

Save Thy People and Bless Thine Inheritance: Consolidation of  
Gains, the Roman-Persian War, and the Rashidun Conquest,  
AD 622-637

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Save Thy People and Bless Thine Inheritance: Consolidation of Gains, the Roman-Persian War, and the Rashidun Conquest, AD 622-637, by MAJ Andrew Harris, 49 pages.

This monograph uses original sources from the Byzantine-Persian War of AD 622-628 and the Byzantine-Arab Wars to advance the US Army's understanding of "operations to consolidate gains" in the twenty-first century. In 2020 much of the theoretical discourse within the US military aims to anticipate the characteristics of the next war and how to best prepare the Joint Force to excel in that environment. The US Army's Field Manual (FM) 3-0 is still new, its effects are still coalescing across US Army thought, with the idea of "consolidation." The concepts of "operations to consolidate gains" and the "consolidation area" have emerged as vital phenomena to understand in the wake of complex conflicts such as the Crimean Invasion of 2014 and the evolving threats surrounding Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the so-called Islamic State. The operations and policies of the seventh-century Byzantine Emperor Herakleios contain strikingly relevant lessons for consolidating gains in conflicts even in a hyper-connected and competitive twenty-first century.

The monograph describes how the Emperor Herakleios achieved a decisive victory over the Sassanid Persian Empire yet failed to adequately address the challenge of consolidating the gains from that victory. This failure presented a strategic vulnerability which the Rashidun Caliphate exploited to dominate the Middle East. The monograph demonstrates that at the operational and strategic levels, the consolidation area is not necessarily physically connected to the main battle area or even the area of operations, and that a military's administrative and bureaucratic features can be critical capabilities or vulnerabilities in operations to consolidate gains. This reality implies that the US Army should prepare to guide and participate in interagency efforts to consolidate political gains across physical and non-physical domains to establish the United States in a stronger strategic position than it had before a given conflict.

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## Abbreviations

FM            Field Manual

LSCO        Large Scale Combat Operations

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

War is war. Its outward forms change, just as the outward forms of peace change. From the stylus to the typewriter is just as far as from the club to the machine gun.

—Brigadier General Oliver L. Spaulding, “Warfare, Ancient and Modern”

The United States’ geopolitical position in 2019 is analogous to that of the Eastern Roman Empire at several points in the empire’s thousand-year history: both polities are (and were) world-leading economic and military powers encountering a multiplicity of threats in a complex environment. The 2019 US Army Posture Statement before the US Senate Armed Services Committee describes these conditions and it seems to unwittingly embrace a Romano-Byzantine way of war. The posture statement cites a strategic environment in which the United States can no longer take for granted its technological and military dominance.<sup>1</sup> Associated with this new environment is the concept of *consolidating gains* found in US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0 which aims to “make enduring any temporary operational successes” as adversaries avoid the US Army’s strengths while undermining those strengths indirectly. FM 3-0 goes on to place the activity of consolidating gains in a consolidation area which is geographically behind a division’s close area in large scale combat operations (LSCO) and includes security and stability tasks.<sup>2</sup>

While FM 3-0’s concept is appropriate and necessary for a division to sustain itself in the short term, the activities of consolidating political gains may not occur in an area contiguous with the close or support areas, and may not even occur in physical space. In the seventh century AD, the Eastern Roman Empire faced challenges similar to those which confront the US military of

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<sup>1</sup> *Army Posture Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 26 March 2019, 2.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 8-1, 8-5, 8-6. Neither a non-physical consolidation space nor a non-contiguous consolidation area exists in FM 3-0, which specifies consolidation areas as “[extending] from a higher echelon headquarters boundary to the boundary of forces in the close area.”

2019. Roman failures to consolidate gains after decisively winning the Roman-Sassanid War of AD 602-628 are instructive for a twenty-first century reader. Like the US Army of 2019, Eastern Roman armies aimed to achieve strategic objectives with small forces while contending with a multiplicity of emerging strategic competitors. As Edward Luttwak notes, Eastern Roman grand strategy "turned the very multiplicity of enemies to advantage, by employing diplomacy, deception, payoffs, and religious conversion" to achieve their strategic objectives with limited military means.<sup>3</sup> In light of the preceding observations, this monograph answers the research question "what can the US Army learn from the Roman military experiences of the seventh century?"

In AD 610, an eight-year civil war had left the Eastern Roman Empire on the brink of extinction. The Exarch of Alexandria, Egypt deposed a usurper emperor named Phokas and placed his own son, Herakleios, on the throne with the unenviable task of restoring civil order and reestablishing the empire's northern and eastern boundaries.<sup>4</sup> During the civil war, Rome's ancient rival, Sassanid Iran seized the opportunity to annex Palestine and Egypt while nomadic Avar and Slavic tribes despoiled the Roman provinces north of Constantinople. From AD 610 to 620, Emperor Herakleios presided over the total rebuilding of the Eastern Roman Army from its most basic institutions and then executed one of history's greatest strategic reversals against the Avars, Slavs, and the Sassanids. Herakleios brought Rome from the brink of extermination to a brief period of hegemony over the known world, employing all the instruments of Roman power to defeat Sassanid Iran while coopting and deterring Sassanid allies. From AD 622 to 628,

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<sup>3</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009), 415. While several prominent Byzantinists consider Luttwak's book to be unscholarly and simplistic, Luttwak's observations on Roman strategy remain useful to modern practitioners of strategy. The author's intent in using Luttwak here is to reinforce the relevance of the Roman experience to the US Army.

<sup>4</sup> Phokas was a popular general among the Roman Army who in AD 602 led a coup to depose the reigning Emperor Maurikios. Maurikios had made a series of unpopular political decisions which Theophanes lists in his *Chronicle*. These decisions included repeated pay cuts for soldiers, the refusal to ransom several thousand Roman hostages of the Avar tribes, and the appearance of weakness before Avar predations in Thrace and Illyricum.

Herakleios personally led three major campaigns which employed a strategic turning movement to draw Sassanid forces out of Anatolia and into the mountains of Armenia where he destroyed Sassanid armies in detail, destroyed the holiest Zoroastrian temple (the Iranian political center of gravity), and then deposed *Shahanshah* Khusro II, installing a puppet king in the Iranian capitol. From the perspective of AD 629, it seemed that the Sassanid Empire was to be a vassal of Constantinople for the foreseeable future. It was perhaps the greatest Roman military victory since the Second Punic War, and even by twenty-first century standards would be an exemplary operational and strategic feat. Five years after Herakleios's meteoric success, the Rashidun Caliphate burst out of the Arabian Peninsula, conquering all Roman territories south of Anatolia. The early Islamic conquests opened with a Roman losing streak leading to the Rome's disastrous defeat at Yarmouk, Syria in AD 636. This defeat initiated a period of political decline and contraction, but it also led to a profound military transformation that set conditions for Constantinople's resurgence in the ninth century.

## Methodology

This monograph inquires what the US Army can learn from the Roman-Sassanid War and the early years of the Rashidun expansion. Research has led the author to hypothesize that the transitional period between the Roman victory over Sassanid Iran and the Rashidun expansion can educate a twenty-first century audience on the US Army's concept of consolidation of gains. The monograph introduces the reader to the basic history of the Roman-Sassanid War. The monograph briefly describes the political and military conditions of the Eastern Roman Empire from AD 610 to 622 and the conduct of the Roman-Sassanid War. Second, the monograph describes the political and military conditions at the end of the Roman-Sassanid War, the Eastern Roman response to Rashidun expansionism, and the conduct of military operations leading to the Battle of Yarmouk of AD 636. The monograph synthesizes five original sources into a single narrative for conciseness and draws on some modern scholarship to gain clarity when original

sources conflict. Throughout the historical narrative, the monograph explains the connections between Roman success in the Sassanid War and the failures against Rashidun expansion as a matter of consolidation of political gains. This monograph describes a Roman perspective throughout both wars because the monograph's objective is the discussion of consolidating gains; the Sassanid Persian and Rashidun perspectives are both important and fertile grounds for study, but such focus would distract from this paper's objective.

This monograph uses original terms rather than modern interpretations of those terms. It avoids the use of the term "Byzantine" or "Byzantium" when referring to the empire which lasted from AD 315 to 1453 and whose capital was Constantinople, but the monograph occasionally uses the term "Romano-Byzantine" to clearly distinguish the affairs and era of the Christian Roman state from that of its pagan pre-incarnation. For any other instances pertaining to the affairs or peoples of the Romano-Byzantine state, this monograph simply uses "Roman;" such usage preserves the historically authentic demonym for the inhabitants of the Roman Empire after AD 315, for they knew themselves as Romans (*Romaioi*) and the international system recognized them as such until the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The monograph defaults to transliterations of Roman names in Greek as most Romans would have spoken and written them in the seventh century. This monograph similarly uses historically authentic terms when referring to the Sassanid Empire. The use of the term "Persia" is conventional, but the peoples of that state referred to the region as Iran (*Eran-shahr*) and acknowledged the House of Sassan as their dynastic rulers; when describing military and political aspects of that entity, this monograph uses the term "Sassanid." Transliterations from Middle Persian conform to the spellings found in D.N. MacKenzie's *Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*. When referring to the Islamic entity which conquered the Levant in the seventh century before the rise of the Umayyad, this monograph uses the terms "Rashidun

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<sup>5</sup> John F. Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204* (London: University College of London, 1999), 1.

Caliphate” or the “Rashidun” (“the Rightly Guided”). When appropriate, the monograph uses US Army doctrinal terms as defined in Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* to describe military actions and their purposes within the case studies.

## Chapter 2: The Roman-Sassanid War

The Roman-Sassanid War of AD 602 to 628 ended with a decisive Roman victory, but that victory proved unsustainable and established conditions for Rome's strategic disasters of the next decade. First, the strategic and operational concepts that Herakleios used to great effect against Khusro became a vulnerability in the next war. Second, the Roman State and Roman Army were unable to consolidate their gains made in reacquired territories, transforming military gains into political ones. Finally, the structural and administrative measures which allowed the Roman Army to defeat the Sassanid Empire in highland Armenia proved inadequate for conflicts in the Levant. The Roman-Sassanid War features several modern characteristics which are salient to the twenty-first century reader: small, technologically advanced, professional armies in concert with diplomatic and informational efforts to defeat an enemy; the conduct of expeditionary warfare and operations against centers of gravity; the use of mobility and maneuver to achieve operational turning effects; and the political-military complexities that resist the easy transformation of military objectives into strategic advantages.

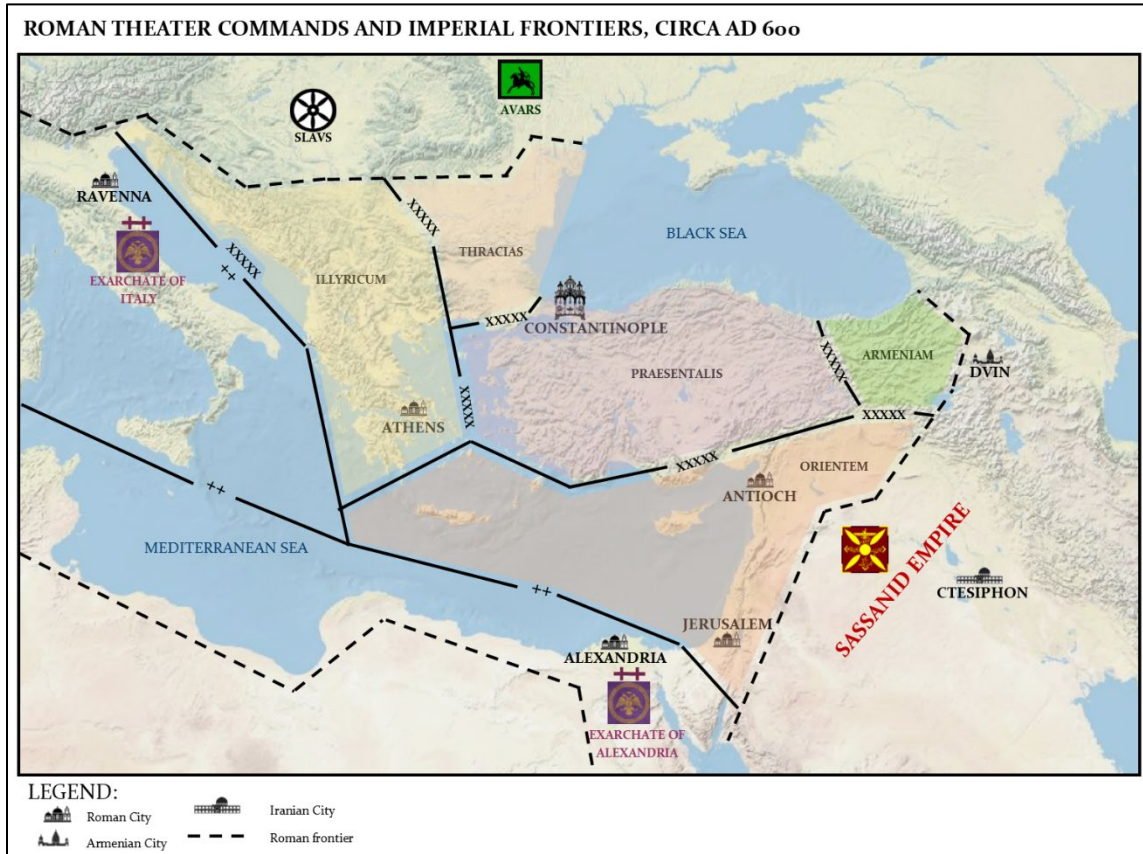


Figure 1. Roman Theater Commands and Imperial Frontiers, Circa AD 600. Created by author using information from Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 62; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

## The Roman Army of the Seventh Century

The Roman Army of the sixth and seventh centuries was a professional organization with established doctrine, and it existed in a political system which divided civil from military authorities. It operated in an era of persistent conflict, perpetually engaged in fighting barbarian incursions on the periphery or the Sassanid armies in the east. The Roman Army's doctrinal and professional structures were the continuation of the Roman military system that Constantine the Great established in the fourth century but had evolved to incorporate a wide variety of eastern warfighting units, techniques, and principles.<sup>6</sup> The Roman Army which went to war in the 610s

<sup>6</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 108.

was a volunteer force which incentivized soldiers to serve for decades, and augmented with variable degrees of conscripted manpower. The military enjoyed a social safety net in the form of pensions, state-provided housing, food rations in old age, and guaranteed employment in the army for the sons of veterans, apparent in both Theophanes's *Chronicle* and in Justinian's *Codex Juris Civilis*.<sup>7</sup> This system, however, was relatively short lived; by the end of the Roman-Sassanid War, the state could no longer afford the social benefits once promised to the army and there is no evidence that such policies ever returned. When emergencies demanded additional manpower, the employment guarantee would turn into ancestral conscription to grow forces as necessary. The rank structure of the Roman Army allowed for meritocratic careers and it was not uncommon for a recruit to rise to officer ranks; at the same time, wealthy and well-connected Roman families could take a shortcut to seniority and purchase army commands.<sup>8</sup>

The Roman Army was a small force that had to secure a vast imperial domain. From the sixth to the seventh centuries the Army probably never numbered more than 175,000 soldiers, and the Romans were unable to mass large portions of the army because it was dispersed for constabulary operations and low-level conflict management.<sup>9</sup> The Roman Army's structure would be familiar to a twenty-first century commander: the Empire consisted of five theater armies and two Exarchates, each with assigned forces based on a battalion, regiment, and division-equivalent structure as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Before Phokas's usurpation in AD 602, the army stood at 150,000 soldiers and probably shrunk significantly over the next eight years of civil war.<sup>10</sup> In the absence of a record of the army's strength between AD 602 and 641, it is safe to assert that the Roman Army was nearly destroyed between internecine conflict against

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<sup>7</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 274; Justinian I, *The Codex of Justinian*, trans. Fred H. Blume, ed. Bruce W. Frier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Twelfth Book, Forty Sixth Title.

<sup>8</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 263, 270.

<sup>9</sup> Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 43. In this era, an army of 175,000 was nonetheless quite large.

<sup>10</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081*, 64.

Phokas, Persian offensives, predations of the Avars and Slavs, and Phokas's purges and civil uprisings.<sup>11</sup> Herakleios probably spent ten to twelve years rebuilding the Army from near total destruction but there are no records of the full extent of Herakleios's army until the end of his reign in AD 641 and following Roman losses to the Rashidun Caliphate; by that time the standing army had shrunk to an all-time low of 109,000 soldiers. Between AD 622 and 630, Herakleios probably fielded a total army force of no more than 140,000 men, concentrated on the defense of Constantinople, the offensives in Armenia and Iran, and with constabulary forces at the frontiers and the Exarchate of Italy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Emil Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest, 471-843: An Interpretation* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1981), 122; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 293, 300; *Chronicon Paschale*, 696, 697.

<sup>12</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 100.



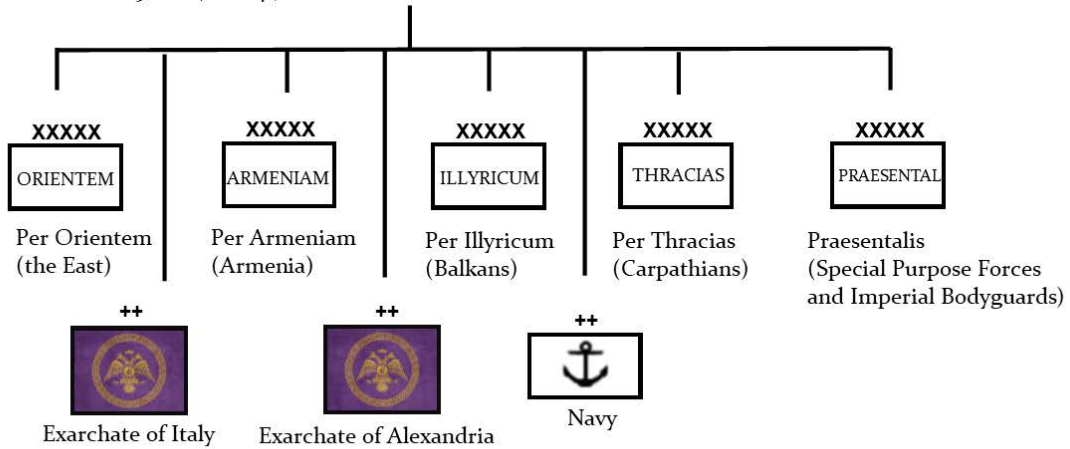
## ORGANIZATION OF ROMAN ARMIES, AD 580—641

### Imperial Government

Strength: 150,000 (AD 600)  
109,000 (AD 641)



*Imperator Caesar  
Basileus*



### Echelon: Theater Army

Strength: Flexible, generally  
15,000-20,000 per theater com-  
mand



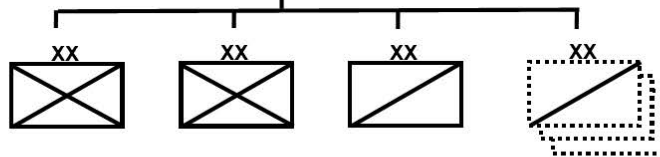
Commander: *Magister Militum*

### Echelon: Field Army

Strength: Undefined, flexible



Commander: *Strategos*



The dotted borders indicate possible additional forces that could exist under the field army structure. Army strengths were not uniform to obscure their composition to enemy intelligence and reconnaissance.

## ORGANIZATION OF ROMAN ARMIES, AD 580—641

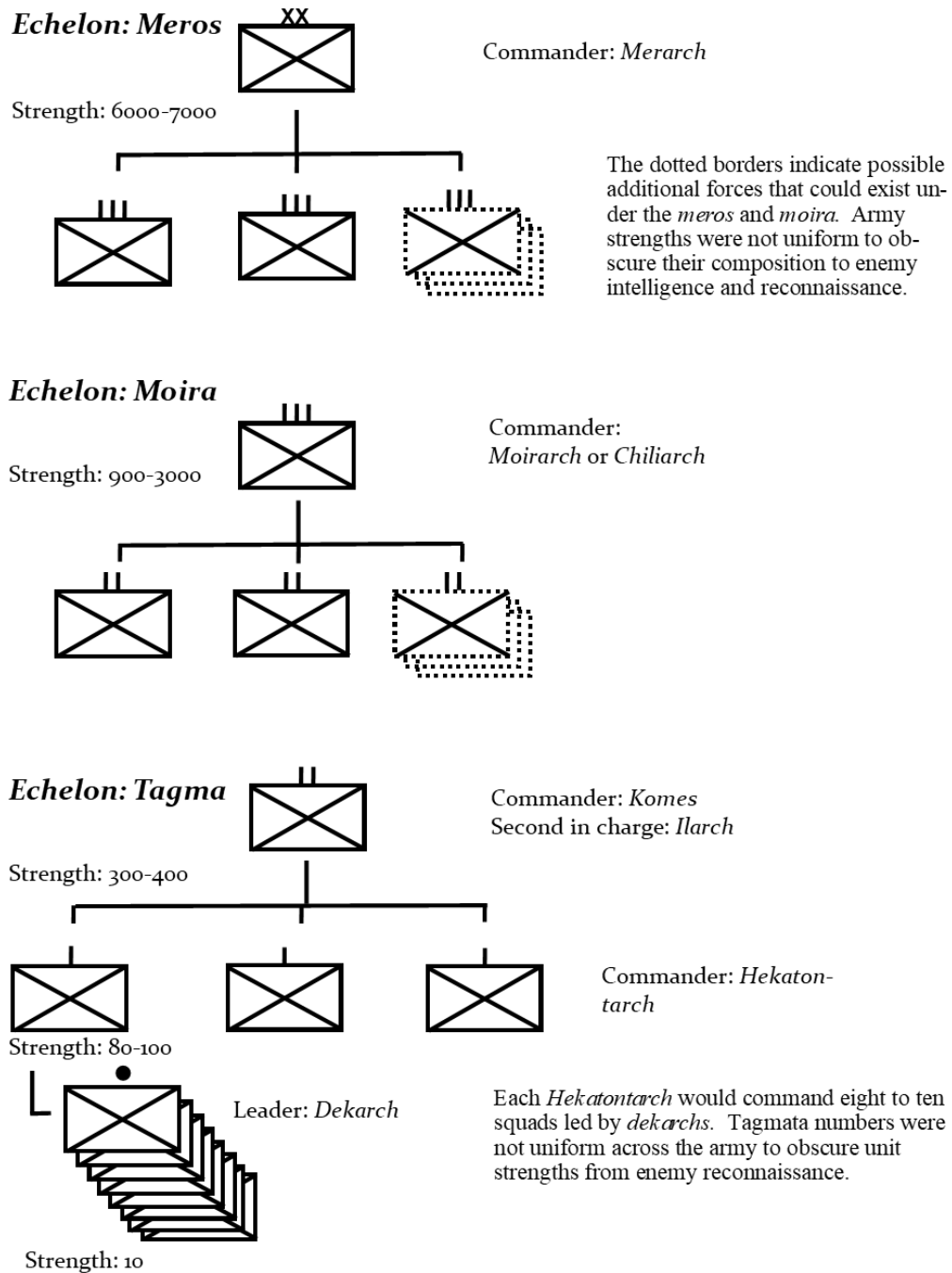


Figure 2. Organization of Roman Armies, AD 580—641. Created by author using information from Maurice, *Maurice's Strategikon* trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 16; John F. Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2001), 46; John F. Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204* (London: University College of London, 1999), 68; Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 64, 147.

The Roman Army of the sixth and seventh centuries was the product of a revolution in military affairs that began with the Hunnic invasions of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. From the pre-Christian era until the fifth century, Roman warfare revolved around heavy infantry. By the sixth century, the Eastern Romans had become a cavalry-centric force as a result of contact with Central Asian peoples and the necessity to secure long and ambiguous borders with small forces. Eastern Romans adopted the stirrup, lamellar armor, and composite bows with thumb-rings from the Huns and Avar trebuchet-style catapults which originated in China.<sup>13</sup> The Eastern Romans combined the mobility, reconnaissance, and direct fire capabilities of the mounted archer with long-standing Roman infantry prowess, Roman armor, metallurgy, and organized logistics. The role of infantry evolved to block, turn, or contain an enemy, while cavalry archers provided support or attacks by fire; heavy cavalry would charge to destroy, pursue, or exploit the enemy at an opportune time. Thus, by the seventh century the army fought under a highly mobile and lethal operating concept which engaged in expeditionary campaigns from forward bases on the empire's periphery. The army obtained its logistics support through a flexible combination of baggage trains, controlled foraging, and purchase of food and equipment from civilian populations.<sup>14</sup> Roman bureaucracies followed the Roman Army to issue salaries, assist with quartering, and exercise technical control over supply and transportation; dysfunctions of the bureaucracy could result in mutinies, unit paralysis, or the enmity of the civilian population.<sup>15</sup>

The Roman Army waged warfare in accordance with published manuals which arose from past experiences; the Roman Army had a form of doctrine and to some extent practiced an operational level of war. The purpose of military actions from the view of Constantinople was to

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Decker, *The Byzantine Art of War* (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2013), 122; Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice, *Maurice's Strategikon* trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> George T. Dennis, "Introduction," *Maurice's Strategikon*, xiii.

attrite and defeat enemy armies or to destroy an enemy's ability to generate military, economic, or political power; military efforts were intended to harmonize with bribery and negotiations to neutralize or destroy a threat.<sup>16</sup> The seventh century texts *Strategikon* and an "Anonymous Treatise on Strategy" furnish the details of how the Roman Army understood and practiced warfare. Roman leaders were strategically defensive and would become operationally offensive when conditions favored or required it. They understood warfare in terms of a strategic level, a tactical level, and an intermediate level called "battle management." Battle management concerned the sound judgement in the employment of tactics and committing to battle in the most favorable conditions.<sup>17</sup> Intelligence collection and diplomatic shaping efforts were continuous in order to support campaigns if necessary. Roman doctrine did not expect battles to be decisive, but to achieve a state of advantage over an adversary. The tactics of *Strategikon* aim for indirect approaches to attack an enemy's strengths such as deep raids on enemy supply trains and the use of feints and turning movements.<sup>18</sup> Both manuals emphasize the need for deception and operational security in task organization, movement, and engagements. The *Strategikon* also included a book on ethnography which described the best operational and tactical methods for battling the Iranians, Avars, Germanic peoples, and others, and Herakleios largely followed these practices throughout his campaigns.<sup>19</sup>

The Roman Army needed operations to consolidate gains, although its doctrine had no term to describe that concept. The Roman Army's administrative and institutional mass necessitated conditions of local stability, secure lines of communication, and bureaucratic operations to maintain combat effectiveness on campaigns. Throughout his campaigns in

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<sup>16</sup> Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> "The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy," in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. George T. Dennis, 21, 45, 95, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice, *Maurice's Strategikon*, trans. George T. Dennis, 49, 64, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice, *Maurice's Strategikon*, trans. George T. Dennis, 17, 80, 89, 113; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 308.

Armenia and Atropatene, Herakleios would maintain a consolidation area which provided logistics, intelligence, and critical diplomatic capabilities for the war against the Sassanid Empire. Yet while his focus adequately addressed these operations, he did not address the need to consolidate his political gains in the Levantine regions with a view to future conditions after the war with Sassanid Iran.

## The Roman Campaigns, AD 622-628

Herakleios's campaigns into the Iranian heartland were the closing chapters of a generational war. From the beginning Phokas's catastrophic reign (AD 602-610), Roman *meros* and field army commanders who remained loyal to the murdered Emperor Maurikios invited the Sassanid *Shahanshah* Khusro II to intervene and depose Phokas.<sup>20</sup> For Khusro, this war began as one of limited political aims: the acquisition of grassland territories in Mesopotamia, the restoration of a favorable regime in Constantinople, and dynastic affiliation with Maurikios's family. As Sassanid armies won enormous successes and Rome fell into greater chaos, Sassanid goals shifted to absolute ones, specifically the overthrow of the Roman government.<sup>21</sup> For Herakleios, the war was one of absolute aims in the beginning and transitioned to a limited war as Roman operations achieved success. From AD 610 to 621, the Roman political aim was absolute: the restoration of its territorial integrity; as Herakleios's operational designs succeeded, his aims became limited and he terminated the war when the Sassanid elites deposed Khusro II and replaced the old shah with one that would be acceptable to the Roman Emperor.

The first ten years of Herakleios's reign and conflict with the Sassanid Empire were fraught with defeat while he rebuilt the Roman Army from its post-civil war shambles. Khusro II conducted the war with two theater armies, one focused on Anatolia and commanded by Shahin

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<sup>20</sup> Khusro was personally indebted to the Emperor Maurikios, and incidentally a son-in-law of the Roman emperor. Maurice intervened in an Iranian coup in 588 to place Khusro on the throne in Ctesiphon and married one of his daughters to Khusro to seal an alliance.

<sup>21</sup> James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, 436-440.

Padgohrspahan,<sup>22</sup> and one focused on Palestine and Egypt commanded Shahrbaraz.<sup>23</sup> From AD 611 to 615, the Sassanid armies commanded by Shahrbaraz and Shahin steadily gained territories from eastern Anatolia to Palestine, with Shahrbaraz seizing Jerusalem in 614 and taking the True Cross to Ctesiphon as a trophy—an event that was apocalyptically traumatic in the Romans’ Christian worldview. By 617, Shahin’s army reached central Anatolia. In 617 or 618, Shahrbaraz led his forces into Egypt and seized Alexandria, separating Rome from its strategic grain supplies and vast trading wealth. Herakleios attempted an offensive in eastern Anatolia in 613 which he lost decisively. The Emperor dispatched embassies to Khusro for a negotiated end to the conflict on Sassanid terms, only for Khusro to execute them. By AD 621, all of Rome’s eastern provinces fell under Sassanid control, with vast devastation to Rome’s agricultural and economic capabilities. Famine was immanent in Constantinople without the supplies of Egyptian grain and plague had broken out in the city.<sup>24</sup> The Roman Empire shrunk to a rump state holding only Constantinople, Cappadocia, and parts of Greece and Italy as pictured in Figure 3.<sup>25</sup> From the north, Slav and Avar raids despoiled Roman cities in Greece while Shahrbaraz brought his southern army from Egypt to the region of Cilicia from which to launch raids on the outskirts of Constantinople with a view to eventually besieging the city. Herakleios again attempted to

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<sup>22</sup> The name means “falcon of the noble armies,” based on entries from D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 62, 75.

<sup>23</sup> The name means “wild boar of the realm,” based on entries from D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 79, 87.

<sup>24</sup> Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, 440.

negotiate an end to the conflict and again the Shah rejected terms, insisting on the complete overthrow of Constantinople and Roman conversion to Zoroastrianism.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 3. Roman Theater Commands and Imperial Frontiers, Circa AD 620. Created by author using information from Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 206; US Department of the Army Geospatial Enterprise.

Herakleios undertook a comprehensive program to restore the Roman Army's confidence which included force-on-force exercises, and was likely a decades-long project, which he had to balance with Avar and Sassanid incursions, plague, and famine. Herakleios's drive to rebuild the army for an offensive was exorbitantly expensive, as a war of absolute aims should be. To finance the war, the Emperor debased the imperial currency, collected all gold and silver items from the Church to melt down for coinage, and suspended Rome's rudimentary social welfare

<sup>26</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 301; Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 122.

programs indefinitely.<sup>27</sup> Glimmers of hope appeared, however: Shahrbaraz attempted an amphibious assault on Constantinople but decisively lost a battle on the Bosphorus against the Roman Navy; some of the nomadic tribes in the north had converted to Christianity, reducing the threat to Rome's Thracian holdings.<sup>28</sup> With the northern barbarian risk mitigated for the moment, Herakleios could seek an audacious (or desperate) solution to the Sassanid problem.

The Emperor realized that only a grand turning movement could spare Constantinople from final defeat. In the spring of AD 622, he consolidated three to five Roman field armies in Cappadocian Caesarea to form an expeditionary force, possibly as large as 40,000 soldiers.<sup>29</sup> Herakleios took personal command of the Roman armies in Cappadocia, delegating joint rule of the empire to the *Magister Militum Praesentalis*, Bonosos, and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Sergios. Herakleios led this force around Shahrbaraz and Shahin's northern flank and into mountainous Armenia. Upon receiving news of this movement, the Shah ordered all of his forces to withdraw from Anatolia to interdict the Emperor.<sup>30</sup> Shahrbaraz made contact with Herakleios's army on 18 June in the western Armenian highlands, and for ten days cavalry *tagmata* sustained counter-reconnaissance fighting in mountainous terrain while Herakleios staged *meroi* for an ambush. In an unnamed mountain pass, Herakleios presented a false retreat and then encircled and destroyed the Iranians. Shahrbaraz and some of his army escaped, while Herakleios conducted a limited pursuit. With the Sassanids removed from Anatolia, Herakleios moved his Roman army north into Armenia for winter quarters.<sup>31</sup> This campaign, shown in

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<sup>27</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 302, 303; *Chronicon Paschale*, 615, 618.

<sup>28</sup> Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 123; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 302; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 123; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 303-304; Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 123-124; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 304-306; Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 83-85.



Figure 4, was the most successful the Romans had attempted against the Sassanid Empire in a generation and the Sassanids' shock at this loss briefly wrested the initiative from Khusro. As this operation occurred in the Roman heartland of Anatolia, Herakleios had the luxury of a relatively simple consolidation of gains, though the gains would only be temporary.

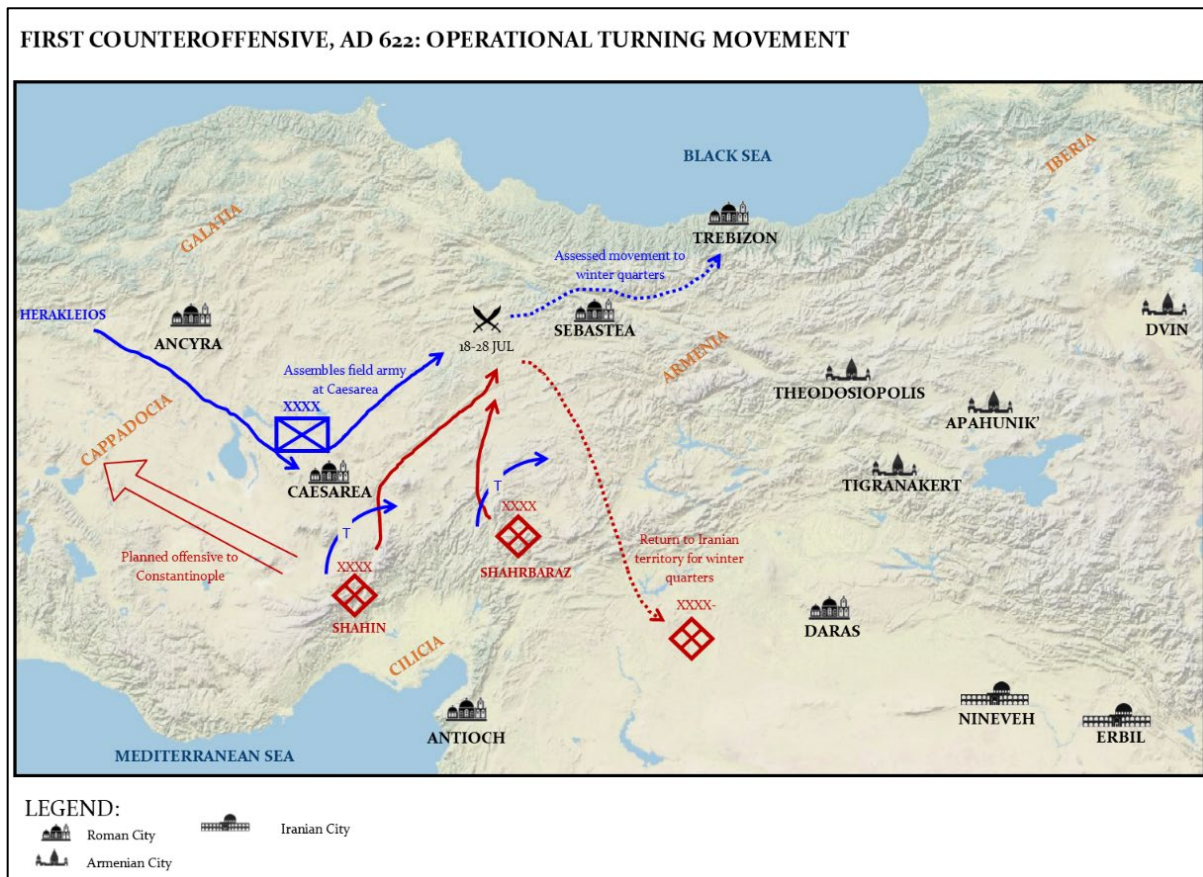


Figure 4. First Counteroffensive, AD 622. Created by author using information from Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* trans. James Howard-Johnston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 123-124; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 303-306; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125; Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 83-85; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

After taking the year of AD 623 to diplomatically mitigate the threat of a renewed Avar invasion from the north, Herakleios left Constantinople for Armenia on 25 March 624 to join his army and Armenian and Lazican allies on an offensive that would last through the winter of 625. As the Sassanids had encroached closer to Constantinople in 623, Herakleios aimed to turn Khusro's armies by destroying the Sassanid political-religious centers of northern Iran. Roman

field armies assembled and departed from Theodosiopolis, moving toward the Armenian capital Dvin and followed the Araxes River southeast to Nakchivan. As he fell upon the cities of Sassanid Armenia and northern Iran, he destroyed all settlements in his path, with special attention paid to Zoroastrian fire temples. His line of operations turned south from the Armenian highlands, following the valleys toward Lake Urmia in the region then known as Atropatene. Herakleios drove to the Sassanid Empire's political and religious center of gravity, the fire temple complex of Adur Gushnasp ("Sacred Fire of the Warriors"); this temple was the most important Zoroastrian site during Khusro's reign and the Shah's continued legitimacy depended on the observance of proper ceremonies there. Khusro personally led a contingent of 40,000 soldiers to defend the temple south of Lake Urmia, but Herakleios's Arabian cavalry raided the Sassanid Army's security outposts and captured its officers, which caused the Shah to abandon the army and flee. The rest of the Iranian force routed or surrendered to the Romans. Herakleios destroyed Adur Gushnasp and the nearby city of Ganzak, which held a winter palace for the Shah and his

court. With the Shah defeated, Herakleios turned north to face Shahrbaraz and Shahin who followed the Roman force from Anatolia.<sup>32</sup>

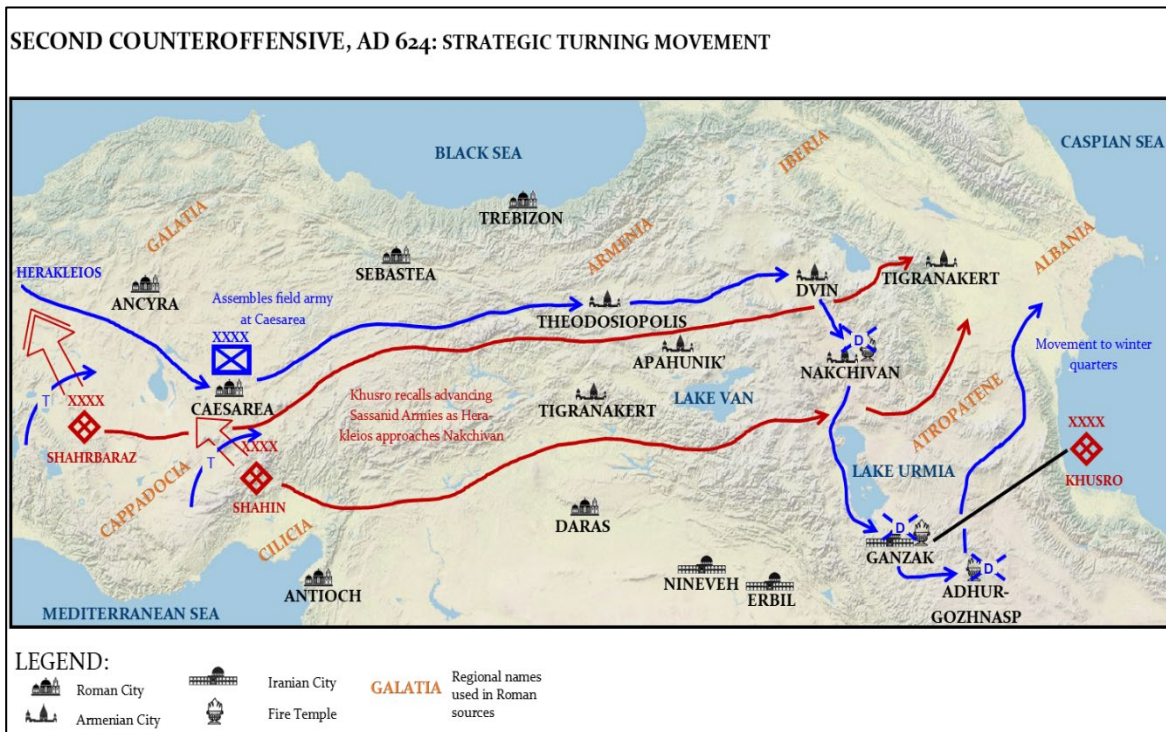


Figure 5. Second Counteroffensive, AD 624. Created by author using information from Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* trans. James Howard-Johnston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 123-124; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 303-306; Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 83-85; Kaveh Farroukh, *The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians* (Barnsely: Pen and Sword, 2017), 367; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

With Herakleios threatening the Iranian political-religious heartland, Shahrbaraz ceased operations in Anatolia and pursued Herakleios as he had done two years before. The Sassanid armies were too slow to prevent Herakleios's destruction of their holiest temple but attempted to destroy the Roman Emperor and Army in the autumn of 625, north of Lake Van in Armenia. While Herakleios ravaged the Iranian cities of Atropatene, Shahrbaraz and Shahin moved to contain Herakleios in valleys by blocking the passes. In the wake of his embarrassing retreat

<sup>32</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 307-308; Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 124-126; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 122.

from Herakleios, Khusro committed a third field army to the encirclement operation under the command of one Shahreplakan.<sup>33</sup> Herakleios became aware of the impending Sassanid encirclement through aggressive reconnaissance: Shahin had brought an army of 30,000 to Tigranakert near Nakchivan, Shahrbaraz brought an army to Tigranakert on the northeast side of the Gardman range, and Shahreplakan was *en route* with a third army to link up with Shahrbaraz; the total Iranian forces held a significant numerical advantage over the Romans. Herakleios committed a reconnaissance detachment to ambush Shahreplakan and raid the Sassanid camps at night, which fixed Shahreplakan's force in a harmless location while the Romans attacked Shahin. Herakleios routed Shahin's army and did not pursue but moved from the plains of Nakchivan toward Lake Van and then to Manzikert while keeping some reconnaissance in contact with Shahrbaraz and Shahreplakan as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

The two Sassanid commanders attempted to pursue Herakleios, but the mounted Roman forces moved faster than the Sassanid armies and remained out of reach until the onset of winter in 625. The Sassanid armies put many of their men in winter quarters and lost their numerical strength, so later in the season Herakleios's reconnaissance and intelligence collection succeeded at identifying Shahrbaraz's disposition and locating the Sassanid headquarters in Aghi, north of Lake Van. Herakleios took three *meroi* and attacked Shahrbaraz who kept one element of 6,000 men with him. The Romans destroyed this force in a night attack but Shahrbaraz escaped and the remainder of the Sassanid armies retreated to Iran to reconstitute.

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<sup>33</sup> The name means "leopard of the realm" based on entries from D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 79, 64.

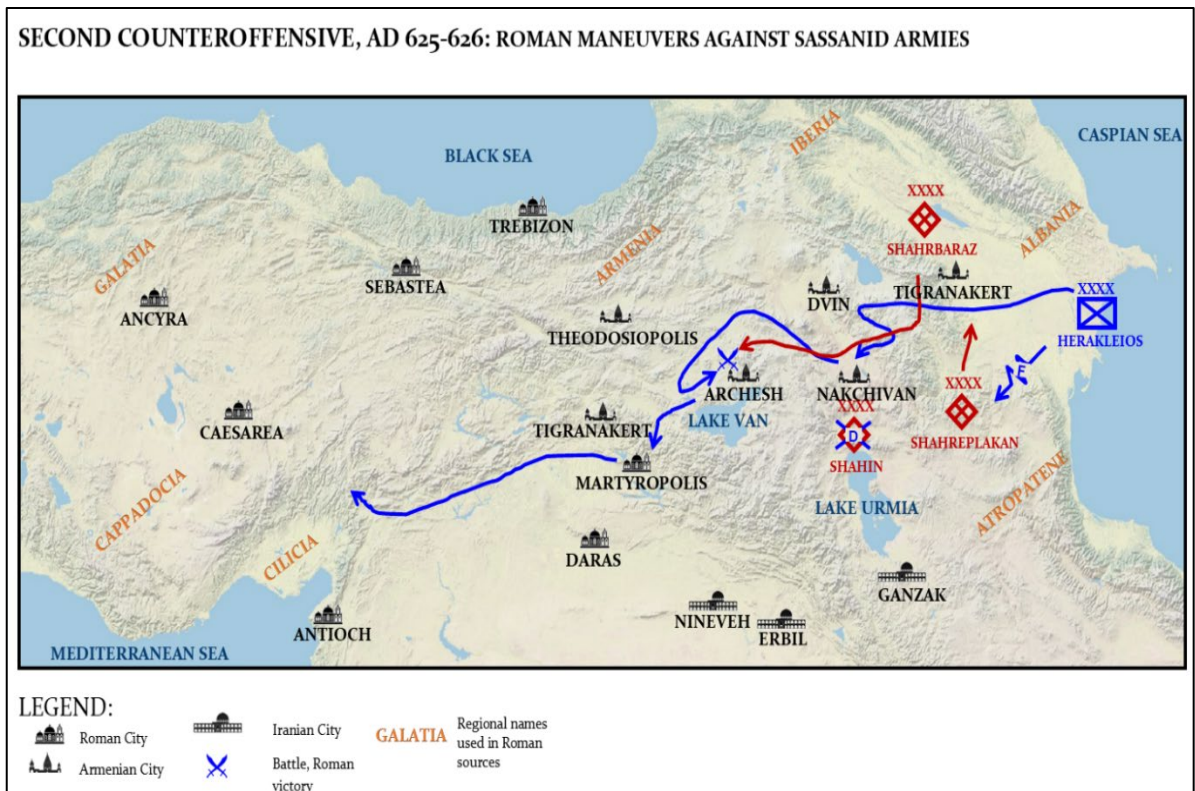


Figure 6. Second Counteroffensive, AD 625-626. Created by author using information from Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* trans. James Howard-Johnston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 123-124; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 303-306; Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 83-85; Kaveh Farroukh, *The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians* (Barnsely: Pen and Sword, 2017), 367; V.I. Minorsky, "Roman and Byzantine Campaigns in Atropatene," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 11 no. 2 (1944): 248-251, accessed 18 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/609312>; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

Herakleios moved into winter quarters in Armenia until March of 626.<sup>34</sup> In this second campaign, Herakleios fought in a manner familiar to students of Napoleon: from a central position, he struck the Sassanids to prevent the uniting of hostile armies, then destroyed their forces in detail. With night operations and a deliberate attack on Shahrbaraz in winter, Herakleios exploited tempo to disintegrate enemy leadership while enemy forces were in an unready state.

<sup>34</sup> Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 125-126; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 309-311; Regan, 93-97.

In AD 626, Khusro attempted to regain the initiative by besieging Constantinople on 29 June and thus disrupt Herakleios's campaigns into Iran, but the Sassanid plan failed to superior Roman strategy. The Sassanids concluded an alliance with the Avars and Slavs and aimed for a siege of Constantinople with the Avars and Slavs on the European side of the Bosphorus and Shahrbaraz's army on the Asian side. The siege failed as the city's leadership under Bonosos, the Patriarch, and the political faction leaders broke the Iranian-Avar-Slav alliance;<sup>35</sup> the Romans combined an assassination of Iranian emissaries to the Slavs and Avars with a deception which convinced Shahrbaraz that the barbarians murdered his emissaries and convinced the barbarians that Shahrbaraz would not pay them. The besieging force disintegrated through infighting among the Sassanids, Slavs, and Avars over broken barbarian promises and perceived manipulation on the part of the Sassanids. Roman amphibious attacks on the Avars and Slavs broke the besiegers' will to continue fighting, and the aggressors departed on 8 August. Herakleios did not have to return to Constantinople but remained in eastern and southern Anatolia as a covering force as shown in Figure 7. Herakleios dispatched a third of his army to reinforce Constantinople while his main force interdicted Sassanid strategic reserves moving to support Shahrbaraz; Herakleios's brother, Theodoros, led an element which destroyed Shahin's army and killed Shahin.

From the AD 626 Siege of Constantinople it is apparent that information operations can prevent the reconstitution of defeated enemy forces, and that the orchestration of all Roman instruments of power enabled operations to consolidate gains. Exploiting the failure of the Sassanid offensive against Constantinople, Herakleios presented Shahrbaraz with an intercepted message from Khusro ordering the execution of Shahrbaraz and a Roman offer of security if the

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<sup>35</sup> A prominent feature of Constantinopolitan politics was the dual political party system in which chariot racing teams had evolved into powerful political machines. The Blue and Green Factions were the political parties which exercised enormous influence on Roman life and could be mobilized in times of emergencies as civil defense forces. Both Nikephoros and Theophanes describe imperial decisions to man the walls of Constantinople with members of the Factions. John Julius Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, 58.

Sassanid general would defect to the Roman side. Shahrbaraz accepted Herakleios's offer and defected with his entire army, depriving the Shah of Iran's most capable military force.<sup>36</sup> Herakleios would use this period of Sassanid disruption and dislocation to secure a temporary alliance with a Turkic tribe to support his next campaign. The convergence of diplomatic, informational, and military power to relieve the Siege of Constantinople was essential to Herakleios's success against Shahin and consolidated Roman political gains to neutralize Slavic and Avar threats on the Empire's northern flanks. With a strong record of recent success, Herakleios could consolidate his gains by persuading another actor, the Gök Turks, to fight for mutually beneficial interests.

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<sup>36</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, 720-727; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 13; Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars*, 100; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 313-314, 323-324. Theophanes describes a confrontation with Shahrbaraz in Cilicia in mid-626, but it may be one of the instances in which Theophanes confuses the record. This was either Shahrbaraz's initial approach to Constantinople for the siege, or it was actually Herakleios's covering operation interdicting Shahin later in the siege. The record of Shahrbaraz's defection is also misplaced in Theophanes's account.

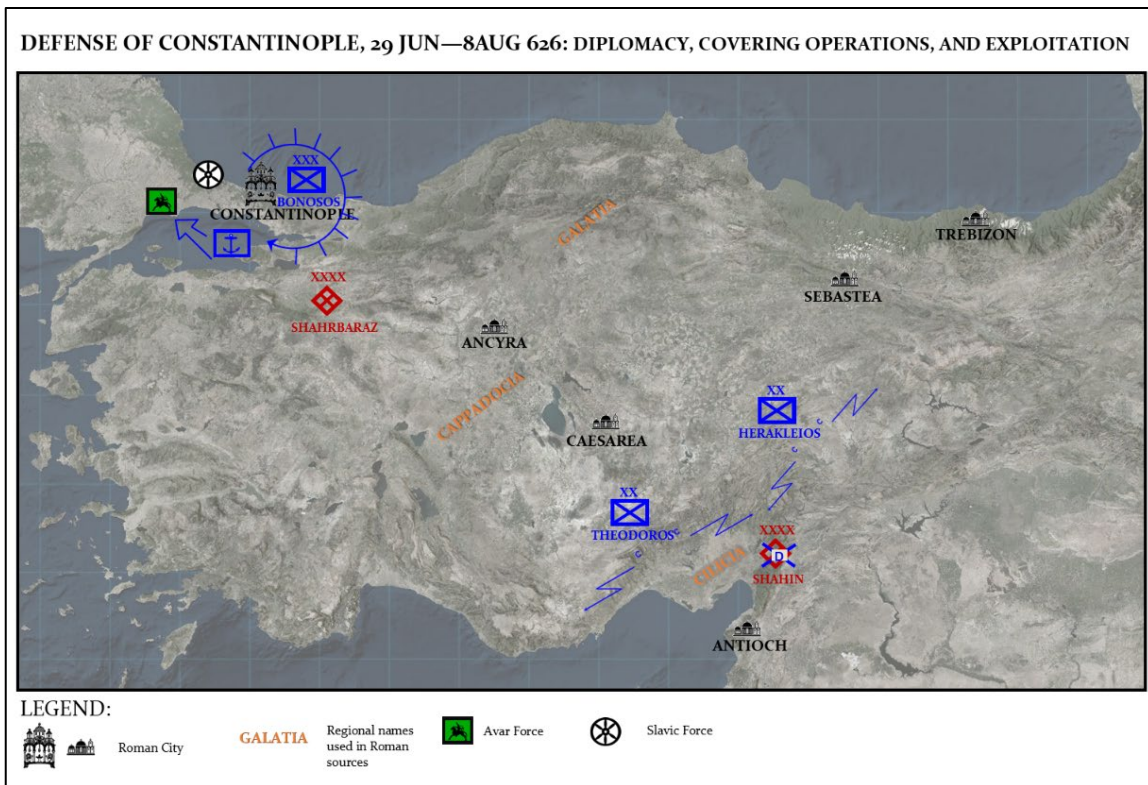


Figure 7. Defense of Constantinople, AD 626. Created by author using information from *Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD* trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 720-727; Nikephoros I, *Short History* trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 13; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 313-314, 323-324; Geoffrey Regan, *First Crusader: Byzantium's Holy Wars* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 100; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

A second point observable in the defense of Constantinople is that political consolidation is as much a military problem as a policy problem. The civil-military-clergy team which led the defensive efforts in and around Constantinople directly impacted Herakleios and Theodoros's operations to destroy the Sassanid reserves. Civil and military actions to consolidate the gains of defensive operations enabled Herakleios's freedom of action to defeat the Sassanid strategy against Constantinople. For Herakleios, who enjoyed the luxury of being both head of state and supreme commander of Roman forces, this linkage of political consolidation to military operations was intuitive and simple. For the US Army and the US Government, achieving a similar level of coordination is as complex as it is important. Success in LSCO will not be enough to achieve a position of advantage over rivals without an eye towards consolidation of



political gains, and military leaders should be invested with civilian plans. To this end, Major General Bill Hix and Colonel Robert Simpson have observed that accelerating offensive actions requires a kind of consolidation among interagency and industrial base partners. This would allow the US Army to seize the initiative across all domains beyond an enemy's ability to react in time, as Herakleios seized the initiative against the second echelon Sassanid forces in 626.<sup>37</sup>

Herakleios's third campaign to the Iranian capitol achieved his political aim, which had shifted over the course of his successful offensives. In the spring of AD 627, Herakleios took the army (25,000 to 50,000 strong) again to Armenia where he met with the *khagan* of a Turkic tribe known as the Göks. He concluded an alliance, gaining perhaps 40,000 Gök Turkic cavalry and marched south into Atropatene. The Roman-Turkic forces destroyed Iranian settlements near Ardabil and Tabriz through the autumn of 627. With the onset of cold weather, the Turks ceased operations and Herakleios continued south through the Zagros Mountains toward Mesopotamia.

By December of AD 627, Herakleios's advance guard *moira* located Khusro's last major army at Nineveh under the command of one Rosh Behan.<sup>38</sup> As the advance guard had captured Rosh Behan's outposts and some officers, the Romans gained intelligence on the Sassanid strength and disposition and learned that 3,000 additional men were *en route* from Ctesiphon to reinforce Rosh Behan. Herakleios therefore led a hasty attack. Rosh Behan became aware of Herakleios's advance and formed a hasty defense after crossing the Zab River. The Roman histories describe a meeting engagement between the two armies on the plain east of Nineveh which lasted from dawn to dusk on 12 December and ended with a decisive Roman victory and Rosh Behan's death in a duel with Herakleios. About half of the Sassanid force died at Nineveh while the other half did not rout but withdrew to mountainous terrain. Those Sassanid elements

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<sup>37</sup> Bill Hix and Robert Simpson, "Accelerating into the Next Fight: The Imperative of the Offense on the Future Battlefield," *Modern War Institute at West Point*, 26 February 2020, accessed 27 February 2020, <https://mwi.usma.edu/accelerating-next-fight-imperative-offense-future-battlefield/>.

<sup>38</sup> The name means "the fortunate" or "the good," based on entries from D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 89.

would attempt to delay the Roman advance toward Ctesiphon as a semi-guerilla force, cutting bridges and flooding canals as shown in Figure 8. Iranian resistance proved inadequate as Herakleios's march devastated the cities and palaces at Dezeridan, Rousa, Beklal, and Dastagerd. Before he reached Dastagerd, the Roman Emperor offered peace terms to Khusro, who refused to concede. Khusro attempted to shelter in the suburbs of Ctesiphon where a cadre of Sassanid nobles—the sons of Shahrbaraz, Khusro's own son, and remnants of the army—imprisoned, tortured, and executed Khusro. The son of Khusro claimed his birthright to the Sassanid throne, adopted the regnal name Kavad II, and accepted Herakleios's peace terms on 3 April 628.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 127-128; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 317-327; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 14-17; *Chronicon Paschale*, 728-736; Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 158-160, 169-171. The Armenian history describes a different version of the Battle of Nineveh in which Herakleios conducted a false retreat into open plains followed by a retrograde defense, and Kaegi supports this narrative. Based on the situation of imminent Sassanid reinforcements, I find the Roman version more likely from an operational perspective: time was against Herakleios, so he had to attack quickly before Rosh Behan's force could gain the advantage of reinforcement.



Figure 8. Final Counteroffensive, AD 627-628. Created by author using information from Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* trans. James Howard-Johnston (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 127-128; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 317-327; Nikephoros I, *Short History* trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 14-17; *Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD* trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 728-736; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158-160, 169-171; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

Herakleios had to consolidate his military gains in this final campaign in a manner analogous to the tasks described in Chapter Eight of FM 3-0. His forces had to secure themselves and logistics from the remains of Rosh Behan's defeat army which became guerilla fighters. As the Sassanid dynasty collapsed into rebellion, Herakleios began negotiations with Kavad's faction to agree on termination criteria and to provide for a semblance of order in Mesopotamia. Another feature of the Roman consolidation of gains was the deliberate plunder of defeated settlements; while this could have been controlled and used to offset the costs of the war for Herakleios, the historical records indicate that there was no significant control over soldiers' plundering.

Herakleios's government did not prosper financially in the Sassanids' defeat and what the Roman's did return to the treasury was less than the cost of the war.

## Outcomes of the Roman-Sassanid War

The Roman victory retroceded all Sassanid lands captured after AD 603 to the Romans. With the subjugation of the *Shahanshah* to Constantinople, it seemed that Rome ascended to complete hegemony over the known world. Herakleios conducted the war as an operational artist, combining his military, political, and economic authority to retain advantages over the Sassanids. His offensives transformed Roman political aims into actions which incrementally forced Khusro into reactive cycles against audacious Roman movements. He employed information operations astutely and regularly dispatched missives to the Roman people to maintain public support and hope in the war effort.<sup>40</sup> Herakleios attempted to unify the disparate corners of Roman society through theological compromises which succeeded only in the short term. He appears to have had little interest in consolidating his hold over the regained Levant whilst conducting operations in Iran.

The real consequences of this destitution would be manifest in the next decade, as Constantinople's administration of the regained territories suffered under chaotic management, dwindling resources, social and religious crises, and the threat of famine. The wars against the Sassanids since AD 613 had depleted Constantinople's treasury and the formerly productive fields of Anatolia and Roman Mesopotamia lay desolate while Sassanid Iran descended into civil war, creating instability on Rome's eastern flanks. Theophanes and Nikephoros both cite that almost thirty years of warfare had caused such destruction that both Rome and Sassanid Iran lost more than they gained through the conflict. Even with the loot obtained from Iranian cities, Herakleios owed a vast amount to the Church, and there seem to have been no controls on soldiers' pillaging of captured wealth which went into individual estates rather than to the

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<sup>40</sup> *Chronicon Paschale*, 728-736; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 313.

imperial government.

The destruction of Roman strategic infrastructure was particularly dangerous for Constantinople. Among the greatest Roman losses was the destruction to the *cursus publicus*, or the post road system, which was the infrastructure for Constantinople's strategic intelligence collection and communications; between Avar destruction in the north and Iranian destruction in the south, Herakleios probably received less information at slower rates than his predecessors.<sup>41</sup> When the Sassanid Empire was a significant geopolitical force, it shared Constantinople's interest in containing Arab raiding and maintained strategic communications with Constantinople which was Herakleios's window on Arabia. Though the Sassanids and Romans used Arab proxies to counter each other's influence in Arabia and the Levant, together they imposed a sense of order in an otherwise chaotic region. With Ctesiphon defeated, Rome would have to manage its southern crises alone.

The external threat of the Sassanid invasion provided the Romans with a rare period of political unity, but it declined into political-religious schism after Herakleios claimed final victory. The religious concept of monophysitism, which asserted that the person of the Christ was either human or divine, but not both, created a rift in the Christian world which was controversial in the sixth century. Herakleios needed a united body politic and he sponsored Patriarch Sergios's adoption of monothelitism as a compromise between Orthodox doctrine and monophysite concepts.<sup>42</sup> Herakleios needed to tolerate a diversity of dogmas in order to strategically employ the Nestorian and Syriac Christians who had long lived under Sassanid rule and were outside the reach of Constantinopolitan theological consensus. These communities

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<sup>41</sup> Francis Dvornik, *Origins of Intelligence Services* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 129.

<sup>42</sup> John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 36-37. Specifically, Monothelitism stated that the Christ was composed of two separate natures united in a single will or essence. Orthodoxy holds that the person of the Christ was both fully human and divine simultaneously.

provided invaluable intelligence and logistics support to the Christian Emperor in his advance through Mesopotamia. Armenian Christians also tended to agree with monophysitism and were crucial military allies in Herakleios's efforts in Atropatene. The years AD 639 to 634 would prove fateful as Roman instruments of power shouldered sectarian tensions, damaged infrastructure, and empty coffers whilst attempting to consolidate its political gains in retroceded Levantine regions.<sup>43</sup>

While consolidation of military gains did occur during the campaigns against the Sassanid Empire, the consolidation of political gains did not occur. Roman territories which had fallen under Sassanid control for more than a decade needed effort and resources to restore the bureaucratic structures necessary for resource extraction, defense, and civil order. Herakleios directed little effort to the Levant as a political consolidation area and instead addressed these areas only after gaining the peace of AD 628. After regaining the Roman territories which had been Sassanid for ten years, the consolidation of political gains did not start until AD 629 and had insufficient time to coalesce when the Rashidun began exploiting the Roman political weaknesses in the Levant. As the Roman Army reestablished the theater command for the *Magister Militum per Orientem*, the necessary administrative structures did not exist which would sustain a professional army in the *Oriens* Theater. The failure to enact necessary political consolidation of gains would lead to military weakness, civil resistance to Roman rule, and the rapid fall of the Levant to the forces of the Rashidun Caliphate. The lessons of the Roman-Persian War can inform the reader of FM 3-0: while it accurately describes the necessity of consolidation in LSCO for a corps or division, readers should learn from the Roman experience that the most important consolidation area may be political in nature, and not in the unit's physical area of operations.

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<sup>43</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 169.

## Chapter 3: The Rashidun Conquest

From Constantinople's perspective, the period of AD 629 to 634 would bring a different kind of complexity, dispersed threats and opportunities, and rapid change. The overthrow of an old geopolitical order began an era of hegemonic maintenance. Rome had to regain control over its territories and rebuild its society after thirty years of civil war and invasion; the withdrawal of Sassanid forces and government organs from Egypt and the Levant would be a convoluted process lasting years; Eastern security challenges persisted from instability in Sassanid Iran as their civil war raged; the Avars and Slavs remained risks to order in Illyricum and Thrace; the Visigoths of Spain would have to be dealt with as they had annexed Roman lands in Malaga during the chaos of AD 614 and 615; and Arab raiders from the south were a perennial low-level threat. The Emperor was torn between his immense debts to the church for financing the Roman Army, the need to rebuild Roman infrastructure, and his desire to immortalize his accomplishments with grand projects. The Roman Army found itself at an ambiguous crossroads, where stagnation proved fateful. The last decade of war had tested and proven Roman operational concepts of mobile, expeditionary forces conducting political, informational, and diplomatic capabilities on campaign. It was small, lethal, and expensive, and an entire administrative-logistic complex evolved to meet its requirements since the days of the Emperor Maurikios more than a half-century before. Of all the problems that now confronted Herakleios, reforming a successful army in the absence of a severe external threat probably ranked low in importance.<sup>44</sup>

The Roman experience of the years AD 629 to 633 may be analogous to the United States' experience of the 1990s. In both cases, a global hegemon found itself free of a long-standing enemy and facing a period of stability operations. In both cases, strategic decision

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<sup>44</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 89, and 194-195; *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

makers weighed domestic efforts as more important than defense against foreign aggressors. In both cases, the paradigmatic assumption of the centrality of stability functions would have to rapidly change in the face of an unexpected threat. In 2001 this threat was global terrorism which had been growing throughout the 1990s. In AD 634, this threat was the Rashidun Caliphate whose military strength had been coalescing since the mid-620s.

The war between the world's two great powers created a sense of eschatological fatigue among the peoples caught between Rome and Sassanid Iran and on the fringes of the conflict. Many believed that humanity was approaching the End Times: mass migrations of Christians and Zoroastrians of all ethnicities disrupted social fabrics across the known world; regional economies were in shambles as plagues and famine persisted through the 620s; governments of Mesopotamian provinces were in various stages of disintegration; the holy sites of all the great religions were in ruins. From this environment, the ravaged populations of Mesopotamia and Iran were especially receptive to Mohammed's austere and syncretic monotheism; the prophet promised assured redemption and pointed to the failings of Christian, Judaic, and Zoroastrian societies as evidence of his vision's rightness.<sup>45</sup> Support from the Roman-Sassanid War's victims would allow the new religion to spread the Caliphate across the Near East as quickly as the armies of Alexander the Great.

### Roman Strategic Situation and Military Policy, AD 629-634

From AD 629 to 634 Constantinople assumed that the Empire was injured but resurgent and its threat perception did not anticipate another existential crisis. To Roman eyes, the Arab threat appeared unchanged from the centuries-long experience that the Romans had in dealing with the southeastern border. Restoring order in the East and continued instability emanating from the Sassanid civil war—refugee movements, cross-border attacks, trade disruptions, and

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<sup>45</sup> Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, 445-451.



banditry—ranked high in the Constantinople’s perception of threats. To underscore this importance, Herakleios resided in Hierapolis and Edessa during the 630s where he was closer to events. Shahrbaraz had become a Roman vassal and may have received Roman Army reinforcements for his ill-fated attempt to claim the Sassanid throne for himself in AD 630. The Avars and Slavs continued to besiege and raid cities in Illyricum and Thrace and may have constituted the primary direct challenge to Roman military might until AD 634.<sup>46</sup>

The Roman military shrunk to a level the state could afford given its economic and social shrinkage resulting from the Sassanid War, plague, and famine. Herakleios slashed military expenditures in favor of civil projects because there seemed to be no existential threats. In AD 634, the Roman Army’s strength and disposition relevant to the East was likely 20,000 soldiers in Praesental Armies, 18,000 soldiers for the *Magister Militum per Orientem*, and 12,000 soldiers for the *Magister Militum per Armeniam*. Arab and local levies in the *Oriens* Theater (Syria and the Levant) probably outnumbered the Roman imperial forces because training local auxiliaries was cheaper than maintaining the professional Roman force on the borders. There was no militia which could assist in the defense of cities and fortifications because Roman governance had long forbidden civilians to bear arms.<sup>47</sup> Local societies were not invested in their membership within the Roman Empire, and the auxiliary forces were unpopular among civilians in *Oriens*; for this reason, auxiliaries and Roman soldiers often idled in fortified major cities and dispersed garrisons. The Praesental Armies remained the world-class fighting force, but for cost-saving and internal security reasons they remained in garrisons near Constantinople; the forces in *Oriens* and Armenia were likely of lesser training and discipline. Against a threat from the south, Roman and local forces in *Oriens* would have to delay an enemy for fifty-five to sixty days to allow the Praesental Armies to march some 1600 kilometers from the capitol to the Syrian borders.

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<sup>46</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 202, 223, 225-227.

<sup>47</sup> Justinian I, Twelfth Book, Thirty-Fifth Title, para. 15, 16.

Compounding this problem was the degraded lines of communication and intelligence which would further delay Herakleios's reaction to events abroad. Even by seventh-century standards, a two-month deployment timeline and an intelligence deficit constituted a crisis in strategic mobility.<sup>48</sup>

The Roman Army's administrative-logistic system was a driver of operational weaknesses in *Oriens*. The basic incentive for the service of a professional army was reliable payment in currency. The crisis of the Roman-Sassanid War led to the halving of Roman Army salaries and their payment was never restored to the comparatively opulent wages of AD 600. In the peripheral regions of the Empire such as the borders of *Oriens*, the Roman forces were beyond the range of standard logistics and were supposed to receive additional stipends for sustenance-in-kind which they would use to procure local supplies; the reductions in military spending and monetary crises jeopardized the integrity of Roman forces in *Oriens*. Herakleios likely understood the role of financial shortfalls during the end of Maurikios's reign and Phokas's coup, so he did not take the matter lightly. By the 630s, imperial *sakellarioi* and *komerkiarioi* were stationed with the Roman forces in *Oriens* and in some cases served as unit commanders.<sup>49</sup> This provided at least the appearance that soldier salaries and sustenance were assured; the reality was that in many cases the army's sustenance originated not from the Roman government but through controlled foraging which alienated local societies over time. Logistics and administration suffered under a multiplicity of disorganized systems. Caught between the disincentives of unpredictable payments and logistics support, local resentment, and the Emperor's preference to cut military expenses, Roman forces generally sat in passive defenses with little interest in offensive operations. In the face of all these deficiencies, there was no impetus to change or reform Roman Army administrative or operational structures—although

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<sup>48</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 34-35, 39-40, and 42; Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081*, 20-21 and 180. The Roman total force was probably between 98,000 and its AD 641 assessed strength at 109,000.

<sup>49</sup> Justinian I, First Book, Fourth Title, para 18.

weaknesses were apparent, the army's capabilities still seemed "good enough" to meet its requirements because no critical threat had yet appeared.<sup>50</sup>

To offset the Roman defense structure's deficiencies on the Syria-Arabia frontier, Constantinople had for centuries "managed" the feuding Arab tribes through sponsorship of the Christian Ghassanid Arab kingdom and a network of amenable pagan Arabs. When the Sassanids were potent, the Ghassanids held in check the Lakhmid Arabs who were the Iranian proxies in Arabia. The Ghassanids would remain Roman allies so long as Constantinople made their alliance worth the risks for Arabs living in the dangerous outposts of Christendom. By AD 630, Roman bureaucrats halted the payments for the maintenance of portions of the Arab alliance and some quickly defected to Mohammed's cause. Payments likely resumed later, as the Romans were still able to draw on Ghassanid allies for the Yarmouk Campaign in AD 636.<sup>51</sup>

Roman military dysfunction was an extension of a greater internal malaise which combined problems of population depletion, religious sectarianism, imperial succession, profligate finances, and an inability to consolidate Roman gains over *Oriens*. Over the last thirty years of war, the Roman population probably declined between twenty to forty percent. Sectarian differences were becoming more vocal across Christendom and were exacerbated with the inclusion of Nestorian communities arriving from Iran; Herakleios's monothelistic political compromise would prove insufficient, and in AD 680, the Sixth Ecumenical Council ruled the doctrine heretical after decades of civil unrest. Herakleios's second and incestuous marriage to his niece Martina became a scandal that would later threaten the Empire with civil war—the Church condemned the marriage and refused to recognize Martina's children as legitimate heirs to the throne, while monothelite Church hierarchs supported the succession. In 641 the succession dispute would result in a short-lived regency council and a military coup to plant

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<sup>50</sup> Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081*, 146-148; Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 222; *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 39, 44.

<sup>51</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 335-336; *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 52-55.

Constans II on the throne as sole emperor.<sup>52</sup>

The consolidation of Roman government bureaucracy in territories regained from the Sassanids was a long process that never survived to completion: Romans had to reestablish facilities, resources, transportation, and communication for the extraction of revenue and provision of civic order while Constantinople spent money elsewhere. Herakleios neglected to address imperial finances after the expenditures of the Sassanid War, though he did repay the Church. He initiated expensive new construction projects at the expense of his foreign and security policies, such as a new imperial residence, renovations of public baths, and the construction of new hippodromes and aqueducts. Migrants and refugees from Iran and ransoms for hostages of Arab raiders further disrupted the return of governance. The Romans' improvised government in 634 consisted of bribes paid to local Arab powerbrokers for the promise of civil control. The transition of bureaucracy from the Sassanids back to the Romans was still incomplete when the Rashidun expansion swept into poorly governed Mesopotamia and Levant. Between the theological, financial, social, and military strains facing the Empire, Rome struggled to reassert positive control over the cities of the region. To the people who lived under Roman rule, Constantinople appeared to be out of touch with reality. What the early Muslims found were cities and provinces desirous of order and weary of perceived Roman greed and economic exploitation.<sup>53</sup> With well-led and aggressive forces, the Rashidun would soon deny Rome the opportunity for political consolidation.

## The Rashidun Expansion, AD 630-636

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<sup>52</sup> Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 199 and 218; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 27-30; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, 444; Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 36. The author differs from James Howard-Johnston's assessment that reestablishment of control in *Oriens* was not a problem for the Romans. Kaegi's observations indicate that Roman military logistics inadequacies to sustain the army in *Oriens* arose from severe administrative and political consolidation problems.

During Mohammed's lifetime, the *umma*'s objective was the establishment of Islam as the dominant faith and political force within the Arab world. After Mohammed's death on 8 June AD 632, leadership of the *umma* passed to Abu Bakr which marked the beginning of the Rashidun Caliphate and the beginning of Islam as a geopolitical force. Its immediate political objectives in 632 were the completion of the conquest of Arabia and the suppression of rival factions who may have seen Mohammed's death as a moment of weakness. By AD 634, the Rashidun political objectives were the propagation of their ideology through any means possible and the acquisition of wealth and territory. The incentives of proselytization, redemption, and looting provided an attractive cause and created a "virtuous cycle" by which the Rashidun expansion could sustain itself; the rich lands and cities of the Roman East and the holy sites of Jerusalem were irresistible prizes. The Rashidun expansion was not a simple wave of violence but was a larger social movement and egalitarian ideology of which violence was a part. The Romans and the peoples who became the first generation of Muslims were not categorical enemies and enjoyed enduring social and economic ties even while states of war existed between them. Yet as Mohammed's ideology expanded, it shaped conditions for the advance of Abu Bakr's armies. Where the Caliphs' ideology cognitively advanced among the populations in some areas, indifferent or resentful of Roman rule, the ideology incited fifth columns who would in some cases surrender settlements and cities to the Caliphate, and provide resources, intelligence, or lethal aid. Thus, the Rashidun expanded their territory through subversion of local governance, separating the people from the Roman center, and using force to effect negotiations on favorable terms. The Roman failures to better consolidate their political gains from the Sassanid War provided ideological fuel for the Caliphate's expansion.<sup>54</sup>

Rome's first military encounter with the Caliphate reinforced Roman complacency and

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Baladhuri, *Origins of the Islamic State*, 107-108; Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* *Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, 465; Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, 2-3, 37; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 239.

provided Mohammed and Abu Bakr with valuable intelligence on Roman tactics. At the Battle of Mut'a in September AD 629, the Romans defeated an Islamic raiding force near a village southeast of the Dead Sea. The Roman commander routed the Arab party in an attack which killed three unspecified *emirs*, and the famous Khalid ibn al-Walid was reportedly among the Arab forces that escaped. The victory was merely tactical, for Mohammed sent subsequent strategic reconnaissance expeditions into southern Palestine in AD 630. The Arabs who fought for the Caliphate probably already had significant understanding of Roman and Sassanid operations because both empires hired Arab auxiliary cavalry during the 620s. Herakleios received reporting on border disruptions probably within the year and requests for reinforcement in *Oriens*, but these events conformed to his existing perception of ordinary Arab raiding and did not spur any strategic changes. Herakleios's leadership in this last decade of his rule was drastically different from the years before AD 629; the Emperor remained in his palaces, no longer took the field, and relied exclusively on leadership through couriers.<sup>55</sup>

The Rashidun conquest of Syria began in AD 634 and the subsequent battles of Areopolis and Dathin spurred Constantinople to change Roman policies in *Oriens*, but the Empire could not stay ahead of events. Areopolis was an outpost on the Romans' Arabian frontier and it sat on a major road which connected Mesopotamia to cities along the Red Sea. The Roman garrison Areopolis offered brief resistance and surrendered to the Caliphate in either late 633 or January 634.<sup>56</sup> On 4 February 634, Abu Bakr's offensive entered Gaza under the command of 'Amr ibn al-As in an engagement near the village Dathin. The Roman commander Sergios of Caesarea Maritima (and friend of Herakleios) led a single *tagma* and an unspecified number of local Arab auxiliaries to close with 'Amr's army of at least 3,000 men. 'Amr's force left no Roman survivors and tortured Sergios to death for previously imposing a trade embargo on Muslim

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<sup>55</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 335; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 72-73, 82.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Baladhuri, *Origins of the Islamic State*, 113; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 83-85.

caravans. Indeed, Sergios may have been hated by his own population; Theophanes writes that some of the Roman Arab auxiliaries defected to the Caliphate, either before or after this engagement because Constantinople refused to pay them. During these events before July of 634, Herakleios moved his residence to Emesa and ordered additional forces to reinforce *Oriens* as the importance of instability rose in the Emperor's estimation.<sup>57</sup>

The Battle of Ajnadiyn of 30 July 634, was a decisive victory for 'Amr and a strategic disaster which began the permanent unravelling of the Roman Army's cohesion and operational coherence. 'Amr and two Roman field armies commanded by one Vardan of Emesa and the Emperor's brother, Theodoros, fought a meeting engagement in an open field near Beit Guvrin in which the Romans suffered a costly defeat, but the numbers are unknown. At least half were casualties and the rest fled in a chaotic rout; Vardan died in battle; Theodoros returned to the Emperor in disgrace, contributed to an impending dynastic scandal, and faced imprisonment for incurring the Emperor's ire. Rural civilians converged on major cities such as Emesa, Damascus, and Antioch for shelter from Rashidun predation. The Roman Army's confidence was perhaps the greatest casualty of Ajnadiyn as units retreated into garrison towns, abandoned outposts for the cities, and ceased security patrolling. Herakleios left Emesa for Antioch—farther away from the frontier—and issued guidance to all army commanders that their priority was the defense of cities and to avoid taking the offensive. The concentration of forces and refugees in cities broke the *Oriens* Theater's already struggling logistics and administrative infrastructure, prevented the coordinated actions between units, and ceded all operational and strategic initiative to the Rashidun who gained control of all lines of communication in *Oriens* and defeated yet more Roman units in smaller engagements such as Pella in early AD 635. Herakleios lost faith in many of the city and provincial governors because several of them negotiated separate peace

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<sup>57</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 336; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 20; Al-Baladhuri, *Origins of the Islamic State*, 108-109, 113; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 88-92.

agreements with the Rashidun armies, such as at Palmyra and Bostra. Herakleios replaced civil leaders with military appointees in order to prevent losing more locations to surrender.

Theodoros's imprisonment and the apparent trust deficit among the Roman strategic leadership were symptomatic of a toxifying leadership environment surrounding the Emperor which would assure the disaster at Yarmouk.<sup>58</sup>

## The Yarmouk Campaign and Aftermath, AD 636-642

The Roman defeat at Yarmouk in on 20 August AD 636 was a result of the disorder which followed the loss at Ajnadiyn. The Romans' fearful defensive mindset, inadequate logistics, and political missteps converged to ensure a catastrophic Roman loss. The Battle of Yarmouk was the finale to a campaign which was the Roman Empire's last counteroffensive in *Oriens* as shown in Figure 9. Herakleios's emerging operational design after Ajnadiyn was to hold fortified cities from which to receive larger armies from Anatolia and Armenia, then launch a counteroffensive to expel the Rashidun. Yet his "defend and build" approach was doomed as the Caliphate's armies had freedom to attack any Roman positions without fear of counterattack; indeed, Herakleios lost Damascus after a six-month siege in September AD 635, and Emesa then surrendered without a fight.

Nonetheless, Herakleios managed to assemble the largest Roman army since the Sassanid War by July of 636 and briefly gained the initiative, driving Khalid ibn al-Walid and Abu Ubaida south from Emesa. Five Roman field armies, perhaps totaling more than 20,000 Romans (probably the entire strength of the *Oriens* theater) and an unknown number of auxiliary forces served as a multinational task force; the task force commander and probable *Magister Militum per Orientem* was an Armenian *strategos* Vahan;<sup>59</sup> Niketas, son of the famous Shahrbaraz, led a

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Baladhuri, *Origins of the Islamic State*, 111-114; Nikephoros I, *Short History*, 20; Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 136; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 99-107, 112; David Nicolle, *Yarmuk, AD 636: The Muslim Conquest of Syria* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 46, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Possibly the same Vahan who led Herakleios's reconnaissance at the Battle of Nineveh in 627.



contingent of Iranian forces in Rome's employ; Gargis led an Armenian field army; King Jabala ibn al-Ayham led the Ghassanid Arab forces; and an unnamed Roman commander recorded as *Buccinator* commanded the right-most field army.<sup>60</sup> Roman leadership suffered from a lack of unity of command across the field army's formations. *Buccinator* refused to support to any requests from Gargis, Vahan hated Niketas, and Jabala was likely fighting against his Christian Arab kinsmen on the Rashidun side. Some accounts indicate the different ethnic forces turned to fighting each other, and the influence of Christian sectarianism probably led to resentment between the monophysite believers (Armenians and Iranians) and the Orthodox (Greeks, Romans, and Arabs).<sup>61</sup>

The Romans marched from Antioch, Chalcis, and Edessa and secured Damascus unopposed, but found the population hostile; the Roman administrator of Damascus refused to supply the Roman forces, citing unacceptable shortages and could not shelter any elements of the armies. As the Romans pursued the Rashidun south, the Rashidun had already selected an engagement area along the gorges of the Yarmouk River where Rashidun would surprise the Romans. The Roman advance plodded southward with forage detachments struggling to secure fodder, food, and water among unsupportive locals. The Romans regained contact with al-Walid's force at Jabiya where the Rashidun bested a Roman-Ghassanid detachment in a short engagement on 23 July. The Rashidun were holding the gorges and restrictive terrain and the Romans established camps for attack positions from which to coordinate against the Rashidun. Sporadic probing engagements ensued between the forces until the Roman armies coordinated frontal attack to begin on or about 14 August.

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<sup>60</sup> Theodoros, brother of Herakleios, may have been a commander at Yarmouk, but the accounts are conflicted on this statement. If he was, then his imprisonment would have likely occurred in 637 or later rather than after Ajnadiyn. Regardless of the sequence of his imprisonment, the relationship was indicative of a greater leadership and trust crisis.

<sup>61</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 338; Nicolle, *Yarmuk, AD 636: The Muslim Conquest of Syria*, 18; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 132-133.

Over the course of six days of combat, possibly spread over a front of thirteen kilometers, the Romans and Rashidun fought attrition-based positional warfare, both seeking an assailable flank to decisively envelop the enemy. By the third day, Khalid ibn al-Walid had sent a cavalry element deep to seize the Romans' encampment and a critical bridge behind the Roman lines which severed the Romans from their operational support bases. Combined with the Romans' existing resource shortfalls, the capture of encampments probably had a severe psychological effect on the Roman soldiery. On the final day, a gap opened between the Roman infantry and cavalry which Khalid ibn al-Walid exploited; that action initiated a panicked mass-desertion across the Roman forces, a subsequent Rashidun pursuit, and the destruction of Rome's eastern armies.<sup>62</sup>

The story of the Yarmouk campaign demonstrates the importance of operations to consolidate gains and how those operations can fail in the absence of strategic consolidation. Unlike the Roman campaigns against the Sassanids a decade earlier, the Romans could not sustain their operations because their logistics were insecure, and the population actively or passively resisted Roman efforts. The systemic failure of Roman bureaucracy then negatively impacted the social systems which provided for unity of command and the ability to seize initiative from the Rashidun. Insecurity and public opposition emerged from the perception that Roman governance was a failure in the wake of the need for reconstruction following the Sassanid withdrawal. Basic bureaucratic infrastructure in the eastern provinces was too slow and too anemic to preserve an environment in which Roman military forces could appear beneficial to the population.

The Roman defeat at Yarmouk effectively disintegrated the *Oriens* Theater, heralded the end of the Roman theater command system under the *magistri militum*, and separated the Roman

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<sup>62</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 318, 337-339; Sebeos, *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, 136; Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 119-121; Nicolle, *Yarmuk, AD 636: The Muslim Conquest of Syria*, 57, 61-65.

heartland of Anatolia from its strategic agricultural asset in Egypt. In AD 637, Jerusalem and Antioch surrendered to the Rashidun as the Caliphate spread throughout Roman Syria. Constantinople's ability to retain and govern its eastern territories dissolved with its eastern forces, and the Rashidun encircled the Exarchate of Alexandria. Although Alexandria did not fall to the Caliphate until 641, it ceased to be a productive Roman asset with the loss of its lines of communication to Constantinople in 637. Alexandria's isolation deprived Constantinople of trade and food production. After Vahan's likely death at Yarmouk, the *Magister Militum per Orientem* disbanded, and all other theater commands followed suit except for the Praesental

Armies which would lead the army's transformation into the *theme* system of the eighth century.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 9. *Oriens Theater Operations, AD 633-637*. Created by author using information from David Nicolle, *Yarmuk, AD 636: The Muslim Conquest of Syria* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 47, 55, 63; Walter Emil Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78-133; Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State* trans. Philip Khuri Hitti (New York: Columbia University, 1916), 108-114; Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 335-336; Nikephoros I, *Short History* trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 20; US Department of the Army, Army Geospatial Enterprise.

## Elements of Defeat and Success

The Roman strategic legacy of the seventh century defies simple characterization. On one hand, Herakleios was unable to repeat his operational and strategic successes of the 620s when confronted with a different threat on different terrain. The Roman Army appears to have

<sup>63</sup> Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 339-340; Haldon, *Warfare, State, and Society in the Byzantine World: 565-1204*, 73; Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army: 284-1081*, 23.

been inadequate for the new environment it faced, crippled under dysfunctional government policies and obsolete bureaucracy. On the other hand, Rome was the only political entity in the Near East to survive the Rashidun, and its territorial losses relieved subsequent Roman emperors of governance problems that they could not afford to address even in AD 629; the Roman strategic contraction to Anatolia gave it a natural line of mountainous fortifications from which to halt the advance of Rashidun and Umayyad depredations, shown in Figure 9. Indeed, Herakleios's so-called failure to retain territory may have been a wise policy decision to ensure the survival of the Roman Army by ceding terrain and "right-sizing" the Roman Empire to be most efficient with its available means.

The Roman capability for seizing the initiative rested on the bureaucratic framework through which the army received sustenance and equipment, and its inability to sustain forces in *Oriens* derived from the lack of political consolidation in that theater from the success won in Atropatene. When the consolidation area of 628 became the area of operations in 633, the Romans found their administrative shortcomings as disastrous as the Rashidun offensive. Years of foraging on the Levantine population undermined logistics for professional armies and turned Levantine publics against Roman administration. The peaceful surrenders of Roman cities to the Caliphate were local political decisions to accept the form of rule that was least burdensome. Without reliable supplies or shelter, and against an environment of public resentment, the Roman forces in *Oriens* were on the path to defeat years before the battle of Ajnadiyn. While the Romans achieved decisive success with expeditionary warfare and mobility against the Sassanids, in *Oriens*, they relied upon fixed bases which their bureaucratic infrastructure could not support. The Rashidun attacked these decisive points, denying the Romans their use, while the Rashidun were able to sustain themselves through foraging and donations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, 122.

Political consolidation is inextricable from bureaucratic efficiency. Bureaucracy is the mechanism through which the state transforms its strategic capital and resources into combat power. Looking aside from Rashidun battle prowess, Constantinople's ailing organizational frameworks for generating and sustaining forces in the east were a significant--if not decisive--factor in Roman military failures of the 630s. As the US military's senior leaders work to prevent disasters like those of the 630s, they should not overlook the opportunities and obstacles to consolidation of gains within the US Department of Defense's bureaucracy. Obsolete defense acquisitions policies and laws reduce the US Army's ability to harness advanced technologies and operate freely across all domains. The US Department of Defense continues to wrestle its own acquisitions policies in implementing necessary cybernetic capabilities that defy the Defense Acquisitions System's preference for mature technologies.<sup>65</sup> As warfare encompasses the cybernetic and space domains, wars of limited political aims will require operations to consolidate gains in these contested domains, such as maintaining a favorable information environment or security of information infrastructure. The policies and administrative restrictions of the last century may prove to be an impediment to how US Army leaders use capabilities and think about how they can "make enduring their temporary operational successes" in esoteric and unpredictable situations.<sup>66</sup>

## Chapter 4: Conclusions

This monograph's objective is to discuss the consolidation of gains in LSCO using the Eastern Roman Empire. Because of its parallel experiences, seventh-century Constantinople

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<sup>65</sup> Jason M. Golaboski, "DoD Weapons Systems Acquisition: A Cyber Disconnect," monograph, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 2011, 14-17.

<sup>66</sup> John Adams, "Global Challenges Demand Scrutiny of Our Defense Acquisition Process," *Real Clear Defense*, 17 March 2020, accessed 17 March 2020, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/03/17/global\\_challenges\\_demand\\_scrutiny\\_of\\_our\\_defense\\_acquisition\\_process\\_115125.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/03/17/global_challenges_demand_scrutiny_of_our_defense_acquisition_process_115125.html); Mike Lundy, Richard Creed, Nate Springer, and Scott Pence, "Three Perspectives on Consolidating Gains," *Army University Press*, August 2019, accessed 20 March 2020, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2019-OLE/July/Lundy-Three-Perspectives/>.

furnishes a useful lesson for the US Army regarding the consolidation of gains and the nature of consolidation areas and a useful perspective regarding the orchestration of the instruments of national power. The Romans failed to address a non-contiguous consolidation area resulting from the Sassanid War and their failure established the conditions of weakness which the Rashidun Caliphate could exploit just five years after the stunning Roman victory over the Sassanid Empire.

Where Herakleios most needed to consolidate gains was not the area to the rear of his army, but was in Syria, the Levant, and Egypt—all beyond the area of operations in Atropatene and Armenia. This does not mean that Herakleios did not have a consolidation area behind his force—he did, and he effectively secured it. The expulsion of Sassanid bureaucracies in the Levant and Egypt and their replacement with Roman systems could not take place overnight, and the political chaos within Iran further disrupted the political consolidation of gains. The Roman example indicates that a nation's ability to consolidate gains is closely linked to its bureaucratic and administrative vigor; an administrative system wedded to enabling a specific type of operations in a specific environment—expeditions through Armenia—became a source of weakness when forced to sustain the Roman Army in static positions in the Levant. Finally, Rome's inability to quickly consolidate their gains in *Oriens* led to a disadvantage in the cognitive space long before the Rashidun captured physical territory; Abu Bakr's offensive culminated a protracted effort of ideological penetration.

The Eastern Roman example also demonstrates that the orchestration of instruments of national power is critical in providing the conditions which enable successful operations to consolidate gains. As head of state and supreme commander in the Sassanid War, Herakleios united diplomatic, informational, and military power to achieve his political goal against Khusro II. The government of Constantinople during the siege of AD 626 provides an example of delegated orchestration of Rome's instruments of power to save the city from the Avar-Slavic-Sassanid offensive but this integration did not continue against the Rashidun threats of the 630s.

The critical element of success and failure for the Romans, and still relevant in the twenty-first century is the appropriate delegation and investing of authorities in subordinate leaders. There is no single policy or mechanical process to assure favorable strategic outcomes from the delegation of military and political authorities. Herakleios demonstrated an early talent for supporting subordinate leaders' initiative and later in his reign adopted less effective and more toxic methods. The success or failure of these authorities was personalistic and irregular. The Eastern Roman example thus suggests that any state aiming to orchestrate its elements of national power must address each situation uniquely and tailor authorities to the personalities who must make decisions.

The Roman experience of the seventh century provides a useful lens to refine the current understanding of operations to consolidate gains. John Amble argues that "boring things will win the next war," highlighting the need for additional conceptual frameworks for how the US Army will compete in the future.<sup>67</sup> Consolidation of gains as discussed in FM 3-0 is one of these emerging frameworks, but military thinkers must avoid myopically focusing consolidation on just the tactical level, because the political gains of any conflict are the most important gains to consolidate. It follows that at the Corps level and higher, one should not fix the idea of the consolidation area as purely the geographical space behind the main battle area, because political gains could be in non-contiguous regions or in other domains such as space or cybernetics. FM 3-0 describes the consolidation area as "portions of the area of operations where large-scale combat operations are no longer occurring" and it is the locus of activities to turn military gains into enduring political gains. The graphics which accompany the definition place the consolidation area geographically behind a unit's close area.<sup>68</sup> For the division level, FM 3-0's

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<sup>67</sup> John Amble, "It's the Boring Things that Will Win the Next War," *Association of the US Army*, 2 January 2020, accessed 15 February 2020, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/it's-boring-things-will-win-next-war>.

<sup>68</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2019), para. 8-2, 8-4.



definition is entirely appropriate, but as the strategic environment becomes increasingly interconnected, the Army should maintain a conceptual flexibility to prepare for consolidation operations in the actual regions or domains where the United States' political gains will be.

Just as the lessons of the Roman-Sassanid War and its aftermath challenge the concepts of a physically limited consolidation area, one can use this as a framework to expand operations to consolidate gains to cognitive, cybernetic, or other non-physical domains. In his 2019 Central Command posture statement, General Joseph Votel provided a more accurate and expansive definition of "securing and stabilizing what we and our partners have fought for." His description is less constrained than the FM 3-0 definition and the Roman experience supports his understanding. Beyond the geographic areas in which combat operations have recently transpired, the consolidation area may encompass physical or non-physical spaces which are the political objectives of the war one is fighting. Such spaces may be easily lost to unanticipated threats and strategic surprises following a military victory if there is no effort to consolidate gains during combat operations. Finally, this type of non-contiguous consolidation area would not replace the unit's need to consolidate between its support and close areas in order to ensure security and logistics support.

The United States' most enduring military victories have featured some element of consolidation of gains in non-physical spaces. The de-Nazification of Europe in the wake of the Second World War and the reconstruction effort following the US Civil War both aimed to consolidate a physical and moral victory through ideological, financial, and social methods, and the US Army was instrumental in both cases. Emerging conceptual frameworks for how military thinkers understand the phenomenon of consolidation should encompass efforts beyond those immediately necessary for tactical consolidation. Herakleios's great lesson for the readers of FM 3-0 is that today's consolidation area can become tomorrow's main battle area. By failing to consolidate political gains today, enemies will be able to set the winning conditions in that main battle area of the future.

## Glossary

<i>Dekarch</i>	“Leader of ten,” a squad leader
<i>Exkoubittoi</i>	(from Latin, <i>excubitores</i> ) Army force structure containing the Emperor’s bodyguards; deployed as an elite heavy cavalry force; commanders were occasionally invested with diplomatic and foreign policy-making privileges.
<i>Exarch</i>	Viceroy
<i>Hekatontarch</i>	“Leader of 100,” a company commander
<i>Ilarch</i>	Executive officer of a <i>tagma</i>
<i>Khagan</i>	Title used for a chieftain of the Avars, Turks, or other steppe peoples
<i>Komerkiarios</i>	Commercial officer, possibly another name for <i>sakellarios</i>
<i>Komes</i>	“Count,” <i>Tagma</i> commander
<i>Magister militum</i>	“Master of soldiers,” a theater commander
<i>Merarch</i>	Division commander
<i>Meros</i>	Unit of 2,000-7,000 men, or a division
<i>Moira</i>	Unit of 900-3,000 men, or a brigade
<i>Moirarch</i>	Brigade commander, sometimes called <i>chiliarch</i> for “Leader of 1,000”
Monophysitism	Christological doctrine that the Christ was of a single essence: either a human sent by God or was God incarnate, but not both simultaneously
Monothelitism	Christological doctrine that the Christ may or may not have had a single separate essence from God but was united in will to God
<i>Tagma</i>	(plural, <i>tagmata</i> ) Unit of 300-400 men, or a battalion
<i>Theme</i>	Military district in which assigned units sustain themselves through ownership of agriculture, commerce, and industries
<i>Sakellarios</i>	A deputy of the Roman treasury
<i>Shahanshah</i>	“King of Kings,” the official title for the king of Sassanid Iran
<i>Strategos</i>	Commanding general of a field army

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