the expense of understanding the root causes of violent subversion. As Menachem Begin articulated elegantly in the epigraph, there was an inevitability to the collapse of Mandate authority, due to the paradoxes on which it was founded.²

Perhaps best encapsulated in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, but mirrored routinely in policy and practice in the following 30 years, the British vacillated between supporting a Jewish "National Home" in Palestine while protecting the rights of the Arab population. Similarly, the British sought to maintain a critical strategic location while not resourcing the conditions necessary for local authority to thrive. In the end, the diverging paths of policy led HMG to an irreconcilable position, in the face of a collapse in its rational and moral authority, forcing a departure from Palestine.

The absence of a framework of authority in Palestine by which the Mandate Government could exercise control was the root cause of its failure. While the spectacular

¹ An early Realist argument for avoiding intervention is posited by Hans Morgenthau "To Intervene or Not to Intervene." *Foreign Affairs* Vol 45 Issue 3 (1967): 425–36. While the article is written in the context of the US War in Vietnam, it is of broader interest and utility. Morgenthau clearly advocates the importance of disaggregation, which I shall discuss in Chapter 5, and denigrates the practice of pursuing "abstract principles," as is argued here, over the interests of the nations concerned.

² Begin was the leader of the Jewish insurgent group the *Irgun Zevai Leumi*, shortened to *Etzel* throughout this paper, to account for the Hebrew acronym for its initials.

audacity of the bombing of the King David Hotel (1946), and the Acre prison breakout (1947), are evidence of the success of the Jewish Insurgency, they are merely symptoms of a wider malaise. To fully appreciate the calculus behind the British departure from Palestine, we must move from a focus upon military events to the political grievances that inspired the use of violence.

To comprehend the underlying issue in the Palestinian Mandate this chapter will first address the strategic context and describe how geographic advantage and a colonial worldview shaped Britain's framing of the problem. Secondly, it will move from the grand strategic to the local framing of the problem and describe the nature of Mandate governance in British Palestine. Critical to this analysis will be an understanding of the tension between the Mandate government in Jerusalem, and the influence of HMG in London, in determining policy in Palestine. Finally, this chapter will look at British handling of a critical policy issue, immigration, which evoked a violent response from both Jewish and Arab communities that led to the undermining of the rational authority needed to maintain order.

In conclusion we will see that the metaphorical "Iron Wall" that the British constructed to enable the large-scale immigration of Jews to Palestine inevitably served to irreconcilably divide two communities.³ While the Mandate government was able to wield an iron fist, violence merely served to highlight the absence of a British "right to rule" to both Jewish and Arab communities. What is perhaps most chilling in addressing the question of the system of Mandate governance are the echoes of these policies into our own time. For the student of contemporary Middle Eastern politics, appreciating the paradoxes of the Palestine Mandate are critical to comprehending many of the issues faced today.

³ The term Iron Wall was first used by the leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement Ze'ev Jobotinsky in an article of that name in 1923. An officer in the British Army in the First World War, he went on to found *Etzel* as a mechanism to challenge British rule.

Strategic Context- Location, Location, Location

To appreciate shifting British attitudes towards the problem of governing Palestine is to chart the setting of the sun on its Empire. However, while two cataclysmic wars would fundamentally change the balance of power and influence in world politics between 1914 and 1945, the value of maintaining a British foothold in the eastern Mediterranean would remain. Ultimately, like all strategic decisions, Britain had to weigh the cost of sustainment versus the benefits accrued. By 1947, with independence granted to India, Palestine had shrunk in Britain's strategic calculus significantly, to the extent that Sir Winston Churchill claimed "no British interest is involved in our retention of the Palestine Mandate."⁴ To appreciate the way in which Great Britain framed the challenges of governance in Palestine, and the resource that its leaders saw fit to exert in order to maintain control, it is essential that we appreciate the conceptual framework within which these decisions were made.⁵

The first major determinant of British policy, with respect to Palestine, was the strategic opportunity that its location presented. As the British Empire was established upon trade, governing Palestine represented a crucial advantage as it lay upon the intersection of several land, maritime, and air routes. To further Britain's interests in trade, therefore, Palestine represented a key node in enabling the delivery of goods to market by the most direct route.

British foreign policy was based upon pragmatism and trade, and Palestine, while of little commercial value of itself, straddled critical strategic and trade routes. Perhaps the clearest articulation of the core thread of British Foreign Policy, which arguably continues today, came in a speech by the then Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, to the British Parliament in March 1848: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no

⁴ Rose, Norman. *A Senseless, Squalid War: Voices From Palestine 1890s-1948*. Random House UK, 2010, 167.

⁵ While the focus of this Chapter is British Palestine, the application of policy largely reflects that found in Britain's other colonies and cannot be solely analyzed in isolation. For a broader perspective on British Colonial Policy and therefore clarity on the means used to enforce HMG's intent see French, David. *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967*. OUP Oxford, 2011. Specifically, pp188-199 deal with the relationship between grand strategy and local political concessions.

perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual and those interests it is our duty to follow.”⁶

Over-land Palestine could facilitate the transfer of the significant oil wealth of Basra and Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) to port for immediate transfer across the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, on the land route to India, the jewel in the British Imperial crown, Palestine enabled the delivery of supplies by the Mediterranean Sea for onward transfer. The establishment of nascent air routes following the First World War made this central location between Europe and Asia extremely attractive as a refueling and resupply point. In time, the proximity of Palestine to the Soviet Union would also confer a strategic attraction as a potential axis of air attack in the Cold War.

Of greater value than what Palestine offered, in the game of great power balancing and geopolitics, was what Palestine denied. By holding a central state in the Middle East, with sea access from the Mediterranean, the British could drive a strategic wedge between French and Tsarist Russian interests in modern day Syria and Egypt, specifically, the Suez Canal. Palestine, therefore, could be a hub for British interests in the Middle East and a breakwater against further French or Russian influence into an area of growing importance.⁷

Against the backdrop of great power rivalry, and with the war on the Western Front not going in their favor, Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. This Agreement sought to exploit the potential collapse of the Ottoman Empire and apportion areas of responsibility to the Tripartite powers—Britain, France, and Tsarist Russia—in the event of their victory.⁸ When the First World War was over, and the League of Nations sought to redistribute the colonies of Germany and the territory of the

⁶ An extract from the British Parliamentary record, Hansard, Treaty of Adrianople—Charges Against Viscount Palmerston. HC Deb 01 March 1848 vol 97 cc66-123, available at:

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1848/mar/01/treaty-of-adrianople-charges-against>, last accessed 29 April 2015.

⁷ Oil was first discovered in Persia in 1908 and was a crucial component both of Britain’s war aims in the First World War, and the subsequent San Remo agreement (1920) that preceded the establishment of the system of Mandates.

⁸ The full text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement is available online at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/sykes_pico.html, accessed 4 May 2015.

Ottoman Empire, Britain and France divided the spoils along the lines that they had agreed in 1916. As General Edmund Allenby, with Arab support, had seized Jerusalem “as a Christmas present to the British people” in 1917, a transitional British administration was in place in Palestine following the Armistice in November 1918, until a formal League of Nations Mandate was issued in July 1922.⁹

Having secured the territory that it sought, British leaders established a policy in favor of the Arabs who had assisted T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) and Allenby in defeating the Ottoman army. The system of Mandates adopted by the League of Nations enabled the French to establish a Mandate in Syria, while further British Mandates or protectorates enabled the establishment of Arab kingdoms or emirates in Iraq, Trans-Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. For British leaders, Palestine was not a problem to be framed, but rather an opportunity to grasp.

The second related contextual factor that merits consideration is the colonial worldview of Imperial Britain. While the period of the *Pax Britannica* is probably most closely associated with the reign of Queen Victoria, the British Empire would reach its maximum geographic extent at the start of the Mandate period under King George V. That the British held in dominion an empire on which “the sun never set” was a crucial factor in appreciating the way in which its leaders approached the subjugation of foreign territory. As well as being an act of strategic geographic necessity, the establishment of a Mandate in Palestine was undoubtedly viewed as being within the rights of any Englishman for a number of reasons.

Perhaps first and foremost, the British Empire, to its promoters and agents, was a moral force for good. Successive British governments trumpeted the benefits of Empire in trade, however, another strong theme in their rhetoric was the moral necessity for holding overseas territories. This sense of duty is perhaps best captured in Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “The White Man’s Burden,” which opens with the following stanza:

⁹ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 17.

Take up the White Man's burden, Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.¹⁰

While Kipling's poem is part satire, it was written by a British Nobel laureate with a keen social conscience imbued with the sentiments of western liberal philosophy. To the British, their Empire was a mechanism for the expansion of civilization into backward corners of the world and was a social necessity. Steeled by Thomas Carlyle's heroic view of history, the *Pax Britannica* was enabled by sending *the best ye breed* to enlighten and elevate those less fortunate i.e., non-British peoples. The British Empire, to those framing policy decisions in London, was a responsibility conferred upon the socially advanced to raise the living standards of the world's under privileged and under developed.

Entwined within the social compulsion inherent in alleviating the "White Man's Burden" is a second moral imperative: religious conversion. While the *half-child* of indigenous societies would benefit practically from the establishment of British institutions and social mores, so too could his *half-devil* soul be saved by conversion to Christianity. Crucial to the recognition of the moral superiority of the Englishman was the acceptance that his place in the world was divinely conferred (i.e., God-given). The British framework of authority was emotionally tied to the concept of the *Crown* as head of state, a throwback to a form of the Divine Right of Kings that was usurped across much of Europe in the 18th Century, but not in Great Britain. With the King as the head of state, and a system of patronage established around a throne conferred by God, the English could legitimately believe that their pre-eminence was ordained by the Almighty himself. Palestine may have been a strategic opportunity, but it was granted to a blessed nation.

¹⁰ The full text of the poem is available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_White_Man's_Burden, accessed 29 April 2015. It is worth noting the subtitle of Kipling's poem: "The United States and the Philippine Islands." Kipling wrote the poem in response the American colonization of the islands in the wake of Spanish-American War (1898) and the justifications used to prosecute the war.

In framing decisions related to the Palestinian Mandate, the pragmatism of British foreign policy dovetailed neatly with the perceived social and spiritual superiority of the English race. In the Holy Land, the seat of the Judeo-Christian religions and the site of the third most sacred site in Islam, Great Britain had an opportunity to govern the terrain at the confluence of the western world's major faiths. To do so, all that Great Britain needed was a client population.¹¹

Zionism offered Great Britain an expedient opportunity, at a crucial stage in the First World War, to secure a long-term footprint in a strategic location. By supporting Zionism, and in particular Theodore Herzl's political movement to establish a *Judenstaat*, British senior statesmen saw an opportunity in the darkest days of the First World War to both unite world Jewry to its cause, and to instigate a novel form of colony.¹² As Britain lacked the human capital to export and colonize, the Jewish diaspora might serve as a client population. Critically, this opportunity resonated with a strand of Christian Zionism in Great Britain that saw the return of the Jews to the Holy Land as a precursor to the Second Coming of Christ. The pursuit of a policy advocating a "National Home" for the Jews, antithetical to the strategic desire to maintain favor with its Arab allies, would necessitate the framing of policy to both encourage Jewish immigrants and enable them to secure a firm foothold.

The Balfour Declaration (1917), and the subsequent Articles of Mandate arranged by the League of Nations, granted a Jewish "National Home" in Palestine.¹³ What the League specifically did not do was state that Palestine would become a Jewish state. Protecting the establishment of a strong, client Jewish community through an "Iron Wall" was at the core of decisions by the international community, enforced through British policy. However, the Balfour Declaration stated explicitly "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in

¹¹ Shepherd, Naomi. *Ploughing Sand: British Rule in Palestine 1917-1948*. Rutgers University Press, 2000, 13.

¹² Smith, Barbara J. *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine: British Economic Policy, 1920-1929*. Syracuse University Press, 1993, 5.

¹³ The Balfour Declaration was a statement written by the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, to a prominent leader of the British Jewish community, Lord Rothschild.

Palestine.”¹⁴ While the details of exactly how this could be done were left until after the war, and would be wrapped up by a colonial administration, the wording of the Declaration presented a paradox that would challenge successive Mandate administrations and created political divisions that remain unresolved today.

Building an Iron Wall 1922-1936

While the Palestinian Mandate was entrusted to Britain to encourage local political sovereignty, it was a Crown colony in all but name. The establishment of a series of Mandates, at the end of the First World War, was designed as a mechanism to re-allocate former territory of the German and Ottoman Empires to the victorious Tripartite Powers. The Articles of the British Mandate in Palestine, a rudimentary written constitution, conferred responsibility for the governance of Palestine to HMG on behalf of the Council of the League of Nations. Designated as an “A-Class Mandate,” Palestine was recognized as a state whose “existence as (an) independent nation(s) can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandate until such time as they are able to stand alone.”¹⁵ However, Britain’s strategic interests did not lie in helping Palestine to stand alone, but in enabling Palestine to assist it in fulfilling its strategic intent.

The British Empire was barely solvent following the enormous costs of the First World War and this influenced the character of British rule.¹⁶ The Mandate Articles enabled Britain to conduct governance in Palestine on a shoestring. Not only would Great Britain attain the strategic location it sought, but the financial and manpower costs would be borne by the Palestinians themselves. Enshrined within the Articles were a series of clauses that guaranteed Great Britain the freedom from external interference in Palestine and therefore secured the strategic opportunity that its leaders sought. To enable Great Britain to maximize the opportunity, Articles 12 and 17 of the Mandate

¹⁴ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 7.

¹⁵ The Covenant of the League of Nations can be accessed online at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22, last accessed 29 April 2015.

¹⁶ For a full appreciation of the economic conditions in Britain’s Palestinian Policy see Smith, Barbara J. *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine: British Economic Policy, 1920-1929*. Syracuse University Press, 1993.

conferred responsibility for foreign policy upon HMG and established the legal basis for the raising and funding of a defense force.¹⁷ Palestine's foreign policy would be King George V's, and the means used to secure the Empire's latest acquisition would come from the Mandate itself, not from the Treasury in London.¹⁸ While the Mandate may have been established to ensure the "wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration," British policies would place the Crown before the commoner in Palestine. Absent the capacity to establish its own foreign policy, Palestine was a long way short of being left to stand alone.

The pattern of governing Palestine as a colony and not a Mandate, obvious in foreign policy, was mirrored in its internal politics. As the policy of HMG was to pursue "a Jewish National Home" whilst preserving the rights of Arabs, she was forced into a governance structure more like that of a "Class C Mandate"—an overseas territory or colony.¹⁹ Despite Article 2 of the Mandate explaining that local autonomy should be permitted where possible, Britain was unable to form a government comprising Arab and Jewish leaders. As the Articles of the Mandate were framed around HMG's determination to enable Jewish immigration, they included specific clauses designed to protect minority rights. To Arab leaders, this was an attempt to diminish their status and was therefore politically unacceptable. Unable to draw a Supreme National Council of community leaders together, Britain established a Mandatory Council of colonial administrators, led by a British High Commissioner. Palestine would therefore have its own Mandatory government, staffed by British officials, to oversee the day to day running of the country. That said, the absence of a locally representative government was of little concern to HMG, as its policy on Palestine would be determined from London not Jerusalem.

The British adoption of the Ottoman policy of governance by "millet" institutionalized the division between communities in Palestine and elevated Zionism at the expense of the Christian and Muslim Arab majorities.²⁰ In line with the policy in its

¹⁷ The Articles of the Palestinian Mandate are available online at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp, last accessed 29 April 2015.

¹⁸ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine*, 49.

¹⁹ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 63.

²⁰ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 65.

other colonies, the British in Palestine attempted to govern through local laws where possible, in order to attain a rational and moral framework of authority with its subject people. However, the imposition of a significant program of immigration, on top of the existing Ottoman laws, created a chasm between the Jewish and Arab communities. The millet system meant that minority groups were given equal opportunity and access before the Mandate government, and while it guaranteed that Palestine would not become a Jewish State, it further elevated the role of the Jewish minority despite them accounting for only 13% of Palestinian inhabitants at the start of the Mandate.²¹

HMG's policy of establishing a Jewish National Home legally fragmented governance in the Mandate and drove a wedge between Britain and its subjects in the territory. The inability to form a coalition government, and the provisions of the Articles of the Mandate, led to the legitimization of a fractured polity that would be driven further apart by immigration in the 1920s and 1930s.²² Specified within Article 4 of the Mandate was the necessity to form and recognize a Jewish Agency as a public body to advise the Mandate government on all social matters relating to the establishment of the National Home. Critically, the Jewish Agency would become the focal point for international Zionist efforts and would eventually hold significant fund raising and political power in the United States. In 1923 the Jewish Agency was a shadow of its future self, but did represent a legally constituted, parallel form of governance.²³

The necessity of balancing the interests of disparate communities led to the development of states within a state. In the absence of a communal government, and because of the establishment of the Jewish Agency, the Mandate Government also created a Supreme Muslim Council (SMC) to ensure parity of treatment for the Muslim

²¹ Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine*, 65.

²² In line with her traditional policy of strategic pragmatism, Shepherd argues that the "king making", in appointing Mufti as head of SMC to counter the Jewish Agency, was intended as a short term expedite to invite participation. However, as the SMC subsequently boycotted elections, the act of "king making" subsequently undermined the democratic regime the British hoped to impose. Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 61.

²³ For a greater appreciation of the moral background to the Zionist argument, and therefore the external support to the Jewish Agency, see Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, Chapter 1 "A Promised Land" 1-19. Rose paints a movement with significant influence and support, most through Chaim Weizmann, in the British Coalition Government of Lloyd George 1916-22.

Arab community. However, by electing the Mufti of Jerusalem as President of the SMC, the Mandate government undermined itself. In an attempt to placate disparate communities, HMG created two parallel governance structures, in the form of the Jewish Agency and SMC, that had a much more ready appeal to the moral authority of their communities.²⁴ Crucially, as the Mandate was keen to ensure that religious and cultural sensitivities were preserved, both the SMC and Jewish Agency were vested with political authority while both holding political aims for self-determination. In an attempt to recognize local cultural norms the British unintentionally empowered, and further divided, those who would later seek to overthrow its authority.²⁵

The desire to maintain the Ottoman status quo, with a veneer of English Common Law applied, denied the Arab population the opportunity for the improvements in education and healthcare that they sought. Because the British were granted the right to raise a defense force for Palestine, the tax burden was drawn from the Arab and Jewish communities. While the Arab population expected a much more progressive form of governance following the collapse of Ottoman Rule, the British focus on its grand strategic ends came at the fiscal expense of its subject peoples and the opportunity cost of social programs. While education was obviously important to successive leaders of the Mandate government, their patriarchal view meant that education for Arab children was based upon practical rural skills and not literacy and numeracy. The aspiration was not to create a literate liberal society but to give the Arabs, at minimum government expense, a sufficient education in the eyes of Mandate leaders. It is for this reason that the allocated

²⁴ This paradox is widely referred to in the literature as a “dual obligation” to the disparate communities. However, Britain’s policy failed to recognize the primary obligation of the state- to effectively provide for its population- for the grand strategic reasons argued earlier.

²⁵ While this may seem like a striking failure, it recognizes a practice which was largely successful in other colonial states. An excellent overview of the British colonial state template is provided in French, David. *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967*. OUP Oxford, 2011, 11-41. In recognition of Britain’s stretched resources, French argues that British colonialism, within the state, was a ‘confidence trick’ and necessitated working with the grain of colonial elites to govern. The limitations of this approach, due to divided religious communities and subsequent strategic events, would subsequently be cruelly exposed.

budget for health and education reached its apogee at only 7% of the total Mandate budget, but was often only half of that total.²⁶

Exacerbating Arab concerns over Mandate provision of services was a visibly more capable Jewish Agency. As the Articles provided for separate education and health systems to cater for differing cultural mores, the Arab majority relied upon provision of social services, with advice from the SMC, by the Mandate government. However, the Mandate governments spending priorities were in infrastructure and defense. The Jewish Agency, however, benefited from both the financial support of international Jewish organizations and from the capital inflow of new immigrants.

As the immigrant population was drawn from across Europe and Southern Russia, many of those arriving were drawn from the professional classes or skilled labor force. To embrace and organize this arriving body of labor and capital, the Jewish Agency spawned a series of departments such as healthcare, labor relations, and education that were able to provide either a better, or more progressive, form of support to their community than the Mandate government.²⁷ Critically, the Jewish Agency also spawned a self-defense organization, the *Haganah*, to protect its population from Arab reprisals. To the Arab population, the visible presence of a growing, increasingly urbanized, and socially more liberal body of immigrants, encouraged by the Mandate government, was a warning of their impending subjugation. To the Jews, the Jewish Agency was more responsive to their needs than the Mandate government, and was able to provide the essential public services expected of a government structure, including providing for their physical protection.

To both Jewish and Arab communities the British framework of authority was hollow. As the focus of the state was on grand strategic advantage, public provision was set at the minimum level necessary to negate a backlash, and decidedly lower than that delivered in mainland Britain.²⁸ The Mandate government ruled through a legalistic

²⁶ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 127.

²⁷ For a more complete understanding of Jewish economic and social integration see Smith, *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine*, 63-86 and 116-132.

²⁸ As both David French in *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, and David Charters *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine 1945-47*. Palgrave, 1989, argue, the issue was more than just the scale of provision but the mechanism chosen: the army as

framework, however, as a former colonial justice noted “one curious result of our scrupulous respect for the status quo is that we preserve systems of law which have elsewhere become extinct.”²⁹ The Mandate government was wholly mechanistic and largely unresponsive to, and detached from, its population. As an example, despite the Jewish population accounting for one third of all Palestinians, only four percent of the Palestinian Police Force spoke Hebrew during the period of the Jewish Insurgency.³⁰

The attempt to establish an Iron Wall to enable the settlement of a Jewish National Home had been partially successful, however, resulted in the creation of three parallel forms of governance. While the Mandate government could claim to be in control, its claim to authority was wholly legalistic and therefore solely rational. Significant disparities in culture and social provision, as a result of British policy, had divided the Arab and Jewish communities of Palestine and placed them in a seemingly zero-sum competition. At the heart of the contest between the communities was the question of immigration.

Events in Europe in the 1930s would rupture the fractious status quo in Palestine. The rise of anti-Semitic parties in Italy and Germany led to a massive spike in immigration and therefore exacerbated the contested question of Palestine’s future. While from 1922 the level of Jewish immigration had been no more than 10,000 people a year, in 1934 and 1935 a total of 100,000 immigrants arrived.³¹ This explosion of immigrants, many of who were refugees rather than voluntary exiles, caused a significant reaction from the Arab community.

While up until 1936 the Mandate government had managed to maintain an aura of legitimacy through ruling by statute, the Arab Revolt between 1936-39 would expose the fragility of the British framework of authority. To uphold the Iron Wall, the state would

the primary instrument of coercion, not the police. French also points out that in the early 1950s, there were more salaried policemen in the United Kingdom than in the whole of the rest of the British Empire: French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency*, 16.

²⁹ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 76.

³⁰ Charters, David A. *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine 1945-47*. Palgrave, 1989, 159.

³¹ Shepherd, *Ploughing Sand*, 98.

have to wield an iron fist. In doing so, the hollow British claim to legitimate authority would be laid bare.³²

Wielding an Iron Fist 1936-48

The British assumption that a malleable client population could be made to achieve its strategic ends was punctured in April 1936. While there had been many local acts of violence during the Mandate, the unresolved paradox enshrined within the Articles erupted in widespread and organized Arab violence. Despite 14 years of Mandate rule, the dichotomy inherent in the Balfour Declaration was being exposed: a National Home for the Jews could not be created without prejudicing the rights of indigenous Arabs. Following riots in Jaffa (1921), the Arab political and religious leader, the Mufti of Jerusalem, called for a massive campaign of civil disobedience against the Mandate government.

The Arab Revolt revealed frustration at Britain's policies in Palestine extended beyond its borders. The call from the Mufti to resist the British extended beyond Palestine to its Arab neighbors and in many ways forged a connection that still exists today. The protection of Jewish immigrants and the sale of Arab land to settlers had inflamed Arab nationalists in Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad and elicited financial and human support in order to remove the "cancer in the bodies of Arab countries"—Zionism.³³ The British, however, were unwilling to give in to Arab demands and rose to the challenge to their monopoly on violence with a military and political response.

The British reaction to an indigenous revolt was as brutal and indiscriminate as one might expect from a patriarchal state. While the British offered an olive branch by attempting to resurrect the option of a National Supreme Council, they also wielded the coercive tools of the state liberally. The doctrine employed by the British Armed Forces was drawn from a recently published manual on arresting breakdown in order, *Imperial Policing*, by Sir Charles Gwynn.³⁴ In line with the mindset of a benevolent Imperial

³² French, David. *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967*. OUP Oxford, 2011, 16.

³³ Rose, A *Senseless, Squalid War*, 43.

³⁴ Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine*, 136. Beyond this individual example, Charters offers a description of the doctrinal development of the

master, Gwynn's work demonstrated no appreciation for the political nature of insurgency, and determined that resolution lay in the application of firepower and maneuver.

The British reacted swiftly to arrest the breakdown in order and expanded the military presence in the country to two full infantry divisions. As a senior British police officer in Palestine remarked: "What was important to us...was that we had absolute faith that what we were doing was the right thing to do. We may have given the impression of superiority and we did see ourselves as superior to the local citizens, I suppose, but I don't think it was an offensive attitude, more paternal than anything else."³⁵

In the mind of the average British military officer, he was facing miscreants and trouble-makers, not a population with a genuine grievance.³⁶ To the security services, given the allegedly moral intent of the state, those who resisted the Mandate deserved to be taught a lesson for questioning the legitimacy of British rule. As the Revolt was fundamentally about immigration, the British also became strange bedfellows with the Jewish paramilitary organization, the *Haganah*, in order to provide for the protection of Jewish settlements. While the extent of cooperation was largely limited to surveillance, due to the Jewish policy of *havlagah*, or self-restraint, they did undertake some covert, direct action operations, or raids. Led by the maverick British officer Orde Wingate, the Special Night Squads provided sabotage and military intelligence experience for Jewish fighters, such as the future Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, who would later be used against their British allies.³⁷

As a precursor to later British counterinsurgency operations in Palestine, the Arab Revolt showed that the British were willing to use collective violence against a community to ensure its compliance. Over the course of the three years of the Revolt,

British Army in Imperial conflicts that is extremely helpful is explaining its subsequent practice.

³⁵ French, *The British Way in COIN*, 62.

³⁶ French, *The British Way in COIN*, 62.

³⁷ Wingate, a staunch Zionist, would build upon his experience with the Special Night Squads to conduct irregular campaigns against the Italians in Ethiopia (1941) and the Japanese in Burma (1943-44) until his untimely death in an airplane crash in March 1944. The most recent treatment biographical treatment of his life is Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior - From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2014).

approximately 2,150 insurgents were killed, 108 Arabs in custody were executed, and 2,000 homes were demolished as a sign of government resolve.³⁸ To demonstrate the old maxim that “crime does not pay,” the collective would bear the responsibility for the few to demonstrate the role of denunciation in reducing group punishment. Over the same period, the British suffered only 265 casualties. In parallel, the British pursued a political solution through the establishment of a Royal Commission to ascertain the root causes of Arab unrest to ensure the long-term protection of their valuable strategic location.³⁹

While the British did not quail in the face of Arab violence, the Revolt did generate a significant shift in British Mandate policy. As Britain’s appreciation of its opportunity was strategic, she accepted that currying the dissatisfaction of its Arab neighbors was not in its interests, specifically with the Axis powers applying pressure to its Empire in the Mediterranean. In lockstep with its traditional, pragmatic approach to foreign politics, British leaders knew that in the coming years they would need all of the friends they could get. Similarly, while Britain was suppressing the Arab Revolt with two divisions, it was also only able to offer a similar-sized force to send France after Adolf Hitler’s *Anschluss* with Austria in 1938.⁴⁰ Understanding the worldview of British leaders on the eve of a major European war, and given the scarcity of the country’s military assets, allows one to see the necessity for a more stable long-term solution in Palestine. Therefore, in an attempt to secure Arab support and ameliorate their concerns, Britain performed a spectacular policy *volte-face*.

While the findings of the Peel Commission (1937) offered some hope to Zionists, the subsequent policy pronouncement would necessitate a violent Jewish counter. The Peel Commission was the first British study to recommend the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish communities, however its findings were not welcome to all. Whilst the Zionists were supportive, neither the British Foreign Office nor the Palestinian Arabs were in favor. To partition Palestine would be to cede previously Arab land to a Jewish State, and would unseat Great Britain from an area of critical strategic value. With a

³⁸ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 45.

³⁹ This Commission, one of many during the Mandate, is known traditionally as the Peel Commission after its head, Lord Peel, a senior British barrister.

⁴⁰ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 42.

failed attempt to resurrect a National Supreme Council of Arab and Jewish leaders consensually in 1937, the British would have to dictate policy.

The 1939 MacDonald White Paper resolved the dichotomies in the Balfour Declaration by declaring the establishment of a National Home for the Jews sufficiently complete.⁴¹ Recognizing that in the face of a war with anti-Semitic Germany its Jewish subjects would have no recourse to revolt, Great Britain elevated the priority of harmony with its Arab neighbors. By the terms of the 1939 White Paper, Palestine would have an Arab government in ten years, Jewish immigration would be capped, and the Jewish community would secure one-third of the seating in Palestine's future parliament.

The Jewish Agency and Zionism had been sacrificed to the challenge of shoring up the Empire's strategic challenges, and husbanding its assets, to face the Axis powers. To those Anglophile Zionists who had supported Great Britain while encouraging their more militant, Revisionist colleagues to pursue a non-violent path, this was a devastating turn. But the common enemy was the specter of a Nazi German Third Reich dominating Europe. The Jewish predicament was obvious, and is perhaps best captured by the future Israeli President, Ben Gurion "we shall fight the White Paper as if there is no war, and the war as if there is no White Paper."⁴² But fight they would.

The Jewish Insurgency

The anti-Semitic nature of Hitler's ideology had significant implications for the political landscape in Palestine. With the Second World War underway, and going poorly for Great Britain, the possibility of the Axis toppling Great Britain's North African and Levantine holdings was extremely real. The decision was therefore made in London, prior to El Alamein, to harness the Jewish population as a tool of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). While envisioned as an "in place" force to operate behind captured Axis lines, SOE later developed to insert individuals by air or sea into Nazi Europe. In both regimens, the Jewish population was an attractive resource. Firstly, small units could be trained to slow or sabotage any potential German advance into Palestine itself.

⁴¹ Named after its principle author Malcolm MacDonald, the British Colonial Secretary and son of former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald.

⁴² Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 53.

Secondly, as the Jewish population was largely composed of first-generation immigrants, they could be parachuted back into the country of their birth to act as “fifth columnists,” to conduct sabotage or subversion missions, or simply as intelligence gatherers.⁴³ In the *Haganah*, or specifically the elite sub-group the *Palmach*, the British found a body of men and women eager to act to disrupt the seemingly unstoppable march of the Axis powers. For the Jews and Zionism, the consequences of a Nazi victory were obvious. Action was essential.

Despite the exposure of the Final Solution in Europe, and the support of its Jewish subjects in the war effort, Great Britain held firm on the immigration quotas set in 1939. While European émigrés did not need to be reminded of the brutality of the Axis nations, the emergence in 1941 of greater clarity on the scale of the pogroms, and the implementation of a determined policy of extermination, added a huge weight to the moral argument for increased Jewish immigration. As the tide of the war turned and the Allied invasion of North Africa, Operation Torch, gave way to the invasion of Italy, Jewish Agency policy shifted to advocating for open acceptance of refugees fleeing the Holocaust in Europe. However, the terms of the White Paper were unequivocal. As the High Commissioner stated “Palestine was under no obligation to them (the refugees)...enemy nationals from enemy-controlled territory should not be admitted to this country during the war.”⁴⁴ Perhaps the starkest demonstration of the resolve of the British came in the shape of the SS *Struma* incident in February 1942: the turning back to sea by the Royal Navy of a barely sea-worthy vessel containing over 700 refugees. When the *Struma* subsequently capsized with the loss of 768 souls, all Romanian Jews fleeing persecution, it was clear to the Jewish population of Palestine that the British were now part of the problem, and not part of the solution, to their cause.

At stake was the future of Zionism. While the 1939 MacDonald White Paper had exacerbated a rift in the Jewish polity that already existed, the *Struma* incident demanded a response. At one end of the spectrum lay the traditional leaders of the Zionist

⁴³ A fifth columnist is a reference to the technique of infiltrating sympathisers to sow dissent within an adversary’s country. A modern analogy might be to the “12th man” in a sports team, but in this instance, he is not cheering on the home team but deliberately undermining them.

⁴⁴ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 62

movement, men such as David Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, backed by the Jewish Agency and the *Haganah*. In the face of British commitment to the 1939 White Paper, the traditionalists elected to target HMG's policy and subvert the rule of law by facilitating a network of illegal immigration. In doing so, the Jewish Agency and *Haganah* would not passively support refugees but would actively participate in ferrying them from Europe's ports to Palestine. On the opposite end of the spectrum where the revisionists, inspired by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who felt that if Britain would not maintain the Iron Wall, then Jews must provide for their own defense.

In organizations such as the *Lehi* and *Etzel*, Palestinian Jews saw the opportunity to challenge not only Britain's policy but also the Mandate state itself.⁴⁵ The contest for popular Jewish support would continue throughout the war and was at times visceral, including a period, termed "the Hunting Season," when the *Haganah* and Jewish Agency facilitated British operations against *Lehi* and *Etzel*. To the Jewish Agency the revisionists were their greatest enemy, as they threatened to undermine the potential for a change in HMG's policy.⁴⁶ The murder in November 1944 of the British Minister in Cairo, Lord Moyne, was one such example where the hardliners provoked the British to renege on a potential partition plan that Churchill was tempted to accept. But the revisionists' calculus was robust: Jews were being slaughtered in Europe, and the British government had demonstrated that it could not be trusted to come their aid.

If the British would not assist, then, Begin argued, their immorality must be demonstrated and their rule of law shown to be illegitimate. While it was an appeal to emotion, Begin's rationale that "faith is perhaps stronger than reality; faith itself creates reality" was an implicit appreciation of Weber's understanding of the nature of legitimacy.⁴⁷ The rational strength of the state was tightly bound to its moral core and the values that its people held. A state's law is only accepted by a population, unless imposed by force, if it resonates with their moral and ethical understanding of reality. As Begin subsequently argued in *The Revolt*, "we learned that in general British officials avoid

⁴⁵ The naming of organizations is fraught with the historical biases that come with them—I have avoided the Anglicized titles given these groups—The Stern Gang and Irgun—but have used their Hebrew names, translated into English.

⁴⁶ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 47.

⁴⁷ Begin, Menachem. *The Revolt: The Story of the Irgun*. Henry Schuman, 1951, 11.

making their rule dependent on force, but rather on the power of prestige.....History and our observation persuaded us that if we could succeed in destroying the government's prestige in Eretz Israel, the removal of its rule would follow automatically. The very existence of an underground, which oppression, hangings, torture and deportations, fail to crush or to weaken must, in the end, undermine the prestige of a colonial regime that lives by the legend of its omnipotence.”⁴⁸ If one re-reads this excerpt and replaces the word *prestige* with *legitimacy*, it is clear that Begin's *Etzel* appreciated the path to unseating the Mandate government. In the face of the Holocaust, if the British refused to accept those fleeing Hitler but incarcerated them instead, the moral superiority of the Allies over the Axis vanished. As their moral authority decayed, so too did the framework of authority that the British upheld.

While the Second World War may have led to Allied victory in Europe and Japan, the battle for legitimacy raged in Palestine. With the advent of peace elsewhere, many traditionalists felt that the significant support offered by Palestine's Jews to the war effort would sway British policy, however, they were proven wrong. Despite claims to the contrary in the Labour Party convention, the 1945 General Election would change the party in power in London but not the policy of HMG in Palestine.⁴⁹ To counter British policy, the disparate elements of Jewish politics in Palestine would unite under the banner of the United Resistance Movement. In electing to join forces against the British, Begin's claim paraphrasing René Descartes that “we fight therefore we are” speaks volumes about the mindset of Palestinian Jew in 1945.⁵⁰ The existential threat to Jewry at the hands of Hitler, the Nazis, and their sympathizers had generated an elemental desire for recognition. If such recognition would be denied to the Jews of Palestine, and a Jewish Home denied to those who had survived the depredations of the Third Reich, then the resort to violence would at least represent an attempt to restore hope and humanity to a population group who had faced annihilation. The barrier to achieving this reclamation of their humanity was the Mandate government.

⁴⁸ Begin, *The Revolt*, 52.

⁴⁹ Lazar, Hadara. *Out of Palestine: The Making of Modern Israel*. Atlas and Co, 2013, 283.

⁵⁰ Begin, *The Revolt*, 46.

The experience that *Etzel*, *Lehi*, and the *Palmach* had gained in sabotage and subversion during the Second World War made them extremely challenging foes for the Mandate government. However, while much has been made of their performance and daring, of greater importance was the moral authority of their cause, and the perceived harshness of the British response to the Jewish insurgency 1944-47. While the Jewish Resistance achieved significant successes in assassinating and harassing security officials, smuggling refugees into Palestine, or damaging infrastructure, their real victory lay in exposing the fragility of the British *right to rule*. While their acts of violence were militarily successful but not significant, the real value in the activities of the Jewish Resistance lay in the “propaganda of the deed.”⁵¹ By contesting the legality of the Mandate government’s actions, the Resistance undermined the very framework of authority that the British had attempted to impose.

In response to the Jewish Resistance, the British employed the tried and tested operational approach that had worked against the Arab Revolt in 1936-39. The order from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, was to “crack down with troops....to turn the place upside down.”⁵² Large cordon and search operations such as Operation Agatha and Elephant, or collective punishment by curfew in cities such as Tel Aviv, were extremely effective in targeting the Jewish Agency and *Haganah* leadership. However, in achieving its military aims HMG was forced into compelling compliance from its Jewish subjects, as the rule of law could not be upheld without coercion. By resorting to violence the Mandate government ceded ground politically to its adversaries. Furthermore, in targeting the *Haganah* and Jewish Agency, Britain was eliminating the party with whom conciliation might be possible and forcing the Jewish population into the arms of *Lehi* and *Etzel*, the irreconcilables.

⁵¹ Propaganda of the deed is a phrase first associated with leftist French anarchists in the late 19th Century, but is widely used to describe terrorist acts. The propaganda value of an act lies in demonstrating, through disobedience or violence, that the state is incapable of providing security or order. The expectation of the actor is that the visible undermining of the state will have a significant impact upon third parties observing the act. The bombing of the King David Hotel, a culturally, politically and militarily significant venue, is the Palestinian example *par excellence*. For a brief discussion of propaganda of the deed in the historical and contemporary context, see John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to bin Laden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 54-60; 124-128.

⁵² Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 105.

In “turning the place upside down,” the British Army and the Palestine police force resorted to forms of resolute authority, long practiced in colonial environments against “restless natives,” that would decimate its moral and rational claim to legitimacy. In order to intimidate the Jewish Resistance the Mandate introduced the whip as a swift mechanism of enacting punishment and held the hangman’s noose as the ultimate threat. In response, *Lehi* and *Etsel* leaders stated that any use of either coercive measure would be met by a direct proportionate response i.e. the same punishment would be enacted upon British servicemen. These were not hollow threats. A group of British officers were publicly whipped in response to the British use of the lash on an *Etsel* member, and *Etsel* even had the death penalty revoked on two of its members by threatening to hang five British officers they held captive.⁵³ By meting out punishments upon the security forces, the Jewish resistance was contesting the authority of the state by demonstrating both the state’s barbarity and its extra-judicial imposition of order through violence.

The moral narrative pursued by *Lehi* and *Etsel* was extremely effective at securing the support of the Jewish population and resonated beyond Palestine’s borders. While the military success of the British imposition of order, and the *Etsel* bombing of the King David Hotel, caused the Jewish Resistance to again fracture into its traditionalist and revisionist camps in August 1946, the Jewish political movement had made significant ground abroad. While the British use of violence in Palestine was troubling to other nations, specifically the United States, the media reporting of the incarceration of concentration camp survivors, on arrival in Palestine, was published to world audiences. In a perverse development of its policy, Britain even attempted to introduce a policy of *Refoulement* or “driving back” immigrants to their port of departure. This policy even led to the transfer of refugees to the former concentration camp at Lübeck as a holding ground before further dispersion within the British Sector in Germany.⁵⁴ In frustration with the treatment of Holocaust survivors, and their ability to compromise with their Jewish subjects, the words of an *Etsel* inmate captured the Jewish perspective on British authority: “there can be no justice without the law. And the law of the fist is no law.

⁵³ The Ashbel-Simchon case of June 1946—both *Etsel* members had their death penalty commuted to life imprisonment by the High Commissioner—*Etsel* therefore released the five hostages.

⁵⁴ Rose, *A Senseless, Squalid War*, 161.

When it operates there are no judges and no accused. There are only cruel oppressors on the one side; and on the other side their resisting victims.”⁵⁵ The British operational approach, which had been so successful against the Arab Revolt, was unraveling. Similarly, the grand strategic context, in which she considered Palestine a fulcrum, had changed and would further limit HMG’s options.

As Winston Churchill’s statement articulated at the beginning of this chapter, by 1947 Britain had no strategic interest in maintaining a Mandate in Palestine. While the Foreign Office and General Staff continued to advocate for an expansive Imperial policy, the consensus in the Attlee government was for a reduction in commitment due to its perilous fiscal position. When India declared its independence in February 1947, the grand narrative for Britain’s maintenance of its Mandate collapsed. Similarly, Britain was forced to reorient its relationship with the United States based upon their relative economic power. In the face of the Truman Doctrine, and the United States’ commitment to supporting nationalist movements over dictatorships, Britain’s policies in Palestine risked US economic support for the bankrupt Empire. While there is undoubtedly an argument that domestic pressure from the Jewish lobby pushed President Harry Truman to publicly censure Britain for limiting immigration, his stance on Palestine was wholly consistent with his broader policy of advocating for self-determination.

By 1947 Britain’s position in Palestine was untenable. Unwilling to change its pro-Arab position; facing a determined and capable insurgency; seeking to rationalize its Empire; facing growing international pressure; and financially bankrupt, Britain’s pragmatic nature prevailed. In September 1947 HMG surrendered the Mandate to the United Nations and withdrew its forces to barracks. On May 14, 1948 the last of its troops and the High Commissioner lowered the Union Jack and set sail from Haifa, leaving the Arab and Jewish communities to reach their own consensus through violence. At midnight on the same day, the State of Israel was declared, with the departments of the Jewish Agency assuming the status of government ministries, the Jewish Agency’s Chairman becoming head of state and the *Haganah* becoming the Israeli Defense Force. At the stroke of midnight, the metaphorical Jewish framework of authority became the de facto government of the land.

⁵⁵ Begin, *The Revolt*, 243.

Summary

While it may seem a little trite, the Jewish Insurgency was wholly a creation of the British government. In attempting to derive grand strategic policy ends, the British failed to account for local conditions. While Great Britain sought to establish a client state with a grateful and supplicant population, it failed to attribute agency to that population, due to a patriarchal worldview.

To establish the client state HMG sought to preserve the Ottoman status quo while encouraging mass immigration and a fundamental change to the stasis quo. Similarly, HMG built an Iron Wall to enable its Jewish émigrés to establish a beach-head for follow on immigrants yet did so with one eye on the preservation of rights for the indigenous Arab population. The paradoxes inherent in British policy in Palestine would have proven extremely challenging to resolve had she been given the time, and allocated the requisite resource, to address them. However, events in Europe would determine otherwise.

While the Second World War placed enormous manpower and material demands upon the British Empire, the Holocaust, and Britain's determination to enact the 1939 MacDonald White Paper, undid her moral authority in Palestine. Having created a Jewish Agency to support Jewish immigrants, HMG effectively created a shadow governance structure to contest her policy. Across all branches of government, including the provision of security, the Jewish Agency was the legitimate authority. Moreover, to the Jewish and Arab populations, the Jewish Agency was openly contesting British rule by deliberately subverting immigration law to achieve its ends. With the instruments of coercion of the state being used to repel holocaust survivors, the Jewish population faced the quandary presented by Hobbes in the epigraph "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." If the state could not provide for the welfare of Jewish citizens and meet their moral expectations, then Begin's call to arms would resonate.

In both the Arab Revolt 1936-39 and the Jewish Insurgency 1944-48 the Palestinian Mandate model of governance was shown to be hollow. For the individual Arab or Jew the Mandate failed to meet their rational expectations in provision of basic services and in many ways failed doubly by negating their progressive expectations in

upholding anachronistic laws. Similarly, when the Arab or Jewish communities aired their genuine grievances, the only recourse available was to enforce draconian forms of collective punishment and to “turn the place upside down.” As HMG had no moral authority to rule, and perceived unrest as a threat to authority rather than an attempt to communicate a grievance, it reverted to the only mechanism that it knew for dealing with colonial malcontents- violent coercion.

By 1947, however, the die had been cast. With the strategic merits of Palestine overshadowed by the cost of maintaining a state by force of arms, Great Britain surrendered the Mandate. Ironically, while HMG was unable to govern effectively, the shadow institutions of the Jewish Agency that she had created did. Unfortunately, the framework of authority that the Jewish Agency offered was not one that applied universally to the Palestinian population, but only to Jewish Palestinians. The tragedy is that this problem, wholly of Great Britain’s instigation, still burns today.



Chapter 4

To “Keep Freedom Alive”- The War Within Vietnam.¹

There was just no sense in even talking about United States forces replacing the French in Indochina. If we did so, the Vietnamese could be expected to transfer their hatred of the French to us.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

*I am in blood stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more,
returning were as serious as go o'er*

William Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act III, Scene 4

A certain inevitability seems to mark escalating US military support for the government of South Vietnam from 1954 onwards. In hindsight, however, there was no predetermined path for the United States to follow. At critical junctures in 1945, 1954, and 1961, the United States might have decided escalating its participation was the right policy option to reach its strategic policy ends. The country's leaders, however, elected not to do so, based upon their assessment of local political conditions in first Indochina and later, South Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution enacted by Congress on 10 August 1964, with the subsequent commitment of air, maritime and land assets to the protection of South Vietnam and the punishment of North Vietnam, marked a fork in the road for US policy. The Resolution and what followed may have led to a significant divergence in American behavior, however, the reason this looks inevitable in hindsight is that it is wholly consistent with the way earlier US administrations conceptually framed the problem in Vietnam.

To bound this case study, the focus is upon the period preceding the commitment of a major US military footprint to South Vietnam, specifically, from the end of World War Two in the Pacific theatre to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. By looking solely at the period preceding the US escalation of the War in South Vietnam, a contrast is clear between the contemporary conception of the problem as a military contest and an alternate vision of a battle for legitimacy. Subsequently, the disparity between the

¹ John Foster Dulles' aspiration for SEATO.

rhetoric of US strategic policy and the ground-truth in French Indochina can be seen alongside the flawed operational approach that the US military embarked upon.

Successive American leaders viewed the contest from 1954 as a conflict between two states, under the auspices of the containment of international Communism, rather than as an internal struggle for legitimacy in South Vietnam. The fact that scholars and others refer to the conflict as the Vietnam War, rather than the War *within* Vietnam, is undoubtedly telling.

To comprehend the underlying issue in the contest over South Vietnam this chapter will first undertake an analysis of US policy spanning the end of World War Two to the fateful autumn of 1964, to demonstrate the United States' focus was on arming and maintaining a non-communist entity, the Republic of South Vietnam (RVN), with little regard for the politics of the indigenous population. Secondly, it moves from the grand strategic to the local framing of the problem and describes the form of governance that existed in South Vietnam following its establishment in 1954. Critical to this analysis is an appreciation of the nature of Vietnamese nationalism and the policies enacted by President Diem to secure his status. Finally, this chapter will contrast Diem's desire to compel compliance, and govern by elite, against the framework of authority that the population was willing to accept.

As a study of the importance of legitimacy as a consideration for military strategists, and as an acid test of Clausewitz's supreme test of judgment, the US participation in the war within South Vietnam is exemplary as a case study in folly. In a twist on one of the most memorable sound bites from Vietnam, a comment by a US Army Major after an operation in the village of Bến Tre, to keep freedom alive in South Vietnam, the United States found it necessary to destroy it.²

² Associated Press "Major Describes Move". *New York Times*. 8 February 1968, accessed online at <http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1968/02/08/88924930.html?pageNumber=14>

Strategic Context- Framing the Problem

The existential threat to the United States, in the form of possible nuclear war with the Soviet Union, cannot be downplayed when looking at the Vietnam War. The existence of this threat colored all policy decisions taken by successive Presidential administrations towards South East Asia after 1945.³ When the initial strategy to court Stalin's Russia as a co-victor and partner led to standoff across the boundary between Allied occupied and Soviet occupied Europe, with the descent of the so-called "Iron Curtain," most notably in Berlin and Greece, a move from détente to a more aggressive strategy was inevitable.⁴

The swift steps from George Kennan's Long Telegram, which outlined the strategy of containment, to the Truman Doctrine were to have a significant impact upon the United States' framing of regional problems wherever the specter of Communism or the hand of the Soviet state was suspected. In truth, this strategy was not wholly without basis, as attested by Soviet suppression of nationalist movements in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and Communist inspired revolutions in Greece (1944-1949) and China (1927-1949).⁵ However, as I shall argue later, appreciating local political context was critical to determining local policy. While the Soviets did exert significant pressure

³ As an interesting period article, Hans Morgenthau "To Intervene or Not to Intervene." *Foreign Affairs* Vol 45 Issue 3 (1967): 425–36, reveals the Realist perspective on the Soviet-US competition. By describing the Superpowers as "two secular religions," he argues "like the religious wars of the Seventeenth century, the war between communism and democracy does not respect national boundaries. It finds enemies and allies in all countries, opposing one and supporting the other regardless of the niceties of international law."

⁴ While the term *Iron Curtain* had been used several times to describe the division of Europe into Soviet and Allied spheres of influence, its broad public acceptance is generally tied to a speech called "Sinews of Peace" by the former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in Fulton Missouri. The speech can be found at http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Sinews_of_Peace, last accessed 6 May 15. An interesting juxtaposition exists between the terms Iron Curtain, used in the Cold War context, and Iron Wall, used in the context of establishing a Jewish national home. There is an obvious permanence to Churchill's perception of the British strategy in Palestine, while the Soviet Iron Curtain infers a limited temporal and structural value.

⁵ For a more complete study of the Cold War see Gaddis, John L. *The Cold War: A New History*. Penguin, 2005.

in Europe and parts of Asia, the nationalist cause in French Indochina may well have been the exception to the rule of Soviet subversion.⁶

While the stand-off between the United States and USSR was one of the defining elements of the political landscape following the Second World War, so too was the rise of nationalism in the void left by crumbling colonial empires. Due to both the fracturing of the perception of colonial invincibility at the hands of the Japanese and the colonists' dire economic situations following World War II, a wave of decolonization and nationalism swept the British, French, Dutch and Belgian's from the Pacific, Middle East, and Africa.

The dual forces of *realpolitik*, exercised by the competing blocs in the Cold War and the desire for national self-determination, was to leave some states, such as South Vietnam, as potentially sacrificial pawns in a greater game. While both Harry Truman (1947) and Nikita Khrushchev (1961) articulated policies that advocated the importance of national liberation movements, in truth, these were strategies to unseat their grand strategic adversaries influence through proxy struggles in limited conflicts and not genuine appeals to political independence.⁷

During World War II the United States had opposed a return of French colonial influence to Indochina and had even supported the nascent popular liberation movement—the Viet Minh—in dealing with the Japanese as a common foe.⁸ After the war, however, reflecting this grand strategic consideration, the Truman Administration switched policy and opposed the Viet Minh, and their leader Ho Chi Minh, because the

⁶ This is precisely the point that Morgenthau was seeking to make in “To Intervene or Not to Intervene,” p432: that Communism was “polycentric” and that the containment of the USSR and not Communism should be US policy.

⁷ US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated in Jul 54, before Dien Bien Phu, that “the important thing from now on is not to mourn the past but to seize the future opportunity to prevent the loss of northern Vietnam from leading to the extension of Communism throughout Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific.” In Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014, 624.

⁸ Schulzinger, Robert D. *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*. Oxford University Press, 1999, 19.

movement was notionally Communist in nature.⁹ Up until 1954, the policy of the United States was to support the French state's drive to re-establish its honor following their humbling at the hands of Hitler's Germany. Rebuilding France was important to American grand strategy as the country would serve as a bulwark to communism in Western Europe. Put simply, this grand strategic consideration was much more important than the desire for national self-determination of the people of South East Asia. In Indochina's case, the *realpolitik* consideration of "Europe first" would take precedence over more liberal, humanist policies on the periphery of the developing Cold War.¹⁰

While the official US policy was the reestablishment of French control over its colonies in Indochina, entailing significant economic and material assistance, events on the Korean peninsula between 1949 and 1953 would have a decisive effect upon narrowing any interpretive flexibility of that policy in South East Asia.¹¹ Following the Communist victory of Mao Tse-Tung's forces over the Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang in 1949, and the invasion of South Korea by its northern Communist neighbor, senior U.S. policymakers believed a Communist strategy in the Pacific had been revealed. Where states could not be co-opted by communist insurrection, a military assault would be launched to conquer any resistant neighbor. Similarly, if proxy states were incapable of achieving a decisive victory by their own hand, direct Soviet and Chinese involvement would be forthcoming to tip the balance.

⁹ US Secretary of State Dean Acheson is attributed with saying "recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement . . . should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina." in Polk, William R. *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Guerrilla War, From the American Revolution to Iraq*. Harper Perennial, 2008, 166.

¹⁰ The term "Europe First" is normally related to the strategic bargain agreed by the United Kingdom and American, upon the United States entry into the Second World War, to adopt a grand strategy of prioritizing Allied efforts against Germany and then Japan. Hence Europe first, then the Pacific. Similarly, the United States' policy in SE Asia post World War Two was focused upon the stability and recuperation of her allies over national determination, or Europe first, SE Asians second.

¹¹ Excellent social histories of this period, and the grand strategic calculus are contained in Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014; Schulzinger, Robert D. *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

One work in particular provides insights into how the context of the Cold War shaped American policy towards South Vietnam. Yuen Fung Khong's *Analogies at War* dissects the public and private pronouncements that shaped US decision making to commit major combat units to support the South Vietnamese government. Critically, it demonstrates how important events in Korea were in the formulation of American strategy towards Vietnam. While Khong demonstrates the importance of the Korean analogy to the decision of the Johnson Administration to commit large numbers of American ground forces in 1965, we can reasonably deduce that it was similarly important in the formulation of strategy from 1950 onwards as Vietnam was a major contemporary problem for American policymaking.¹² The pattern of Communist intervention seemed well established, and only by assisting states in improving their internal security and defense, combined with an offensive campaign against aggressor proxy states to deter invasion, could the dominoes be stopped from falling again.

A State in Name Only: South Vietnam

A kaleidoscope of changing territorial boundaries, great power intervention, and tribal allegiances makes it very difficult to present an accurate linear history of Vietnam. What is clear is that the state supported by the United States at the Geneva Accords in 1954, and subsequently bolstered through significant military and economic aid, was a novel creation in the history of South East Asia. The geographic boundaries of North and South Vietnam, as they were drawn in Geneva in 1954, overlaid a region fragmented by successive Chinese mandarin, French colonial, and traditional Vietnamese village politics. To treat South Vietnam as a homogenous whole, governed by consent, was an artificiality. As with many modern states, South Vietnam was created as a political expedient by the USSR, China, Great Britain, and the United States with no solid heritage to which to appeal.

Vietnam's long history is one of continued resistance to external rule. Historically, Vietnam had never been unified as a single state but was a collection of

¹² Khong, Yuen Foong. *Analogies At War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 97. and Dunn, Peter M. *The First Vietnam War*. St Martin's Press, 1985.

smaller states, ruled by different families and ethnic groups in dynasties with varied allegiance to any regional power that might tip the local scales of control. However, the backbone of governance, and a critical part of the regions social fabric, was formed by the Confucian ideas and Mandarin form of bureaucracy that had spread down the Indochinese peninsula from Ming dynasty China.¹³ Unfortunately, that social fabric tore apart in the 1940s and 50s in opposition to the French *colons*, or settlers, and their Indochinese supporters.¹⁴

French policy towards Indochina was typically imperial and wholly divisive, with five separate provinces of Laos, Cambodia, Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina established under French Union rule in 1887.¹⁵ Rather than implementing a uniform code of justice and governance, the French elected to rule by province, creating a fractured polity with neither centralized control nor uniformity. While there may not have been a strong group sense of collegiate identity in the past, the French form of rule did create was a strong sense of *the other* between the indigenous population and *colons*. While a grand unifying idea had been absent throughout Vietnam's 25-century existence, one grew in the 1920s as a counter to French rule and imperialism. Although Vietnam did not exist on a map, it did begin to exist in the minds of a group of nationalists.

To rule Indochina the French promoted a Vietnamese Roman Catholic elite in cosmopolitan centers and areas of commercial value. For example, in the Mekong, the so-called "rice basket of Asia," mass agriculture could be promoted for export to enable resource wealth to be extracted from Indochina for the benefit of France. To drive out the influence of Confucianism, and to supplant Vietnamese Roman Catholics into positions of power, the most fertile land was ceded to the Roman Catholic elites to enable them to hold the important local role of "landlord."¹⁶ Thus French *colons* and their

¹³ Duiker, William J., *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*. Hyperion, 2000, 10.

¹⁴ The *colon* was a key component of French colonial rule. By populating key administrative positions with French nationals, who married indigenous women, they exercised significant influence in French colonies and in some ways, rather ironically, became an argument for further maintenance of colonies because of the presence and interests of French nationals abroad.

¹⁵ Olson S, James, and Roberts, Randy. *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945-1995*. St. Martin's Press, 1996, 12.

¹⁶ Olsen and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 12.

Vietnamese supporters were able to establish a hierarchical colonial bureaucracy, based upon landholding, and left the older, feeble traditional Mandarin order to rule in poorer areas such as Tonkin and Annam. This form of rule, what one author has labeled “structural dualism,” proved to be a new twist on the colonial recipe of dividing and conquering.¹⁷ Unlike the traditional colonial recipe, however, the French destroyed the old order in Indochina without establishing a new one that could be accepted as broadly legitimate.

Although the Viet Minh were not formed until 1941, a movement towards recognizing the right of the indigenous population to self-determination had arisen since the arrival of the French.¹⁸ Ho Chi Minh would later become the leader and symbol of the organization from the 1940s. Before Ho’s establishment as a leader, the French committed a series of repressive actions that catalyzed local opinion against them. One such action, the Nghe An Revolt, featured the French use of airpower to suppress a local demonstration in Vinh in 1930.¹⁹ Through the disproportionate use of violence to quell unrest, known locally as the White Terror, the French dismantled the local Communist Party and demonstrated to the local population the brutal lengths that they were willing to go to maintain control of their colony.²⁰

The pretense of French rule, based on brute force and provincial competition, was shattered in 1940. The speed at which France was routed in Europe in the summer of 1940, followed by the collapse of French forces in the face of a Japanese invasion of Indochina in September 1940, led many Vietnamese to question the superiority of French rule. Indeed the subsequent supplication of French colonial leaders to a conquering Imperial Japanese Army of Asians irreparably shattered any pretense that French rule was a legitimate form of governance.²¹

Defeat at the hands of the Japanese was disastrous for French rule in Indochina. A further blow among the indigenous population’s perception of the French mandate to

¹⁷ Lomperis, Timothy J. *The War Everyone Lost-and Won: America’s Intervention in Vietnam’s Twin Struggles*. CQ Press, 1992, 25.

¹⁸ The Viet Minh is a short form for *Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội*, or League for Vietnamese Independence.

¹⁹ Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 180.

²⁰ Dunn, Peter M., *The First Vietnam War*. St Martin’s Press, 1985, 6.

²¹ Dunn, *The First Vietnam War*, 52.

rule was the Japanese insistence that the French collect the peasant rice harvest from 1943, in order to offset shortages for the Japanese domestic market. While the number of peasants who starved to death in Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina is contested, scholars suggest figures between a half-a-million and two-million dead.²² As a result of this collection and famine, the indigenous Vietnamese population viewed the French simply as the lackeys of the Japanese and the enforcers of unpopular policies. Similarly, the passive attitude adopted by French colonial administrators toward the Japanese did not help their position with the indigenous population. With France over-run by the Germans, and the Vichy regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain in power, French colonial administrators adopted the approach of placidly sitting on the sidelines, following Japanese orders, and waiting for the war to end before restoring French order and rule. The Viet Minh, however, contested Japanese occupation and began to advocate a policy of local resistance for national independence.

By the war's end, as Ho noted on behalf of the people of Indochina, France had fled, Japan had capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai (the heir to the 300 year old Nguyen dynasty) had abdicated responsibility and the country was on the cusp of establishing a republic.²³ The Viet Minh, with the support of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), had fought a determined battle against the Japanese that had culminated in popular allegiance in most rural areas, as well as the seizure of the major cities of Hue and Hanoi.²⁴ More importantly, in the absence of an effective form of government, the Viet Minh had enacted significant local land reform to gain the support of the population. Regardless of what had happened in the other theatres of war, what the people of Indochina had observed was a tenacious and brave fight by local people to overthrow the brutal Imperial Japanese while the French, at best, neutrally observed. Despite Emperor Bao Dai's warning to the French government that if they returned post 1945 they "will no longer be obeyed: each village will be a nest of resistance every enemy a former friend,"

²² Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 26.

²³ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 23.

²⁴ As an act of expediency in war, Martin Windrow, describes the relationship as an exchange of local information (HUMINT) for arms and training: with long term support an unstated aspiration for the Viet Minh, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam*. Da Capo, 2004, 82.

European *realpolitik* was prioritized over local conditions, and the French returned to Indochina to reclaim their colony.²⁵

Despite Ho Chi Minh's attempts to establish a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), by uniting the states of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, no external power would recognize his claim. Critically, a significant rift in US policy opened between those on the ground in the OSS, who saw the plight of the Vietnamese people and their rightful claim to self-rule, and those advocating the grand strategic design of the victorious Allies.²⁶ Ho Chi Minh's aspiration was for a complete upending of the French-imposed social order. For this reason, Ho was anti-feudal and anti-imperialist and pursued insurgency or "people's war" as a mechanism to overthrow Japanese, then French rule. Ho may have been a communist, however, he did not believe that his politics would preclude an accommodation with the United States to secure an independent DRV. However, absent favorable conditions on the ground, the French were reinstated and the First Indochinese War commenced between the Viet Minh and the French.

In the vacuum following the Allied victory in the Pacific theatre and the capitulation of Japan, Emperor Bao Dai handed rule during the August Revolution to the only viable force in Indochinese politics- Ho's Viet Minh. Having travelled to the United States following the First World War; been aroused by Wilson's call to liberal progress at Versailles; and having fought alongside the OSS, Ho recognized that American's were practical forward-looking people.²⁷ In truth, he calculated that this character trait would cause them to recognize that the legitimate claim to rule in Indochina lay with the indigenous people.²⁸ However, when the United States supported regressive French

²⁵ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 23.

²⁶ Schulzinger, Robert D. *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*. Oxford University Press, 1999, 19.

²⁷ While Olsen and Roberts' *Where the Domino Fell* offers a neat summary of Ho's life and the importance of his worldview, for a more complete assessment see Duiker, William J., *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*. Hyperion, 2000.

²⁸ During the Second World War Roosevelt was extremely hostile towards the re-establishment of French colonies and saw peace as an opportunity for decolonization. Unfortunately, this policy placed him squarely at odds with both Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. What would follow under Truman was a significant shift in US attitudes. For details see Dunn, *The First Vietnam War*, 69.

Colonial interests over those of the people of Indochina, he determined that the United States was now a foe and must be deterred from military intervention.²⁹

From the French perspective, following their humiliation at the hands of the Germans in World War Two, the restoration of their overseas territories was a vital act of moral rejuvenation. Somewhat ironically, this had to happen at the expense of a Vietnamese drive for self-determination. In the French paradigm, the Viet Minh was an insurgency that had swollen against Japanese rule and had to be lanced. In a sarcastic riposte by his aide, undoubtedly indicative of his character, the French High Commissioner appointed to oversee this task, Admiral Georges D'Argenlieu, was described as "the most brilliant mind of the Twelfth Century."³⁰ D'Argenlieu swiftly took the offensive against the Viet Minh by shelling Haiphong from the sea, killing an estimated 6,000 people, and annexed the prosperous region of Cochinchina, with its capital of Saigon, from the rest of Indochina. From their acts, the French intent was clear: Ho Chi Minh's popular movement would be brutally repressed and France would rule Indochina.

The years 1946-54 saw the French, with significant US aid, attempt to militarily suppress the Viet Minh insurgency and to re-impose their colonial bureaucracy.³¹ As the US paradigm mirrored the French, therefore, so too did their path in problem resolution. As Vice President Richard Nixon noted in 1953, in considering US support to Operation Vulture, "there is no reason why the French should not remain in Indochina and win. They have greater manpower, and a tremendous advantage over their adversaries, particularly airpower."³² Nixon's comments articulated his beliefs: the war in Indochina was a contest that could be won by the use of overwhelming force, and the French were the legitimate government. This US position would continue for the next 12 years and lead to the commitment of major American combat units in 1965 to support a central government devoid of influence, other than coercion, over its population. As Bernard

²⁹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, 598.

³⁰ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 29.

³¹ For a detailed tactical perspective, see *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam*. Da Capo, 2004.

³² Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 44.

Fall observed in a *Street Without Joy* “Americans were dreaming different dreams than the French but walking in the same footsteps.”³³

Supported by Communist China with arms and training via the shared Tonkin-China border, the Viet Minh had established a very firm grasp on the population. By 1953 they controlled two-thirds of the territory, minus urban enclaves and an area on the Cambodian border.³⁴ As a demonstration of the waning influence of the French colonial state upon the populace, when Emperor Bao Dai issued a draft for 94,000 soldiers for security duties to free French units for combat operations in Tonkin, only 5,400 men reported for duty.³⁵ The framework of authority, from the state’s perspective, had been shattered. Vice President Nixon’s earlier assessment was wholly wrong. There was a very good reason why the French should not remain in Indochina and win: the state could merely command and coerce as it had no power.

As the nine years fighting in the Resistance against a Franco-Japanese then a Franco-American regime taught them, real power lay with the Viet Minh given their local presence. As Jeffrey Race records in *War Comes to Long An*, “the Viet Minh slept with the people, the village councils slept with the soldiers in their outposts.”³⁶ The village councils’ safety could not be guaranteed as they had lost the moral right to rule due to their corruption and barbarity. The Viet Minh, however, were one and of the people. By resisting the French, Japanese, and now the Americans, they gained the affection of the population.

The inability of the French to establish a viable form of government and their tactical defeat at Dien Bien Phu led to a desire for France to extricate herself from Indochina with honor. The Geneva Accords of 1954, attended by China, the USSR, Great Britain, France, the United States, and representatives of the Viet Minh, were an attempt to achieve a political compromise that might halt the fighting.³⁷ In truth, they merely cemented the entrenched positions already held. The formal outcome was the

³³ Quoted in Logevall, *Embers of War*, 714.

³⁴ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 36.

³⁵ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 47.

³⁶ Race, Jeffrey. *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*. University of California, 1972, 40.

³⁷ For a detailed appreciation of the differing national positions, particularly the tension between the United States and Great Britain, see Longevall, *Embers of War*, 549-616.

separation of Indochina into four states: Laos, Cambodia, North Vietnam (Tonkin plus part of Annam), and South Vietnam (Cochinchina plus the remainder of Annam) and the promise of free and open elections, by 1956, in order to determine the future status of Vietnam as either two countries separated at the 17th parallel or one unified state.

Critically, neither the United States nor South Vietnam was signatories to the Geneva Accords.³⁸ In a move that resonates when one observes Russia's position with respect to the rebellion in the Donbas in 2014, as non-signatories and "non-participants" in the conflict, the United States claimed that they were not party to nor therefore bound by the accords. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, to the US, looked very much like the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, established the previous year. The natural policy line must therefore replicate that taken to support South Korea, namely the creation and sustainment of a non-communist government at any cost.³⁹

To Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh the Geneva Accords were a betrayal. The aspiration to unite the states of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina as one Vietnam was denied, albeit, a popular referendum was promised by the end of 1956. Knowing that the weight of popular support was behind them, the Viet Minh put down their arms and returned to their villages. With a broad political base, the Viet Minh would just await the election then defeat the South Vietnamese government, united under the detested French client Emperor Bao Dai, at the ballot box.

In addressing the differences between the French and US positions on Indochina, McGeorge Bundy later claimed "the central fact of French involvement in Vietnam was the persistent seven-year effort to re-establish French colonial rule. The Johnson Administration was committed to a different cause."⁴⁰ As Johnson's National Security

³⁸ The United States could not be a signatory as President Eisenhower stated "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese affairs..who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai." Longevall, *Embers of War*, 610. To sign the Geneva Accords would therefore have been to undermine the stated US policy of containing Communism.

³⁹ For a more complete appreciation of the role that the Korean War played in this assessment, see Khong, *Analogies at War*, 97-147.

⁴⁰ Goldstein, Gordon M. *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam*. Holt Paperbacks, 2009, 22.

Advisor, Bundy's comment is illuminating as while the cause in Vietnam may have changed, to countering Communism, the means would not. In creating the state of South Vietnam, the United States was following the logic that had guided its policy in Indochina since 1945, namely placing grand strategic desires ahead of, and even in spite of, local conditions, and therefore ignoring the local framework of authority. What the US now needed was an astute politician who could shore up the divisions in the new South Vietnamese state and propel the country forward. The individual chosen by Emperor Bao Dai to become the First President of South Vietnam was Ngo Dinh Diem.

Compelling Compliance- 1954-64

The Geneva Accords offered an excellent opportunity to bring peace to South Vietnam by establishing a unity government that could break from its French colonial heritage while dealing with peasant grievances. Unfortunately, while Diem was successful in rapidly consolidating his position as head of state and ejecting the French, his perpetuation of government by elite, and a feudal system of land management, failed to address the popular demand for social change.⁴¹ While Diem's penetration of the state apparatus was extremely successful in suppressing the Viet Minh, the brutality with which he exercised control led to a growing resentment of the central government. By 1959 the conditions were ripe for a popular social revolt, with support from returning Viet Minh from North Vietnam, which led to an increasingly military response by Diem to address the deteriorating security situation.

The misreading of this revolt as an invasion, rather than a popular social response to feudal policies, would be mirrored in US attitudes to the insurgency. As evinced in this 1962 statement by the US Army Chief of Staff "it is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in South-East Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem is military," this

⁴¹ This challenge is referred to in the literature on South Vietnam as Diem's Dilemma: enact the reforms requested by the United States and risk ceding control to the Viet Minh/ NLF or purge the countryside of the Viet Minh/ NLF but risk a popular revolt in favor of the organization that defeated the French and Japanese.

worldview would eventually lead the United States into a war in South Vietnam.⁴² Absent a framework of authority that the majority of the population could accept, Diem and his successors relied upon coercion. The resulting war was caused by a failure to conceive the problem as a crisis of legitimacy and to therefore use inappropriate instruments of the state. By instead framing the problem as a North Vietnamese Communist land grab, the resort to the use of military force would generate a vicious self-defeating spiral.

The Mandate of Heaven

Upon his selection by Emperor Bao Dai to assume the role of President of South Vietnam, the nationalist Diem moved rapidly to consolidate his position. In doing so, Diem practiced rule by the traditional Indochinese concept of the Mandate of Heaven, similar in some ways to the European claim to the Divine Right of Kings. Compromise and democratic institutions would be anathema, as Diem observed, as “our political system has been based not on the concept of management of the public affairs by the people or their representatives, but rather by an enlightened sovereign.”⁴³ In Diem’s conception of The Mandate of Heaven, legitimacy was inherent in his position and power was vested in the instruments of the state. For this reason, he wielded those instruments ruthlessly to cement the strength of the central government, his family- the Ngo, and their followers in the Roman Catholic elite.

At the national political level, Diem was extremely efficient at breaking the influence of colonial France and Emperor Bao Dai. In a series of direct confrontations, including the Battle of Saigon in early May 1955, he challenged the powerful Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Bin Xuyen sects who had all been elemental to the French mechanism of rule.⁴⁴ Subsequently, through the passing of legislation called "Ordinance Number 6" he

⁴² General Earle Gilmore “Bus” Wheeler, US Army Chief of Staff (1962- 64), quoted in Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 105.

⁴³ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 61.

⁴⁴ The sects in Vietnamese culture were a mixture of political, economic and religious organizations which enabled stability through the establishment of fiefdoms or spheres of influence. For more information see the excellent article: Fall, Bernhard B. “The Political- Religious Sects of Viet-Nam,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Sep 1955. Online at

furnished the police with the power needed to intern members of the sects, and the Viet Minh, by categorizing them as threats to the state and common security. In short order, the security apparatus of the state became the foundation for a narrow kleptocracy. Having targeted the sects he turned to Emperor Bao Dai himself, and through a rigged plebiscite had the population choose between a republican or monarchical form of government. With the sects emasculated and the Emperor ousted, any French foothold in South Vietnam evaporated.⁴⁵ As a testament to his nationalist credentials, President Diem expedited the departure of the final French troops from South Vietnam in April 1956. Critically, the loss of French influence on South Vietnamese policy meant the death of any chance Ho held for a referendum on unification, as promised in Geneva. As Diem and his US advisors were not signatories to the agreement, they were not bound to its conditions.

Having dealt with the macro political issues that he faced, Diem worked in parallel to penetrate the state to ensure compliance. Critical to consolidating his power was Diem's appeal to the same Catholic elite that had been favored by the French to ensure that a measure of bureaucratic proficiency could be maintained; while this enabled him to govern without French influence, it would also present a significant moral challenge to the population, as the status quo appeared to be maintained. The hand on the whip may have changed, but the instruments of enforcement did not.

While Ordinance Number 6 had a significant effect upon the membership of the Viet Minh, so too did Diem's dismantling of their village apparatus established during the resistance. The end of the violent contest against the French allowed the landlords to return to their villages and take back the land that had been redistributed to peasants by the Viet Minh.⁴⁶ Similarly, in ruling in accordance with Diem's conception of the Mandate of Heaven, the imposition of provincial, canton, district and village leaders enabled the Diem regime to build a dependent culture amongst those tasked to manage

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3035404?uid=3739520&uid=2&uid=4&uid=3739256&sid=21106275028501>

⁴⁵ Longevall, *Embers of War*, 648.

⁴⁶ This was enacted in legislation under Diem's land-reform program. Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 97.

the country. By investing this infrastructure with the “instruments of manipulation” or the ability to tax, set policy and employ violence, Diem exercised his control.⁴⁷

Critical to the exercise of rational authority by Diem was the linkage between the provincial leader, appointed by Diem’s family, and the village council. By 1957, through legislative change, Diem had constructed a pseudo-imperialist governance structure with significant power vested in the provincial leader- an appointed military officer.⁴⁸ The provincial governor bypassed the canton and district—largely titular posts to guarantee a stipend—and operated directly through the village council. Critically, as well as holding the authority to tax, the provincial chief wielded the security apparatus of the state: the Dan Ve (part time local militia), the Bao An (full time civil guard) and the hated anti-subversion unit the Cong An. By the manipulation of tax, land holdings, and violence, the provincial chief and his village councils controlled the population.

Because control was exercised by indiscriminate violence and without popular assent, a fertile breeding ground was established for the Viet Minh’s return. As US estimates placed roughly 10,000 Viet Minh operatives in South Vietnam in 1954, the execution of between 25,000 and 75,000 people as subversives and the imprisonment of 100,000 people between 1955-60 shows that the average villager bore the brunt of the regime’s capricious and brutal behavior.⁴⁹ Symbolically, Diem’s reintroduction of the guillotine for local executions served as an emblem to the peasant population of the hated French imperial rule. In a crisis of moral legitimacy, Diem and his American advisers began to be referred to as *My-Diem* or the American-Diem. While this may seem innocuous, the implication is shattering; the US-Diem regime was comparable, for the rural peasant, to the old French and Japanese regimes that had sustained popular resistance.

Crucially, the regime was a product of US aid and import taxes and was not sustained by direct popular taxation.⁵⁰ As the state did not rely upon the population’s assent for policies but was able to source revenue externally, the state was free to exercise

⁴⁷ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 12.

⁴⁸ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 22.

⁴⁹ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 69.

⁵⁰ Polk, *Violent Politics*, 50.

its security apparatus without recourse to popular support. While Diem could draw income from the United States he did not need to hold the support of his population for his policies. This aberrant position meant that the state's interaction with its populace could be one way- to command- and the framework of authority that it therefore rested upon was illegitimate to the rural peasantry, as governance was imposed and not conferred.

While Diem's consolidation enabled him to gain a monopoly on violence it prevented him gaining popular support. By ruling from his capital Saigon and exercising authority through direct appointees, Diem built a governance structure that an early US advisor described as populated by "fair weather friends."⁵¹ In parallel to the creation of a highly centralized form of control, Diem fashioned, post Ordinance 6, an image of a homogeneous adversary that was wholly abstract. Viet Cong—or South Vietnamese Communist—was a pejorative term fashioned by Diem to describe the adversaries of the state when in fact its enemies were Buddhists, Vietnamese *Bin Xuyen* mafia, the sects, nationalists, and communists. It also lumped the Viet Minh, a nationalist umbrella movement, under the banner of communism to guarantee US support in their eradication. Like the misuse of the term "terrorist" after 11 September 2001, targeting "the Viet Cong" became a pseudonym for settling local disputes and eradicating rivals through the Cong An, regardless of their politics. When the Viet Minh responded with the assassination of 700 village officials in 1957, Diem replied with a collective punishment strategy that shattered any claim he held to being a form of legitimate authority.⁵²

A critical component of the Mandate of Heaven, overlooked by Diem, was the recognition that "the laws of the emperor yield to the customs of the village."⁵³ In an ancient articulation of the conception of power and consent that I described in chapter two, the Mandate of Heaven was not a *carte blanche* to centralized and accumulated control, but a mechanism for just rule in accordance with local needs, hence its longevity over centuries. In Diem's exercise of control, the Mandate of Heaven was corrupted and was twisted by his land policies. As part of the consolidation of his elite, he courted

⁵¹ Polk, *Violent Politics*, 80.

⁵² Polk, *Violent Politics*, 60.

⁵³ Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost-and Won*, 19.

Roman Catholics from the newly created Democratic Republic of Vietnam with privileged access to land at the expense of current tenants and landlords. By claiming that there had been a Marian apparition, a testament to the sanctity of his Catholic dominated regime, over 500,000 Catholics were resettled in the Central Highlands alone in 1960 from North Vietnam.⁵⁴ The subsequent forced displacement of local peasants, in order to make way for Roman Catholic migrants, would prove to be a critical recruiting ground for the Viet Minh.

When it became clear that elections would not be conducted in 1956, the Viet Minh produced *Path of the Revolution in the South*, part strategy and part propaganda, to articulate their approach. The fight in South Vietnam, according to *Path of the Revolution*, would be anti-feudal.⁵⁵ It was primarily a contest over land ownership and hence a direct challenge, at the village level, to the land-owners and their taxation. As the revolution was anti-feudal it was a contest over competing social systems, and appealed directly to the primary concern of every tenant farmer. A crucial early advantage for the Viet Minh was the moral authority that they held as the organization that had successfully supported the people against the French and Japanese. Aided by the loss in moral authority suffered by Diem's regime due to its use of repressive violence, the pendulum of perceived legitimacy began to swing against Diem's imposed rule. By mid 1959 it was time for the Viet Minh to match words with deeds, and to extend its rational as well as moral claim to legitimacy.

While a slow ratcheting up of insurgent activity commenced in 1959, it would be matched by organizational improvements and the establishment of the National Liberation Front (NLF) at the Third Party Congress in September 1960. As an umbrella organization, like its predecessor the Viet Minh, the NLF sought not the overthrow of the government but of the whole social system in the South. The focus was therefore on the village as the point of leverage, not the central government, and the primary weapon was the *Chi Bo*, or village council. Through the reintroduction of "Southern" Viet Minh from the DRV, violence was employed to rapidly change the conditions on the ground. By targeting village governance structures directly, the NLF assassinated 2500 village

⁵⁴ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 63.

⁵⁵ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 75.

officials in 1959 and a further 4000 in 1960.⁵⁶ This staggering change in local dynamics would have the effect Stathis Kalyvas articulated in *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* of wresting control from the Diem government and transferring it to the NLF. While the NLF's message resonated with the rural peasant, violence played a significant role in altering peasants' rational decision making, based upon the changed security dynamic.

To cement their gains, each *Chi Bo* rapidly set about solving local problems by a mixture of coercion and co-option. By establishing a series of "contingent incentives" the NLF set a contract with the local population that rewarded participation and induced motivation.⁵⁷ Through local inclusivity rather than elitism, land redistribution, reduced taxation, and the removal of capricious threats of violence by underpaid or under supervised local militiamen or the Cong An, the NLF gave the rural population a stake in their own future. Most importantly, the establishment of rational and moral norms that resonated with core local grievances conferred legitimacy upon the NLF activity. Through the use of violence to eradicate the coercive elements of the state, the NLF established a rational framework of authority that relied heavily upon cooperative and not commanded behavior. The framework of authority established by the Viet Minh, albeit using violence to contest government control, was consensual and not coercive for the rural peasant.

As all provincial chiefs were military officers, their natural response to the deterioration of security in their area of responsibility was to apply military force. However, as Kalyvas, Arendt, and Jeffrey Record all argued in Chapter Two, only in very narrow circumstances does such violence work *for* the user. In the case of the NLF, the indiscriminate application of government violence further drove the population into the arms of their movement. As an indication of the priorities of the regime, 78% of the US budget to South Vietnam between 1956-60 was spent on their military vice two% on housing, health and community development.⁵⁸ Their conception of the problem is clear

⁵⁶ Polk, *Violent Politics*, 174. The figures quoted by Polk are actually ascribed to the prominent historian and journalist Bernhard Fall. A vocal critic of US policy in Vietnam and Diem's regime, he was unfortunately killed by a landmine in South Vietnam in 1967 while reporting from the field.

⁵⁷ Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 174.

⁵⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, 669.

from this statistic: the challenge to government authority was violent and not social. Therefore, as US Army Chief of Staff General Wheeler articulated earlier, the solution to the Viet Cong problem was the application of force. However, to reveal the insurgent "fish" hiding amongst the population, the government of South Vietnam would need to drain the swamp. In truth, the Diem response was more akin to catching fish in a small pond by throwing in a hand grenade.

While the role of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) is well-known in the conduct of operations in South Vietnam, much less is articulated about the role played by the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM) and its leader, Robert Thompson.⁵⁹ Fresh on the heels of a successful counter-insurgency campaign, British political and military leaders aspired to offer Diem and Washington direct advice based upon their recent experience in countering a communist insurgency. However, significant disparities between the two visions for success would prove fatal for Diem's regime.⁶⁰ The Strategic Hamlet Program, operational between 1961 and 1963, was an attempt by Diem to incorporate "best practice" from British experience in the Malayan Emergency. While it was described as a total failure in *The Pentagon Papers* due to errors in execution, its failings run deeper and can be attributed to significant differences in culture and context.⁶¹

The first critical difference between the Malayan and Vietnamese campaigns was contextual. In Malaya the British sought to enable a move to independence and therefore co-opt the population to support their campaign. The contingent incentive was that if they supported the drive to eradicate the guerrilla movement, they would secure their

⁵⁹ In an attempt to resource wider participation, President Lyndon Johnson had pressed British Prime Minister Harold Wilson for British Infantry participation, nonchalantly requesting at least "a platoon of bagpipers." Despite Australian and New Zealand's participation, Britain's response would come in the form of an advisory team only, albeit an extremely adept and experienced one. Dixon, Paul Ed. *The British Approach to Counter-Insurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, 14.

⁶⁰ To gain Thompson's perspective of US conduct of the war, post his departure from South Vietnam, see Thompson, Sir Rupert. "America Fights the Wrong War." *The Spectator*, 11 August 1966. Scathing in his criticism but lavish in witticism it concludes "The Americans have displayed their power. Let them now dispose it to win the glory."

⁶¹ Polk, *Violent Politics*, 178.

right to self-determination. Unfortunately, the opposite was the case in South Vietnam. The execution of the Strategic Hamlet program was a mechanism for preventing the unification of the country and for denying land reform. The program was specifically designed to afford the government even greater control over peasant access to basic resources, hence bound them to become dependent upon the Diem regime. By the end of 1962, following a vigorous expansion of the program across South Vietnam, 3,225 hamlets had been constructed and 4.3 million peasants were forcibly relocated.⁶² While impressive in scale and pace of enactment, the program demonstrated clearly Diem's illegitimate claim to rule due to a failure to understand the traditions of the Vietnamese peasant.

The second major divergence between operational theatres was cultural, specifically the concept of land, or *xa*. While the Enlightenment in Europe separated man from nature and sought to codify the natural world more carefully, the same intellectual tradition did not exist in the Orient. Analogous to the Native American conception of land ownership, in Indochinese tradition land has a much more holistic and personal meaning than in the West. Critically, the Indochinese character *xa* holds three synonymous meanings- land, people and sacred.⁶³ The attachment to the land was spiritual as it formed a core element of a family identity and community. To separate a man from his land would mean eradicating his identity and desecrating his familial lineage. Ignorant of this cultural norm, Diem ordered the mass relocation of rural peasantry to separate them from the NLF.

The Strategic Hamlet program offers a strong metaphor for the difference in approach between the NLF and the government of South Vietnam. To Diem, the population was a commodity- the prize- and could be contested. Society could be uprooted and manipulated to "protect the people from their own disloyalty."⁶⁴ To the NLF, the population was the *means* for enacting revolution, therefore had to be mobilized. Recalling Michel Foucault's argument in Chapter Two, because power is exercised and not held, the NLF recognition of the population as the means of social

⁶² Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 96.

⁶³ Polk, *Violent Politics*, 172.

⁶⁴ Gurman, Hannah. *Hearts and Minds: A People's History of Counterinsurgency*. New Press, The, 2013, 87.

change, and not simply the ends, was crucial to their success over the established government.⁶⁵

By corralling the population into hamlets, the MAAG was able to get on with doing what it did best- facilitating the South Vietnamese Army's find, fix, and finishing of the Viet Cong.⁶⁶ The MAAG was so successful that by the end of 1962 the incumbent Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, commented that "every quantitative measurement we have shows we're winning this war."⁶⁷ Through defoliation, mass relocation, the creation of "free bombing zones" outside strategic hamlets, and body counts, the MAAG unleashed an impressive and dizzying array of military capability. The more appropriate question—to what end—was left unanswered. Military performance measures based upon false metrics fed a narrative that the contest was military and not social, and created a spiral of violence. In Social Constructivist terms, the US had achieved closure on the problem in South Vietnam. The second order effect was that the MAAG became an unintentional advocate of the NLF's message: *My-Diem* was an instrument of repression and would not meet the needs of the people. To Diem, and the population of South Vietnam, the MAAG became a coercive tool designed to command. The people of South Vietnam, however, would not obey.

The imposition of martial law in the summer of 1963 demonstrated clearly the moral bankruptcy of the Diem regime and the disparity between the concepts of governance expected by the people and the state. Despite attempts by the US and BRIAM to pressure Diem to accept social and economic reforms within the Strategic Hamlet program, it was instead used to shore up the regime's position rather than to ameliorate popular grievances. Similarly, the brutal suppression of the celebration of Buddha's birthday led to widespread disorder, the use of live rounds by the army against

⁶⁵ This is effectively the central thesis of Smith, Rupert. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*. Penguin Books, 2007, 168. In framing contemporary warfare, including the war in Vietnam, as "war amongst the people," Smith argues that "force is being used to form the people's intentions as to their governance: throughout all lines of operations the revolutionary is working to increase the acceptance of the people to be governed by the revolution."

⁶⁶ Krepinevich Andrew F. Jr. *The Army and Vietnam*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, 68.

⁶⁷ Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 92.

Buddhist protestors, and, foreshadowing the catalyst for the Arab Spring in late 2011, the self-immolation of a 73-year-old Buddhist monk in protest in Saigon.

Diem was presented with a dilemma: maintain the hard-ball approach that had so characterized his regime to date, or bow to US demands for moderation and economic reform. Unfortunately for Diem, he felt that bowing to US demands would lead to his delegitimization in the eyes of the populace. What he did not realize, was that this had happened long ago. When his sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, stated in response to Thich Quang Duc's immolation that she would be "willing to provide the gasoline for the next barbeque," she exposed the chasm in appreciation between the elite and the sympathy of the people.⁶⁸ Echoing Marie Antoinette's fateful "let them eat cake" on the cusp of the French Revolution, Nhu's comments would represent the death throes of another despotic and unpopular regime.

The collapse of the Diem regime, culminating in a coup and his assassination, would spell the end of any opportunity to resolve the crisis of legitimacy in South Vietnam in the United States' favor. Following Diem's assassination in November 1963, the country held 12 heads of state in a series of revolving door coups in two years.⁶⁹ The South Vietnamese government would now become a wholly self-serving entity, attempting to secure positions of authority, devoid of the consent of the population. In a continuation of Diem's legacy, government was imposed and titular, not conferred nor consensual. With the assassination of President Kennedy in the same month as Diem, and a deteriorating security situation in South Vietnam, the subsequent US administration would drift towards further military escalation.

Summary

The war in Vietnam still holds much mystery for Americans, as it did at the time. For example, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff in 1963, General Maxwell Taylor, observed "the ability of the Viet Cong continuously to rebuild their units and make good

⁶⁸ Quoted in Olson and Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell*, 100.

⁶⁹ Paul, Christopher, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan. *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*. RAND Corporation, 2013, 184.

their losses is one of the mysteries of this war."⁷⁰ What General Taylor's comment reveals is the depth of US misperception of the problem that they faced in South Vietnam. While many criticisms have been made of US practice, most of which are warranted, the more critical failure was conceptual in nature. The reason that the Viet Cong could continuously rebuild their units was that the nature of the problem the US faced was not a monolithic international Communist conspiracy, but rather a heterogeneous popular revolt.

The Viet Cong confronting the US was much the same entity that held off the Chinese, Japanese, and French before them: the rural majority of Indochina. The battle in Vietnam was not between North and South, the Viet Cong and the U.S military, or Communism versus the Free World, but for a legitimate framework of authority that the population could accept.

Diem's South Vietnam was a creation of the United States to buttress against the perceived spread of Communism. Unfortunately, the focus on resolving a grand strategic challenge did not account for local conditions. Through government by elite, an unwillingness to implement land reform, the coercive use of the security apparatus of the state to quash dissent, and the relocation of a large rural population, Diem demonstrated that his model for governance did not match the expectations of his people. Diem may have been anti-imperial, but this merely served as an expedient to cement his powerbase. His refusal to allow a popular referendum on unification, and his unwillingness to enact meaningful land reform, solidified his power with the ruling elite but fundamentally undermined his moral authority with the majority of the population. His recourse to violence to enforce policy further demonstrated the absence of power in the central state and, as the graphic (Figure 3) below illustrates, tipped the balance in favor of his opponents.

For the United States, the available choice of alternatives to Diem may have been unpalatable, but the subsequent cost in lives and reputation would have significant international and domestic repercussions. Unfortunately, 1964 would see precipitous developments under the Johnson Administration that would draw the United States in even further militarily and present the same problem to which Shakespeare's Macbeth

⁷⁰ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 99.

attested in the epigraph. The battle for legitimacy in South Vietnam had been lost before the expansion of US participation. Disastrously, so too had an appreciation of the very issue they were contesting.

For the Viet Minh, and later the NLF, an emotional and moral attachment already existed with the population, and they therefore started with a significant advantage over Diem. However, Diem's early consolidation largely blunted the Viet Minh's ability to have local effect. However, an opportunity to counterattack was presented through the cumulative perception among the population of increasingly illegitimate legislation, compounded by the use of violence by the state. When laws and regulations were obviously designed to favor elites and not tackle popular grievances, the balance of support within the population began to swing towards the NLF.

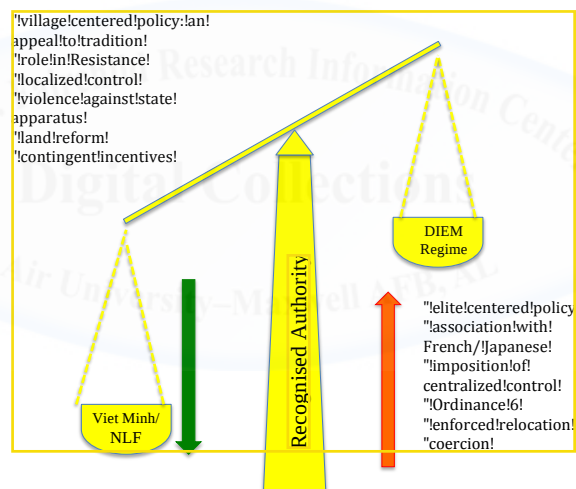


Figure 3- The Contest for Authority in South Vietnam 1954-64.

Source: author's original work.

When the NLF were seen to remove the local threat of violence by the state, and instituted policies designed to have immediate impact at the village level, the contest swung significantly in their favor both rationally and morally. The framework of authority that the population accepted was that presented by the NLF. Power, therefore, lay with the opposition. In a cruel twist of irony, to keep freedom alive, the United

States sacrificed a popular movement to keep the government of South Vietnam in place. In doing so, and with the benefit of hindsight, it appears the United States may have merely delayed the inevitable.



Chapter 5

Conclusion

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance.

Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*.

The Main Themes Revised

The specific goal of this thesis has been to provide an amplifying perspective upon the failures of the West in military interventions. This paper has at its heart not war *between* states but war *within* states, as this has been the predominant experience of Western military forces since the Second World War. The real point of interest here has been why does the Biblical tale of David defeating Goliath continue to repeat itself?¹ Why is it that the shepherd with the slingshot, unacquainted with warfare, is able to unseat the seasoned champion of a warrior nation? The answer proposed is that conceiving of the contest as a military challenge, and therefore applying military force, has demonstrated a failure in our appreciation of the nature of the contest itself. We have failed to appreciate the primacy of the *framework of authority* in a sovereign state's politics and have subsequently failed to ascribe agency to an indigenous polity.

To make this argument we started in Chapter Two by describing military myopia and proffering an alternate perspective. The argument made was that our image of state on state war has necessitated the honing of a military instrument that has continually pursued technological advantage to deliver greater precision and lethality at extremely high tempo. Like any thoroughbred, this military instrument has been bred with a specific mission set: the ability to penetrate an adversary state's command structure and cause systemic failure. As the adversary state has been conceived as a monolithic

¹ This analogy is similarly applied by Jeffrey Record *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*. Potomac Books Inc., 2007, however, his conclusions rest upon domestic political will, adversary access to sanctuary and ineffective strategic interaction with the adversary. While these factors all exist, I have argued that the broader malady is the context in which violence is applied- the legitimate framework of authority.

rational actor composed of a skeletal structure binding the critical components of the state together, we have designed our model of state-on-state war to achieve systemic paralysis or collapse, through the focused application of violence, to change an adversary's calculus.

In practice, our conception of war has failed to deal with the rigors of our recent experience, namely wars *within* states. The argument in the second half of Chapter Two is that we need to regain perspective and re-calibrate our conception of military intervention with our experience. Below the state, war is an intensely social affair. While weighing relative military advantage may be applicable between states, within states knowledge of the accepted social fabric is a prerequisite to determining how violence may be used. Accepting that war is a social phenomenon means not simply conceiving of the state as a skeletal structure or hierarchy, but adding the flesh and organs to the bones to create a more complete anatomical survey.

A fuller appreciation of the workings of a state highlights the disparity between power and violence. The social order that we accept in Western democracies is a compact between the instruments of the state and its population that shapes both sets of behaviors. Control is established when the state is empowered by its population through a *framework of authority*, consisting of a mix of moral and rational norms which bounds the expected behavior of the state. Violence, within this framework, is strictly codified and regulated to ensure that it is predictable and minimized. Where the state wields violence beyond the accepted boundaries, its power dissipates as its population recognizes the illegitimate nature of that violence i.e. violence is being employed beyond the prescribed limits. While this may seem an abstract concept, one need only consider the questions being asked about the legitimacy of police violence, by black US citizens in Baltimore and Ferguson, to recognize its applicability to current events.

When we intervene in states we do so due to a breakdown in order. Chapters Three and Four examined case studies in Palestine and South Vietnam, as attempts to impose order, which failed to resolve the conflict in favor of the intervening nation. By attempting to appreciate the way in which the strategic problem was framed, and in determining the nature of governance, the aim of these chapters was to highlight the propensity to military myopia. In both Palestine and Vietnam, while the grand strategic

paradigms of colonialism and anti-communism blinded American and British leaders from accurately understanding the problem, those same paradigms also heavily influenced the mechanism for problem resolution, namely the application of military force, or violence, to defeat an insurgent movement. Similarly, having described the grand strategic context, both chapters then demonstrated the exercise of governance to highlight the importance of violence as a mechanism for securing popular control. What both Palestine and South Vietnam demonstrate, is that compelling compliance merely delayed the inevitable outcome.

The final element of the two case studies was to determine the framework of authority that the population accepted and that the US and Britain needed to understand. By attempting to recognize the underlying cause of both popular revolts, the case studies demonstrated that the quixotic nature of the interventions lay not only in the false conception of the issue, but more importantly, in the misapplication of violence. In Palestine and Vietnam the challenge was the recognition that the contest was social, between a status quo perceived as serving an elite, and a popular demand for change. In this instance violence was futile. What was necessary was an attempt to alleviate the social grievance to re-establish a form of order that the population would accept.

Whether the core issue was the question of land reform or immigration, the critical failure in both case studies was in addressing this central issue. When the Mandatory government, or President Diem, used violence to quell unrest, the backlash was an attempt to demonstrate the illegitimacy of compellence. As no alternate venue for political competition existed, both the Jewish Insurgency and National Liberation Front of Vietnam resorted to violence in an attempt to contest the order being imposed. In both case studies, a popular revolt demonstrated the difference between violence and power. By withdrawing consent, both popular movements denuded the existing government of the authority to rule. All that was left was violence and coercion.

Unfortunately for both the United States and Great Britain, their strategic framing of the issue led them to uphold a status quo that was anathema to the social needs of the people of South Vietnam and Palestine. By failing to link strategy to the tactical problem, the United States and Great Britain surrendered the moral advantage to an

adversary, then multiplied the failure by using violence to compel compliance. The rest is history.

It may well be that one could cast this analysis aside as relating to the myopia that countering Communism or the practice of colonialism produced. However, as has been argued, the futility lies not solely in mistaking windmills for giants, but in using force to suppress domestic unrest out-with the prescribed, legitimate limits. While they have not been studied directly here, this analysis does cast insight into our recent interventions in Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan and therefore merits unpacking to determine its utility in future conflict scenarios.

The Main Themes Applied

It would be remiss not to point out that this paper *is not* an attempt to argue for a decline in the military utility of violence, nor to address the nature of war itself, but to recognize that the war which we have organized, trained, and equipped for—and are therefore conceptually prepared for—is not the type of war that we have had to fight.² As General William Wallace, Commander of US V Corps, recognized, with a hint of irony, in Iraq in 2003, “the enemy we’re fighting is a bit different from the one we war-gamed against.”³ Our failure has been to apply military force in the ways we exercised for state-on-state conflict in a battle for political legitimacy.

One significant implication of our recent foreign policy failures, therefore, is that they may lead the ill-informed to draw the conclusion that using military force is an anachronism. Events in the Islamic Caliphate, Crimean peninsula, and Yemen should remind us of the essential truth that lies within Leon Trotsky’s epigram “you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.” Deftly orchestrated violence is advancing the political goals of the Islamic State and Russia, and unless we more clearly capture its

² For a more complete assessment of the role of military force in modern conflicts see Smith, Rupert. *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*. Penguin Books, 2007. His unequivocal opening statement that “war no longer exists” leads him to argue that the first form of war which I have described, state-on-state, is actually an anachronism and that “war amongst the people” or contested governance (what I have termed war *within* states) will be the norm.

³Quote taken from Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era, Third Edition*. Stanford University Press, 2012, 154.

instrumentality, our reticence to use military force may enable others to achieve their ends at our expense. The challenge that we face is in clarifying our lexicon to negate the potential for learning the wrong lessons. What we must do is more clearly articulate the failures of Palestine and South Vietnam in a way that enables clear parallels to be drawn with some of the foreign policy choices that we face today. In order to do this, I shall propose two general recommendations and describe an area that merits further research.

Re-modelling the State

A major critique of the two case studies invoked within this paper is the tendency to address grand strategic design at the expense of tactical reality. This recommendation leads us back to the discussion at Chapter Two titled “Strategy to Tactics,” and addresses the challenge of turning concepts to concrete actions. In both Palestine and South Vietnam, it is clear that local events were hostage to grand strategy. However, the ground truth, available to both the US and Great Britain, would have advocated that the conditions were not favorable for the strategy being recommended. McGeorge Bundy’s assertion that “LBJ isn’t deeply concerned about who governs Laos, or who governs South Vietnam—he’s deeply concerned with what the average American voter is going to think about how he did in the ball game of the Cold War,” demonstrates the fragility of making foreign policy decisions based on rhetoric or domestic politics.⁴ If President Johnson did not care about who governs Vietnam, then the NLF and Ho Chi Minh certainly did, and his grand strategy would be no match for their local knowledge and commitment.

The reason that the operational approaches adopted in South Vietnam and Palestine were fraught, was that they were predicated upon a false model of the state. As this paper has argued, the monolithic Rational actor is not a model that is either fit for purpose for the strategist or the operational planner. While it may serve, as Waltz intended, as a mechanism for predicting systemic change in the international order, it does not stand scrutiny when used for conducting war *within* states.⁵ Because we lack a

⁴ Goldstein, Gordon M. *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam*. Holt Paperbacks, 2009, 98.

⁵ For a fuller description of his theory and its intended function see Waltz, Kenneth N.

representative model of the state, we have found ourselves using violence to enforce the rule of law, when in fact, a shadow rule of law or framework of authority has been built at the political grassroots. As Bernard Fall famously observed, we have “out-fought our adversaries, but been out-governed” and have applied force, in the eyes of the population, illegitimately.⁶ Our inability to recognize the kaleidoscope of local politics, and their importance, has led to a void between our strategy and tactics.

A similar problem presents us today in addressing the challenge presented by the Islamic State. As in Palestine and South Vietnam, there is a necessity to act. The question for the strategist is *how* to do so. A grand strategic narrative may drive a policy that seeks to homogenize and target the group, however, there is also merit in placing the organization in its local setting to enable Western nations to understand the underlying grievance that begets support. Treating the Islamic State as a monolithic actor, as it has many qualities and characteristics of a state, may be as dangerous as treating the nation-state as a unitary actor.⁷ In using violence to attrit the leadership of the Islamic State we may simply be legitimizing it, as our actions may be interpreted by its supporters as a further example of Western compellence. While this is intended as an example and not a critique of current policy, this paper does advocate for an understanding of the heterogeneous factors that make up the social contract upon which the Islamic State is basing its authority.

The imposition of social control, synonymous with my earlier definition of the attainment of power, requires the ability to penetrate the state from the level of government elites to local politics. However, this penetration is predicated upon an ability to leverage consent as well as to coerce. Societal penetration necessitates the establishment of alliances or accommodations with a crucial mid-level filter in society to enable the coupling of nation level intent with the ground truth of local politics. The truism that “all politics are local” recognizes that local contests for political control are

Theory of International Politics. Waveland Pr Inc, 2010, 80.

⁶ Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford University Press, 2010, 149.

⁷ For a more complete appreciation of historically successful neutralizations of Terrorist campaigns, and the strength of “disaggregation” when facing a networked- non-state threat see Kurth Cronin, Audrey. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton University Press, 2010, 35-71 and 193-197.

critical to enabling macro level issues to be addressed. With popular grievances settled, and the “politics of survival” addressed, the business of governance can be conducted. As Jeffrey Race observed in the battle for legitimacy in the province of Long An, South Vietnam, contingent incentives and the loci of authority needed to be at the local not national level.⁸

The critical pathway to establishing popular control is a *meso* level political alliance to match ways and means with ends.⁹ As Clausewitz’s supreme act of judgment attests, if we do not have an appreciation of the political context in which violence is conducted we risk misapplying force, as the two case studies describe attest. If the state does not penetrate society, then local political actors will fill that void and provide the essential framework of authority necessary to gain popular participation. As Stathis Kalyvas noted in his ground-breaking work *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*, “people’s political views would be highly contingent on the power arrayed around them.”¹⁰ In many cases of insurgency or revolutionary war, it is precisely the inability of central government to provide basic services that robbed it of authority in the eyes of a local population. Effective governance, therefore, requires a *meso* level or regional form of alliance, which enables micro level grievances to be effectively addressed and communicated to central government.¹¹ Critically, this *meso* level of arbitration means that fragmented societies could be united through incremental problem resolution and an attempt to achieve arbitration through dialogue.¹²

⁸ Race, Jeffrey. *War Comes to Long an; Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province*. University of California, 1972, 161.

⁹ By meso I mean a level between macro (state) and micro (local) politics: the concept is addressed in Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, and also Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era, Third Edition*. Stanford University Press, 2012. While he uses a different set of terminology, this same mechanism for conflict resolution is central to Migdal, Joel S. *Strong Societies and Weak States*. Princeton University Press, 1988.

¹⁰ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 113.

¹¹ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, 365.

¹² Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 257.

Redefining Phase Zero and Knowing When to Say “No”

An assessment of the British and American failures presented here might place military intervention into the “too difficult” bracket for policy makers, however, the insight that this paper offers is a greater appreciation of when to estimate that military intervention will succeed or fail under local conditions. In both of the case studies presented, violence was used as a mechanism to compel compliance by the state when a social grievance turned into a violent movement. While it may seem obvious, the critical inference is that violence has an important role to play but it is much earlier in the contest than when it was exercised in Vietnam or Palestine. Crucially, this assertion runs counter to the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine that has been accepted by Western nations where violence is the final recourse.¹³

In both of the case studies addressed here, a crucial factor in the loss of legitimacy is the use of violence by the state beyond that prescribed. Crucially, for the intervening power, a delay in the application of force will merely serve to tip the scales in favor of the adversary and make the case for problem resolution less likely. As Arendt counsels in the epigraph, “violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance.”¹⁴ The caution, therefore, is to those who would seek to uphold despotic regimes when the weight of public opinion is towards change. To delay the use of violence is to enable a grassroots campaign to gain support and challenge the government in place through acts of civil disobedience or the use of violence against the state. The advantage in the use of violence goes to the early bird.

The nomenclature advocated by the US Department of Defense in *Joint Publication 5-0: Joint Operational Planning* to conceive of operations by phase from zero (shape) to five (enable civil authority) has limited utility as written for wars *within*

¹³ The Weinberger-Powell Doctrine is based upon a series of pronouncements made by the former US Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and later embellished by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, that aimed to capture the purported policy failings in Vietnam and propose a handrail of eight points that might serve to guide future decision makers when considering using military force. For an analysis of the doctrine in practice, see Gordon, Michael R. and Trainor, General Bernard E. *The Generals’ War: The Inside Story of the War in the Gulf*. Little, Brown and Co., 1995.

¹⁴ Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1970, 56.

states.¹⁵ As we have learned from the two case studies presented, the sequential escalation of violence by the state was mirrored by the adversary. To succeed in suppressing a popular revolt the phases must all effectively be conducted simultaneously to ensure that the monopoly of violence, and therefore rule of law, is maintained by the government. The learned practice of JP5-0 is of value, however, if the phase nomenclature used is stood upon its axis to describe simultaneity rather than sequential behavior.

JP 5-0 Phase Number	Phase Name	Phase Description
0	Shape	Normal and routine military activity
I	Deter	Adversary action by demonstrating resolve and commitment
II	Seize Initiative	By the application of Joint Force capability
III	Dominate	Breaking the enemy's will or gaining control of the environment
IV	Stabilize	In absence of functioning government
V	Enable Civil Authority	Support to enable essential services provision to cement legitimacy

Figure 4: Redefining Phase Zero.

Source: Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Operational Planning.

What is clear in redefining Phase Zero is that at the front of any campaign within a state, violence will be essential to maintain order: a breakdown in order is a crack that will fissure and demonstrate the hollow claim to legitimacy of the state. To seize the initiative and dominate an adversary, government violence, within the framework of authority, will be necessary to arrest any gains in moral authority being achieved by a revolutionary movement. However, simultaneously, the civil authority must be enabled and the reach of the state maintained. Violence may be essential “up front,” but so too must come a genuine reconciliation of the core grievance of the populace. Amongst the litany of failures in the case studies examined, was the perception that the intervening

¹⁵ Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning*, 11 Aug 2011, III-41.

power's interest was in the status quo and not in the amelioration of a genuine injustice. To paraphrase Bernard Fall, we must “out-fight *and* out-govern our adversaries.”

The critical challenge for the counter revolutionary is to appreciate the importance of consent over coercion.¹⁶ For the intervening power, or the incumbent government, the presence of a revolutionary movement is indicative of a failure in the pattern of governance that necessitates change. While the temptation may be to preserve privilege, the path to grievance resolution lies in reconciliation not repression. As a third party observing affairs, it is essential that intervening nations engage early in Phase Zero to ensure that the policy solutions invoke political participation while targeting irreconcilable elements. If we support repressive regimes with sequential violence, like that advocated by phase in JP 5-0, then we risk repeating the failures of Vietnam and Palestine.

Successful intervention lies in embracing Hedley Bull's assertion that if order “does have value, this can only be because it is instrumental to the goal of order in human society as a whole.”¹⁷ While he was referring to international order, the importance of Bull's argument is that it places the establishment of a system that values a just outcome over one which prioritizes the preservation of privilege. In determining whether to intervene militarily, a commitment from the host government to meaningful compromise is as essential as a robust use of violence against those bearing arms against the state. Without it, we risk the slide to compelling compliance and failure.

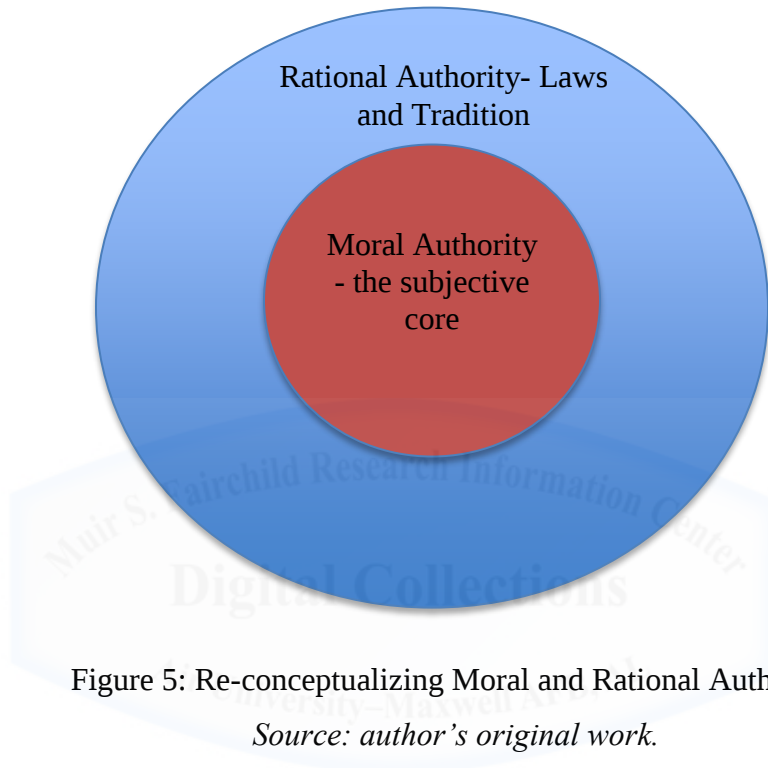
Morality Versus Rationality.

A clear theme from both case studies reviewed was the moral collapse of the incumbent government and therefore the eventual loss of authority. While it is extremely easy to cast dispersions with the benefit of hindsight, it is extremely challenging to comprehend the immigration stance of the British Government in the face of the Holocaust. As accounts from British soldiers tasked with enacting *Refoulement* or placing concentration camp survivors in barbed wire holding pens attested, the task was a

¹⁶ Ahmad, Eqbal. “Revolutionary War and Counter-Insurgency.” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, Issue 1 (1971), 41.

¹⁷ Bull, Hedley. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 21.

morally repugnant one that was not lost on the security services.¹⁸ What this raises is the relationship between moral and rational authority and is an area that would merit further research. My earlier analysis of the relationship led to the creation of an unitary entity of sub-components, however, perhaps the relationship between the two components is not as similar entities but one of dependence, as at Figure 5.¹⁹



The language of the critical stage of a revolutionary movement is enlightening. At a crucial juncture in the war within South Vietnam, and the British suppression of the Jewish revolt, the states recourse to violence undermined its legitimacy. With the state's legitimacy undermined, its framework of authority was described as *hollow*. The inference, therefore, is that our Rational and Moral authority are not equal components, but that Rational authority *depends* upon a moral core. Absent a shared set of sacred values, the legal framework of a state can only compel or command. Perhaps the reason that Napoleon argued that "the moral is to the physical as three to one," while an

¹⁸ A series of excellent first hand accounts are contained in Lazar, Hadara. *Out of Palestine: The Making of Modern Israel*. Atlas and Co, 2013.

¹⁹ Figure 2, page 16.

inducing an arbitrary figure, is an attempt to capture the centrality of morality as underpinning the physical or rational levers of the state.

While this may seem like a discussion over ethereal semantics, our conceptualization of the framework of authority is critical to our method of addressing the issue. If my earlier description of the forms of authority (Figure 1 on page 17) is accurate, then we can divide our resources evenly to ensure that we achieve success across the swathe of challenges facing the state, and may well focus on those tangible entities, such as Security Sector Reform, that we can easily measure. However, if further research was to demonstrate that Figure 5 was a more representative model, then all efforts should be focused upon ensuring that we sustain and uphold the moral claim to authority of the state. In Figure 1's tabulated framework, the collapse of moral authority can be supplemented by rational reward. In Figure 5's roundel, a moral collapse is catastrophic to the cause.

What is clear from the case studies presented is that the collapse in moral authority of the state significantly augmented the claim to legitimacy of their opponent, specifically with respect to violence. What was the exercise of law and order became repression, while adversary acts of terrorism became acts of resistance. The subjective nature of moral authority, it would appear, significantly flavored our appreciation of the just nature of the cause. In an era of information war, if we are to appreciate a local framework of authority to operate effectively, recognizing and capturing the moral high ground may be the decisive component in military intervention.²⁰ Using our graphic at Figure 5, as the basis for determining military application, perhaps gives "inside-out" warfare a whole new meaning and focus.²¹

²⁰ For more on the primacy of the strategic narrative see Simpson, Emile. *War From The Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2013, 15-39.

²¹ Inside Out Warfare is a term used to describe the contemporary propensity collapse the leadership of the state without having to address the annihilation of its fielded forces. Therefore, targeting the state from the "inside" first. See Shimko, Keith L. *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. 58.

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