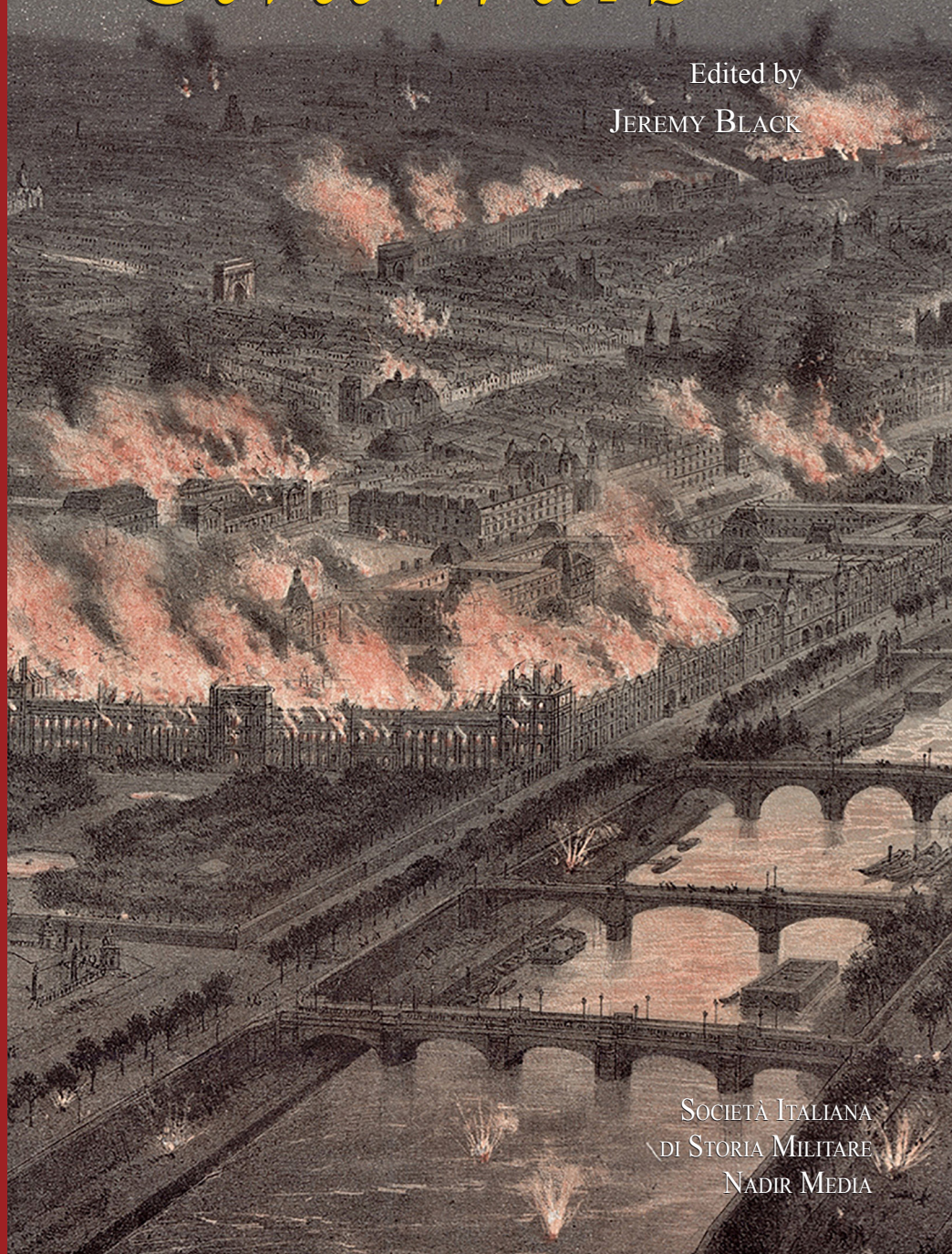


Rebellions & Civil Wars

Edited by
JEREMY BLACK



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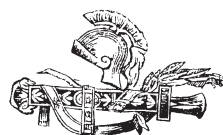
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L'expérience historique a favorisé la prise de conscience théorique. La raison, effectivement, ne s'exerce pas dans le vide, elle travaille toujours sur une matière, mais Clausewitz distingue, sans les opposer, la conceptualisation et le raisonnement d'une part, l'observation historique de l'autre.

R. ARON, *Penser la guerre*, 1976, I, p. 456

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*For Al Nofi, another keen internationalist
in advancing Military History*



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Introduction

by JEREMY BLACK

Most military history has been written, and continues to be written, around international conflict, with warfare assessed accordingly.¹ However, such conflict itself constitutes a range, with warfare within a clear state system different in context, content and character to that of international expansion. Yet, there is a clear contrast with conflict that can be described as rebellion and/or civil warfare. Significantly, the latter has seen most attention when leading modern states are faced with insurrections, as with America in Iraq after 2003, or when rebellion and/or civil warfare can be seen in terms of similarities with the symmetries of international conflict, notably regular-type forces with arms accordingly,² and clear areas of control, as in the Dutch Revolt and the English and American Civil Wars. These, however, do not necessarily characterise civil wars, let alone rebellions, although, equally, their presence do not mean that the events in question are not civil wars or rebellions.

However, it is the varied types of the latter that is underplayed in the standard approach to military history. This is notably so in terms of the usual focus on a typical form or neo-Platonic essence of military conduct, with developments understood in a corresponding fashion.

This is so whether the emphasis is on continuity or change, a snapshot of circumstances or a focus on developments, or emphases that are chronological, geographical or thematic. There is also the linguistic element, as in rebellion or rebellions; the latter including symbolic speech, action and clothing, and ranging to encompass an anthropological dimension.

1 I would like to thank Murray Pittock and Daniel Szechi for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of my pieces.

2 B. Connable, *Ground Combat. Puncturing the Myths of Modern War* (Washington, 2025), pp. 173, 187, 217. This book neglects the political dimension.

At the national-chronological level, a state or military that participates in revolutionary or counter-revolutionary warfare can also be involved in state-to-state campaigning that has more of the character of conquest, as with the invasion of Canada in 1775 by the American Patriots. The Chinese Civil War of 1946-9 was rapidly followed by an invasion of Tibet and large-scale intervention in the Korean War (1950-3) against an American-led coalition, bridging domestic and international forces.

The Korean War is a clear instance of issues of emphasis if not definition. It was at once a civil war and an international one, and this has been true of many other conflicts, for example Ottoman (Turkish) support for Hungarian opposition to Habsburg rule from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.³ The India-Pakistan massacres at the time of partition and the subsequent conflicts between the two states can be viewed as in effect a civil war.

In 1719, the British ministry reflected ‘as for tumults at home, they are of opinion that when there is an impossibility of assistance from abroad, they are by no means to be apprehended.’⁴ This relationship was also seen in the opposite perspective, as when Havilland Le Mesurier, the British Commissary-General of southern England, observed in his *Thoughts on a French Invasion* in 1798, when such an invasion appeared imminent, that the French had been aided by local supporters in their European invasions.⁵

As a result of such relationships, we need to consider rebellions and civil wars not only as ‘pure’ forms but also as aspects of hybrid conflict. For example, in the fourteenth and fifteenth century against the (federal) Kalmar Union, whether the Swedes were rebels or people fighting for a national interest.

More generally, Alan Forrest raises the question of what is best described as rebellion or war. So also with other federal unions, as with Switzerland, a true confederacy until 1848, with each canton essentially sovereign. This division was accentuated by the Reformation which led to four civil wars, in 1531, 1656, 1712 and 1848. The result of the last was a different federal state. In contrast,

3 G. Michels, *The Habsburg Empire under Siege: Ottoman Expansion and Hungarian Revolt in the Age of Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü, 1661-76* (Montreal, 2021).

4 James Craggs to his fellow Secretary of State, James Stanhope, 7 July 1719, London, National Archives, State Papers (hereafter NA. SP) 43/57.

5 H. Le Mesurier, *Thoughts on a French Invasion* (London, 1798), p. 8.

there was a very different civil war in 1653, a peasants' war, covering large swathes of northwestern Switzerland, across several cantons, both Protestant and Catholics. It was essentially a consequence of economic depression following the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and was put down by the ruling oligarchs of the different cantons, with help from militias from the cantons of central and eastern Switzerland. In a similar fashion, the general strike of 1919 was put down by the army (a militia army), with several demonstrators killed in Geneva. This left profound scars in the military and the political landscape.

The extent to which the American Revolution (War of Independence) and American Civil War can be discussed in this federal perspective is also worthy of consideration. So also for other federal states such as the United Provinces [Dutch] in 1650 and 1787, Argentina from 1814 to 1853, and Brazil, notably in 1824, 1835-45, 1893-5 and 1932.

Seeking to provide the lens through which the state and its soldiers viewed civil warfare, this issue can definitely affect the way in which a conflict is waged and notably what constitutes legitimate violence and action, from the outset of rebellion to its conduct, not least the treatment of prisoners.

These were issues that played a major role in discussion in the Classical period, which has recently received long-overdue attention,⁶ as well as in religious thought. Thus, the acceptable response to legitimate authority concerned commentators, legalists and religious figures such as St Augustine in the *City of God*, Book 19:

'Justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is governed by the authority of a ruler; it is bound together by a pact of association; and the loot is divided according to an agreed law. If, by the constant addition of desperate men, this scourge grows to such a size that it acquires territory, establishes a seat of government, occupies cities and subjugates peoples, it assumes the name of kingdom more openly. For this name is now manifestly conferred upon it not by the removal of greed, but by the addition of impunity.'⁷

6 T. Howe and L. Price (eds), *Companion to Insurgency and Terrorism in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Leiden, 2016), especially by Price 'Insurgency and Terrorism in the Ancient World, Grounding the Discussion,' pp. 3, 9; and S. Melville, 'Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the Assyrian Empire during the Late Eighth Century BCE,' p. 89.

7 Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 147-8. See also I.

In the Ancient World, there was a consistent representation of insurgents as bandits, which makes it difficult to distinguish the two in documents.⁸ Further, the problem of legitimate as opposed to illegitimate violence was a major issue in political thought.⁹ However, on what was to be a longstanding pattern, slave uprisings and, overlapping with this, resistance by slaves who had fled and created independent communities, were treated as illegitimate. Furthermore, until the last half-century, most received less attention than rebellions by non-slaves. Thus, for Martinique, the slave uprising in 1710 received less than the planters' uprising of 1717,¹⁰ and the rebellion on Saint Domingue/Haiti in the 1790s¹¹ far less than that in France from 1789.

These issues remain highly pertinent today, not least in terms of the acceptability of interventionist action by other powers in particular disputes. Thus, realist and idealist concepts of international relations come to the fore when considering how to respond to such disputes.

We also need to focus on the geographical-chronological dimension. Thus, since the 1880s, South America has largely seen rebellion and civil war, but not international conflict or hybrid forms. In contrast, the full range has been present in Europe and the Middle East, although the attention devoted to each category varies greatly. In particular, there has been a contrast between that devoted to the First World War and that to the conflicts in the following five years as frontiers and political systems were settled, for example in Hungary in 1919. To a lesser extent, the same is true for the late 1940s after the Second World War, as with the Greek Civil War and, less prominently, the suppression of anti-Communist movements in Eastern Europe and the western Soviet Union.

Moreover, linked to the hybrid issue is the extent to which many conflicts generally known as international also had prominent components that can be seen as rebellions and civil wars. Robert Gildea, Dominique Tantin and Virgilio

Duyvesteyn (ed.), *Rebels and Legitimacy Processes and Practices* (Abingdon, 2018).

8 Price, 'Insurgency,' pp. 21-22.

9 See eg. S. Richardson, 'Insurgency and Terror in Mesopotamia,' *ibid.*, p. 56.

10 B. Rushforth, 'The Gavolet Uprising of 1710: Maroons, Rebels, and the Informal Exchange Economy of a Caribbean Sugar Island,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 76 (2019), pp. 75-110. For the comparison, C. Hodson and B. Rushforth, *Beyond the Ocean. France and the Atlantic World from the Crusades to the Age of Revolutions* (Oxford, 2026), pp. 322-3.

11 On which, see most recently *Beyond the Ocean*, pp. 439-82.

Ilari discuss how this is very true of the Second World War, and Lothar Hobelt for the Thirty Years' War. Italian history from 1943 to 1945 is defined in general historiography on the Second World War as the 'Italian campaign' and in official Italian historiography as the 'War of Liberation, Co-Belligerence, and Resistance'. The category of 'civil war' is used by 'neo-Fascist' historiography to support the 'equal dignity' of victors and vanquished and the need for 'pacification', but also, exceptionally, by anti-Fascist writers deploring what they claim is the postwar 'betrayal' of the Resistance.

The methods used by Gildea, Tantin and Ilari can more generally be extended and remains readily applicable. The possibility of joining crises for rhetorical or analytical purposes is part of this discussion, not least as it can provide a way to justify concern and intervention but also to link periods of formal war with those of lower-level struggle.

In one perspective, this question represents an extension of the emphasis on intervention by powers in the domestic affairs of others. Yet, more profoundly, the issue here is also one of 'indefinition': the porosity of boundaries in terms of definitions, processes and approaches, when assessing military history; and, indeed, all branches of history.

This stance very much cuts across that of the methodological precision seen in quasi-scientific definitions and measurable criteria, as in the categorisation of conflict.¹² However, the latter does not correspond to human practice as opposed to intellectual and legislative process. So, even more, if we consider 'rites-of-violence'¹³ in which the ethos and practices rarely matched those of more 'intellectual' explication. This was also true of feuds, at once denials of sovereign authority and confirmations of social links. The distinction between a feud and a civil war or rebellion is less clearcut than might be anticipated. This is particularly so if civil wars and rebellions are understood, at least in part, as an amalgam of feuds both at the local level and at the national. Thus, the struggle

12 I. Duyvesteyn, *Rebels and Conflict Escalation. Explaining the Rise and Decline in Violence* (Cambridge, 2021).

13 N.Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,' *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), pp. 51-91; J. Norrie, 'Rites of Resistance: Urban Liturgy and the Crowd in the Patarine Revolt of Milan, c.1057-75,' *English Historical Review*, 137 (2022), pp. 1575-1605.

between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians in early fifteenth century France can be seen in part as such. Moreover, even when there were clear ‘policy’ distinctions, as with the French Wars of Religion in the late sixteenth century or the *Frondes* in the mid-seventeenth,¹⁴ there was also the dimension of feuds within the royal family and the aristocracy. This focus on cause is also one on process, as clientages and affinities were the way in which forces were raised accordingly.

Feuds remain significant to conflict today, as in the relations between Mexican drug cartels. At the international level, there are also suggestions that the motivations of leaders has a feud like character, as in George W. Bush’s opposition to Saddam Hussein, and the attitudes and rhetoric of Donald Trump.

As a related point, the ‘one-answer-fits-all’ approach to military history is of limited value. Frequently centred on war and technology, this approach leads to a diminution of other factors, not least spatial ones; and groups them in accordance with a problematic thesis. Thus, we have warfare in the eighteenth century, or in Europe or insurgency warfare, as if they were consistent or could be grouped in terms of a dominant narrative. That, however, requires enormous caution and so many caveats as to breakdown as an interpretation.

The approach here, in contrast, is one of the tentative, the contingent and the contextual. That is an approach true more generally of military history. Yet it is particularly so of rebellions and civil wars as each arise so much from the political particularities of the crisis in question. These particularities help set strategic goals and means, and ensure that military history is especially political in these cases. In his essay, Harold Tanner explores these issues as seen in the relationships between rebellion and civil war in China from 1910 to 1950. That emerges clearly, but differently, in for example the essays by Jack Gill, David Grummitt, Kenneth Swope, and Rotem Kowner.

The political dimension is strongly to the fore with rebellions and civil wars as this dimension helps define the sides and also explain the institutions and other agencies that provide foci for struggle. As such, we are far from the concern with borders that is so important in international struggle.

The character and causes of rebellions and civil wars are, and have long

14 D. Parrott, *1652: The Cardinal, the Prince, and the Crisis of the ‘Fronde’* (Oxford, 2020).

been, major topics in historical research and exposition, albeit generally without much of any discussion of the military dimension at all or at least only providing a backdrop-chronology. For this writer, there is a curious sense of circularity here, as major themes in my schoolboy and university student experience of the subject recur, notably the extent to which there were general themes in what could be presented as a mid-seventeenth 'general crisis.' For the British, this thesis had, as a basic building bloc, the contested nature of the civil wars in Britain, a topic that continues to engage scholarly attention.¹⁵ In particular, the role of religion invites attention as do the interactions of England, Ireland and Scotland. A similar theme of continuity in attention can be seen in the 'Atlantic Revolutions' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Such groupings make more sense if the discussion of common themes is matched by one of the role of interaction in terms of personnel (usually on the revolutionary side) as well as thanks to the impact of international intervention.

There is also the intellectual interest in categorisation and grouping. This is seen across space and time and leads to attempts to investigate commonalities in particular struggles, as in my chapter later in the book, with the hope that these lead to an understanding of those struggles. Again, that dimension can lead to an emphasis on the political or the military. Yet grouping can also be misleading.

Using Italy as a template, Virgilio Ilari presents civil war as an interpretative criterion of history: 'hot' phases are seen as preceded, accompanied and followed by coexistence and cooperation but not true national unity. He proposes the criterion of virtual 'civil war', one induced but also halted by European conflict, as a key to interpreting the period in Italian history from 1793, the export of the French Revolution to Italy to the transformation of Italian politics in the 1990s. This approach can be employed as one for politics and conflict, and works for many countries. Thus, there has been the grouping of periods of international war and peace as parts of longer-term civil wars, as in Europe to include the world wars.¹⁶

15 J. Morrill, 'The English Revolution as a civil war,' *Historical Research*, 90 (2017), pp. 726-41.

16 J. Rodrigo, 'Under the Sign of Mars: Violence in European Civil Wars, 1917-1949,' *Contemporary European History*, 26 (2017), pp. 487-506 and (with D. Alegre) 'Civil Wars: What Is Wrong with History,' *War in History*, 31 (2023) and (with D. Alegre), *Civil Wars: A Global*

The degree to which this is helpful is problematic as each world war was an ‘umbrella’ struggle incorporating a number of largely disparate conflicts and without any one central theme. Thus, the position of Russia in 1914-18 and of the Soviet Union in 1939-45 scarcely conforms to a clear narrative in terms of a longer-term civil war, and so also with the ideologies at play between 1914 and 1945.

The political dimension is also very significant insofar as coups are concerned. Indeed, the issue of definition is particularly problematic in the case of coups. They are clearly rebellions but they do not necessarily have the depth and resonance of violence seen with rebellions. Yet, the role (explicit or implicit) of force and prominence of the military in coups ensures that they should certainly be included. So also with unsuccessful coups.¹⁷

Coups become more significant a topic if the threat of them is part of the equation: the coup as demonstration of power and intention. The response could vary greatly. So also with public demonstrations at once intimidatory and political. The significance to coups of the military, whether in support or in opposition, means that the nature of armies becomes of great importance. This is a matter of political awareness and commitment, but also of institutional and other factors affecting their ability as well as willingness both to act and to respond.¹⁸

The role of coups in modern military history tends to be underplayed not least because it is not a formal part of military doctrine or training, and cannot readily be discussed in terms of tactics, strategy, technology or others of the usual spectrum of military analysis. That of course is an indictment of how military history is commonly considered. This point is certainly apparent where the military are a source and/or means of control. This is the standard backdrop to the deterrence, prevention and opposition to rebellions, including those from within the military. Furthermore, the use of the military as a factor in power-maintenance has been significant in countries where opposition in recent years has not reached the scale of civil war, as in China in 1989.

History, 1917 to The Present (Cambridge, 2026).

17 R. Service, *The August Coup. The Destruction of the Soviet Union and the Making of New Russia 1985-1991* (London, 2026).

18 H. Reece, *The Army in Cromwellian England, 1649-1660* (Oxford, 2013).

So also if the military is not used, as in America in 2021 with rioting at the centre of government. That raises the question of the place of counterfactualism in the assessment of civil wars and rebellions. In the case of 6 January 2021 was it the lack of a forceful response that ensured that an episode of disorder did not become a rebellion? Conversely, should the assessment focus on the intentions of the action, intentions that in this case centred on the overthrow of the established process for validating a presidential election. It might be asked whether the assault on the federal Capitol would have been greeted similarly at state level or if, instead, Governors would not have called out the National Guard and ensured a forceful defence of authority that would have meant that the rioters could be seen as rebels. Were the events of 6 January a riot or an attempted coup?¹⁹

In this book, it is notable that the contributors tend not to write about coups. In contrast, rebellions generally excite far more interest if they can be seen as ‘popular,’ not least if there is a class, social or ethnic dimension. That is an aspect of rebellions as in the discussion of Haiti in the 1790s.²⁰ There is now good scholarship devoted to slave rebellions.²¹

However, much of the work is within set ideological blinkers which is similar to the traditional approach to peasant uprisings. These assumptions work both explicitly and implicitly, and they influence the more general consideration of what is pertinent in the study of rebellions.

For civil wars, rebellions and coups, there is also the question of how best to discuss respective military and political causes of failure and, separately, markers of failure, as with Alan Forrest’s discussion of the 1790s in France and Ethan Rafuse of the American Civil War (1861–5). This brings to the fore the question of how rebellions and civil wars end. This question tends to receive less attention than it merits as it is most commonly subsumed into that of reasons for

19 J. Black, *Insurgency Warfare. A Global History to the Present* (2nd ed., Lanham, MD, 2023), p. vii.

20 For example by S. Hazareesingh, as in his *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (London, 2021) and *Daring to be Free. Rebellion and Resistance of the Enslaved in the Atlantic World* (London, 2025).

21 See, for example, V. Brown, *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2020).

failure, which, while interesting, is not the same problem. Indeed, the ending is political as well as military, and this raises the question of how exactly the two are related. In particular, there is the question whether the relationship should be seen in terms of conjuncture, process or context, or with reference to what causal relationship between these.

The academic discussion of causes for rebellion and reasons for result are overwhelmingly secular, but that does not capture the nature of much contemporary analysis. Instead, an emphasis on religious considerations, from heresy to sin, is significant. This cuts across modern functional interpretations centred on economic and social control and resentment, with ethnicity frequently added of late to the discussion.²² The latter interpretations, and the factors they deploy, are apt to be seen as more modern and essential; but that is to downplay the role and integrity of ideological considerations, and notably so for 'pre-modern' ones.

The role of respective narratives as explicit and/or implicit analyses of causes (in the sense both of origins and of reasons for outcomes), course, and consequences, is also an element with considerable agency, as seen in Luca Lori's contribution. Indeed, the role of rebellions in the overthrow of Republican Rome was such that it was a major feature in the Western historiographical tradition. That, in turn, meant that rebellions were seen in particular ways. Personalities and conspiracies were to the fore, as in the widespread contemporary reading of the French Revolution.²³

The Classical tradition of seeing the populace as the 'crowd,' an ignorant and ignoble force, was also significant. Thus, there was a predisposition for certain forms of analysis, which, indeed, is also the current situation. Moreover, the latter is based on a view of group relationships in which it is assumed that conflict is normal, for example in social, political, gender and ethnic terms. This helps encourage an emphasis on strife as normal and therefore rebellion and civil warfare as likely to emerge, rather than as difficult to explain or requiring a particular explanation. Indeed, the modern intellectual emphasis on identities is one that is predicated on antagonisms and adversities. How far that deserves

22 J.C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2016).

23 J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London, 1972).

discussion in terms of civil war is open to consideration. There is certainly that implication in much of the language.

So, differently, also with the idea of wars on crime or, as a different way of expressing that idea, conflict as crime or crime as conflict. Again, this may appear farfetched, but Mexico is not alone in having gangs that are as large and well-armed as some armies, and that are able to challenge the power of the state and the cohesion of society. The same can be seen elsewhere, with groups in civil wars assessed in terms of the interests they pursue, for example the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary force that is one of the principals in the Sudanese civil war that began in 2023. The role of mercenaries in the RSF supports this analysis, with their costs carried by control of assets, notably gold mines, as well as by pillage, extortion and international support.

The suggestion that a political ideology is required in order to produce a rebellion may appear intellectually credible in terms of intentionality, but is not necessarily accurate with reference to the functional challenges to the state, and in Sudan both appear absent. Again, the issue of definition is relevant because that means that there is a very different spread for analysis.

As such rebellions and civil wars are not only consequential politically and militarily, but also of great significance in conceptual, analytical, methodological, and historiographical terms. These points should be borne in mind when reading this important volume.



John Hamilton Mortimer (1740-1779). *Sextus Pompeius consulting Erichtho before the Battle of Pharsalia* (part.). The painting, inspired by Lucan's *Pharsalia*, depicts

Sextus Pompey (son of Pompey the Great) asking the Thessalian witch Erichtho before the Battle of Pharsalus to learn the outcome of the civil war. Erichtho raises a dead soldier from a corpse using dark potions and rituals to deliver a grim prophecy, causing Sextus Pompey to recoil in horror. Private Collection. CC SA 2.0 Generic via Flickr (2012) and Wikimedia Commons.

Rebels and Risings in Medieval European Society

by JOHN FRANCE

The central fact of medieval European political history is that after the collapse of Roman authority power fell into the hands of various “kings” who claimed to be the heirs of Rome, but were actually the leaders of the armies which had invaded the western Roman Empire. Those who we designate as peoples, Franks, Goths etc were not in any real sense tribes. Rather they were armies made up of agglomerates of groups, each formed around a leader who looked to a king under whose authority they might profit by extorting or conquering the Romans. Successful kings created amongst their immediate entourages a culture and a sense of identity which the leaders of their more diverse followings quite naturally tended to adopt, and which later chroniclers found useful as a label. In his history of the Lombards, Paul the Deacon depicted them as a warlike assembly of Gepids, Bulgars, Sarmatian, Pannonians, Swabians, Noricans and even Saxons.¹ The Vandals are known to have been divided between Hasdingians and Silingians. In fact, most of the names by which we know these peoples were by origin Roman. The “Franks” were made up of many groups settled along the Rhine who had notably entered Roman service, but their unity was forged by the successful leadership of Childeric and his son, Clovis, and firmly established in our minds by Gregory of Tours.² To what extent were they distinct in descent, language and culture from their great rivals, the *Alamanni*?³

1 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani*, MGH. *Scriptores Langobardicarum et Italicarum* 2:26, translated by F.W. Foulke, *Paul the Deacon. History of the Lombards* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1907).

2 Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* tr. L. Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1974).

3 M. Innes, *Introduction to Early Medieval Western Europe, 300-900* (London: Routledge, 2007), 71-80.

None of the barbarian societies which entered the Roman Empire was in any sense equalitarian. From their first entry into the empire the kings had chief warriors who enjoyed high status and rich rewards. It was inevitable that they would occupy the important positions in government which, thereby, became militarized.⁴ By 613, when we first hear of them, Arnulf of Metz and Pippin I of Landen, the ancestors of the Carolingian family, were powerful landowners whose faction backed Chlotar II in his struggle for the crown of the Franks.⁵ Attracted by such rewards, the Roman aristocracy, where it survived, tended to merge with them. Thus was established that intimate link between warriors and ownership of land which has lasted to this very day. Such men saw themselves as sharing in what we call sovereignty, with all its rights, including the use of violence. Kings might claim, and ultimately some made good on an overarching power, but others did not. In consequence the pretensions of monarchy were open to contest, at the very least because kings too were warriors and landowners and, in the absence of real bureaucracies, had to rule through others drawn from the social elite.

In early medieval Europe kingship, all commentators have agreed, was venerated. Yet attitudes to kings were very varied indeed and much depended on personal ability rather than possession of any kind of sacred personality. Ostrogothic Italy under Theoderic seemed the true heir of Rome, and he a king with imperial pretensions. But on his death in 526 bitter faction divided the Goths providing East Rome with an opportunity to reconquer Italy. The Goths rallied around various successors, some of whom were capable leaders but ultimately the long wars resulted in their defeat. A new people, the Lombards then arrived in the north of the peninsula. They were led by strong kings, but for some twelve years, 574-96, their high aristocracy, the dukes, forbore to choose a king, and even thereafter, despite constant war with the empire, contested royal authority well into the eighth century.⁶ The Visigoths had ruled much of Spain and France, but in 507 they were defeated in battle and their king was killed by

4 Bennett, Ellora, G.M. Berndt, S. Esders and L. Sarti (eds), *Early Medieval Militarisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

5 *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar and Continuations* ed. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1960), 32-33.

6 N. Christie, *The Lombards* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 69-109.

Clovis. Defeat undermined loyalty to the royal Balthi family's claim to rule by sacred descent, for thereafter Gregory of Tours commented:

The Goths had adopted the reprehensible habit of killing out of hand any king who displeased them and replacing him on the throne by somebody they preferred.⁷

Moreover, much of Spain had been conquered by independent lords rather than the king. So the various families amongst the warrior aristocracy saw their ambitions to rule as legitimate. In an effort to create stability monarchs tried to imitate Rome by an imperial style, above all by the adoption of a capital at Toledo. And the church rallied to their support, even creating the first European coronation by sacred unction to give the king a Christian sacrality and elevate his person. But ultimately the turbulence of the elite was not curtailed and contributed to the collapse of 711.⁸

But the Franks too "replaced" kings. All members of the family claimed a charisma of blood, but there was no rule about succession, and any adult male of the family who was recognised by his father could hope to achieve a crown, and eldest sons had no security of succession. After 639 the Merovingians produced a series of child successors, opening the way for regencies divided by bitter factional struggles amongst the aristocracy for the position of Mayor of the Palace, who controlled access to the king. Kings were killed, and not simply at the behest of other Merovingians. The Merovingians were never, until the very end, as feeble as the Carolingians who overthrew them liked to pretend, but for well over a century before their final extinction they had clearly lost the initiative in political affairs and ultimately became the mere play-things of others. Their overthrow was a singularly long-drawn out and bloody affair in which Charles Martel (718-41) triumphed, opening the way for his son, Pepin III, to assume the kingship in 751.⁹

In the early medieval period, it is extremely difficult to see who actually was a rebel. The term was widely used in our sources but the reality tended to be that

7 GT 3: 30 and see R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain, Unity in Diversity 400-1000* (New York: St Martins, 1983), 108-128.

8 P.C. Diaz, "Visigothic Political Institutions," in *The Visigoths, from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century* ed. P. Heather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 321-72.

9 P. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000).

factions backed particular pretenders to power against others. Essentially there was a problem of legitimacy. The Franks had no firm rule of royal succession except acknowledged descent in the Merovingian family, the major Visigothic families saw pretention to monarchy as a right, so that the election of a king, proclaimed by the Spanish Church, was little more than recognition of a *fait accompli*, while the leading Lombards were ambivalent. In general amongst all these peoples the eldest son of the dead king enjoyed the best chances of succession, but this was by no means guaranteed and, in any case, might not last.¹⁰

The chances of survival have left us with two notable examples of rebellion in different realms, but both were essentially about legitimacy. At the very start of his reign in 672 Wamba of the Visigoths (672-80) was faced by a “rebellion” in the cities north of the Pyrenees in Provence. He despatched a general, Paul, who himself emerged to challenge Wamba who crushed him. The account of the event by Julian of Toledo portrays this as a rebellion.¹¹ Julian and the church stood firmly behind Wamba, though from a different perspective this was a quite common kind of struggle for the throne, in this case featuring a distant province whose great men may never have been able to participate in the making of the king. Wamba himself was deposed because of illness in 680. The earliest Frankish law code certainly exalts kingship, but although promulgated by Clovis between 507 and 511 it is nonetheless ascribed to a group of wise men who recalled the traditions of their people, an authority implicitly, therefore, separate from that of the king.¹²

In 584/5 one Gundovald, who had been at Constantinople arrived in southern Gaul. He claimed to be the son of Clothar I, who, however, had refused to acknowledge him, thereby excluding him from the royal succession. After adventures in Italy, where he married, Gundovald went to Constantinople, but returned to Gaul, allegedly with a huge sum of money. Relieved of this cash he then sloped off uselessly for a time, causing no trouble. However, it has been argued that he suddenly acquired importance because of a shortage of Merovingian

10 Collins, *Early Medieval Spain*, 112-130.

11 *The Story of Wamba: Julian of Toledo's Historia Wambae Regis* ed. J.M. Pizaro (Washington: Catholic University 2013).

12 K.F. Drew, *Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991).

heirs in the three kingdoms of Austrasia, Neustria and Burgundy.¹³ This gave him a momentary traction in Frankish affairs, enabling him to make conquests in southern Gaul with the support of notable Franks. But he was doomed by the birth of heirs to the established kings, his supporters deserted him, and he was defeated and killed.¹⁴

Obviously support for a different king - either of another Frankish kingdom or a pretender with a real claim, was influenced by grievances, especially as prominent men could swap allegiances and were not confined to one kingdom. So the complex game of legitimacy makes grievances difficult to perceive. Within Austrasia and Neustria there were factions, and as the position of Mayor of the Palace became more and more important differences sharpened and personal rivalries and feuds must have been very important. Amongst the Visigoths and the Lombards, we see a similar pattern of a struggle for legitimacy. While it would be interesting to discover more about particular grievances and attitudes, the sources are very limited. What is important about this early period of European history is that elites, which were strongly military in ethos, became very firmly embedded as the European aristocracy. Their members clearly believed they had a right to express discontents in violent terms and saw themselves as removed from the bulk of the population.

The importance of this process has been somewhat obscured by the almost universal approval amongst historians in which Charlemagne has bathed.¹⁵ But the fact is that even he was constrained by reliance upon the nobility, including those who dominated the higher ranks of the clergy.

The Carolingian family proved to be very able rulers. Charles Martel designated his sons as rulers of the Franks, in much the same way as the Merovingians before him, continuing the belief in a sacred family. One son, Pepin the Short, then ousted the other, just as his son Charlemagne eclipsed his brother. The

13 W. Goffart, "The Frankish Pretender Gundovald, 580-82. A Crisis of Merovingian Blood," *Francia*, 39 (2012): 1-27.

14 For interesting military aspects of his career see B.S. Bachrach, *The Anatomy of a Little War: A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568-586)* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

15 H. Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire* tr. P. Munz (Toronto: Medieval Academy of American, 1978) is the only hostile study of his reign, produced shortly after World War 2 when attitudes to conquerors were perhaps different.

act of coronation by the church elevated the person of the king above the run of great men. And Charlemagne enlisted the aid of the church and to a degree created a systematised a much more literate government. But the key to Carolingian success was successful war, and Charlemagne, exploited with great skill the circumstance of having much weaker neighbours. His victories conferred great prestige and the resources from which to exercise great patronage. As one authority has remarked:

The driving force behind the revived Frankish empire of the eighth century had been the distribution of booty, tribute and land among the political community.¹⁶

He and his successors were at pains to consult their chief men and to act in concert with them. Indeed he gained great strength from enlisting them ever more closely in royal government.¹⁷ In fact, beneath the structure of government which he built, much real control of the countryside was conceded to others. The strength of their position enabled them to force lesser men, notably those eligible for military service, into their control and while Charlemagne moved to check this, the signs are that he was largely unsuccessful.

The formidable military skills and resources of Charlemagne inevitably trod on the interests of some. In 786 Hardrad inspired a *conjuratio* of discontented Thuringian nobles angry at Charles' seizure of lands in their area.¹⁸ Equally serious was the revolt of Charlemagne's eldest son, Pepin the Hunchback, in 992. Although the eldest, the circumstances of his birth and subsequent status are uncertain and he was clearly much less regarded than the king's sons by a later wife. In summer 792 Charlemagne and his sons were at Regensburg, in an area where Pepin had sympathizers, giving Pepin the chance to eliminate his father and all possible rivals. The plot was betrayed, but Pepin had clearly enjoyed much support and Charlemagne's effusive gratitude to those who supported him

16 T. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1991), 94.

17 J. France, "The Composition and Raising of the Armies of Charlemagne," *The Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002), 61-82; C. West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution. Political and Social Transformation between Marne and Moselle, c.800-c.1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 50-79.

18 J.L. Nelson, *King and Emperor. A New Life of Charlemagne* (London: Penguin, 2020), 2014-221.

is clear evidence of the threat.¹⁹ Only two conspiracies in such a long reign is impressive. Charlemagne clearly had a remarkable personality and a real understanding of the need for literacy in government, but quite apart from this his success was made possible by the scale of rewards arising from successful war. He created a European aristocracy, largely, though not entirely, drawn from Frankish followers, and the consistency of expansion over so many years offered prospects for a rising generation. For even after 800 some conquest continued but it was largely left to local initiatives - the Marquises in eastern Europe, his son, Louis, king of Aquitaine, in northern Spain.

In 806 Charlemagne issued his plan for the succession which harked back to the Merovingian notion of family sanctity because all his sons were to be endowed with kingdoms, and there was no provision for the empire. It was never implemented because only Louis "the Pious" (814-40) survived his father. His problem was that because his father had ruled for so long Louis was a mature man of 36 by the time of his accession, and had three adult sons. With no rules of succession except the notion of the sacrality of blood, the important leaders had to think who to back in a succession event which might prove to be imminent. This was why Louis issued the *Ordinatio Imperii* in 817 by which his eldest son, Lothar, was proclaimed co-emperor and promised overlordship of all the other sons and their territories. Pepin was given Aquitaine and Louis Bavaria. Emperor Louis' nephew, Bernard, had inherited Italy, and he was to retain this subject to Lothar's overlordship. This arrangement was problematic because great men had always had local connections and local power,²⁰ and the problem which now arose was whether their local king was the decisive voice in local affairs, or the emperor?

The greatest problem of the system, clashing personalities, soon manifested itself. Bernard of Italy, Louis' nephew had been made subordinate to Lothar and deprived of jurisdiction over key frontier provinces in favour of Louis king of

19 Ibid.285-88; S. Airlie, "Charlemagne and the Aristocracy: captains and kings," in J. Story (ed.), *Charlemagne. Empire and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 100 [90-102].

20 M. Innes, "Charlemagne's Government," in J. Story(ed.), *Charlemagne. Empire and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 71-89.

Bavaria. News subsequently reached the imperial court that Bernard was seeking to break away from imperial rule. It is not clear whether this was true, or a rumour or even a cover for a pre-emptive strike by Louis, but in any case an imperial army overwhelmed Bernard who, along with his co-conspirators was blinded, dying in 818 in consequence. It is not clear what Bernard and his supporters were reacting against or what they wanted but it is not difficult to see the tensions inherent in the *Ordinatio*, which escalated, especially after the birth of another son, Charles the Bald, in 823 for whom Louis was determined to make provision. This provoked his existing sons to the degree that in 830 and again in 833 they deposed their father who, nevertheless, ultimately retained his throne until death in 841 because of their disagreements. There followed war between the brothers. Lothar aspired to rule the whole of his father's empire, but his aspirations were ruined by defeat at Fontenoy in 841. By the Treaty of Verdun of 843 the lands of the old empire were divided between the three sons in a settlement which, on a grander scale, mirrors those between Merovingian kings; Charles acquired West Francia, Louis the German East Francia and Lothar the title of Emperor and the lands in between giving him both "capitals", Aachen and Rome. There was enormous friction in the family: in 858 Louis the German accrued extensive noble support when he attempted to seize West Francia, the realm of his half-brother, Charles the Bald.²¹ However, a sense of Frankish unity persisted, and, indeed, when a number of royal lines failed Charles the Fat became sole emperor from 884-87. But significantly he treated Germany, West Francia and Italy as separate kingdoms, each with their own assemblies of nobles, and the great lords, especially in East Francia, largely ignored him.²²

Charles was overthrown in a coup by his nephew, Arnulf of Carinthia who became the ruler of Germany. He was an energetic soldier who in 896 received coronation as emperor at Rome, before succumbing to stroke which crippled him till his death in 899. His son, Louis the Child, died after an inglorious reign in 911 when the great men then chose Conrad of Franconia. He attempted to coerce the great aristocracy, but there had been no sustained kingship amongst the East Franks since Louis the German died in 876 and the so-called "stem-duchies" were virtual kingdoms within the kingdom. Their emergence was marked

21 J.Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London: Longman, 1992), 160-90.

22 Reuter, *Germany*, 115.

by factional struggles, but to call any of the leaders rebels is merely to say that Conrad backed their opponents. Conrad, as death approached, nominated Henry duke of Saxony.

Arnulf's coup of 887 caught the West Franks by surprise. There was an available Carolingian, Charles the Simple, but he was a child and because born after the death of his father doubts were cast on his legitimacy. The great men chose one of themselves, Odo Count of Paris, as king, partly at least because of his defence of Paris against the Vikings in 885-86. He was recognised as king by Arnulf in 888, but this was withdrawn in favour of Charles the Simple, his Carolingian rival, in 893, precipitating a century long struggle between their descendants. In the Middle Kingdom of 843, allocated to the Emperor Lothar, division and aggression from neighbours eventually left very weakened areas, with even Italy lacking a real sovereign authority until the German kings imposed their dominance and received coronation in Rome as Emperors.

Wessex was a very small kingdom whose very existence was menaced by the Vikings who were, by contrast, never able to mount a real threat to the Frankish lands. Alfred rallied the nobility of Wessex and fought off the immediate Viking threat. His immediate successors then conquered much of English Britain. But the heavy imposts royal leadership made upon the realm were clearly resented and the military structure Alfred had created was allowed to decay. The masterful behaviour of a line of strong kings alienated many nobles and the disputed succession and murder of Edward (975-78) led to the rise of rebellion, really factional struggle amongst the political class, which permitted the Viking conquest under Cnut in the eleventh century.²³

In the East Frankish lands Henry of Saxony was accepted as king. Unlike his predecessor he respected the rights of the great aristocracy and ruled with them. His victory over the Hungarian raiders at the Riade in 933 enhanced the prestige of his dynasty. He was succeeded in 936 by his son, Otto I who faced a series of revolts in which his brothers were prominent. After the complex rivalries and savage battles in the civil wars of 936-41 few of the rebels were executed because of the "sense of community among the political elite," - what I call the

23 R. Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars. Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 47-141 and R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992).

aristocratic consensus. And the same was true after Otto's victory over the rebels and their Hungarian allies at the battle of the Lechfeld in 954.²⁴ The Saxon dynasty were a series of strong and able rulers, as were their Salians successors in the eleventh century. The destruction of the Magyar threat led to the eastward advance of German power. Their acquisition of the imperial title and the accompanying expeditions to Italy conferred prestige and wealth. But the great nobles were virtually autonomous in their duchies and counties, and their rights had to be respected.²⁵

Amongst the West Franks the long succession dispute of the tenth century left the major nobles with a very high degree of autonomy and belief in their right to settle differences by force. In 987 Hugh Capet was chosen as king and he associated his son, Robert, in the kingship. Fulk Nerra, count of Anjou, supported the Capetians. However, when his position of favour at the court of King Robert II (996-1031) was threatened by the rise of Hugh of Beauvais he "slew Hugh before the king's own eyes", but was nevertheless soon back in favour.²⁶ A distinguished historian has remarked that in the 11th century "the age of kings seemed to have passed and that of princes to be the future."²⁷

The rebellions which are noted in the accounts of early medieval Europe tend to be, in whole or part, struggles for legitimacy. Amongst the Franks the notion of sacred blood, Merovingian or Carolingian, established itself. When a Carolingian, Grimoald, tried to make himself king he was killed in 641 and the family went into eclipse. But for all the respect for blood, who could exert power was a matter of personality and capable leadership. Ultimately ability, in the person of Charles Martel, triumphed over blood by a process seen as rebellion, but that is a very simple description for a complex process. His descendants reinforced their claim to sacred blood by priestly consecration, but were faced with the same dilemma. When Charles the Fat was deposed in 887 Regino of Prüm commented:

24 Reuter, *Germany*, 154, 155-60.

25 J. Gillingham, "Kingdom of Germany in the High Middle Ages, 900-1200," Historical Association Pamphlet, G77 (1971) is an excellent short introduction to the reality of the German Monarchy, but for a more sustained analysis see Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*.

26 Rodulfus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque* ed. J. France in *Rodulfus Glaber Opera* ed. J. France, Neithard Bulst and P. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 107-109.

27 J. Flori, *L'idéologie du glaive préhistoire de la chevalerie* (Geneva: Droz, 1983), 168.

On [Charles'] death the kingdoms he had ruled over, deprived of a legitimate heir, separated out from the body of the empire and each, instead of waiting for its natural lord, chose a king from its own bowels.²⁸

The near disappearance of the Carolingian line and the particularism of the elements of their empire precipitated a crisis of legitimacy in which the real factor which made a king - the consent of the chief men in assembly - played an increasing role especially as minorities occurred, and had to be set alongside the growing emphasis on descent and priestly consecration. The death of Charles the Fat did not totally end the dream of Frankish unity, for West Frankish Carolingians would continue to take an interest in Lorraine and seek possession of the old imperial capital at Aachen.²⁹ The East Frankish monarchy claimed the title of Emperor with its Carolingian references, seizing control of northern Italy and Rome, where its rulers only exercised real power occasionally in the face of particularist interests of the growing cities. Their power in Burgundy and Provence was hardly that. The minority of Henry IV (1054-1105) offered local interests and German enemies great opportunities, especially when they enjoyed papal backing. Effectively, from the start of the tenth century the kingdoms of the Franks and the lands they possessed went their own ways, and their rulers and leading men seeking legitimacy, even to the extent of inventing diplomatic forms.³⁰

Kingship continued to have prestige, but the notion of sovereignty was profoundly attenuated by the existence of landed aristocracies who conceived themselves as having a right to rule autonomously, at best in concert with the king with each party respecting the rights of the other. Moreover, the language of power remained highly personal and the qualities of the person of the king mattered a great deal. Above all the king was expected to recognize the aristocratic consensus and to rule within it. The author of the early eighth century *Liber Historiae Francorum* believed in:

28 Tr. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages*, 121.

29 J. France, *Medieval France at War: A Military History of the French Monarchy, 885-1305* (Leeds: ARC, 2022), 31-33.

30 L. Roach, "Charting Authority after Empires. Documentary Culture and Political Legitimacy in Post-Carolingian Europe," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 7/3 (2025), 3-30.

A properly functioning system had a Merovingian on the throne reigning in concert with the great of the realm.³¹

Not much had changed by the twelfth century, though both sides of this equation might have rather different ideas of rule and concert.

By about 1000 AD the aristocratic consensus based on land ownership was the dominant form of political organisation in most of western Europe, though on the peripheries, the Celtic parts of the British Isles, Scandinavia and Central Europe, older forms prevailed for a time, while in Eastern Europe Byzantine influence was strong. But the consensus was profoundly affected by the process of change. The church became a much more organized and coherent body serving as a focus for literacy and systematic administration which challenged lay conceptions of aristocratic government. In general churchmen championed royal power as a source of stability and support. In Germany the Ottonian kings were at pains to appoint friends to important ecclesiastical posts and these were men who lived like secular magnates and could justify involvement in war and politics:

‘If anyone who is ignorant of the divine dispensation objects to a bishop ruling the people and facing dangers of war and argues that he is responsible only for their souls, the answer is obvious: it is only by doing these things that the guardian and teacher of the Faithful brings to them the rare gift of peace and saves them from the darkness in which there is no light.’³²

However, in making appointments they always had to consider local interests and families so that the institution as a whole was royalist, but individual bishops had different and sometimes colliding interests and affiliations.

Aristocrats took refuge in their chivalric ghetto, but many adopted different careers beneath a mere veneer of soldierly power.³³ The rise of cities injected new elements with military aspects into society. Technology facilitated the cre-

31 Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France. History and Hagiography*, 80.

32 Ruotger, *Vita Sancti Brunonis, Coloniensis Archiepiscopi (953-65)*, PL 134: 937-77 or MGH SS 4: 252-6.

33 J. France, ‘Property, Warfare and the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century’, *Journal of the Haskins Society* 11 (1998), 73-85 (pub. 2003).

ation of great cathedrals and castles, and while weapons remained much the same, they were refined in ways not always pleasing to the noble outlook.

In fact, the kind of upper class society which dominated most of Europe for many hundreds of years was a very complex one. Great nobles and lesser followers had huge estates, but their relationship with the crown was personal. And often it was indirect. A count might in principle acknowledge that he held a royal office, but he owed no obedience for his family lands, the real basis of his power. And in places he might acknowledge the authority of a quite different person, royal or not. Many people might acknowledge him as a superior because he held public authority, but for others he was a great man whose nearby presence and wealth demanded only a degree of respect. And his office and land attached thereto was hereditary, just like his personal lands, and subject to practices of inheritance which varied from place to place. Great men held military power and saw inheritance as legitimizing that, so when offended, even by a king, believed they had the right to use it in their own interests. The autonomy of power in a certain sphere of influence was so well established after centuries of acceptance, even royal acceptance and encouragement, that great landholders had something like a parallel authority, rather than a subordinate one to kings. But, of course, they often found dealing with those they regarded as subordinate difficult. Lesser men, especially if they held castles, also aspired to autonomy on their lands, so the actual state of relations was political, and just as the king listened to his chief men so a great lord listened to his. While relations between the noble - the landowners - was essentially political, the rest of the population were subject to law as interpreted by them. The combination of private ownership and public authority which we call lordship was exclusive and acted as a superstructure dividing the mass of producers from a tiny minority of consumers. In such a society one man's rebellion was another's righteous cause.

By about 1000 the foremost monarchy in Europe was that of the Germans whose king also ruled Italy and thereby claimed Charlemagne's old title of Emperor. Yet the ruler was surrounded by great men, dukes and counts, who controlled the land and whose obedience was conditional. Even here the negotiation between king and lord could slip into rebellion and suppression. The accession of a new king was a moment of weakness when any discontents could explode. The accession of the Salians to the German throne in 1002 was marked by un-

rest, including the sack of Magdeburg for which Bernard of the Nordmark had to pay compensation of 500 lbs of silver in 1017. The new dynasty faced unrest in Saxony where Henry II was seen as an alien from Bavaria.³⁴ Although there were numerous rebellions most were motivated by limited grievances and there is little indication of any attempt to overthrow the dynasty. The effort of some Italian leaders to persuade William V of Aquitaine to become their king on Henry II's death, which brought Robert of France and Odo of Blois into an alliance came to nothing and Conrad II succeeded.³⁵ Henry III's imperious ways caused considerable friction, especially in Saxony, and throughout his life he faced hostility from Godfrey of Lorraine. In his last years there was a serious rebellion in Bavaria. But until the reign of Henry IV there was no concerted effort to overthrow the Salian dynasty, and this was inevitably made possible by his long regency from 1056 till towards 1070.³⁶

The tensions amongst the nobility became very evident in 1062 when Archbishop Anno of Cologne and his faction kidnapped the 12-year old Henry IV and supplanted his mother as effective ruler of Germany till the boy came of age in 1065 when Adalbert of Bremen emerged as his chief adviser. This blatant act failed to provoke any attempt to rescue of the young king as Tellenbach remarked.³⁷ Even when Henry IV as an adult tried to rebuild royal power in Saxony around Goslar he was driven out and he was only able to regain his power there after conciliating many magnates and crushing the Saxons at the battle of Unstrutt in 1075. Even then the rebels and some of their families were taken as hostages and a general conciliatory line was taken.³⁸ But a new phase in resistance arose from what is still usually termed the "Investiture Contest."

In 1070 the archbishop of Milan resigned and nominated one Godfrey to succeed him. It was an act of dubious legality and it infringed the rights of the population of the city, amongst whom the *Patarini*, lay people of the city who demanded reform, led a bold resistance with papal support. The election

34 Ibid., 204-205.

35 France, *Medieval France at War*, 66.

36 Rweuter, *Germany*, 199-208.

37 G. Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century* tr. T. Reuter of a German original of 1988 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 227.

38 Ibid., 232.

of Gregory VII (1073-85) with a radical program of reform precipitated a crisis in relations with the empire because Gregory challenged not merely the Milan election but the very sanctity of kingship on which its claim to nominate clerics depended. The German church, hitherto a great prop of the monarchy, became divided and Henry chose to support an anti-pope to challenge the legitimacy of Gregory. But rebels seeking greater power and autonomy, whether in Germany or Italy, could now claim a higher justification and a rallying point in support of the papacy and "Church Reform." Henry's son, Conrad, rebelled and his queen deserted him. In 1106 Henry IV was deposed by his son, Henry, though the dispute with the papacy lingered on till 1122. While the monarchy had its strengths it was clear that the series of rebellions had radically weakened its position. No doubt those who supported the papacy had their own reasons, but what was new was the adaptation to ideological reasons for rebellion.

The French monarchy faced a different pathway. The long contest of the tenth century meant that the Capetian monarchs presided over very largely autonomous principalities. Hugh Capet held a rich and extensive patrimony in the Île de France, but it was surrounded and interpenetrated by other similar holdings. The king was not without influence beyond his demesne. The counts of Anjou, notably Fulk Nerra, created a huge principality in the Loire valley, much of its in rivalry with the house of Blois-Chartres. Hugh (987-996) and Robert II (996-1031) at various times supported one or the other of these great houses but there was never any question of controlling either. About 1023 Odo II of Blois invaded Troyes, Meaux and Champagne on the death of a relative contrary to the King Robert's will, and when this resulted in conflict, admitted:

I have committed certain offenses against you. I was driven thereto by necessity and the wrongs I have suffered. For is it conceivable that I should hesitate to defend my honour?³⁹

Interestingly there was no challenge to the king's rule. But the consequences of his pursuit of what Odo saw as his rights and honour could be very dangerous. He was also related to King Rudolf III of Burgundy (992-1032) whose kingdom had nestled in the grasp of the German Emperors. In 1032 Odo II claimed this

39 Recueil des Historiens de France 10: 501-502 tr. R. Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France, Monarchy and nation (987-1328)* tr. by L. Butler and R.J. Adam of a French original of 1942 (London: Macmillan, 1960), 65-66.

throne, raising the prospect of a great kingdom across borders. In fact, Odo II was killed at the battle of Bar in 1037.⁴⁰

A rather similar threat to the dynasty has arisen earlier. In 956 Otto, brother of Hugh the Great, acquired the duchy of Burgundy which, on his death passed to his brother Henry called the Great (965-1002). But Henry was childless and adopted his wife's son, Otto-William count of Mâcon, who possessed substantial lands in imperial Burgundy across the river Saône. Despite the obvious Capetian claim, many of the Burgundian nobles favoured Otto-William, partly because of Henry's nomination and partly because he had apparently promised them land and power. King Robert, in alliance with Richard II of Normandy, besieged Auxerre in 1003, without success, but ultimately his persistence paid off, though only after a war which extended down to 1016 when the duchy was secured for his younger son, Henry.⁴¹ However, the king's eldest son Hugh died, Henry (1031-60) succeeded him, and Burgundy was conferred upon the youngest royal son, Robert. A particular aspect of this rebellion was that Otto-William had married Ermentrude, sister of Bruno Bishop of Langres, who could claim Carolingian blood, which may have made his ambitions appear very sinister to King Robert.⁴²

Of great concern to the French kings was the duke of Normandy, especially from the time of William the Conqueror. His equivocal position especially after the conquest of England in 1066, was nicely described by his biographer, William of Poitiers:

"Normandy which had been under the kings of the Franks from the earliest times, had now been raised almost to a kingdom."⁴³

Despite royal expeditions against William enlisting the counts of Anjou and Flanders no Norman duke performed homage to the French king until 1144. But essentially while France and Normandy warred, often over uncertainties in the frontiers, there was no rebellion in the sense of a challenge to the authority of the French king.

40 Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, 160-63.

41 Ibid., 78-81; Fawtier, *Capetian Kings*, 101-103.

42 Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, 105, n.8.

43 William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. R.C.H. Davies and M. Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 45.

A considerable practical challenge to the royal position came from the lesser barons of the Île de France, for royal domination depended on holding together not blocks of territory, but collections of land and rights. In an era when lordship might consist of diverse rights over a peasant community - fragmented land-ownership, fishing rights, collection of dues, oven rights - it was easy to lose them, hence Fawtier's famous picture of the eleventh century Capetian kings hastening around the demesne asserting their rights village by village. But there was more to it than that. For one lord could appeal to the king for help against another, thereby exalting royal status. Such petty wars could escalate as the famous cases of Thomas of Marle and Hugh of le Puiset reveal, especially when miscreants involved outside powers like the duke of Normandy.⁴⁴ And monarchs like Louis the Fat consciously sought to protect churches against such encroachments as a means of asserting authority and making allies in and outside the Île de France.⁴⁵ With a few exceptions most such incidents of rebellion finished in a compromise. For after all there was no threat to the throne, only the continuation of negotiation by other means.

There was real danger in that such petty rebels could and did align with the great barons of France, with whom the king's relation were essentially similar to those with foreign powers. Indeed in the south the monarchy was barely evident. But even the greatest were aware of monarchy. In 1137 William duke of Aquitaine, realising he was dying while on pilgrimage, asked that Louis VI be the ward of his heir, his daughter Eleanor. William had enjoyed no special relationship with the king, but who else could it be? And all the great lords of France had much the same problems as the king, and were rivals one with another. Given that the king was generally passive, they had little incentive to rebel. Even the English kings as dukes of Normandy did not pose an existential threat. The Capetians, generation by generation, managed to produce an obvious heir.⁴⁶ At the same time they had not really threatened any of the great counts and dukes, while being friendly with the Church and reasonably just to the lesser lords of the Île de France. One might say that by the early twelfth century they had be-

44 Suger, *The Deeds of Louis the Fat* tr. R.C. Cusimano and J. Moorhead (Washington: Catholic University, 1992), 84-94, 104-105 and see, Fawtier, *Capetian Kings*, 96-109.

45 Fawtier, *Capetian Kings*, 79-95.

46 There were only two exceptions, both quickly settled: Fawtier, *Capetian Kings*, 54.

come a habit, a factor in the politics of Northern France, though only a shadow of that in the south, hardly worth rebelling against.

English history reveals a very different picture. Anglo-Saxon England had evolved from the small kingdom of Wessex, barely a duchy by French standards. Tight control by the monarchy enabled it to survive the Viking attacks and to extend its power over most of England. That power was uneven - the north was a different land - and the chief thegns were important and enjoyed a degree of control over the military. Alfred had established a system of fortifications and a field army but this became outdated by the process of expansion, and military affairs were powerfully influenced by greater thegns. King Edward the Martyr (975-78) was killed and later generations, appalled by the murder of a consecrated king, revered him as a martyr, but his death reveals bitter aristocratic faction set free by the death of the masterful King Edgar (959-75), which only worsened with the impact of defeat under his successor, Aethelred (978-1013, 1014-16). His failures led to the conquest of England by the Norse Cnut (1016-35). Since England was clearly rich, as repeated and enormous payments of Danegeld reveal, it seems to have been weakened by faction, betrayal and rebellion which Cnut refused to tolerate. He killed Aethelred's son, and nobles who proved unfaithful, like Eadric Streona, quickly suffered the same fate - he was establishing a new consensus and would tolerate none who stepped outside it.⁴⁷

But although Cnut was masterful, the succession was problematic and profoundly influenced by Godwin earl of Wessex who eventually secured the accession of Edward the Confessor. But in 1051 he tried to block Edward's policy of building up a Norman party at court as a counter to his own influence, and was driven into exile, from whence he returned with a fleet and army, forcing Edward to rescind his demotion. On his death his son Harold went on to dominate English politics and eventually, in 1066, to be elected king. This was disputed by William of Normandy who killed Harold at Hastings in 1066 inaugurating the construction on earlier Anglo-Saxon foundations of a powerful governmental tradition in England, quite in contrast with the French situation.⁴⁸

But this was no proof against rebellion. In 1067 Eustace of Boulogne, one of

47 T. Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (London: Yale, 2017).

48 R. Huscroft, *The Norman Conquest* (London: Pearson, 2008).

William's allies, rebelled, but simply because he had been denied Dover castle which he expected to hold. He was deprived of his vast estates but soon after restored to favour in the usual pattern of negotiation by force. English rebellion was expectable, though William treated the leaders generally well, even Edgar Aetheling who was of Anglo-Saxon royal blood, until his final rebellion brought the devastation of his northern lands and his exile in 1069-70. In all these rebellions Danish support increased the danger, though quite often it seems to have been purely hopeful of immediate gains. The revolt of a group of Norman lords in 1075, also with Danish support, has never been fully explained nor its objectives defined, but it is possible that they intended a partition between them of England. Their possession of strong castles made the rebellion very dangerous, and once it had failed William imprisoned the Norman leaders, and executed Walthe of earl of Northumberland, perhaps because he was exasperated by the failure of his attempts to reconcile Anglo-Saxons to his rule. He imprisoned Roger of Bretueil and deprived him of all his lands, did likewise with the property of Ralph de Gael and made war against him in his native Brittany.⁴⁹ Like Cnut before him William had a very definite view of the aristocratic consensus.

And he was not alone because conditions in England repeatedly tested its limits. Between the death of the Conqueror and the accession of Edward I in 1272 no succession, with the exception of Richard I (and his was troubled), was uncontested. This provided ample opportunities for what some would call "rebellion." At the same time the English monarchy centralised government and created a machinery of power almost unprecedented in Europe. The price of this was violence and struggle, for the capacity to intervene in the affairs of the aristocracy was much resented. The price of great administrative progress was a series of rebellions and rebels. Robert of Bellême fought against William II of England, his brother, Robert Curthose duke of Normandy and ultimately King Henry I who, in 1110, imprisoned him for life. Henry I's death in 1135 precipitated a full-scale civil war in England for nearly 20 years. In 1173 the ruthless government of Henry II produced a revolt by his son, led by Henry, the "Young

49 M. Strickland, "Military Technology and Political Resistance: Castles, Fleets and the Changing Face of Comitatal Rebellion in England and Normandy, c. 1026-10," in J. Hudson and S. Crumplin (eds), *The Making of Europe: Essays in Honour of Robert Bartlett* (2016) (Brill: Leiden, 2016), 145-83.

King". Robert earl of Leicester, one of the young king's supporters, was defeated in battle at Fornham and lost his lands, but they were restored, and though lost again when young Henry repeated his rebellion in 1183, he was at the time of his death in 1190 back in favour under Richard I.⁵⁰ He is a very notable example of the workings of the aristocratic consensus. Indeed, although he faced open rebellion in the Aquitaine, although so often masterful, Henry II showed indulgence to the extent that he forgave Geoffrey of Lusignan the murder of Early Patrick of Salisbury in 1168.⁵¹ Richard feared his father might choose another successor in 1189, while on his death in 1199 John had to face the claims of Arthur, the son of an elder brother. John exerted such pressure on the great lords in an unsuccessful attempt to regain his continental lands lost in 1204 that they overwhelmingly deserted him, preferring Louis, son of Philip Augustus, as king of England. Even his child son, Henry III, had to struggle for the succession, and later in his reign faced real hostility, to the extent of civil war, from his great men led by Simon de Montfort. For the price of Henry's victory over Louis was *Magna Carta* which allowed the great nobles and even lesser people a right to a role in government.

This rebellion was, however, different. Exasperated by Henry III's poor leadership many of the barons supported the Provisions of Oxford of 1258 which, drawing on ideas embodied in *Magna Carta*, confined royal authority by a council of barons who worked with the parliament. As the king resisted the barons grew more intransigent, precipitating the second barons war in 1264-67. In this de Montfort encouraged the English boroughs by providing them with representation in parliaments, and pressed on with a council which effectively replaced the king. But the English baronage were always factious and Henry III's son, Edward, was able to create a powerful army which defeated de Montfort and his army at Evesham in 1265, and went on to defeat the barons by 1267.⁵² De Montfort had represented a new sense of the community of the realm and the need for its participation in the common good. These were dangerous ideas, and the murder of Simon at Evesham and the very harsh treatment of the barons who

50 M. Strickland, *Henry the Young King 1155-1183* (London: Yale, 2016), 176-77, 300-301.

51 *History of William the Marshal* tr. N. Bryant ((Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016), 44-45.

52 D. Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery. The Penguin History of Britain 1066-1284* (London: Penguin, 2003), 369-91.

supported him is testimony to the fear such ideas inspired. But in fact Henry III accepted many of the ideas put forward by the reformers and the reign of his son would see the firm establishment of the English parliament.

By contrast to the struggles for the English crown, the French Capetians transmitted their kingdom to sons smoothly and because they were not powerful, harmed nobody. In a sense by the time the monarchy became more aggressive under Philip Augustus (1180-1223) obedience had become a habit and the improving administration of the great duchies quickly meshed into that of the crown. By the thirteenth century the French kingdom was very prosperous and the aristocracy were more inclined to profit than to rebel, and a new consensus arose by which all noblemen in the realm agreed they owed military service to the crown. In the thirteenth century under St Louis and his successors the French state was elaborated and strengthened. St Louis defeated Henry III's attempts to recover his French lands, mounted two vastly expensive crusades, and supported the French conquest of Southern Italy/Sicily by his brother, Charles of Anjou. Under his successors the right of the monarchy to tap the military potential of the whole kingdom was insisted upon by a numerous and skilled professional body of administrators.⁵³

The creation of states in England and France served by complex bureaucracies with strong judicial aspects changed the nature of the relationship between crown and aristocracy. *Lèse-majesté* now became the basis of treason legislation which was highly effective and intolerant of violent dissent. This was very apparent in France where harsh sentence fell upon many.⁵⁴ In England the Statute of Treason of 1352 offered a sharp definition of the offense and severe punishments, though aristocrats were saved from the most shameful forms of death.⁵⁵ The development of the state replaced the earlier often ambiguous and fluid relationships between noblemen and monarchs with a structure of command which eventually culminated in the princes of the Renaissance. In France and England a corps of royal officers, educated men, took over as administrators, though the

53 France, *Medieval France at War*, 165-88.

54 S.H. Cuttler, *The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

55 C.J. Neville, "The Law of Treason in the English Border Counties in the Later Middle Ages," *Law and History Review*, 9 (1991), 1-30.

high nobility remained important politically. Kingship remained very personal, but in the 14th and 15th centuries it was bolstered by new men with their strong vested interest in royal success. In both England and France the strength of the state was such that only men of great power - the dukes of York, or the dukes of Burgundy, were in a position to rebel, at least in moments of weakness. In both countries there was a struggle for the state marked by civil war, assassinations, executions, murders as the stakes were so high.

But if the rebellions we have been discussing so far were those within the aristocratic consensus, there were other kinds of rebellion which were treated in a totally different way. We know very little about the lives of the broad mass of the population in the early Middle Ages. In the late Roman period Gaul and Spain were troubled by *Bagaudae*, revolts supposedly of the rural population which have often been portrayed as social rebellions provoked by the oppressions of the Roman state and the high aristocracy, particularly at moments of crisis such as the fifth century. The difficulty any study faces is that the sources are very limited indeed and often misleading.⁵⁶

Our narrative sources are little interested in the life of the broad mass of the population, while such records as have survived from the early medieval period reflect the view of the narrow social elite. Law codes appear pleasingly clear, but equally reflect the concerns of the social elite. There is a belief that the period between the fall of Rome and the Carolingians may have been good for peasants, as a gap between the voracious imperial tax-collectors and the equally savage private landlords whose close presence enabled them to oppress those who worked the land from Carolingian times.⁵⁷ Whether this is true or not, it is evident that from the 8th century a period of agricultural innovation and expansion set in, perhaps stimulated by the relative peace and settlement of the age.⁵⁸

Interest in the lower classes of medieval society has been much influenced

56 J. Grant Cooper, "Gallic Insurgencies. Annihilating the Bagaudae," in T. Howe and L.L. Brice (eds), *Brill Companion to Insurgency and Terrorism in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 312-43.

57 See, for example, C. Wickham, *Medieval Europe. From the Breakup of the Western Roman Empire to the Reformation* (London: Yale, 2017), 22-42.

58 M. McKarracher, *Farming transformed in Anglo-Saxon England : agriculture in the long eighth century* (Oxford: Windgather, 2018), 103-14 and C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome, 400-1000* (London: Penguin, 2009), 157-61.

by notions of economic discontent, but the first real indications of popular revolt are curiously lacking in evidence of this. Charlemagne's conquest of Saxony involved an acceptance and promotion of the role of its higher aristocracy, effectively disenfranchising lesser free people, the *Stellinga*. During the struggle amongst the sons of Louis the Pious the Saxon magnates supported Louis the German as their king, but the *Stellinga* turned to Lothar who claimed an overarching authority as Emperor over the old Carolingian lands. Unfortunately they had backed the wrong horse and they were savagely repressed by the great nobles.⁵⁹ There was no mercy for rebellion by those outside the aristocratic consensus, and this would continue to be the case. In 859 northern France was attacked by Viking raiders. Their assaults were part of a deadly game in which the monarchy and high nobility played them off against domestic enemies, but into this complexity stepped ordinary people, still capable, as in the times of Charlemagne, of effective soldiering. But:

The Danes ravaged the places beyond the Scheldt. Some of the common people living between the Seine and the Loire formed a sworn association amongst themselves and fought bravely against the Danes on the Seine. But because their association had been made without due consideration, they were easily slain by our more powerful people.⁶⁰

This was not a disarming of the peasantry. Poorer people continued to be a vital part of armies, normally as infantry, and the great demanded their service. But they were to be embodied in forces created by their social superiors whose supreme position would otherwise be endangered. So although this was not a rebellion as such, its implications were not lost on powerful lords whose eminence, as they knew all too well, rested on military force. They and their armed retainers, who after about AD1000 we call knights and envisage as mounted, dominate because they had the wealth to eat well, to buy the best arms, and the leisure to train well. In France war was primarily a local matter in a country torn by a century and more of succession disputes. In Germany, with more threatening external enemies the kings retained the service of large infantry forces, at least until the fragmentation which accompanied the Investiture Contest after 1074.

59 E.J. Goldberg, "Popular revolt, dynastic politics, and aristocratic factionalism in the early middle ages: the Saxon *Stellinga* reconsidered," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 467-501.

60 *Annals of St Bertin* ed. J. Nelson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), Year 859 p.89.

Our sources are massively dominated by this minority which embraced those who wrote and kept records, and historians have been anxious to see something of the wider society. The Peace of God was a movement of the eleventh century essentially aimed by the church at restricting the violence of the lordly class and their knights by protecting the persons, and to a degree the property, of the clergy and the poor. In southern France where it originated the power of the monarchy was very limited. To fill the vacuum bishops tried to deploy the political and moral authority of the church to curb what it saw as the excesses of the military aristocracy. As part of this process great rallies were organized in which the country people, the peasants, were used to strengthen this pressure by demonstrating their enthusiasm for such restrictions. The result was rather like camp meetings in which the display of relics, processions and rituals created a deeply moving atmosphere in which miracles were performed and :

the bishops raised their croziers to the heavens, and all cried out with one voice to the God, their hands extended 'Peace! Peace! Peace!'⁶¹

But the poor essentially only had a bit part in a political movement whose course was essentially determined by the attitudes of the lay and clerical elite. However, in very exceptional circumstances things developed differently. In 1033 Bishop Aimo of Bourges, faced with firm opposition amongst many nobles, created a sort of army, including many country folk, to overawe the recalcitrant. But the bishop had miscalculated and his army was destroyed. The Peace Movement lost momentum by the mid-century, but its moral effect was to inspire kings and other great men to concern themselves with curbing disorder in declarations of peace, and giving birth in troubled areas like the Aquitaine to truces and peace brokered by local bishops.⁶² So although the Peace Movement enlisted the peasant masses, it was only as a marginal factor, and while events at Bourges were important, they were essentially isolated. After 1066 England saw a series of revolts against the new Norman rulers and these do seem to have involved much of the general population, especially in the north, but how far this represented elite hostility enlisting others as against peasant interests is

61 Rodulfus Glaber, *The Five Books of the Histories* ed. J. France (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 194-99.

62 H.E.J. Cowdrey, "The Peace and the Truce of God in the Eleventh Century," *Past and Present* 46 (1970): 42-67.

simply not known. But the range of people outside the elite was increasing and this posed problems sometimes for the status quo.

In Italy and Flanders city people were armed and ready to make their feelings clear. When Charles the Good was murdered in 1128 it was an alliance of his faithful men and the notable citizens of the town which carried war against the murderers and they had swords.⁶³ In Italy the armies of the cities featured citizen foot who had a strong influence on politics and war, though the nobility were usually in the front rank of leadership.⁶⁴ But Henry II of England's two *Assize of Arms* of 1181 testify to the effect of economic development in an armed society. Henry was primarily concerned that all free men should contribute to the maintenance of peace and order in their communities and ordered that every fit male should equip themselves according to their wealth. The assize for the continental lands differs a little from that for England, but they both reveal the existence of people below the rank of knights capable of buying armour and weapons. These orders were reissued and by the time of the *Assize of Winchester* of 1285 requirements were much heavier and fell onto a broader range of people, including the poor who had to produce bows and arrows.⁶⁵ The scale of armament this implies suggests a real danger to the elite. In England the civil war begun in the reign of John was marked by a degree of popular resistance led by Willikin of the Weald, who was William of Kensham, a royal bailiff. He led a force of archers who terrorised the French attackers, cutting off the heads of those they captured. It was a nasty snapshot of the military capacity of lesser men, truly a signal to the elite.⁶⁶

Actual revolt by ordinary people was pretty rare, and events do indicate why. In 1096 a very large number of contingents eager to answer Urban's call for a crusade, arrived in Byzantium, and adopted the leadership of Peter the Hermit.

63 Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good* translated by J.B. Ross (New York: Colombia, 1982), 151, 175.

64 J. France, 'Thirty Years of War: the cities of the Lombard Plain', in R.G. Khamisy, R.Y. Lewis, V.R. Shotten-Hallel (eds), *Exploring Outremer I Studies in History in Honour of Adrian J. Boas* (London: Routledge, 2023), 127-41.

65 D.C. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents* 12 vols (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), 2:416, 3:462.

66 S. McGlynn, *Blood Cries Afar: The Forgotten Invasion of England 1218* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2011), 179-80.

Overall they very much resembled the later and highly successful armies which in 1099 liberated Jerusalem, but they failed and were crushed by the Turks in Western Anatolia. Contemporary accounts offered almost no sympathy for these dreadful events and conveyed the impression of an ill-disciplined and hopeless mass, led by foolish and poor people, to such an extent that historians long referred to this as the “People’s Crusade”. In this way the successful crusade, led by princes, was clearly distinguished from such failure.⁶⁷ It has been argued that on the crusade itself the poor, or at least some of them, gathered in a distinct group called the Tafurs whose reputed cannibalism horrified friend and foe alike.⁶⁸ How distinct a group they were and whether they actually had a “king” is open to dispute, but clearly there was social tension at work here. This certainly reappeared on the Third Crusade where, during the siege of Acre, many of the leaders of the footsoldiers became exasperated by the passivity of the great leaders and demanded to make a sally against Saladin’s army. On 25 July 1190 they attempted such an attack, but after early success were massacred.⁶⁹ It is clear that many of the leaders regarded this as appropriate punishment for people who had stepped out of social obedience and attempted to influence events. In Germany and France the failure of the Fourth Crusade sparked a powerful reaction amongst poor, or at least poorer people, who believed that the rich had failed in God’s work of supporting the Holy Land, and masses of people left to go to the east. Ultimately this came to nothing, but it was a signal of the ability of elements of society beyond the elite to organise themselves, though treated with contempt by the elite.⁷⁰

A related and very serious kind of rebellion, which sometimes united classes, was that of heretics. Early medieval Europe was Christian, but from about AD1000 the Roman church became a dominating institution making its ideas and policies felt across all Europe. Increasingly, perhaps because of the many limitations on its practical authority, Rome saw conformity to its own pattern

67 See J. France, *Victory in the East. A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 88-95.

68 L.A.M. Sumberg, “The Tafurs and the First Crusade,” *Medieval Studies* 21 (1959), 227-28.

69 J. D. Hosler, *The Siege of Acre 1189-91. Saladin, Richard the Lionheart and the Battle that decided the Third Crusade* (London: Yale, 2018), 68-71.

70 P. Raedts, “The Children’s Crusade of 1212,” *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 279-333.

of top-down authority as being true Christianity. There had always been debate amongst scholars about the nature of the faith, and this was accepted by church authorities as long as dissension from whatever became the official line was not persistent and was not promulgated widely. By the mid-twelfth century churchmen in what is now Provence and the Languedoc began to complain that their authority was challenged by heretics who they tended to accuse of Manichaeism - a form of Christian dualism known from the ancient world. Historians have differed sharply about the nature of this heresy, indeed whether "heresy" is in any sense an appropriate description.⁷¹ The area was also beset by a savage and many-sided struggle for authority between the counts of Toulouse, their local rivals, the kings of Aragon and the Kings of England as dukes of Aquitaine, resulting in a constant state of war and a plague of mercenaries. In 1179 Third Lateran Council equated mercenaries and heretics and invited people to crusade against both. The result was the rise of the Capuchins, a highly organised armed movement which fought, with some success, against the mercenaries. It seems to have been led by the people of the cities, but it obviously enlisted others. Ultimately the Capuchins were crushed by the army of Richard of Aquitaine (later king of England). Contemporaries hardly mourned their fall because such an armed movement not led by nobles was always viewed with suspicion, even though it was not rebellious and worked in the spirit of Third Lateran's decree.⁷²

Complaints by the church against the heretics multiplied until, in 1208, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) proclaimed a crusade against them. This met with considerable resistance amongst the nobility of the south who resented the northern French invasion of their lands which threatened to supplant them. In the end the leader of the crusade, Simon de Montfort, was killed in 1217 and the crusade petered out.⁷³ The papacy, however, persisted and allied with the French monarchy which extended its power into the south. At the same time the papacy devised the Inquisition, a kind of religious police force, which gradually extirpated what

71 For a sense of the divergence see A. Sennis (ed.), *Cathars in Question* (York: York University Press, 2016).

72 J. France, 'Mercenaries and Capuchins in Southern France in the Late Twelfth Century', in R. Gertwagen and E. Jeffreys (eds), *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2012), 289-315.

73 L.W. Marvin, *The Occitan War. A Military and Political History of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

it saw as heresy, so that by 1350 the heretics had disappeared. Religious rebellion was ruthlessly crushed by enlisting worldly ambition and greed against the offenders. It was seen as subversive of the social order in the same way as rebellion by peasants and poor people who were not permitted to play an active role in politics. This consensus was soon to be shaken by events.

In 1302 Bruges, provoked by arrogant behaviour, rose against the French who had occupied the county of Flanders in 1300. Many Flemings, and perhaps a majority of the nobles, were reasonably content to accept King Philip IV (1285-1314) provided he respected their privileges, which at first seemed to be the case. But the royal governor insisted on entering Bruges with troops to quell suspected discontent, and the city erupted in rage murdering 300 Frenchmen in the “Matins of Bruges.” Led by a small coterie of disaffected Flemish nobles, Bruges, despite the refusal to participate of its social elite, raised an army of 10000 well-armed infantry - the core of which were the men of the city itself. They attacked Courtrai where a garrison held out for the king. The French raised an army of 3000 magnificent cavalry supported by about 6000 foot which included 1000 crossbowmen. On 11 July the army of Bruges totally destroyed this force at the battle of Courtrai. Before battle was joined the Flemings resolved that there would be no prisoners, partly in revenge for the ravaging they had earlier suffered at the hands of the French and partly because they knew that if they lost they would be massacred.⁷⁴

Courtrai was a profound shock which was felt across Europe. The victory of an infantry force of common people over a knightly and lordly cavalry force seemed a threat to the social order, and, indeed, the French nobility responded to the defeat by accepting the claim of the monarchy to mobilise the total manpower of the realm. In fact, of course, this was more than the victory of the common people, for the city people who led the revolt were uncommon, the product of the growing wealth of Europe which enabled more people to afford good weapons, and permitted members of city and country militias to organize, practise and understand the business of war. The *Assizes of Arms* in England, paralleled elsewhere, reveal this reality which enabled Edward I to raise very large infantry masses for his wars in Wales and Scotland. In France the political consensus, by

74 J.F. Verbruggen, *The Battle of the Golden Spurs. Courtrai 11 July 1302* ed. K. Devries, trans R. Ferguson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), 228.

which anyone with claims to nobility, promised to serve the king, had worked so well and with such success that there was a certain blindness to new developments which made foot more threatening. These technical and organisational developments were not the cause of the rebellions of the later middle ages; each had its particular roots, but they facilitated rebellion from the lower ranks of society and made it more formidable. But they were no guarantee of success.

In 1358 the peasantry of much of northern France erupted in a savage outburst of fury and destruction known as the *Jacquerie*. They blamed the nobility for their failure to protect France from the English and to relieve the suffering caused by war and its economic disruption, which came on top of the harsh consequences of the Black Death. When taxes were demanded, the poor saw this as paying for forces which had failed, and they wreaked a terrible revenge, destroying noble property and killing those who opposed them. The revenge of the nobility, led by Charles of Navarre was equally terrible.⁷⁵ In England, taxation on behalf of a failing war, at a time of economic disruption, resulted in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. This produced such destruction, especially in London where the Tower was seized by the rebels, that the government was forced to negotiate with the rebels. However, when their leader, Wat Tyler, was killed the rebellion collapsed and from then on the government was in the ascendant. Savage reprisals followed, and over 1500 died. But there was none of the wanton killing which characterised the *Jacquerie* and most lords proceeded cautiously in relations with their tenants. For the rebels were a mixed lot, spearheaded by better-off peasants for whom the Poll-Tax and traditional restraints on their social position were bitterly resented.⁷⁶ These were revolts triggered by political events, but there is no doubt that deep underlying resentments fuelled the fury.

Successful revolt did happen. The Habsburgs were by origin a Swiss family from the region of Aargau. Their rise to power in Austria and Germany after 1278 launched them as major powers in the German Empire. In the 13th century under the Hohenstaufen emperors the importance of communications between Germany and Italy had resulted in grants of autonomy to the small towns and

75 J. Firnhaber-Baker, *The Jacquerie of 1358. A French Peasants' Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), is a fine study of the whole episode.

76 R. Hilton and T.H. Alton (eds), *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

peoples of the area. The Habsburgs, inheriting lordships, sought to revoke these privileges and assert their close authority over the routes to Italy, provoking rebellion. Despite considerable friction between the various Canton and towns of what is now Switzerland the Swiss were able to create a largely infantry army. In 1315 the Austrians were allowed to advance into dangerous rough country, were ambushed at Morgarten and virtually annihilated, with Duke Leopold barely able to escape. This victory brought considerable freedom to the rebels, but it was only after the more decisive victory over the Austrians at Sempach in 1386, where the duke of Austria was actually killed, that the Swiss cities and cantons really emerged as a coherent political force. In this case the Swiss shared in the European-wide development of infantry, ultimately giving birth to tactics which made them into highly effective mercenaries.⁷⁷ What is notable in the early Swiss victories was the ruthless killing of their enemies, who, of course, would have been equally murderous given the opportunity.

Perhaps the most remarkable and large-scale rebellion of the medieval period occurred in another part of the German Empire - Bohemia. The rebellion here was in part religious and in part a reaction by the native population against German social and political domination. Bohemia had enjoyed much contact with the Greek Orthodox Church, and as a result there was a strong Utraquist tradition (in favour of communion in both Bread and Wine). At the same time the kingdom was within the German empire and ruled by Wenceslas IV (1378-1419) and King of Germany (1376-1400). This domination caused friction between the German elite, the native nobles and the mass of the population. At the same time across Europe there was widespread criticism of the church, partly because of the long papal schism when there were two popes between 1378 and 1417 and the perceived greed of churchmen. This was the more dangerous because the growing wealth of the continent had helped to create a wider educated class, educated in the Universities. Contact between these centres and the sheer number of the new educated class meant that, although the church had never forbidden intellectual speculation, the growth of religious ideas amongst this elite made control difficult. In England John Wycliffe demanded that the church renounce its wealth and suggested that real authority was to be found in the bi-

⁷⁷ K. Devries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 188-89.



Loyset Liédet (1420). "While they were attempting to take the fortress of the Meaux market where the family of the Dauphin Charles was entrenched, the Jacques and their Parisian allies were surprised by a cavalry charge led by Gaston Phébus and Jean de Grailli (June 9, 1358)." Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, Flandre, Bruges, XVe s., folio 226, verso (BNF, ms. Français 2643). Wikimedia Commons.

ble. Most importantly, he had contact with the royal court and his patrons there provided protection from churchmen who wanted to persecute him.⁷⁸ Jan Hus was a prominent critic of the church in Prague and he seems to have been influenced by Wycliffe whose writings he cited. Richard II of England was married to Anna of Bohemia from 1384-92 and there was considerable contact between

⁷⁸ I.C. Levy, *A Companion to John Wyclif, Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

the courts. In Prague the issue of papal indulgences stirred up controversy in which Hus was notable. So violent was the controversy that Wenceslas IV felt he had to defend the critics despite the anger of churchmen, but made every effort to conciliate all the parties.

In 1414 Hus appeared before the Council of Constance of 1414-18 which had been called to end the papal schism and reform the church, largely as a result of the efforts of Sigismund of Hungary, Wenceslas IV's likely successor. Despite a safe conduct from Sigismund Hus was condemned and burned as a heretic. The Hussites commanded such support in Bohemia that Sigismund was unable to establish himself as successor when Wenceslas IV died in 1419. The church proclaimed no less than five crusades against the Hussites who found two great military leaders in the persons of John Zizka and Prokop the Great who developed good tactics, even making use of the newly developed firearms. But the crusades created enormous pressure upon the alliance of moderate Utraquists who included most of the nobility, and the more radical Taborites who rejected much of catholic tradition and looked to biblical authority. In 1435 the Utraquists defeated the radicals at the battle of the White Mountain, composed their differences with Sigismund and were permitted to create an utraquist church obedient to the Holy See.⁷⁹ The Bohemian rebellion was a real rejection of the authority of both church and state, revealing the limitations of both, and, as it happened, a portent of much that was to come.

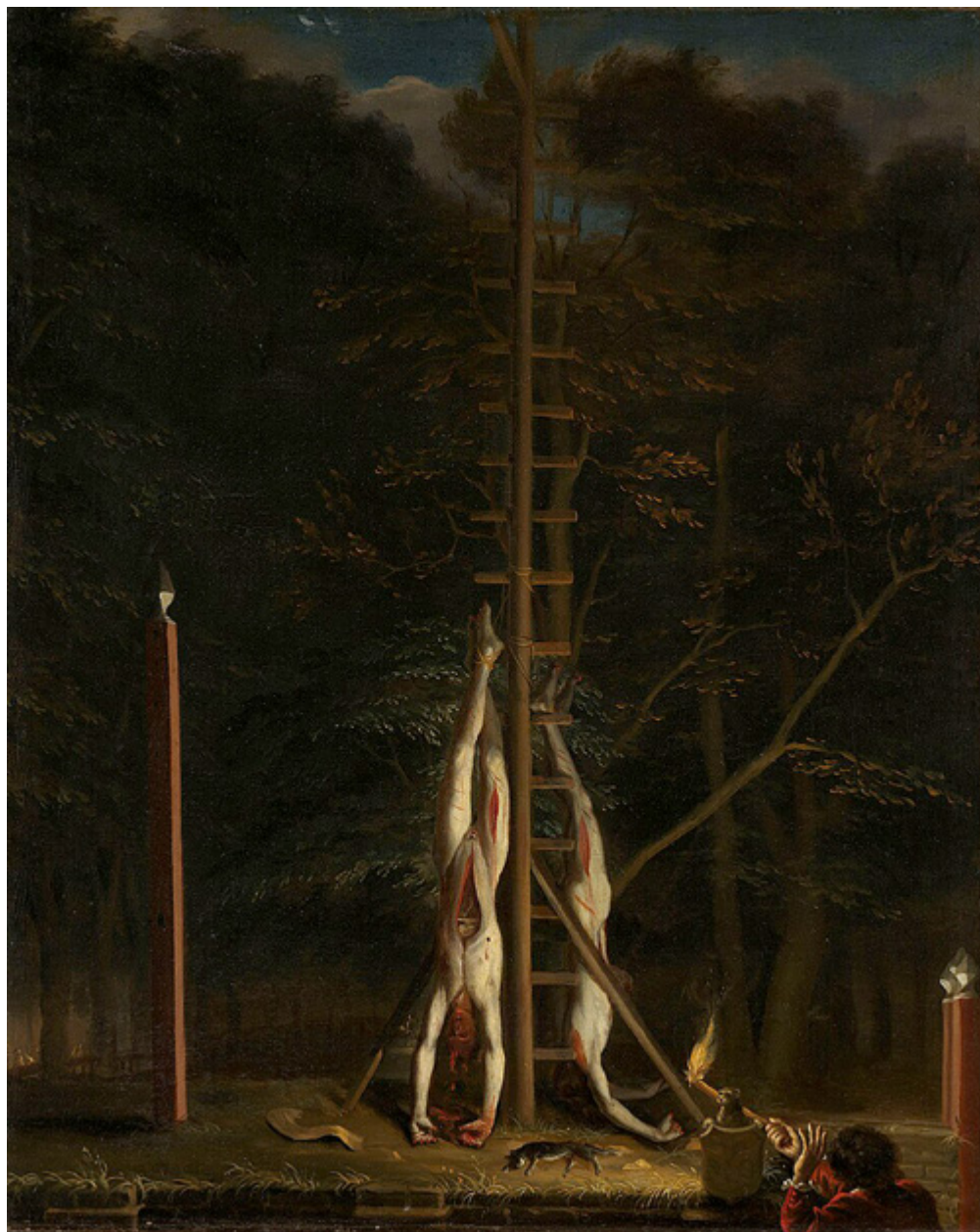
It is interesting that really large-scale and sustained popular revolts occurred at the beginning and end of the medieval period. In the late Roman world there was a highly advanced trading network creating conditions for communicating resentments across wide stretches of countryside. By the late middle ages just such networks, albeit in different forms, had been created. And the distribution of ideas about simplicity and purity amongst the clergy, a highly notable feature of late medieval thinking, may have contributed to the formulation and communication of ideas. Moreover, infantry weaponry and ideas about its use were much more developed. In the centuries in between peasant life may have been vigorous, but the development of villages across much of Europe enabled lords to control communities. In the cities a real sense of solidarity could exist

79 S. Turnbull, *The Hussite Wars, 1419-36* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

and their were treated with care, but the communication built up between cities and industries connected also to the countryside and revealed its results in the later medieval period. In addition, by the late medieval period many people who appear as peasants were quite prosperous and capable of giving a lead. It is not difficult, therefore, to account for the rarity of rebellion amongst the mass of the population between the fall of Rome and the 14th century. The armies of the landed lords who controlled the countryside were small but they were highly trained soldiers and very well equipped. There was certainly a potential for organisation of the country and townspeople - the events of 859 and the Capuchin movement reveal that -but resistance would have been very difficult. For political society was dominated by a narrow social elite who were all too aware that their eminence depended on military superiority, mitigated only by a degree of prudence in dealing with those over whom they ruled. In the literature of their self-regarding chivalric literature the poor barely feature and, while it demanded that women be well treated and not exposed to the horrors of war, this was applied only to ladies of quality. Chivalry was little more than a rationale for self-serving violence, frequently exercised upon the poor and helpless.⁸⁰ In 1413 Paris was bitterly divided and the duke of Burgundy enlisted the Cabochians, a group originally of butchers, who mounted a reign of terror against the government controlled by the Armagnac faction. At this very same time Henry V of England was negotiating with both parties and making clear his threat to invade France. When the leaders of the Parisian society, relatively rich, but of course commoners in the eyes of the great lords, protested about such division, the duke of Berry responded that such matters were not their business for: "We fight each other when we please and we make peace when we see fit."⁸¹ It is a suitable comment on the aristocratic consensus and the attitude of its members towards all who stood outside it.

80 R.W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) offers a brilliant exploration of this theme.

81 J. Sumption, *Cursed Kings. The Hundred Years War IV* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 400.



Jan de Baen (1633-1702) *The corpses of the De Witt brothers* (1672/5) hung upside down in The Hague at the Groene Zoodje on August 20, 1672. Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Wikimedia Commons.

A Very English Civil War?

The Wars of the Roses, 1455–1487

by DAVID GRUMMITT

On 7 November 1485, Henry VII's first parliament assembled at Westminster. Like the parliaments of 1461 and 1484, its principal purpose was to legitimise the rule of a usurping king. One aspect was the overturning of *Titulus Regius*, the act that had legitimised Richard III's accession in June 1483. A second was the unusually short bill which merely stated that 'the inheritance of the crowns of the realms of England and of France' was vested in the new king and his heirs. The third strand in legitimising the new regime was, for our purposes, the most important. 'An act of conviction and attainder' recalled the 'unnatural, wicked and great perjuries, treasons, homicides and murders' committed by King Richard and 27 of his followers. They were duly attainted of high treason. The most innovative and important aspect of this legislation, the usual means by which prominent rebels were dealt with during the later fifteenth century, was that Henry's reign was dated from 21 August, the day before his victory at the Battle of Bosworth.¹ By this simple expedient, what many modern commentators consider the decisive victory of the Wars of the Roses was reduced to another example of failed rebellion against royal authority.

These acts of Henry VII's first parliament raise three interrelated questions. First, what is gained – and potentially obscured – by characterising these conflicts as civil war, and how did contemporary classifications affect participants' actions? Second, what was the nature of the series of conflicts that dominated English politics in the second half of the fifteenth century? Finally, which char-

¹ *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England 1275–1504* [hereafter *PROME*], ed. C. Given-Wilson et al. (18 vols, Woodbridge, 2005), Parliament of November 1485, items 5, 8 and 18.

acteristics were particular to England, and which belonged to a wider European experience? The period from 1455 to 1487, generally known since the nineteenth century as the Wars of the Roses, did not witness 32 years of continuous warfare that ended inevitably in the accession of the first Tudor king.² Instead, it saw a series of rebellions against royal authority, some successful and others not, punctuating long periods of relatively stable government. This essay will move from the language of conflict, through its institutional and social consequences, to the circumstances in which international involvement altered its character.

Educated contemporaries undoubtedly possessed a sophisticated understanding of civil war. They had inherited a vocabulary of civil conflict from classical history. They could recognise the phenomenon in ancient Rome and elsewhere, while accounts of political disorder drew upon inherited moral and narrative conventions. Englishmen seemed reluctant, however, to apply this understanding to their own experience.³ Although the period was characterised by vernacular chronicles and political manifestos, no one writing in English used the term ‘civil war’ directly to describe the events of 1455 to 1487.⁴ While civil war was an available category through which to consider contemporary events, the lexicon of treason, rebellion and unlawful violence dominated the discourse of English political conflict.

This is more than a matter of semantics. To describe opponents as rebels was to deny their authority to wage legitimate war; to describe oneself as a loyal subject resisting corrupt counsellors was to claim continuity with lawful government. Both the rebels and the Crown deployed arguments about allegiance, punishment, property and political legitimacy, but they eschewed the conceptual

2 For the origins of the term ‘Wars of the Roses’ and its historiography see David Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses* (London, 2025), pp. 1–14.

3 John Watts, *The Wars of the Roses: A Medieval Civil War* (Cambridge, 2025), pp. 35–53.

4 In April 1461 George Neville, bishop of Exeter, at least according to the Italian copy made for the duke of Milan, referred to ‘la bataglia civile’ in a letter to the papal legate, France Coppini. The original letter is no longer extant: *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, in the Archives and Collections of Milan 1385–1618*, ed. A. B. Hinds (London: HMSO, 1912), p. 62. In 1475 in a work dedicated to Edward IV, William Worcester referred to the ‘anguishes, troubles and divisions here late before in this realm by civil battles’: [William Worcester], *The Boke of Noblesse: Addressed to King Edward the Fourth on His Invasion of France in 1475*, ed. John Gough Nichols (London, 1860), p. 3.

language of civil war despite possessing the linguistic and intellectual tools to do so. It is important to distinguish between how contemporaries named a conflict, how they justified participation in it, and how later historians classify it. Nevertheless, the conflict can usefully be analysed as civil war even where its participants ignored the concept – deliberately or otherwise – and insisted that they were suppressing treason, battling rebels or tackling corrupt counsel.

These themes have recently been explored by John Watts. Watts states that ‘there is no question the Wars of the Roses should be considered a civil war.’ His interpretation places the Wars within the structures and institutions that shaped political action, using modern comparative approaches to civil war to illuminate their causes, course and consequences. Drawing on recent scholarship, his emphasis on reform and the contemporary language of commonweal makes the Wars of the Roses less about dynastic struggle or warring nobles. It restores the commons to the political community and recognises that the political language used across English society both expressed grievances and shaped the means of addressing them. Yet neither reforming rhetoric nor allegiance should be taken at face value. Developing an interpretation rooted in the failure of royal leadership, Watts stresses the importance of fear and uncertainty in determining individual choices. Men commonly sought to protect themselves, their families and sometimes their principles amid circumstances in which loyalty could become dangerous and political authority was insecure. ‘Lancastrian’ and ‘Yorkist’ consequently offer misleading explanations when they imply stable identities or a sustained dynastic struggle between two coherent parties. Watts likewise resists reducing political breakdown to economic and demographic difficulties, treating conflict instead as a political response to wider social and economic change. His insistence on the interdependence of England and its neighbours is important: English upheavals shaped continental politics, while European rivalries conditioned English possibilities. Civil war thus emerges as a contingent process whose dynamics transcended dynastic antagonism. Watts therefore provides useful organising principles for understanding of the Wars of the Roses.⁵ We can accept the analytical value of the concept of civil war for historians of fifteenth-century England while recognising the peculiarly English features of

⁵ Watts, *Wars of the Roses*, quotation at p. 2.

the conflict, shaped by law, lordship and martial culture. It allows us to move beyond the narrow confines of dynastic struggle, of York and Lancaster, and of good and bad kings that have dominated much recent writing on the Wars, towards a more nuanced understanding of this very English civil war.

The Wars of the Roses took place, and were understood by contemporaries, within established traditions of political opposition in late medieval England. The struggle between Stephen and the Empress Matilda in 1139–1153 offers an earlier example of how disputed royal legitimacy could turn resistance into civil war. Its central issue was possession of the crown rather than the correction of an acknowledged king's government.⁶ Later periods of political turmoil in England, including the Wars of the Roses, were fundamentally different. The period of baronial reform and warfare under Henry III was characterised by a prolonged armed campaign to press the king on issues of counsel and justice and to demand an end to misgovernment. The same priorities can be seen in the opposition to Edward II led by Thomas of Lancaster. Only later, in the crisis of 1327, did baronial reform lead to the deposition of the king. The events of 1399 also saw the deposition of a king who had acted in a tyrannical manner and who had exiled and disinherited his most powerful subject, Henry Bolingbroke. By contrast, the rebellions of 1381, 1408 and 1450 established a pattern in which the community of the realm, in its widest sense, sought to influence the king and remove unpopular counsellors through violence.⁷ Despite the circumstances of their accession and the stain of usurpation, the Lancastrian kings successfully saw off dynastic challenges in 1403 and 1415. On both occasions, the rebels had little support within England.⁸ Fifteenth-century rebels increasingly accepted the legitimacy of royal government while demanding that it operate properly for the benefit of the commonweal.⁹

6 *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, ed. Edmund King (Oxford, 1994), pp. 1–36.

7 Simon Walker, 'Civil War and Rebellion, 1200–1500', in *Political Culture in Late Medieval England: Essays by Simon Walker*, ed. M. J. Braddick (Manchester, 2006), pp. 246–62.

8 T. B. Pugh, *Henry V and the Southampton Plot* (Stroud, 1988); Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation 1399–1422* (New Haven, CT, 1998), pp. 63–91.

9 John Watts, 'The Pressure of the Public on Later Medieval Politics', *The Fifteenth Century* 4 (2004), pp. 159–61; 'Public or Plebs: The Changing Meaning of "The Commons", 1381–1549', in *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Huw Pryce and John Watts (Oxford, 2007), pp. 242–60; Watts, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 64–82.

From the second half of the fourteenth century, the Crown's response to such rebellions, whether originating in noble opposition or discontent among the commons, was shaped by treason legislation. The statute of 1352 made levying war against the king – that is, assembling and arraying for war with banners displayed in the face of the king's own banner – treason. Thus, acts of violence or organised military opposition to the king were framed as treason, and their perpetrators were condemned or, during the second half of the fifteenth century, attainted. The language of the attainder of the duke of York and his supporters in the parliament of 1459 makes this very clear. Four years earlier, York had presented the events at St Albans, which had seen the death of the duke of Somerset, York's sworn enemy and one of Henry VI's leading counsellors, as loyal opposition to those around the king. Violence had ensued only because of the deception of Somerset and his cronies, who had hidden York's true intent from the king. In 1459, the Lancastrians characterised York's actions in 1455 as treason. Duke Richard had come to St Albans 'where you, sovereign lord, were present with your banner displayed, and there they falsely and traitorously waged war against you, whereby your royal person was badly hurt and your life in great danger: and they also slew various lords of your blood.' In October that year, faced with a larger royal army, the Yorkist lords had retreated to Ludlow. There they, 'intending the destruction of your most noble person, on the same Friday and in the same town, falsely and traitorously raised war against you in the field there, and fired their said guns then and there, and fired at your most royal person, as well as at your lords and people then and there with you.' As well as raising war against King Henry, York was described as an oath-breaker who had twice reneged on promises not to take up arms against the king. The language of the Act of Attainder deprived the Yorkist lords of all legitimacy. They 'were only intent on untruth, falseness and cruelty, under the sly pretence of a feigned zeal for justice, meant the greatest falseness and treason.'¹⁰ At this point, of course, the duke of York had not yet made his claim to the throne. He would not do so until October 1460, when the prospects of accommodation with the Lancastrian regime had become virtually non-existent. It was only then that the dynastic aspect of the conflict was formally introduced. Yet after the duke of York himself had been captured and murdered at Wakefield that year by the

10 *PROME*, 'Parliament of 1455', item 21, 'Parliament of 1459', item 18.

Lancastrians, his son Edward's subsequent claim to the throne was explained as much by Henry VI's unsuitability to rule, because he was complicit in York's murder and had thus committed treason, as by the superior title of the House of York. Notions of treason and the legal consequences of rebellion were thus just as important to the legitimacy of the new Yorkist dynasty as natural law and hereditary right.¹¹

Viewing the events of the later fifteenth century through the lens of treason and rebellion has important ramifications for the military history of the Wars of the Roses. It enables us to differentiate between what contemporaries considered treason – that is, the raising of war against the king as an act of treason and rebellion – and what was simply an expression of aristocratic violence. Neither was accorded the same status in English political, legal or martial culture as war pursued against the king's enemies in France, Scotland or Ireland.¹² The 'battle' of Nibley Green on 20 March 1470, 'fought' between Thomas Talbot, Viscount Lisle, and William, Lord Berkeley, over a long-running dispute concerning the Berkeley estates, is frequently included among the battles of the Wars of the Roses. There are two issues with its characterisation as 'reputedly the last private battle in England', fought between 'private' magnate armies numbering in the hundreds. First, our narrative of the 'battle' rests almost entirely on the seventeenth-century family history written by the local lawyer and antiquarian John Smyth.¹³ Second, the consequences of the clash, which resulted in Lisle's death, were worked out in the common law courts and not through parliamentary attainder or according to the law of arms. Lisle's widow pursued an action against the eight men she accused of her husband's murder in the court of King's Bench, but the Crown brought no actions against the participants.¹⁴ The 'battle' did not bring an end to the land dispute, and it was not until 1609 that a final settlement was reached. It may be that political uncertainty in 1470 created the conditions

11 An act of the 1460 parliament made plotting to kill or murdering the duke of York treason: *PROME*, 'Parliament of 1460', item 24, 'Parliament of 1461', item 19.

12 David Grummitt, *The Wars of the Roses: War and Martial Culture in England, 1455–1487* (Oxford, 2025), pp. 34–8.

13 Peter Fleming and Michael Wood, *Gloucestershire's Forgotten Battle: Nibley Green 1470* (Stroud, 2003); The Battlefields Trust, 'Battle of Nibley Green' (www.battlefieldtrust.com/resource-centre, accessed 9 October 2026).

14 The National Archives [hereafter TNA], KB27/843, rot. 68.

in which the dispute turned violent, although Lisle's challenge to Berkeley had its origins more in the codes of knightly behaviour than in the political problems of Edward IV. The timing of Nibley Green, like that of the 'battle' of Heworth in 1453 between the Nevilles and the Percies, during a period of national crisis has allowed historians to weave it into their narratives of civil war. Yet other similar – and at times larger or more deadly – expressions of aristocratic violence, such as that between Sir John Manners and William Heron, whose property dispute ended in 1428 with the violent death of the latter, were a common feature of late medieval English society. Historians have made various incidents of high-profile aristocratic violence in the 1450s, 1460s and 1470s prominent in their narratives of the Wars of the Roses, seeing in them both the origins and the consequences of the dynastic struggle between Lancaster and York.¹⁵ It was a connection that few contemporaries seem to have made.

Even where rebellion was met with attainder, its consequences were not necessarily permanent. In Michael Hicks's analysis of the acts of attainder passed between 1453 and 1509, as many as 265 individuals (67 per cent) had their attainders reversed.¹⁶ These included many men of noble rank, such as Henry Beaufort, duke of Somerset, who was attainted in Edward IV's first parliament and pardoned less than two years later. In some cases, such as Somerset's, this policy backfired spectacularly, and Duke Henry was killed fighting against the Yorkists in May 1464.¹⁷ Other reversals were more enduring, such as that of John, Viscount Beaumont, attainted in November 1461 and pardoned soon after presenting a petition to the king on 23 December 1461 'in consideration of the

15 R. L. Storey, *The End of the House of Lancaster* (Stroud, 1986), pp. 84–92, 165–75; Ralph A. Griffiths, 'Local Rivalries and National Politics: The Percies, the Nevilles and the Duke of Exeter, 1452–1455', in *King and Country: England and Wales in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1991), pp. 321–64; Martin Cherry, 'The Struggle for Power in Mid-Fifteenth-Century Devonshire', in *Patronage, the Crown and the Provinces*, ed. Ralph A. Griffiths (Gloucester, 1981), pp. 123–44; Helen Castor, '"Walter Blount was Gone to Serve Traytours": The Sack of Elvaston and the Politics of the North Midlands in 1454', *Midland History* 19 (1994), pp. 21–39; Jackson W. Armstrong, *England's Northern Frontier: Conflict and Local Society in the Fifteenth Century Scottish Marches* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 310–30.

16 Michael Hicks, 'Attainder, Resumption and Coercion, 1461–1529', *Parliamentary History* 3 (1984), pp. 15–31.

17 Michael Hicks, 'Edward IV, the Duke of Somerset and Lancastrian Loyalism in the North', in *Richard III and his Rivals* (London, 1991), pp. 149–64; Michael K. Jones, 'Edward IV and the Beaufort Family: Conciliation in Early Yorkist Politics', *The Ricardian*, 6 (1983), pp. 258–65.

approach of Christmas.’ Still others, such as Richard Woodville, Lord Rivers, who had fought against Edward at Towton, received pardons within weeks of their treason. Many, like the Paston brothers, pardoned after fighting against Edward IV at Barnet in April 1471, appear to have suffered no long-lasting detriment after taking up arms against their sovereign lord.¹⁸ These examples reinforce the view that the Wars of the Roses were not a devastating civil war in which the normative patterns of English society and government were set aside. The pardons and reversals of attainder demonstrate how the authority of royal institutions could persist regardless of attempts by powerful individuals to possess or exert their influence over them.

In a purely military sense, the Wars of the Roses operated within the existing martial culture and institutions of late medieval England, albeit with certain constraints. Armies were raised through the existing mechanism of the commission of array. The thirteenth-century Statute of Winchester required Englishmen aged between 16 and 60 to possess weapons and military equipment appropriate to their wealth and social status and to be available, when called upon, for the defence of their counties. Both the Crown and the rebels, sometimes claiming legitimacy by misusing the king’s letters patent, deployed the machinery of royal government to put men in the field. More importantly, perhaps, both sides raised armies through the private power of lordship, with magnates drawing upon their households, retainers and wider affinities, while the king used his private resources as duke of Lancaster (and later as duke of York and earl of March). Significantly, however, the Crown did not enter into formal indentures of war with its subjects specifying the type, length and remuneration of military service for campaigns fought against rebellious subjects. Throughout the fifteenth century, such indentures were the principal means of raising armies for expeditionary forces, both on the European continent and within the British Isles. The fact that kings did not use this expedient during the Wars of the Roses says much about the nature of the conflict and how it was perceived by the participants.¹⁹

18 TNA, C81/1488/238; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls: Edward IV, 1461–1467* (London, 1897), p. 97; Colin Richmond, ‘Paston Family (per. c.1420–1504)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (www.oxforddnb.com, accessed 9 October 2026).

19 Grummitt, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 66–77.

The fact that the armies raised during periods of civil conflict – 1455, 1459–61, 1469, 1470–71, 1485 and 1487 – were not assembled in the same way as those for royal expeditions overseas shaped the nature of the conflict. Most importantly, it placed practical limits on the size of armies and the length of time they could be kept in the field. Expeditionary armies were often months, if not years, in the making. They required parliamentary taxation to pay their wages, a concerted campaign of procurement and impressment to provide the men and materiel with which to wage war, and the support of the nobility and local landowners to serve as captains, man the commissions of array and provide the political capital to ‘get the job done.’ Even with all this in place, no expeditionary army of the fifteenth century could raise more than 20,000 men, and most of those for which we have records were much smaller, typically 5,000 to 8,000 strong.²⁰ Without this apparatus to equip and feed the army or the united support of the king’s greatest subjects, armies raised in the Wars of the Roses were probably much smaller. No muster rolls or financial accounts survive for any of the armies raised for civil conflict between 1455 and 1487, but it seems inconceivable that either side could have mustered more than 10,000 men for any campaign. The inability of commanders to keep their armies in the field for long periods, since they lacked both the political capital and the means to feed their men and animals, explains the relatively short duration of active campaigning. At most, there were 61 weeks of active campaigning between 1455 and 1485 and, in terms of maintaining field armies of thousands of men, probably far fewer. This imperative also shaped the dynamics of the conflict, as both the Crown and the rebels – or in 1461, 1471, 1485 and 1487 the rival kings – sought decisive battle.²¹

The Wars thus did not force major changes in these institutions or England’s martial culture at a time of rapid transformation in the practice of European warfare more generally. The second half of the fifteenth century did not see the emergence of national standing armies in England, as it did in France or the Burgundian territories. Nor did the Wars bring wholesale changes in tactics or

20 Adrian Bell, Anne Curry, Andy King and David Simpkin, *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 271–4; David Grummitt, ‘Chivalric Competition, Military Organisation and Edward IV’s French Campaign of 1475’, *The Ricardian* 35 (2024), pp. 95–115.

21 Grummitt, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 78–86, 94–7, 118–19.

broader trends in martial culture. Gunpowder weapons may have become more prominent in battles, as they did in the rest of Europe, and English men-at-arms may have become more willing to fight on horseback. Yet these developments were probably shaped more by expanding knowledge and experience of European practice, as well as by the campaigns that English kings led against foreign princes. Yorkist tactics at Barnet and Tewkesbury, where an opening salvo of gunpowder weaponry was used alongside archery, may have been influenced by the prevailing use of gunpowder and Burgundian practice some six years earlier at the Battle of Montlhéry.²² In 1475, Edward IV assembled the largest expeditionary army to have crossed the Channel during the fifteenth century up to that point. It was notable for an artillery train which contemporaries considered to rival that of the duke of Burgundy, while the large number of mounted men-at-arms moved Philippe de Commynes to compare it favourably with the *compagnies d'ordonnance* of the French king, Louis XI. These changes were not principally driven by civil war, or even by knowledge of tactics employed on the Continent, but in no small part by the cultural competition between rival princes.²³

Nor, as has frequently been argued, did the Wars of the Roses witness the end of chivalry in England.²⁴ While there were instances of brutality that fell outside the framework of chivalric and legal norms, such as the murders of the duke of York and earl of Salisbury at Pontefract in December 1460, the duke of Buckingham after the Battle of Northampton earlier that year, or Sir Thomas Kyriell and William, Lord Bonville, at St Albans in February 1461, more frequently such occurrences followed accepted practice. When the earl of Warwick executed some of the sailors captured when the duke of Somerset's force landed in Calais in November 1459, he selected for death only those who had previously been

22 Devin Fields, '1471: The Year of Three Battles and English Gunpowder Artillery', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 13 (2015), pp. 193–212; Robert Douglas Smith, *The Artillery of the Dukes of Burgundy 1363–1477* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 142–6; Dan Spencer, 'Change and Continuity in English Armies, 1453–1513', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (2025), pp. 1–25.

23 Grummitt, 'Chivalric Competition, Military Organisation and Edward IV's French Campaign of 1475', pp. 112–15.

24 Robert Jones, *Knight: The Warrior and the World of Chivalry* (Oxford, 2011), p. 223; Andrew Boardman, *The Medieval Soldier in the Wars of the Roses* (Cheltenham, 2022), pp. 91–109.



Beheading of Edmund Beaufort, 4th Duke of Somerset in 1471 at Tewkesbury. King Edward IV watches. Illuminated miniature from *Histoire de la rentrée victorieuse du roi Edouard IV en son royaume d'Angleterre* *Histoire de la rentrée victorieuse du roi Edouard IV en son royaume d'Angleterre* (cote MS 236 ou Hs. 0236) Bibliothèque de l'Université de Gand. Wikimedia Commons.

sworn to his service as captain of the town and marches. The well-documented trial and execution of Sir Ralph Grey, following his unsuccessful defence of Bamburgh Castle for the Lancastrians in 1464, were conducted according to the law of arms and presided over by the constable of England, the earl of Worcester. The charges against Grey were a mixture of breaches of the chivalric code (including his breach of faith towards his fellow knight, Sir John Astley, who was delivered into French captivity) and common law notions of treason. Grey was pardoned for the former by the king on account of his family's service to the House of York but found guilty of the latter and duly beheaded.²⁵ The process of treason trials conducted by the constable, in accordance with his right to try and execute traitors arbitrarily, may explain what appeared to some contemporaries and later historians to be the brutal murders of William, Lord Hastings, and Anthony, Earl Rivers, by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in 1483.²⁶

The conduct of the Wars of the Roses and the treatment of defeated foes were a far cry from the claims of Tudor chroniclers and some later historians. The claim that Edward IV declared that no quarter would be given to his Lancastrian opponents before the Battle of Towton in 1461 seems to have been entirely the invention of Edward Hall, whose chronicle, published posthumously in 1548 and edited for its modern edition in 1809, has done more than any other source to obscure our understanding of the military conflicts of the period.²⁷ The claim made by Philippe de Commynes that Edward IV's mantra in the battles of 1460–1461 was to 'kill the nobles and spare the commons' may have had some basis in truth. Casualties in the battles of the Wars of the Roses were certainly fewer than the tens of thousands quoted at the time (although not all contemporary estimates were as outlandish as those made for the Battle of Towton). The various stories of the indiscriminate slaughter of fleeing men during the rout were prob-

25 David Grummitt, *The Wars of the Roses Volume 1: The Triumph of York* (Warwick, 2025), pp. 59, 76; Gordon McKelvie, 'The Treatment of Defeated Opponents in England, 1455–1471', *Historical Research*, 99 (2026), pp. 1–20; *The Contemporary English Chronicles of the Wars of the Roses*, ed. D. Embree and M. T. Tavormina (Woodbridge, 2019), pp. 135–8.

26 Anne Sutton, 'The Admiralty and Constablenesship of England in the Later Fifteenth Century: The Operation and Development of these Offices, 1462–85, under Richard, Duke of Gloucester and King of England', in *Courts of Chivalry and Admiralty in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Musson and N. Ramsey (Woodbridge, 2018), pp. 197–214.

27 Grummitt, *Triumph of York*, pp. 129–33.

ably simply the usual tropes employed by chroniclers. If large numbers of men were killed in this way, their deaths have left little or no trace in the documentary sources: there was no spike in the number of wills registered following the major battles of the Wars of the Roses, no wholesale transfer of property from those killed, nor evidence of economic or social dislocation in areas affected by the fighting. We also know that men were taken prisoner and ransomed during the Wars, especially, it seems, in the campaigns of 1459 to 1461. It was far from clear at the time whether the taking of prisoners had any legal basis, as military service was not regulated by indentures for war, which usually specified the terms of ransoming prisoners, and there are several instances of men seeking legal redress against their captors for kidnapping and false imprisonment.²⁸ When Henry VII issued a set of ordinances for his army against the Yorkist rebels in 1487 – probably the only such ordinances to be issued during the Wars of the Roses – he was careful to include clauses against the taking and ransoming of fellow Englishmen as prisoners.²⁹

The effects of war clearly fell unequally across different groups in society. While many noble families suffered succession crises caused by unexpected deaths in battle or on the executioner's block, or lost their titles and estates through attainder, the English nobility as a whole was not destroyed by the experience of civil war. It was quite possible, whether through age, infirmity or simple choice, for lords to remain aloof from the conflict. While Colin Richmond estimated that 56 of the 70 members of the English nobility played an active role in the fighting between 1459 and 1461, his figures included men who pledged allegiance to Henry VI in the parliament of 1459 and for whom there is no evidence – save for a single chronicle reference made more than a decade later – that they took the field. In reality, the conflict was pursued principally by three or four committed noble families on each side, probably fewer than 20 individuals in total. Excluding the two peers who were children in Richmond's sample, it seems only 48 of 68 nobles participated in some form of military

28 Grummitt, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 164–6; McKelvie, 'Treatment of Defeated Opponents', pp. 8–11.

29 Anne Curry and Andrew Martinez, *English Military Ordinances 1385–1599: Discipline and Control in English Royal Armies from Richard II to Elizabeth I* (Warwick, 2026), pp. 131–4.

activity between 1459 and 1461.³⁰ Moreover, many of these men were present at only one of the seven actions fought during that period. Individuals from all sections of society, of course, did suffer. Many, like John Scletter, who lost his hand fighting alongside the duke of York at Wakefield, must have been permanently maimed, while others, like the younger John Paston, who was shot with an arrow at Barnet, suffered painful and potentially life-threatening wounds. Women, who necessarily lacked agency in this period, were also victims. Some, like Elizabeth Bold, whose husband had been killed at Wakefield, were imprisoned and ransomed. Only by making another marriage, this time to an esquire in Edward IV's household, was she able to gain any redress from her wrongdoers.³¹ Others, like Margaret, Lady Hungerford, whose son Robert was captured and ransomed by the French towards the end of the Hundred Years War and later executed and attainted for treason by Edward IV, faced a life of penury as a result of the Wars.³² While the absence of sustained devastation among civilian populations did not make the impact of the Wars inconsequential, their costs were concentrated unevenly across households, individuals and locations. As Hannes Kleineke's survey of provincial life in 1461 following the Yorkist victory on Palm Sunday has demonstrated, even at their most intense the Wars affected everyday life across the realm at large only indirectly and fitfully.³³

Thus far, this essay has shown that, while often described as a dynastic civil war fought between the Houses of York and Lancaster for control of the English crown, the Wars of the Roses are best understood through the legal, political and cultural framework of late medieval English rebellions against royal authority. As Michael Hicks has argued, to present the period as a continuous series of conflicts that began on the streets of St Albans in 1455 and ended either at Bosworth in 1485 or at Stoke in 1487 is to impose upon events a narrative coherence and a sense of continuity that obscure their complexity and the long

30 Colin Richmond, 'The Nobility and the Wars of the Roses, 1459–61', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 21 (1977), pp. 71–85; Grummitt, *Triumph of York*, pp. 155–64.

31 Paul L. Dawson and David Grummitt, 'The Battle of Wakefield 1460 Reconsidered', *Battalia*, 3 (2025), pp. 1–26 at p. 17; Grummitt, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 162–4; TNA, C1/27/202.

32 M. A. Hicks, 'Counting the Cost of War: The Moleyns Ransom and the Hungerford Land Sales, 1453–87', *Southern History* 8 (1986), pp. 11–35.

33 Hannes Kleineke, 'England, 1461: Predominantly Provincial Perspectives on the Early Months of the Reign of Edward IV', *The Fifteenth Century*, 18 (2020), pp. 81–92.

periods of peace and stability that punctuated the various political crises.³⁴

In the final part of this essay, I explore the nature and extent of foreign involvement in the Wars of the Roses and make some observations on the peculiarly English character of the conflict in comparison with rebellions and civil conflict in France and the Burgundian Netherlands. This is not merely a question of whether European mercenaries were present at this battle or that, or whether foreign princes gave support to one side or another, but something more fundamental. What historians have usually characterised as a war between rival claimants for the English throne is, in fact, better understood, at least in terms of its military dynamic, by considering it also as a conflict between the English king and his foreign rivals. This was particularly the case in 1461–3, in 1470–1, and again in 1485 and 1487. Equally, just as foreign princes sought to exploit divisions in England for their own ends, so kings of England, especially Edward IV, looked to gain advantage from civil conflict in France and elsewhere.

How a wider European dynamic shaped events both on and off the battlefield is especially clear in the early 1460s.³⁵ When Edward IV became king in 1461, he did so with the tacit support of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, and in the face of active opposition from the king of France, Charles VII. Towton, fought on Palm Sunday 1461, was not the decisive victory that later Yorkist propaganda presented, and within weeks Edward was faced with a siege of Carlisle by the combined forces of the remaining Lancastrian rebels and their Scottish allies. Potentially more serious still, an ‘Army of England’ had assembled in the Breton ports, while the French were embarking their own invasion force in the Somme estuary bound for south-west England. The French invasion of England in May 1461 achieved little except for the capture of Jersey and a raid on Portsmouth, not least because the Bretons were forced to return to port because of storms. Yet the intention of Charles VII and Francis II, Duke of Brittany, to intervene in English politics was clear. Fortunately for the new Yorkist regime,

34 Michael Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses* (New Haven, CT, 2010), pp. 3–11.

35 There is no satisfactory narrative of these years which fully explores the European dimension. The key narrative remains Cora Scofield’s monumental *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth* (2 vols, London, 1923), I, pp. 153–342. The second volume of my three-volume history of the Wars from 1455 to 1471 offers a reappraisal of these years: David Grummitt, *The Wars of the Roses, Volume 2: Securing the Crown, 1461–1468* (Warwick, 2027). The following three paragraphs draw heavily on the first five chapters of that book.

Charles died in July that year, to be succeeded by his estranged son, Louis XI. Louis, probably out of spite for his father as much as anything else, had flown his banner and sent troops to support Edward at Towton, but once he became king his interests aligned more closely with the traditional anti-English policies of the Valois monarchs. The Treaty of Chinon, signed with the Lancastrian queen Margaret of Anjou in July 1462 and promising to aid the Lancastrians, was designed to destabilise Edward's crown rather than constituting a serious attempt to restore Henry VI to the English throne. Yet it prompted probably the largest military mobilisation seen in England for almost half a century. A naval expedition under William Neville, earl of Kent, raided the French and Breton coasts and was instrumental in persuading Louis to scale back his military support for the Lancastrian exiles in Scotland. In October that year, however, Margaret of Anjou landed in Northumberland with a force of perhaps 2,000 French, led by the seneschal of Normandy, Pierre de Brézé, soon retaking the three main border strongholds of Alnwick, Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh.

It was this French invasion and the prospect of a new Scottish attack on the border counties, rather than the threat posed by the sorry band of Lancastrian rebels, that led Edward IV to assemble an army which included two dukes, seven earls and 31 lords in November 1462. This was the largest gathering of the English peerage serving their monarch in war to date in the fifteenth century, even more than Henry V had gathered for the Agincourt campaign.³⁶ The expedition ended in confusion in early January, as the Scots and English failed to engage each other in battle outside the gates of Alnwick, allowing the French garrison to march out of Alnwick unmolested. Despite the lack of a decisive battle, the campaign of the winter of 1462/3 (and that led by the earl of Warwick against the Scots to break the siege of Norham the following summer) was fundamentally different from those fought against English rebels. The presence of so many members of the English nobility suggests the armies were larger than those of 1459 to 1461. They were funded by loans from the king's subjects and by the effective mobilisation of the resources of the duchy of Lancaster. This enabled armies to remain in the field longer and sieges to be mounted and broken using significant amounts of gunpowder artillery. The force assembled in

36 *Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, ed. James Gairdner, Camden Society, new series 28 (London, 1880), pp. 158–9.

the autumn of 1462 was more representative of the political nation as a whole, as shown by the way in which reconciled Lancastrians and previously neutral lords served alongside committed Yorkists in the armies that faced Scottish and French foes. The resulting campaigns were fought according to the established rules of war: men served for pay, prisoners were taken, and combat was prearranged according to chivalric norms. When the Scots retreated from their siege of Norham Castle in June 1463, they were pursued across the border by the earl of Warwick. An Italian merchant commenting on the events of that summer reported that Warwick had raided 63 miles into Scotland, ‘destroying castles, villages, and houses’ until forced to retire for lack of victuals. He continued that ‘King Edward has written to the Duke of Burgundy that he intends to enter Scotland in person with a great army, and not to stop until he has destroyed and entirely subjected that kingdom.’³⁷

Edward’s reported letter to Duke Philip of Burgundy in the summer of 1463 and the negotiations at Saint Omer and Hesdin that autumn remind us of the centrality of England’s continental neighbours in determining the course of the Wars of the Roses. Lancastrian hopes in the north of England were not dashed principally by the rebels’ defeat at the small skirmishes at Hedgeley Moor and Hexham in the spring of 1464, but by the agreement reached with Louis XI on 27 October the previous year that the French king would not ‘make war on England nor provide aid or favour to Henry, late calling himself King of England, Margaret his wife, nor to her son.’³⁸ Edward IV’s throne was secured ultimately not in a Yorkshire dale or in the wilds of Northumberland, but across a negotiating table in northern France.

The Wars of the Roses were part of a wider pattern of political instability that afflicted western European polities in the second half of the fifteenth century. In France, the end of the Hundred Years War was followed by the *Guerre du Bien Public* in 1465 and renewed conflict during the minority of Charles VIII. Castile experienced prolonged rebellion between 1465 and 1475, while Catalonia was engulfed in civil war between 1462 and 1472. The dukes of Burgundy likewise

37 K. Bittman, ‘Le Campagne Lancastrienne de 1463’, *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, 26 (1948), pp. 1059–83 at p. 1075.

38 *Foedera, Conventiones, Literae et Cuiuscunque Generis Acta Publica*, ed. Thomas Rymer (13 vols, London, 1727), pp. 508–9.

struggled to assert their authority over rebellious subjects and disputed territories, while the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III faced persistent challenges from within the Empire. These conflicts shared three broad characteristics: popular discontent over taxation, justice and failures of government; opposition led by powerful nobles who challenged the authority or legitimacy of their rulers; and the inability of individual princes to provide effective political leadership. Personal rivalries, dynastic disputes and wider grievances thus combined to produce civil wars and rebellions across western Europe. Paradoxically, these conflicts often contributed to the consolidation rather than the fragmentation of political authority. By the late 1480s, many European rulers had emerged from decades of political crisis with their powers and institutions strengthened.³⁹ In some ways, England fits this pattern neatly. Yet events across the Channel in the 1460s also show the peculiarity of the English experience of civil war.

As the Lancastrian cause disintegrated in England, so Louis XI was faced with a rebellion by some of his greatest subjects, led by his brother, Charles, Jean II, duke of Bourbon, Francis, duke of Brittany, and Charles, count of Charolais, heir to the duchy of Burgundy. This alliance of princes of the blood and lesser nobles, joined by some towns, railed against Louis's attempts to assert the authority of the French crown over its territories. In some ways, the language of rebellion used in France was similar to that in England: notions of the *Bien Public* – the 'Public Weal' or commonwealth – were used alongside the language of reform to challenge royal authority, if not overtly to depose a king.⁴⁰ Yet the recourse to open war was very different. On 27 April 1465, the Estates General of the Burgundian Netherlands granted Charolais money to raise an army of over 10,000 men-at-arms and archers. Louis called out his *compagnies d'ordonnance* and the *franc archers* to meet the rebels in battle at Monthléry on 16

39 John Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 339–75; Grummitt, *Wars of the Roses*, pp. 210–15.

40 Neil Murphy, 'Towns and Princely Rebellion in Fifteenth-Century France: The War of the Public Weal, 1465', *English Historical Review*, 139 (2024), pp. 1027–58; Jacques Krynen, 'La rébellion du Bien public (1465)', in *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter*, ed. Marie Theres Fögen (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 81–97; Loïc Cazaux, 'Une Étude Comparée sur la Guerre Civile au Xve Siècle : Les Révoltes Princières de la Pragerie, du Bien Public et de la Guerre Folle', in *Guerres et Paix Civiles de l'Antiquité à Nos Jours*, ed. Olivia Carpi (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2018), pp. 75–88.

July. Montlhéry was one of the largest battles of the fifteenth century. Although the Burgundians were left with possession of the field, in a confused battle (not least caused by the sheer size of the armies involved) neither side emerged as a clear victor.⁴¹ By October, Louis and his opponents had reached an uneasy compromise. There were no attainders or executions; the Somme towns, ceded to France in 1463, were restored to Burgundy, while Louis's feckless brother, Charles, was given the duchy of Normandy. Ultimately, though, Louis's authority remained intact. For Edward IV, the War of the Public Weal presented an opportunity to limit the ambitions of the French king and gain some advantage for England. By 1467, he was attempting to build alliances with Burgundy and Brittany and looking to use these to press his own claim to the French throne. However unrealistic this goal might have been, it undoubtedly contributed in no small part to Edward's breach with the earl of Warwick in 1469/70 and to the renewed outbreak of civil conflict in England.

In the Burgundian Netherlands, the dukes faced persistent challenges from their urban subjects during the 1460s, particularly from the powerful city of Ghent. Philip the Good's attempts to increase taxation and extend ducal control over municipal government provoked a major rebellion in 1449–53, eventually suppressed by military force. Although defeated, the citizens of Ghent continued to resent the restrictions imposed upon their traditional liberties. The accession of Charles the Bold in 1467 prompted renewed disturbances, when popular demonstrations during his ceremonial entry into the city forced him temporarily to restore privileges forfeited in 1453. Charles subsequently imposed a humiliating settlement in January 1469, compelling the city's magistrates to surrender their charters and accept tighter ducal control. These conflicts reflected the tension between the political ambitions of increasingly powerful princes and the traditional rights of their subjects.⁴² As in England, political instability could arise not simply from dynastic disputes or aristocratic rivalries, but from fun-

41 Michel Rimboud, 'La Bataille de Montlhéry – 1465', *Cahiers du Centre d'études d'histoire de la Défense*, 23, *Nouvelle histoire bataille (II)* (2004), pp. 75–91.

42 Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), especially pp. 127–58; Peter Arnade, 'City, State, and Public Ritual in the Late-Medieval Burgundian Netherlands', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 39 (1997), pp. 300–18; Marc Boone, *Gent en de Bourgondische hertogen ca. 1384–ca. 1453: Een sociaal-politieke studie van een staatsvormingsproces* (Brussels, 1990).

damentally different understandings of legitimate government. Yet the different forms of government and the relatively powerful position of the English crown compared with its nearest European counterparts meant that rebellion and civil conflict, and their aftermath, followed very different paths in the various polities.

A reappraisal of events during the 1460s, within both the British Isles and mainland Europe, should cause us to question many of the assumptions about the Wars of the Roses. In political terms, the Wars were not a continuous period of civil war fought primarily because of the dynastic rivalry between the houses of Lancaster and York. Rather, they should be viewed as a series of rebellions against royal authority. While these events shared many similarities with contemporary rebellions in France, the Low Countries and the Iberian Peninsula, their conduct and their aftermath were often very different. Rebels were punished and pardoned within peculiarly English constitutional and legal contexts. In military terms, their scale and effects were markedly different from their continental counterparts. No English town was sacked during the Wars of the Roses and, despite contemporary claims to the contrary, the battles seem not to have been large or bloody affairs. Some rebels received severe and exemplary punishment, as they did elsewhere in Europe, but more often they were pardoned and eventually rehabilitated into the king's service and English political life. The centralised nature of English royal power did not allow for independent political and military action by great lords on the scale seen across the Channel; the duke of York or earl of Warwick, let alone Henry Tudor, was no duke of Burgundy. When the English state and the king's subjects were mobilised fully for war in the later fifteenth century, it was against the armies of foreign princes, not those of rebellious subjects. While modern and historical concepts of civil war can illuminate some aspects of the Wars of the Roses for historians, we need to be mindful that contemporaries did not give the various rebellions that beset the English crown between 1455 and 1487 the same narrative coherence that some modern accounts do. Moreover, the notion of civil war can actually obscure the military aspects of those rebellions and the response of the king and his subjects to them.

Who were the ‘peasants’ of the German Peasant’s War?

by ALEXANDER QUERENGÄSSER

ABSTRACT: Contrary to the historiographic label of “Peasant’s War”, the early-modern rebellions in southern and central Germany have been local and regional affairs with similar roots but no organizational connections. While popular exhibitions (as the DDR Bauernkrieg Panorama on the Kyffhäuser Mountain) still portray Peasants as poor land folk with primitive arms, they were all equipped members of a social elite of land and ton.

KEY WORDS: PEASANTS, MILITIA, CHURCH, WAR FLAIL.

The German Peasants’ War holds great significance—less in terms of national history than regional history—which is why, in 2025, three federal states (Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt) were mounting a joint state exhibition on the subject. That year, I was employed on a project for the city of Aschersleben (Saxony-Anhalt) that also focused on the local historical impact of the Peasants’ War; the municipal museum planned to tie its own exhibition into the state-wide event.¹ In the course of this work, I participated in a series of planning discussions and gained insight into the proposed exhibition concepts—eventually prompting me to make the heretical remark that both the state and local exhibitions were evidently leaving out two aspects of the Peasants’ War: the peasants and the war.

This seemed particularly regrettable in the states of the former GDR, where the image of this war remains shaped by official socialist historiography; it was therefore hardly surprising that several exhibitions featured scenes and images

¹ While the exhibition proved to be another disappointment, I published the results of my research: Querengässer, *Thomas Müntzer und Aschersleben*.

from the East German film *Thomas Müntzer – Ein Film deutscher Geschichte* (GDR 1956, dir. Martin Hellberg), depicting peasants clad in rags and armed with scythes and pitchforks facing the armies of the princes. Even the Military History Museum in Dresden makes the shocking claim that the peasants went into battle armed with modified agricultural implements.² These state exhibitions would have offered a prime opportunity to dispel long-standing myths; instead, however, they often skirted the military-historical theme, focusing instead on the era's key figures and local events—such as the destruction of monasteries and castles—while failing to address the question of who the Peasants' War insurgents actually were. This essay aims to explore that very question.

Before addressing the question of who the peasants of the Peasants' War actually were and how they were armed, it is necessary to examine the causes of the uprisings, as this context also reveals the social strata from which the insurgents originated. However, since the scope of this volume extends beyond a mere structural analysis of military levies, a closer look will subsequently be taken at the key figures of the Peasants' War. For—contrary to what the term, notably phrased in the singular, might suggest—this was not a war waged by a unified rebel faction, but rather a confluence of numerous local and regional conflicts.

A Changing World: Root Causes of the Conflict

Around 1500, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation stood on the threshold of a new era. This had little to do with Columbus's discovery of the Americas, an event that had minimal impact on Central Europe. The Lutheran schism still lay nearly two decades in the future. Yet, during the waning years of the Late Middle Ages, the Empire—at least in its initial stages—began to transform from a feudal association of vassals into a modern territorial state, even though vestiges of the traditional feudal system persisted well into the 19th century. Under Maximilian I, a series of reforms—though ultimately left unfinished—were initiated to give the Empire a modern character. Since the

2 This is also reflected in the catalogue entries in several recent accompanying publications. "For the peasant uprising, everyday tools were repurposed as weapons," quot.: Erwin Frauenknecht, 'Spieß mit Sende', in: Herzog Ulrich und die Bauern, p. 68.

early 15th century, the Estates of the Empire—comprising princes, free cities, Imperial knights, and ecclesiastical lords—had gathered sporadically for Imperial Diets; these assemblies authorized measures such as taxes to finance wars, including the „Hussite Penny“ and, later, the „Turkish Penny.“ In 1495, Maximilian sought to introduce the „Common Penny“ (*Gemeiner Pfennig*), a permanent tax payable directly to the Emperor. To facilitate the administration of the vast Empire, Maximilian established six Imperial Circles in 1500. An institution for the legal resolution of conflicts between the Imperial Estates—the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*)—had already been established in 1495. This measure aimed to curb the practice of feuding, which had been outlawed that same year by the „Eternal Public Peace“ (*Ewiger Landfriede*).³

It was primarily the flourishing cities that eroded the economic and military power of the knights. The 12th and 13th centuries had seen a wave of new town foundations across the Empire. Particularly in the south, Free Imperial Cities such as Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Rothenburg emerged as formidable rivals to ecclesiastical and secular territorial lords, sometimes even developing into small territorial states in their own right. Major metropolitan centers like Mainz, Cologne, and Magdeburg—sometimes through violent means—ousted their ruling prince-bishops and pursued independent policies. The cities played a far more significant role than the old knightly class in raising the new taxes; consequently, the financial burden on citizens increased noticeably at the beginning of the 16th century. In 1508, King Maximilian demanded support from all Imperial Estates for his planned journey to Rome, where he intended to be crowned Emperor. The escalating conflict with the Ottomans also led to new tax demands. For instance, the city of Aschersleben—located in the Bishopric of Halberstadt—was required to pay 3,000 guilders for the Rome expedition in 1508, 1,000 guilders as a „Turk Penny“ in 1519, and another 3,000 guilders a year later. Yet these tax burdens did not deter the city council from commissioning a new town hall in 1517, ordering three cast cannons from Braunschweig in 1522, and commissioning an organ for the church—all of which underscored the city's financial strength.⁴

3 See Angermeier, *Die Reichsreform*; Angermeier, *Reichsreform und Reformation*, Fischer, *Reichsreform und „Ewiger Landfrieden“*.

4 Querengässer, *Thomas Müntzer und Aschersleben*, pp. 43–44.

The Church played a central role in the life of every medieval European. Every Christian was subject to mandatory parish affiliation and was obliged to attend Mass and confess at least once a year. Church sacraments accompanied the individual throughout their entire life, from baptism to the last rites. Throughout history, criticism frequently arose regarding Church practices, alleging a departure from the true ideals of Christianity. During the Early and High Middle Ages, reform efforts sometimes led to the founding of new religious orders that—at least in their origins—committed themselves to the Church's vow of poverty. These included the Benedictines (tracing their roots to the ideas of Benedict of Nursia, c. 480–547) and their High Medieval offshoot, the Cistercians, as well as the mendicant orders of the High and Late Middle Ages, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. The Franciscans, in particular, faced accusations of heresy during the first decades of their existence. The Council of Constance (1414–1418) set itself the task of a fundamental reformation (*causa reformationis*) of the Western Church—an undertaking that went beyond merely resolving the Western Schism (the division of the Church into two, and at times more, papal courts in Rome and Avignon in southeastern France). To combat heresies—such as the teachings of the English reformer Wycliffe or the Bohemian Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake during the council—the Church fathers resolved to hold further councils at regular intervals in order to reform what had become „deformed“. Continuous reformation was thus considered a fundamental task of the church—though this was understood not as innovation, but as a return to a primordial state viewed as an ideal. However, with the resolution of the schism and the end of the Hussite Wars in the mid-1430s, the concept of conciliarism lost its significance. Put simply, a certain „reform backlog“ built up over the remainder of the century—a situation that was perceived as such by a number of contemporaries.⁵

This backlog of reform—manifesting primarily, though not exclusively, in criticism of the growing departure from the principle of poverty by high-ranking prelates and ordinary clergy alike—was accompanied by the increasing commodification of salvation. As the holder of the Petrine power of the keys (symbolized on the papal coat of arms), the Pope was authorized to grant ple-

5 Kaufmann, *Erlöste und Verdamnte*, pp. 12-14.

nary indulgences, which entailed the complete remission of guilt and sin. Eventually, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 also permitted high-ranking prelates to grant indulgences of up to forty days. Furthermore, the late Middle Ages saw the rise of *ad instar* indulgences, which transferred the grace of salvation to other locations, briefly elevating their status as pilgrimage sites—often on specific feast days. Indulgences were also increasingly purchased on behalf of the deceased, lending a basis in reality to the—albeit anachronistic—rhyme: „When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul to heaven springs.“ It was not only the Curia that profited from the trade in indulgences, but also high-ranking ecclesiastical princes.

In the early 16th century, growing criticism of church practices and the commodification of salvation coincided with an economic crisis—perceived differently across various regions—precipitated by extreme weather conditions. Scholars define the period between 1300 and 1700 as the „Little Ice Age.“ Although this era included extended warm spells, the early 16th century saw a rise in extreme weather events, particularly cold and wet winters. The River Thames, which had frozen over only twice during the 15th century, was covered by a thick layer of ice during the winters of 1506 and 1514. Anton Wenck's 1680 chronicle of Dresden contains two chapters dedicated to famines and extreme weather; the early 16th century stands out in these accounts: „In the year 1509, there was such a dry summer that—like other waters—the Elbe dried up to such an extent that one could walk across it in many places. However, the year 1513 saw a very harsh yet volatile winter, marked by sudden shifts in weather, and the Elbe froze over three times. In 1514, a significant and severe cold snap struck in the autumn, causing the grapevines to freeze; the same occurred in 1517.“⁶ Tellingly, another harvest crisis struck large parts of the Empire in 1524–25. Well into the 19th century—before improved means of transport and a more complex banking and credit system could better mitigate food crises—the lives of Europeans, whether peasants or city dwellers, were profoundly shaped by the annual rhythm and the harvest cycle linked to it. It was commonplace for grain prices in the spring, as granaries emptied, to be twice as high as during the autumn harvest months. However, crop failures could cause prices to quadruple

6 Quot.: Wenck, *Der Chur=Fürstlichen Sächsischen weiteruffenen Residentz- und Haupt=Vestung Dresden Beschreib.*, p. 535.

or quintuple, dealing a severe blow to a population that spent a far larger share of its income on food than people do today. Even localized crop failures were difficult to offset because transport costs were comparatively high and rose in tandem, as the price of oats—essential for draft animals—was also affected by poor harvests. Regional and supra-regional crises, such as that of 1524–25, thus represented near-apocalyptic catastrophes and provided fertile ground for the religious exhortations of theological hardliners like Thomas Müntzer.

Around 1500, these manifestations of crisis erupted in intensified hostility toward Jews. Antisemitic conspiracy theories circulated throughout the Empire, leading to pogroms and the expulsion of Jews from the Archbishopric of Magdeburg and the Bishopric of Halberstadt in 1494, from Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola in 1496, and—by the turn of the century—from numerous Imperial cities such as Nuremberg, Ulm, Strasbourg, and Regensburg; Electoral Brandenburg followed suit in 1510. Anti-Jewish demands also appear in various programs of the *Bundschuh* movements. On the other hand, the fact that popular anger was directed at a different religious group during this period can also be interpreted as a sign of stability within the Church. Unlike earlier in the century, there were no major heresy trials. The Church as an institution appeared stable, as did the majority of major European territories.⁷

Thus, despite all criticism of ecclesiastical practices in the early 16th century, a high degree of lay piety is evident. In the 15th century alone, an estimated 1,200 new churches were built in France and roughly the same number in the Empire, many of them around 1500.⁸ The piety of the laity found expression primarily in endowments that increased the Church's wealth. However, these growing holdings of land, real estate, and rights fueled envy and resentment during a time of crisis.

Criticism regarding the actual conduct of the Church had already permeated broad segments of society before Luther posted his theses. Even that act did not necessarily signify a radical break between the reformer and the Church. In July 1518, Luther was invited to Dresden by Hieronymus Emser, secretary to Duke George of Saxony, to preach at the court chapel. The ensuing theological dispute

7 Kaufmann, *Erlöste und Verdamnte*, p. 58.

8 Kaufmann, *Erlöste und Verdamnte*, p. 59.

with the court chaplain, however, escalated into a heated conflict. Nevertheless, the episode illustrates that the origins of the Reformation aimed not at a schism, but rather at the reform of the Church—as the name implies—and that Duke George himself was generally open to this idea. Yet times changed rapidly; what soon seemed insufficient to Luther eventually became too much for George. While the reformer ultimately called into question the Pope and ecclesiastical institutions such as religious orders, Duke George remained a loyal adherent of the Catholic Church; during the Peasants' War, he would dispatch troops to suppress the uprising in Thuringia.⁹

At that time, Albrecht of Brandenburg—serving as Archbishop of Magdeburg, Bishop of Halberstadt, and, above all, Elector of Mainz—was the Empire's most important metropolitan and its Archchancellor. Albrecht was not the dull reactionary later portrayed by Protestant historiography; indeed, he was quite open to church reform. He patronized humanist scholars at his court and maintained contact with the critic of the Church and reformist theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam. Following one of the guiding principles of this intellectual movement—*ad fontes* (to the sources)—Erasmus had the original Greek text of the New Testament printed alongside a Latin translation in 1516. Moreover, he advocated for Bible translations in the vernacular—doing so even before Luther took this step at the Wartburg, a move long regarded as revolutionary.¹⁰

However, as a prince who loved pomp and was already heavily in debt due to his accumulation of ecclesiastical offices, Albrecht had allowed himself to be drawn into the indulgence controversy—a central bone of contention for the reformers from Wittenberg. While he did view the St. Peter's Indulgence of 1514—intended to finance the reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome—critically from a theological standpoint, his own technically unlawful accumulation of offices (tolerated by the Curia) left him little room for maneuver. As early as 1514, Albrecht's negotiators, who had traveled to Rome, recognized that „resentment and perhaps other consequences might arise from this.“¹¹ They were entirely correct in this assessment, for criticism emerged not only among the rural and urban populations but even from within the ranks of the Observant

9 A very good German study on this topics is Volkmann, *Reform statt Reformation*.

10 Heide, *Der einzig wahre Bibeltext*.

11 Quot. after: Winterhager, „Ich dachte für war, Er were ein Engel“, p. 137.

Franciscans charged with proclaiming the indulgence. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther wrote a letter to Albrecht urging him to withdraw the indulgence. Although the archbishop was certainly willing to take measures against abuses in the indulgence trade, he sharply rejected Luther's general criticism of the practice, labeling it a „poisonous error“ and calling Luther himself an „audacious monk.“¹² Yet, within his own territories, Albrecht soon found himself facing growing pressure for reform. Towns such as Magdeburg, Halberstadt, and Aschersleben demanded the right to appoint Lutheran pastors to their city churches. When the cardinal refused this request, civil unrest ensued, eventually escalating into uprisings in 1525.¹³

Thus, the German world at the beginning of the 16th century was characterized by profound and multifaceted change. Shifts in the social and economic hierarchies within the Empire resulted in legal uncertainty. On the one hand, the schism in the Church offered a potential outlet; on the other, it provided new potential for conflict.

Peasant Sidearms and Spears – The Weapons of the Peasants

An inventory from the Landgraviate of Thuringia—one of the central regions of the Peasants' War of 1525—demonstrates just how well-equipped these rural householders were. In 1466, Duke William III commissioned an arms register for his Thuringian territories; records from a total of 14 administrative districts have survived to the present day. These documents list 319 villages with a combined population of over 5,200.¹⁴ William also explicitly codified the peasants' obligation to bear arms: „Every farmer shall keep a crossbow or other weapon by his plow [...] so that, should an alarm be raised, he may immediately respond—armed and shouting—under penalty of a fine imposed without leniency.“ Of the 5,291 individuals listed, 2,680 possessed iron helmets, 678 had mail armor, 2,017 owned a crossbow, 357 had a firearm, 1,850 carried a long knife (*Bauernwehr*), and 10 even possessed a sword. In addition, there were 1,490 spears, 607 war flails, and 2,103 pavises (shields).

12 Quot. after: Winterhager, „Ich dachte für war, Er were ein Engel“, p. 137.

13 Goebke, *Der Bauernkrieg in Halberstadt*, pp. 17-0.

14 Herzer, *Wehrpflichten und Heerfolge im Spätmittelalter*, p. 90.



Title page of the Twelve Articles of the German Peasant's War (1525), from page 21 of *Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes* by Otto Henne am Rhyn, Berlin 1897.
(from World History Encyclopedia, online)

The situation was little different in other rural areas of the Empire. In Lower Bavaria, around 1500, plans were even made to outfit the *Landwehren* (territorial militias) in uniform attire. Estimates suggested that the rural population of Lower Bavaria could field 20,000 men, while the towns could provide 10,000. The small village of Aichstetten, located in the rebellious Allgäu region, was able to muster 113 men during the Peasants' War. A contemporary muster roll records their equipment and lists men such as „Jacob Risinger“ and „Brait Hans“—who carried only a halberd—and „Hans Stackmann,“ who possessed two halberds (one for himself and one for his son), alongside well-equipped individuals like „Hais Schumacher,“ who owned a boar spear, a *Krebs* (breastplate), and matching arm defenses. „Jäck Scheich“ carried a firearm, a boar spear, and a breastplate.¹⁵

The war flail had been popular among German and Bohemian infantry since the Hussite Wars. Although derived from the agricultural threshing flail, it was manufactured as a distinct weapon; the striking head and the shaft were connected by a chain rather than the leather strap used on farming tools, and it was likely employed primarily for the defense of *Wagenburgen* (wagon forts). Incidentally, the same applies to a whole range of other supposedly typical „peasant weapons.“ Hay forks were usually made of wood, whereas „war forks“ had an iron head; a scythe used for harvesting had a blade far too thin to be repurposed as a weapon—though, of course, any village blacksmith could forge a sturdier „war scythe“ based on the same design.¹⁶

These banns not only formed the backbone of the peasant armies, they were also used against them. As unrest mounted in the northern Harz region and the mountain peasants and charcoal burners banded together into armed mobs, Cardinal Albrecht—in his capacity as Bishop of Halberstadt—summoned the levies of the towns and administrative districts to arms. The *Stiftshauptmann* (territorial commander) von Werther demanded that the town of Aschersleben provide fifteen well-equipped men-at-arms and a barrel of gunpowder, to be delivered to Gartersleben. Four additional mounted men-at-arms were to be assigned to the

15 Blickle, *Der Bauernjörg*, pp. 173-175.

16 As older, but still readable account regarding rural militias of the age, see Hoyer, *Das Militärwesen*, pp. 35-45, there also examples for city militias. The latest work of course is: Herzer, *Wehrpflichten und Heerfolge im Spätmittelalter*, pp. 78-104.

princes' levy marching toward Thuringia, along with twenty wagons carrying beer and bread; for the latter, several administrative districts supplied flour to Aschersleben to be processed by local bakers.¹⁷

Townspeople and property-owning farmers were also subject to military call-up obligations and were often well-armed. In the Middle Ages, „city air“ not only brought freedom but also entailed obligations—foremost among them the duty of military service for the community. This obligation to bear arms is documented in many contemporary municipal ordinances. For instance, a municipal ordinance and bylaw issued in 1554 for the town of Delitzsch (part of Electoral Saxony) stipulated that anyone wishing to acquire citizenship must possess „a suit of armor, suitable offensive and defensive weapons, a leather bucket, a fire hook, and a long knife“¹⁸ at their home. Armor and the „long knife“ were required for military service, while the leather bucket and fire hook were for fire-fighting. A well-equipped townspeople in the late Middle Ages might possess a pike, sword, helmet, breastplate, and other pieces of armor, differing little in this regard from the knights of the era. Ranged weapons were also part of urban arsenals. By the early 16th century, these included crossbows, even though many cities had begun supplementing their arsenals with handguns during the 15th century. Cities did not always rely on new citizens to provide their own gear; Leipzig and Frankfurt, for example, initially purchased large stocks at their own expense, which new citizens could then acquire.¹⁹

The equipment of urban and rural levies was inspected annually at musters. Missing or defective gear could have serious consequences, as demonstrated by an inspection of the Dresden bakers' guild's armor in 1473. During this review, it was noted that „Hans Lindener has two *payfosen* [padded jacks] and one crossbow; he has been barred from practicing his trade because he lacks a helmet.“ Regarding Jacob Moser, the record states: „He has one black helmet, one *payfose*, and one crossbow; the helmet is in poor condition, so he has been barred from practicing his trade.“²⁰ Both bakers were thus temporarily banned

17 Zittwitz, *Chronik*, p. 166.

18 Quot.: Historisches Archiv Zöbzig, U 48 Urkunden, no fol.

19 Querengässer, 'Kriegswesen und Herrschaftsbildung', pp. 67-68.

20 Quot.: Stadtarchiv Dresden, A. Xvb. 37 Einwohnerverzeichnisse, Revisionslisten über Harnisch, Feuerstätten, Holz, Bier u.a., fol. 101.

from working until they had rectified the state of their equipment.

Military service obligations extended not only to city burghers but also to homeowners in the suburbs or in villages affiliated with the towns, as these homeowners were likewise subject to the call-up. A 1537 muster roll from the city of Delitzsch demands six men „with armor“ from the nearby village of Geritz, „four men as above“ from Werben, and „two men with weapons and armor“²¹ from Bendorf.

In the late Middle Ages, cities were frequently required to provide mounted contingents as well. For instance, in 1470, the council of Aschersleben decreed: “In addition to the captain, the council maintained two armor-bearers, eight attendants, and twelve watchmen, while each guild master kept a mounted squire. It was also resolved that every sworn city official and prosperous citizen should own a horse fit for military service, so that seventy mounted horses could be mustered at the ringing of the bell.”²² Maintaining a “reisig” horse—that is, one fit for combat—in addition to the equipment they were already required to provide, demanded considerable financial resources from the citizens of Aschersleben. A troop of seventy horsemen constituted a truly formidable force for a city. The example of Delitzsch is also worth examining regarding the provision of mounted troops, as the muster rolls there record not only who supplied a horse but also who actually rode it. Thus, Hans Lange rode Martin Raschelberg’s blue-grey horse, Paul Fritzsche rode a blue-grey horse belonging to the town council, and Nickel Dömel rode „the Holznisterlin Blassen“—that is, a woman’s horse. Some of the riders appear to have been the sons of citizens liable for military service; for instance, Hans Lübbe the Elder rode „his father’s brown horse,” and Bartell Lubben rode „his father Andres Luppen’s horse.” In total, only five of the 35 riders—some of whom are merely noted as having „volunteered to ride”—are recorded as riding „their own horse.”²³

The insurgents eventually obtained cannons from the towns as well. Müntzer procured eight *Karrenbüchsen* (light field guns mounted on carts) in Mühlhausen. In southern Germany, peasant armies engaged in prolonged artillery duels

21 Quot.: SächsStA Leipzig Stadt Delitzsch, Nr. 1070 Kriegsbürger, no fol.

22 Quot.: Abel, *Sammlung etlicher noch nicht gedruckten alten Chronicken*, p. 478.

23 Quot.: SächsStA Leipzig Stadt Delitzsch, Nr. 1070 Kriegsbürger, no fol.

with the armies of the princes during the battles of Gausbeuren and Weingarten. The Margrave of Brandenburg reported in a letter that additional troops from the Hegau, Breisgau, and Black Forest regions were gathering, bringing nine pieces of artillery with them. According to a report by Jörg Truchsess, the Neckar-Odenwald contingent possessed as many as 42 pieces, which they used to subject the well-fortified city of Würzburg to heavy bombardment.²⁴

The organization of the peasant bands was modeled on that of *Landsknecht* armies. The individual bands were generally divided into companies (*Fähnlein*) of 500 men, which were in turn subdivided into squads (*Rotten*) of 10 to 15 men. The companies were commanded by captains, while the bands as a whole were led by a supreme field commander. These leaders were usually experienced mercenaries—often nobles. The first peasant company formed near St. Blasien elected the *Landsknecht* Hans Müller as its field commander, while the Allgäu band chose Walther Bach von Oy, a veteran of Frundsberg's armies. The most famous of these leaders were the knights Florian Geyer von Giebelstadt, who commanded the Taubertal Band, and Götz von Berlichingen, the leader of the *Lichter Haufen* (Bright Band). Furthermore, some peasant bands actively recruited battle-hardened *Landsknechte*. In March 1525, for instance, veterans reportedly made up about one-third of the 5,500-strong Lake Constance band.²⁵

Peasants and citizens vs. Mercenaries

So if the Peasant bands have been well equipped and organized, why did they fail in the end and fail dramatically? Occasionally, these groups were also used for military exercises, yet a lack of training and experience remained a significant shortcoming for the insurgent bands. However, actual skirmishes—let alone full-scale battles—were the exception in medieval warfare. Sieges and campaigns of devastation were far more common; the aim was to inflict damage on the enemy by plundering or destroying crops and driving off livestock. Such operations required a substantial number of troops, typically provided by urban and rural levies. For open-field battles, by contrast, commanders increasingly relied on experienced mercenaries. While field armies were sometimes supple-

24 Blickle, *Der Bauernjörg*, pp. 180-183, 306-307.

25 Blickle, *Der Bauernjörg*, pp. 179-180.

mented by these levies, the latter rarely proved their worth in open combat. The reasons for this lie partly in the mercenaries' superior experience, but also in psychological factors: mercenaries were recruited not only from the ranks of the impoverished nobility but increasingly from the poorer strata of the urban population—people who had failed to establish themselves in the city's economic life. Military service offered them a means of making a living, but success was essential for this. Town burghers and established farmers who joined the levies, on the other hand, were integrated members of society with something to lose; consequently, they were less willing to face death on the battlefield. Although it was not uncommon for burghers and farmers to provide their equipment to sons or hired hands rather than serving personally, even these substitutes—despite their lower social status—enjoyed a relatively secure livelihood. Nevertheless, this social imbalance helps explain the psychological superiority of the mercenary armies over the insurgent peasants: the Peasants' War was not an uprising of the poor, but rather of the urban and rural elite fighting for their privileges and "liberties."

Mercenaries also played an increasingly important role in the military practices of towns during the late 15th century. It was by no means uncommon for individual citizens or entire towns to supplement their levies with substitutes or specifically recruited mercenaries. In Aschersleben, the sources first identify a town captain—Friedrich Hoym—in 1413; he had at his disposal seventeen **Wepener** (armed retainers) and thirteen men to man the town's watchtowers. For potential field operations, the town also issued him a letter of indemnity, which stipulated reimbursement for any equipment or damaged horses, as well as for ransoms in the event of capture. By the middle of the century, these mercenaries were also replacing town levies in the military campaigns that continued to take place regularly: „In the year 1452, there was a mounted expedition or campaign into the Holtzland; our captain was Sivert von Difturt, with 24 men-at-arms, including Hans von Neindorp, Hintze von Trothe, and Baltzer von Crosig.”²⁶ The annual mention of the captain and the size of his retinue in the *Chronicon* suggests that their contracts were limited to a maximum of one year. In all likelihood, they were employed only during the warmer months suitable

26 Quot.: Abel, *Sammlung etlicher noch nicht gedruckten alten Chronicken*, p. 473.

for warfare; indeed, the Chronicon notes for 1456: „Jan von Berge was our captain in this year and the previous one, and was retained with his men until St. Gall's Day.“²⁷ St. Gall's Day fell on October 16. Recruiting members of the lower nobility as mercenaries offered several advantages to those urban communities that could afford it—and Aschersleben quite evidently fell into this category: the burghers were relieved of the not particularly popular obligation of military service, and the city was protected because the nobleman defended it, rather than potentially threatening trade routes as a highwayman. The obligation for citizens to bear arms remained in place, yet the likelihood of becoming involved in serious combat—and thus the need to come to terms with it mentally—diminished.

Peasants' Wars instead of Peasants' War

As previously indicated in the introduction, the label „German Peasants' War“ actually encompasses dozens of distinct centers of conflict; while these shared similar causes—as described in the preceding section—and occurred in close temporal proximity, they were ultimately geographically separate. Tellingly, after the unrest broke out in Thuringia, Thomas Müntzer attempted to travel to southern Germany to coordinate cooperation with the peasants there but failed. Ultimately, the years 1524–25 saw actors with varying motives and adversaries: on one hand, townspeople rose up against urban overlords or other—usually ecclesiastical—holders of rights within the city, seeking to assume those rights themselves. On the other, peasants turned against the rulers of both small and large territorial states because they perceived a threat to their traditional „freedoms“ (in the sense of established rights). These two forms of conflict could—though they did not necessarily have to—merge with one another.

The Duchy of Ulrich of Württemberg provides an example of such an entanglement and the long history behind these conflicts. As was the case with many princes of the Empire at the time, there was a wide gap between his ambitions and his territory's economic means. A lavish court, a succession of mistresses, and a foreign policy marked by feuds and minor wars consumed a significant portion of the land's tax revenues—revenues that were already depressed in the

²⁷ Quot.: Ibid, p. 576.

early 16th century by a series of climate-induced crop failures. In 1514, 70 percent of income went toward debt repayment. Yet, because Ulrich was planning a military campaign into Burgundy, he felt compelled to summon the Estates to authorize a new wealth tax. However, the local elites agreed only to a consumption tax on meat, wine, and grain—a measure that placed a far heavier burden on the middle and lower income classes. Public outrage was fueled in particular by the fact that this levy was collected indirectly: weights and measures were reduced while prices remained constant. This resulted in price inflation of nearly 600 percent within just a few months.²⁸

Resistance to these measures emerged not only from the ranks of the poorest but, above all, from the cities. The widespread expansion of the movement eventually forced Duke Ulrich to make concessions. The Treaty of Tübingen, negotiated with the Estates on July 8, severely curtailed the Duke's claim to authority and strengthened the position of the Estates. Similar developments would be seen in other German territories over the next 200 years.

Although the Treaty of Tübingen is regarded today as a significant early constitutional document in German history, it did little to resolve the central grievances of the *Armer Konrad* (Poor Conrad) movement. Unrest broke out again in early August. However, Ulrich managed to assemble both his own troops and those from neighboring territories at the Württemberg border and forcibly crush the armed bands of peasants and townspeople.

The *Armer Konrad* movement stands within a tradition of various unrests and uprisings that swept through southern Germany around 1500. In 1476, Hans Böhm—known as „Pfeifferhannes“—preached to as many as 50,000 peasants in the Tauber Valley. As his name suggests, Böhm's parents hailed from the Kingdom of Bohemia, and his teachings were likely influenced by the Hussite movement. He was arrested and executed in Würzburg that same year. In 1493, a conspiracy emerged in the Alsatian town of Schlettstadt; it was the first to adopt the *Bundschuh* (peasant's shoe) as its symbol. The insurgents—among them the former mayor of Schlettstadt, Johann Ullmann—protested against excessive taxes and an unregulated legal system, as well as the presence of Jews. The unrest was violently suppressed, and Ullmann and other ringleaders were

28 Detailed: , Andreas, *Württemberg im Aufstand*.

quartered. During the winter of 1501–02, an uprising of 7,000 peasants and townspeople took place in Bruchsal—part of the Bishopric of Speyer—led by the mercenary Joß Fritz. Before a general revolt could break out, the bishop learned of the conspiracy and had the ringleaders arrested and executed. Joß Fritz, however, managed to escape; he later played a role in the *Armer Konrad* movement of 1514, where he again used the *Bundschuh* as a symbol. Prior to that, in 1513, he had organized another conspiracy in Lehen im Breisgau. Much like the Bruchsal uprising, he demanded the abolition of princely rule, intending to recognize only the Emperor and the Pope as legitimate authorities. He sought to drastically curtail clerical privileges, reduce levies, and standardize the legal system. This conspiracy, too, was uncovered and thwarted prematurely.

Ulrich's rule lasted another five years before he was driven from his lands by the Swabian League in 1519, following the imposition of the imperial ban upon him due to his attack on the Imperial City of Reutlingen and other misdeeds. He shuttled between the Lordship of Mömpelgard and the Swiss Confederation, while his duchy came under the direct administration of the Emperor. However, the Emperor's measures to re-impose Catholicism met with resistance from the rural population—a cause with which Ulrich now aligned himself. After the outbreak of peasant unrest in southwestern Germany in 1524, he raised his own army and marched alongside Württemberg peasants against Stuttgart, his former seat of power. When news of the outcome of the Battle of Pavia reached the camp, the Swiss contingent abandoned his army. Ulrich was forced to abandon the siege and fled with a handful of loyal followers to Hohentwiel Castle.²⁹ It is an irony of fate that Ulrich—a high-ranking nobleman—could have emerged as one of the most significant peasant leaders. Although the peasants of Württemberg had initially sided with him, a rift developed over the question of how power would be structured following the capture of Stuttgart; the peasants were unwilling to support Ulrich's full restoration to power. It was only after his flight that a peasant army formed for a second—and ultimately futile—siege of Stuttgart.³⁰

While in Württemberg a disparate array of rural, urban, and even aristocrat-

29 Frauenknecht, 'Konfrontation und Kooperation mit den Bauern', pp. 13-20.

30 Regenbogen, 'Der Herzog als Bauer', pp. 21-28.

ic actors joined forces—albeit uneasily—in the struggle, the Peasants' War remained a local phenomenon in many regions, often manifesting as an urban rather than a rural uprising. Contemporary accounts provide a clear picture of events in Aschersleben that differs significantly from earlier narratives, which claimed the town was attacked by peasants from the surrounding countryside. The conflict actually stemmed from a dispute over the appointment of a Lutheran pastor—a move Cardinal Albrecht had rejected by citing the local nunnery's right of patronage. When the first uprisings broke out in the surrounding area and unrest spread among the Franciscans and Cistercian nuns, the town council saw an opportunity to wrest the patronage rights from the nuns in exchange for protection. Instead, however, the nunnery was destroyed—if not at the council's instigation, then at least with its tacit approval—in a bid to wipe the slate clean once and for all. Subsequently, the council humbly submitted to the demands of the territorial ruler—who was fully occupied with suppressing the peasant revolts—hoping he would accept the *fait accompli* they had created in Aschersleben. Yet this calculation did not initially pay off. After a thorough review, Cardinal Albrecht ruled on September 30, 1525, that the council must pay 600 guilders for the livestock seized from the nunnery, in addition to a fine of 6,000 guilders payable directly to the diocese. Ultimately, however, the town did succeed in purchasing the patronage rights from the nuns the following year.³¹

A very similar case is found in Frankenhausen, Thuringia, where the final major decisive battle of the uprisings took place. Much like in Aschersleben, social tensions played a role in the Frankenhausen revolt that was at least as significant as the theological ones.³² Here, however, the initiative actually came from the townspeople themselves; they overthrew the town council and plundered the nearby St. Georgii nunnery, deliberately destroying its archive of legal deeds and debt instruments. On May 4, additional bands of Thuringian peasants arrived outside the town and began plundering the surrounding monasteries. On May 11, Müntzer himself arrived with a contingent of the force from Mühlhausen. By this time, the uprisings in southern Germany had largely been suppressed, allowing the princes to turn their attention to events in Thuringia. To this end, Landgrave Philip of Hesse—who had been increasingly leaning toward

31 Querengässer, *Thomas Müntzer und Aschersleben*, pp. 57-75.

32 Hahnemann, *Die Einwohner von Frankenhausen*.

the Reformation since 1524—joined forces with the staunchly Catholic Duke George of Saxony. The princely armies united on May 13, while the insurgents constructed a wagon fort on a hill behind the town—a site known today as the „Schlachtberg“ (Battle Hill). The Bohemian Hussites had achieved great success with this tactic a century earlier; Müntzer may well have had the opportunity to study it closely during his time in Prague. The tactic relied on the opposing army storming a hilltop position, only to be battered by cannon fire and a hail of crossbow bolts; once their momentum was broken against the chained-together wagons, they would be crushed in a counterattack. Although Müntzer's forces possessed artillery, they had only poor-quality gunpowder. Instead, it was the princes' cannons that opened fire on the wagon fort before the disciplined and far more battle-hardened *Landsknechte* launched their assault. The insurgents' will to resist collapsed instantly, and they fled in all directions, pursued by the princes' foot soldiers and cavalry, who slaughtered at least 6,000 of them and took 600 prisoner.³³

Conclusions

Research—particularly in the German-speaking world—has extensively examined the multifaceted causes of the rebellions in conjunction with the 500th anniversary of the Peasants' War. The wealth of new publications has also highlighted the complex and fragmented nature of the uprisings; while they shared a similar timeframe, structurally comparable causes, and a degree of interdependence, they lacked any centralized coordination. This is evident both in Ulrich of Württemberg's failed attempt to align the peasant unrest with his own dynastic interests and in Thomas Müntzer's unsuccessful effort to harmonize the Thuringian movement with that of southern Germany. In this context, the question of the insurgents' weaponry has received little attention; the reality differs vastly from the image of a ragtag proletariat armed with scythes and pitchforks—a depiction still propagated by prominent museums, particularly in the former East Germany, despite having been refuted by East German schol-

³³ Fischer, *Die Schlacht unter dem Regenbogen*, p. 6-33. Hoyer, *Die „Schlacht“ bei Frankenhausen*. A more recent account of the battle is still pending. However, adequate descriptions can also be found in the new comprehensive accounts: Schwerhoff, *Der Bauernkrieg*, pp. 377-391; Bauer, „Den Anfang machte diese Wut“, pp. 77-82

ars such as Siegfried Hoyer. Recent supra-regional studies on the armaments of urban and rural contingents—such as the work of Mathias Herzer and my own research on Aschersleben—further corroborate this finding. The peasants involved in the Peasants' War were well-armed and were frequently townspeople.

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William Blake (1757-1827), *Behemoth and Leviathan*, Watercolor, part of *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825). Wikimedia Commons.

The Thirty Years War: The Dynamics of interlocking Rebellions

by LOTHAR HÖBELT

The Thirty Years War (and its aftermath) turned out to be the turning-point in the almost never-ending series of wars for hegemony between France and the House of Habsburg; yet, the two states that could definitely claim victory in 1648 were Sweden and the Netherlands, tiny in terms of population (two million compared with twenty for the “super powers”), but well able to “punch above their weight”. Before assuming the character of a full-blown war between Spain and France in 1635, the “Teutonic War” also briefly assumed the form of a contest between the Protestant and the Catholic estates of the Holy Roman Empire; an aspect that has often lead people to think of the Thirty Years War as a (last) “war of religion”. One of the significant features of that “war of religion”, however, was the consistent neutrality of the foremost Muslim power, the Ottoman Empire that was involved in a “war of religion” of its own – a fight for Baghdad against the Shiite Persians.¹

While the Thirty Years War can thus be firmly anchored within the context of international politics, rebellions were responsible for most of the turns and twists of the war. To name just a few of the obvious suspects: The rebellion of the Bohemian estates against their Habsburg rulers started the war; the rebellion of Portugal (and Catalonia) in 1640 proved to be the great turning point; while the rebellion of the Portuguese planters in Brazil against their Dutch occupiers in 1645 acted as a catalyst that hastened the decision of the Netherlands to make

1 Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream. The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2005), pp. 205-223; Lothar Höbelt, *Ferdinand III. Friedenskaiser wider Willen* (Graz: Ares 2008), pp. 162-3.

peace with Spain, thus enabling Madrid to continue the fight against France for another decade. Apart from these major rebellions, however, fighting was punctuated by any number of minor uprisings, from the Huguenot Wars in France to peasant resistance against marauding armies almost everywhere.

I. Two confessional uprisings: Bohemia and the Valtellina

As the starting point of a Thirty Years War the (second) “defenestration” of Prague on 23 May 1618 is almost as famous as the shots of Sarajevo in 1914. The conflict that started in Prague (and ended in Prague thirty years later) merged with another rebellion that had started almost exactly half-a-century earlier, the Dutch revolt against its Habsburg rulers. The decision not to renew the armistice that had put an end to the fighting in the Netherlands in 1609 was taken in the same year of 1618, by both sides.² Both the Dutch and the Bohemian rebellion were the results of a conflict between the (mostly aristocratic) estates and a (more or less) foreign king who upset local sensibilities and privileges. That sort of tension was well-known all over the late medieval and early modern Europe. It had briefly surfaced e.g. when the Habsburg brothers Charles V and Ferdinand I claimed their respective possessions in the early 1520s, with the revolt of the Comuneros in Castile and a confrontation with the estates in Lower Austria.

However, while it is too one-dimensional to simply subsume the 1568 and 1618 “rebellions” under the heading of a religious war, it might well be argued that the religious dimension lead to an escalation of the conflict. The activists among the Bohemian rebels, paradoxically lead by a half-Italian, Count Matthias Thurn, and the Catholic loyalists, among them old Czech families such as the Slavatas and Martinic, both clearly represented minority factions. But once fighting had become inevitable, many nobles from the middle of the road Protestant majority needed an extra element of religious motivation to persuade them to take the risk of openly rebelling against secular authority. Bohemia was not simply “Protestant”. It was the pre-Protestant, post-Hussite “utraqvist”

2 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World 1606-1661* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), pp. 66-85; Peter Brightwell, ‘The Spanish System and the twelve years’ Truce, *English Historical Review* 89 (1974), pp. 270-292.

Church, with its old-established body of secular “defenders of the faith”, going back to the 15th-century, that provided a ready-made organizational structure around which resistance could crystallize.³

Moreover, the direct line of succession within the Casa d’Austria had been interrupted: None of the five sons of Maximilian II had produced any legitimate children. Thus, their cousin Ferdinand from the Styrian cadet line was supposed to take over. But then both Bohemia and Hungary insisted on at least going through the motions of an election. In 1617, the Habsburgs had consented to humour them: Under pressure from his cousin, Archduke Ferdinand actually did subscribe to the religious concessions granted by Rudolph II in 1609. But it was an open question whether he was doing so in good faith. As usual, constitutional texts provided for all sorts of loopholes to advance the cause favoured by the ruler. Perhaps the estates missed an opportunity to extract some more binding guarantees.⁴ The Habsburgs, in turn, may have resented the strangle-hold the Bohemian estates had achieved over royal finances once they had taken over the management of the rulers’ debts in 1615.⁵

In 1618, the Bohemian conspirators had actually targeted only two members of the Emperor’s governing board – and those two miraculously survived the defenestration. The two highest ranking office-holders – among them a cousin of Wallenstein – continued to act as mediators between Vienna and Prague.⁶ If neither side was really willing to compromise, for almost a year both were playing for time and sought to project an image of sweet reasonableness. But Emperor Matthias’ long expected demise in March 1619 ushered in an escalation. The rebels had managed to get the Estates of their neighbouring lands (Moravia and

3 On the religious dimension of the war the leading authorities are: Axel Gotthard, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg: Eine Einführung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016); Georg Schmidt, *Die Reiter der Apokalypse: Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Munich: Beck, 2018); Winfried Eberhard, *Konfessionsbildung und Stände in Böhmen 1478-1530* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1981).

4 Thomas Brockmann, *Dynastie, Kaiseramt und Konfession. Politik und Ordnungsvorstellungen Ferdinands II. im Dreißigjährigen Krieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), pp. 39, 58-62.

5 That often overlooked aspect has been analyzed by Petr Vorel, ‘Zahajeni “ceske valky” v kontextu vladního bankrotu roku 1615’, *Ceske Casopis historicky* 118 (2020), pp. 893-963..

6 Josef Hrdlicka, ‘Der böhmische katholische Adel’, in Vaclav Buzek, ed., *Der böhmische Ständeaufstand 1618-1620: Akteure, Gegner und Verbündete* (Münster: Aschendorff 2021), pp. 369-393.

Silesia) to join a Bohemian confederation.⁷ They were now actively looking for an alternative ruler to Ferdinand II. Once the Calvinist Elector Frederick of the Palatinate decided to accept their offer in August 1619, the die was cast.⁸

The defeat of the rebellion, culminating in the Battle of the White Mountain in November 1620, counts as one of the disasters of Bohemian history. However, as far as rebellions go, on the face of it, its chances of success were comparatively good – at first sight, at least. The Bohemian aristocracy was rich – the wealth of several of its members easily topped that of a few of the smaller princes of the Empire.⁹ The Vienna Habsburgs did not dispose of a standing army; only a few regiments left over from the Styrians' recent feud against Venice, the "War of Gradisca".¹⁰ In 1619, a Transylvanian army under Bethlen Gabor almost joined the Bohemians once they turned up in front of Vienna.¹¹ Yet, the subversive nature of the enterprise that turned away potential supporters among German Protestants.

As a result, the Elector of Saxony as the defender of Lutheran orthodoxy actually joined the Habsburgs¹² – and the "Union", an alliance of Protestant princes after some soul-searching ended up declaring itself neutral.¹³ Frederick's

7 On the aims of the Bohemian estates see Josef Polisensky, *Tragic Triangle. The Netherlands, Spain and Bohemia 1617-1621* (Prague: Charles University 1991); Joachim Bahlcke, *Regionalismus und Staatsintegration im Widerstreit. Die Länder der böhmischen Krone im ersten Jahrhundert der Habsburgerherrschaft* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1994).

8 Brennan Pursell, *The Winter King. Frederick V of the Palatinate and the Coming of the Thirty Years War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

9 As a cautionary note also see: Thomas Winkelbauer, 'Nervus Belli Bohemici. Die finanziellen Hintergründe des Scheiterns des Ständeaufstandes der Jahre 1618 bis 1620', *Folia Historica Bohemica* 18 (1997), pp. 173-223.

10 Lothar Höbelt, 'Schlimmer noch als die Böhmen...' Der Putsch vom 20. Juli als letzter Akt des Bruderkriegs', in: Robert Rebitsch, ed., *1618. Der Beginn des Dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2017), pp. 129-148, at 137-140.

11 Gabor Karman, ed., *The Princes of Transylvania in the Thirty Years War* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2022); Denes Harai, *Gabriel Bethlen. Prince de Transylvanie et roi élu de Hongrie (1580-1629)* (Paris: L'Harmattan 2013).

12 Axel Gotthard, 'Politice seint wir bapstisch'. Kursachsen und der deutsche Protestantismus im frühen 17. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 20 (1993), pp. 275-319; Frank Müller, *Kursachsen und der böhmische Aufstand 1618-1622* (Münster: Aschendorff 1997).

13 Stefan Ehrenpreis, 'Die protestantische Union 1608-21. Ein regionales Verteidigungs- oder antikaiserliches Offensivbündnis?', in: Rebitsch, ed., *1618, Beginn*, pp. 77-100.

brother-in-law, the Elector of Brandenburg, was a Calvinist, too; his wife and his mother kept their fingers crossed for Fredrick; but his subjects were Lutherans who cheered Frederick's defeat in 1620.¹⁴ Above all, the rebellion gained the sneaking sympathy but not the active support of anti-Habsburg powers in the rest of Europe, from Venice and Savoy¹⁵ who had only recently made peace with the Habsburgs, to the Dutch who were going to start fighting them again in 1621. James I of England tried to help his hapless son-in-law by wooing rather than antagonizing Spain.¹⁶ Thus, Ferdinand II was able to decisively defeat the rebellion thanks to massive help from Spain¹⁷ – and his just as fervently Catholic but financially far more astute Wittelsbach neighbour Maximilian of Bavaria.¹⁸

France, the usual suspect in any anti-Habsburg combination, was occupied by internal feuds, with Louis XIII facing both his wilful mother Maria de Medici and the suspicious Huguenots. Calvinist assertiveness was unlikely to win his support. (In that context, the resistance of the small Pyrenean county of Bearn might be classified as another example of a rebellion – that happened to benefit the Habsburgs.) Louis XIII actually helped broker the neutrality of the Protestant Union, while fighting a Huguenot uprising that lasted until the Peace of Montpellier in 1622.¹⁹ The French were alerted by another rebellion, though,

14 Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Die Hohenzollern*, vol. 1: *Anfänge, Landesstaat und monarchische Autokratie bis 1740* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1996), p. 139; Ulrich Kober, *Eine Karriere im Krieg. Graf Adam von Schwarzenberg und die kurbrandenburgische Politik von 1619 bis 1641* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot 2004).

15 Ruth Kleinman, 'Carlo Emanuele I and the Bohemian election of 1619', *European Studies Review* 5 (1975), pp. 3-29.

16 See the most recent addition to the literature: T.G. Otte, '“Warr kindled in the very bowels of Christendom.” England and th Opening of the Thirty Years' War', in Lothar Höbelt & Pavel Marek, eds., *The Escalation of the Thirty Years' War in the 1620s and the Rise of Wallenstein* (Woodbridge: Boydell 2026) pp. 112-133.

17 Ruben Gonzalez Cuerva, *Baltasar de Zuniga. Una encrucijada de la Monarquia Hispanica (1561-1622)* (Madrid 2012); Eberhard Straub, *Pax et Imperium. Spaniens Kampf um seine Friedensordnung in Europa zwischen 1617 und 1635* (Paderborn: Schöningh 1980), pp. 133-159; Peter Brightwell, 'Spain and Bohemia: The Decision to Intervene, 1619', *European Studies Review* 12 (1982), pp. 117-141.

18 Dieter Albrecht, *Maximilian I. von Bayern 1573-1651* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1998); Michael Kaiser, *Politik und Kriegführung. Maximilian von Bayern, Tilly und die Katholische Liga im Dreissigjährigen Krieg* (Münster: Aschendorff 1999).

19 See the classic study: Victor-Lucien Tapie, *La Politique etrangere de la France et le debut de la guerre de trente ans (1616-1621)* (Paris: Leroux, 1934); Axel Gotthard, 'Wie Frank-

this time a Catholic-based one which they liked even less. The Catholic inhabitants of the Valtellin rose against their Protestant overlords from one of the Swiss confederations, the Grisons. The points of conflict were similar to the Bohemian disputes over the use of churches between local Catholics and Protestants, only with inverted fronts. Arguably, the Grisons went a step too far when they arrested the leading Catholic cleric and banished his sympathizers after “a makeshift Kangaroo court” in 1618.²⁰

The conspiracy against the overbearing Grisons was unleashed by Baron Robustelli and his allies on the night of 18/19 July 1620, but this time the noble assassins coordinated their action with mob violence that resulted in a wholesale massacre of the Grison administrators and their camp-followers, with hundreds of casualties rather than two miraculous survivors. The Valtellina rebels had also made sure they could rely on outside help: The Spanish governor of neighbouring Milan, the Duke of Feria, belonged to the “hawks” who were eager to get hold of the Valtellin as the missing link between the Spanish possessions in Italy and the Tyrol, governed by Ferdinand II’s brother Leopold.²¹ But the expansionist ambitions of Feria and Leopold was not always shared by their headquarters. Baltasar de Zuniga, right now the leading statesman in Madrid, was willing to renounce every idea of annexation. So did Philip III who listened to papal admonishments on his death-bed. On 25 April 1621, a few days after Philip III’s death, Zuniga signed a treaty that provided for the withdrawal of Spanish forces from the Valtellina. However, the treaty also bolstered the position of the Catholics which is why the Grisons refused to ratify it and unsuccessfully tried to reconquer the valley. Thus, Feria was able to impose much harsher terms on

reich und England die Großmachtposition Habsburgs retteten’, in: Sven Externbrink & Jörg Ulbert, eds., *Frankreich und das Alte Reich im europäischen Staatensystem. Festschrift für Klaus Maletke zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 395-417. Oliver Chaline adds that the Ulm agreement at least left the Union free to fight the Spanish invading the Palatinate.

20 Benjamin Barber, *The Death of Communal Liberty. A History of Freedom in a Swiss Mountain Canton*. (Princeton: UP, 1974), p. 57.

21 Andreas Wendland, *Der Nutzen der Pässe oder die Gefährdung der Seelen. Spanien, Mailand und der Kampf ums Veltlin (1620-1641)* (Zurich: Chronos, 1995), pp. 75, 105-120; Friedrich Pieth, *Bündnergeschichte* (Chur: Schuler, 1945), pp. 200-2; Agostino Borromeo, ed., *La Valtellina crocevia dell’Europa. Politica e religione nell’eta della Guerra di Trent’anni* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998).

them in early 1622.²²

As it happened, both Zuniga's Madrid treaty and Feria's Milan treaty were destined to remain a dead letter. One of their clauses read that Spanish troops had to evacuate the valley but were allowed to cross it on their way to Germany, as part of the "Spanish road" that had moved East since the days of Alba.²³ France was predictably not amused. As a way out, in September 1622, the Pope offered to guarantee the neutrality of the Valtellin in any future conflict. Neutral for whom, though? In terms of alliance partners, the Papacy was prestigious but unreliable. After all, the next Pope might see things quite differently. In 1623, the election of Urban VIII Barberini, who was much less beholden to the Habsburgs than his Ludovisi predecessor Gregory XV, might have been expected to tip the scales in favour of France. But in an agreement dated 24 February 1624, Urban VIII granted the Habsburgs free transit from Milan to the Tyrol. As a result, the French ambassador to Rome, the Marquis de Sillery, was abruptly recalled.

The Valtellin rebellion had been a short-term boon for the Habsburgs but it came with the drawback of threatening to convert the placid neutrality of Louis XIII into the customary rivalry. However, Cardinal Richelieu, in power for the first time, overplayed his hand when he encouraged an intervention in November 1624, spearheaded by Hannibal d'Estrees, Duke of Coeuvres, the brother of Henry IV's long-time mistress, who captured or expelled the Papal garrisons in the Valtellina and threatened to invade Milan. In turn, Urban VIII came close to offering military support to the Habsburgs and their allies.²⁴ An escalation of the conflict was prevented by the peace of Monzon in February 1626 when Richelieu – after some dithering – gave priority to fighting the Protestants in France,

22 Gonzalez Cuerva, *Zuniga*, pp. 479-492. On 30 Sept. 1622, a separate treaty at Lindau also compelled the Grisons to cede some territory to Archduke Leopold of the Tyrol.

23 Peter Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy. A History of the Thirty Years' War* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p. 298 notes that the Western version of the Spanish road had for the last time been used in 1620.

24 Remy Python, 'Les debuts difficiles du ministere de Richelieu et la crise de Valteline (1621-1627)', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 74 (1960), pp. 298-322; Robert Bireley, 'Pope Urban VIII and Emperor Ferdinand II', in Irene Fosi & Alexander Koller, eds., *Papato e impero nel pontificato di Urbano VIII (1623-1644)* (Citta del Vaticano: Archivio Apostolico, 2013), pp. 31-50; Romolo Quazza, *Mantova e Monferrato nella politica europea alla vigilia della guerra per la successione (1624-1627)* (Mantua: Mondovi 1922), pp. 61, 84.

rather than fighting for Protestants abroad. The Grisons had helped the French to oppose Spanish designs but got short thrift in the peace settlement between the two foremost Catholic great powers. They retained only nominal suzerainty over the Valtelline and a small annual payment, but with no real power.²⁵

II. Stubborn Protestant Towns: La Rochelle and Stralsund

The background to Monzon were the recurrent troubles Louis XIII had with his Huguenot subjects who could not be that easily defeated as they had a fall-back position in the form of the strongholds Henry IV had left them in the Treaty of Nantes 1598. As David Parrott has summarized: “The entire Italian military operation [including an attack on Genoa by Savoy] was quickly overshadowed by the 1625 upsurge in Huguenot unrest led by Rohan and Soubise.”²⁶ Even though a first round of fighting ended in a compromise that almost coincided with (and might have endangered) the Peace of Monzon, the famous siege of La Rochelle began in earnest the next year.²⁷ Once again, the question was whether these rebels were discreetly supported by external rivals of the Bourbons? Even if Olivares in Spain publicly denied ever having supported the French heretics against His Most Christian Majesty, the record does seem to show that his minions followed the logic of power politics and gave comfort to the rebels, at least in the beginning, before they started to rely on Buckingham and the English.

When La Rochelle finally surrendered in October 1628, the siege of another port town had started: Stralsund – the one town that successfully resisted the might of Wallenstein who had managed to conquer all of Germany for the Emperor in 1627. Stralsund’s resistance could also be characterized as a rebellion: The town belonged to the Duchy of Pomerania – and Duke Bogislav XIV had made his peace with Wallenstein (even if it could be argued that the Duke had hardly chosen the leonine friendship of the generalissimo at his own free will

25 Wendland, *Nutzen der Pässe*, p. 135; John H. Elliot, *The Count-Duke of Olivares – the Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven: Yale UP), pp. 222-256. Strangely enough, there is no monograph on the peace of Monzon.

26 David Parrott, ‘French perceptions of the rise of Wallenstein’, 1624-26, in Höbelt/Marek, eds., *Escalation*, pp. 134-159, at p.145.

27 Sven Externbrink, *Le Coeur du monde. Frankreich und die norditalienischen Staaten im Zeitalter Richelieus 1624-1635* (Münster: Aschendorff 1997);

but under duress). Still, a deal that imposed only minor payments on the town, might have been a promising idea. But within the town, the cautious mercantile oligarchy and the more stridently Protestant citizens were unable to agree on a compromise solution. Wallenstein's local commander, Hans Georg von Arnim, made an inconsiderate first move when he occupied an island in the harbour that he proved unable to defend.

Perhaps Wallenstein was too eager to use the town as a naval base for the Baltic fleet the Spanish wanted him to raise against Dutch trade. However, the famous quote that he would subdue the town even if were chained to the heavens by heavy chains, turns out to be apocryphal.²⁸ On closer inspection, he does not seem to have worried too much about it. His interest proved to be short-lived. But the damage was done: The city of Stralsund decided to open their doors to Danish and Swedish auxiliaries rather than to Wallenstein's garrison. While Wallenstein's armies foraged widely into Jutland to the North and into Prussia in the East, they proved unable to subdue Stralsund. When he came north to inspect his newly won duchy of Mecklenburg, Wallenstein ordered one last assault then ordered his armies to withdraw (under some face-saving formula).

While the fall of La Rochelle cleared the way for Richelieu to intervene in Italy once again, the successful resistance of Stralsund provided the thin end of the wedge for Swedish intervention in Germany, camouflaged as help for their Danish rivals. Gustavus Adolphus only waited for the French to broker an armistice with Poland before risking a full-blown confrontation with the Emperor. Gustavus Adolphus has often been named as a pioneer of yet another "military revolution": In June 1630, he landed at Peenemünde – almost exactly where a few centuries later a new age of military technology was inaugurated with the development of the first ballistic missile. What propelled Gustavus Adolphus to greatness almost over-night, though, was a political blunder of the first magnitude. In the summer of 1630, the Emperor dismissed Wallenstein, the condottiere to whom he owed the high-water mark of Habsburg power. As Gustavus Adolphus started to fill the vacuum created by the dispersal of Wallenstein's forces, enthusiastic Protestants flocked to his colours.

28 Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte Wallensteins* (6th ed. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1910), pp. 85-6; Golo Mann, *Wallenstein* (Frankfurt/M. 1971), pp. 474-5 (quoted from the Fischer pocket book edition 1996).



Johann Werfring, Portrait of Stephan Fadinger, the Supreme Commander of the Upper Austria peasant army, fatally shot the 28 July 1626 under the walls of Linz.
(„Stefan Fadinger-Museum“ St. Agatha, CC SA 3.0 Unported. Wikimedia Commons)

III. "Bottom-up rebellions": Werewolves and segadors

The rebellions discussed so far, had undoubtedly benefited from popular participation, but had still as a rule started with elite conspiracies (except maybe the obstinacy of the Stralsund burghers). As the war spread across Germany and across Europe, however, those "top down rebellions" were increasingly complemented by an endemic form of "bottom up rebellions" that were part of a much larger, wide-spread phenomenon of peasant resistance against the depredations of the plundering armies passing through their lands. The result was a form of a-symmetrical warfare. Peasants withdrew into the woods and attacked isolated soldiers or groups of soldiers. Couriers got lost and were captured or murdered. To some extent, those dangers even tended to form a barrier against desertion. The German journalist and "poet of the heath" Hermann Löns (1866-1914) has coined the term "Werewolves" for those guerillas shortly before World War I in his eponymous novel; the contemporary term was "Schnapphähne".

The one peasant war that formed an exception to that rule was the Upper Austrian example in 1626. The Habsburg province had been pawned to Maximilian of Bavaria as a security for the Emperor's war debts, the (in)famous 13 million florins he owed him. The Bavarians tried to make the most of their temporary rule, both financially and in terms of the counter-reformation. That's why the Upper Austrian peasants, lead by well-to-do farmers and even a few members of the "gentry", followed a religious agenda, and a very patriotic one. They wanted to return to Habsburg rule, and at one point even offered to collect the sum necessary to get rid of the Bavarian occupation, if in turn they were promised religious freedom. Of course, it's an open question whether they would actually have been able to raise that much money?²⁹

When the uprising against the Bavarians actually started in May 1626, there were some voices in Vienna who took a fairly detached view of the situation. Why not permit Protestant services at least temporarily?³⁰ Wallenstein could not

29 Felix Stieve, *Der oberösterreichische Bauernaufstand des Jahres 1626* (Linz: Mareis 1904), p. 133; see also: Hans Sturmberger, *Adam Graf Herberstorff. Herrschaft und Freiheit im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Munich: Oldenbourg 1976); Georg Heiligensetzer, *Der oberösterreichische Bauernkrieg 1626* (Vienna: HGM 1976).

30 Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (ÖStA), Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Große Korrespondenz 27, fol. 212 v. (Questenberg to Khevenhüller, 3 June 1626).

agree more: He wondered why the powers-that-be were so worried about Upper Austria. Let the Bavarians, who had provoked the rebellion, take care of it.³¹ By that time, the rivalry between Wallenstein and Maximilian was already an open secret. Wallenstein openly welcomed Protestant officers; he kept reminding ministers in Vienna that if it came to the worst the Jesuits could easily found colleges elsewhere, but the Emperor would not that easily find another country to rule.³² Wallenstein was not at all eager to divert some of his troops to help Maximilian (nor entrust them to Rombaldo Collalto, the president of the Aulic War Council, with whom he had fallen out). The Upper Austrian Estates tried to mediate; even the ministers sent from Vienna were in two minds about the merits of calling in the army that was bound to devastate the country (including their own estates).³³

But Ferdinand II proved to be a loyal ally and over-ruled his generalissimo. He lived up to his reputation as an uncompromising representative of the Counter-reformation, unwilling to countenance concessions to heretics (and too honest to pretend that he did).³⁴ This time, the religious dimension actually proved to be the factor that made an escalation unavoidable. The Upper Austrian peasants organized a system of conscription (in theory, one man for each of the 40 000 households) and even pieced together a small unit of cavalry; they stretched a chain across the Danube to stop the river traffic and actually managed to besiege the capital of Linz, but they suffered from a shortage of muskets and gun-powder.³⁵ Towards the end of the year, once the campaign season elsewhere had ended, reinforcements finally reached the Catholics. The superior discipline and equipment of the regular forces, both Austrian and Bavarian, made itself felt.

The field armies of the Upper Austrian peasants were an exception, or may-

31 Ferdinand Tadra, ed., 'Briefe Albrechts von Wallenstein an Karl von Harrach (1625-1627)', *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* 41 (1879), pp. 241-492, at pp. 389, 393 (13 July 1626).

32 Tadra, ed., 'Briefe Wallensteins', p. 353 (5 May 1626).

33 Tadra, ed., 'Briefe Wallensteins', p. 374 (26 June 1626); Stieve, *Bauernkrieg*, p. 214.

34 See his congenial biographer: Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counter-reformation. Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1981); id., *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578-1637* (Cambridge UP 2014).

35 ÖStA, HHStA, Große Korrespondenz 27, fol. 217 (Questenberg to Khevenhüller, 16 Sept. 1626); Stieve, *Bauernkrieg*, pp. 99-100.

be they just foreshadowed some of the developments to come. For as the war progressed, the regular armies of the fighting powers became less disciplined; whereas peasant resistance sometimes coalesced into fighting units of their own. During the 1620s, Wallenstein had still tried to pressure the princes of the Empire and their local authorities into raising ‘contributions’ to keep his army supplied, relying on the ever-present threat that unpaid soldiers might take things into their own hands otherwise. The technical term for that sort of blackmail was “brandschatzen”, i.e. not actually putting settlements to the torch, but threatening to do so unless they paid up.³⁶ The Emperor should become master of the world, Wallenstein advised, but not look too closely at the means involved. After all, his ruin or good fortune all depended on the “affection” of the army.³⁷

As a rule, of course, only well-supplied units could be relied on to be disciplined. In the long run, though, both pay and obedience were found wanting. As one of the worst examples, the Imperial army that had reached the Baltic in 1638, disintegrated during the winter for want of suitable billets. In the devastated no man’s land in the North of Germany, their general complained, the only crop to be harvested were apples and pears that grew on their own.³⁸ The peasants apparently no longer bothered to plant crops but had withdrawn into the walled towns – or, as it turned out, into safe-havens of their own, organizing self-defence units. When the Imperial troops approached their Lower Saxon strong-holds in the autumn of 1638, they were repulsed in no uncertain manner, losing two cannon in the process.³⁹ The Lower Saxon peasants were Protestants but even-handed in defending their home turf. When the Swedes entered that area a few years later, they surprised a hunting party and were said to have bur-

36 In the latter half of the war, Swedish Count Hans Christoph Königsmarck would acquire an admirable reputation as an impudent, but disciplined robber baron. He would demand sizeable sums of money at short notice, but during that period his men would scrupulously refrain from any individual acts of appropriating enemy property. (Höbelt, *Ferdinand III.*, p. 151.)

37 Tadra, ed., ‘Briefe Wallensteins’, p. 476 (30 January 1627).

38 Lothar Höbelt, *Von Nördlingen bis Jankau. Kaiserliche Strategie und Kriegführung 1634-1645* (Vienna: HGM 2016), p. 202.

39 Rikskansleren Axel Oxenstierna Skrifter och Brevväxling, Abt. II, vol. 6: J. Baners bref (Stockholm 1889), p. 576 (9 Jan. 1639); see also: Michael Kaiser, ‘Inmitten des Kriegstheaters. Die Bevölkerung als militärischer Faktor und Kriegsteilnehmer im Dreißigjährigen Krieg’, in: Bernhard Kroener & Ralf Pröve, eds., *Krieg und Frieden. Militär und Gesellschaft in der frühen Neuzeit* (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 1996), pp. 281-303.

ied a Swedish colonel alive.⁴⁰

Once they had proven their potential, the Lower Saxon “werewolves” were wooed by the warring parties. In February 1642, Torstensson set off from the environs of Hamburg to advance along the Elbe river once again. The army blocking his way was commanded by the Emperor’s brother, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, a prince-bishop several times over. The area between the two armies, in the Altmark, the border zone between Lüneburg and Brandenburg, was dominated by the peasant irregulars. One of their strong points was their intimate knowledge of the terrain. Leopold Wilhelm’s Bavarian second-in-command recruited a Lutheran pastor as a go-between and asked the peasants to show them the way across the swamps, allowing him to launch a surprise attack on the Swedes. At the last minute, though, the arrangement fell apart.⁴¹ Torstensson marched around the flank of the Austrians; by June of that year he had advanced 500 miles and his advance parties were raiding in the environs of Vienna.

Apart from that lost opportunity, the fascinating question remains: If the peasants acted as a vigilante force, what did their natural “*Obrigkeiten*” have to say about that, their feudal lords who acted as the first layer of administration and justice. After all, the peasants were not rebelling against them. It might be said that they were acting in their best interests if they created no go areas for armies of occupation. Thus, certain incentives existed for collusion between rebels and local authorities, a situation maybe somewhat reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock’s film version of Daphne du Maurier’s “Jamaica Inn” (with the squire acting as an accomplice of the wreckers infesting the coast of Cornwall). In Löns’s novel, too, the Duke of Lüneburg certainly nods his approval of his subjects fighting spirit.

In that respect, the historian is likely to face a conspiracy of silence, though. If the nobles felt some sneaking sympathy with the subversive activities of their subjects, they could hardly admit it. In Habsburg Bohemia, when challenged by the Imperial commanders, they simply excused themselves that they had lost their influence over the peasantry because of their inability to protect them from

40 ÖStA, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Familienarchiv Trauttmansdorff 139, Auersperg 5 Feb. 1642.

41 Höbelt, *Nördlingen bis Jankau*, pp. 317-9.

harm, coupled with the warning: Efforts to try and raise ‘contributions’ would only result in a general uprising.⁴² There are hints, though: In one case, the authorities cooperated, nay ordered their peasant to save their cattle and retire into “inaccessible areas” once armies turned up in the neighbourhood.⁴³ As a result, it took the authorities a long time, even after the war’s end, to re-establish law and order. Social historians point to the imposition of a “second serfdom” after the Thirty Years War. But that was a long-term development. Immediately after 1648, with workers at a premium after the ravages of the war, complaints about the “wilfulness” of the peasants persisted for a number of years.⁴⁴

The cooperation between the Emperor’s forces and the Lower Saxon peasants that did not come to pass, was one of those occasions, where history failed to turn. However, the one instance where the rebellious mood of the country population did indeed change the course of the war was Catalonia. Whenever the Vienna line of the Habsburgs suffered a set-back against the Swedes (as had happened around the turn of the years 1638-39), they confidently expected “big brother” in Madrid to come to their rescue, just as the Spanish cousins had done twenty years earlier. Two events made such a repeat performance almost impossible: One was a re-run of the Lower Saxon experience of peasant resistance in a Mediterranean setting.

On the face of it, the *Guerra dels Segadors* (War of the Scythe-men) started as a revolt of the country people, against the burdens imposed on them by the Spanish army that was defending Catalonia against the French. On Corpus Christ Day, 7 June 1640, the agricultural labourers who customarily gathered in Barcelona that day for renewing their contracts, rioted and murdered the Spanish viceroy in a “collective protest of frightening proportions”.⁴⁵ In a first post-mortem, the Count-Duke of Olivares, Spain’s First Minister, openly admitted: The rebellion was “the outcome of sheer exasperation with undisciplined soldiers,

42 ÖStA, Kriegsarchiv, Alte Feldakten 102/VI/1 3, Schwanberg to Schlick, 8 June 1639.

43 This example from the records of the (secularised) Bishopric of Lübeck a few years later, during the Northern War see Eckardt Opitz, *Österreich und Brandenburg im Schwedisch-Polnischen Krieg 1655-1660* (Boppard: Boldt 1969), p. 253.

44 Neugebauer, *Hohenzollern I*, pp. 152-3.

45 John H. Elliot, *The Revolt of the Catalans* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963), p. 421.

who have given no little pretext for it.”⁴⁶ Olivares added it was a rebellion without a leader. Yes, but. If the main thrust of the rebellion came from below, the local elites were ambivalent, at least.

Since October 1639, Madrid had openly defied the regional privileges when assigning billets and demanding supplies without payment. Olivares himself is supposed to have commented: “The Devil take the constitutions!”⁴⁷ The standing committee of the Catalan estates, the *diputacio*, under the leadership of a pugnacious cleric, Pau Claris, rose to the challenge. The lower clergy acted as leaders, or at least supporters of obstruction. In retaliation for their excesses, a bishop excommunicated a whole *tercio* of His Most Catholic Majesty’s army. It is an open question whether there was a hint of a conspiracy that went well beyond Catalonia. “The Castilian aristocracy as a whole was bitterly opposed to Olivares. [...] It is difficult not to believe that there was at least some understanding between the Conde Duque’s enemies and the Catalans.”⁴⁸

However, even the local elites bitterly opposed to Madrid in general and Olivares in particular, were clearly unhappy with anarchy and mob-rule as an alternative. In Barcelona, the civic authorities desperately tried to make the *segadors* leave the city under the pretext of sending them against Spanish garrisons elsewhere.⁴⁹ The rebels might have appeared as liberators at first; but they soon became “an embarrassment to those who had greeted them with enthusiasm.”⁵⁰ The angry populace increasingly tended to turn not just on foreign oppressors but on all those in authority, who were indiscriminately bracketed as traitors. As a result, the Catalan elites faced an agonizing dilemma. Part of them opted to try and ride the tiger; part of them were looking for ways of coming to an agreement with Madrid.

Opinions at the Spanish court were divided. For all his worries about the bad example of treating with rebels, Olivares did not necessarily play the part of a

46 *Ibid.*, p. 489 (Olivares to the Cardinal Infante, 24 June 1640).

47 *Ibid.*, p. 375.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 472.

49 Victor J. Jurado Riba, ‘Barcelona y su defensa durante la guerra Franco-Espanola (1635-1659). Cambios, Continuidades y Perdidas de Prerogativas bajo dos monarquias’, *libros de la corte* 32 (2026), pp. 32-63, at 43-48.

50 Elliot, *Revolt of the Catalans*, p. 460.

hard-liner during that crisis. But apart from pardons and constitutional guarantees, the preconditions of a peaceful settlement included the withdrawal of the Spanish army that had caused such havoc. But withdrawal of the *tercios* meant an open door policy for the French who were pushing at the gates of Catalonia. Once it became clear that Madrid was unable to compromise on this vital issue, Pau Claris and his followers turned to the French. For a brief period, the negotiators toyed with the idea of a Catalan republic as a French protectorate. But on 23 January 1641, the Catalans agreed to put themselves directly under the government of Louis XIII. Three days later French auxiliaries helped to stop the Spanish at the fortress of Montjuic, overlooking Barcelona.⁵¹ Catalonia proved to be a running sore and a serious drain on the Spanish war effort for the next dozen years.

IV. Two Portuguese Rebellions

Towards the end of 1640, the Catalan Uprising was followed by a potentially far worse defection, even if it involved almost no fighting in its initial stages. The Portuguese royal House of Avis had become extinct after King Sebastian's quixotic Moroccan campaign in 1578. Philip II had famously said about Portugal that he had inherited it, bought it and conquered it. After 1630, Spain steadfastly refused to make peace with the Dutch at the expense of the Portuguese overseas Empire. Still, the association with Spain was clearly detrimental to Portugal that had no stake in any of the quarrels of either Flanders or the Holy Roman Empire. Being closely allied to the super-power of the age might well result in certain fringe benefits. But by the late 1630s, the link with Spain had clearly outlived its usefulness.

If the *Guerra dels Segadors* represented an explosion of popular discontent, the secession of Portugal reverted to the model of an elite conspiracy of "forty fidalgos" who took matters into their hands and organized a coup d'état in Lisbon in December 1640. The Duke of Braganza who had initially appeared rather reluctant (and was actually related to Olivares) was declared king as Joao IV of Portugal.⁵² The secession of Portugal led to a three-way fight. The Spanish

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 521-2.

⁵² Rafael Valladares, 'Sobre reyes de invierno. El diciembre portugués y los cuarenta fidalgos (o

were still fighting the Dutch. The Portuguese were now having to fight the Spanish. Why should the Dutch and the Portuguese any longer go on fighting each other? Actually, the answer was quite simple. Because there were still a few rich pickings to be had. But Joao IV was eager to conclude an armistice with the Dutch. Once they had added Malacca and (most of) Ceylon to their conquests in the Far East, the Dutch relented. An armistice was signed in June 1641.⁵³

Matters looked bleak for the Habsburgs. The years 1644-45 marked the nadir of their fortunes. Torstensson's incursions twice reached the Danube and the neighbourhood of Vienna; the French crossed the Rhine; the supposedly almost invincible Spanish *tercios* had suffered their first big defeat at Rocroi. Yet, 1645 was one of those year when the new world intervened to save the balance of powers in the old one. Once again, the impetus was owed to a rebellion. The armistice of 1641 left the Dutch West Indian Company (WIC) in possession of the Northeast of Brazil that they had conquered after 1630, fuelled by the windfall profits of the silver fleet captured at Matanzas.⁵⁴ The armistice was no comprehensive peace settlement: The Portuguese planters who had gone into exile and been expropriated were not offered any compensation. Naturally enough, they lobbied for a reconquest of their lost estates, just as the Bohemian exiles had looked to Gustavus Adolphus to redress their fortunes.

However, there was a curious twist that set the story of the Brazilian uprising apart from the simple story of a revanchism of exiles. As it happened, in Brazil, a significant number of collaborators who had leased or bought confiscated estates, also joined the rebels. One of the reasons, just as with Virginia planters on the eve of the American Revolution, was the crushing amount of debt they had run up with the WIC, combined with falling prices of sugar after 1637. The "peace dividend" the area enjoyed under the benign rule of Maurice of Nassau, benefited European consumers, not American producers. Politically, too, many of those who started to have second thoughts about the merits of collaboration,

algunos menos, con otros mas'), *Pedralbes* 15 (1995) 103-136; Malyn Newitt, *The Braganzas. The Rise and fall of the Ruling Dynasties of Portugal and Brazil, 1640-1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), pp. 71-81.

53 Evaldo Cabral de Mello. *O negocio do Brasil. Portugal, os Paises Baixos e o Nordeste, 1641-1669* (Sao Paulo : Companhia das Letras, 2011), p. 33.

54 C.R. Boxer, *Salvador de Sa and the Struggle for Brasil and Angola* (London: Athlone Press, 1952), pp. 199-209, 213-4.

wanted to take out an insurance premium, in case the Portuguese old order did come back. To some extent, their willingness to change tack (again) turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy – and presented the crown with a dilemma once claims for restitution were filed.⁵⁵

The rebellion was supported by the Portuguese colonial authorities in neighbouring Bahia who engineered an elaborate, maybe too elaborate deception, with a column of supposedly runaway Negro slaves being pursued by Indian auxiliaries, who were both supposed to join the rebels at a given moment.⁵⁶ King Joao IV in faraway Lisbon tried to play both sides. His main-stream advisors, including his political “mastermind” Father Antonio Vieira, naturally shied away from provoking the Dutch and preferred a buy-out of the WIC claims, as long as Portugal was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Spain. But that life-and-death struggle did not translate into any actual large scale fighting along the common border.⁵⁷ Spain concentrated on fighting the Catalans and the French. A group of courtiers, compared to a “kitchen cabinet” by Brazil’s foremost expert on the period, Evaldo Cabral de Mello, spotted a window of opportunity and acted as a conduit between the officially disapproving King and the loyalist rebels beyond the Atlantic.⁵⁸

Situations such as the tri-cornered conflict between the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal were fairly common around the mid-17th century. But none of them lasted long for very long. Sooner rather than later statesmen managed to re-arrange their priorities. In 1641, the Dutch had concluded an armistice with the Portuguese to avoid a pointless war on two fronts; after 1645, with the re-assumption of hostilities in Brazil, it was the turn of Spain to cut the Gordian knot. Spain no longer felt compelled to fight for the overseas possessions of the rebel Portuguese. In Holland, too, the financially and politically big battalions of Amsterdam opted for peace. Of course, the well-known slogan “Gallia amica, sed non vicina” might have provoked second thoughts about the wisdom of contin-

55 Evaldo Cabral e Mello, *Olinda restaurada. Guerra e acucar no Nordeste, 1630-1654* (3rd Ed. Sao Paolo: Editora 2007), pp. 317-335, 340-358.

56 Boxer, *Salvador da Sa*, p. 203.

57 On the warfare along the border during the 1640s see Fernando Dores Costa, *A Guerra da Restauracao 1641-1668* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 2004), pp. 47-65.

58 Cabral de Mello, *Olinda restaurada*, p. 339; Cabral de Mello, *Negocio do Brasil*, pp. 44-49.

uing the fight against Spain, anyway. But the news from the new world certainly acted as a catalyst. It was only the province of Zeeland, the stronghold of WIC shareholders, that fought a paradoxical rear-guard action: Zeeland wanted to trade its agreement to peace with Spain for a commitment to send a huge relief expedition to Brazil.⁵⁹

Count Maximilian Trauttmansdorff, the Emperor's chief minister, summed up the welcome news in early 1646: "Braganca has dealt the Dutch a heavy blow in Brazil. That's why the Dutch will not reject peace with Spain any longer."⁶⁰ True enough: In the midst of the campaign in Flanders, on 21 August, the Prince of Orange quite openly told his French allies: "Times have changed". Cooperation between them stopped abruptly. In January 1647 an armistice was concluded with Spain, followed by the peace of Münster a year later.⁶¹ (Actually, it's that treaty and not the more famous Westphalian one that is depicted by Gerard ter Borch's famous painting.) The French, whose hopes of overrunning or partitioning the Spanish Netherlands were dashed, scoffed that Philip IV was so eager for peace with the Dutch heretics that he would be willing to crucify Christ a second time to get it.⁶²

V. Conclusions

Rebellions were important because they exposed the brittle power base of supposedly "absolutist" rulers. Early modern states-in-the-making did not find it easy to deal with such emergencies. They were sometimes surprisingly willing to negotiate with "traitors" (even if maybe not always willing to do so in good faith). Rebellions also fitted one of the core elements of baroque warfare: The 17th-century mantra of success was not the principle of "concentration of

59 Boxer, *Salvador da Sa*, p. 186. Boxer adds that "it is all Lombard Street to a China orange that Portugal would have been forced to abandon the insurgents", if Amsterdam had been willing to find the money... (ibid., p. 256).

60 Acta Pacis Westphalicae, Series II, Abteilung A: *Die kaiserlichen Korrespondenzen*, vol. 3 (Münster: Aschendorff 1985), p. 107 (4 Jan. 1646).

61 Olaf van Nimwegen, *'Deser landen krijchsvolck'. Het Staatse leger en de militaire revoluties 1588-1688* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2006), p. 237; Rene Vermeir, *En estado de Guerra. Felipe IV y Flandes 1629-1648* (Cordoba: CajaSur 2006), p. 310; Israel, *Hispanic World*, pp. 360-370, 374;

62 Boxer, *Salvador da Sa*, p. 250.

forces” (which could easily turn into a nightmare of logistics) but a strategy of “diversion” that forced the enemy to disperse its armies. Yet the impact of those rebellions followed no consistent pattern. If in strictly military terms they promised to be a convenient way of weakening your enemies, they might still turn out to be counterproductive politically.

Thus, the Bohemian rebellion galvanized the Habsburgs into the sort of concerted effort that had been lacking ever since Charles V had abdicated in 1556. Such a “Union of Arms” was difficult enough to achieve even within the confines of the far-flung Spanish Empire; yet the Habsburgs never came closer to that ideal than in 1629, with Wallenstein’s lieutenants invading the Netherlands and moving into Italy.⁶³ The Valtellina uprising might have had a similar effect to concentrate minds wonderfully on the other side of the hill, but for the time being the solidarity of the anti-Habsburg powers was stopped in its tracks by the Huguenots.

The impact of the secession of Portugal in 1640 was huge on a global scale but almost nil in terms of the Thirty Years War; with Catalonia it was the other way round – the *Guerra dels Segadors* did more than anything else to hamstring the Spanish war effort in the 1640s. The 1645 Portuguese rebellion in Brazil was the catalyst that started the great *renversement des alliances*, the switch of the Netherlands from an anti-Habsburg to a pro-Habsburg stance that was not fully completed until the days of William III but sufficed to give the Spanish a fighting chance to continue their feud with a France that in 1648 faced a bankruptcy-induced rebellion of its own: the *fronde*...

63 Lothar Höbelt, ‘Weltmacht und „Weltgeist“. Wallenstein und die Casa d’Austria’, in Zdisława Röhsner, ed., *Wallenstein und noch viel mehr: 850 Jahre Familie Waldstein* (Vienna, 2009), pp. 45–62 is an attempt to undermine the cliché of Wallenstein’s supposedly antagonistic relationship with Spain; Ruben Gonzalez Cuerva, ‘Wallenstein, the Improbable Spanish Client’, in Höbelt/Marek, eds., *Escalation*, pp. 220–234.



Nicolaes Visscher (1618-1679). *Hanc Tabulam continens Laetam Pharnambuci victoriam, Amplissimis prudentissimis consultissimisque Dominis De Societatis Indiae occidentalis Curatoribus, nec non Fortissimo Victoriosissimoque Domino D. Henrico C. Long.* [This panel, depicting the joyful victory at Pernambuco, is dedicated to the most distinguished, prudent, and sagacious Lords—the Directors of the West India Company—as well as to the most valiant and victorious Lord, Henricus C. Long.] Rare broadside map celebrating the Dutch capture of the town of Olinda in Pernambuco by the Dutch West Indies Company in February 1630.

Rebellions and Civil Wars in the British World, 1639-1798

by JEREMY BLACK

Many of the key episodes in the British national account occurred in this period, from the civil warfare of 1639-51, via the Glorious Revolution and the Jacobite Risings, to the American Revolution and its would-be Irish counterpart in 1798.¹ In their very range, reason enough emerges to challenge attempts at a common model, and that point would be taken further were there space to consider rebellions in the British Caribbean islands of which there were many.

Not in any order of significance, rebellions broke out at the centre of power and authority in 1642, but very much on the peripheries in 1641, 1775 and 1798. Yet the character of a multiple kingship is that there were centres of power, not a centre, such that Edinburgh, Dublin and the American state capitals were centres different to London but still centres. As a result, the definition of peripheries can require rethinking. The meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in December 1638 that helped kick off the First Bishops' War in 1639 began in Glasgow, and the occupation of Edinburgh Castle in March 1639 was a key event. These were not peripheral sites.

Foreign intervention or would-be foreign intervention were to the fore in 1688 and 1798, and 1719, 1744 and 1745 respectively, but not in 1642 when all the powers in Western Europe were heavily involved in the Thirty Years' War (1618-48). Indeed, although both Sweden and Spain released some of their British troops to intervene, such involvement in Continental struggles can be seen as the 'hidden hand' preventing, or at least limiting, foreign intervention in British struggles and, partly as a result, helping influence their outcome. Yet, the

¹ I am most grateful to Murray Pittcock for his comments on an earlier draft.

relationship in 1642 between England and Scotland invites questions about the extent to which 'foreign' intervention, by England in Scotland or vice versa, and by England in Ireland or vice versa, were not important throughout the period 1639-51.

And so on in terms of political and military factors. It might be far from clear that these and other factors permit discussion of common themes. Naseby (1645) was no Culloden (1746), and Yorktown (1781) no Vinegar Hill (1798).

Yet, there was one overarching theme, the extent to which there was a consistency in that the target of the rebellion was the Anglo-British state or, phrased differently, a British state dominated and directed by England. That provided provocation, target and military continuity. In contrast, there was far less consistency in terms of the challengers. There might be for Ireland in 1641, 1689 and 1798, and for Scotland in 1715 and 1745, Ireland and Scotland being understood as incorporating many who were not part of the rebellion, indeed being opposed to it. Yet, the dynastic element present with William III of Orange in 1688-9, while differently present with the Jacobite Risings or conspiracies from 1689 to 1759, was absent in the other cases.

That was a key element in the American Revolution. It was not linked to a dynastic struggle, either in the British world or further afield. No disaffected member of the Hanoverian royal family headed the Revolution nor was attached to it, despite George III having three brothers, although his uncle, William, Duke of Cumberland (who was depicted by critics in the early 1750s as a would-be Richard III-style usurper) both died in 1765 and had no children. George II similarly did not have nephews ambitious to take over Britain. There was no reiteration of the methods of the Wars of the Roses, and it is difficult to see how the American Revolution could have developed in a dynastic direction or envelope. There had been a clear development of difference. There was no equivalent to the role of Philip, Duke of Orléans in the early stages of the French Revolution, nor to the consequences of the rivalries in the Spanish royal family in 1808.

Nor was there a Jacobite role, or one for the French, or any other, royal family. In short, this was very different to the early stages of the Dutch Revolt and, instead, more the case of the later republican part of the British Civil Wars of 1638-51. Dynasticism there did not emerge in a new form until after the total defeat of Charles II in 1651, when the Royalist element was driven from the

British Isles and Oliver Cromwell (r. 1653-8), in the shape of the Protectorate, sought to follow a quasi-royal path. That started (1653) and ended (1659) without any civil war, although the army played a role in the fall of Oliver's ineffective son, Richard in 1659. Indeed, 'civil war', or rather pressure, in 1659-60 essentially was a matter of confrontation between sections of the army, a factor that played a role in the late 1640s. This was not the case, however, with the other rebellions, although there was some disaffection in the army in 1688.

As a reminder of the overlaps of categories, the Interregnum army also suppressed the Royalist Booth's Uprising in 1659, an uprising that included a battle in the shape of the army's victory at Winnington Bridge. Thirty rebels were killed. This was scarcely rebellion at scale,² but then that rising was intended not solely for Cheshire but as part of a broader insurrection. That is frequently the case with rebellions, as with the Jacobite rebellion in 1715 and its Irish counterpart in 1798. In each case, poor preparations and effective governmental policing limited the scope of the rebellion. This was even more the case with the failure of the Jacobite Atterbury Plot in 1722.³

Yet, the international context was also crucial then, 'James III', the Jacobite claimant, observing in December 1720 that there was no hope of French or Spanish assistance:

'which prospect is the more melancholy that matters seem at present to be very ripe in England ... it were to be wished that if no foreign help is to be had one way or another so favourable an opportunity might not be slipped.'⁴

In the event in 1722, the French and Spaniards were unwilling to help, the Emperor, Charles VI, promised George I whatever assistance was required, and the government requested Dutch military assistance and summoned troops from Ireland. The frequency with which Dutch aid was sought and the assumption that it would be automatic,⁵ helped ensure that the United Provinces (Dutch Republic) was part of the deep-defence of the governmental side in 1689-1755.

2 J.R. Jones, 'Booth's Rising of 1659,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 39 (1957), pp. 416-43.

3 E. Cruickshanks and H. Erskine-Hill (eds), *The Atterbury Plot* (Basingstoke, 2004).

4 Windsor Castle, Royal Archives, Stuart Papers (hereafter RA. SP.) 50/62.

5 La Ville, French envoy in The Hague, to Montaignu, French envoy in Venice, 3 Mar. 1744, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 14915 f. 291-3.

This was an obvious consequence of the subsequent maintenance of the Williamite alignment, but also a key aspect of its breakdown even before George III moved from 1761 against Continental alliances. In this instance of seeking support and other cases, it was important to create an impression of success, however misleading.

At a different level, and offering a reminder for the need to employ evidence with care, George Tilson, an Under Secretary, noted in London in March 1722 'the ferment runs high here and the Jacobites fancy they have a crisis to exert themselves.' Yet, he was sceptical of their chances, writing in May:

'the Jacobites abroad were in firm expectation of the great event, and doubted not if the foreign powers would only stand neuter to carry their point. Ormonde and others were beginning to put themselves in motion, and they seemed to depend that it was un *coup seur*, but for my life I can't reason as they do; nor because the mob is poisoned, women and parsons rail, and the grumblers put about libels and ballads, that therefore the whole nation will join and take up arms in favour of the Pretender.... But such are the hopes hot and zealous people encourage one another to.'⁶

Consideration of the Atterbury Plot indicates the need for a large scope in discussing rebellions. It, moreover, helps ensure the need for some care in judging from results to options.

The contrast in 1775 is particularly impressive, because the rebellion held together across the Thirteen Colonies, not only in 1775, but also in the declaration of independence in 1776 and in the subsequent continuing struggle, and that despite repeated defeats and failures in 1776-80. The scope led to the creation of what became a state-wide army and government. The scope of this state could have been wider, to include the other British colonies in America, and notably Canada and the Floridas. Nevertheless, the failure to do so still left a large area, and this political success helped set the military parameters for Britain. It would not suffice simply to suppress opposition in Massachusetts as had initially appeared the case. Thus, the politics of the situation helped drive the military aspect, creating a context and cartography for conflict. Equally, the warfare sought to change these latter.

6 London, British Library, Department of Manuscripts, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BL. Add.), vol. 37389 f. 8, 20.

More generally, it is always necessary to change the politics, for example, with the Franco-Jacobite schemes of 1692, 1708 and 1744, the Spanish-Jacobite one of 1719, the Atterbury Plot, and other Jacobite schemes, as in 1726, 1733 and 1752.⁷ The dynastic element was clearly apparent in 1722 and 1752, as the target in each case was the seizure or killing of the monarch, which had also been the case in the non-Jacobite Rye House Plot of 1683, and in the Jacobite Fenwick Plot of 1696. This outcome appeared far easier than securing foreign assistance. The search for the latter entailed adapting to, and also seeking to change, international realities, such as the Anglo-French alliance of 1716-31, alternative military commitments for the potential invader, including the possibility of invading Hanover, and the uncertainties of the naval situation. Philip, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, a former diplomat and one-time possible Secretary of State, was stating the obvious when he told the House of Lords in 1734, when France was fully engaged in the War of the Polish Succession:

‘We are certainly in greater danger of being suddenly invaded by our neighbours, when they have their troops unemployed and quartered upon the sea coasts, than when all their troops are marched many hundred miles from their sea coast, and employed against another enemy; and surely they may more suddenly fit out a fleet proper for that purpose, when none of their ships of war are employed elsewhere, than when they were obliged to keep many of them in seas very distant from this island.’⁸

Yet that degree of the obvious can be difficult for modern commentators to accept if focused solely on the bilateral. Moreover, as in 1692, 1708, 1744-6 and 1759, France was capable of mounting an invasion attempt while strongly committed to war on the Continent. So also with Spain in 1719.

Yet there were also trade-offs as with the knowledge or expectation of no foreign intervention enabling a focus on suppressing rebellion, as in 1715.⁹

7 C. Petrie, ‘The Elibank Plot, 1752-3,’ *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (1931), pp. 175-96.

8 W. Cobbett (ed.), *Parliamentary History of England from 1066 to 1803* (36 vols, London, 1806-20), IX, cols 536-7. For the best book on that rising, D. Szechi, *1715. The Great Jacobite Rebellion* (New Haven, Conn., 2001). See also his ‘Towards an Analytical Model of Military Effectiveness for the Early Modern Period: the Military Dynamics of the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion,’ *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*, 72 (2013), pp. 289-316.

9 Manuscript newsletters to George I’s brother, Ernest, Prince-Bishop of Osnabrück, 24, 27 Sept. 1715, Osnabrück Staatsarchiv, Rep. 10, Ab. 1, vol. 196.

Plans for rebellion and invasion, and the knowledge of them gained by the government, provide contexts within which the counter-insurgency intentions and moves should be assessed. That is an element of symmetry that was present and very different to those that were generally absent in terms of weaponry, tactics and doctrine.

The modest death-toll in the 1659 rising serves as a reminder that scale does not offer an easy definition of civil warfare or rebellion. So also with the overlap with the broader question of the use of force in resisting or circumventing (the two were far from identical) the regulations of the government or indeed the law as a whole. In this light, conflict with pirates and smugglers should be included. So also with opposition to rioters, for example against enclosures or what were deemed unfair market pricing or labour practices.

The use of the military to oppose pirates, smugglers, rioters and criminals suggests an overlap with rebellions, as does the extent to which those turning to crime and violence could have links with political opposition.¹⁰ In part, as with Jacobites, this was due to the degree to which they lacked favour with the authorities and needed to seek alternative paths to wealth and status. This provides a way of considering civil conflict over a long term as a resistance by the excluded. That is of use, but can adopt an overly clearcut approach. For example, as with piracy and smuggling, the 'excluded' and the response (militarised or otherwise) to them, could reflect or at least be influenced by major changes in the politics and practices of regulation.¹¹ The weakness of policing meant a reliance on the army, as in Boston in 1770 and London in 1780, a militarisation that sits ill with modern liberal ethos about non-violent control. George III pressed for firm action in the face of the serious Gordon Riots in London in 1780: 'for I am convinced till the magistrates have ordered some military execution of the rioters, this town will not be restored to order.'¹²

10 E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1977); E. Cruickshanks and H. Erskine-Hill, 'The Waltham Black Act and Jacobitism,' *Journal of British Studies*, 24 (1985), pp. 358-65; P. Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge, 1993).

11 M.G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015).

12 George III to Charles Jenkinson, Secretary at War, 8 June 1780, BL. Add. 38564.

In the early nineteenth century, alongside social discontent, as in the late 1810s, there was a new focus of dispute in the case of political reform. This led to violence as in 1819 and 1831,¹³ but the violence was restricted. There was no equivalent in severity to the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Furthermore, when alarm was at its height, during the Chartist agitation of 1848, there was, in the event, not the conflict that had been feared. This was an important aspect of 'the British Transition' to coin a phrase, that from the persistent civil conflict of the medieval and early modern period, to the absence, in the 1830 and 1848 European years of revolutions, of truly challenging British counterparts: the Young Ireland rising of 1848 was weak.

The placing of this transition is important to the discussion in this chapter. There is a classic focus on a making of political stability in the early eighteenth century.¹⁴ Adopting such an approach can mean treating subsequent events in 1715, 1745 and 1798 as essentially Celtic afterthoughts operating to a different timetable, and with 1775-83 a 'special case' of colonial failure.

From this perspective, there was a difference in England, one that was created from 1688-9 and, indeed, included that because it was part of a pattern of 'rebellion' in which the key element or, at least, a crucial element, was foreign intervention, whether or not it included an invasion. The attempts to invade England in 1692, 1696, 1719, 1744, 1746 and 1779, can be seen in this pattern, as can the efforts by conspirators to gain foreign military assistance, as in 1722 and 1726. This was part of a more general trend, one that had deep roots in British history, roots strengthened by the Reformation. Indeed, this assistance was an aspect of the British Wars of Religion.

Yet, it would be mistaken to differentiate this from rebellions in Scotland, Ireland and North America. They also all involved attempts to elicit foreign support, as in Ireland in 1689 and 1798, and Scotland in 1716, 1719 and 1746. In 1715, the death of Louis XIV was seen (correctly) as a major blow to the Jacobites,¹⁵ even if it did not end British concern about Franco-Jacobite possi-

13 R. Poole, *Peterloo! The English Uprising* (Oxford, 2019).

14 J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (London, 1977).

15 Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland (hereafter NAS), GD 135/141/2, 4; BL. Add. 63093 no. 34; London, National Archives, State Papers (hereafter NA. SP) 43/1 f. 53; James, 1st Duke of Montrose, to Hugh, 3rd Earl of Loudoun, 20 Sept. 1715, San Marino, California,

bilities.¹⁶ This advantage from Louis XIV's death helped ensure a determination for better relations with his successors. In 1718, there was a similar response to the death of Charles XII of Sweden.¹⁷ This was, to a degree, also true of North America, for foreign backing was sought, first with money and arms, and then with recognition and military support.

There was a strategic dimension to foreign backing, not only in the sense of possibly overturning the regime, but also, less boldly, in distracting it from other goals.¹⁸ In 1756, when a French invasion was threatened, Henry Fox, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, observed 'if invasion or threats of invasion from France can effect the keeping of our fleets and troops at home, while they send regular troops, with their fleets to North America, the object of the war will be lost the first year of it.' Three years later, Andrew Mitchell, envoy in Berlin, remarked 'the French have begun to play off the Pretender.'¹⁹ Mitchell had earlier, in August 1756, noted the view of Frederick II of Prussia, then an ally, that the threat of invasion was linked to the possibility of rebellion:

'with regard to an invasion of His Majesty's kingdoms he looks upon it as a wild and romantic scheme, which can never succeed, unless there was a party within, to favour the invaders, that however, it will be proper to look narrowly after the known enemies to the government.'²⁰

This point underlines the difficulties in differentiation between rebellions and, thus, assessing their relevant capabilities. Much depends not simply on distinguishing what was intended to happen from what actually did. It is also necessary to consider the possible perspective, including that of foreign 'stakeholders', in the shape of other states that could add a 'symmetrical' dimension to the military challenge.

Huntington Library, Loudoun papers (hereafter HL. Lo.), no. 11669; John Clavering to Countess Cowper, 27 Sept. 1715, Hertford, Hertfordshire County Record Office, Panshanger papers D/EP F196.

16 James Stanhope, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, to John, 2nd Earl of Stair, envoy in Paris, 5 Oct. 1715, NA. GD. 135/141/2.

17 RA. SP. 41/39; NAS. GD220/5/828.

18 Hull, University Library, Hotham papers DD Ho 4/9.

19 History of Parliament, Chatsworth transcripts, Fox to Duke of Devonshire, 31 Jan. 1756, BL. Add. 35482 f. 205.

20 NA. SP. 90/66.

In terms of 'the state', 'the deep-state', or any one of a number of phrases used to describe the authority, power and continuity of governance, there was no such institutional or military body specifically providing for opposition to rebellion. The intelligence role of the offices of the Secretaries of State and the Post Office were not matched by the military. There were legal and moral codes against disobedience, but they did not amount to doctrine in terms of military response.

Moreover, the degree of failure in opposing rebellion, notably in 1638-46, 1688-9, and 1775-83, was such that there was no method honed by experience and approved by precedence. Unsurprisingly so, we are talking about 160 years of history and a wide-ranging imperial system, and it would be foolish, as well as misleading, to think that there should be an essential method of counter-rebellion or, even less plausibly, albeit for different reasons, of rebellion. Those points could be taken further if issues of scale and legitimacy are concerned: for example, Monmouth's Rebellion (1685) and the Glorious Revolution (1688) were close chronologically, but very different in their scale, in the presence of regular troops, and in the legitimacy of the rebellion and its leadership.

So also, to extend the scope, if peasant and religious rebellions are included. These tend to be downplayed or treated as less consequential because pre-modern, or as pre-modern due to being less consequential. That, however, is not an accurate perception whether of the modern, modernity or modernisation, including in military and political terms, and also far from accurate for violent peasant and religious activism.

In the case of the British Isles, which were not united for most of the period, it might be thought that the selection of the period 1639-1798, rather than say the previous 160 years (1478-1638), is misleading as the earlier period saw both peasant risings as in 1549 and 1607,²¹ both unsuccessful, and those that can be seen as religious and linked to the Reformation, as in 1536, 1549 and 1569.²² In all of these, there was also a regional dimension, one significant both for con-

21 R.G. Page, 'New insights into the Newton Riot of 1607,' *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 71 (2018), pp. 17-35.

22 K. Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics and Protest in Elizabethan England* (Basingstoke, 2007).

texts and contingencies,²³ and that element can be underplayed when making comparisons.

It would be mistaken to ignore the continued role of peasant, religious and regional dimensions to rebellion in the period 1639-1798. These elements can be downplayed, but they help explain the 'take-up' of the option for rebellion, as with the Irish Rebellions of 1641 and 1798 and the Monmouth Rising of 1685. Moreover, support for Jacobitism in Scotland and for the Patriot cause in America, as well as opposition to both, owed much to religious considerations, at least in terms of the politics of religious alignments. The latter were very important to the insurgency against Charles I in Scotland, although that element scarcely explained the military outcome.

Where Scotland was differently 'modern' was the place that ideology had in its history of political action. There was a long tradition of aristocratic opposition to monarchy, but in the 1550s and 1560s, it had been successfully linked with Protestantism, notably with the 'First Band' or Covenant to work to make Scotland Protestant, a rebellion that gathered military force in 1558 and, eventually supported in 1560 by Elizabeth I of England and facilitated by the death of the Queen mother, Marie de Guise, led to the Scottish Reformation taking effect in 1560. Subsequently, the Confederate Lords defeated Mary Queen of Scots and James, 4th Earl of Bothwell in 1567-8. This legacy acted as a legitimation for the defence of Scottish Protestantism in the Bishops Wars of 1639-40, wars that owed much to the National Covenant of 1638 promising opposition to liturgical 'innovations.'

In England, there was no real comparison, as the Wyatt Rebellion of 1554 against Catholicisation under Mary Tudor was quickly suppressed, and the other risings of the 1530s-60s were more clearly pro-Catholic or, in the case of Kett's Rising of 1549, primarily economic. As a result, the legacy in England looked back to Magna Carta in 1215, which provided a different complexion to the opposition to Charles I in 1640-2, however much there was still a religious dimension, as there was more clearly in 1688 against James II.

In the case of America there was also a religious division, with Virginia and

23 R.B. Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbance in England, 1509-1640* (Oxford, 1988).

the other southern colonies more similar to England while New England was more similar to Scotland in the important role of religion, not least with the idea of covenanting and the hostile memorialisation of Archbishop William Laud much invoked by the descendants of seventeenth-century Puritans. In Massachusetts, Jonathan Mayhew and Andrew Eliot raised the temperature over what they saw as a threat to religious freedom.

There is an implication in the Western academic tradition, much of which is *Marxisante* and secular, that factors that are peasant, religious, and regional correspond to backwardness and therefore are likely to contribute to failure. That interpretation can be adapted to note that Catholicism is usually equated, at least implicitly, with backwardness, as in repeated Irish failure, and Protestantism with success, as in the Presbyterian Scots defeating the English Royalists in 1640. Phrased so starkly this is clearly absurd, but the assumption plays a significant role in judgment about what is progressive.

Linked to this comes the teleological idea that the future is bound to prevail. Yet, there is a variety of futures on offer for this period, and, indeed, for others. Should the focus be on the rise of the state or that of capitalism, that of 'the West' or that of liberalism, a centralised or a multipolar British state?²⁴ None of these preclude the other but they are crucial in terms of a placing of progress, which then apparently means the discounting of campaign-and conflict-specific factors such as leadership, situational understanding, tactics, unit cohesion, morale and other elements seen as important in manoeuvre and battle.

This discounting is of course implausible. It is part of the preference for theory, system and model over practice, particularity and complexity. This preference is attractive to socio-political theorists, those historians who would rather be sociologists, but the explanatory weight of these models is limited. Thus, in 1640, Charles I made a poor choice of commanders, inadequate finance wrecked his logistics, and the army was badly deployed. The greater success of the Scottish army owed much to the location of conflict, near Scotland, and to the greater degree of experience of the officers. That was not so much due to modernity as a product of the poverty of Scotland, which led much of its gentry to foreign military service, in particular gaining experience in the Dutch and Swedish armies,

²⁴ M. Pittock, *Culloden* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 2-5.

both of which were heavily engaged in the 1620s and 1630s. English ‘modernity’ was in large part seen with the navy, but that was not the arm at issue in 1640.

The Scottish army was also to play a direct role in the English Civil War of 1642-6, as it entered northern England on the side of Parliament in 1644 and contributed greatly to the major victory that year at Marston Moor, where the formal name of the victors was the Army of the Two Kingdoms. Yet, far from there being any automatic consequence, the Scots lost heavily when facing English Parliamentary armies in 1648 and 1650, and in very different circumstances: the first an invasion of England and the second one of Scotland by the English, with defeats respectively at Preston and Dunbar.

This does not correspond to any explanation of failure in terms of social system and the apparent military equivalent or consequence. Yet, such an explanation is very common. For example, it is argued that the Royalists in the English Civil War of 1642-6 were overly conservative and status-conscious and that this explained Parliamentary victory once the meritocratic New Model Army was organised.²⁵ Linked to this, comes the claim that Royalist defeat owed something to aristocratic command which, with the New Model, was essentially banished from the Parliamentary side.

In practice, there were a range of factors and contingencies at play in battles and campaigns, including resources and the command of the flow of battle, as by Oliver Cromwell at Naseby Dunbar in 1650.²⁶ In 1718-19, the Spanish first minister, Cardinal Alberoni, repeatedly emphasised the uncertainties of events when discussing a pro-Jacobite invasion of Britain: ‘... it is necessary to leave some things to chance.... We can’t command the winds,’²⁷ as indeed proved to be the case, not only in 1719, but also for the French, including in 1744, 1746 and 1795. As a comparison, Isidro, Marquis of Monteleón, the Spanish envoy, remarked in 1715 that ‘The British peoples’ were even less constant than the sea.’²⁸

However, mention of a range of factors and contingencies does not prevent

25 I. Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford, 1992).

26 R. Hutton, *Oliver Cromwell: Commander in Chief* (New Haven, Conn., 2024).

27 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS French e 20.

28 Monteleón to Jérôme, Comte de Pontchartrain, Minister of the Marine, 2 Aug. 1715, Paris, Archives Nationales, Archives de la Marine, B⁷ 265.

the need for analysis. It is seriously mistaken to assume that the principles of good military leadership were incompatible with aristocratic culture and that radical military forces were inherently more effective. This is underlined by the failure of the radical Pentland and Bothwell Bridge risings in Scotland and, arguably, Monmouth's rising in Scotland.

Yet, a presentation of the New Model as more effective because radical (and vice versa) both apparently helped explain the course of the conflicts in the 1640s and early 1650s, and also, structured by difference, the understanding of the other conflicts in the period to 1798. In essence, movements that lacked the radicalism of the New Model were bound to fail and this helped explain the significance of the Continental Army in the American Revolution. That army could also be presented as radical, or at least progressive, and counterpointed accordingly with the British army.

This approach, however, was/is the triumph of model over complexity, and one that was/is attractive precisely because it downplayed the significance of the latter. There was also a variant of the 'false consciousness of the working class' approach here in that those who lacked radicalism and organisation were apparently foredoomed to fail before the forces of reaction.

The rapid success of William of Orange in 1688-90 appeared to be a surprising caveat, notably as his revolution was scarcely radical. Yet that provided one way to add to the model for it was argued that only the addition of Dutch regulars could compensate for the military weakness of the English opponents of James II in 1688, opponents, moreover, who were apparently doubly damned in owing much to the aristocratic leadership. In one light, 1688 was an invasion aided by rebellion,²⁹ in another a rebellion given effect by an invasion, and in the third a coup within the royal family. James II's general military and political position was eroded by the degree to which, unlike for his grandson, Charles Edward Stuart, in 1745, a number of provincial uprisings took place. By 5 December 1688, Derby, Durham, Hull, Nottingham and York had been seized for William. However, the extent of loyalty towards James and the role of local circumstances, notably determined leaders, is indicated by the fact that Carlisle,

29 E. Cruickshanks (ed.), *By Force or By Default? The Revolution of 1688-89* (Edinburgh, 1989); A. der Weduwen, *The Last Invasion of England: 1688 and the Dutch Armada* (Princeton, NJ, 2026).

Chester and Newcastle resisted such attempts successfully, albeit only briefly. Invasion, rebellion and coup worked in England, largely due to the combination of weight of force and a particular political context, but led to civil war in Ireland and Scotland, where political contexts were different.

This was an aspect of the geography of civil warfare, a theme that deserves attention provided determinism is avoided. A contrast between Scotland and southern England in this period is instructive. There was a greater propensity in Scotland until 1745 to uprisings. This was not only a question of Jacobitism and/or the Highlands. For example, Covenanters, Presbyterian rebels, were responsible for the unsuccessful Pentland Rising of 1666 and an eventually unsuccessful rising in 1679-80. South-west Scotland, the area of the latter, subsequently saw anti-enclosure violence, as in 1724. So also with Ireland in that rural violence was significant across the eighteenth century.

These episodes in the late seventeenth century involved troops and battles notably Bothwell Bridge (1679) and Airds Moss (1680) in the case of the Covenanters. Yet, they somehow fall beneath (much) attention in discussion of the subject. This raises conceptual and methodological questions of choice, apparent consequence, and resulting flaws in both presentation and analysis.

Politics was more directly part of the military dimension in that it was crucial both to recruitment and to maintaining army numbers and cohesion. This was not axiomatically true of rebellions, as forcible service could play a role. Nevertheless, volunteering was generally more significant for rebellions than for regular forces as the latter often drew on conscription. In the British case, where the latter was not the case for the army prior to 1916, the difference was one that is less easy to classify and certainly to measure, namely that between volunteers as part of a continuing system and those for a particular cause. Volunteering for the latter, however, could be highly contingent, not least in response to hardship let alone defeat.

The '45 is instructive in that respect as the Scottish volunteers were not only disappointed that promises of English support were not realised but also able to affect policy accordingly by turning back at Derby from their march on London. There was not a cohesion of terror or ideology as in some twentieth-century revolutionary forces.

So also earlier, with different clans, in the failure in 1685 in the rising by Archibald, 9th Earl of Argyll. Rapid recruitment was followed by Argyll advancing to confront a royal army near Dumbarton, only for the overruling of his wish to fight and the retreat of his troops. During the retreat, always a very difficult period for armies, and notably for insurgent forces, the cohesion of Argyll's force was lost and its numbers fell as clansmen disappeared back to their homes. The rebellion collapsed without battle.

Keeping the troops going with promises was one way in which the military trajectory of the rebellion was very much affected by the political, but in a process in which military success was also part of the equation. This was seen with the cumulative impact of the successful advance on Edinburgh in 1745 and that of the reining in of the British in Boston three decades later. In each case, there was a sense of military victory, and, even more, an appearance of such victory that helped ensure a sense of political opportunity. The latter was important to sustaining and developing the rebellion, not least in increasing the political and military costs of suppressing it. Opportunity costs and risks are very much part of the contingencies of rebellions, not least because their outcome is inherently problematic and without the much dearer outcomes generally seen in international conflict, for example the gain of territory. Where success was lacking, or could not be sustained, rebellions dissolved rapidly, as in 1719, irrespective of whether there was an actual defeat. In part this was a reflection of the sociology of rebel groups and the economy of insurgents, but there was also the practical problem of succeeding in major schemes without fortresses, supplies and money,³⁰ discipline and even arms.³¹

A related factor challenging both rebels and the authorities was the degree of non-engagement or neutralism shown by much of the population. This was the case for example in America in 1775-83, which throws up a big question about engagement in terms of ideological commitment. So also in the British Isles. In 1715, Edward Southwell MP found Somerset and Gloucestershire 'like to all Wales perfectly indolent which get the better, the king [George I] or the rebels so

30 Re 1715, A. Manno, E. Ferrero and P. Vagra, *Relazione Diplomatiche dalla Monarchia da Savoia della Restaurazione, 1559-1814, Francia, period 2, vol. 3 (1715-17)*, p. 58.

31 Charles-François d'Iberville, French envoy in London, report, 21 Nov. 1715, *Correspondance Consulaire Londres*, AN. AM. AE. B¹ 760.

as to toss cross or pile,' a reference to a game of the period.³² The militia failed to offer resistance in Cumberland or Westmorland.³³ This helped the side with the standing army and foreign military assistance but only as long as they were not countered by the intervention of other professional foreign units as happened in England in 1688, Ireland in 1689, and America in 1778, and as threatened to happen in 1744-6. Conversely, standing army forces were vulnerable if success deserted them as with the army after defeat at Prestonpans in 1745.

The need to raise forces helped ensure that rebellions required a background of time and space for safe consolidation. This was classically lacking in Ireland in 1798. There the rebellion in County Wexford began on the evening of 26 May and ended with defeat at Vinegar Hill on 21 June. So also with the rapid overcoming of risings in England and Scotland in 1685.

In contrast, there was the depth necessary to provide a grounding for rebellion and a consequent transformation into war in 1639, 1641, 1642 and 1775. The alternative to such spatial and temporal depth was provided by foreign intervention by regular forces, as in 1688, and for the American Patriots this also made a major difference from 1778.

The particular nature of Britain as a military power attracts attention, but the relevant term should possibly be *natures*, as there was scant necessary congruence between their impacts. Moreover, the contingency of the particular challenge in question was of significance. Foremost, Britain was a naval power, with the navy seen as the key means of defence, rather than such alternatives as coastal forces and/or fortifications. In 1732, William, Lord Harrington, Secretary of State for the Northern Department, wrote to the Duke of Newcastle, his counterpart for the Southern Department, of the concern of Britain's Dutch ally that Spanish military preparations might be intended to support the Stuarts:

'though they have not the least suspicion of its being designed against any of His Majesty's dominions, they approve however extremely the orders given for fitting out a squadron of ships, not only as a prudent measure, but such a one as would have been unpardonable in the ministers not to have advised in the present conjuncture.'³⁴

32 BL. Add. 47028 f. 97.

33 BL. Add. 63093 no. 33.

34 Harrington to Newcastle, 4 July 1732, NA. SP. 43/82.

In 1745, Andrew Stone, Newcastle's 'man of business' noted:

'We hope we shall soon have a pretty strong squadron in the Channel. But I know too well the great delays and uncertainties that Service is liable to, to depend very much upon it. When Ostend is gone (as it will soon be) I tremble to think of the constant alarms we shall be subject to.'³⁵

Ostend, a possible invasion port, indeed fell to the French soon after and its strategic significance helped ensure that its acquisition in the subsequent peace by Britain was considered in 1748.³⁶ Naval forces also made it readily possible in civil wars to move troops, from the Continent to Britain, as in 1708, 1715-16, and 1745, and between Britain and Ireland, as in 1649 and 1689, and also to support operations on land, as with William, Duke of Cumberland's advance in Scotland in 1746. Indeed, the Royal Navy on the Moray Firth had a view of the Jacobite army, which delayed the night attack by the latter.

On the other hand, the pace of movement on land could not readily be matched by sea, in part because of the problems posed by contrary winds. Moreover, fleets took longer to prepare than insurgency forces on land, and, in peacetime, few warships were ready to serve, usually only six.

Secondly, Britain was poorly-fortified by European standards. In part, this was a matter of the actual fortifications and their state of repair. Yet the size of the garrisons was also an issue. The sole fortress generally kept with an adequate garrison was Gibraltar. In the British Isles, the fortifications were inadequate as were the garrisons, although any fortifications increased the value to the attacker of artillery. That meant a reliance on regular forces, as with the French at Yorktown in 1781, as insurgents tended to lack artillery.

In Britain, fortifications were not strategic in their conception, as in controlling particular routes and rivers. Indeed, the only real strategic conception was the wish to protect the major naval bases, although Parliament rejected that measure in 1786. This wish, was in practice a sensible response to the possibilities of hostile amphibious operations, as with those planned in 1779, and, possibly, the linked danger of cooperation with domestic dissidence. The for-

35 Stone to Edward Weston, Under Secretary of State, 2 Aug. 1745, Farmington, Conn., Lewis Walpole Library, Weston papers (hereafter Farmington, Weston), vol. 16.

36 J. Black, 'Territorial Gain on the Continent: An Overlooked Aspect of Mid-eighteenth Century British Foreign Policy,' *Durham University Journal*, 86 (1994), pp. 43-50.

mer factor was certainly pertinent when fortifications and garrisoning were improved during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and again in the mid-nineteenth century.

The relatively unfortified nature of the British Isles contributed to a situation in which battle, rather than siege, was more important than elsewhere in Western Europe, and notably so of the Low Countries and northern Italy. But more than that was at stake. Volunteer insurgent forces were harder to maintain in the field, and insurgencies meant an emphasis on bold generalship and, in particular, a willingness to seek, and certainly to risk, battle. There were wars of manoeuvre on the Continental model, as with William III's invasion in 1688, but that was only because James II was not willing to engage. In contrast, he did so at the Boyne in 1690. That battle was followed by the fall of Dublin, and victory at Aughrim in 1691 by that of Galway and Limerick. Battles were more significant than sieges. So also with the American Revolution. The failure of the Jacobite siege of Londonderry was crucial, as was the two sieges of Limerick, as the first in 1690 led directly to the revival of Jacobite cause in Ireland in 1691 while the success of the second that year killed the Jacobite cause in Scotland. The siege of Stirling Castle was central to the campaigning in Scotland at the start of 1746.

The absence or avoidance of battle could also be consequential, and notably so in 1688. So differently with the dissolution of rebel forces in the absence of any battle in which to sustain success, as for the Jacobites in Scotland in late 1690 and 1691 and again in 1716. In 1715, the indecisive battle of Sheriffmuir was in practice a victory for the supporters of George I under the Duke of Argyll as the Jacobites under the Earl of Mar needed a triumph, both in order to hold their army together and in order to help the Jacobites in the Borders. It was inaccurately reported in Paris that Mar had captured Edinburgh, and in Venice that Argyll had been killed and his army defeated.³⁷

The third factor specific to Britain was its relatively small army. This meant that it was not well-suited to counter-insurgency warfare, and notably so if also at war elsewhere, as in 1689-91, 1745-6, and 1778-83, but not in 1639-46, 1648-

37 John Craufurd, British agent in Paris to Robert Pringle, Under Secretary, 11 Dec., Alexander Cunningham, envoy in Venice, to Pringle, 13 Dec. 1715, NA. SP. 78/160 f. 159, 99/61 f. 80. Other false news included the capture of James III, Brink, French agent in Hamburg to Mr. Eustache, 2 Mar. 1716, AN. AM. B⁷ 267.

51, 1688, 1715-16 and 1775-7. Stone wrote to Weston about the threat posed by Charles Edward Stuart: 'We are so naked of troops, that, if a body of men was to be flung over [the Channel], no one can say what may be the consequence.'³⁸

The particular vulnerability of Ireland led to the bulk of the army being based there: both in order that the Irish taxpayer should pay and in response to traditional fears of the Irish. Charles Delafaye, an Under Secretary of State, observed in 1725: 'I can have no notion of a scheme of our enemies upon Ireland both where there is an army, and where all the Protestants (in whose hands is the wealth and power) bas they are, are so nearly concerned in point of private interest to resist such an attempt.'³⁹

The situation was less favourable in terms of army size in England and Scotland. Pressure on numbers helped ensure that in opposing insurgency, the British called on allied troops, as they also did in civil warfare as in Ireland in 1690-1 and 'symmetrical warfare' on the continent. Thus, in 1731, when a collapse in relations with France led to the fear of invasion, much of the army was deployed along the Kent and Sussex coasts and steps were taken to obtain military assistance from Austria, the Dutch, and British forces in Ireland.⁴⁰

Yet, again, this situation could be affected by military circumstances, notably victory, as for the Jacobites at Prestonpans in 1745, or the avoidance of defeat for the rebel force, as at Bunker Hill in 1775, or the avoidance of destruction, as after Long Island in 1776, which enabled the maintenance of an 'army in being' strategy. Referring to American history, notably the war for independence, in terms of the play of circumstance may not meet supposition is of exceptionalism or solipsism; but setting American history both in a background of contingency and with respect to the contexts of rebellions and civil wars in the Anglophone world from 1639 helps provide a valuable qualification to these tendencies. Indeed, the taking American history out of context helps lead to a frequent misunderstanding of its character, including its specific elements.

As a good instance of British vulnerability, in 1708, the garrison in Edin-

38 Stone to Weston, 13 Aug. 1745, Farmington vol. 16.

39 NA. SP. 35/59 f. 182.

40 J. Black and A. Reese, 'Die Panik von 1731,' J. Kunisch (ed.), *Expansion und Gleichgewicht: Studien zur europäischen Mächtepolitik des ancien régime* (Berlin, 1986).

burgh Castle was in no state to resist a siege and the Earl of Leven, the Commander in Scotland, wrote about having ‘few troops ... I must retire towards Berwick if the French land on this side the Forth.’ The Union was unpopular and the British army under pressure in the Low Countries.⁴¹

Given this situation, it was unsurprising that a key element of anti-insurgency activity involved espionage, not only against possible insurgents in Britain but also centred on conceivable invasion ports abroad such as Le Havre in 1715.⁴²

It is very easy in each of these cases to play through counterfactual scenarios in which the respective conflicts would have had very different outcomes. Such discussion can be seen, even derided, as nostalgic or as the complaint of the loser. For some, doubtless so, but counterfactualism also returns readers to the uncertainties of contemporaries. These uncertainties related not only to what was going to happen, but also as to how best to interpret what was happening and/or had happened so far. As such, counterfactualism was, and remains, a central element in analysis.⁴³ And so also for contemporaries arguing for particular policies, as with French ministers who had served Louis XIV pressing for support for Charles XII and James III including helping enable Charles to send troops to Scotland.⁴⁴

The counterfactual approach, however, is unwelcome to those who treat the past as a clear source of lessons. This is particularly so for rebellions and civil wars as they provide clear turning points or could-have-been-turning-points.

These resonate to the present in instructive instances of the role of past rebellion in present national accounts/myths. This is in part true for Ireland, but 1641, 1690-1 and 1798 lack the resonance of the Easter Rising of 1916 which can be presented as modern and modernising.

In contrast, for Scotland, there are no subsequent events to put Culloden

41 HL. Lo. no. 7885; D. Szechi, *Britain's Lost Revolution?: Jacobite Scotland and French Grand Strategy* (Manchester, 2015).

42 Lieutenant William Rowley, RN, to Josiah Burchett, Secretary to the Admiralty, 2, 3 Dec. 1715, NA. SP. 42/14 f. 37-42; Captain Thomas Swanton, Commissioner of the Plymouth Royal Dockyard, to Burchett, 27 Mar. 1716, NA. SP. 42/15 f. 193.

43 J. Black, *Other Pasts, Different Presents, Alternative Futures* (Bloomington, Ind., 2015).

44 Stair to Stanhope, 17 Dec. 1715, NAS. GD. 135/137 no. 67; M. de Ségur (ed.), *Mémoires de M. Le Baron de Besenval* (Paris, 1805), I, 103-4.

(1746) into the shade. Moreover, 1642 and 1688 have gone on providing standard staples for the 'Whig' account of English history and have done so even if repurposed for *Marxisante* accounts.

So also for the American Revolution which was presented as a departure for America from the standard presentation of the British world, one misrepresented in 1820 by the hostile American envoy Richard Rush:

'This is essentially a military government. The regular army is too strong for the unarmed millions, who would otherwise not allow the government to stand for six months; and while the government has the direction of the army the latter will continue to be paid, and the former supported by the bayonets in its authority.'⁴⁵

While capturing serious discontent, that interpretation failed to note the many strengths of the British system and the degree of backing it enjoyed. Significantly, in the British Isles when the state was weak and suffering defeats and serious setbacks, notably in late 1745, 1755-7, 1775-83, and 1793-1809, there were no widespread rebellions. Thus, in 1745, Ireland, England and Wales did not rebel. There was a level of complacency in the remarks of Sri James Lowther MP in 1743 but they were more accurate than those of Rush:

'The best guard against hardships and oppression is not to let people have power to do it. We all see there is much more oppression and severity in arbitrary countries where a king has gained an unjust power of loading his subjects with what taxes he pleases than in countries of more freedom where the people cannot be taxed but by the representatives who if they are persons of the best substance will pay the most themselves.'⁴⁶

Instead, Rush offered militarisation in effect as the socio-political analysis, one that made successful rebellion/civil war the sole route to progress. This seemed natural to an American, who thus anticipated Karl Marx, but does not describe the more interesting aspect of rebellion and civil war in the British world, namely the essential quiescence in the England, Scotland and Wales during the nineteenth century, and even in Ireland by the standards of the 1790s and 1916-21.

45 Rush to James Madison, former President, 30 Aug. 1820, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Am. 13520.

46 Lowther, industrialist and landowner, to his father, John Spedding, 27 Dec. 1743, Carlisle, Cumbria Record Office, D/Lons/W2/1/104.



Wax copy of one of the alleged Oliver Cromwell's death mask; "taken after the body had been embalmed; it shows the cloth bound round the head to cover the cincture, and the face has a beardlet and moustache but the wart has been pared off; on the back an inscription in wax; inside the back is a metal wire bent round to follow the outline of the face. John Piper expressed some doubts about the identity of the British Museum mask in the early 1950s. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence.

Maratha Insurgency and Mughal Counterinsurgency: circa 1620-circa 1720

by KAUSHIK ROY¹

Introduction

This paper attempts to trace the Maratha rise to power especially during the long reign of the last great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707). The Marathas by waging guerrilla warfare against the Bijapur Sultanate and the Mughal Empire rose to prominence during the second half of the seventeenth century. In the context of this paper, the terms guerrillas and insurgents (and also the terms guerrilla warfare and insurgency) are used interchangeably. Insurgency may be defined as armed rebellion by the subjects against the legally constituted authority (the state which was ruling over them). The Maratha guerrilla warfare which started under Shivaji (b. May 1627-d. 5 April 1680) gradually spread out of Maharashtra and by the 1670s had spilled into southern and central India. While discussing Maratha guerrilla activities, it is also essential to discuss the counter-guerrilla warfare conducted by the Mughals. Counter-guerrilla warfare is equated with counterinsurgency (COIN). COIN in this paper refers to the techniques pursued by a polity to stamp out armed rebellion in its territory.

Historiography

It would be wrong to hold Shivaji as solely responsible for the rise of Maratha insurgency. This is because the roots of Maratha guerrilla warfare could be traced back to the pre-Shivaji era. Further, Maratha insurgency became more intense after the death of Shivaji. The physical geography of Deccan (the region

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south of Vindhya Mountains till the Krishna River) in general and Maharashtra in particular and the cultural climate of early modern Maharashtra in addition to the economic aspect made possible the continuation of Maratha guerrilla warfare for a century.

Scholars who follow the materialist approach and especially the Marxist historians discount the role of religion in the emergence of Maratha military power. Andre Wink in his monograph asserts that the very expansion of the Muslim power (Bijapur Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire) resulted in the emergence of Marathi landed gentry, who later constituted the backbone of the Maratha uprising.² Wink's assertion is partly correct. Marxist historians like Satish Chandra asserts that the Maratha movement under Shivaji was an assertion of the petty landholders for economic gains against the high caste big landed elements of Maharashtra.³ Such a narrow inflexible reductionist interpretation really does not hold water. Many big landed elements, *sirdars* (chieftains who maintained armed followers) as well as lower class of the society joined Shivaji Bhonsle's banner for both material and non-material reasons, to fight the Islamic invaders. Small peasants (Kunbi) and even tribal communities (like Hetkaris, Mawalis, etc.) participated in the Maratha insurgency. As regards the participation of big clans, one example is Hambir Rao Mohite who was once Shivaji's Commander-in-Chief and his daughter married the former's younger son Rajaram in 1683. This marriage cemented the alliance between two distinguished Maratha lineages: Bhonsle and Mohite clans.⁴

Nationalist historians idolise Shivaji as a Hindu hero who fought to defend Hinduism against the religious orthodoxy of Aurangzeb.⁵ Social, economic and geographical factors (terrain and climate) were definitely important for the ger-

2 Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya*. 1986, reprint, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008.

3 Satish Chandra, *State, Society, and Culture in Indian History*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2012, pp. 105-18.

4 Richard M. Eaton, *The New Cambridge History of India, I:8, A Social History of the Deccan, 1300-1761, Eight Indian Lives*. 2005, reprint, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 178.

5 The most recent advocate of this line is Vaibhav Purandare who in his biographical study of Shivaji titled *Shivaji: India's Great Warrior King*. 2022, reprint, Juggernaut, New Delhi 2025 portrays the founder of Maratha power as the son of Maharashtra whose objective was to protect Hindu *dharma* against the iconoclasm of the Muslim rulers.

mination of Maratha insurgency. In addition, religious persecution of the Hindus to a great extent motivated the ordinary people of Maharashtra to join the insurgency and fight the Muslim invaders.

Academic analysis of Maratha guerrilla warfare is rare. Umesh A. Kadam in his recent monograph turns the limelight on diplomatic policy of the Marathas.⁶ Eric Osborne's article mainly based on secondary sources offers a succinct chronological overview of Maratha guerrilla warfare after Shivaji.⁷ There is scope for further studies. This paper gives due attention to the period before Shivaji's rise and the shape insurgency took under Shivaji. The present work attempts to unravel how the Maratha insurgency sustained itself and the changing contours of Mughal COIN. Shivaji also had a coastal navy for conducting naval guerrilla warfare in the Arabian Sea. The Mughals deployed the Siddis of Janjira for conducting maritime COIN. Due to lack of space, I will not deal with the aspects of naval insurgency and COIN in this paper.

The present author utilises contemporary indigenous and foreign sources. There are some problems with the existing sources. The Marathi *bakhars* (chronicles and genealogies) are uncritical of Shivaji (the founder of the Maratha power) while the Persian court histories of the Mughals are overtly negative in their portrayal of the 'rebel' Marathas. In addition, we have memoirs by two Hindu officers of the Mughal Empire who fought the Marathas. One was Jai Singh, a Hindu (Rajput) general of Aurangzeb who campaigned against Shivaji. The other was Bhimsen, a Hindu civil servant who served several Mughal commanders who fought the Marathas.

Physical Geography, Culture and Way of Warfare

The Maratha military movement originated in Maharashtra. Maharashtra included the western edge of the Deccan Plateau which is bound in the north by Narmada River and in the south by the Krishna (Bhima) river. The total area comes to about 28,000 square miles. However, the Marathi speaking people

6 Umesh Ashok Kadam, *Deccan in Transition: European Dominance and Maratha Sovereignty*. 2023, reprint, Routledge, Oxon/New York 2024.

7 Eric W. Osborne, 'The Ulcer of the Mughal Empire: Mughals and Marathas, 1680-1707,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies* Vol. xxxi1 Issue 5 2020, pp. 988-1009.

were spread along a wider region stretching from eastern Gujarat in the west, Satpura Mountains in the north till the borders of Mysore in Karnataka in the south. The total area covered by the Marathi speaking people came to about 102,000 square miles. In Maharashtra, the most fertile region was the Konkan which means the narrow valleys between the Western Ghats (Sahyadri Range) and the Arabian Sea. The Konkan stretches from Bombay to Goa and comprises of about 10,000 square miles. Rice and to a lesser extent mango and coconut were grown in this area. Because it was a fertile plain, this region was most densely populated within Maharashtra. East of the Western Ghats is the undulating land of central Maharashtra known as *Desh* (later the core of Shivaji's *Swarajya* [Kingdom/Homeland]). In the seventeenth century, about half of Maharashtra's population were Marathi speaking people who were concentrated in the Konkan. Even the Konkan was not truly a flat plain like the Ganga-Jamuna plain of north India. Konkan for most parts was rugged, interspersed with rivulets, streams, mountains and thick jungles. The roads were stony footpaths which vanished as they approached the Western Ghats. In the Western Ghats, there were only paths and defiles so narrow that through them only one person or a horse could travel. The rest of Maharashtra was mostly hilly and covered with forest. Except the Konkan, where annual precipitation was 120 inches, Maharashtra received very low rainfall (annual precipitation was 17 inches) and the soil was not fertile. The staple crops were wheat, barley and millet. The broken and rocky nature of the terrain in most of Maharashtra prevented the development of land communications and the rivers were not navigable. Due to the underdeveloped state of agriculture, and bad communications, trade and commerce did not readily develop and big cities were mostly absent.⁸

Overall, the bad state of agriculture and absence of any prospect of trade and commerce encouraged the inhabitants to take to soldiering as a career option. Many Marathas became military mercenaries of the Ahmadnagar and the Bijapur Sultanates which were ruling Maharashtra during the sixteenth century. Further, the hilly forest covered terrain provided ample opportunities to carry out ambush and organise hit and run attacks against the enemies and then to

8 James Grant Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*, vol. 1. 1863, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2023, pp. 2-4; Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and his Times*. 1919, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2025, pp. 2-6.

escape inside the forest covered hills. These techniques became the special forte of the Maratha guerrillas. Again, bad roads, lack of rivers, infertile land and absence of sprawling towns prevented the big powers like the Mughals from sending a big army inside Maharashtra to crush the Maratha raiders. The irony was that a huge army would starve while campaigning in Maharashtra, but a smaller force would be crushed by the Maratha guerrillas.

Shivaji waged a form of warfare which could roughly be categorised as guerrilla warfare. It was a sort of attrition oriented harassing warfare and the Marathas called it *ganimi kava*. It means that being unable to meet the enemy (enjoying quantitative [larger armies] and qualitative superiority [in arms and equipment]) head on, the Marathas waged asymmetric warfare. It involved cutting off the enemy's supply lines, ravaging his base area, following scorched earth policy to obstruct hostile advance and tiring out the enemy by launching continuous harassing raids at his front and rear but never engaging the main force of the enemy in a pitched battle or to lay siege to his fort. This was because the Marathas lacked field artillery and heavy cavalry for engaging in set piece battle and siege artillery for capturing the forts.⁹

Shivaji's Way of Warfare was based on three elements: horses, infantry and forts. Maharashtra did not breed high-quality horses. Further, Shivaji lacked money to buy good war horses from West Asia and Central Asia. So, Shivaji had to rely on the *tattus* (home bred ponies) available in the Godavari and Bhima Valley which functioned as light cavalry. Such small mounts were not suitable for carrying a heavily armoured trooper or plate armour on themselves. These small ponies and lightly armed men mounted on them were not suitable for launching heavy cavalry charge in the battlefield like the heavy Mughal and Rajput cavalry. Further, the people of Maharashtra did not know the use of composite bows from horseback, a tactic in which the Turkish mercenaries of the Mughal Army excelled. Hence, there was no question of launching the famed '*taulqama*' charge against the enemy army. Shivaji's guerrilla bands comprised of light cavalry. The focus was on achieving surprise and mobility. The term which was used for depicting cavalry warfare by the Marathas was *kavebaji*

9 Kaushik Roy, 'From the Marathas to the British: The Waning of Horse Warriors in Eighteenth-Century India,' in Pratyay Nath and Ranabir Chakravarti (eds.), *The Coveted Mount: The Horse in South Asian History*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2026, pp. 267-69.

(forward and backward movement of the horses). The objective of such guerrilla bands was to attack the reconnaissance parties, supply convoys, cut off stragglers, harassing the enemy force on march and especially carrying raids deep into the enemy territory away from the frontlines for pillaging and plundering.¹⁰

While Shivaji had been able to craft a way of warfare which was in tune with the ecology of Maharashtra in particular and Deccan in general, the Mughal way of warfare was suited for conducting decisive battles in the fertile wide plains of north India. Field artillery was present (mortars, light field guns, small howitzers) but they were not that effective against the dispersed Maratha raiders who practiced swarming tactics. The Mughal Army was cavalry centric. It comprised of two types of cavalry: heavy and medium. The medium cavalry comprised of Turani horse archers wearing chain mail armour riding on big horses imported from Central Asia. The heavy cavalry comprised of Irani and to a lesser extent Rajput horsemen. They rode big Arabian and Persian horses imported via the sea route from West Asia. On an average some 100,000 horses entered India annually. Of them, 60,000 mounts came from Uzbek territories in Central Asia. The rest 40,000 were Irani and Arabian horses.¹¹

The Turani horse archers armed with composite bows opened the battle by circling around the enemy force at high speed and then launching barrages of arrows. This was the so called *taulqama* charge. A Turani bowman could fire six arrows by the time taken by a matchlock man to fire one shot from his matchlock. Further, the long and heavy matchlock could not be used effectively from horseback especially when the mount was in motion. So, lack of wholesale induction of handguns by the Mughal infantry and cavalry was not merely an example of technological stagnation. Rather, it was contextual. When the enemy force was dislocated due to constant barrage of iron tipped arrows from a distance, the heavy cavalry wearing plate armour (both the men and the mounts were covered) and armed with spears charged at high speed. Then, they engaged in close quarter combat with *tulwars* (long curved swords with razor sharp edg-

10 Kaushik Roy, 'The Rise of the Marathas: A Geopolitical Analysis,' in Jeremy Black (ed.), *Geopolitics and War*. Nadir Media, Rome 2025, pp. 205-07.

11 Deepti Kumari, 'Horse Trade,' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. lxxviii 2017, pp. 351-60.

es used for cutting at the enemy from horseback).¹²

In the rugged terrain of Deccan and especially in the hilly and mountainous Maharashtra, the horse archers were never able to gather speed which was necessary for dominating the battlespace. Worse, the Marathas rarely waited to become static targets for the horse archers. The Maratha light cavalry retreated as soon as they sighted the Mughal force. The medium and heavy cavalymen of the Mughals never caught up with the rapidly withdrawing light Maratha horsemen. East of the Western Ghats was a narrow belt of land some 20 miles wide called Maval. This area was extremely rugged, a series of table lands cut on every side by deep winding valleys. From the valleys, hills of various heights and forms emerged with steep sides strewn with black basalt boulders. Scattered in this region were patches of evergreen forest.¹³ The physical geography was suited for conducting ambushes against the slow-moving Mughal forces.

The forts, in Shivaji's paradigm of warfare, functioned as bases for his guerilla parties. Most of the hill forts of Shivaji were located in the Western Ghats. Since food and fodder were not available in this region, a big Mughal Army with large number of animals and men could not subsist here for a long period. Worse lack of good wide roads and absence of navigable rivers in this region, prevented the Mughal besiegers from deploying large number of heavy siege cannons to blast the Maratha hill forts.

Culture and ideology (meaning religion in our context) were also important for the emergence and continuation of the Maratha insurgency. Due to the teachings and activities of the religious scholars and saints like Eknath (sixteenth century), Tukaram, Ramdas and Vaman Pandit (early seventeenth century), the Marathi speaking people acquired a cultural unity which preceded the political unity they would achieve under Shivaji.¹⁴ Ramdas in 1649 gave an audience to Shivaji. Shivaji accepted Ramdas as his spiritual preceptor in 1650. Inspired

12 Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation in Eighteenth-Century India*. 1994, reprint, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1998, p. 188; Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700*. 2002, reprint, Routledge, London 2023, pp. 111-21.

13 Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 4, *Southern India, 1645-1689*. 1930, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2023, p. 10.

14 Sarkar, *Shivaji and his Times*, pp. 13-5.

by him, Shivaji accepted the brown banner as his standard in imitation of the brown robe of the Hindu mendicant. After Shivaji's victory over the Bijapur general Afzal Khan in 1659, Ramdas told him that he owed his victory to Goddess Bhavani and the Maratha ruler started worshipping her. Bhavani became the warrior goddess of the Maratha raiders. Another saint was Tukaram whose lyrical poetry in vernacular inspired by Marathi poet saint Namdev (d. 1350) targeted the lower class and moved the masses. Namdev was a Shudra (lower caste) and propagated the cause of lower caste (Kunbi who were Shudras) and urged to craft a casteless society in his *abhangs* (verses). In 1648, Shivaji visited Tukaram and requested the latter to grace his court. Tukaram politely refused but gave his blessings to Shivaji.¹⁵

The Maratha insurgency was fuelled by a sense of Hindu nationalism. In fact, Shivaji himself from his childhood listened to the stories about the mythical Hindu heroes of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. His father Shahji hired teachers who taught Shivaji the knowledge of *Vedas*, *Puranas*, etc. As a result, he was imbued with the greatness of Hinduism.¹⁶ Shivaji played the card that the Muslim rule in India had almost destroyed the Hindu way of life. The destruction of the Hindu kingdoms had resulted in the degradation of the Kshatriyas (martial caste among the Hindus). Further, Hindu temples were destroyed and on their ruins, mosques were built. Hence, it was the *dharma* (duty) of each and every Hindu to fight the Muslim invaders. In fact, Ramdas encouraged Shivaji that it is the bounden duty of a Hindu king to save religion, shrines and cows from the Muslim invaders. For the Marathas, it more narrowly became Maharashtra *Dharma*. This ideology was propagated in a popular Marathi work titled *Guru Charitra* which was composed in the mid fifteenth century.¹⁷

Hence, a sense of regional Hindu nationalism was emerging which was en-cashed by Shivaji. This factor to a great extent, motivated the Maratha peasantry to continue the struggle against the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb who attempted

15 H.G. Rawlinson, *Shivaji the Maratha: His Life and Times*. 1915, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2022, pp. 113-19; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, pp. 129-54.

16 *The Life and Exploits of Shivaji Maharaj*, Krishnaji Anant, Sabhasad, tr. by J.L. Mankar. 1867, reprint, Nirnayanagar Press, Bombay 1886, p. v; Bal Krishna, *Shivaji the Great*, 2 vols. 1934, reprint, Gyan Publishing, New Delhi 2024, vol. 2, p. 10.

17 G.S. Sardesai, *The Main Currents of Maratha History*. Keshav Bhikaji Dhavle, Bombay 1933, pp. 2-4.

to follow a radical Islamic policy. In fact, from June 1659, Aurangzeb initiated a series of Islamic reforms which were anti-Hindu in nature. For instance, he prohibited building of new temples, and in 1669 ordered the demolition of recently built and repaired shrines. Numerous Hindu temples especially in Mathura and Varanasi (two most holiest places) were ruined. In 1679, he imposed *jizya* poll tax on the Hindus. Then, in case of taxation and custom duties, Hindus were discriminated against the Muslims.¹⁸

Military Mercenaries to Military Entrepreneurs: Shahji, Shivaji and the Mansabdars

On the eve of the seventeenth century, due to lack of economic alternatives, the Marathas were eager to join as military mercenaries. Since the return from agriculture was low and trade and commerce were almost non-existent, the peasants were ready to take service under the *sirdars*. For the Maratha *sirdars*, the collapse of the Hindu states like the Vijayanagar Empire (practically ended in 1565), left no alternative other than joining the military service of the Muslim sultanates. Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah I (r. 1534-1557) of Bijapur maintained 30,000 mercenary Maratha light cavalry. They were called *bargirs* (horsemen) and waged *mulk giri* (pillaging and plundering enemy territories, conducting reconnaissance, scouting, skirmishing, etc.).¹⁹ Shivaji acted and elaborated on these tactics.

Successful mercenaries became military entrepreneurs. One such person was Shahji (b. 1594-d. 1664), the father of Shivaji. The Maratha *sirdars* got *jagirs* (land grants) from their employer and out of its revenue, they were supposed to maintain a cavalry contingent for their master. Shahji when hired by the Ahmadnagar Sultanate in 1623, was granted a *jagir* which had an annual income of 20,75,000 *hons* (1 *hon*=Rs 3.5) and he was under the obligation to maintain 3,000 cavalry.²⁰ The military entrepreneurs frequently changed sides. After the

18 Andre Wink, Al-Hind, *The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Great Mughals, 16th-17th Centuries*, Part 1, *Afghans and Mughals in the Struggle for Empire*. 2024, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2025, pp. 159-60.

19 Chandra, *State, Society, and Culture*, p. 106.

20 P.S. Pissurlencar, *Portuguese-Maratha Sammandh*, tr. by T.V. Parvate as *Portuguese-Maratha Relations*. Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, Bombay 1983, p. 34.

conquest of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate by the Mughals in 1636, Shahji joined the service of the Bijapur Sultan. Next year, he maintained 5,000 cavalry and was granted *jagir* in Karnataka.²¹

The Mughal Army was a collection of private military enterprise under quasi-bureaucratic control of the emperor. The officer corps of the Mughal Army were *mansabdars* who maintained their own military contingents for the emperor. The military contingent comprised clan members of the *mansabdar* and mercenaries. The *mansabdars* were also military entrepreneurs but operated under bureaucratic regulations laid down by the Mughal central government. A person was inducted in the *mansabdari* organisation by the Mughal Emperor. There were 33 ranks in this organisation starting from 10 and ending at 10,000. Each *mansabdar* was given a rank and he had to maintain horsemen in accordance with his rank. For maintaining their military contingents, the *mansabdars* were granted *jagirs*. The *mansabdar* used the revenue for his *jagir* for meeting the expense of maintaining cavalry contingent. However, the *jagir* grant by the Mughals unlike those granted by the Deccani Sultanates like Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, was temporary. After every five years, the *mansabdars* were transferred from one region to another region in accordance with the exigencies of military requirements. Further, the *mansabdars* were promoted and demoted depending on their military performance. If a *mansabdar* was promoted, he got extra *jagir* and if he was demoted, parts of his *jagir* were taken away from him. In addition, to prevent a *mansabdar* from growing territorial roots, his *jagir* grant was scattered in various provinces. Imperial inspectors occasionally conducted inspections to check whether the *mansabdars* were maintaining quality contingents in accordance with their ranks.²² Thus, we see the Mughal regulations made the *mansabdari* system more rigid than the mercenary service of the Deccani Sultanates. This rigidity in the conditions of military service discouraged the Marathas from joining the Mughal service. Further, unlike the Deccani Sultanates, the Mughals rarely gave high ranks to the Marathas. These factors prevented cooption of the Marathas in Mughal service even if the latter wanted.

In 1600, the *mansabdars* consumed 82.13 percent of the total Mughal rev-

21 Krishna, *Shivaji*, vol. 1, p. 104.

22 M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*. 1966, reprint, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2010. See especially Chapter 2 of Ali's book.



Fig. 1. Paint by Mughal court artists Tulsi the Elder and Jagjivan from Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnama* (1595) depicting the 1565 battle across the Ganges between the Mughal Imperial Army led by General Shuja'at Khan and vizir Asaf Khan who had stolen a large portion of the spoils taken after a military campaign. Wikimedia Commons.

enue. Of this share of the *mansabdars*, 10.47 percent went for maintenance of the animals (horses and beasts of burden). The Mughals had 200,000 cavalry which constituted the core of their army along with 40,000 disciplined infantry equipped with handheld firearms (matchlocks and *bans* [rockets]).²³ Besides Deccan, the army had to guard the vulnerable Northwest Frontier which ran along Kabul, Ghazni and Indus River. In February 1636, the Mughal Empire deployed 58,000 military personnel in Deccan. This was known as the Army of Deccan. However, the presence of two conventional Shia powers (Bijapur and Golconda) prevented the Mughals from focusing exclusively against the Marathas. At that time, the Marathas were a minor threat for the expanding Mughal Empire. Some 50,000 personnel were deployed against Bijapur and Golconda. In 1658, Shivaji and Shahji got a fresh lease of life because Aurangzeb the *Subadar* (Governor) of Deccan marched north with the bulk of his army in order to participate in the War of Succession that broke out among the four sons of Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658).²⁴

During the seventeenth century, the population of India was about 200 million and the world's population was 700 million.²⁵ The peasantry of the Indian subcontinent was armed and during lean season or harvest failure took to part-time soldiering. Not all the armed peasantry and their leaders could be accommodated within the armies maintained by the various polities in the Indian subcontinent. The floating armed mass constituted a potential reservoir for an ambitious warlord or an upcoming insurgent leader.

In 1661, though practically independent, but theoretically operating as a military entrepreneur of Bijapur, Shahji sacked the coastal port of Porto Novo in Tamil Nadu and looted goods (elephants, calicoes, broad clothes, copper, etc.) worth 34,000 *hons*.²⁶ Shahji maintained 12,000 soldiers for Bijapur and in return

23 Abdul Aziz, *The Mansabdari System and the Mughul Army*. Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delli, Delhi 1972, p. 228; K.K. Trivedi, 'The Share of *Mansabdars* in State Revenue Resources: A Study of the Maintenance of Animals,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. xxiv no. 4 1987, pp. 411-12.

24 Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vols. 1-2. 1912, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2023, vol. 1, pp. 19, 213.

25 J.F. Richards, 'Early Modern India and World History,' *Journal of World History* vol. viii no. 2 1997, p. 201; J.F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 1:5, *The Mughal Empire*. 1993, reprint, Foundation Books, New Delhi 2002, p. 190.

26 *English Records of Shivaji (1659-1682)*, 2 vols. Shiva Charitra Karyalaya, Pune 1931, vol. 1,

was awarded the *pargana* (subdivision of a district [*sarkar*]) of Pune as *jagir*. When Shivaji was 12 years old, he was sent to Pune. The *jagir* was managed by Dadaji Kondev who was an official of Shahji. When he died, Shivaji took over the task of managing the estate. Shivaji was ambitious and eager to chart out his own career. He added Supe to his father's estate. With the territories now under his possession, he had 300 cavalry. Immediately, Shivaji started his career of banditry.²⁷ Shivaji thus like his father became an independent military entrepreneur who occasionally sold his service to Bijapur. However, Shivaji would be more successful than his father and would be able to carve out an independent state for himself in western Maharashtra.

The core of Shivaji's cavalry comprised of the Marathas (middle caste).²⁸ Shivaji's light infantry comprised of Kunbis, Mawalis and Hetkaris along with forest tribes like Bhils and Kolis. The Bhils and Kolis inhabited the jungle covered valleys between the Western Ghats and the Konkan. The inhabitants were hunters and plunderers by nature. They made excellent light infantry adept for operating in difficult terrain. They were well acquainted with the topography and knew about the secret small paths across the mountains. Further, they were experts (due to growing up and hunting in this terrain) in climbing up along the mountains.²⁹ Since there were no prospect of agriculture or trade and commerce for them, perforce they turned to banditry. Hence, they under the leadership of their hereditary chieftains engaged in plundering the Bijapuri territories in the plains. Shivaji enlisted the support of the chieftains. The opportunity for plunder attached them to Shivaji's banner. Shivaji employed them as light infantry especially for scouting and conducting nocturnal ambushes in the hilly regions. During a commando attack or an ambush in the night to achieve surprise and prevent noise, they used bows and arrows and not matchlocks.³⁰

Chamber to President at Surat, 19 Oct. 1661.

27 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, *Siva Chhatrapati being a translation of Sabhasad Bakhar with Extracts from Chitnis and Sivadigvijaya*, tr. and ed. by Surendranath Sen. University of Calcutta, Calcutta 1920, pp. 1-4.

28 Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 4, p. 13.

29 Duff, *History of the Mahrattas*, vol. 1, pp. 5-6.

30 N.S. Takakhav and K.A. Keluskar, *The Life of Shivaji Maharaj: Founder of the Maratha Empire*. Manoranjan Press, Bombay 1921, pp. 36-7; *The Life and Exploits of Shivaji*, Mankar, p. viii.

For the Marathas, looting was one of the principal means for sustaining their insurgency. More plunder resulted in increasing military strength of Shivaji which in turn encouraged him to undertake more frequent and long distance plundering raids. In 1660, as a result of his success, Shivaji's prestige and wealth grew. Hence, the size of his army also grew. Shivaji in that year maintained 7,000 infantry and 15,000 cavalry.³¹ The Mughals could no more turn a blind eye to Shivaji's insurgency.

Jai Singh's 'Soft' COIN: 1665-1666

The Mughals till the 1650s considered the Marathas as a 'law and order' problem. Delhi believed that the very presence of a strong imperial force in the heart of Maharashtra (stationed at Pune) would deter the Marathas from doing anything foolhardy. At this stage, the Mughals showed no inclination to compromise with Maratha politico-military aspirations. In the 1650s, the Mughals administered four provinces in Deccan: Khandesh (Tapti Valley which was very fertile), Berar (capital Ellichpur), Daulatabad (Ahmadnagar) and Telengana (hills and forests in southeastern Madhya Pradesh). The total revenue from these four provinces came to Rs 5 crore (one crore=100 lakhs; 1 lakh=100,000) per year. The expenditure for the Mughal force in Deccan was supposed to be met from this revenue.³² However, continuous raiding by light Maratha cavalry not only prevented the Mughals from acquiring land revenue but also seriously damaged cultivation. In 1652, the Deccan revenue did not amount to even Rs 88 lakhs annually. The Mughals had to transfer resources from north India continuously for maintaining their forces in Deccan.³³

In 1660, Aurangzeb sent his maternal uncle Shaista Khan with a force numbering 100,000 (including combatants and non-combatants) personnel. In March 1663, the Mughals sent two detachments comprising of 12,000 and 7,000 cavalry against Shivaji near Chaul in Raigad district of western Maharashtra. Shivaji avoided the Mughal heavy cavalry by withdrawing at the rate of 45 to

31 *The Life and Exploits of Shivaji*, Mankar, pp. 17, 21.

32 Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vols. 1-2, vol. 1, pp. 22-3.

33 Shireen Moosvi, 'The Mughal Empire and the Deccan: Economic Factors and Consequences,' in S.A.N. Rezavi (ed.), *Explorations in Premodern Deccan*. Primus, Delhi 2026, pp. 179-97.

50 miles per day.³⁴ In April 1663, Shivaji with 200 commandos made a daring night raid at the Mughal *Subadar* Shaista Khan's headquarter at Pune. Shaista escaped with his life and in fear left the city. Raja Jaswant Singh a Rajput *mansabdar* who was guarding Shaista Khan's headquarter with 10,000 soldiers failed to apprehend Shivaji's commandos. According to one view, the Rajputs were alienated due to anti-Hindu policy of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb in utter rage transferred both Shaista Khan and Jaswant Singh from Deccan. The financial burden for this failed campaign came to 32,00,00,000 *hons*.³⁵

Mirza Raja Jai Singh, a premier Rajput *mansabdar* was assigned the task of crushing the Maratha insurgency. Jai Singh followed what could be categorised as a soft 'COIN.' Instead of destroying Shivaji, Jai Singh attempted to coopt the Marathas as the Mughals had done to the Rajput rulers. The Marathas were to be won over by providing them with *jagirs*, wealth and a share in the top echelons of the bureaucracy of the expanding empire. If Shivaji and his adherents refused to join the Mughal service, then they would be coerced with a display of military strength, and at best defeated but not destroyed. Threat of force and not actual implementation of force was important for Jai Singh. Besides military force, bribery, diplomacy and conciliation occupied a large component of Jai Singh's soft or 'humane' COIN. In fact, in Jai Singh's paradigm, non-kinetic elements were more important than the kinetic element. He wrote in one of his letters: 'But, if policy can accomplish a thing, why should we court delay (by resorting to force).'³⁶

On 30 September 1664, Jai Singh started his journey from Delhi with 70,000 soldiers. On 9 January 1665, his army crossed Narmada River and entered Deccan. On 10 February, he reached Aurangabad, the principal Mughal headquarters in Deccan. Then he marched for Pune and reached this place on 3 March. A COIN campaign was indeed costly. In three months, the army consumed Rs 20 million. The annual revenue of the Mughal Empire at that time was Rs 220

34 *English Records of Shivaji (1659-1682)*, vol. 1, Philip Gyfford at Rajapur to Surat, 30 March 1663.

35 *Tarikh-i-Dilkasha of Bhimsen, Memoirs of Bhimsen relating to Aurangzib's Deccan Campaigns*, tr. and ed. by Jadunath Sarkar. 1972, reprint, Life Span Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi 2024, pp. 36-7; *The Life and Exploits of Shivaji*, Mankar, pp. 29-30.

36 Quoted from *Haft Anjuman...*, *The Military Despatches of a Seventeenth Century Indian General*, ed. and tr. by J.N. Sarkar. Scientific Book Agency, Calcutta 1969, p. 51.

million. Jai Singh opened communication with the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* (high caste Maratha landlords) and informed them not to provide any supplies or manpower to Shivaji. They were told that if they abide by the Mughal orders they would be rewarded monetarily but if they disobeyed the imperial command then their land would be appropriated.³⁷

A section of the Mughal infantry was armed with matchlocks. There were various types of matchlocks. The longer matchlock was seven feet in length and the shorter matchlock was four feet and seven inches in length. The barrel was manufactured with rolled strips of Wootz steel with the two edges welded together. The heavier and longer matchlock was fired from a wooden tripod.³⁸ The Marathas were technically backward especially in regards the production of arms, armour and weapons. Most of the Maratha infantry and cavalry fought with simple bows and arrows, swords and spears. A section of the Maratha infantry and cavalry however used matchlocks and muskets. Muskets were manufactured in the villages by the local craftsmen. The Mughal *faujdars* (police officers) attempt to prevent the local locksmiths in the villages of Maharashtra from manufacturing handguns failed.³⁹

Jai Singh's strategy was to bring military pressure on Shivaji so that the latter would be forced to come to the negotiating table. No insurgency even in premodern times was possible without foreign aid. The Bijapur Sultanate was supporting Shivaji militarily and financially. It was clear to the Adilshahi ruler of Bijapur that once the Mughals destroyed Shivaji, their next target would be Bijapur. To prevent any cooperation between the Marathas and Bijapur, Jai Singh sealed Maharashtra's border with Bijapur and decided to lay siege to Purandhar, the principal fort on Maratha-Bijapur border. Further, Jai Singh established *thanas* (military posts) comprising between 2,000 to 7,000 soldiers each in various parts of Shivaji's domain to prevent the latter from drawing any sustenance from these regions.⁴⁰

37 G.B. Mehendale, *Shivaji: His Life and Times*. Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal, Pune 2025, pp. 377-81.

38 William Irvine, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls: Its Organization and Administration*. 1903, reprint, Low Price Publications, Delhi 1994, pp. 103-04.

39 Chandra, *State, Society and Culture*, p. 126.

40 Mehendale, *Shivaji*, pp. 381-89.

Shivaji sensed serious trouble and approached Jai Singh for political accommodation. However, Jai Singh decided that further military pressure should be exerted on Shivaji to extract the maximum political concessions out of him. Otherwise, once the Mughal force was removed from Maharashtra, Shivaji would break the agreement with the Mughals. Jai Singh wrote to Aurangzeb: ‘After the arrival of the imperial army near Pabal, Shiva’s agents began to visit me, and again up to my arrival at Poona they twice brought letters from him. But I gave no answer, and sent them back in disappointment. I know that unless a strong hand was laid on him, his words and stories would not contain a particle of truth.’⁴¹

In April 1665, Purandhar was besieged by the Mughals. Shivaji went for mountain strongholds because he lacked money and technical expertise to build huge forts on the plain (like the Mughal Agra Fort in north India). Most of the Maratha forts were *giridurgas* (hill forts). They were located at the summit of the mountains and designed to control the mountain passes and gorges. A de-

41 Quoted from *Haft Anjuman*, p. 49.

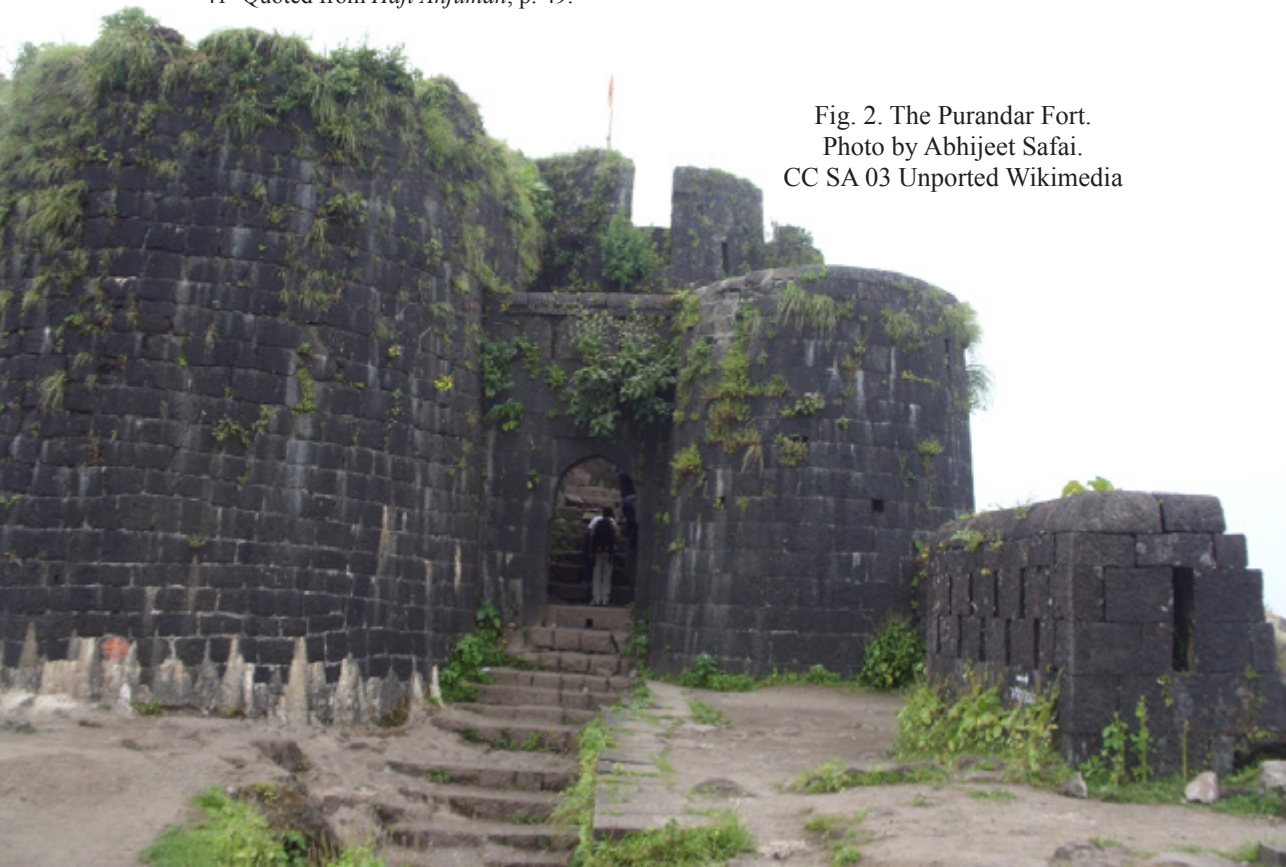


Fig. 2. The Purandar Fort.
Photo by Abhijeet Safai.
CC SA 03 Unported Wikimedia

scription of one such Maratha fort named Raigad comes from an Englishman:

We arrived at the top of that strong mountain... which is fortified by nature more than art, being off very difficult access, and but one advance to it, which is guarded by two narrow gates, and fortified with a strong high wall, and bastions.... All the other parts of the mountain is a direct precipice, so that it is impregnable except the treachery of some in it betrays it. On the Mountains are many strong buildings, as the Raja's Court, and houses for other Minister of State, to the number of about 300.⁴² While Shivaji constructed some forts, he captured most of the forts from the Deccani Sultanates, and then refurbished them for his own use. Every fort under Shivaji had a barrack, a powder house (for storing gunpowder), granary and storehouses (for storage of oil and *ghee* [clarified butter]) and an *ambarkhana* (for storing perishable food items). The Panhala Fort for example had three big granaries made of stone for storing 26,000 *khandis* (1 *khandi*=20 *maunds*; 1 *maund*=40 kg) of grain.⁴³

When the Mughals were on the point of capturing Purandhar Fort, Shivaji again appealed to Jai Singh for peace. For five months, roving Mughal cavalry was pillaging and plundering his domain. Further, Jai Singh was encouraging large scale desertions in the Maratha force by offering each deserter pay which was higher by Rs 10 and in case of junior officers Rs 20 from the salary they derived from Shivaji. So, on 12 June 1665, Shivaji in desperation agreed to surrender provided the Mughals gave him a 'proper' deal. Jai Singh decided to coopt a chastened Shivaji. In accordance with the Treaty of Purandhar, Shivaji agreed to surrender 24 forts to the Mughals. Further, Shivaji was to provide a cavalry contingent for the Mughal invasion of Bijapur.⁴⁴

To make the Treaty of Purandhar into a long-lasting peace settlement, Aurangzeb ought to have displayed some political sagacity. Instead, the Mughal Emperor insisted on rigidity. Shivaji had requested Jai Singh that he may be excused from going to the Mughal Court and bowing before the emperor person-

42 Quoted from *English Records of Shivaji (1659-1682)*, vol. 1, Oxinden's Narrative, pp. 372-73.

43 Abdul Sabahuddin and Rajshree Shukla, *The Mughal Strategy of War*. Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi 2003, p. 182.

44 *Tarikh-i-Dilkasha of Bhimsen*, pp. 44-5; *Haft Anjuman*, p. 50.

ally. Instead, his son would do obeisance to the emperor. However, Aurangzeb insisted that Shivaji himself should come to his court. In 1666, when Shivaji visited the Mughal Court at Agra, the emperor did not show him proper respect which was due to a high-ranking Mughal noble. In anger, Shivaji left the court and was arrested by the Mughal security personnel. While being kept under house arrest, Shivaji escaped from Agra and returned to Deccan. The Treaty of Purandhar was dead. Shivaji could no more trust Aurangzeb and started his insurgency again. Aurangzeb was also displeased with Jai Singh's induction of so many Marathas in the higher ranks of *mansabdari* system as part of his co-optation strategy. Aurangzeb argued that such a policy was economically costly. What he forgot was that waging an all-out war with the Marathas would prove to be economically ruinous. In 1666, with soft COIN dead, Aurangzeb transferred Jai Singh out of Deccan.⁴⁵ In 1667, the Mughals in Deccan were back again to square one: the Maratha raiders were plundering the towns and countryside and the heavy Mughal cavalry was failing to catch them.

From Military Entrepreneur to Sovereign Ruler

Cosme da Guarda, the Portuguese biographer of Shivaji, describes the nimbleness and simplicity of the Maratha raiders in the following words:

None should be surprised at the celerity of these Deccanis [Marathas], for they are accustomed to carry no more baggage than their arms, which consist of lances, bow, arrow, long and broad swords with some bread, and gram for their horses in the saddle bag, for water and straw are abundantly found in the field. In this fashion they always go unencumbered, they sleep on the ground upon the earth, and taking the bridle of the horses, and loosening the reins, fasten them with their halters to their own wrists. They cover themselves with a cloth that serves as dress, mattress and wrapper; they live in this manner and are therefore, so quick and skilful that cause admiration, and all these are quite contrary to (what is found among) the Mogols [Mughals], for he who does not have with him at least a loaded camel feels very unhappy, so that what is necessary to equip a Mogol soldier is sufficient for an army of the light Deccanis.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Tarikh-i-Dilkasha of Bhimsen*, pp. 46-51.

⁴⁶ Quoted from Surendra Nath Sen (ed.), *Foreign Biographies of Shivaji*. 1927, reprint, Life Span Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi 2022, p. 88.

Despite some amount of hyperbole in Cosme's account, there are certain elements of truth in the speed, surprise and mobility achieved by the hardy Marathas against the slow-moving Mughal Army with its tents, and thousands of baggage animals and followers.⁴⁷

In 1668, faced with destructive annual Maratha cavalry raids, the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda agreed to pay to Shivaji Rs 300,000 and Rs 500,000 respectively.⁴⁸ Shivaji was now so emboldened by Mughal military impotence, that he declared himself as the sovereign Hindu ruler of Maharashtra. Thus, the guerrilla leader became a legal ruler and he tried to build a state framework and a conventional army. After his coronation (6 June 1674), Shivaji found that the revenue which was acquired from *Swarajya* (homeland) was not adequate. Hence, he had to depend on plundering expeditions for maintaining his civil and military establishment. In 1676, Shivaji with 25,000 cavalry led an expedition into Karnataka which was under the Golconda Sultanate. The objective was to strengthen his treasury by looting the rich province of the Golconda Sultanate. In fact, Shivaji's father Shahji had also campaigned in this region on behalf of the Bijapur Sultanate.⁴⁹

After his coronation Shivaji also tried to set up a centralised bureaucratic civil cum military administration in his *Swarajya*. His aim was to establish a sovereign Hindu state. Thus, the insurgent leader after achieving success in his turf was becoming a sort of territorial ruler and attempted to maintain a conventional force. It was not an agglomeration of private forces bought by the military *sirdars* under him. The cavalry which was paid and equipped by the state was called *paga*. Each horseman in the *paga* was called a *bargir*. Over 25 *bargir*, there was a havildar. Above five havildar was a *jumladar*, who was the commander of 100 horsemen. He had a salary of 500 *hons*. A *jumladar* was assisted by a *majumdar* (secretary) whose initial salary was 100 *hons* and later increased to 125 *hons*. Over 10 *jumladers*, was a *hazari*, who thus commanded 1,000 horsemen. He derived a salary of 1,000 *hons*. Occasionally, during a big cam-

47 Sabahuddin and Shukla, *The Mughal Strategy of War*, p. 184.

48 Surendranath Sen, *The Military System of the Marathas*. 1928, reprint, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta 1979, p. 37.

49 Surendra Nath Sen, *Studies in Indian History: Historical Records at Goa*. 1930, reprint, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1993, pp. 134-45.

paign, five *hazaris* were commanded by a *panch hazari*, commander of 5,000 cavalry. *Paga* horses came under the administration of the *sarnobat* (war minister). The *sarnobat* and the *panch hazaris* had *jasuds* (couriers) for maintaining command and control during battle.⁵⁰ Shivaji's infantry wore short breeches and waistcoat. Over 10 infantryman was an officer termed *naik*. Over five *naiks* was a *havaladar*. An officer in charge of 100 infantry soldiers was designated as *jumladar*. Over 10 *jumladars*, there was an *ek hazari*. The term means commander of 1,000 infantry. All these infantry officers also reported to the *sarnobat*.⁵¹ Shivaji had under him 10,000 light cavalry and 50,000 light infantry and these personnel were paid by him in cash directly.⁵² Shivaji's military administration was looked after by a minister who was part of the *Asta Pradhan* (a Council of Eight). Another minister of this council was the *Nyayadhish* (Foreign Minister) who conducted diplomacy with the representatives of the foreign powers.⁵³

Shivaji towards the end of his reign was able to establish a well-developed administrative fabric in *Swarajya* which in turn generated a regular source of income. This income supplemented the gains made from pillage and plundering. Rent free land was granted for establishing markets. To new settlers, grain and money for buying seeds were given and this was realised in the next two to four years.⁵⁴ This was somewhat equivalent to the *taccavi* loans issued to the poor peasants by the Mughal administrators. In 1674, the year when Shivaji proclaimed himself *Chhatrapati* (Hindu King), he carried out detailed revenue assessment of Northern Konkan. Shivaji appointed several officials for accurate estimate of the yields of the land under his control. A *sarsubedar* was in charge of revenue assessment of several districts. Below him came the *hawaldar* who was in charge of preparing revenue assessment of a particular district. The *hawaldar* employed several people for assessment of the villages of his district. For each village, one revenue assessor was appointed.⁵⁵

50 *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, pp. 29-31, 164.

51 *The Life and Exploits of Shivaji*, Mankar, pp. viii-ix.

52 Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, p. 207; *Extracts and Documents relating to Maratha History*, vol. 1, p. 5.

53 Sen, *Studies in Indian History*, pp. 128-33.

54 Surendra Nath Sen, *Administrative System of the Marathas*. 1925, reprint, LG Publishers, Delhi 2021, p. 52.

55 *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar*, (ed.), G.S. Sardesai, No. 31, *Selected Papers from the Ja-*

Aurangzeb's 'Hard' COIN: 1681-1707

In September 1681, Aurangzeb himself came to Deccan with a grand army numbering 100,000 soldiers. Jai Singh's soft COIN failed. Worse, Shivaji from a rebellious warlord had declared himself as a sovereign ruler of the Hindus. After his death in 1680, his son Sambhaji was coronated as *Chhatrapati*. In response, Aurangzeb followed a kinetic oriented 'hard' COIN. The objective was complete destruction of the Maratha power and there could be no question of accommodating the Maratha political and military demands within the framework of Mughal imperium. Aurangzeb focused on conducting decisive battles and siege warfare in Deccan. He assumed that destroying the hostile force in great battles and then capturing the principal forts which protected the cities and capitals by conducting sieges would result in complete victory for the Mughals. This strategy was successful vis a vis Bijapur (1686) and Golconda (1687), two agrarian-bureaucratic polities, but not against the Maratha insurgents. Before a final showdown with the Marathas, Aurangzeb decided to conquer Bijapur and Golconda for several reasons. First, as long as these sultanates existed the Mughals could never concentrate their full strength against the Marathas. Second when the Mughals moved against the Marathas, these two Deccani sultanates for their survival provided money and supplies to the insurgents of Maharashtra. After completing the conquest of Golconda, in 1688, Aurangzeb focused on the Marathas.

The Marathas never waited for a set piece battle in which the Mughal fire-power superiority would come into play. Unable to confront the Marathas in pitched battle, Aurangzeb focused on capturing the Maratha hill forts. Khafi Khan, the court chronicler of Aurangzeb writes: 'The daring inroads of the Marathas brought Aurangzeb to the resolution of waging a holy war against them, and of reducing the fortresses which were their homes and defences.'⁵⁶ So, the Mughals mainly pursued a siege war against the Marathas. In contrast, the latter tried to cut off the grain convoys supplying the Mughal forces and also pillaged and plundered the Mughal territories to prevent the imperialists from drawing any revenue from these regions. The total estimated revenue of Bijapur

mav Section. Government Central Press, Bombay 1933 [in Marathi], Document No. 24, 11 May 1656.

56 Quoted from *Muntakhabu-L Lubab* of Khafi Khan, tr. H.M. Elliot, ed. John Dawson. 1877, reprint, S. Gupta, Calcutta 1952, p. 149.

and Golconda was Rs 53 million. But due to Maratha raiding the Mughals were unable to establish an administrative apparatus for extracting revenue. Worse, Aurangzeb's orthodox Islamic policy prevented the Mughals from coopting the Telegu *nayaks* (chieftains) who were in charge of local administration in Golconda. The net result was that the disgruntled Telegu *nayaks* not only joined the Maratha insurgents but simultaneously also started their own insurgency. Since Aurangzeb had to concentrate his forces to fight the Marathas in Maharashtra, eastern Deccan (Golconda) was denuded of Mughal soldiers. The result was that trade, industry and agriculture collapsed in Golconda. Not only the Mughals were able to derive any income from Golconda but the hard pressed treasury in Agra had to divert resources for maintaining the modicum of Mughal authority in eastern Deccan.⁵⁷

The Mughals had lot of difficulties in moving their heavy siege guns to the hill fortresses of Shivaji. For capturing forts, the Mughals deployed huge and heavy siege guns. The heaviest piece of siege artillery weighed up to 20 tons and it could fire a cannon ball weighting 10 *maunds*. Such a siege gun required 28 *seers* (1 *seer*=1 kg) of gunpowder for firing a ball. There were gunpowder factories at Ahmedabad in Gujarat, Aurangabad in Madhya Pradesh and the saltpetre was bought from Patna and Munger in Bihar.⁵⁸ So, the presence of these guns not only slowed the foot slogging Mughal Army but the supply of gunpowder required long and vulnerable LOCs which stretched back to more than hundred miles. The LOCs provided tempting targets for the Maratha raiders.

In 1685, 10,000 Maratha cavalry was ravaging the region between Aurangabad and Surat. Aurangzeb detached 18,000 cavalry to destroy the pillaging Maratha cavalry. The heavy Mughal cavalry was always six days march behind the fast footed Maratha raiders.⁵⁹ The bigger Mughal horses unlike the smaller Maratha *tattus* required lots of grain and hay, which were not available in Maharashtra. Further, the Mughal horsemen and the heavy horses covered with plate armour grew tired and required lot of water and fresh grass even after travelling

57 J.F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, pp. 306-09.

58 M.K. Zaman, *Mughal Artillery*. Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delli, Delhi 1983, pp. 11, 16-7.

59 Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English Concerns in Indostan*. 1782, reprint, Strand, London 1805, pp. 143-44.

a short distance. The Mughal commissariat was burdened with bringing huge amount of hay, fodder, grain and water across the inhospitable terrain from their bases hundreds of miles away. It was an almost impossible task. As a result, many costly Mughal horses were lost due to malnutrition and dehydration. In contrast, the cheaper Maratha *tattus* had greater staying power and survived by gnawing at the scrubs and bushes which grew at the nook and corners of the rocky boulders strewn across the hills of Maharashtra.

Sambhaji (Shivaji's son and successor; r. 1681-1689) was able to acquire some guns and ammunition from the English factors at Bombay. The English agreed to supply military stores because Sambhaji offered the British East India Company trading privileges at Jinji in Tamil Nadu. In 1688, Sambhaji made Panhala Fort his headquarter and from the forts in the Western Ghats, Maratha raiding parties made sudden raids in the plains which was garrisoned by small parties of Mughal soldiers.⁶⁰ Towards the end of 1698, the Mughals laid siege to Satara. The Mughal camp was at a distance of one and half *krosh* (1 *krosh*=2 miles) from the fort. While the Mughals were busy in constructing siege lines, mining and preparing artillery batteries, light Maratha cavalry attacked all the grain convoys supplying the Mughal force and burnt the whole region of the country for 20 *krosh* around the fortress. So much so, grain and hay became scarce in the Mughal camp. In fact, the Marathas were practicing scorched earth policy even in their own homeland. The Mughals had to spend Rs 160,000 for conducting siege operation. The Mughal mining operation however went wrong resulting in the death of about 2,000 soldiers.⁶¹

Aurangzeb believed that elimination of the principal Maratha leaders would result in disintegration of the Maratha movement. Since Marathi culture fuelled by Hindu nationalism motivated the insurgency, death of particular leaders did not result in collapse of the movement. This was the principal factor which resulted in the failure of Aurangzeb's leader centric hard COIN. After Sambhaji's capture and execution by Aurangzeb on 11 March 1689, Rajaram (r. 1689-1700), the brother of Sambhaji, became the monarch of the Marathas.

60 Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India: II:4, The Marathas, 1600-1818* (1998, reprint, New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2000), pp. 91-2; Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire*, pp. 161-62.

61 *Muntakhabu-L Lubab*, pp. 150-52.



Fig. 3. Aurangzeb at the Siege of Satara (1699-1700); Department of Prints and Photographs, document reference RESERVE OD-44-FOL, record 42154291; 2010 exhibition – Indian Miniatures and Paintings; part of a collection titled “Battles and Historical Subjects from India and Persia,” folio 41. Wikimedia Commons

The Maratha uprising had become a people's movement and could not be snuffed out due to the death of the top Maratha leader. Due to heavy concentration of Mughal troops in Maharashtra, Rajaram shifted the theatre of war further south. Rajaram established himself at the Jinji Fort which was located at 160 km southwest of Chennai (Madras) in Tamil Nadu. From Jinji, Rajaram attempted to acquire resources from Mysore Plateau and Karnataka.⁶²

Different Maratha *sirdars* accepted his authority and with their private bands continued attacking the Mughal outposts and military detachments. The Mughals could not be strong everywhere. If Aurangzeb tried to prevent the Marathas from raiding Mysore Plateau and Karnataka, then he had to move south from Aurangabad with the bulk of his army and this in turn would reduce Mughal troop density in Maharashtra. Such a development would enable the Maratha *sirdars* from Maharashtra to revive their power and launch raids against the Mughal provinces in central and west India. Thus, the Mughals were caught in a vicious circle. Further, at that time, there was no Maratha state nor a central leadership. Different Maratha *sirdars* were raiding various parts of the Mughal territory between Godavari and Krishna rivers to sustain their own forces from the loot gathered and also to prevent the Mughals from collecting land revenues. Aurangzeb attempted to divide his army into various parts for guarding his far-flung domain in Deccan. These different Mughal detachments were too scattered to come to each other's help if attacked. In contrast, the light Maratha cavalry could concentrate faster and disperse quicker than the Mughals. As a result, disaster followed. In 1690, the Mughal commander Rustam Khan was defeated by the Maratha raiders who converged quickly to achieve numerical superiority and his camp was captured.⁶³

Now the Marathas shifted from defensive to offensive strategy. During 1697-1698, Niba Sindhia, a Maratha *sirdar* with 8,000 cavalry came to the district of Nandurbar and burnt several villages. The Mughal commander Husain Ali Khan then stationed at Talner east of Nandurbar marched towards Niba. Husain had with him 800 cavalry, 2,000 musketeers and 1,000 archers. The Marathas by this time had become aggressive. Instead of retreating as in Shivaji's time,

62 Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 5. 1924, reprint, Manohar, New Delhi 2023, pp. 5-6.

63 Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. 5, p. 6.

being confident of their numerical superiority decided to cross sword with the Mughal commander. Both the armies clashed at a place 2 *krosh* from Talner. The numerically superior light Maratha cavalry easily surrounded the comparatively slow-moving Mughal horses. In the ensuing combat, the Mughals suffered 300 killed. Husain Ali along with his baggage was captured. In response to this defeat, Aurangzeb issued an order that no Mughal commander should henceforth engage the Maratha raiding parties unless the former enjoyed numerical superiority.⁶⁴ After the death of Rajaram on 3 March 1700, his widowed wife Tarabai took up the leadership of the Maratha uprising.

The Maratha soldiers while campaigning were not allowed to take any servants and baggage animals with them to prevent the raiding parties from slowing down. After all, the objective of the Maratha raiding parties was to surprise the Mughals, gather loot and then to escape if possible without engaging the capital-intensive Mughal Army in a battle. Mobile light cavalry without baggage and non-combatants were to skirmish to engage the Mughals and then retreat quickly before the slower moving Mughal horses and elephants catch up with them. In 1698, a desperate Aurangzeb ordered all the Mughal commanders that they and their soldiers should leave behind their womenfolk, children, servants and unnecessary baggage at Islampuri which was fortified as a base. However, neither the Mughal commanders nor their soldiers did pay any heed to this order of the emperor.⁶⁵ In 1703-04, there was a famine in Maharashtra. The result was that the peasants who were armed joined in droves the roving bands of the Maratha *sirdars* like Dhanaji Yadav and Nimaji Sindhia who carried on pillage and plunder in the Mughal provinces.⁶⁶ Aurangzeb's hard COIN had failed because there was no centre of gravity in the people centric Maratha insurgency.

Epilogue

The crowning failure of Mughal COIN was the restoration of Maratha monarchy under Shahu. After Aurangzeb's death, Shahu (grandson of Shivaji who was captured along with his father Sambhaji in 1689) remained in the Mughal

64 *Muntakhabu-L Lubab*, pp. 147-49.

65 *Muntakhabu-L Lubab*, p. 149.

66 Gordon, *The Marathas*, p. 103.

camp under Prince Azam Shah. Tarabai who was fighting the Mughals petitioned Azam Shah to grant her the zamindari of Bhonsle. Actually, in 1705, Tarabai petitioned Aurangzeb that she was willing to make peace if the emperor granted her the right to exact *sardeshmukhi* (at 9 percent of the total revenue demand) from the six Mughal provinces in Deccan. Aurangzeb however rejected her proposal. In 1707, after Aurangzeb's death (3 March 1707), Zulfiqar Khan, a senior *mansabdar*, persuaded Aurangzeb's son Azam Shah to release Shahu for two reasons. One to start a civil war among the Marathas (between Shahu and Tarabai) and second to ease the pressure on the Mughals. Zulfiqar's proposal was not totally original. In fact, after 1705, a lobby within the Mughal high command was for releasing Shahu and granting him *sardeshmukhi* right (10 percent of the Mughal revenue demand) in Deccan. Aurangzeb himself granted Shahu the districts of Akulkot, Indapur, Supa and Nevasa as *jagir*. Azam Shah needed the Mughal Army of Deccan to participate in the civil war for the Mughal throne at Agra. Since Shahu was brought up in Aurangzeb's camp as an honourable prisoner for a long time, he was more acceptable to the Mughal nobility than Tarabai. Azam Shah rejected Tarabai's request and issued a *parwana* (imperial order) that Shahu was granted hereditarily the Maratha *zamindari-rajya*. It included the territory captured by Shivaji from Bijapur and also the additional territories between Bhima and Godavari rivers. As a result, many Maratha *sirdars* with their contingents flocked to him. As the Mughal Army of Deccan withdrew northwards, Shahu with 20,000 Maratha horses marched towards Maharashtra.⁶⁷

A total and permanent victory over the Marathas for the Mughals was a chimera. Political devolution from a position of strength was the only answer. In the prevailing circumstances, Aurangzeb would have done well to accept Tarabai's proposal because at that time, the Mughals were still strong. Even after 1707, Shahu probably would have remained loyal to the Mughals if the Mughal Army of Deccan remained at Ahmadnagar. With the aid of hindsight one can say, that probably Azam Shah would have made a better deal by backing Tarabai. The Maratha civil war would end soon with the defeat of Tarabai by Shahu on 12 October 1707. When Bahadur Shah became emperor after Aurangzeb's death on 19 June 1707, the Mughals could not deploy a big army in Deccan. By that

67 Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, pp. 85-6.

time, the political will of the Mughal nobility was sapped by century long indecisive warfare with the Marathas. The Mughal *mansabdars* started fighting among themselves for grabbing the provinces in north India. The Mughal treasury was also weakened due to continuous transfer of funds from Agra to Deccan. Further, the Mughal Army had to be deployed in Punjab (a core province of the empire) for crushing the emerging Sikh insurgency. Then, in 1719, Shahu's *Peshwa* (Prime Minister) Balaji Viswanath with the united Maratha force would challenge declining Mughal authority not only in Deccan but also in north India. The end of the Mughal Empire was just a matter of time. And it could be added that the failure of Mughal COIN resulted in rise of the Maratha Empire in the eighteenth century.



Fig. 4. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj Statue. Sambhaji led the Marathas for the first nine years of the Deccan Wars. Wikimedia Commons.

The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories in China (1673-1683)

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The Rebellion of the Three Feudatories, known in China as the San Fan Rebellion (三藩亂) of 1673-1683 was a seminal moment for the nascent Qing dynasty. Coming out of more than five decades of continuous conflict and with a very young monarch on the throne, this civil war easily could have spelled the end for the Qing or resulted in the division of the empire. Its successful suppression had significant consequences for both the Qing dynasty itself and for the historical development of modern China. First, in its immediate aftermath, the Qing decided to formally annex Taiwan and its adjacent islands for the first time making these territories a formal part of the empire. Second, the successful prosecution of the rebels was due in large part to the cooperation of Han Chinese officials with their new Manchu overlords and to the wedding of Chinese and Manchu military institutions and logistical structures. This paved the way for the subsequent Qing expansion into Tibet and Central Asia thereby creating what became, more or less, the borders of the modern Chinese state. This process in turn helped lay the groundwork for creating a new, broader conceptualization of “Chinese” identity, one that incorporated the minority peoples of the multi-ethnic empire into the vision of the modern Chinese nation.¹ Indeed, today Xi Jinping uses the example of the High Qing as China’s aspirational model, often lauding the accomplishments of Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736-1795), the grandson of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662-1722), the victor in the Three Feudatories Rebellion and a man widely considered to be the greatest monarch in China’s long history. In this chapter I will provide a broad

¹ Liu Fengyun, *Qingdai Sanfan yanjiu* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2012), 334-340.

overview of this civil war and its significance for both the Qing and the subsequent historical trajectory of modern China. However, in order to properly understand the context and significance of this event, we must travel back several decades to the years of the Ming-Jurchen conflict that preceded the founding of the Qing state in 1636.

Loyalists and Desperados: The Ming-Latter Jin Struggle

The state that would be later known as the Qing originated from the imperial aspirations of a Jurchen tribal leader named Nurhaci (1559-1626).² His family had served as vassals of the Ming for generations and received various titles and honors from Ming emperors. But owing in part to regional military rivalries that claimed the lives of his father and grandfather as well as to changing demographic conditions occasioned by the global climate crisis of the early seventeenth-century, Nurhaci decided to form his own khanate, independent of the Ming, which he declared the Latter Jin (after an earlier Jurchen Jin dynasty that had ruled part of north China from 1115-1234) in 1616, promulgating a set of seven grievances against the Ming (1368-1644), then under the rule of Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620).³ Though the Ming had fairly recently defeated a massive Japanese invasion of Korea (1592-1598) and suppressed several other massive revolts in different regions of China, they fared poorly against the Jin forces, suffering their first major defeat at the Battle of Sarhu in 1619 and then losing several important cities in Manchuria outside the Great Wall over the next few years.⁴ With the death of Wanli in 1620 and the intensification of the factional strife that plagued much of his reign, Ming military efforts in the northeast

2 A brief biography of Nurhaci can be found in A.W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period*, Revised edition (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2018), 448-452. Hereafter *ECQP*.

3 On Wanli's long and eventful reign, see Fan Shuzhi, *Wanli zhuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993). On his role as a military leader, see K. Swope, "Bestowing the Double-edged Sword: Wanli as Military Commander," in D. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers and Competition: The Ming Court (1368-1644)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 61-115.

4 The rise of Nurhaci is detailed in K. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44* (London, 2014), 10-33. On the war in Korea, see K. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592-1598* (Norman, 2009).



Fig. 1. Unidentified artist - Portrait of Kangxi Emperor (1662–1722).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain

continued to founder with one notable exception: a maverick general named Mao Wenlong (d. 1629), who harassed the Jin forces from his island base in the Bohai Gulf located between China and Korea.⁵

Like many men of his era, Mao was an opportunist and a skillful one at that. While he did indeed score several victories against the Latter Jin at a time when triumphs were few and far between, his reports tended to exaggerate his accomplishments, and it was nigh impossible for the court to discern the substance of his claims. He also took advantage of the fluid political situation in the Bohai Gulf between China and Korea to extract resources, including food and women for his troops from Korea and came to play a dominant role in trade in the region, carving out a mini-maritime kingdom and serving as patron to many eager young military officers who also found themselves swept up in the Ming-Jin conflict.⁶ He also established connections with the Jin rulers, sending emissaries and communications with the aim of strengthening his own position and preserving his mostly independent status. These actions, while perhaps understandable enough given the context, have made Mao the subject of endless dispute and controversy ever since. As significantly for the present essay, Mao's example of double dealing and trading on his considerable military talents and charismatic bond with his men was emulated by his most prominent followers who would rise to far greater heights than he ever did in his short tenure as a warlord.

For even as Mao was achieving successes at sea and along the coast, newly energetic military leaders were rising in Beijing. The most prominent of these was a civil official named Yuan Chonghuan (1584-1630). Though several other officials had pushed for greater employment of the latest Western technology,

5 A brief biography of Mao can be found in *ECQP*, 420. On Mao's exploits, see Swope, *Military Collapse*, 39-46; and Li Guangtao, "Mao Wenlong niangluan Dongjiang shimo," in Li Guangtao, *Ming-Qing dang'an lunwenji* (Taipei, 1986), 165-194. Notable sources from the era and just after include Mao Chengdou, *Dongjiang shujie tangbao*; Wu Guohua, *Dongjiang kewen*; and Wu Qian, *Dongjiang yishi*, all compiled in Mao Chengdou, comp., *Dongjiang shujie tangbao jiechao* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1986.)

6 For more on these processes, see Jing Liu, "Sea Routes, Intelligence Agents, and the Social Dynamics of the Sino-Korean Frontier during the Ming-Manchu Conflict," *War and Society* 41.3 (2022), 163-181; and Jing Liu, "Warfare, Military Men and the Maritime Orientation of Northeast Asia in Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of Asian History* 54.2 (2020), 281-310.

namely heavy cannon that were dubbed the “Red Barbarian Cannon” (*hongyi dapao*), it was Yuan who finally managed to lure the Jin Khan Nurhaci into a decisive battle that favored the Ming. Situating his cannon atop the massive city walls of Ningyuan rather than outside them as previous commanders had done, Yuan’s gunners strafed the field, inflicting massive casualties and dealing Nurhaci himself a mortal wound.⁷ This was the most serious defeat inflicted upon the Jin yet and it made Yuan the toast of Beijing. As a result, he was soon feted by the newly enthroned Chongzhen Emperor (r. 1628-1644) in a personal audience in the Forbidden City, who had replaced his deceased elder brother. Chongzhen was deeply impressed by Yuan and gave him free rein in the north-east to implement a more aggressive policy to counter the Jin. As things turned out, Yuan had heard the rumors about Mao Wenlong’s possible collaboration with the Jin and one of his first acts was to decapitate Mao in front of his own troops during a review on Mao’s island base.⁸ Yuan’s action shocked the Ming court and just a year later, in 1630, Yuan himself would be hacked to pieces by Chongzhen’s order after being framed by the Jin for colluding with them.

Thus, Yuan’s execution of Mao was the first domino to fall in not only the demise of the Ming, but also in the emergence of the feudatory princes. As the editors of the *Mingshi*, compiled in the early Qing dynasty, observed, “First Chonghuan ignorantly killed Wenlong, then the emperor foolishly killed Chonghuan. From the time of Chonghuan’s death there was no one who could deal with border affairs and the fate of the Ming was decided.”⁹ While one can debate this point, in the immediate aftermath of Mao’s liquidation his top commanders were restive. Some stayed on his old island base of Pidao, others were transferred to the mainland, either to Manchuria or Shandong. One officer mutinied due to lack of supplies. And within another two years they were embroiled

7 On the Battle of Ningyuan of 1626, see Swope, *Military Collapse*, 56-59. Also see Ji Liuqi, *Mingji beilue* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 41-42. For biographies of Yuan Chonghuan see Yan Chongnian, *Yuan Chonghuan zhuan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), and *EC-QP*, 822-823.

8 See the discussion in Swope, *Military Collapse*, 75-76, and 79-85, based largely from the accounts in Zhang Tingyu, et al, comps., *Mingshi* 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 6716-6717; and Li Qing, *Yuan dushi zhan Mao Wenlong shimo* in Longdaoren (pseudonym), *Youbian jilue* (Taipei: Taiwan wenxian congkan, 1968), 41-45.

9 *Mingshi*, 6719.

in more dramatic events that led to their defection to the Jin, now led by Hong Taiji (r. 1627-1643), Nurhaci's successor.

After briefly being on the defensive following Nurhaci's death, Hong Taiji took the offensive, striking at several Ming cities outside the Great Wall, most notably laying siege to the fortified town of Dalinghe in the summer of 1631. In these operations the Jin proved more effective at positional warfare and managed to take the city after more than four months of fighting, obtaining the surrender of its commander, the experienced Zu Dashou. They also raided inside the Great Wall, bringing back slaves and booty. These actions forced the Ming to scramble in defending wide swathes of territory and many of Mao Wenlong's former commanders were transferred back and forth but often shortchanged on supplies and rations.¹⁰ Several mutinies erupted, the most significant of which turned out to be the Wuqiao Mutiny of 1631-33, which was led by Kong Youde (d. 1648), another of Mao's former underlings and came to embroil nearly all of Shandong province. Kong would be joined by Geng Zhongming (d. 1649) and Mao Chenglu, two more of Wenlong's subordinates, the latter being his adopted son.¹¹ The rebels occupied several cities and opened negotiations with the Ming government. After negotiations failed, Ming Emperor Chongzhen sent one of his most decorated commanders, General Wu Xiang, along with his young son, Sangui, to put the rebellion down by force.¹² This time the Ming were successful and the mutineers were forced to evacuate Shandong, sailing across the Bohai Gulf and into the open arms of Hong Taiji, who valued their expertise in firearms and siege craft.¹³ They would soon thereafter be joined by Shang Kexi

10 Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2024), 48-53.

11 Detailed accounts of the mutiny can be found in Teng Shaozhen, *Sanfan shilue* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), 97-123; and Swope, *Military Collapse*, 95-103. Biographies of Kong and Geng can be found in *ECQP*, 294; and 117-178, respectively. On the broader regional context, see C. Agnew, "Migrants and Mutineers: The Rebellion of Kong Youde and Seventeenth-Century Northeast Asia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52.3 (2009), 505-541.

12 See Liu Jian, *Tingwen lu* in Shen Yunlong, comp., *Ming-Qing shiliao huibian* 3rd series vol. 24, 3831-3940 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 3838. Hereafter *TWL*. On Wu Sangui, see *ECQP*, 687-690. Notable recent Chinese biographies of Wu include Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan* (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe 2005); and Zhang Luyuan, *Wu Sangui zhengzhuan* (Beijing: Qiye guanli chubanshe, 2013).

13 The best contemporary accounts of the quelling of the mutiny are Mao Bin, *Pingpan ji* in Yu Hao, comp., *Ming-Qing shiliao congshu shubian* 18 vols. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan, 2009),

(d. 1676), yet another ex-subordinate of Mao Wenlong.¹⁴

As part of general Jin/Qing policy, the defectors were treated very well, lavished with gifts and military ranks and subsequently being promoted to princely status, with their children married into the royal family.¹⁵ Over the course of the next decade as the Latter Jin morphed into the Qing, the assistance offered by the defectors proved invaluable as they trained the troops in firearms use and siege craft, allowing the challengers to take city after city from the Ming beyond the Great Wall. There were several military reorganizations at this time as the Manchus (as they started calling themselves in 1635) expanded their dynastic aspirations, formally declaring the Qing empire in 1636.¹⁶ These included the creation of Han Chinese banners and dedicated firearms divisions. Through this process the Qing continued to recruit able defectors from the Ming as the factionalized politics of the Ming court precluded effective action and cooperation amongst its military commanders. Germane to the present discussion, Kong Youde, Geng Zhongming, and Shang Kexi all distinguished themselves in battle, participating in all the major campaigns, including those in Korea and receiving additional honors from the Qing.¹⁷

With the fall of the fortified cities of Songshan and Jinzhou to the Qing in 1641-42, only Ningyuan, defended by the now Regional Commander Wu Sangui, remained in Ming hands outside the Great Wall. In fact, Wu Sangui had been involved in the siege of Song-Jin but escaped to Ningyuan with much of his army before the two cities fell.¹⁸ In the meantime, massive peasant revolts

vol. 1, 3-347; Xu Congzhi, *Weicheng rilu* in Yu Hao, comp., vol. 1, 348-466. On the defections of Geng and Kong to the Qing, see Zhao Lian, *Xiaoting zalu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 3.

14 On Shang Kexi's defection to the Jin, see Shang Eryuan, "Shang Kexi xiang Jin xiaoyi," *Qingshi yanjiu* 1987.4 (1987), 25-27, and Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 66-98. This is the most comprehensive biography of Shang's life and career. A brief biography of Shang can be found in *ECQP*, 522-523.

15 See Teng, *Sanfan shilue*, 124-209.

16 On the military changes, see M. Chung, "Negotiation and Innovation: Artillery Technology, Ethnicity, and the Formation of the *Hanjin*," *Late Imperial China* 45.2 (June 2024), 151-191.

17 See Luo Zhenyu, comp., *Pingnan jingqinwang Shang Kexi shi shice* in Luo Zhenyu, comp., *Shiliao congan chubian* 2 vols. (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1964), 855-860.

18 Zhao Erxun, et al., comps., *Qing shigao* 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 3289. Hereafter *QSG*.

had been ravaging central and western China since 1628, their ebb and flow coinciding somewhat with the course of the Ming war against the Qing. By the spring of 1644, the peasant rebels of Li Zicheng (1606-1645) had established their own challenger state in Xi'an and pushed through Ming defenses at the Great Wall west of Beijing and was threatening the capital. Meanwhile, Li's rival, Zhang Xianzhong (1606-1647), established his own kingdom in Sichuan province in the southwest.¹⁹

In desperation Chongzhen recalled Wu Sangui to Beijing. While Wu set forth from Ningyuan for Shanhaiguan, which is where the Great Wall meets the sea, he was slowed down by a huge civilian population of refugees. By the time he reached Shanhaiguan, the capital had already fallen to Li Zicheng's forces.²⁰ Wu now found himself in a conundrum which has fascinated and polarized historians for nearly four centuries. Wu had been courted by the Manchus for years. In fact, Zu Dashou was his uncle and had been trying to obtain Wu's collaboration for some time as had other relatives who already defected to the Qing, including Wu's elder brother, Wu Sanfeng.²¹ Moreover, according to popular lore, Wu's father had been captured in Beijing and tortured by Li Zicheng and his beloved concubine Chen Yuanyuan, allegedly the most beautiful woman in China, had been ravaged by one of Li's lieutenants.²² Yet Li also offered terms to Wu, hoping to join forces to fend off the Manchus. According to his own later representations Wu eventually decided to form an alliance with the Qing, now under the rule of Emperor Shunzhi (r. 1644-1661), sending envoys to negotiate with the regent, Prince Dorgon.²³ The idea was that the allies would avenge the Ming by sweeping the peasant rebels out of the capital and restoring order to the

19 There are myriad accounts of the late Ming peasant rebellions. The standard treatment in English remains J.B. Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming Dynasty* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1993). Also see Swope, *Military Collapse*. The full story of Zhang Xianzhong's rise and fall is detailed in K.M. Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma and Social Dislocation in Southwest China during the Ming-Qing Transition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).

20 *QSG*, 3289.

21 One such letter can be found in Chen Yinke, et al., comps., *Ming-Qing shiliao* 15 vols. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishiyuyan yanjiusuo, 1972), *bing*, 85. Hereafter *MQSL*.

22 Cangbian shanqiao (pseudonym), "Wu ni quwang lu," *Shuoku* 8 (1963), 1722, and *TWL*, 3840.

23 *TWL*, 3844.



Fig. 2. Wu Sangui, Palace Museum Archive

empire. Wu was promised a noble title, and he later claimed that he was under the impression that a Ming claimant was going to be restored to the throne.²⁴ In any case, after Wu fought a couple engagements with Li's forces and pulled back to the pass, the Manchus entered on his side and they routed Li's forces, sending him scurrying back to Beijing. After looting the capital and setting it afire the rebels retreated to the southwest.

Crushing the Ming Resistance

For their part, while they did not respect any perceived offer to restore the Ming, the Qing did make good on their promise to promote Wu to the rank of prince and they immediately sent Wu in pursuit of Li Zicheng, who had fled southwest towards his old base of operations, accompanying the Manchu Prince Ajige. As they were clashing with rebel remnants, Ming loyalists established a court in exile in Nanjing and offered Wu a title as duke along with posthumous elevated ranks for his parents and a hefty amount of cash, but he declined.²⁵ It was around this time that Wu was formally promoted by the Qing Shunzhi Emperor (r. 1644-1661) to Prince Who Pacifies the West (*Pingxi wang*). Over the next year Wu continued his pursuit of the peasant rebel forces, chasing them from Shaanxi into Henan and from thence into Hunan, where Li Zicheng finally met his end at the hands of a local mob.²⁶ In late summer of 1645 Wu was recalled to Beijing and subsequently assigned to Jinzhou, outside of the Great Wall, with his troops being divided amongst several posts in the northeast. The emperor then offered to increase Wu's rank to that of a Prince of the Blood, but he declined this honor. The next year Wu was invited to a banquet with the emperor in the Forbidden City and received a generous reward of 20,000 ounces of silver. His life was fairly quiet the next two years, but in 1648 his eldest son, Wu Yingxiong, was given a residence in the capital and he would later be married

24 For a detailed accounts of the events surrounding Wu's surrender that engage the competing interpretations, see Lin Kuicheng, *Wu Sangui yu jiashen zhi bian* (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubashe, 2013); Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan* (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 94-138; and Li Ge, "Shanhaiguan zhi zhanqian xi Wu Sangu yu nongminjun de guanxi," *Qingshi luncong* 1986.7 (1986), 136-150.

25 *QSG*, 3289.

26 On the final year of Li's Shun regime, see Gu Cheng, *Mingmo nongmin zhanzheng shi* (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 2012), 289-315.

to the Shunzhi Emperor's half-sister, Princess Jianning, following a pattern the early Qing rulers used with several of the former Ming generals, including the Kong, Shang, and Geng families.

In the meantime, even though the initial Ming claimant, Emperor Hongguang, and been captured in the summer of 1645 and the Great Western Kingdom of Zhang Xianzhong dissolved with Zhang's death in early 1647, Ming loyalism remained a force to be reckoned with, with all manner of claimants and independent warlords contesting for authority across south and southwest China.²⁷ Thus, the Qing still required the services of their defector generals. After the death of Li Zicheng, Kong Youde, Shang Kexi, and Geng Zhongming battled loyalist forces in the southwest, with Kong being named Prince Who Rectifies the South (*Dingnan wang*); Geng being elevated to Prince of the Tranquilized South (*Jingnan wang*) in 1648; and Shang being named Prince Who Pacifies the South (*Pingnan wang*) in 1649. Along with Wu Sangui, all the princes received lavish gifts and generous cash bonuses for their exploits on behalf of the new dynasty.²⁸ As matters in the south were becoming increasingly tenuous, they were about to be sent to front again, suggesting the reason for the court's largesse in attempting to assure their loyalty at a time when many previously surrendered generals were reverting to the Ming cause.

The generals were given additional contingents of troops and sent on their respective ways to different theaters. Shang Kexi was dispatched from Tianjin with some of his forces proceeding by land and others by sea. The others were sent overland. Geng Zhongming was dispatched to battle loyalist elements in the southeastern province of Guangdong. But as he was heading to the front, he received word from the Ministry of Justice that some of his subordinates had received and concealed runaway slaves as war booty. Geng recovered some 300 slaves and sent them to Beijing, then promptly committed suicide in shame, even before a decision on the case was rendered.²⁹ Initially, Zhongming was denied posthumous honors and his eldest son was not allowed to inherit his title,

27 The tragi-comedic saga of the Hongguang court is covered in L. Struve, *The Southern Ming, 1644-1662* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 15-45. On the demise of Zhang Xianzhong's regime, see Swope, *Yellow Tiger*, 91-144.

28 Li, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 548-550.

29 Teng, *Sanfan shilue*, 648-651.

though the emperor reversed that decision in 1651. Kong Youde would be the next of the first generation of princes to die, killing himself after being defeated by the ex-Ming peasant rebel turned loyalist Li Dingguo in the Siege of Guilin in 1652.³⁰ Li emerged as one of the primary commanders for the Ming claimant, Zhu Youlang, enthroned as the Yongli Emperor in late 1646.³¹ Kong's daughter, Sizhen, would be made an imperial princess and received an estate in Beijing as her residence. Incidentally, according to Qing sources she was somewhat of a tomboy, being described as a "skilled mounted archer who was versed in military affairs."³²

Despite the deaths of Kong Youde and Geng Zhongming, the Qing held their own against the resurgent Ming loyalist forces and aided by internal squabbling amongst the loyalists and the inept leadership of Yongli, they turned the tide in the 1650s. Shang Kexi was implicated in the scandal that led to Geng Zhongming's death but paid a fine to avoid punishment and was allowed to redeem himself through meritorious service. He proceeded to Guangdong and battled the forces of the Ming loyalists for the next several years, eventually joined by Geng Jimao (d. 1671), Zhongming's eldest son, who had been restored to his father's rank by virtue of his military successes in 1651.³³ Capitalizing on the death of Kong Youde, Li Dingguo drove deep into Guangdong and attempted to link up with the Ming loyalist pirate Zheng Chenggong (1624-1662), also known as Koxinga.³⁴ Over the next several years Li and the Ming forces battled back and forth across Guangdong and Guangxi, but he was eventually thwarted and pushed back to the southwest by the combined efforts of Shang Kexi, Geng Jimao and other (Manchu) Qing commanders. At the time but Geng and Shang

30 On Li Dingguo's, see K. Swope "From Peasant Rebel to Ming Loyalist: The Career of Li Dingguo," in K. Swope, ed., *The Ming World* (London: Routledge, 2019), 385-402.

31 For Zhu Youlang, see *ECQP*, 934-937.

32 *QSG*, 3295. For more on Kong Sizhen, see Dian Ying and Daren, "Qingdai weiyi Hanyu gongzhu Kong Sizhen," *Lishi daguan* 9 (Sept, 1986), 12-13.

33 Liu, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 219-244. Geng Jimao's biography can be found in *ECQP*, 175-176.

34 There are myriad accounts of Zheng Chenggong's colorful life and exploits. Two excellent recent studies are Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

came under investigation for acts of excessive violence, including the massacre of commoners when they seized the city of Guangzhou, but they were cleared by the emperor. Geng Jimao would subsequently be charged with additional excesses including levying illegal taxes and imposing corvée upon local subjects. This resulted in him being transferred to Sichuan, which was switched to Guangxi due to military exigencies, but he was diverted to Fujian to counter new threats posed by Zheng Chenggong, who continued to menace the coast despite having been badly defeated in an assault upon Nanjing in the autumn of 1659.³⁵

By 1656 Li Dingguo and the Ming loyalist forces were pushed southwest into Guizhou and Yunnan. Shang Kexi now had nearly complete control of Guangdong and Wu Sangui was assisting another Ming defector, Supreme Commander Hong Chengchou (1593-1665) in defeating the Ming loyalist forces, after having previously carried out pacification activities in Shaanxi and Sichuan.³⁶ With the defection of Li Dingguo's adoptive brother, Sun Kewang (d. 1660) to the Qing, Ming resistance efforts were further compromised and the Yongli emperor retreated to Kunming in Yunnan province. The Qing amassed huge resources and mounted a four-pronged advance against the loyalists, dislodging them from Kunming and eventually forcing the court to seek refuge in Burma. Although Wu suffered a major defeat at the hands of Li Dingguo at Mount Mopan in 1659 when Li was covering the emperor's retreat, Wu managed to secure Kunming and gradually extended his control over Yunnan while thwarting efforts by the loyalists to dislodge him.³⁷ At this time Wu also obtained the surrender of several rebel commanders who ended up being his most loyal and accomplished generals, such as Mao Bao (d. 1681). Meanwhile, Yongli found himself under house arrest by the newly crowned king of Burma, who feared a

35 An overview of these operations can be found in Teng, *Sanfan shilue*, 823-873, and Liu Fengyun, *Qingdai sanfan yanjiu*, 90-114.

36 A brief biography of Hong Chengchou can be found in *ECQP*, 219-221. Also see Chen-main Wang, *The Life and Career of Hung Ch'eng-ch'ou (1593-1665): Public Service in a Time of Dynastic Change* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1999). For a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon of Ming generals who defected to the Qing, see Ye Gaoshu, *Xiang Qing Ming jiang yanjiu, 1618-1683* (Taipei: Institute of History, Taiwan Normal University, 1993).

37 *TWL*, 3861-3862.

Qing invasion. While the Qing were initially content to mop up resistance in China proper, allegedly at Wu's instigation, shortly after the ascension of the new Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662-1722), they authorized an extraction operation. Wu's forces defeated those of the Ming remnants and Yongli was turned over to Wu towards the end of 1661. Wu brought him back to Kunming, where he strangled the claimant in the fourth month of 1662. Shortly thereafter Wu's rank was increased to Prince of the Blood and this time he did not refuse the honor.³⁸

Enjoying the Spoils of Victory

Over the next decade, Wu Sangui, Shang Kexi, and Geng Jimao would become the wealthiest and most powerful military commanders in the entire empire, despite being of Han background. They were repeatedly showered with honors and imperial favors. Their sons and grandsons were married into the imperial clan. And they enjoyed almost complete authority in their regional jurisdictions, levying taxes, confiscating wealth from locals in the name of redistribution, abducting local women for their harems and followers and extracting even more resources from the central government by playing on its fears of continued Ming loyalism and resistance. Indeed, this state of affairs was quite similar to other dynastic transitions in Chinese history when the commanders who helped the founding emperor gain power received tremendous favor but were then perceived as a threat once the fighting was over. The situation was exacerbated by the special circumstances of the period. The new emperor was but eight years old when he ascended the throne, so a regency was established. The regents were concerned with checking one another as well as with determining whether the subsequent government would adhere more closely to Chinese or Manchu customs and practices.³⁹

And to be sure, there remained clear and present dangers to Qing rule. The minority peoples of the southwest were restive. Many had enjoyed varying levels of independence under the Ming, with some having been ensconced in their

38 These events are covered in Swope, *Yellow Tiger*, 252-275 and Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan*, 218-248. Also see Qing National History Project, comp., *Erchen zhuan; nichen zhuan* 8 vols. (Beiping: Guoshi guan, 1930), 1.3a-b. Hereafter NCZ.

39 On the regency, see R.B. Oxnam, *Ruling From Horseback: Manchu Politics in the Oboi Regency, 1661-1669* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

territories for hundreds of years as hereditary vassals. The Qing pacification campaigns had been brutal and many were unsure of how they would fare under the new regime.⁴⁰ And though Zheng Chenggong himself had died in 1662, his eldest son, Zheng Jing emerged as his successor after a brief power struggle and remained a threat, though he was now confined to Taiwan and its outlying islands. He still had many ex-followers on the mainland, which compelled the Qing to intermittently issue draconian measures of relocation, forcing all coastal residents to move twenty miles inland while government agents torched the land to deny the rebels resources.⁴¹ Both Sheng Kexi and Geng Jimao played on government fears of a renewed assault from the Zheng forces though, ironically enough, Shang himself carried out surreptitious trade with the Zheng, not to mention other traders, in violation of the Qing bans.

Thus, from the early 1660s the feudatory princes (*fan wang*) as they were now called, steadily increased their regional power, embedding themselves in local society at all levels. The Geng clan was based in Fujian, the Shang in Guangdong, Wu Sangui in Guizhou and Yunnan. In 1666 Sun Yanling, Kong Sizhen's husband and the son of a former subordinate of Kong Youde, was appointed the Military Governor of Guangxi province.⁴² Kong Sizhen had been made a Princess of the Imperial Blood in 1660 and Yanling was Consort of the Princess and a hereditary baron, who also held an honorary position on the Council of Princes and Officials in Beijing.⁴³ This demonstrates how the early Qing rulers attempted to closely bind the prominent Ming defectors to the Court. And the regents of the 1660s regarded the feudatory princes as comrades in arms who were not a serious threat and who, in any case, were more trustworthy than the Han Chinese gentry, who retained the stink of Ming loyalism so far as the conservative Manchu princes were concerned.⁴⁴

40 On the situation with the minorities in the southwest, see J. Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200-1700* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Qing concerns are reflected in *MQSL jia*, 493a-494a.

41 On the Taiwan situation, see Y. Wong, *China's Conquest of Taiwan in the Seventeenth Century: Victory at Full Moon* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 109-140; and Jiang Risheng, *Taiwan waiji* 2 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990).

42 *QSG*, 101.

43 *ECQP*, 571-572.

44 H. Miller, *State versus Gentry in Early Qing Dynasty China, 1644-1699* (New York: Palgrave

Of the feudatory princes Wu Sangui was undoubtedly the most accomplished and the most powerful. Like all of the princes, he benefitted from his distant location vis-à-vis the imperial capital. And while the Shang and Geng were able to (illegally) tap into the flourishing overseas trade of the South China Sea, Wu inherited the state structure created in the southwest by the Ming loyalist regime of Yongli. In their bid to resist the Qing and restore the Ming, the loyalists had established weapons manufacturing facilities, opened mines, appointed officials, and improved the infrastructure of this rugged frontier region. All of this fell into Wu's hands. Additionally, many of the loyalist soldiers were enrolled into Wu's ranks under their former commanders, who Wu treated generously if they submitted. These troops were experienced, as were their commanders, as would be displayed a decade later when the rebellion commenced. In the name of restoring order, Wu also appropriated the lands and wealth of the hereditary local officials (*tusi*) who resisted him and/or professed continued Ming loyalism, crushing a number of revolts between 1660 and 1670, all the while exaggerating their danger to the Qing court, though according to *Veritable Records of the Qing*, the threat posed by such peoples was the reason for giving Wu sweeping authority in the first place.⁴⁵

Moreover, contrary to popular depictions of Chinese military men as unsophisticated and merely rapacious, Wu proved to be an adept state builder and entrepreneur. He continued to exploit the mines opened by the Ming loyalists and (illegally) minted his own coinage, which circulated as far away as the Chinese coast. He stepped up the manufacture of weapons. He also engaged in a lucrative tea-horse trade with Tibet and Mongolia, cultivating ties with the Fourth Dalai Lama.⁴⁶ Again, Wu covered up these actions and told the Qing court that he was engaged in combatting Mongol raids on the frontier, requesting additional funds from the government to cover his costs. In fact, the 9 million silver taels he requested annually for his operations were sufficient to sustain 375,000 cavalry troops at official pay rates! Additionally, Wu was empowered

Macmillan, 2013), 102; and Oxnam, *Ruling from Horseback*, 141-145.

45 *Qingshilu*, 60 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2023), 2734. Hereafter *QSL*. Also see *NCZ*, 1.5a-b; *TWL*, 3878-3885, and *QSG*, 3290.

46 Deng Ruling, "Wu Sangui pan Qing qijian diwu bei Dalai Lama tongshi shimo," *Zhongguo zangxue* 1998.4 (1998), 16-25, and Z. Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970).

to appoint his own officials in the regions under his jurisdiction, a practice that became known as “Selection by the Prince of the West” (*xixuan*). Officials who protested Wu’s actions by formal impeachment found themselves dismissed or even exiled as Wu used his extensive contacts in the government to have them disciplined.⁴⁷ At the same time Wu sent lavish gifts to the court, even offering Kangxi five tame elephants at one point early in his reign, which the emperor refused.⁴⁸

Indeed, his many decades of service in the Ming and Qing militaries, along with his generous personality, had made Wu a popular and well-connected figure. His son, Wu Yingxiong, whom it will be recalled was married to the aunt of the Kangxi emperor, remained in Beijing most of the time, spying and advocating for his father. Wu’s former subordinates were posted in prominent positions all over the empire. It was said that “his stables were like a forest” and he was the richest man in China. He built magnificent palaces and gardens in Yunnan, expanding the former Ming imperial palace in Kunming.⁴⁹ He also donated money to temples, making himself a patron like his civilian counterparts. He shared this largesse with his followers, treating them to lavish banquets and giving them expensive gifts. For example, when his commander Wang Fuchen (d.1681) departed for a new position in Shaanxi, Wu gave him a gift of 20,000 taels “for expenses on the road and to support his family.” And another subordinate received 17,000 taels as a wedding gift.⁵⁰ He also continued to lavish gifts upon his aging concubine Chen Yuanyuan, building her a separate garden residence, even as he packed his harem with younger beauties acquired from all across China, much to the consternation of his wife.⁵¹ When the time came, Wu would call in his favors, however.

Wu’s counterparts in the southeast operated similarly. The Geng in Fujian appropriated the lands of commoners and redistributed them to their own followers and relatives. Horse pastures were created from some of these lands.

47 See *QSL*, 2588, regarding an early impeachment of Wu Sangui when he was serving in Sichuan. Also see *NCZ*, 1.3b-4a.

48 *QSG*, 99.

49 *Cangbian shanqiao*, “Wu ni quwang lu,” 1722-1723.

50 *TWL*, 3889.

51 *NCZ*, 1.8a-9b.

Peasants were forbidden from digging wells or using lands near these pastures. They established monopolies on key commodities such as salt and took cuts of taxes and commercial transactions while also creating a variety of new exactions such as taxes on the butchering of pigs. They also engaged in widespread loansharking to “help” their subjects keep up with their payments. Thugs were hired to travel the countryside to “harvest” wealth, especially pearls. Families who could not pay were forced to sell their daughters into prostitution. And they also continued to carry out illicit trade with pirates, including agents of the Zheng regime on Taiwan, even as they claimed they required extra funds to battle the pirates (which they did do, when it suited them). Such activities allegedly brought in over a million taels of silver annually. And Geng gained continued trust from the central authorities by capturing Xiamen and Jinmen from the Zheng clan and driving Zheng Jing to Taiwan in 1663.⁵²

Their Shang neighbors were equally entrepreneurial, levying all manner of special taxes and surcharges and “opening mines” which brought in over a million taels annually.⁵³ As with their counterparts, they appropriated lands from commoners and former Ming officials, allocating some to their troops and designating others as “princely estates.” Trade monopolies were established on vital commodities and surcharges added to essentials such as sea salt. Like the Geng, they too, participated vigorously in trade, particularly with Southeast Asia, despite the maritime bans. As with Wu Sangui, Shang Kexi was considered one of the richest men in the empire, with locals claiming, “the wealth of the Prince who pacifies the south exceeds that of everyone under Heaven (*Pingnan zhi fu jia tianxia*).” To underscore their prominence and again in emulation of the traditional gentry they supplanted, the Shang also extended their ties to local society by lavishly patronizing Buddhist temples and sponsoring religious exchanges with monks in Vietnam.⁵⁴

By the late 1660s the economic costs to the Qing were staggering, with the costs of subventing the Three Feudatories exceeding 20 million taels a year, a

52 Teng, *Sanfan shilue*, 890-899, and *QSG*, 100.

53 As Harry Miller has observed, such mines were not necessarily literal mines for extracting precious metals or salt. It was also a euphemism for shaking down the wealthy. See Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572-1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

54 Li Zhiting, at el., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 292-309.



Fig. 3 Shang Kexi drawn by Johan Nieuhof in 1655

figure that sometimes exceeded the entire tax income of the young empire and hampered its reconstruction efforts.⁵⁵ There were increasing calls to remove the feudatories and the young Kangxi emperor slowly implemented changes to curtail their power, particularly that of Wu Sangui, by retaking the throne's power of appointment of provincial officials to key posts. In fact, in 1667 Wu tested the court by requesting permission to retire on the grounds of poor health and Kangxi was leaning towards accepting it but demurred after requests came in from the commanders of Yunnan and Guizhou pleading that Wu remain in his post because of military exigencies.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, when Kangxi finally took the reins of power from the regents in 1669 the stage was set for the final act of this drama.

⁵⁵ As a benchmark, the tax revenue of the empire in 1662 was around 26 million taels. See *QSG*, 99.

⁵⁶ *QSL*, 2911. Also see Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan*, 632-633, and L.D. Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule, 1661-1684* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 75-76.

Riding the Tiger

Over the next several years, as Kangxi consolidated his own authority, the feudatory princes entered their waning years. He also tried to placate the feudatory princes with gifts and special positions and titles for their offspring. Geng Jimao died in 1671, passing his post along to his son Jingzhong, who was married to a daughter of the Manchu Prince Haoge, eldest son of Hong Taiji.⁵⁷ Wu Sanghui's son, Wu Yingxiong, remained in Beijing, though Sangui had urged him to return to Yunnan once he began seriously considering military action to retain his perquisites. Yingxiong declined on the grounds of not wanting to raise suspicion of his father and because he apparently believed he could serve as an intermediary between Sangui and the throne in the likely advent of hostilities. In 1671 Shang Kexi requested that his eldest surviving son (of a whopping 32 children), Shang Zhixin, be allowed come to Guangdong to administer affairs due to his own ailing health. Zhixin was also married into the imperial family, but he also had a reputation for drunkenness and extreme cruelty. He regularly beat servants, abducted women for his personal pleasure and roamed the streets of Guangzhou intimidating the locals and feeding those who offended him to his pack of vicious dogs. By 1673 Shang Kexi was ready to retire to his old home in Liaodong and, upon the advice of some of his senior aides, he replaced Zhixin as heir with his younger brother, Shang Zhixiao.⁵⁸

Shang Kexi's retirement request was the straw that broke the camel's back. Hearing news of Shang's request, Wu Sangui and Geng Jingzhong submitted their own requests in the summer of 1673 to test the court's resolve. And while Shang Kexi's request itself was sincere in that he did plan on retiring to his old home in Liaodong, he intended for his fiefdom to pass along to his designated heir. The court deliberated the matter vigorously. For his part Kangxi was of a mind to accept, but he was in the minority. Only two high ministers backed him, with the others arguing that accepting the retirement requests would certainly trigger a civil war. In the end, supported by his grandmother, the young emperor decided to accept the resignations, appointing officials to travel to the feudato-

57 *QSG*, 103. Geng Jingzhong's biography can be found in *ECQP*, 176-177; for Haoge see *ECQP*, 208-209.

58 Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 322-350, and *QSG*, 3294-3295.



Fig. 4. Shang Zhixin (son of Shang Kexi) Scanned from *Qingshi tudian* ["Illustrated compendium of Qing history"], vol. 3, *Kangxi chao xia* ["The Kangxi reign, part 1"] (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002, p. 202)

ries to facilitate the process at once.⁵⁹ His reasoning was simple: whether or not he accepted the resignations, a civil war loomed on the horizon. His spies had already informed him that Wu Sangui in particular had been training troops in secret for years. It was better to take the fight to them now than to allow them to continue to grow in power.⁶⁰

Kangxi's assessment proved prescient. Alerted by his own spies, on the 21st day of the 11th month of 1673, Wu rose in outright rebellion. Prior to this Wu had consulted with his top generals and even conducted a ceremony honoring the Ming claimant Yongli, whom Wu himself had executed, building a shrine for Yongli in Kunming.⁶¹ Moreover, Wu initially claimed to be rebelling on behalf of the long lost Third Ming Prince who was the son of the last Ming Emperor Chongzhen, claiming to have sequestered him for some three decades. Thus, Wu did not initially declare himself emperor but rather gave himself the title of Grand Marshal of the Realm (*Tianxia du zhaotao dayuanshuai*), though he also designated the following year the first year of a new Zhou dynasty rather than a restored Ming. Wu then sent personal messages to former subordinates and potential allies across the empire, while also issuing a general call to arms that delineated the various crimes perpetrated by the Qing against the Han people over the previous thirty years.⁶² Wu immediately killed the governor of Yunnan, Zhu Guozhi, who refused to join the uprising, and after a banquet and a rousing address to his troops, he set out towards the northeast.

Though many regional officials answered Wu's call and some committed suicide, others hastily send word to the capital. The Qing court was rocked by the news and the high officials commenced pointing fingers at those who had advocated for accepting the retirements, but Kangxi assumed full responsibility and set about contriving a plan to protect the capital and constrain the rebels. His first priority was to secure the capital, and he designated the city of Jing-

⁵⁹ QSG, 103.

⁶⁰ Zhao Yi, *Pingding sannu shulue* in Li Chunlong and Liu Jimao, comps., *Zhengxu Yunnan beizheng zhijing xuan dianjiao* (Kunming: Yunnan minzu daxue, 2000), 172. Hereafter PDSNSL.

⁶¹ QSG, 3291.

⁶² Most copies of this call to arms were confiscated and destroyed by the Qing but a version of it made its way to Japan and can be found in Hayashi Shunsho and Hayashi Nobuatsu, eds., *Kai Hantai* 3 vols. (Tokyo: Toyo bunko, 1958), 33-39.



Fig. 5. Map of Feudatories' Rebellions

zhou on the banks of the Yangzi River to be the lynchpin of his defenses. He also dispatched commanders to secure the western approaches to the capital from whence the peasant rebel armies had attacked several decades before and rescinded his acceptance of the retirements of Shang Kexi and Geng Jingzhong, hoping to retain their loyalty, while also sending letters to other former subordinates and cronies of Wu Sangui around the empire, reminding them of the many imperial favors they and their families enjoyed.⁶³ Kangxi then appointed several of his imperial relatives to high military posts, following standard dynastic practice.⁶⁴

63 For an overview and assessment of Kangxi's strategic plans, see Kang Deqi, "Luelun Kangxi di pingding Sanfan zhanzheng zhanlue zhidao sheng de jige wenti," *Qingshi yanjiu tongxun* 57 (1986), 14-18. The official Qing campaign history of the rebellion is Ledehun, Li Wei, and Han Tan, comps., *Pingding sannan fanglue* 3 vols. (Taibei: Taiwan yinhang, 1970).

64 *QSL*, 3195-3199.

Wu's troops were experienced and their morale was high and they quickly pushed northeast through Guizhou and Guangxi, where Sun Yanling took the opportunity to liquidate several troublesome subordinates and eventually join Wu's cause, albeit rather tepidly. By early 1674 the rebels had steamrolled their way all the way to Changsha in strategically vital Hunan province, ironically prefiguring the early months of the great Taiping Rebellion (1851-1866) some two centuries later. Seeing Wu's stunning successes, the bandwagoning commenced and the military leaders of Sichuan cast their lot with the rebels, quickly seizing control over the entire province.⁶⁵ In the third month of 1674 the strategically important city of Yuezhou, located on the eastern shore of Dongting near the Yangzi River, was captured, as its commander simply handed the city over without a fight. These successes aroused Geng Jingzhong and he joined the rebellion as well, seizing the local governor-general and throwing him in prison as the governor himself surrendered. So, within just four months Wu Sangui was in control of six southern and western provinces, and the Qing were on their heels, scrambling to mount some form of defense.

To make matters worse, Beijing was swirling with rumors that the old boogeyman, the Third Ming Prince, was indeed alive and well and in the city, waiting for loyalists to rise up in support of his cause. A brief revolt of Manchu household slaves erupted under one Yang Qilong and even though it was quelled in short order, the Qing court was unnerved and reports persisted that other seditious elements remained at large and Yang Qilong himself slipped through the Qing dragnet.⁶⁶ Many officials believed that Wu Yingxiong was somehow connected to the rebels and some called for his execution, though the emperor held off for the time being, hoping to make use of him as an intermediary and bargaining chip with his father.⁶⁷

As if this wasn't enough, a disgruntled Chahar Mongol named Burni plotted his own revolt in revenge for a previous slight against his father and numerous troop mutinies broke out along the Yangzi River and in the northwest. Burni's uprising was crushed in a surprisingly quick campaign wherein the ragtag forces were motivated by somewhat exaggerated reports of the great wealth they could

65 *PDSNSL*, 172, and *QSL*, 3200-3201.

66 *QSG*, 104; *PDSNSL*, 173, and *QSL*, 3201-3202.

67 *QSL*, 3217.

plunder from his family and Kangxi made new appointments to stabilize the military fronts as several of the Manchu commanders initially deployed were either defeated or too passive.⁶⁸ Supply depots and relay stations were established at regular intervals stretching from Shandong to Shaanxi. The emperor himself read daily reports and frequently visited the staging area at Nanyuan, just south of the capital, after his ministers dissuaded him from going to the front to direct matters.⁶⁹ He also ordered Shang Kexi to head west to battle Sun Yanling and the rebels in Guangxi. Kangxi promulgated a condemnation of Wu Sangui as well, detailing his many crimes and stripping him of his titles.⁷⁰

As it turns out, this was Wu Sangui's moment, and he failed to seize it. Several of his advisers urged Wu to push north of the Yangzi and strike for Beijing as soon as possible, but Wu instead paused and sent a letter to Kangxi offering to split the empire and urging him to relocate the Qing court back to Manchuria.⁷¹ This finally raised the ire of Kangxi to the extent that he ordered the execution of Wu Yingxiong by slow slicing as well as the execution of the other members of the Wu clan in Beijing above the age of five.⁷² Sangui was despondent at the news, weeping and drinking and allegedly exclaiming, "Now I've truly mounted the tiger!"⁷³ Kangxi also pronounced a death sentence for Sun Yanling. But despite the fact that Geng Jingzhong had also joined the rebellion, the emperor held out the possibility that other members of the Geng clan might still be spared since it was Wu who was the ringleader, though Jingzhong was formally stripped of his title and denounced as a traitor.⁷⁴

The question remains as to why Wu did not strike for Beijing in the spring of 1674. Some argue that he hoped to save the life of his son. Others suggest that he feared engaging the vaunted Manchu cavalry on terrain that favored them around Beijing, or that he lacked sufficient boats to cross the Yangzi and was concerned about having his supply lines cut. Another line of argument is that

68 On Burni, see *PDSNSL*, 173, and *ECQP*, 605-606.

69 *QSG*, 104-105.

70 *QSL*, 3215.

71 *NCZ*, 1.14a-b.

72 See *QSG*, 104 and Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan*, 428-433.

73 *TWL*, 3904.

74 *QSL*, 3216-3219, and *NCZ*, 2.20b-21b.

he was satisfied with his conquests to that point and did not want to risk losing everything. After all, in the first place his ambitions were not in fact to control the whole empire, he merely wished to retain his fiefdom in the salubrious environment of the southwest and live out his remaining years enjoying wine, women, and song. He may have sincerely believed his position at this point was strong enough to effect such an arrangement with the youthful monarch. Wu even enlisted the Dalai Lama in his negotiations, an act that would have negative repercussions for that august figure and his entire line later on.⁷⁵ Additionally, there was the real possibility that Wu's allies in the west might push through the Qing defenses there and press Beijing from that direction, making his own task easier. And even though Wu's old compatriot Wang Fuchen in Shaanxi had thus far remained loyal to the Qing, he continued to press Wang to join the insurrection. Indeed, this eventuality did come to pass in early 1675 as Wang, allegedly frustrated by his treatment at the hands of the Manchu noble sent to assist him in fighting the rebels, was embroiled in a mutiny and cast his lots with the insurgents.⁷⁶ In any event, Wu decided not to press his advantage at this juncture and his reticence allowed the conflict to turn into a war of attrition that would ultimately favor the Qing with its vastly greater resource base and centralized leadership.⁷⁷

Through the summer of 1674 the forces skirmished along the Yangzi as Geng Jingzhong's forces seized cities in the southeast in Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces. The Qing were loath to lose these regions, which constituted the rice bowl of the empire and Kangxi delegated still more imperial princes to their defense and recovery. More threatening still was the fact that Geng, partly at Wu Sangui's instigation had managed to solicit the support of Zheng Jing for the rebel cause. In fact, Zheng had been pushing Wu towards just this course of action for years. Fortunately for the Qing, Geng's arrogance undermined the alliance as he reneged on certain representations made to Zheng and the two fell to fighting amongst themselves intermittently until Geng finally surrendered to the Qing towards the end of 1676.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *QSG*, 3291.

⁷⁶ *ECQP*, 620, and *NCZ* 2.10b-11b.

⁷⁷ A good analysis of Wu's strategic dilemma in 1674 and his mistakes can be found in Zhang, *Wu Sangui zhengzhuan*, 292-298.

⁷⁸ On the discord between Geng and Zheng and its contribution to the defeat of the rebellion, see

Meanwhile, in the northwest Wang Fuchen's entry into the conflict initially bore fruit as he assumed control over Pingliang and other rebel leaders seized Lanzhou, Suide, and Yan'an, bringing much of Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Gansu provinces into the rebel orbit. Wu Sangui sent lavish gifts to the defectors and issued orders for the rebel leaders in Sichuan to assist them. Luckily for the Qing, several other competent regional commanders, including some who had formerly served under Wu Sangui, remained loyal and they managed to stem the tide, quickly retaking lost cities, driving Wang Fuchen back towards Pingliang and securing the border between Shaanxi and Sichuan, thereby protecting the western approach to the capital. These acts in 1675 contributed to the development of the stalemate in central China. In the southeast, the action seesawed between Geng and Qing forces, with the latter gradually pushing the Geng back. By this time Kangxi was firm in his conviction that Wu Sangui posed the greatest military and political threat, so he ordered his commanders to whittle away Wu's support by attacking his allies both militarily and via generous surrender terms, which admittedly the Qing often did not honor after the fact. But this was how war had been waged in China since ancient times and for all his decrying of the military classics and their utility, Kangxi proved an astute student of their teachings.⁷⁹

For his part, even though he might be characterized as a cooperative adversary, Wu Sangui proved quite intractable in his defensive positions in Hunan and his experienced commanders inflicted successive heavy defeats upon the Qing. For one, his troops were well-equipped with firearms, having taken over the old manufacturing facilities in the southwest. They had a fair number of ships and a formidable flotilla that patrolled the rivers and lakes of central China, supplying the troops and thwarting several major offensives by the Qing, causing Kangxi to repeatedly replace his senior commanders and berate many of his own relatives for cowardice and incompetence. Moreover, the rebels brought the fighting spirit and tactics of the southwestern minority troops, long lauded as

Huang Yuzhai, "Ming Yanpingwang shizi Zheng Jing zai Min-Yue de kang Qing yu Sanfan de bengkui," *Taiwan wenxian* 17.1 (1966), 109-137, and *QSG*, 2365. On Geng's surrender to the Qing, see *NCZ*, 2.26a-27b.

79 Later in his life Kangxi famously dismissed the military classics as superstitious rubbish, maintaining that practical experience was all that mattered. See P. Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900-1795* (London: Routledge, 2005), 158.

martial races, to bear. They excelled in mountain and guerrilla warfare, and they used elephants for shock effect and for destroying city walls. Their considerable abilities prompted Kangxi to consult with his Jesuit advisers and step up cannon manufacturing capabilities and to greatly expand the Qing riverine navy.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, up to this point, the Shang clan had remained loyal to the Qing, operating primarily in the west, fighting the forces of Wu and Sun Yanling. But when the tide started turning against them and their capital of Guangzhou was imperiled by the rebels from all sides, Shang Zhixin decided to defy his ailing father, now on his deathbed, and accepted a title of duke from Wu Sangui and joined the rebels.⁸¹ For the next six months the rebel cause was invigorated as by this point the Geng and Zheng had resolved their disputes and were working together to a limited extent. However, in June of 1676, Wang Fuchen, who had been besieged for months in Pingliang, surrendered to the Qing and they were now free to throw more resources into the campaign in the southeast. The Qing commander Giyesu (1645-1697), who had been negotiating with Geng Jingzhong for more than a year, finally convinced him to return his allegiance with provisions for full reinstatement of his title and privileges upon the rendering of meritorious service for the duration of the conflict.⁸² The defections of Wang Fuchen and Geng Jingzhong, along with his anger at Wu Sangui making appointments in areas he considered under his jurisdiction would soon convince Shang Zhixin to revise his own stance and he opened negotiations with the Qing to return his allegiance as well, seeking the same basic provisions enjoyed by the others, and formally submitting at Guangzhou on the first day of the fifth month, 1677.⁸³ Despite this reversion, however, Zhixin subsequently prevaricated when ordered to take up arms against the rebel forces, and did not actively campaign for the Qing until after the death of Wu Sangui in 1678.

80 See M.Y.H. Chung, "River Transport and the Effectiveness of the Qing Artillery Corps during the Ming-Qing Transition," *Journal of Chinese Military History* 12.1 (2023), 40-62.

81 Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 576.

82 For a biography of Giyesu, see *ECQP*, 179-181. The official account of his pacification campaigns is held in the National Palace Museum of Taiwan. See *Heshuo Kang qinwang pingding si sheng dagong tu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum Collection, Kangxi era, 1662-1722).

83 Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 576. Family records suggest that Shang never truly rebelled, but just pretended to join Wu, secretly communicating with the Qing all along. See the discussion in Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 581-611.

Defeat and Retreat

Thus, by early 1677 the walls were closing in around Wu Sangui. In addition to the reversions of the Geng and Shang clans to Qing allegiance, Wu had harbored suspicions about the loyalty of Sun Yanling in Guangxi. Sun had proven to be a somewhat less than useful ally as he was a fickle leader and poor military commander often at odds with his own subordinates, provoking mutiny. So, under the auspices of conferring with him over military matters, Wu had him assassinated in early 1677 and took direct control over Guangxi via his own commanders.⁸⁴ Things were not much better in Sichuan, where Wu's allies, though not defeated, had failed to push back north and east and were on the defensive against the Qing counterattacks. Plus, the constant warfare in central China meant that the rebels' resources were stretched thin and they were reduced to forceful exactions to keep their troops in the field. Additionally, bolstered by the Geng and Shang, the Qing managed to drive Zheng Jing back to Taiwan.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, frustrated by the passivity and ineffectiveness of his Manchu commanders, many of whom were his relatives, Kangxi increasingly turned to Han Chinese officers. His reasoning was twofold. On the one hand, many of them were from the regions they fought in and were more experienced in infantry warfare than the Manchus, whose forte lay in cavalry operations. He also hoped that such commanders might better be able to relate to the troops and the common folk, many of whom still harbored anti-Manchu sentiments. Moreover, since these commanders could not rely on blood for their positions, they were more likely to fully exert themselves for promotions and rewards. In essence he flipped the classic Chinese stratagem of using barbarians to fight barbarians to one of using the Han to fight the Han. This ended up bearing fruit not only during the rebellion itself, but also later on as the melding of Han and Manchu tactics and capabilities creating arguably the most successful conquest military apparatus in the long history of imperial China.

As losing rebels often do too late, Wu Sangui finally decided to formally enthrone himself at the city of Hengzhou in Hunan on the first day of the third month of 1678, taking the reign title Zhaowu and renaming the city Dingtian-

84 QSG, 106.

85 PDSNSL, 174.

fu (Rectification of Heaven). The omens preceding Wu's enthronement were mixed, and insult was added to injury when Wu donated a hefty sum to a local temple, hoping to gain a favorable augur from its resident albino turtle, which was said to have great powers of prognostication. The turtle was placed on a map of China and three times it approached the Yangzi River, only to turn around and walk back towards the south.⁸⁶ While Wu was not completely convinced of the veracity of such predictions, it was not the auspicious result he hoped for. Wu nonetheless appointed high civil officials, granted additional titles to his military commanders and ordered the minting of new coinage and the scheduling of regular civil service examinations in areas still under his jurisdiction. He also planned a breakout offensive for the summer. But he would soon fall seriously ill and died just five months later, shortly after the death of his wife. The cause of death is related differently in various sources, but he apparently had at least one major seizure, along with dysentery, and general mental fatigue.⁸⁷

Wu's surviving commanders debated their course of action. They were essentially divided into two camps, one favoring a last furious assault that might somehow demoralize the Qing and perhaps attract help from the west and the Zheng by sea; and another favoring a retreat and stand in the southwest. Due in part to the desire of the courtiers surrounding Wu's heir, who was his grandson Wu Shifan, the latter course was adopted, though Wu's putative nephew, Wu Yingqi (who was actually his illegitimate son), also intrigued for the throne. Wu Shifan was enthroned in Guiyang, but before long his handlers convinced him to retreat southwest to Kunming rather than head northeast to his grandfather's capital and lead the war in person.⁸⁸ In any event, in late 1678-79 the rebel defenses in Hunan collapsed quickly and by the end of 1679, the Qing were mounting a four-pronged advance through Sichuan as well, closing the net on Wu's remaining forces. But the latter were now on what Sunzi dubbed "death ground" and they fought like it, inflicting heavy casualties upon the Qing with their still superior firepower and making use of the mountainous terrain of the southwest and their elephant cavalry to brake the Qing advance. It took two full

86 *TWL*, 3914-3915.

87 On Wu's illness and his final days, see Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan*, 567-582, and Zhang, *Wu Sangui zhengzhuan*, 331-337.

88 *QSG*, 3292.

years for the Qing to slog their way to the gates of Kunming and even once the city was encircled and fully besieged, there were serious reverses in Sichuan to the north that prolonged the conflict.⁸⁹

Kunming finally fell after an eight-month siege towards the end of 1681. Wu Shifan killed himself just before the city fell to Qing forces, who looted the rebel capital despite warnings from their commanders to refrain from such activities. Officially the Qing retrieved Shifan's corpse as well as one allegedly belonging to Wu Sangui for desecration by quartering, but in fact Sangui's body had been spirited away to Guizhou, along with Chen Yuanyuan, who was escorted there by Wu's general Ma Bao. She would be buried beside Wu after her death some years later.⁹⁰ Most of the various rebel leaders granted clemency by Kangxi were brought to Beijing under various pretexts and executed, despite Kangxi's promises.⁹¹ Wang Fuchen committed suicide en route to his "audience" with the emperor, correctly predicting his fate. The feudatories were then all dissolved, though some younger relatives and members of the Shang clan in particular who had remained loyal to the Qing were given honorific posts. Kangxi himself would later pay a visit to Shang Kexi's grave in Liaodong.⁹²

The Qing court, particularly Kangxi himself, was jubilant at the news of the defeat of the rebels and the state's victory was announced to the empire. The official records of the campaign were compiled into an entirely new type of history called the *fangle*, or campaign history, which would become the standard method of commemorating military victories for posterity for the duration of the dynasty.⁹³ The youthful monarch had good reason to be pleased. After all, he had masterminded the government campaign, helping articulate the dispensation of supply lines and relay stations, making most key appointments, visiting the staging grounds south of Beijing several times, and formulating the overall

89 See *PDSNSL*, 174-176, and Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui dazhuan*, 583-602.

90 See David Leffman, "A Remote Chinese village kept a Courtesan's secret for Centuries—Now its Founding Mother takes centre stage," *South China Morning Post Magazine* (May 10, 2019).

91 *NCZ*, 2.28b, and *QSG*, 3294.

92 Li Zhiting, et al., *Shang Kexi zhuan*, 438-443.

93 On the connections between the creation of *fangle* and Manchu martial culture, see Ma Yachen, "Manzhou shangwu wenhua zai jianzhi: Yi Kangxi chuangfa fangle wei yi," *Xin shixue* 30.1-2 (2019), 55-122.

strategy of fixing Wu Sangui in place while isolating and co-opting his allies.⁹⁴ He also reached out to the Han scholar-officials and generals, convincing them that their best chance for long-term stability and career advancement lay with the Qing rather than the rebels. Simultaneously he eliminated much, though not all, of the factionalism and cronyism that had afflicted the Manchu elites over the previous three decades of the conquest.

Aftermath and Repercussions

Yet one major issue remained unresolved: that of Taiwan. Zheng Jing was still alive and his presence threatened Qing sovereignty along the southeast coast and undermined the dynasty's legitimacy in Southeast Asia as the Zheng regime still had aspirations of maritime hegemony in the region. In fact, for decades Shi Lang (1621-1696), a former subordinate of Zheng Chenggong, had clamored for a punitive expedition to fully bring Taiwan into the Qing orbit.⁹⁵ Shi defected to the Qing after his rift with the Zheng and was even appointed to lead punitive expeditions against Taiwan in the 1660s, though all were called off for various reasons ranging from poor weather conditions to disagreements over strategy with other officials. Shi was eventually kicked up to an advisory position in Beijing, where he languished from 1668-1681, constantly regaling Kangxi with tales of his own prowess and pushing him for another crack at Taiwan. For his part, Zheng Jing had entertained talks with the Qing intermittently for nearly two decades even as he joined the rebellion, seeking a status commensurate with Korea or Ryukyu as an independent tributary vassal king of the Qing based on Taiwan.⁹⁶

This was simply untenable from the Qing perspective and when the war with the Three Feudatories ended, Shi raised his voice again, arguing that Taiwan was strategically vital to Qing interests and if they did not take it, some other potential foe, such as Japan or the Dutch, might seize it. Initially, the emperor's response was tepid. But Zheng Jing died in March of 1681, and the resultant

94 *NCZ*, 1.16a.

95 On Shi Lang, see *ECQP*, 541-542, and Shi Weiqing, *Shi Lang pingzhuan* (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1987).

96 *QSG*, 2365.

power struggle left his twelve year old son, Zheng Keshuang, in nominal control of the island. This was enough to convince Kangxi to grant Shi Lang his opportunity.

Shi was made the Naval Commander-in-Chief of Fujian and directed to implement his long percolating plans. He carefully amassed troops and supplies but clashed with other regional officials regarding both the timing and execution of the assault. There were multiple postponements and truncated expeditions. Called on to intervene, the emperor finally bestowed full military authority upon Shi and he sailed for Taiwan in early July of 1683. Though his fleet initially suffered a defeat at the hands of the Zheng commander Lu Guoxuan, Shi regrouped and scored a smashing victory by employing what he described as the “Five Plum Flower Attack Formation” in a naval clash near the Pesacadores.⁹⁷ At this point he decided not to launch an all-out assault on Taiwan proper, but rather to employ suasion and political pressure. The Zheng leaders considered setting off for the Philippines and attempting to continue their resistance there, but Shi’s conciliatory language and fairly generous surrender terms, which were contingent upon the Zheng vacating Taiwan, cutting their hair in Manchu fashion and resettling in Beijing, persuaded the longtime holdouts to at last submit to Qing rule. Shi Lang would subsequently oversee the formal integration of Taiwan into the Chinese empire for the first time in its history though it was attached to Fujian, not becoming its own province until 1885.

In the wake of the conquest of Taiwan the Qing not only had control of the South China Sea for the first time in its history, they were also poised to expand their conquests into the southwest and Central Asia. Kangxi would subsequently become more closely involved in the politics of these areas and both Tibet and Xinjiang would come under Qing rule over the next several decades as the Qing combined Manchu military prowess and steppe warfare tactics with Chinese bureaucratic organization and superior firepower, bringing these areas under central control to an extent unprecedented in Chinese history. Through these actions the Qing would establish, more or less, the territorial boundaries that the modern People’s Republic considers inalienable to the modern nation. The Qing would not be seriously challenged by another military foe until the

97 Shi’s own account of the campaign to take Taiwan is detailed in Shi Lang, *Jinghai jishi* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1983).

Opium War of 1839-42 and the subsequent Taiping Rebellion (1851-1866), which mirrored the Three Feudatories' Revolt in fascinating ways. Among other things, it was this war that once again raised the specter of anti-Manchu sentiment amongst the Han which had largely lay dormant for two centuries. To combat this, the Qing leaders once again turned to a talented coterie of Chinese officials to crush the rebels and produced histories praising the Han loyalists of the seventeenth-century.⁹⁸ And while these officials succeeded admirably in that task, they could not stem the tide of Qing defeat, though the China that has emerged under the Communists once more aspires to reach the glory of the high Qing with repercussions for the rest of the world.

98 On the Taiping Rebellion and its similarities to earlier conflicts in the Qing, see K.M. Swope, *Struggle for Empire: The Battles of Zuo Zongtang* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2024).

Rebellion and Anti-Revolutionary Warfare in Rural France

by ALAN FORREST

The eighteenth-century French countryside had a well-merited reputation for lawlessness and insurgency, one that long pre-dated the French Revolution. A spirit of rebellion was deeply engrained in many local communities and posed a challenge to public order which the *maréchaussée*, the force entrusted with the policing of France's roads and markets, was ill-equipped to combat. It took contrasting forms in different parts of the country to reflect the local economy and the opportunities offered by the nature of the terrain. In mountainous regions like the Massif Central and the foothills of the Alps, rocks, caves and isolated shepherds' huts provided the fugitive with concealment and shelter, while the pastoral economy with its dispersed patterns of habitation served to encourage a spirit of rebellion and autarchy. Along the coastline fugitives could take refuge in the treacherous marshlands of the Landes or the Gironde or in the North along what is now the Belgian border. And in broad swathes of Brittany and the Loire valley they could hide from customs officers or taxmen in the dense forests and thickets that typified the area. Frontier regions were especially appealing to those defying the law, not least those criss-crossed by hill tracks known only to the local population, a terrain offering a multitude of hiding places and safe houses and thwarting the best efforts of troops or police to cut off their escape. The Pyrenean border with Spain, for instance, was notoriously porous, allowing fugitives to escape easily into the villages and valleys on the Spanish side where they could merge with their fellow Basques or Catalans.¹

1 Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 13-22. For the history of the Pyrenean frontier during the Revolution, see Simon F. Reeve, *The French Catalan People in Revolution and War, 1789-95* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), and for the Empire see Shota Fujihara, *Repenser la centralisation napoléonienne : les Pyrénées, 1799-1815* (Toulouse: Presses Universi-

Roots of Peasant Insurgency

Much of agricultural work was seasonal in nature, with the consequence that many in the rural population – day labourers and sharecroppers, but also pedlars, former soldiers and itinerant beggars – were driven by poverty to leave their homes when the crops had been harvested and take to the roads in search of employment where they could find it, in towns, on building sites, or on public works. Respect for the law was a luxury few could afford; they found casual work where they could, and begged or stole when there was none. ‘The line between crime and economic migration’, as Michael Broers reminds us, ‘was as precarious as the lives that drove peasants to transhumance’.² They smuggled salt and tobacco; they robbed government mails; and they attacked the carters who were taking grain to the urban markets of Lyon, Marseille, and especially Paris. Rural France understood their plight and was slow to condemn: it was all an integral part of what Olwen Hufton has called the ‘economy of makeshifts’ that enabled the poor to survive.³ It was a fragile economy even in good years, and when harvests failed desperation set in, often leading to violence and disorder.

The brigand bands that formed in the French countryside were not ephemeral groups that could be dispersed after a few months. The most notorious of them, like the Bande d’Orgères that devastated the roads of the Beauce, around Orléans, remained at liberty for many decades after they first appeared in the 1740s and 1750s, and they included in their ranks entire families of men, women and children, outlaws who continued to defy the authorities while benefiting from the tolerance – and at times active support – of the local community. If they terrorized the highways leading to the capital, they were careful not to rob local people but to restrict their attacks to merchants from outside the area passing through on their way to the Paris markets. The Beauce and Sologne, as Arthur Young noted when he toured the region on the eve of the Revolution, had some of the most degrading living conditions he had encountered in France, a ‘wretched country’ with primitive farming methods which struck him as the

taires du Midi, 2025).

2 Michael Broers, *Napoleon’s Other War: Bandits, Rebels and Their Pursuers in the Age of Revolution* (Witney: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 5.

3 Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 69.

very epitome of rural backwardness.⁴ During the Revolution, in the 1790s, the brigand bands quickly adapted to the times, taking advantage of the social upheaval to find new victims. They were particularly active in the extreme winter of 1795, when snow covered much of the countryside and they were aided by the long hours of darkness; and when the government drew up the final indictment against them at the end of the decade, the devastation they had caused became graphically clear. It listed 95 crimes that had been committed by members of the band, among them 75 murders, as well as numerous cases of attempted murder, rape, robbery, forgery and arson, and prominent among their victims were shopkeepers, cattle merchants, millers and traveling salesmen. For much of the century there was nothing political in their choice of victims; they were simple criminals. But their activity had political consequences. It destabilized the communities where they operated, and spread alarm and terror throughout the neighbouring countryside.⁵

Other, more deep seated discontents helped to drive the rural population to insurgency. These extended beyond economic issues to matters which they associated with their freedom and human dignity and to what were perceived as the shared interests of the community. Villagers were prepared to resist authority, to rebel, as Jean Nicolas observed, in defence of their values and their independence, which he described not as revolutionary, but as insurrectionary, evidence of 'la France rébellionnaire', a tradition of rebellion that lasted from the Fronde to the Revolution.⁶ Peasants would turn against those whom they judged to be intruders in their neighbourhoods or as outsiders trying to impose new rules and regulations, and riots became symptoms of solidarity against the demands of the seigneurie or the imposition of the *taille*. They would resist royal taxes and oppose any attempts to deprive them of access to common grazing. They would take the law into their own hands in defence of traditional hunting and gleaning rights, pitting them against landlords or richer farmers. And they would defend their village elders and their priests when they came under attack. Villagers

4 Arthur Young, *Travels in France during the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789* (London: George Bell, 1899), p. 19.

5 Richard Cobb, 'La Bande d'Orgères', in *Reactions to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 198-99.

6 Jean Nicolas, *La rébellion française. mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, 1661-1789* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2002).

prized their autonomy. They united in opposition to modernisers, reformers and government officials sent out from nearby towns, and in the same way mountain communities turned on the more prosperous denizens of the plain. Often their mood was deeply conservative, clinging to their traditional practices or religious beliefs when these came under attack from the authorities. In the mountains of the Cévennes, for instance, in the early years of the eighteenth century fanatical Protestant villagers known as Camisards were driven by government repression to open rebellion in defence of their faith. Following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, they were hounded by Louis XIV's government, determined to extirpate the last traces of Protestantism from the region. The peasants were terrorized by a massive campaign of *dragonnades*, billeting troops on Protestant households, banishing their pastors, forcing their compulsory conversion to Catholicism, and ordering the demolition of their temples. Many were hanged; others fled into exile in the United States. A peasant revolt had spilled over into insurrection and civil war.⁷

Catholicism and Rebellion

Anti-urban sentiment was revived during the French Revolution, which many in the countryside regarded as an unwelcome intrusion into their communities by townsmen and specifically urban interests. Clubs and political societies were mostly based in towns from where militants fanned out into the surrounding villages, and the more radical groups, from the Patriot party to the Jacobins, were largely composed of townspeople and excluded those who were regarded by the peasantry as their natural spokesmen. Early enthusiasm for the abolition of feudal dues did not always lead to sustained support for the revolution, and often gave way to bitterness and disillusionment. The attack on the commons and the division of *biens nationaux* brought as many losers as winners in the French countryside; while the Revolution's measures against the Catholic Church appalled the faithful and caused deep resentment in many rural communities. In those regions – notably in the South-east of the country – where the rural population was concentrated in villages and *bourgs*, there is evidence of

⁷ Catharine Randall, *From a Far Country: Camisards and Huguenots in the Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), pp. 11-13.

more sustained politicisation, but more commonly, as Peter Jones has observed, 'demoralised, they simply opted out of the revolution'.⁸ Or else villages would become divided into opposing factions, with those who had gained from revolutionary reforms committing themselves to the republic while those who had lost threw in their lot with the opposition, in extreme cases engaging in counter-revolutionary violence. Local leaders who were difficult to distinguish from more traditional brigands appeared to become politicised as they adopted the slogans of one side or the other, defending the Church against atheism or rising in defence of the *patrie en danger*. In southern towns like Aubagne this quickly descended into a gang culture of lynching and vigilantism and that had little to do with revolutionary ideals or monarchist principle.⁹

Two regions of France lay at the epicentre of Catholic anti-revolution in the revolutionary years. One was the southern Massif Central, a sprawling region that extended from the uplands of the Ardèche and Lozère to the lower Rhône valley and the Papal states of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, an inhospitable and often mountainous countryside that was largely resistant to the Revolution's political and religious reforms. The other covered a large swathe of the rural West, extending from the coast of Brittany in the north to the Loire Valley and the *bocage* of the Vendée in the south – the territory that became known as the *Vendée militaire*, which was soon engulfed in a civil war that would undermine the military capabilities of the republic at a critical time when the country was embroiled in foreign war against four of the major European powers, Austria, Prussia, Britain and Spain. The Vendée posed the most serious internal challenge that the Revolution faced, tying down republican units in the West when they were desperately needed to defend the frontiers in the north and east. Rebellion and anti-revolution became the defining identity of a region which had otherwise had little shared history, an identity that was rooted in its Catholic faith and its martyrology and which led the Vendée to be regarded with intense suspicion by every successive regime across the nineteenth century. But it would always be a divided identity, one that pitted village Jacobins and pur-

8 Peter M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 217.

9 D. M. G. Sutherland, *Murder in Aubagne. Lynching, Law and Justice during the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 122-50.

chasers of Church property against local nobles and the mass of the peasantry.¹⁰ The Vendée was less united by faith or politics than its reputation implied.

Peasant insurgency extended beyond France's frontiers. From 1792 the Revolution was at war with much of the continent, and from the following year the campaigns were largely fought on the territory of neighbouring states. The Revolution soon faced peasant insurrections elsewhere in Europe, in the lands its troops had annexed or invaded. As in France, the cause was often to be found in the heavy-handed approach of French officials to local beliefs and customs and their determination to extirpate all trace of individual initiative. The initial revolt was often triggered by French anticlericalism and what were perceived as insults to the Church and its priests and monks, and by attempts to impose French-style conscription on foreigners who had no wish to fight and die for a foreign power. The so-called 'peasant war' which broke out in Flemish Brabant in October 1798 is perhaps the most notable of these insurrectionary movements; also known as the 'Belgian Vendée', it shared so many of the characteristics of the revolt in the West, and, like the Vendée, would become an essential part of the heroic myth of the region. It was, in the words of the Belgian historian Philippe Raxhon, a 'heterogeneous' movement formed of armed peasants, local nobles and refractory priests that swelled to an armed band of some 3,500 men, all intent on resistance. As in the Vendée, religion was at the heart of their cause, with the anti-religious policies of the French among their major grievances. Raxhon lists them: laws on the policing of worship, the suppression of religious orders, the imposition on priests of an oath of loyalty to the republic, and the nationalisation of lands owned by the clergy. For the rural population, here as in several others regions that France annexed, the assault on religion was resented as an attack on their traditions and culture.¹¹

Religion, indeed, was a common element in instigating rural opposition to revolution, both within France and beyond its borders, and priests figure prominently in calls for peasant insurgency. Such violence was most common in areas where Church attendance was high or where rural property risked being

10 Alain Gérard, 'En manière de conclusion', in Collectif, *Christianisme et Vendée. La création au dix-neuvième siècle d'un foyer du catholicisme* (La Roche-sur-Yon : Centre vendéen de recherches historiques, 2000), p. 667.

11 Philippe Raxhon, 'La "Vendée belge" dans la mémoire collective aux 19^e et 20^e siècles', *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest*. 102 : 2 (1995). p. 60.

bought up by Protestants from nearby towns, creating a clash of interests that was as much economic as confessional. The earliest incidence of revolt, indeed, occurred in regions of southern France where reactionary nobles and Catholic peasantry made common cause in response to a Protestant bourgeoisie who had profited from their new freedoms by establishing a power base in the clubs and on municipal councils. The result was a climate of hostility and a series of violent confrontations across the southern Massif, in towns and villages where the two communities existed side by side. The Catholics of Nîmes issued a call to arms that circulated throughout the hinterland of the city, and in towns from Alès to Sommières and from Uzès to Pont Saint-Esprit there were clashes between rival factions. By May 1790 much of Languedoc was in turmoil, with notable riots in Avignon and Montauban and the most deadly clashes, resulting in over three hundred dead, in the streets of Nîmes itself. The 'Bagarre de Nîmes', pitting Catholic textile workers against their Protestant masters, was primarily an urban affair, but the antagonisms it sparked quickly spread across the hinterland of the city to the villages and hamlets where many of the workers lived. The rioting lasted three days, until Protestant National Guards from surrounding towns arrived to quell the violence. The bitterness and thirst for vengeance lasted, of course, much longer, and drove many of the Catholic villagers to take up the cause of anti-revolution.¹²

Peasant Violence in the Midi

While much of the resulting violence was limited to family feuds and clashes between rival gangs, in some places it posed a real threat to the security of the state. And the religious dimension was never far removed. Refractory priests in rebel areas were mobilised by their bishops or by *émigré* clergy from across the frontier in Italy or Spain to oppose anti-clerical measures which they saw as a betrayal of their religion. In August 1790, some three months after the massacre in Nîmes, the southern Ardèche witnessed the first mass movement of Catholic peasants in the cause of counter-revolution, when between 20,000 and 40,000 of them, drawn from over 100 parishes, gathered to support their local nobles at the Commanderie de Jalès, near the village of Berrias, demanding revenge

12 Robert Laurent et Geneviève Gavignaud, *La Révolution française dans le Languedoc méditerranéen* (Toulouse : Privat, 1987), pp. 74-77.

for the victims of the Protestant assault. Already the movement had a sectarian character; and when a call to arms was issued at a second *camp de Jalès* the following spring, the alliance was strengthened though the leadership of overtly counter-revolutionary figures, like the priest Claude Allier, who was working in the cause of the king, in alliance with foreign *émigrés*. The movement was quickly repressed, but the intentions of their leaders were clear. Whether the peasants were committed royalists is a moot point – the first two *camps de Jalès* were much more interested in pursuing local conflicts than in challenging the national leadership, and more concerned to avenge their fellow Catholics than to imagine restoring the king¹³ – but royalist leaders were always ready to exploit their grievances. By the spring of 1793 the revolt had spread westwards into the Lozère and the Aveyron, where a ‘Christian Army of the Midi’ engaged with the National Guard before withdrawing into the mountains to conduct guerrilla operations against the state and its representatives.¹⁴

The other focus of insurrection in the South-east was, perhaps predictably, the Papal States of Avignon and the Comtat Venaissin, which, as sovereign territories, enjoyed none of the liberties claimed by the rest of France in 1789: their peasants still paid feudal dues to their seigneur and tithes to the Catholic church. The expulsion of the papal legate and demands for annexation by Paris soon followed, demands to which the National Assembly was initially loath to accede as it was well aware of the strength of papal opposition and the likely impact on public order. But after months of indecision, in September 1791, they accepted that they had no choice but to agree, whatever the consequences. The region was already deeply divided, with the years from 1791 to 1793 marked by a fierce struggle between the cities of Avignon and Carpentras, the one favouring revolution, the other remaining loyal to the Pope. Peasant reaction in the Comtat was especially violent. Here 34 communes, mostly rural villages, formed themselves into an anti-revolutionary alliance, the Union de Sainte-Cécile, which effectively plunged the whole region into civil war. The mayor of one commune, Vaison, was brutally murdered; Carpentras was twice placed under siege; and in an atrocity that would help to define the revolution

13 François de Jouvenel, ‘Les camps de Jalès, 1790-92, épisodes contre-révolutionnaires ?’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française*, 337 (2004), pp.19-20.

14 Jones, *Peasantry*, pp.220-22.

in Avignon, in the Tour de la Glacière of the papal palace some sixty prisoners were summarily executed following the lynching of a *patriote* municipal officer by a Papist crowd.¹⁵ The incorporation of the Papal States went ahead, with the territory initially split between the revolutionary departments of the Drôme to the north and the Bouches-du-Rhône to the south; then, in June 1793, it was reintegrated into a single department, the Vaucluse. But the conflict with the rural Comtat was far from being resolved, and rural violence continued unabated as anti-revolutionary factions sought revenge and rebel communes responded to the appeals of emissaries sent out from federalist Marseille to join them in armed resistance to Jacobin centralism. Some threatened to close republican clubs and patriotic societies or set up rebel sections on the model of Marseille; others drew up lists of local republicans and demanding the most bloodthirsty punishments for those they viewed as maratiste extremists; while elsewhere the thirst for revenge led to physical attacks and murders. As was always the case in civil conflict, communities that were divided between the warring camps tended to suffer disproportionately and to invite retribution.

In the rural communes of the Vaucluse there was no common response to the appeal of Marseille any more than to the demands of the republic. In the north of the department the pull of Valence was stronger than that of Marseille, and the response of village leaders more cautious. Valence had resisted the temptation of subscribing to the federalist cause, guided by the public prosecutor in the Drôme, Claude Payan, a close ally of Robespierre, who wrote to towns and villages across the South-east warning against any action that could be construed as an attack on the unity of the republic, adding, diplomatically, that it was 'impolitic' to use sarcasm against the city of Paris or to sow division between Paris and the departments of the Republic.¹⁶ His warning was heeded; in June 1793 42 clubs and popular societies from across the wider South-east held an assembly in Valence to reaffirm their loyalty to the Convention and to declare their 'execration' of any hint of federalism. They were wise to be cautious, as the Jacobins were already plotting their revenge on those who had dared to un-

15 Valérie Sottocasa, 'Un crime amnistié dans la construction révolutionnaire du Vaucluse', in Ève Duperray and Bruno Poinas (eds), *Mémoires républicains en Vaucluse* (Le Kremlin Bicêtre : Mare et Martin, 2021), p.147.

16 Claude Payan, *Aux sans-culottes des campagnes* (Grenoble : J. Allier, 1793).

dermine the authority of the nation, and soon the villages that had embraced the federalist cause were subjected to coordinated terror campaigns. Mayors and municipal officers were arrested, along with those denounced by neighbours for their criticisms of the Jacobin republic. In the summer of 1793 federalism was the most serious of revolutionary crimes, and those accused of aiding Marseille could expect no quarter. Most were tried by an exceptional tribunal, the *Commission populaire d'Orange*, that was set up in 1794, after the federalist crisis, to 'judge the enemies of the Revolution' who had been arrested in the Vaucluse and the Bouches-du-Rhône. Case files were compiled within two months on around 2,600 suspects, among them men who had already been tried elsewhere but who now faced a retrial before a more political court.¹⁷ Denied a defence counsel and a jury trial, those found guilty of counter-revolutionary or anti-Parisian sentiments could expect harsh reprisals. More than three hundred men and women, many of them peasants or tradesmen who had made the wrong political choice, were summarily despatched to the guillotine.¹⁸ The rancour of the families that had lost loved ones would fester, often for several generations.¹⁹

What had started as an insurgency over land and Catholicism in the South-east of France turned into open conflict between families and factions and created lasting hatreds that split communities. After Thermidor, with the Jacobins overthrown and Robespierre executed, the violence that had scarred much of rural France did not cease. Rather a process of reaction set in against both the Terror and local Jacobins who had been its agents in their towns and villages. The laws that had enabled terror were gradually dismantled, but this only unleashed panic and confusion before turning into a spate of anarchic violence and revenge killing across much of the South.²⁰ The brigand bands that had been such a feature of pre-revolutionary France reformed, some led by warrior-priests like Claude Allier and the Abbé Solier and claiming to be fighting

17 Bruno Poinas, 'Les dossiers d'instruction de la Commission populaire d'Orange', in Ève Duperray and Bruno Poinas (eds), *Mémoires républicains en Vaucluse*, pp. 173-81.

18 Siméon Bonnel, *Les 332 victimes de la Commission populaire d'Orange en 1794* (2 vols, Orange : chez l'auteur, 1888).

19 Steven Clay, 'Les réactions du Midi : conflits, continuités et violences', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 345 (2006), pp. 55-91.

20 Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 269-70.

for the cause of Church and King; but, as Gwynne Lewis has pointed out, they were often indistinguishable from the highwaymen of old, *égorgeurs* whose principal interest was in thieving and killing rather than in any political ideal. There were, in his words, *fausses armées contre-révolutionnaires* during the Directory just as there had been *fausses armées révolutionnaires* during the Terror.²¹ But there was also a deliberate move to stir up hatred. Deputies sent out on mission from the Convention ordered the release from prison of men who had served the counter-revolutionary cause. Printed pamphlets known as *livres rouges* circulated in southern departments, denouncing local Jacobins and those who had held any form of public office during the Terror, and helpfully adding a brief summary of their crimes and details of the addresses at which they might be found. Nocturnal visits and gunshots in the night almost inevitably followed. Known Jacobins, elected officials and justices of the peace who were blamed for bringing terror to village communities now found themselves targeted by royalist bands. Also at risk were those who had purchased national lands and those suspected of being informers or police spies during the Terror. As in any civil conflict, *délation* was regarded as the most contemptible of offences, and those accused of it were ruthlessly hunted down. In contrast, their killers could expect to be treated as respected members of local society whose crimes went largely unpunished.²²

Though there was a loose network linking the terror gangs to royalism in the Midi, Colin Lucas warns against the temptation to explain the murders in purely ideological terms. More commonly they were personal, acts of revenge for the deaths of fathers, brothers and other relatives at the hands of the Jacobins, acts of vengeance that created or extended family feuds and rivalries. But that does not mean that they lacked organisation or concealed their identity. Indeed, counter-terror was often very public, carried out by the young men of these southern villages organised in paramilitary formation as *compagnies de Jésus* or *compagnies du Soleil*, wearing elite uniforms and even assuming the duties of the now disbanded National Guard. They acted openly, in full view of their

21 Gwynne Lewis, 'Political brigandage and popular disaffection in the south-east of France, 1795-1804', in Gwynne Lewis and Colin Lucas (eds), *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 197.

22 Gwynne Lewis, *The Second Vendée. The Continuity of Counter-revolution in the Department of the Gard, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 109.

fellow townsmen and villagers, with something of the swagger of soldiers in a Catholic army. And their activities, as Lucas explains, resembled a military operation: 'They guarded the prisons where they massacred, they escorted prisoners whom they killed on the road, they surrounded and searched areas of town, they claimed orders to arrest, and they patrolled the streets and beat up Jacobins whom they encountered'.²³ Such beatings and humiliations were necessarily public, administered in the street or in the heart of the commune, on the village green or in front of the liberty tree, as their message was as much collective as individual. In a number of towns, from Lyon to Marseille and Aix-en-Provence to Tarascon, prisoners suspected of crimes during the Terror were dragged from their prison cells and massacred in full public view, while members of the former Revolutionary Tribunal at Orange were killed and their bodies thrown into the Rhône. But if their killers took satisfaction from exacting vengeance, there was little honour in White Terror of this kind. What had started as rural insurrection had descended into the politics of vendetta and campaigns of assassination.

Civil War in the West

Whereas the anti-revolutionary movement in the Midi has been widely subsumed into the wider history of banditry and revenge killing, the peasant rising in the west of France – whether *chouannerie* in Brittany or the full-scale insurrection that was the Vendée – has enjoyed a more sympathetic press. It had many of the same causes as the rebellions further south: loyalty to the King played its part, as did the strength of Catholic piety across the region, but, as in the South, the trigger to the initial rising was the attempt by the state to enforce its troop levies on an unwilling population. Before 1793 it had no wider significance – it was, like most other departments, simply a local geographical feature, a river or a range of mountains. But the war changed that, leading its most prolific historian, Jean-Clément Martin, to reflect that in studying the convulsions of civil war in the West he had uncovered something of greater importance. He had been present at the birth of a region whose identity owed everything to martyrdom and to the memory of rebellion.²⁴

23 Colin Lucas, 'Themes in southern violence after 9 thermidor', in Lewis and Lucas (eds), *Beyond the Terror*, pp. 170, 175.

24 Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris : Le Seuil, 1987), p. 13.

How can we explain this transformation from a moment of peasant rebellion to the mobilisation of whole region against the very ideals of revolutionary France? Historians are right to stress that there is nothing ineluctable about this. The region was not exceptional in the strength of its feeling about military service or its rejection of the levies imposed on its communities in March 1793. Frontier regions in the Pyrenees, pastoral communities in the Massif, and villages in the southern Drôme were already reporting difficulties in finding willing recruits, and though the government managed to raise the 300,000 soldiers it was seeking, there were already premonitions of resistance in large swathes of rural France.²⁵ But it was in the West that the reaction was fiercest, with young men taking up arms against those they depicted as their oppressors and mayor joining them in a collective defiance of the law. Here alone, it would appear, the ground had already been prepared to launch the insurgency in a series of antireligious measures by the state and what was seen as the merciless bullying of their clergy. Within a very short time the army sent to curb the insurrection found itself faced by a mass of peasants, many of them armed with little more than shotguns or pitchforks. They responded as French soldiers responded to the guerrillas they encountered on other war fronts – in Piedmont, for instance, in the Tyrol, or across much of rural Spain – with a contempt and brutality that helped unite local people against them. Or, as Ivan Burel notes, they made the situation worse by simple errors in the first months of the conflict – errors that he sees as repeated on every occasion when French regular troops faced irregular opponents. In the Vendée as later in Algeria, ‘a nearly constant pattern emerges in French counter-insurgency wars: the initial uprising escalates into a major insurgency—often due to the French forces’ own errors and, most frequently, following a military defeat brought about by overconfidence’.²⁶ The crisis that followed cannot be solely ascribed to the values or determination of the insurgents.

The region’s suffering lay at the heart of the foundation myth that was created over the course of the nineteenth century. The Vendée would identify with a spirit of rebellion against the republic and central government, that would be

25 Alan Forrest, *Conscripts ad Deserters. The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 30–32.

26 Ivan Burel, *Histoire de la contre-insurrection française. Combattre la guérilla, 1793–1962* (Paris : Perrin, 2026), pp. 16–17.

regularly refreshed in successive decades until the region came to symbolise, in its own eyes and those of the French nation, heroic resistance.²⁷ Intrusions from Paris continued to be resented, along with the annual levies imposed by the conscription law and the imposition of the Concordat on a reluctant clergy. Nor was the region ever successfully pacified. There would be further uprisings against the Consulate 1800, while *chouan* dissidents from Brittany and the wider West continued to agitate against the Empire and some forged plots against the Emperor's life. Napoleon paid particular attention to public order in the region and in 1810 built a new, heavily militarised capital for the department of the Vendée at La Roche-sur-Yon, but he did not succeed in snuffing out peasant opposition or in curbing the ambitions of the Catholic Church. Royalism remained strong among both noble community leaders and the peasantry, leading, when Napoleon returned from Elba in 1815, to further insurgency in what historians have dubbed the Hundred Days' War between monarchists and republicans, *Blancs* and *Bleus*. With the Second Restoration calm temporarily returned to the region, but its rebellious spirit remained, flaring up into violence again at sensitive moments, whether in the revolution of 1830, in the July Monarchy, or in the Second Empire. Across much of the nineteenth century memories of 1793 were continually revived and tales of Vendean resistance retold.²⁸

A 'War of Giants'

For Catholic conservative France it was a romantic tale that never lost its appeal, a tale of loyally monarchist noblemen providing leadership for a peasant army outraged by the revolutionaries' assault on their Church and its property throughout the region. This version of events was presented to the public in a series of Vendean memoirs, many of them written by noblewomen who were either themselves involved in the revolt or who sympathised with the ideals it purported to uphold.²⁹ The most influential of these, the memoirs of the Marquise

27 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'Préface', in Jean-Clément Martin, *La Vendée de la mémoire, 1800-1980* (Paris : Le Seuil, 1989), p. iii.

28 Aurélien Lignereux, *Chouans et Vendéens contre l'Empire. 1815. L'autre Guerre des Cent-Jours* (Paris : Vendémiaire, 2015), *passim*.

29 Among the more significant pro-Vendean memoirs are those of the Marquise de Bonchamps, the Marquise de La Rochejaquelein and Madame de Sapinaud.

La Rochejaquelein, first appeared in 1814, edited by the Baron de Barante, and it quickly became something of a best-seller, going through eight editions by the time of the author's death in 1857; and there was a new effusion of sympathy when her original manuscript was published by her grandson in 1889. Her story, of course, appealed to the romantic spirit of the age; it is surely no coincidence that an English edition was hurried into print in 1816, or that it was translated by Sir Walter Scott himself.³⁰ She had married one of the Vendean leaders, the Marquis de Lescure, at the age of just nineteen, before choosing another, the Marquis de La Rochejaquelein, for her second husband following Lescure's death. Her story had all the sentimental appeal of a nineteenth-century romantic novel. Within a few months she was again a widow, as La Rochejaquelein, too, died young, killed in a skirmish at Nuillé at just twenty-one. In the words of a later editor, she had shared in the dangers and privations of the war and seen her home destroyed by the Republicans in the repression that followed; and she had been forced, 'on the final defeat of the Catholic Army at Savenay, to take refuge in Brittany, where, disguised as a peasant, proscribed and hunted by the Republicans, she had spent a year in hiding before the general amnesty of 1795 allowed her to return to her father's estate in Gascony'.³¹ By writing her memoirs she sought to construct a memorial to men who had been her friends and lovers and to elevate the cause for which they had fought and died. She would be a willing propagandist for anti-revolution in the nineteenth century.

Apologists for the Vendée, then as now, claim that theirs was a 'war of giants', an idealistic crusade led by the legendary heroes of the Catholic and Royal Army, Henri de La Rochejaquelein and François de Charette, Jacques Cathelineau and Jean-Nicolas Stofflet, idealised figures who came to epitomise the spirit of resistance in the West. But it was not just the leaders who caught the imagination of a romantic age. It was also the nature of the campaign: the character of an army of peasant insurgents, the supposed spontaneity of its soldiers, and the ability to conduct a mixed campaign by regular and guerrilla fighters. This allowed for a degree of poetic licence, and writers like La Rochejaquelein did not hold back when describing their tactics in battle. At Les Aubiers, facing a repub-

30 Cecil Biggane (ed), *Memoirs of the Marquise de La Rochejaquelein* (London : Routledge, 1933), p. xv.

31 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

lican army lined up for an engagement, she describes the Vendean response in dramatic (and doubtless exaggerated) prose: ‘The Vendean armed with cudgels rushed forward like mad, emerging in swarms from behind the hedges where they had lain concealed; they sprang upon the guns .. and the Blues fled in disorder’. It was, she implies, the only tactic that an inexperienced peasant army could usefully deploy, and they would turn to it repeatedly in the early stages of the war. They were short of officers as many of the local gentry had emigrated or found themselves in prison. And they had little in the way of weaponry, being, in the early phase of the war, ‘destitute of artillery and almost of firearms, among which was not a single musket’. She depicts them as ‘peasants armed with sticks’, fighting against fully-armed soldiers – all of which helped to emphasise their outstanding ‘multitude of heroic qualities’.³² It was these qualities, combined with the landscape of forests and *bocage* that provided cover, which, Vendean historians have claimed, alone can explain their success in standing up to the Republic. They shine through the brutality and viciousness of the war as it was described by Victor Hugo in *Quatre-vingt-treize*, the novel he dedicated to the Vendée towards the end of his life.³³ And they give the Vendean cause a certain nobility and dignity.

The Republic’s Response

Republicans, of course, saw things very differently. At a time when French soldiers were being pinned down in campaigns against enemies abroad, they had no desire to divert troops to the West to fight rebels in the interior. Fighting peasants in a civil war was quite different from the defence of the *patrie* that was the duty of every male citizen, and the Vendean was depicted as the counter-revolutionary other, as an enemy of the French people who had voluntarily and treasonably excluded himself from the nation and rejected the values of the Revolution. The nineteenth-century historian and republican Jules Michelet, most famously, decried the Vendée as the home of backwardness and supersti-

32 Ibid., pp. 65-66.

33 Victor Hugo, *Quatre-vingt-treize* (Paris : impr. spéciale du “Rappel”, 1874) ; an English translation by David Bellos was published earlier this year as *Ninety-three* (London: Penguin, 2026).

tion, battling the very soul of the Enlightenment. He refused to see the Vendéans as true Frenchmen and depicted them through two of the most powerful images of ultra-conservative reaction, images of women and of priests.³⁴ In this respect he drew heavily on the language of the revolutionaries themselves, whether in speeches in the Convention, in despatches from the army, or in the memoirs of republican generals in the West, most notably General Louis-Marie Turreau who led the 'infernal columns' sent to repress the rebellion.³⁵

Turreau understood the civil war in the West as a soldier, and though he shared the republican view of the Vendéans as fanatical and superstitious, he was not without a certain admiration for their heroism in battle and their undying dedication to their cause. He understood, too, how the Vendean countryside could obstruct the republican advance and how the insurgents, knowing every path and track and enjoying the support of local people, were able to exploit it. They adapted their tactics to take advantage of the landscape, hiding in woods and thickets from where they would suddenly emerge to ambush republican columns or to launch attacks from the sides or the rear. Though, unlike the *chouans* in Brittany, the Vendéans did fight more formal battles when they were required to, they also resorted to guerrilla tactics, picking off republican soldiers from behind hedges as they marched along rural roads. Turreau's army, hastily assembled in a levy of raw recruits along with small number of men transferred from the armies on the frontier – 'but never battle-hardened units, line troops or volunteers from earlier years'³⁶ – was poorly prepared for these conditions, while the enemy's capacity for surprise attacks posed a tactical dilemma for the commander of a more structured force. 'In a country that offers no advantages to the attacking army and presents so many resources for its defence, how is one to lead a column, regulate its movements, and maintain order and cohesion on the march? How is one to execute manoeuvres, deployments, and formations for attack or retreat, or allow the artillery and cavalry full scope for action?'³⁷ He

34 Raoul Girardet, 'La Vendée dans le légendaire national français', in Alain Gérard and Thierry Hackmann (eds), *La Vendée dans l'histoire* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), p. 163.

35 Michel Chatry (ed), *Turreau en Vendée: mémoires et correspondance* (Cholet: Éditions du Choletais, 1992). The original publication dated from 1824.

36 Jean Delmas, 'Légende et réalité: la Vendée a-t-elle représenté un danger militaire pour la Convention?', in Gérard and Hackmann, *La Vendée dans l'histoire*, p. 114.

37 Chatry, *Turreau en Vendée*, p. 25.

admitted that, faced with an elusive adversary, his options were limited. Military force, he argued, would always be insufficient in a war of this kind unless it was reinforced by a range of political, administrative, and internal security measures to help pacify the countryside. 'For defeating armed rebels was not enough; it was also necessary to halt the ravages of public opinion and the spread of a moral contagion that threatened to infect all the neighbouring departments and offered no prospect of ending the successes of the royalist faction'.³⁸ But to achieve that would have required resources that he had not been given, and any hope of a quick victory in the Vendée was quickly dissipated.

In their depiction of the Vendéans Turreau's soldiers barely concealed their contempt and hatred for an enemy they considered illegitimate and whose cruelty towards those of their colleagues unlucky enough to fall into their hands elicited widespread disgust. Examples abound of atrocities which would today constitute war crimes. A peasant boy from the Jura serving in the Vendée, François-Xavier Joliclerc, describes his horror at finding his friends massacred after attending a carnival. 'We lost fifty-two men' he writes, 'whom we found on the road on our way back after the meal, all with their heads smashed in or their bodies pierced by bayonets'.³⁹ Wounded soldiers making their way to hospital were an easy target for guerrilla fighters who were indistinguishable from common criminals: in the words of one republican soldier, Louis Primault, they were 'brigands' who did not fight cleanly and honestly but preferred to crouch in the undergrowth until they saw 'three or four volunteers who were unarmed or were passing on their way to hospital, when they would suddenly appear and try to kill them in order to steal whatever they had on them'.⁴⁰ There was no honour in such a battle, and no shame in killing such opponents when the opportunity arose. The words they used to describe the Vendéans deliberately dehumanised them, referring to them as 'savages' and 'wild beasts' that 'cowered' in the thickets before 'leaping' on their prey, killing and murdering before returning to their 'lair' and 'licking their wounds' in preparation for the next attack.⁴¹ It

38 Ibid., p. 37.

39 François-Xavier Joliclerc, *Ses lettres, 1793-96* (Paris : Perrin, 1905), p. 159.

40 Archives de la Guerre, Vincennes, Xw29, letter from Louis Primault to his mother, 10 fructidor II.

41 Alan Forrest, 'Insurgents and Counter-insurgents between Military and Civil Society from the

was the language used throughout the French countryside to describe attacks by wolves on shepherds and their flocks. It was intended to elicit a mixture of fear and loathing, and it helps to explain the soldiers' pitiless response.

If the republican army did not consider the Vendéans to be proper soldiers, worthy of the privileges that come with wearing a uniform, they also saw the civilian population of the West as their accomplices in crime. Villagers offered the guerrilla fighters sustenance and protection, hiding them when on the run, supplying them with food and weapons, and helping the Vendean cause by denouncing republicans to the authorities and betraying the positions of revolutionary units. In the eyes of the army, indeed, the distinction between guerrillas and civilians was never clear, and Vendean peasants were always the object of suspicion. Memories of recent atrocities were difficult to efface, atrocities such as the massacre that took place in March 1793, at the very beginning of the insurrection, in Machecoul, where a rebel crowd that included large numbers of women attacked and routed the National Guard and seized all those in their community whom they identified with the revolutionary cause. A bloodbath followed. While the guardsmen and some of the leading citizens were killed on the spot, many others were taken prisoner, then slaughtered in a series of prison massacres. This was not a military operation: rather, a mob of villagers, their mood enflamed by fear and rumour, turned on their neighbours, on priests who had taken the oath to the Civil Constitution and on officials seen as loyal to Paris, and butchered them in cold blood. Machecoul was one brutal incident among many that defiled the war in the West, but it was an emblematic moment that left a profound mark on republican memory and provided the excuse needed by republican generals, judges and political commissars to justify the most savage repression.⁴²

Between 1793 and 1795 the departments of the West were the scene of a bloody conflict in which no quarter was given. The republican troops adopted a scorched earth policy that left more than 150,000 Vendéans dead, many of them civilians. Turreau's 'infernal columns' criss-crossed the region, arresting, burning and killing in what one recent historian of the war has called a 'paroxysm of

1790s to 1815', in Erica Charters, Eve Rosenhaft and Hannah Smith (eds), *Civilians and War in Europe, 1618-1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 191.

42 Alain Gérard, *La Vendée, 1789-1793* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1992), p. 126.

violence'.⁴³ For those caught bearing arms there could be no mercy, and when they fell into republican hands they were brutally despatched. As one young soldier reported in his letter home, executions quickly became a routine feature of their lives. 'We shoot them every day', he wrote, 'fifteen hundred at a time'.⁴⁴ The brutality of the repression shocked even the troops who participated in it, though they had no choice but to play their part in the slaughter and destruction. This was a war, wrote Sergeant Girardeau from his hospital bed in Nantes, in which they burned and killed indiscriminately, 'men, women, and children - indeed, everyone who came into the path of our army - but the saddest sight of all was the poor little children'.⁴⁵ Girardeau spoke with feeling, for he felt regret and shame at the work he had had to do. But he could comfort himself with the thought that this was a war without honour, that he was not fighting soldiers but peasant insurgents whom it was his duty to repress. The rebels were criminals, and those they captured could expect no mercy. The work of the army would be supplemented by revolutionary tribunals in Nantes and in neighbouring departments.

Conclusion

Colin Lucas is surely right to label peasant insurgency as 'anti-revolution' rather than 'counter-revolution', stressing the desire of rural communities to be left to live and worship in their traditional ways without outside interference. They held to an ideal of communal solidarity at a moment when revolutionary government was its enemy and, in Lucas' words, 'the Jacobins, if only by their revolutionary affiliation, could be seen as the instruments of the erosion of the primacy of the local community'.⁴⁶ If it is true that among their leaders were local nobles and notorious royalists, few of their followers shared their ideological convictions. Despite their continued adherence to a traditional Catholicism, the mass of the insurgents were not deeply ideological; for many, indeed, their

43 Anne Rolland-Boulestreau, *Les colonnes infernales. Violences et guerre civile en Vendée militaire, 1794-95* (Paris : Fayard, 2015), p. 23.

44 G. Pagès, 'Lettres de requis et volontaires de Coutras en Vendée et en Bretagne', *Revue Historique et Archéologique du Libournais*, 190 (1983), p.157.

45 Ibid., p. 158.

46 Lucas, 'Themes in southern violence after 9 thermidor', p.192.

deepest concern was to avoid recruitment into the republic's army and the call to serve on distant frontiers. Yet the spirit of rebellion that was fanned by the intrusion of urban militants in their communities proved damagingly persistent, leading to a resurgence of violence at the beginning of the Consulate, most especially in the territory of the *Vendée militaire*. This time, however, the timing did the rebels few favours, as, in Napoleon they were faced with a more determined opponent, one who distrusted crowds and was ruthless in suppressing all forms of disorder. The Peace of Amiens gave him a breathing space, a brief truce in his European war which he could use to destroy internal opposition to his regime. In the months that followed he would unleash a newly reinvigorated Gendarmerie to enforce the law in some of the most rebellious departments of France, rooting out banditry in the Rhône valley, curbing resistance to conscription in some of the most refractory rural areas, and effacing the final traces of royalism in the heartlands of anti-revolution in the West.⁴⁷ Military commissions were installed to avoid the necessity for jury trials and secure rapid convictions. Death sentences routinely followed, whether by guillotine or by firing squad, the victims not nobles and landowners but ordinary people, villagers with little social standing who had been lured into a life of crime, peasants who had been tempted into banditry. It was a brutal operation, as Howard Brown observed: 'The military commissions of 1801 killed more people in four months than the Fructidorian military commissions killed in two years'.⁴⁸ But it was effective and very public, with the executions, carried out in the heart of their communities, serving as a vivid and often gruesome reminder of the power of the state.

47 Michael Broers, 'The Napoleonic Gendarmerie. The state on the periphery made real', *Crime, histoire et sociétés* 20:1 (2016).

48 Howard G. Brown, *Ending the French Revolution. Violence, Justice and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), pp. 323-24.



Louis Hersent (1777-1860), *General Louise-Marie Turreau* (1756–1816), during the Gravière affair (8 Prairial, Year VIII – May 21, 1800), Musée Carnavalet Wikimedia Commons.

The Indian Mutiny (1857-1859): the “Strange” Rebellion

by EDWARD M. SPIERS

Understandably, the Indian Mutiny (1857-1859) has often been dubbed the “Great Mutiny”,¹ testifying to its pivotal importance in British and Indian history, and as a challenge to the British empire and Britain’s reputation as a great power. Yet in the lines before Delhi, Captain Charles John Griffiths (61st Regiment) simply found the rebellion “strange”, that is, in seeing an enemy wearing the scarlet uniform (later changed to white) but using “our own bugle calls”, organized and trained in the British manner, and until the end of the war giving “English words of command”.² As the uprising spread through the northern and central provinces, it took different forms: Mukherjee insists that the sepoys (infantry soldiers) in Cawnpore (Kanpur) disowned their uniforms to become “peasants in arms”, but they still had a hierarchy of command with rebels appointed as majors and colonels.³ In the central provinces, though, Tapti Roy describes how the mutineers kept together in their original regimental formations and took up their posts in a military fashion, posting arms, receiving orders and behaving like regular soldiers.⁴ Accordingly, many British soldiers,

1 William Forbes-Mitchell, *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny, 1857-59* (London: Macmillan, 1893); Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny India 1857* (London: Penguin 1978); Bruce Watson, *The Great Indian Mutiny: Colin Campbell and the Campaign at Lucknow* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

2 Charles John Griffiths, *A Narrative of The Siege Of Delhi with an Account of the Mutiny at Ferozepore in 1857* (London: John Murray, 1910), pp. 85 and 115; see also George Dodd, *History of the Indian Revolt and of the expeditions to Persia, China and Japan 1856-7-8* (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1859), pp. 300-301.

3 Rudrangshu Mukherjee. ““Satan Let Loose upon Earth”: The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857”, *Past & Present*, No. 128 (Aug. 1990), pp. 92-116, at pp. 99 and 106.

4 Tapti Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 49.

correspondents and historians have described the events as first and foremost a “mutiny”, but as it spread beyond the sepoys to become a limited uprising or rebellion, it remained a “strange” event in British eyes.

The mutineers lacked any overall political leader, still less a positive ideology that would sustain the bonding between Hindus and Moslems, and provide a positive direction for the differing localities in which disaffection festered. This uprising was emphatically not as Marx and Engels claimed, and some Indian nationalist historians once imagined, the first war of Indian independence.⁵ It was a massive intelligence failure by the East India Company (EIC), with only a few British observers detecting the depth of agitation within the Bengal Army, but without a positive response from their senior commanders.⁶ The military authorities were not entirely obtuse; they never issued the cartridges rumoured to be greased with cow or pig fat, and tried to reassure sepoys that their ghee, atta and sugar had not been adulterated with bone dust. Yet the fears of the infidel British trying to undermine the caste of the Brahmins, and convert Hindus and Moslems to Christianity, had taken root. Spread by rumours and messages, coupled with the circulation of mysterious chapattis and the legend of British rule ending one hundred years after the battle of Plassey (23 June 1757), these fears erupted at Meerut on 10 May 1857 after 85 sowars (cavalry troopers) had been imprisoned for refusing to demonstrate the cartridge drill for the new Enfield rifle.

Neither then nor now has anyone been able to identify the principal conspirators among the mutineers of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry. They freed their 85 comrades, joined with mutinous sepoys from the 11th and 20th Bengal Native Infantry (BNI) and ran amok with local *badmashes* (hooligans), plundering and burning the European cantonments, while slaughtering 31 European men,

5 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence 1857-1859* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960); R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopandhyay, 1963, 2nd edition); pp. ii-iii, 111, 416-429; and Biswamoy Pati (ed.), *The 1857 Rebellion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. xxi-xxiii.

6 Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 221; H. H. Greathed, *Letters written during The Siege of Delhi* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1858), pp. x-xi; General Sir Hugh Gough, *Old Memories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1897), p. 22; and Hibbert, *Great Mutiny*, p. 73.

women, and children.⁷ They then marched 40 miles (64km) southwest to Delhi, the old capital of the Mughal empire, where in the absence of European troops the entire garrison joined them.⁸ They also released criminals from the jails, and engaged in an orgy of plunder, arson and murder of Europeans and Indian Christians. Although a few Europeans escaped, some fifty women and children sought protection in the royal palace only to be butchered collectively (16 May 1857). Meanwhile the mutineers pressed the 81-year old, Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal emperor and nominally the "King" of Delhi, for legitimacy, leadership, payment, and religious protection.⁹

How the mutiny spread thereafter was as important as why it attracted support. As the effects rippled across the Gangetic Plain, they proved particularly appealing in areas such as Oudh (Awadh), which had been annexed recently (1856). Henceforth local issues and a broader range of resentments augmented the mutineers' disaffection. As chronicled in a proclamation issued under the Delhi King's name, they included *inter alia* British dispossession of Zamindars (landlords of large estates), the trading practices of the EIC, restrictions on promotions for Indians in the Army and Civil Service, and the import of English articles that reduced artisans to "beggary".¹⁰ Personal grievances that denied Nana Sahib a pension as an adopted son, or the recognition of Rani of Jhansi's adopted son as the rightful heir to her deceased husband (and so her state

7 J. A. B. Palmer, *The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 131; Gough, *Old Memories*, pp. 23-32; 'List of People Killed at Meerut on night of 10 May', Sir William Muir, *Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-West Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857: including correspondence with the supreme government, Delhi, Cawnpore and other places*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), vol. 2, p. 386..

8 The 38th, 54th, 74th BNI regiments and 5th light Field Battery Foot Artillery had already been alarmed by the announcement in a general order of the execution of Mangal Pandey for mutiny at Barrackpore, Hibbert, *Great Mutiny*, p. 96.

9 William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); on the flight of Europeans, Colonel Edward Vibart, *The Sepoy Mutiny As Seen by a Subaltern: From Delhi to Lucknow* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), pp. 26-27, 57-78, 115-116; Gough, *Old Memories*, p. 59; and on the massacre, Mrs. Aldwell's testimony reproduced in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 174-175.

10 *Delhi Gazette*, 29 September 1857 reproduced in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 630-632; on the causes of the mutiny, see P. J. O. Taylor (ed.), *Companion to the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 243-246.

‘lapsed’ to the British), contributed to dispossessed rulers assuming the mantle of rebel leadership in their localities.

What all these disparate mutinies and rebellions had in common was a visceral hatred of British rule. Hence, as in Delhi where every symbol of the British presence was destroyed – the Post Office, Telegraph Office, the Delhi Bank, the Delhi Gazette Press offices and the houses and cantonments of the British and Indian Christians – so in Cawnpore and many parts of north India, similar government buildings, representing “the presence of British rule were burnt or demolished”.¹¹ Even worse was the intent of the rebels to wage a war of extermination: Lieutenant Kendal Coghill (2nd Bengal Fusiliers) reckoned, “it was the intention of the native army to rise and kill every European in India”, while the doyen of frontier fighting, Colonel (later Brigadier) John Nicholson reckoned that the mutiny would only spread “if not put down with the bayonet”.¹² William H. Russell of *The Times*, succinctly concluded that this was “a war of religion, a war of race, and a war of revenge”.¹³

From a Company perspective, the first challenge was how far and how fast the rebellion would spread. This was a tangible fear, as mutinies occurred in another five stations before major revolts erupted in Lucknow and Bareilly (30 and 31 May 1857). Over 3-4 June 1857, the mutiny spread to Central India at Neemuch, where the mutineers after looting and burning bungalows, and plundering the local Treasury, marched on Delhi. At a time when European soldiers in India had suffered losses in the Crimean War (Britain had retained two of the three regiments involved), only 40,000 British troops remained on the sub-continent compared with 226,000 Indian soldiers in the Bengal, Bombay and Madras armies. Fortunately from a British perspective, the Madras and Bombay sepoys had little in common with the high-caste Brahmins that largely composed the Bengal army. All 52 Madras regiments remained loyal while a mere three of the 29 Bombay regiments mutinied (and in a very limited way), leaving the revolt

11 Mukherjee, “Satan”, p. 99 and N. A. Chick, *Annals of the Indian Rebellion, 1857-58* (Calcutta: Sanders, Cores & Co. 1859), p. 123.

12 National Army Museum (NAM), 1972-07-2-26, Coghill Mss., Lt. K. Coghill to Rosy, 20 May 1857 and Captain Lionel J. Trotter, *The Life of John Nicholson: Soldier and Administrator* (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 202.

13 William Howard Russell, *My Diary in India*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1860), vol. 1, p. 164.

confined to 54 of the 74 BNI regiments, as well as horse and field artillery units and all ten cavalry regiments. This involved about 100,000 mutineers, 70,000 of whom would fight the British (the remainder returned to their villages).¹⁴

More significantly, the rebellion never became a national cause: most of India remained unaffected, many servants, retainers and villagers stayed loyal or assisted fleeing Europeans, and more Indian and Nepalese soldiers served in the British ranks (entire battalions of Sikhs, Gurkhas, Pathans and vast numbers of camp followers) than opposed them. In the lines before Delhi, "a great many Sikhs" were "doing good service", wrote Lieutenant Thomas Cadell, but they didn't fight "nearly so well or are so trustworthy as our little Goorkhas (sic)".¹⁵ British reinforcements remained critical: whether returning from Persia, diverted from transit to China or sent from the United Kingdom, but they took time to arrive. Meanwhile, Herbert B. Edwardes, the commissioner at Peshawar and his assistant, Nicholson had intercepted local sepoy correspondence to ascertain the depth of their grievances. They advised Sir John Lawrence, the Punjab commissioner, that a Moveable Column had to be formed to keep order locally and contain the mutiny. Based on this idea, an operational plan was devised and later part of this column was sent onto the siege of Delhi, leaving the Punjab seriously short of reliable troops. When the 55th NI regiment mutinied at a station in Hoti Mardan (25 May 1857), it had to be pursued into the hills and defeated, while another five Bengal regiments were disarmed.¹⁶ Yet the Punjab survived signs of disaffection, and William Muir, when heading the revamped intelligence operations in the North-West Provinces, commended "Sir J. Lawrence"

14 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), map 5; Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 19; Kaushik Roy, *The Army in British India: From Colonial Warfare to Total War 1857-1947* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 36; and P. J. O. Taylor, *What Really Happened During the Mutiny: A Day-by-Day Account of the Major Events of 1857-1859 in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 46-47 and 54-63.

15 NAM Acc. 1967-02-90-1, Cadell Mss., Lt. Thomas Cadell to Harriet, 27 August 1857, p. 18; T. A. Heathcote, *The military in British India: The development of British land forces in South Asia 1600-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 104.

16 Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty-One Years in India: from Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897), pp. 64-65; H. B. Edwardes to H. B. Lumsden, 16 May 1857 in P. S. Lumsden and G. R. Elmslie, *Lumsden of the Guides* (London: John Murray, 1899), pp. 177-178; David, *Indian Mutiny*, pp. 137-145; "Letter from Peshawar, June 14", *Hereford Journal*, 5 August 1857, p. 5.

for how he had managed “in keeping the Punjab quiet and in detailing a large force for Delhi”.¹⁷

Apart from the geographical containment in the south, around Calcutta, and in the Punjab, physical containment through siege operations protected key sites, Europeans, loyal servants, sepoys and Sikhs in the north. As the mutinies erupted in a desultory manner, prospective siege commanders were able to prepare their defences and pre-stock supplies, ammunition, guns and treasure.¹⁸ Great sieges characterised this “strange” rebellion from its outset at Delhi (5 June–21 September 1857), Cawnpore (6–25 June 1857) and at the Residency of Lucknow (30 June–17 November 1857), but others occurred, notably Allahabad (6–11 June 1857), a key strategic junction of the Ganges and Jumna rivers where the 6th BNI mutinied in a peculiarly brutal manner; Agra, the administrative centre of the North-West Provinces, where 6,000 civilians crowded into the fort (7 June–10 October 1857); and the symbolic triumph at Arrah House, a two-storied building intended as a billiards hall, where under 70 British civilians, officers, engineers and Sikh policemen, held off an estimated 10,000 rebels from 27 July to 3 August 1857. Apart from Cawnpore these sieges held firm, not least on account of Jhansi (8 June 1857) where 56 European men, women and children, on the promise of safe conduct, vacated the fort only to be massacred.¹⁹

With military and civilians isolated in sieges, awaiting relief forces, the collection and distribution of intelligence and restored communications became imperatives. The rebels enjoyed advantages in local intelligence (knowledge of terrain, jungle tracks, river crossings, and places to obtain supplies); an ability to observe and spy upon European forces through camp followers, merchants and deserters in sieges or on the move (where a column might stretch for half a mile in length, followed by up to five miles (8km) of camp followers).²⁰ They also severed British communications periodically by cutting telegraph wires and closing postal communications along the Grand Trunk Road and elsewhere. The

17 Muir to H. C. Tucker, 13 August 1857, in Muir, *Records*, vol. 2, p. 121.

18 “Letters from India”, *Aberdeen Journal*, 5 August 1857, p. 5; Martin R. Gubbins, *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh and of the Siege of the Lucknow Residency* (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), pp. 157–171.

19 ‘List of Persons Massacred at Jhansi’, Muir, *Records*, vol. 2, p. 392.

20 Taylor, *Companion*, p. 66.

rebels communicated by proclamations, placards outside mosques, anti-British newspapers and other means, but as both sides intercepted the other's messages, the British wrote partially in Greek characters.²¹

Accordingly, protecting key roads, like the one from the Delhi Field Force (DFF) up to Umballa (Ambala), and repairing the field telegraph (for communications with other bases and Calcutta) became priorities: the telegraph being described "as just as much a part of every mobilized force as the commissariat".²² Besieged forces sent forth spies and messengers (*cossids*), with the costs soaring to several thousand rupees per message from the increasingly desperate Cawnpore garrison. The risks were huge, with rebel courts determining that captured spies should be mutilated and sent back with missing ears, hands or fingers and split noses.²³ Nor was the information gathered from such sources always timely, useful, or accurate: sometimes officers outside Delhi were delighted to be cut off from Calcutta, others in Lucknow bemoaned the lack of reliable intelligence until a letter arrived from Brigadier-General (later Major-General Sir) Henry Havelock (28 August 1857), and officers in Agra overlooked reports from reliable sources. Meanwhile Captain A. Taylor (Royal Engineers) undertook personal reconnaissance missions, often at night, to check assault routes upon Delhi. Later Thomas H. Kavanagh, a Bengal civil servant, disguised as a sepoy, would earn a Victoria Cross for sneaking through Lucknow from the Residency (9 November 1857) to serve as a guide for Sir Colin Campbell's relief force. Spies also provided crucial information on rebel positions, prompting Havelock to employ "a liberal use" of "secret service money", and for Campbell in his

21 Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers* (London: Greenhill Books, 1990 reprint of 1896 edition), Ch. IV; Gubbins, *Account*, p. 54; Mukherjee, *Awadh*, pp. xvi-xvii; Ball, *History*, vol. 2, p. 16; and Thomas Lowe, *Central India During the Rebellion of 1857 and 1858* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), p. 48.

22 P. V. Luke, "How the Electric Telegraph saved India" in Vibart, *Sepoy Mutiny*, pp. 245-67, at p. 249; and communications for the DFF, William W. Ireland, *History of the Siege of Delhi by An Officer who Served There* (Woolwich: The Naval and Military Press and FIREPOWER The Royal Artillery Museum, 2009 reprint of 1861 edition), pp. 117-118.

23 British Library (BL), Add Mss. 41,488, Amelia Horne Narrative, p. 66; W. J. Shepherd, *Masacre at Cawnpore 1857: A Personal Narrative of the Outbreak and Massacre at Cawnpore during the Sepoy Revolt of 1857* (Delhi: Indian Bibliographic Bureau co-publisher Balage Enterprises, 1987 reprint of 1879), p. 140; Mowbray Thompson, *The Story of Cawnpore* (London: R. Bentley, 1859), p. 135; Andrew Ward, *Our Bones are Scattered: the Cawnpore Massacres in the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: John Murray, 1996), p. 243.

assault upon Lucknow.²⁴

Intelligence and communications were so important because wars fought in an imperial context were, as Colonel Callwell remarked, “in the main campaigns against nature”.²⁵ Climate and disease were major challenges, especially for soldiers in sieges or static locations: the DFF, as Brigadier-General Archdale Wilson informed his wife, was “more besieged than besieging”.²⁶ Forced onto the defensive for over three months, soldiers suffered from sunstroke, plagues of flies, fever, and cholera, which killed Sir Henry Barnard, the first commanding officer of the DFF. In Lucknow they also suffered severely from dysentery, which accounted for Havelock and smallpox, Captain Sir William Peel, VC of HMS Shannon’s Naval Brigade. The humidity and flooding of the monsoon worsened conditions in the camps, but William Ireland, a medical officer on the Delhi Ridge, thought his staff coped with the cholera, sending the worst cases “by litters and covered waggons” to the field hospital at Umballa.²⁷ Conversely, in Lucknow the sick and wounded had to be treated in a makeshift hospital in the banqueting hall, reeking of gangrene. The camp also stank from dead horses and cattle, ensuring that graves had to be dug most evenings for the rotting carcases. Fortunately, the besieged enjoyed excellent water and sufficient supplies of most commodities save tobacco.²⁸

Mobile forces, especially reinforcements arriving at Calcutta, also faced challenges. The 120-mile (193km) railway from outside Calcutta to Raniganj

24 Thomas H. Kavanagh, *How I Won the Victoria Cross* (London: Ward & Lock, 1860); Ireland, *History of the Siege*, pp. 118 and 124; A Staff Officer, *The Defence of Lucknow: A Diary* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1858), pp. 10, 15, 28-9, 37, 70, 76-77, 87, 91, 131, 175; Col. Sir Edward Thackeray, *Reminiscences of The Indian Mutiny (1857-58) and Afghanistan (1879)* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1916), pp. 27, 35-36, 41, 110-111, 113; Roy, *Army*, pp. 16 and 29; and John C. Marsham, *Memoirs of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), p. 290.

25 Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 44.

26 NAM, Acc. 1968-07-483, Wilson MSS., Brig.-Gen. A. Wilson to Ellen, 24 June 1857, f. 31.

27 Ireland, *History of the Siege*, pp. 128-129; Thackeray, *Reminiscences*, pp. 4 and 27; Griffiths, *Narrative*, p. 103.

28 Gubbins, *Account*, pp. 216-217, 238-239 and 249; *The Defence of Lucknow: T. E. Wilson's Memoir of the Indian Mutiny, 1857* (London: Greenhill Books, 2007 reprint of 1858 edition), pp. 90 and 98; and Major-General G. L. Verney, *The Devil's Wind: The Story of the Naval Brigade at Lucknow from the letters of Edmund Hope Verney* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), pp. 40-1.

provided only limited assistance, while river-steamers, though often slow (20 miles [32km] per day) and prone to breakdown, towed troops and their equipment up the Ganges, including two Naval Brigades and their heavy artillery.²⁹ Operational demands often trumped acclimatisation, as Havelock's small army (1,100 British and 150 Sikhs initially) hastened in an attempt to save 200 women and children held at the Bibighurh.³⁰ In forced marches, often at night and in heavy rain, they covered 126 miles (203km) in nine days and won three battles before reaching Cawnpore. Though blessed with "robust and well-seasoned" soldiers in the 64th Foot and 78th Highlanders, Havelock also commanded raw recruits in the Madras Fusiliers, who suffered even more than their comrades from the conditions on the line of march, including outbreaks of cholera. Nevertheless, in defeating the rebels in the first open battle (Fatehpur, 12 July 1857), Havelock exploited the rebels' poor military intelligence, inferior firearms and artillery management, and tactical inflexibility. He later routed Nana Sahib's army of 5,000 men at the first battle of Cawnpore (16 July 1857), before advance units reached Cawnpore just a day after the 200 women and children were slaughtered and their bodies thrown down a well at Bibighurh (15/16 July 1857). On seeing this "terrible sight", a lance-corporal of the 78th Highlanders heard his men saying, "I will never spare a man with a black face".³¹

The outcome of the three great sieges affected the course of the Mutiny critically, if not as decisively as contemporaries imagined. Even if the atrocities at Cawnpore had a purpose - to deter Havelock's advance and leave no evidence from European survivors³² - and even if a subsequent inquiry disavowed the

29 Edward M. Spiers, *Engines for Empire: The Victorian army and its use of railways* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 43-45 and Richard Brooks, *The Long Arm of Empire: Naval Brigades from the Crimea to the Boxer Rebellion* (London: Constable, 1999), pp. 29-32.

30 On Havelock's army, Col. G. B. Malleon, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: Seeley & Co., 1898), p. 188; Nana Sahib's men had slaughtered 130 refugees from Fatehgarh (12 June) and another 200 men, women and children at Satichura Ghat (27 June) after Major-General Sir Hugh Wheeler had accepted an offer of safe conduct (25 June). Four men escaped, while 125 women and children were imprisoned in Savada House and then with more refugees in Bibighurh, Taylor, *What Really Happened*, pp. 74, 84, 98-102.

31 'Cawnpore', *Inverness Courier*, 29 October 1857, p. 5; Marshman, *Memoirs*, pp. 288-289, 304-312; J. W. Sherer, *Havelock's March on Cawnpore 1857* (London: Thomas Nelson, n.d.); NAM, Acc. 1959-03-103, Major G.W. Bingham diary, p. 5; and Roy, *Army*, pp. 26-27.

32 Shepherd, *Massacre*, p. 116; Mukherjee, "Satan", p. 128.

lurid speculation in the Anglo-Indian press of sexual assault and rape,³³ this was the worst, single atrocity by the rebels. The Cawnpore massacres became a by-word for treachery, cowardice and slaughter of the innocents: Lieutenant Thomas Cadell (2nd Bengal Fusiliers) doubted that officers could make men “spare the women and children” in Delhi, and even moderate voices claimed “no quarter” would be given.³⁴

British reprisals earned notoriety, too, not merely on the field of battle but also on the barrack square, in burning villages, punishments, and storming forts and cities. Colonel (later Brigadier-General) James Neill, a Lowland Scot and subordinate of Havelock, declared: “My object is to inflict a fearful punishment for a revolting, cowardly, barbarous deed, and to strike terror into these rebels”.³⁵ Indian historians have noted that Neill began his reprisals at Benares and Allahabad before the Cawnpore massacres.³⁶ Indeed he did, but atrocities had characterised the Mutiny from the outset up to Allahabad, and severe punishments - disarming suspect regiments, public hangings and blowing away mutineers from guns (an old Mughal punishment for mutiny) had enforced discipline and order in the Punjab.³⁷ Admittedly, Neill and his officers imposed more severe and indiscriminate reprisals, including the forcing of condemned men to clean blood from the Bibighurh (and break their caste) before hanging. Many contemporaries praised such punishments, but others saw them as counter-productive (making it more difficult to find supplies on the line of march) and as deepening the hatred between belligerents.³⁸

33 A few women were seized as “prizes”, Mukherjee, “Satan”, pp. 109, 115-116; David, *Indian Mutiny*, pp. 220-222 and Jane Robinson, *Angels of Albion: Women of the Indian Mutiny* (London: Viking, 1996), pp. 130-150.

34 NAM, Acc. 1967-02-90-1, Cadell Mss., Lt. T. Cadell to Harriet, 27 August 1857, p. 17 and Acc. 1952-06-10, Hargood Mss., Lt. W. Hargood to his parents, 7 July 1857; Fred. Roberts, *Letters written during the Indian Mutiny* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 54; no quarter also prevailed in Central India but prisoners were taken, Lowe, *Central India*, pp. 96, 104, 125, 250, 262.

35 ‘Letter from General Neill’, *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 9 October 1857, p. 6.

36 S. N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information, 2nd reprint, 1977), p. 150 and Mukherjee, “Satan”, p. 112.

37 Trotter, *Nicholson*, pp. 212-216, 227, 233, 244-251 and Rev. J. Cave-Browne, *The Punjab and Delhi in 1857* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1861), pp. 277-278.

38 William T. Groom, *With Havelock from Allahabad to Lucknow, 1857* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1894), p. 48; Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An account of the In-*

Delhi had provided the strategic focus for the rebellion, embraced by Moslems and Hindus alike, and the siege had attracted mutinous regiments since the future of Mughal and British rule appeared to hinge on its outcome. Lord Canning, the governor-general, was not alone in believing the revolt would collapse "as soon as Delhi is entered".³⁹ Despite three months of skirmishing and shelling, both sides built up their numbers – 11,200 "effectives" in the DFF (two thirds of whom were Indian) and estimates in excess of 30,000 rebels, or many more, inside the seven miles [11.2km] of walls, forty-feet high, with massive gates and a surrounding ditch. Effectively, the siege contained the main rebel army and enabled the British to reorganize and receive reinforcements elsewhere.⁴⁰ Once the siege train, bringing some 30 large-calibre guns, mortars, howitzers and ammunition, arrived on 4 September 1857,⁴¹ it facilitated the bloody assault on 14 September, which cleared Delhi of rebels over six days while extensive plundering ensued.

The triumph of Sir Archdale Wilson's field force broke the "backbone of the Mutiny", as Viscount Wolseley later averred, and removed its only national symbol when Captain William Hodson captured the King of Delhi and shot three of the royal princes, who were reportedly involved in the Delhi atrocities.⁴² The victory cemented the loyalty of the Punjab, boosted morale among British forces and beleaguered communities, and provided hope, as the magistrate,

dian Army, its officers and men (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), pp. 299-301; John W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-1858*, 3 vols. (London: W. H. Allen, 1864-1867), vol. 2, pp. 129-130, 236, 266-271; Sir George Campbell, *Memoirs of my Indian Career* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 282.

39 Michael MacLagan, 'Clemency' Canning: *Charles, John, 1st Earl Canning Governor-General and Viceroy of India 1856-1862* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 99; Neville Chamberlain to his brother, 19 June 1857, Sir G. W. Forrest, *Life of Field Marshal Sir Neville Chamberlain* (London: Blackwood, 1909), p. 338 and Dalrymple, *Last Mughal*, p. 196.

40 Colonel G. B. Malleson, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: Seeley and Co., 1898), p. 408; Ireland, *History of the Siege*, p. 138 and Alexander Llewellyn, *The Siege of Delhi* (London: MacDonald and Janes, 1922), p. 61.

41 Lieut Colonel J. H. Leslie, 'The March of the Siege Train from Ferozepore to Delhi – August-September, 1857', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research (JSAHR)*, vol. X, No. 39 (1931), pp. 1-16.

42 Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1903), vol. 1, p. 290; Reginald G. Wilberforce, *An Unrecorded Chapter of the Indian Mutiny* (London: John Murray, 1894), p. 200; and Griffiths, *Narrative*, pp. 201-205.

Mark Thornhill observed, that suppressing the rebellion “was now merely a question of time”.⁴³ Many thousands of rebels fled the city but in nothing like the condition they had entered Delhi. As Wilson reported, his force had “captured 148 guns, besides a lot of shot, shell and ammunition”, while the insurgents were “driven with slaughter in confusion and dismay from their boasted stronghold”.⁴⁴

Less than a week passed before the first relief of the Lucknow Residency on 25 September 1857. The forces under Sir James Outram, spearheaded by Havelock’s Highlanders, reinforced rather than relieved the siege, as they had lost heavily in the street fighting.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, after 87 days the garrison of 1,692 men, having lost 713 through casualties, sickness and desertion,⁴⁶ could now expect relief. This followed on 17 November 1857, led by the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Colin Campbell and his force of 4,550 men with 32 guns, including eight heavy guns and howitzers manned by Captain Peel’s sailors from HMS Shannon. Facing “excellent garrison troops”, adept at fighting from behind barricades, walls, and firing through loopholes, Campbell’s gunners and engineers demolished their infrastructure, whether mud-walled villages; buildings, parapets and walled gardens in cities; or forts.⁴⁷ Breaching the walls of Secundrabad and Shah Najaf secured the second relief, especially at the former where the 93rd Highlanders and Sikhs annihilated the defending body. Using bayonets in threes, with the central man thrusting while protected by his flankers, the 93rd suffered 9 officers and 96 men killed and wounded: the rebels lost 1,857 dead.⁴⁸

43 Mark Thornhill, *The Personal Adventures and Experiences of A Magistrate during the Rise, Progress and Suppression of the Indian Mutiny* (London: John Murray, 1884), p. 279; Roberts, *Letters*, p. 65; NAM, Acc. 1959-03-103, Major G. W. Bingham, Diary, 1 October 1857, f. 16; Lowe, *Central India*, pp. 60-63.

44 “Capture of Delhi – General Wilson’s Final Despatch”, *Lancaster Gazette*, 19 December 1857, p. 2; Ireland, *History of the Siege*, p. 289 and Thornhill, *Personal Adventures*, p. 288.

45 Out of 3,197 men, 31 officers and 504 men were killed and wounded, with Neill among the fallen, Heathcote, *Military*, p. 97.

46 Gubbins, *Account*, p. 354. Compare with Verney, *Devil’s Wind*, pp. 38 and 42.

47 Lord Clyde, despatch, 7 January 1859 in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 563-567 at p. 565 and Mukherjee, *Awadh*, p. 86.

48 Lieut.-General W. Gordon Alexander, *Recollections of a Highland Soldier* (London: Edward Arnold, 1858), pp. 83-107; Adrian Greenwood, *Victoria’s Scottish Lion: The Life of Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde* (London: History Press, 2015), p. 365; and Hibbert, *Great Mutiny*, p. 342.

The Lucknow siege had a huge political, military and cultural significance both during and after the rebellion. The gallant defence of the Residency followed the disastrous ambush at Chinhath (30 June 1857), where 365 British and Indian soldiers had been killed, wounded or missing and three guns lost, including an 8-inch howitzer. Yet in a massive boost to British morale, the garrison protected 1,280 non-combatants, including hundreds of women and children. Having resisted sustained musketry, shelling and 37 mining attacks, it repulsed major assaults from a far larger enemy (estimated in excess of 8,000 infantry with 20 to 25 guns), but one bereft of a unified command and disciplined organization.⁴⁹

Yet the rebels had rallied to Lucknow. When Havelock failed to press on with his small (and depleted) relief force after three victories north of the Ganges, and re-crossed the river to defeat the rebels at Bithur (16 August 1857), many uncommitted landowners in Oudh had assumed that the Company was too weak to respond effectively and joined the rebel cause. Similarly, after Delhi fell, mutineers and rebels flocked to Lucknow (and tried to sever British contact with Cawnpore). Mukherjee calculates that 53,350 rebels gathered in Lucknow to oppose Campbell's force, but 60 per cent of them were untrained, poorly equipped and undisciplined levies sent by the talukdars. Not only did this army fail to thwart the relief, and then the withdrawal, without a casualty, of 600 women and children, 1,000 sick and wounded and the garrison itself, with baggage, guns and government treasure, but it also failed to dislodge Outram with his garrison of 4,000 men and 35 guns from the forward base left at the Alambagh near Lucknow. Meanwhile Campbell, having found reinforcements at Allahabad, defeated the rebel army, including the Gwalior Contingent, under Tatya Tope at the third battle of Cawnpore (6 December 1857).⁵⁰

49 John Lawrence, *Lawrence of Lucknow: a story of love*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 251; Lieut.-General James J. McLeod Innes, *Lucknow & Oude in the Mutiny: A Narrative and a Study* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1895), p. 160; and Brigadier T. Inglis, despatch, 26 September 1857 in *Defence of Lucknow*, pp. 141-162 at p. 147; Gubbins, *Account*, pp. 188-191.

50 Tatya Tope's 10,000 rebels, half of whom were the Gwalior Contingent, had defeated Major-General Windham's 1,000 men at the Second Battle of Cawnpore (27 November 1857) and shelled them within Wheeler's entrenchments. Mukherjee, *Awadh*, pp. 90-91, 94, 102-104; Lieut.-General Sir George F. MacMunn, *The Indian Mutiny in Perspective* (London: Bell & Sons, 1931), pp. 137-140; Wolseley, *Story*, vol. 1, pp. 322-323; Gordon Alexander, *Recollections*, p. 142.

In 1858-1859 the “strange” rebellion evolved into two more conventional operations: one in the northern provinces under Campbell, at the head of the largest force that Britain had ever placed in the field since Waterloo (31,000 men and 164 cannon), the other under a more dashing Scotsman, Sir Hugh Rose, in the central provinces, numbering 5,700 men.⁵¹ The size of the British and allied forces reflected the expanse and nature of the terrain, the vast rebel numbers, and the strength of their defences (15,000 workers had built three defensive lines in Lucknow to support 131 canon and 100,000 troops, only a third of whom were trained sepoys or sowars, led by a rebel leader known as the Maulvi of Faizabad). Both British commanders struggled with supplies and transport; Campbell’s baggage train stretched for 25 miles (40 km), with 60,000 non-combatants and thousands of oxen, camels and bullocks, while Rose spent three weeks collecting food, transport and ammunition after storming Jhansi.⁵² They also encountered micro-management from Calcutta, where Canning insisted upon the capture of Lucknow initially, and then in the midst of the hot season, the crushing of rebels in Oudh. This was later modified to give priority (after the capture of Lucknow) to Rohilkhand, where a significant number of pro-British Hindus were thought to be resistant to Moslem rule under Khan Bahadur Khan at Bareilly. While Campbell followed Canning’s directions, Rose proved resolute in pursuit of his principal objective, Jhansi, and had Sir Robert Hamilton, the governor-general’s Agent in Central India, intervene on his behalf to avoid the proposed diversion.⁵³

Both forces, nonetheless, were better balanced than those of Havelock

51 Col. A. R. D. MacKenzie, *Mutiny Memoirs: Being Personal Reminiscences of the Great Sepoy Mutiny of 1857* (Allahabad; The Pioneer Press, 1891), pp. 190-191; MacMunn, *Mutiny in Perspective*, pp. 211-212 and 226-227; Watson, *Great Indian Mutiny*, p. 87 and Brian Robson (ed.), *Sir Hugh Rose and the Central India Campaign 1858* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Company for the Army Records Society, 2000), p. 2.

52 George W. Forrest (ed.), *Selections From The Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Military Department of the Government of India (1857-58)*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Asian Educational Service reprint of 1912, 2001), vol. 4, p. 128.

53 Lord Canning to Campbell, 29 December 1857 and 7 January 1858 in Lieut.-General L. Shadwell, *The Life of Sir Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1881), vol. 2, pp. 72, 86-87; Maclagen, ‘Clemency’ Canning, pp. 151-152; Archibald Forbes, *Colin Campbell: Lord Clyde* (London: Macmillan, 1895), pp. 173-174; Sir R. Hamilton to G. E. Edmonstone, 20 March 1858 in Robson, *Rose*, pp. 4 and 109-111.

(Campbell had 17 infantry battalions, 28 cavalry squadrons, engineers and among his artillery 54 heavy cannon and a Naval Brigade). This was far different, as Captain Julius Medley (Bengal Engineers) observed, from "the small force assembled at Delhi in September 1857": that had been "scraped together [from] so many miscellaneous elements, and worn out by three months of incessant fighting, at the most trying season of the year".⁵⁴ Yet the campaigning had a distinctive Indian character: "a Crimean education", wrote Commissioner Greathed, was not helpful since access to the sea at Balaclava had removed any "care about communications".⁵⁵ Veterans of the Crimean service reckoned that the "Sebastopol sufferings" barely resembled those in India,⁵⁶ and that failed assaults on the Redan hardly prepared men for the street fighting in Delhi or at Lucknow "on the 25th Sept.". ⁵⁷ The 1st Madras Fusiliers, wrote Lieutenant William Hargood, had entered Bengal "850 strong" but by mid-November 1857, barely mustered 400 of whom "only 190 privates" were fit for duty, the rest being sick or wounded.⁵⁸

A Crimean veteran, Campbell knew that losses on this scale were unsustainable. So, assisted by his chief of staff, Sir William Mansfield, he requested a much larger and better-balanced army, but all the divisions were not available when he began the assault on Lucknow (2-21 March 1858). Campbell launched a central thrust from Dilkusha Park in the south, battering through walls towards the Kaisarbagh (royal palace), while Outram's and Walpole's divisions swung round by the east and north to enfilade the rebels and turn their defences. A column of 4,000 Euro/Nepalese soldiers under Major-General Franks arrived on the 5 March, and Jung Bahadur, the Nepalese prime minister, with 8,000 Gurkhas six days later. Siege artillery led the assaults, as the British and allied

54 Julius G. Medley, *A Year's Campaigning in India from March 1857, to March 1858*, 2 vols. (London: Thacker & Co., 1858), vol. 1, p. 186; Gordon Highlanders Museum, Lt-Gen R. Barter, PB 1657, 'The Assault of Delhi' in which the 75th Regiment took part with 350 effectives out of "928 Privates" brought to the siege lines.

55 Greathed, *Letters*, p. 92.

56 'The Indian Mutinies', *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 27 November 1857, p. 6; Lt.-Col. J. H. Leslie, 'The Diary and Letters of Arthur Moffat Lang, 1st Lieutenant, Bengal Engineers, India -1857 to 1859, *JSAHR*, vol. 10, no. 40 (1931), pp. 195-206 at p. 202.

57 NAM, Acc. 1952-06-10, Hargood Mss., Lt. W. Hargood to his parents, 18 November 1857; Griffiths, *Narrative*, p. 173.

58 NAM, Acc. 1952-06-10, Hargood MSS., Hargood to his parents, 18 November 1857.

forces captured one stronghold after another, but in his reluctance to risk lives, Campbell restrained Outram from crossing the Gumti River, and cutting off the rebel retreat. This allowed thousands to escape westwards and prolong the campaign. Yet Campbell captured the city of nominally 600,000 inhabitants, losing only 127 killed and 595 wounded, while the rebels lost 3,000 dead by 16 March. The victors then ransacked the Kaisarbagh, prompting Russell's famous description of the men being "literally drunk with plunder".⁵⁹

Just as the capture of Lucknow paved the way for further campaigns in the north, so the storming of Jhansi (3-6 April 1858) proved pivotal in the central provinces. When Tatya Tope brought "22,000 troops and 28 guns" to break the investment of Jhansi,⁶⁰ which had begun on 23 March, Rose detached a mere 1,200 soldiers (500 of whom were British) to engage the advancing forces at the battle of Betwa (31 March-1 April 1858). Rose turned the flanks of the advance column and, as these rebels fell back in confusion, harried them with cavalry and horse artillery until they fled, losing 1,500 killed and 18 guns, for only 19 of his men killed and 66 wounded. Disproportionate losses recurred in the storming of Jhansi, where as Dr. Thomas Lowe observed, "no maudlin clemency", marked "the fall of the city": 5,000 rebels perished, while the victors lost 807 killed and wounded.⁶¹ Rose (and Major-General Whitlock in separate operations) then defeated the rebels in a series of battles. Rose, supported by Colonel Maxwell's column on the left back of the Jumna, vanquished the rebels at Kalpi and entered their stronghold (23 May 1858). Rose triumphed finally at Gwalior, seizing the town and fort (16-20 June 1858), where the Rani was killed while Tatya Tope and Rao Sahib (a nephew of Nana Sahib) fled as fugitives.

Militarily, the final operations and 'mopping up' of renegades were undertaken mainly in the north⁶² over the next nine months. Lord Canning's Oudh

59 Russell, *My Diary*, vol. 1, p. 330; Ball, *History*, vol. 2, p. 256; Watson, *Great Indian Mutiny*, pp. 82-91 and 98-105; and MacMunn, *Mutiny in Perspective*, p. 216.

60 'Statement of Tantia Tope taken at Camp Mushairi, 10 April 1859, in the presence of Major Meade, Commanding Field Force' in Maj. R. G. Burton, *The Revolt in Central India 1857-59 compiled in the Intelligence Branch Division of the Chief of Staff, Army Headquarters* (Simla, 1908), Appendix XVII, pp. 273-277 at p. 274.

61 Rose to Lord Elphinstone, 10 April 1858 in Robson, *Rose*, pp. 117-118, 155-156; Forrest, *Selections*, vol. 4, p. 127; Lowe, *Central India*, pp. 236 and 246.

62 Tatya Tope sustained a guerilla resistance with Rao Sahib in Rajputana and Central India, but suffered defeats at Rajgarh (15 September 1858), and with Prince Firoz Shah, at Sikar (21

Proclamation (14 March 1858) had stiffened rebel resistance and proved controversial in Britain and India. It allowed six loyal *talukdars* in Oudh to keep their estates but deprived the remainder of their lands unless they "promptly" surrendered, without "English blood" on their hands, whereupon their lives would be spared and discussions opened about "a restitution of their former rights".⁶³ Lacking any hope of victory, and dispersed in sizeable groups around Lucknow, and across Oudh, at least 88,000 rebels remained active during April/May 1858 but could only harass the British.⁶⁴

In Rohilkhand, Campbell despatched separate columns to converge on Bareilly, the provincial capital. Despite a costly blunder by Walpole's lack of reconnaissance at Ruiya (15 April 1858), the columns met and defeated the forces of Khan Bahadur Khan at a battle outside the capital (5 May 1858). Surviving rebels fled into Oudh, swelling the numbers arrayed against Campbell. "The people hate us and our rule" bemoaned the commander-in-chief, so marching "columns through the country does not appear to produce any permanent result".⁶⁵ He found success, nonetheless, by exploiting local rifts. When the Maulvi of Faizabad sought to extend his guerrilla warfare along the Rohilkhand/Oudh border by seeking support from the Raja of Pawagan (15 June 1858), the raja refused entry to his fort. As the Maulvi ordered an assault, the raja's brother shot and killed the Maulvi on his elephant, had him beheaded, and so enabled the raja to claim the reward of 50,000 rupees. Open battle also remained a disastrous option for the rebels as 16,000 of them discovered at Nawabganj (12 June 1858), where Major-General James Hope Grant attacked them with 3,500 men. Within three hours his cavalry and supporting units killed 600 rebels, and seized six guns, for a loss of 67 killed and wounded. But Hope Grant lost another 33 men to sunstroke and had 250 hospitalised: it was the "sun and heat", he wrote, not the rebels that were "fearful scourges in this country during the hot weather".⁶⁶

January 1859), Burton, *Revolt*, pp. 211-35 and Appendix XVII, pp. 274-277.

63 The full text can be found in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 276-77 and MacLagan, 'Clemency' *Canning*, pp. 183-185.

64 Mukherjee, *Awadh*, pp. 108-111.

65 Campbell to Hope Grant, 1 June 1858 in Henry Knollys (ed.), *Life of General Sir Hope Grant with selections from his correspondence*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1894), vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

66 Knollys, *Hope Grant*, vol. 2, p. 12.

During July 1858 Campbell began his co-ordinated drives northwards through Oudh, Behar (Bihar) and Gorakhpur. In driving the enemy across the Gogra (Ghaghara) River, a tributary of the Ganges, and towards the Nepalese border, Campbell was pursuing a politico-military strategy. The slow advance was “a thorough process of occupation”, which involved establishing garrisons in support of his “forward movement” to restore law, civil administration and local police forces in conquered areas. His columns disarmed parts of the provinces, particularly in the operations from the beginning of November, accumulating “many hundreds of guns, and about 350,000 arms”. They also exploited the rebels’ lack of “bomb-proof cover” to demolish 300 forts and disperse the rebels whenever they made a stand. Campbell commended the “simultaneous movements of so many troops scattered often in small detachments over a very great extent of country”.⁶⁷

In his final operations Campbell, now Lord Clyde, had been assisted immeasurably by ‘Queen Victoria’s Proclamation’ of 1 November 1858, which abolished the East India Company, established direct British rule over India, and offered an amnesty and restoration of lands to the talukdars of Oudh, if they surrendered by 1 January 1859. The only exceptions to this amnesty were those who had killed British subjects, or had harboured those who had done so or acted as leaders of the revolt. By 7 January 1859, Clyde could report that: “a considerable number” of mutineers had surrendered, and that “the resistance of 150,000 armed men had been subdued with a very moderate loss”.⁶⁸ The newly knighted, Sir James Hope Grant reckoned that “all the courage had been driven out of the faint-hearted wretches, and they would not stand a moment, running away like wild fire”.⁶⁹

Many of the rebel leaders fled across the frontier into the fever-infested jungles of Nepal, but Jung Bahadur refused to protect them. Among the rebel leaders captured at this time was Tatyá Tope, betrayed to the British, tried and hung (18 April 1859). His demise symbolised the collapse of a rebellion in which the insurgents rarely exploited their massive advantage in numbers, local support,

67 Lord Clyde, despatch, 7 January 1859 in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, pp. 563-565, 567.

68 Ibid; for a full text of the Proclamation, see MacLagen, ‘*Clemency*’ *Canning*, Appendix 4, pp. 350-352.

69 Knollys, *Hope Grant*, vol. 2, p. 34.

and "the very best of information".⁷⁰ Even the well-trained Gwalior Contingent flattered to deceive. Conversely, the British adapted (as far as they could) to the demands and conditions of Indian warfare – every brigade, wrote Lord Clyde, "since the fall of Lucknow" had been equipped "with heavy guns".⁷¹ Better organised in logistical, tactical and operational terms, they managed their fire-power, including the superior Enfield rifles, to overwhelm and demoralise the enemy, while minimising their own losses.

Company forces also 'shaped' battles, turned the flanks of their enemy, and often enabled their disciplined sub-units to prevail despite massively adverse odds. Colonel Callwell added that "the spirit of the offensive" drove them on with "unflinching courage" and "restless energy"⁷² – values often laced with racial hatred and a desire for righteous retribution. Commanders such as Nicholson, Havelock, Neill and Hope Grant never concealed their deep religious convictions, and officers and other ranks often sought 'Revenge for Cawnpore' in engagements where no quarter was given or expected. Yet military experience involved much more than battlefield encounters, not least the "tedious" campaigning in temperatures of 120 degrees in tents, and 130 degrees in the open during Rose's campaign, and the monotony of garrison service. Some officers also worried about due process in respect of reprisals and post-war reconciliation. Nevertheless, the Christian service held at the grave of the massacred Europeans after the storming of Jhansi was more representative of the victors' feelings.⁷³ Even forty years' later Colonel A. R. D. MacKenzie (formerly of the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry) still regarded "the mutineers, not as honest enemies, but as foul and cruel murderers", while Wolseley recalled how "remembrance of the treatment our women and children had received at [the] hands of these fiends roused all our worst instincts".⁷⁴

70 This intelligence officer added: "We had the very worst of information.... The sympathy of the people was on their side" quoted in Burton, *Revolt*, p. 235.

71 Lord Clyde, despatch, 7 January 1859 in Ball, *History*, vol. 2, p. 565.

72 Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 79.

73 NAM, Acc. 1967-02-90-1, Cadell Mss., Cadell to Harriet, 27 August 1857; Roberts, *Letters*, pp. 70, 133 and 140; Muir to Greathed, 17 September 1857 in Muir, *Records*, vol. 2, p. 262; and Lowe, *Central India*, pp. 230 and 267.

74 MacKenzie, *Mutiny Memoirs*, p. 107; Wolseley, *Story*, vol. 1, p. 263.

Conclusion

Suppressing this “strange” rebellion had lasting effects upon the manner in which Britain conducted future imperial wars and suppressed rebellions. The notion of Christian militarism that had evolved during the Crimean War received fresh impetus in a defence of Christianity itself, and gained a new martyr in the Baptist Major-General, Sir Henry Havelock.⁷⁵ Two groups of military heroes emerged, underlining their value for future imperial service: the seamen of Peel’s Naval Brigade, brilliantly described by Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, as “4 ft. high, 4 ft. broad, long hair and dragging big guns!!”⁷⁶ and the Highlanders, who earned plaudits in the press, widespread acclaim, and tributes in paintings, prints, poems, novels, lithographic works, memorials and monuments. The Mutiny, as John MacKenzie argued, “thoroughly established the iconic significance of the Scottish soldier, and the musical resonance of his bagpipes”.⁷⁷ Dubbed the “deliverers” of Lucknow by Mrs. Harris, and the skirl of the pipes as the focal point of the songs, ballads and the four-part drama known as “Jessie’s Dream”,⁷⁸ the Indian experience fully justified the popular reputation of the Highlanders as assault troops of the empire.⁷⁹ Moreover, the popular and cultural extravaganza associated with the suppression of the Mutiny ensured that “The Indian Rebellion could be described as the first ‘national-popular’ colonial war fought by Britain in its empire.”⁸⁰ Cawnpore and Lucknow had enduring legacies, too, becoming celebrated in paintings, prints, fiction, drama, memorials, and Alfred

75 Olive Anderson, ‘The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain’, *English Historical Review*, vol. 86 (1971), pp. 46-72 and Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Victorians at War* (London: Hambledon, 2003), pp. 13-24.

76 Roberts, *Letters*, p. 91.

77 John M. MacKenzie, ‘Heroic myths of empire’ in John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular imperialism and the military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 109-138, at p. 116.

78 Mrs. Harris, *A Lady’s Diary of the Siege of Lucknow* (London: John Murray, 1858), p. 119; Edward M. Spiers, ‘Introduction’ in Edward M. Spiers, Jeremy A. Crang and Matthew J. Strickland (eds), *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 1-38 at pp. 18-19.

79 Edward M. Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854-1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 7-10.

80 Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 81.

Lord Tennyson's poems, "Havelock" (1858) and twenty-years later the more memorable, "The Defence of Lucknow" (1879). There was even a rare imperial ballet, "Nana Sahib" (1872). The cultural memory never left the Victorians, with references to these events during the sieges of Mafeking and the Peking Legation forty years later.⁸¹

Although suppressing the Indian rebellion was in many respects "unique, and unlike any other,"⁸² it required enduring military qualities like resolve and a capacity to improvise (Moveable Column) in response to the shock and savagery of the initial mutiny, and resilience in trying to contain the spread of rebellion across the northern and central provinces. Apart from the disasters at Jhansi and Cawnpore, the early sieges held, demonstrating the value of preparation, resolute command, organized resistance with indigenous support, and what the Victorians described as 'pluck'. Britain's capacity for global reach brought timely reinforcements and expert assistance from Naval Brigades, as Company forces campaigned across vast expanses of terrain, often in dreadful heat and in spite of recurrent bouts of devastating diseases. In defying massively superior numbers, and deep-seated hostility in many parts of the disaffected provinces, EIC commanders had exploited the shortcomings of rebel leadership, their tactical rigidity and their increasing reliance on untrained and poorly equipped levies. A soldier of the 90th (Perthshire Volunteers), serving at the Alambagh, aptly summarised military attitudes: "We are not afraid of their numbers for the more there are the greater will be the confusion among them."⁸³ Success in overcoming this "strange" rebellion required an experienced and tactically astute leadership, with achievable aims, field intelligence, and political support. These factors facilitated an effective use of disciplined firepower, particularly heavy artillery in pulverising fixed defences, disrupting attacks, and paving the way for generally well-led and highly motivated infantry offensives.

81 J. Emerson Neilly, *Besieged with B.-P. A Full and Complete Record of the Siege* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1900), pp. 173-174; Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners That Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2000), p. 80.

82 MacKenzie, *Mutiny Memoirs*, p. 105.

83 'Letter from the Camp at Allumbagh (sic)', *Newcastle Journal*, 3 April 1858, p. 7.



Fig. 4. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj Statue. Sambhaji led the Marathas for the first nine years of the Deccan Wars. Wikimedia Commons.

Why the Confederate Insurgency Failed: Another Take on the Course, Conduct, and Outcome of America's Civil War, 1861-1865

by ETHAN RAFUSE

In his April 10, 1865, farewell message to the Army of Northern Virginia, Gen. Robert E. Lee assured his men that it was not the qualitative superiority of the enemy army, nor any lack of virtue on their part nor deficiency in the justice of the cause they fought for, that explained their defeat at the hands of the Union Army. Rather, “[a]fter four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude,” Lee explained, “the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources. . . . You will take with you the satisfaction that proceeds from the consciousness of duty faithfully performed.”¹ Lee’s explanation for the failure of Confederate arms to secure Southern independence has not gone unchallenged. To be sure, in his contribution to a landmark collection of essays debating why the Union won, Richard N. Current concluded, “in view of the disparity of resources, it would have taken a miracle, a direct intervention of the Lord on the other side to enable the South to win. As usual, God was on the side of the heaviest battalions.” Shelby Foote agreed. The North, Foote concluded, “fought the war with one arm tied behind its back. . . . If there had been more Southern victories, and a lot more, the North simply would have brought that other hand out from behind its back. I don’t think the South ever had a chance to win that war.”²

1 Headquarters, Army of Northern Virginia, General Order No. 9, 10 April 1865, in *The War-time Papers of Robert E. Lee*, edited by Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin (1961; New York: Da Capo, 1987), 934-35. This is a revised and expanded version of an essay that appeared as “Why the Confederate Insurgency Failed: Another Take on the Essential Question” in *North and South* 7 (November 2004): 29-34.

2 Richard N. Current, “God and the Strongest Battalions,” in *Why the North Won the Civil War*, edited by David Donald (1960; New York: Macmillan, 1962), 32; “Men at War: An Interview

There have, however, been no shortage of students of the American Civil War who have found Lee's explanation for Confederate defeat unsatisfactory. That this is the case is hardly surprising, for one of the reasons we study history is to debate the causes, course, and the outcome of events, as well as the individuals who shaped them. Indeed, about seventy years ago the great historian David H. Donald famously exclaimed (no doubt with a twinkle in his eye) that, "There must be more historians of the Civil War than there were generals fighting it, and of the two groups, the historians are the more belligerent."³

Moreover, at least one Confederate general took exception to the "overwhelming numbers and resources" argument put forward by Lee. "The cause of the subjugation of the Southern States was neither want of wealth and population," Joseph E. Johnston insisted in his memoirs, "That people was not guilty of the high crime of undertaking a war without the means of waging it successfully." The problem, as Johnston saw it, was that the Confederacy's "ample means . . . were not applied to the object of equipping great armies, and bringing them into the field." This, he attributed to financial mismanagement, which produced "wretched impressment laws" and inadequate pay, food, and arms for the army due to "an empty treasury."⁴ In the 1920s, historian Frank Owsley argued the death of the Confederacy was attributable to an excessive commitment to state rights, which prevented the Confederate government from providing the sort of unified direction to the Southern war effort that the Lincoln administration was able to give to the Union war effort.⁵ This by no means is an exhaustive list of all the explanations that have been put forward for Confederate defeat.

The purpose of this essay is to revisit the question of why the Southern rebellion failed. Although the American Civil War was primarily waged by conventionally organized armies conducting operations in line with the practices of interstate warfare, this essay considers the Confederacy as an "insurgency".

with Shelby Foote," in Geoffrey C. Ward with Ric Burns and Ken Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Random House, 1990), 272.

3 David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York: Knopf, 1956 ed.), 82.

4 Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), 421-426.

5 Frank Owsley, *State Rights in the Confederacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925).

Indeed, when Abraham Lincoln called for troops after Fort Sumter he did not ask Congress for a declaration of war the way James Madison did when he sought legal authorization to apply violence for a political purpose against the nation-state of Great Britain in 1812. Nor did he follow the lead of James K. Polk when he asked Congress for authorization to do the same against the nation-state of Mexico. Instead, Lincoln deliberately employed the language of the 1792 Militia Act, making clear he was not employing military force against another sovereign state or group of states (which Lincoln never recognized the Confederacy as). Rather, he was calling for 75,000 troops to address the problem of the execution of “the laws of the United States” being “opposed . . . by combinations too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings” and to “suppress said combinations and to cause the laws to be duly executed.”⁶

Indeed, Lincoln saw the Southern secessionist movement much as the modern United States military defines an insurgency; namely, as, “The organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”⁷ At the core of any insurgency is a contest between the two belligerents for the “hearts and minds” or a population over whether the right of revolution is being exercised appropriately. As historian John Shy pointed out in his landmark analysis of the American War for Independence, in such conflicts it is always critical to keep in mind “the triangularity of the struggle,” for the “two armed forces contend less with each other than for the support and control of the civilian population.”⁸

In the experience of the struggle for American independence that both the North and South looked back to for inspiration in guidance, the Declaration of Independence of July 1776 laid out the principle that, “Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the government. . . . That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of

6 Abraham Lincoln, “A Proclamation,” April 15, 1861, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), vol. 4: 331-32.

7 Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington DC: The Joint Staff, June 2025), 85.

8 John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990 ed.), 218-219.

these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or ability it, and to institute new Government.” Jefferson Davis called back to this in February 1861 when he declared the Confederacy rested on “the American idea that governments rest upon the consent of the governed, and that it is the right of the people to alter or abolish governments.”⁹

Given the centrality of politics in any insurgency, it is necessary to consider why insurgent leaders seek to convince the people to withdraw their consent from the established government and give their consent to the political institutions established by the insurgents. The goal of Southerners was not independence as an end in itself; rather, it was the way and means Southern leaders determined was necessary after Lincoln’s election, the failure of compromise in 1860-61, and the United States government’s call for troops after Fort Sumter, to achieve their end. This was the defense of the South’s distinctive culture and way of life—above all their ownership of enslaved people—from molestation from Yankee outsiders. Having defined this as the strategic purpose of the Confederacy, Confederate leaders would be judged by their success in achieving this purpose. Only if they succeeded in convincing the Southern people of the need to keep the Yankees out, and demonstrated that they had the ability to do this, would the leaders of the Southern insurgency maintain the consent of their people. If they failed in this, they had little hope of keeping the hearts and minds of the Southern people behind the cause of Confederate independence. This placed significant limits on Southern strategy and their ability to possess all of the elements necessary for success in their rebellion.¹⁰

In the early 2000s, a group of military historians at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College produced a volume of essays looking at wars—including the American Revolution, the Peninsular War, the Vietnam War, and the

9 Jefferson Davis, “Inaugural Address,” [February 18, 1861], in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, edited by Lynda Laswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, 14 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971-2004), vol. 7: 46.

10 Few serious scholars of the Confederacy today dispute the notion that the defense of slavery was central to the decision of the states that seceded in 1860-1861. See Richard Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William L. Still, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 69, 425, 436-440, 525n22; George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 27-29; William C. Davis, *The Lost Cause: A History of the Confederate States of America* (New York: 2002), 42-43, 47-48, 97-110, 130, 135-137, 146-147, 149, 162.

Soviet war in Afghanistan—that were not conducted exclusively as conventional state-on-state conflicts, with its editor, Thomas Huber, identifying as a central theme the conceptual problem of “compound warfare”. In compound warfare, a belligerent employs a combination of conventional military operations and irregular warfare in pursuit of its political goals. (More recently, military theorists have preferred the term “hybrid warfare”).¹¹ In addition to effectively employing conventional operations and irregular forces, two additional elements were critical to the outcome of these conflicts—external assistance from a “major-power ally” and “safe haven” or sanctuary. It is not necessary that an insurgency possess all four of these elements to be successful—what Huber labeled “fortified compound warfare”—but when it does, it is, in Huber’s words, “nearly impossible to defeat.”¹² In the case of the American War for Independence and Vietnam War, the insurgents possessed all four and were successful. By applying the concept of fortified compound warfare to the Confederacy and considering why it did not possess all four of the elements of fortified compound warfare, it is possible to better understand the failure of the Southern bid for independence.

An Effective Conventional Army

There is little question that, at least in the East, under the direction of Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy created and maintained an effective conventional army. The first function an effective regular force serves is symbolic. They are an institutional representative of the insurgency that tells people both at home and abroad that the insurgents seek not only to overthrow the existing government

11 Thomas M. Huber, “Compound Warfare: A Conceptual Framework,” in *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*, edited by Thomas M. Huber (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002), 1-2. In the introduction to a 2012 volume of essays looking at historical examples of “hybrid warfare,” editor Peter R. Mansoor, “defined hybrid warfare as conflict involving a combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists), which could include both state and nonstate actors, aimed at achieving a common political purpose.” He also acknowledges the earlier introduction of the concept of compound warfare, stating, “For this study, we make no . . . distinction between hybrid and compound war.” Mansoor, “Introduction,” in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, edited by Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2-3.

12 Huber, “Compound Warfare,” 3-4.

(in which case, they could be dismissed as criminals or anarchists), but to set up a formal functioning government with institutions that establish a proper system of laws and order that enable economic, social, and political life to function and thrive. Militarily, the existence of an effective conventional army undermines the standing of the government that is being overthrown, as in order for any government to have legitimacy, it must have the exclusive power to command obedience from the people and enforce its policies. Simply by existing and denying the ability of the government to assert it has a monopoly on organized, legitimate violence, an effective insurgent conventional army erodes the moral authority of the existing government in the hearts and minds of people at home and abroad.

The conventional army also, of course, serves a military function. It conducts large and small-scale operations in a conventional manner against the conventional armies of the government in pursuit of victories that defend the territory and institutions of the insurgent political structure. In addition, conventional victories target the legitimacy of the government that is seeking to defeat the rebellion, with actions ranging from merely menacing the government's armed forces to engaging them in conventional battle to delivering the *coup de grace* on the battlefield, as the Continental Army did at Yorktown in 1781 and the People's Army of Vietnam did in 1975. By just existing, the insurgent regular army also places the government in a serious dilemma. The insurgent regular force compels the government to keep its own army concentrated in order to ensure it has sufficient strength to deal with the insurgent conventional force. To do this, however, the government is compelled to divert coercive power from the task of maintaining control over the population, leaving the people exposed to insurgent political and irregular military efforts. Conversely, if the government disperses its strength to control the population, it risks being caught at a disadvantage by the insurgent conventional force.

The Confederate States of America, of course, did raise and maintain a robust conventional military. In Virginia under Robert E. Lee, at least, this military was superbly led and able to win victories that protected critical points on the map, boosted Southern morale, imposed heavy costs in lives and treasure on the United States government, enabled them to threaten points on the map that were critical to the Union war effort, and depressed Northern morale. Lee's

army also served as a point of pride and thus a unifying force for the people of the South (indeed, by becoming central to the Lost Cause mythology it did so long after the guns fell silent) and provided an aura of legitimacy for the Confederate government at home and abroad. That Confederate armies had this effect was evident in October 1862, when British Chancellor of the Exchequer William Gladstone famously declared in a speech, "We may have our opinions about slavery; we may be for or against the South; but there is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army. They are making it appear, a navy; and they have made what is more than either—they have made a nation."¹³

Irregular or Guerrilla Forces

The leaders of the Confederacy, however, failed to develop fully another element of fortified compound warfare; namely a truly effective irregular force. To be sure, irregular warfare was a feature of life in the Confederacy, with Abraham Lincoln himself complaining in February 1863:

In no other way does the enemy give us so much trouble, at so little expence to himself, as by the raids of rapidly moving small bodies of troops (largely, if not wholly, mounted) harrassing, and discouraging loyal residents, supplying themselves with provisions, clothing, horses, and the like, surprising and capturing small detachments of our forces, and breaking our communications.¹⁴

Organized into small bands located throughout the territory being disputed by the government and insurgents, the job of irregular forces is, in the words of Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz, "to nibble at the shell and around the edges."¹⁵ They erode the military strength and political standing of the existing government by attacking its army's supply lines, mounting hit-and-run raids, and ambushing isolated units. Moreover, in order to deal with guerrilla bands,

13 Allen Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 291.

14 Lincoln to Rosecrans, February 17, 1863, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), vol. 6: 108.

15 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1832: Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 480-481.

it is usually necessary for the government to disperse its armed forces in order to assert control over the countryside, which can render them vulnerable to operations of the insurgent main army. Alternately, where the government concentrates its forces against the insurgent main army, the irregulars have room to disperse to operate among the people at the local level.

Irregulars are in the truest sense “the people,” a physical manifestation of popular sentiment, drawn directly from the populace with a political, as well as a military mission. They pose a general menace that fosters an image of government impotence in the eyes of the people, acting as a domestic constabulary force, operating directly among the people on behalf of the insurgency, forcing them to take sides, and steering their decisions through a combination of carrots and sticks in ways that support the insurgency. These are the roles, of course, that irregular forces played in both the American Revolution and in the Vietnam War, wearing down and exhausting the materially superior foe through constant harassment and working at the local level to convince the people of the perfidy and weakness of the existing government—and of the virtue and effectiveness of the insurgency.

Could irregulars have done the same for the Confederacy? In the past few decades, with the struggles U.S. forces experienced in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan influencing their work, scholars of the Civil War have produced a truly impressive body of scholarship delineating the extent and character of guerrilla activity in the Confederacy.¹⁶ Certainly, the material was there for a

16 For the state of scholarship on the guerrilla war of 1861-1865 at the start of the 21st century, see Daniel E. Sutherland, “Sideshow No Longer: A Historiographical Review of the Guerrilla War,” *Civil War History* 46 (March 2000), 5-23, and William B. Feis, “Jefferson Davis and the ‘Guerrilla Option’: A Reexamination,” in *Collapse of the Confederacy*, edited by Mark Grimsley and Brooks D. Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 104-128. A few years later, Robert R. Mackey published *The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), which was followed in 2009 by the appearance of Sutherland’s *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), which won the Society for Military History’s Distinguished Book Award and the Tom Watson Brown Book award from the Society of Civil War Historians. 2009 also saw Sutherland contribute to “Irregular Warfare, 1861-1865: A Roundtable,” *North and South* 11 (June 2009): 16-29, and the appearance of Clay Mountcastle, *Punitive War: Confederate Guerrillas and Union Reprisals* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009). Notable works on the subject since then include Joseph M. Beilein, Jr. and Matthew C. Hulbert, *The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfold-*

sustained an effective irregular resistance that, if properly and fully executed, might have fatally compromised the Northern effort to restore loyal governments in the Southern states.

Yet, despite the complaints of Lincoln and innumerable department and district commanders and provost marshals about the many headaches guerrillas created in the wartime South, irregular warfare was not made an integral component of Southern strategy to the extent it was in the American Revolution and in the Vietnam War. Southern irregular forces popped up locally, remained local in their orientation, and there was no real effort by Richmond to integrate and coordinate their efforts with those of regular forces. Indeed, despite expressions of popular support for irregular warfare and the authorization of partisan and ranger bands in the Partisan Ranger Act of April 1862, the attitude of Confederate military authorities—the most important of which, of course, being Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee—was notably cool. Throughout the war, they generally dealt with irregular forces (John Mosby's partisan rangers in northern Virginia being the notable exception) at arm's length.

The reasons for this have been well-documented by historians such as Daniel E. Sutherland, William B. Feis, and Gary W. Gallagher. First, the hierarchical nature of Southern society and politics that shaped the outlook of the Confederate high command made it exceedingly uncomfortable with the chaos and democratic nature of guerrilla bands. In the American Revolution and Vietnam, the insurgencies were based on political theories that (at least on the surface) sanctioned and encouraged the delegation of power away from elite segments of society. Guerrilla warfare, by its very decentralized, informal nature, requires a willingness on the part of the insurgent leadership to delegate tremendous power and authority over the organization and application of violence. This was, for all their talk of state and local autonomy, something the Confederacy's political and military leadership was unwilling to do.

Although historians will probably never settle the question of whether in fact

ing the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), Joseph M. Beilein Jr., *Bushwhackers: Guerilla Warfare, Manhood, and the Household in Civil War Missouri* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2016), and Brian D. McKnight and Barton A. Myers, *The Guerrilla Hunters: Irregular Conflicts During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2017).

the rebellion was in fact a “rich man’s war and poor man’s fight,” few dispute the notion that to its leadership the Confederacy was driven by a desire to preserve and conserve a hierarchical, labor, social, economic, and political system. It was conventional warrior George Washington that the leadership looked to as they defined their expectations in military leadership, methods, and organization—not Francis Marion or Thomas Sumter. Moreover, as Mao Tse-tung wrote, among the essential qualities the guerrilla fighting on behalf of an insurgency against the government needs is the will and ability to: “Fight when you can win, move away when you can’t win.”¹⁷ This was something the leaders of the Confederacy could not make a major component of their strategy. To do so would be to accept the notion that Northern armies would occupy large swaths of Southern territory and thus become stretched thin enough to provide targets of opportunity for guerrillas to operate against effectively. Not only would this have wrecked the authority of the master class that was critical to slavery, it was completely contrary to the purpose of the Confederacy and the source of legitimacy in the eyes of the Southern people—namely, to keep Yankees out of the South in order to avoid an undermining of white control. In addition, the Confederacy’s richest agricultural and industrial, as well as most politically divided, regions happened to be those located on the frontier between the Union and Confederacy. These could not be abandoned to Union occupation if the Confederacy was to survive.

Moreover, the confidence of Southern leaders that resort to large-scale guerrilla warfare was unnecessary to achieve victory was undoubtedly boosted by Confederate conventional victories at Big Bethel, Wilson’s Creek, and, above all, First Manassas in the war’s first year. Any doubts that might have arisen in early 1862 by the string of Union victories that enabled the overrunning of much of Tennessee and brought a Union army to the gates of Richmond were undoubtedly allayed by the series of Confederate victories after Lee took command that carried the war to the outskirts of Washington, D.C. Consequently, although they had adopted the Partisan Ranger Act in April 1862 authorizing the organization of irregular units, the leaders of the Confederacy would stake the fate of their new nation on the ability of their conventional armies to win

17 Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War,” in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 139.

sufficient victories to convince the North that victory in would not be worth the cost in blood, time, and treasure.

Safe Haven

The location of so much of the Confederacy's vital economic and human resources also contributed to the inability of the Southern war effort to have a fourth of the elements of fortified compound warfare identified by Huber; namely, safe haven. The balance of power between an insurgent movement and the government whose authority it seeks to overthrow and displace is often—and at times overwhelmingly so—in favor of the government. Consequently, it is very difficult for an insurgency to succeed if its leaders and military do not possess places of safe haven to which they can escape to maintain and husband their strength until such time as they can engaged the government at an advantage. For the American revolutionaries, British North America offered mountains, forests, swamps, and an extensive backcountry. For the Vietnamese communists, Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, as well as the heavily vegetated and physically rigorous countryside of South Vietnam, provided places of sanctuary from the pressure of United States and South Vietnamese military power.

On the surface, the Confederacy seemed as well, if not better, situated than the American and Vietnamese insurgents in terms of sanctuary. Not only was the Confederacy large in terms of sheer size, it contained all kinds of terrain features, from rugged mountain to dense forests to thick swamps (not to mention hostile microbes), that were inhospitable to an invading army. Any discussion of Confederate strategy must therefore address the argument that Southern military leaders should have utilized the space and physical geography of the South through a Fabian strategy. In this scenario, Confederate military leaders would exhaust the Northern will to continue the contest by taking advantage of the South's extensive geography to overextend Union armies and frustrate Northern efforts to achieve an overmatch on the battlefield.

Several factors, however, denied the Confederacy the ability to adopt and successfully execute such a strategy. First among these was the character of the Southern people. As Gary W. Gallagher and Joseph L. Harsh have documented, the Southern people demanded an aggressive military posture. "Convinced

not only of their political rectitude,” in Harsh’s words, “but also of their military prowess,” Southerners saw no need to shy away from confrontations with Northern armies or avoid battle.¹⁸ Thus, a Confederate government that pursued a strategy of retreating and avoiding directly engaging invading Union armies composed of what they believed to be inferior Yankee stock would not have inspired confidence in the hearts and minds of the Southern people. Moreover, the wave of Union military success in the spring of 1862 that brought Union armies into possession of large swaths of territory west of the Appalachian Mountains and within ten miles of Richmond, and the dramatic reversal of this as a consequence of Confederate offensive efforts provided ample evidence of the virtues of an offensive mindset and the folly of a defensive one.

Then there was the fact that the South’s richest provinces were located in the Upper South and along the coast. Any effort to take advantage of sanctuary in the interior and mountains (the latter having the added complication of having few slaves and thus being hotbeds of Unionism) would have surrendered the industrial, agricultural, political, and population heart of the Confederacy. Allowing Northern armies to march through large, valuable swaths of the Southern states would have been fatal to the ability to maintain hearts and minds in support of the Confederacy. After all, the very legitimacy of the Confederacy rested on the premise that it was needed to keep Yankees out of South in order to protect the Southern way of life and the institutions that defined it from Yankee interference. If the Confederate government did not do what it had been created to do, why would anyone bother to support it?

Outside Help

The role of foreign assistance, of course, must figure heavily in any explanation for why the Americans won our war for independence and the Vietnamese communists. If not sufficient in and of itself to explain the outcome of these conflicts, it is exceedingly difficult to see how the American patriots could have

18 Joseph L. Harsh, *Confederate Tide Rising: Robert E. Lee and the Making of Southern Strategy* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press 1998), 16; Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 127-140.

sustained an effective military effort without the aid of France. It is likewise difficult to see how the communists could have prevailed in their efforts in Indochina without the massive military assistance they received from the Soviet Union and China. In addition to the material assistance outside support provided, it also helped legitimize and provide moral support to the insurgent causes—both internationally and in the hearts and minds of the people.

The political and military leadership of both the Union and Confederacy were keenly aware of how outside help had shaped the outcome of the American Revolution and viewed the diplomatic contest as an important front in the War of the Rebellion. Yet, it is clear in retrospect that the prospect of outside intervention on behalf of the Confederacy was never as great as Northern statesmen feared and Southern statesmen hoped. To be sure, in 1861 Confederate authorities were not wrong about a seemingly inexhaustible European demand for cotton, the existence of real sources of friction between the United States and Great Britain, and the fact that significant segments of British society were sympathetic to the South's reactionary and oligarchic political and social system.¹⁹

However, British statesmen, from whom all other European powers took their cue in dealing with the American question, consistently approached the war between the North and South on the basis of a cold calculation of self-interest that balanced the costs of intervention against its possible benefits and an appreciation for the fact that international diplomacy, like domestic politics, was the art of the possible. Although a Confederate victory might provide some benefits, there were always more compelling arguments for not intervening on behalf of the Southern insurgency. One was a conviction on the part of many

19 Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 2, 45; Norman A. Graebner, "Northern Diplomacy and European Neutrality," in Donald, *Why the North Won the Civil War*, 56, 64. The diplomatic front in the American Civil War is well-documented in D.P. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers* (New York: Wiley, 1974); Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974); Charles M. Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Phillip E. Myers, *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2008); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

European leaders that the North simply did not have the means or will necessary to defeat the rebellion, which made intervention and antagonizing the North seem pointless. Further encouraging a policy of non-intervention was the fact that, although at times a source of consternation to the British, the hegemonic pretensions of the United States were a source of stability in the Western Hemisphere that ensured an environment in which British political and commercial interests were well-served. Finally, in the aftermath of the Crimean War, British statesmen were conscious of the limits of their ability to project power effectively over long distances at a cost that was acceptable to the British public.²⁰

The most often cited factor that shaped British policy was, of course, the deep distaste of the British people for the institution of slavery. Yet, even on this matter British thinking revolved less around humanitarian concerns (although these existed to be sure) than around practical considerations. The closest Britain came to intervening in the war was in the period after the issuance of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. This action, British statesmen feared, would lead to slave insurrections that would destabilize the western hemisphere at severe cost to British interests. However, clear evidence of the North's unflinching determination to preserve the Union and ability to make anyone who considered interfering with that effort pay a heavy price combined with an appreciation for the limits of British power to remind British statesmen of the virtue of restraint in dealing with the American war.²¹ Ultimately, the calculus of self-interest and weighing of costs against benefits never produced a result that made active intervention in the American rebellion acceptable. In retrospect, it is difficult to see how it ever could have.

Conclusion

When addressing the problem of "the people in arms," Carl von Clausewitz identified several conditions under which a society adopting such an approach to war could be effective. Perhaps the most important of these was: "The national

20 Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union*, vol. 2: 95-100, 394-399; Jones, *Union in Peril*, 2-4, 24; Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers*, 374; Graebner, "Northern Diplomacy and European Neutrality," 66.

21 Jones, *Union in Peril*, 172-180, 210-220.

character must be suited to that type of war.”²² In the case of the Confederacy, this proved not to be the case—at least not enough the case for the cause of Southern independence to be anything but a lost one. Had the Southern people and their society been different enough to enable the Confederacy to possess enough of all the elements of “fortified compound warfare,” there seems little reason to doubt that they could have been as successful as the American revolutionaries and the Vietnamese communists in achieving their ultimate objective. Indeed, Clausewitz’s great rival among early 19th-century military theorists, Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini proclaimed in his analysis of the problem of the people in arms that: “No army, however disciplined, can contend successfully against such a system applied to a great nation, unless it be strong enough to hold all the essential points of the country, cover its communications, and at the same time furnish active force sufficient to beat the enemy wherever he may present himself. If this enemy has a regular army of respectable size to be a nucleus around which to rally the people, what force will be sufficient to be superior everywhere, and to assure the safety of the long lines of communications against numerous bodies?”²³

Clearly, the North, for all the advantages it enjoyed in manpower and industrial resources, faced a massive challenge doing these things, which was one of the motives behind the “raiding strategy” Union forces employed in 1864-65. Not only did this strategy wreck Southern resources, it broke Southern morale by demonstrating the inability of Confederate leaders to protect slavery and spare the Southern people the presence of Yankees. This, combined with the total defeat of Confederate conventional armies, was sufficient to cause the Confederacy to surrender, even though there were still plenty of resources available to continue resistance to the power of the United States government—as would be demonstrated during Reconstruction.

The people of the South, however, imposed significant limits on what they were willing to do in order to achieve victory in their war for independence. Faced with the fact that adopting methods that maximized the chances of their insurgency’s success would compromise the very institutions, ideals, and tra-

²² Clausewitz, *On War*, 480.

²³ Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (1862; Mechanicsburg, PA: Greenhill Books, 1992), 32.

ditions that gave purpose to their bid for independence, Southerners decided to eschew revolutionary methods. Instead, they chose to bet their bid for independence on their ability to destroy the North's will to continue the contest through conventional military means. This proved a forlorn hope. The resiliency of Civil War armies and the impossibility of achieving a battlefield success so striking it would render the North incapable of continuing the contest made a strategy of annihilation focused on conventional military victories a dead end. The North, however, simply had too much power and too much will to use it for the South to win a conventional war of exhaustion or attrition. Yet to pursue alternative methods, such as embracing and encouraging irregular operations and taking advantage of sanctuary that was available, would have been fatal to the struggle for Southern hearts and minds. After all, if the Confederate government was willing to give up the very end their insurgency was designed to serve—the protection of Southern territory and slavery from Yankee contamination—what was the point?

Fortunately for the political and military leadership of the North, the Confederacy did not and could not possess all of the ingredients to make the Confederate insurgency a fatal exercise for the Union. To their credit, Confederate leaders did create an incredibly effective conventional force and make a vigorous effort to secure foreign assistance. It was, however, always a long shot as to whether they could do the latter, as their ability to influence foreign leaders was never great. From a strictly military perspective, they did possess the geographic features necessary to provide sanctuary for their forces and the means to mount a truly irregular resistance. In the final analysis, however, for Confederate military authorities to be able to take advantage of these, the nineteenth-century South would have had to be a very different place. Of course, if the South had been a different enough place to tolerate the sacrifices necessary to possess all of the elements that could have ensured success of their insurgency, there would have probably not have been a Civil War.

Of course, any effort to explain the course and outcome of the Civil War must recognize, to borrow from George Pickett, that the Yankees had something to do with it. While the lack of a truly concerted guerrilla campaign, assistance from a major power, and ability to take advantage of geographic sanctuary, may have undermined the Confederate effort, that did not mean the North had an

easy job in suppressing the rebellion. Far from it. Dealing with the problem presented by the rebellion was such a challenge that in November 1862 Lincoln felt compelled, while expressing frustration with a number of his military leaders, to wonder if “we shall at last find out that the difficulty is in our case, rather than in particular generals.”²⁴ Defeating the Confederacy was indeed a formidable challenge and Lee certainly had a compelling explanation for his army’s defeat in the North’s possession of “overwhelming numbers and resources”. Yet, the North’s quantitative advantages in manpower and resources would have been meaningless if the Northern public did not have the determination to apply these resources and endure the costs of nineteenth century warfare. Also essential to Northern victory was having a society that possessed the leaders, both civilian and military, who could organize and apply Northern resources effectively and demonstrate the inability of Confederate leaders to fulfill their purpose of keeping Yankees out of the South. Lacking the means to destroy the North’s ability to make war, unable to secure outside assistance, make guerrilla war central to their strategy, or take advantage of safe haven, the Confederacy pinned their hopes for victory that they could win conventional military victories of sufficient number and significance to exhaust Northern will to persist. Northern determination and skill ensured this did not happen.

24 Lincoln to Schurz, November 24, 1862, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, vol. 5: 510.

CONSCRIPTS!

You can VOLUNTEER at any time before leaving for Raleigh; after that time it will be too late! Act as **FREEMEN** and join my corps of

PARTISAN RANGERS

at once and receive **\$100 BOUNTY**—the usual pay and value of all captures from the enemy.

Apply to me at Ordnance Office, Greensboro, N. C.

ROBT. WHITE,
July 8, 1862. Major Partizan Rangers.

Major Robert White invites conscripts to enlist in his state cavalry corps of Partisan Rangers (Greensboro, North Carolina, July 8, 1862). Duke University Libraries.
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The Three Rebellions That Shaped Modern Japan: A Comparative Perspective

by ROTEM KOWNER

Japan prides itself on an unbroken imperial line dating back to antiquity, a continuity that might suggest a long history of political stability. Yet this remarkable dynastic longevity endured largely because, unlike the ruling houses of imperial China and many other monarchies, Japan's imperial court possessed symbolic legitimacy while exercising little direct political power for much of its history. Real authority was contested by competing military factions, impoverished peasants, or idealistic monks, making domestic conflict a defining feature of Japan's past. This is hardly surprising: as an island nation insulated from foreign invasion, premodern Japan channeled its military energies almost entirely inward.

In this vein, certain eras in Japan's long history were far more prone to civil strife than others, with the *Sengoku* (Warring States) period serving as a prime example. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, internal warfare was so pervasive that conflict became the norm.¹ Crucially, this prolonged instability was fueled by the collapse of central authority, ending only when a strong, unified regime emerged to enforce lasting peace. Indeed, although the rise of

1 The *Sengoku* period, conventionally dated from 1467 to 1573, although some historians end it in 1568, 1600, 1603, or even 1615, arose from the prolonged erosion of Ashikaga shogunal authority, a process dramatically accelerated by the Ōnin War (1467–1477), and was characterized by intense struggles among rival warlords (*daimyō*) for territorial supremacy. Earlier medieval Japan had already witnessed several shorter, though no less violent, contests for power. Among the most consequential were the struggle between the Taira and Minamoto clans, culminating in the Genpei War (1180–1185), and the conflict of 1335–1336 between Ashikaga Takauji and forces loyal to Emperor Go-Daigo, which brought the Kenmu Restoration to an end and inaugurated the prolonged Nanbokuchō wars.

the Tokugawa Shogunate (Jpn. *Tokugawa bakufu*, 1600–1868) was punctuated by two major rebellions, once the new regime consolidated its power, Japan enjoyed over two centuries of relative peace, free from any significant challenge to shogunal authority.² Local unrest nevertheless persisted. Under the Tokugawa rule, there were nearly 2,700 peasant protests, roughly 1,100 of them involving force or destruction.³

Modern Japan appeared far less susceptible to domestic upheaval. By opening itself to the international community and becoming an active participant in global trade, it increasingly redirected popular frustrations and ambitions outward, toward commercial expansion and, eventually, imperial conquest. From 1869 until 1945, Japan built a vast empire across East and Southeast Asia under a unified, highly centralized regime capable of projecting power and enforcing its will. Following its defeat in 1945, Japan's susceptibility to domestic strife declined even further. It relinquished its imperial possessions and renounced military aggression, entering an era of democratic governance, social stability, and economic prosperity that greatly reduced the likelihood of internal conflict.

Nevertheless, modern Japan was by no means immune to civil strife, full-scale rebellion, or even civil war. The country experienced several armed challenges that profoundly unsettled society and tested the authority of the state, ultimately altering the course of its political development. This chapter argues that three pre–World War II uprisings played a particularly consequential role in shaping the modern Japanese state during its first eight formative decades: the Boshin War (1868–1869), the civil war at the heart of the Meiji Restoration; the Satsuma Rebellion (1877); and the February 26 Incident (1936).⁴ In addi-

2 These two events were the Siege of Osaka in 1615 and the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637–1638. In the former, the fledgling Tokugawa shogunate defeated Toyotomi Hideyori, heir of the previous ruler, and extinguished his house, framing his resistance as a 'rebellion' to eliminate the last major rival dynastic claim. In the latter, the shogunate's brutal suppression of a Christian-led uprising consolidated its religious and sociopolitical control throughout Japan.

3 Stephen Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 46.

4 These three uprisings were not the only episodes of domestic unrest in modern Japan. Other, generally less consequential rebellions, coup plots, and violent protests included the Saga Rebellion (1874), the Shinpūren Rebellion (1876), the Akizuki and Hagi Rebellions (1876), Chichibu Incident (1884), Hibiya Incendiary Incident (1905), The Rice Riots of 1918; the March and October Incidents (1931); the May 15 Incident (1932); the Matsue Incident (August 24,

tion, the chapter examines the Mishima Incident (1970), a notorious attempted coup d'état, to illustrate the drastically diminished impact of political violence in postwar Japan. To substantiate the consequential role of these events, the chapter analyzes the causes, dynamics, and aftermath of each uprising; assesses their relative historical significance; identifies their recurring patterns; and draws broader conclusions regarding the evolving nature of rebellion and civil conflict in modern Japan.

Case 1: The Boshin War, 1868–1869

The Meiji Restoration was the pivotal transformation that ended centuries of samurai rule and inaugurated modern Japan. Yet beneath the debatable notion of a “restoration” lay a political revolution whose decisive military phase pitted the forces of the Tokugawa shogunate against a pro-imperial coalition in what became known as the Boshin War (Jpn. *Boshin sensō*).⁵ Until then, for over two hundred years, the Tokugawa shogunate had controlled Japanese society rigidly and enforced a strict policy of quasi-isolationism, severely restricting interactions with foreign powers.⁶ However, this policy abruptly ended in 1854 when the Perry Expedition, led by Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the United

1945); the Bloody May Day (May 1, 1952); and various large-scale violent demonstrations and protests throughout the 1960s. For major studies of these lesser-known episodes, see, in chronological order, Herbert P. Bix, *Peasant Protest in Japan, 1590–1884* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); Danny Orbach, *Curse on This Nation: The Rebellious Army of Modern Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Stephen Vlastos, “Opposition Movements in the Early Meiji, 1868–1885.” In *The Emergence of Meiji Japan*, edited by Marius B. Jansen, pp. 203–267 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcasts* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pp. 25–6; Michael Lewis, *Rioters and Citizens: Mass Protest in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990); Nick Kapur, *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Oguma Eiji, 1968: *Wakamonotachi no hanran to sono haikai*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 2009).

5 For the Meiji Restoration, its background and repercussions, see Robert Hellyer and Harald Fuess, eds., *The Meiji Restoration: Japan as a Global Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

6 For the Tokugawa worldview and policy of quasi-isolationism, see Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 26–37.

States Navy, forced Japan to open its ports to global commerce. The subsequent signing of unequal treaties with Western powers, coupled with fears of further foreign encroachment, provoked widespread domestic opposition.⁷

Against this backdrop, the radical political movement known as *sonnō jōi* (literally, “revere the emperor, expel the barbarians”) expanded rapidly.⁸ The movement’s call to restore imperial power and rid the country of the Westerners attracted disaffected samurai of different ranks, particularly younger retainers, in domains such as Mito, Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tosa. Many of these activists were known as *shishi* (see Figure 1).⁹ Their sentiment was strongly shared by Emperor Kōmei (r. 1846–1867), who departed from the imperial court’s long-standing political reticence by vehemently opposing the foreign treaties. In 1863, he pressed the shogunate to promulgate an order for the expulsion of foreigners. This order strengthened the *sonnō jōi* movement and directly prompted Chōshū forces to fire on foreign vessels passing through the Shimonoseki Strait.¹⁰

These anti-foreign attacks provoked swift military retaliation from Western powers. They culminated in the British bombardment of Satsuma’s capital, Kagoshima, in 1863 and a multinational campaign against Chōshū in the following year. Far from crushing heir defiant spirit, these interventions forced the southwestern domains to realize that isolating the nation was no longer viable. From then on, they shifted their strategy toward rapid internal modernization. While the shogunate turned to France for military advisors, weaponry, and naval engineering to assert its authority, the rebellious domains formed a secret alliance backed by Great Britain.¹¹ Fueling an arms race, tensions peaked when Chōshū forces launched the failed Hamaguri Rebellion in 1864 in an attempt to seize the imperial court in Kyoto. Though the shogunate temporarily suppressed the insurrection, it rapidly lost the ability to enforce its will over the increasingly indepen-

7 See W.G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 98–116.

8 Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, pp. 150–1, 173–4, 183–97.

9 For the anti-shogunal radicals, see Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, pp. 140–71. For the *shishi* (Literally, “men of high purpose”) and their ideals, see Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 95–104. For the entire restoration movement, see Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, pp. 241–72.

10 For Emperor Kōmei’s views on foreign policy, see Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, pp. 137–8.

11 For this Anglo-French rivalry, see Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations*, pp. 106–10.



Fig. 1. Young samurai in mixed attire on the eve of the Boshin War. Woodcut engraving. Source: *Illustrated London News*, 1866

dent provincial lords, setting the stage for an inevitable domestic showdown.¹²

The political landscape changed after Emperor Kōmei's death in 1867 and the accession of his young son, Emperor Meiji (r. 1867–1912). Later that year, the shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (r. 1866–1868), relinquished governing authority to the imperial court, hoping that the Tokugawa house would retain a leading role in the new political order. That prospect faded when an anti-Tokugawa coalition took control of the court, proclaimed the restoration of imperial rule, and demanded that Yoshinobu surrender his lands and offices. Violence provoked by Satsuma partisans in Edo, the shogunal capital, further inflamed tensions. In response, Yoshinobu dispatched troops toward Kyoto to challenge the coalition's actions.¹³

12 Conrad Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980), pp. 67–147.

13 Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, pp. 375–415; Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations*, pp. 115–20.

The clash at Toba–Fushimi in late January 1868 between pro-shogunal troops and forces supporting the newly proclaimed imperial government marked the beginning of the Boshin War, Japan’s first major nationwide civil conflict since the early seventeenth century. Victory enabled the imperial coalition to claim exclusive imperial legitimacy and portray continued resistance as rebellion against the emperor. Imperial armies subsequently advanced toward Edo along several major routes. At the Battle of Kōshū–Katsunuma on March 29, 1868, a force commanded principally by Itagaki Taisuke (1837–1919) intercepted and decisively defeated Tokugawa loyalists, securing the western approaches to Edo. These successive reverses transformed the conflict’s political and psychological balance, contributing to mounting territorial and military losses during the following months (see Map 1).

The Boshin War is properly understood as a civil war. Although it did not mobilize the population on the scale of a modern mass conflict and its armies remained organized principally by domain and commanded largely by samurai, commoners also served as soldiers, laborers, porters, medical attendants, and logistical auxiliaries. The participating forces were drawn from numerous regions and domains across much of Japan. At the opening Battle of Toba–Fushimi, the numerical balance strongly favored the shogunal coalition, which mobilized approximately 15,000 troops against some 5,000 soldiers from Satsuma, Chōshū, and their allies, although not all the shogunal troops were simultaneously committed to battle.¹⁴ This numerical superiority nevertheless failed to produce victory. The imperial coalition benefited from the effective organization and modern weaponry of its leading domains, but its victory cannot be attributed to technological superiority alone, since the shogunate also possessed modern infantry, artillery, and naval forces. More effective battlefield organization, the imperial legitimacy claimed by the imperial coalition, defections by wavering domains, and Tokugawa Yoshinobu’s withdrawal from Osaka all contributed substantially to the collapse of the shogunal position and its ultimate defeat.

Imperial forces advanced steadily across the country, culminating in the negotiated surrender of Edo Castle on May 3, 1868.¹⁵ After consultations between

14 For the shogunal army on the eve of the war, see Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, pp. 418–20. For the Battle of Toba–Fushimi, see *ibid.*, pp. 430–5.

15 For the decision to capitulate, see Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, pp. 437–9.



Map 1. Campaign map of the Boshin War, 1868–1869. Cartography: Hoodinski; source: Wikipedia Commons

the imperial commander Saigō and the shogunate official Katsu Kaishū (1823–1899), the castle was relinquished without a major battle, sparing the shogunal capital from destruction. Tokugawa Yoshinobu, who had already submitted to the new government on April 11 and withdrawn from active resistance, was permitted to retire. Edo was subsequently renamed Tokyo (Literally “Eastern Capital”) and became the seat of the imperial government. Refusing to accept defeat, however, a determined contingent of Tokugawa loyalists continued the struggle in northern Honshū before retreating by sea to Ezo, later renamed Hokkaido. Under the leadership of Enomoto Takeaki (1836–1908), they established the

short-lived Republic of Ezo as their final bastion. This last center of organized resistance was destroyed during the Battle of Hakodate, which ended with the rebels' surrender on June 27, 1869 (see Figure 2).¹⁶

By then, the rebels established the Meiji government as Japan's uncontested national authority, although the country's administrative centralization would continue for several more years. Estimates suggest that the opposing sides mobilized approximately 120,000 men during the Boshin War, of whom roughly 8,200 were killed and more than 5,000 wounded. Despite this bloodshed, the broader Meiji Restoration later acquired a misleading reputation as a "bloodless revolution," largely because the transfer of central power was comparatively swift and the death toll appeared modest relative to the magnitude of the societal transformation that followed.

The victors displayed considerable pragmatism in their treatment of the defeated Tokugawa camp. Although several prominent shogunal loyalists were executed, the conflict's limited scale and comparatively modest death toll may have facilitated more lenient treatment of many former officials and capable samurai, some of whom were subsequently integrated into the new administration. The former shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, was himself eventually elevated to the highest rank in the new kazoku peerage (*kazoku*) (see Figure 3).¹⁷ Yet domestic peace remained fragile. Disputes over the pace and direction of reform, together with mounting resentment over the erosion of samurai status and privileges, fractured the victorious coalition and contributed to a series of uprisings that culminated in the substantially bloodier Satsuma Rebellion less than a decade later.

The war's long-term consequences were far more profound. By the time of

16 Although imperial forces won the war, the collapse of the bakufu had deeper and more complex causes. For an analysis of those causes, see Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, pp. 457–76.

17 In 1902, Emperor Meiji permitted Tokugawa Yoshinobu to establish a separate branch of the Tokugawa family and elevated him to prince (*kōshaku*) in recognition of his loyal service to the nation. See Takano Kiyoshi, *Tokugawa Yoshinobu: kindai Nihon no enshutsusha* (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1997), p. 273. For the rehabilitation of other former shogunal loyalists, see Michael Wert, *Meiji Restoration Losers: Memory and Tokugawa Supporters in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 2013), pp. 74–107.



Fig. 2. The Battle of Hakodate, April 1869 (detail). A woodblock print by Nagashima Mosai, 1880. Source: Hakodate City Museum Digital Archives



Fig. 3. Leniency toward the vanquished: Former shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu in official attire, c. 1900s. Source: Wikipedia Commons

their victory, the leaders of the new imperial government had already abandoned the expulsionist objective of *sonnō jōi*. Instead, they embraced rapid industrialization, military modernization, and the selective adoption of Western

institutions, recognizing that strengthening Japan's economy and armed forces offered the only viable means of preserving national independence and eventually revising the unequal treaties. This course transformed Japan into a regional power within a few decades and, by the end of World War I, into a global power. It also propelled Japan toward overseas imperial expansion, culminating in catastrophic defeat in 1945, the loss of its entire colonial empire, and the adoption of a new, peaceful course that has endured to the present day.

Case 2: The Satsuma Rebellion, 1877

The Satsuma Rebellion, widely known in Japan as the *Seinan sensō* (literally, the “Southwestern War”), was the largest domestic uprising in modern Japanese history. Erupting in 1877, it represented the last and most formidable armed revolt by disaffected former samurai against the newly established Meiji government. Nine years earlier, the Satsuma domain had played a pivotal role in the Meiji Restoration and the Boshin War, helping to overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate. Yet the central government's subsequent modernization policies were perceived by many samurai as a profound betrayal of their expectations. Sweeping reforms transformed Japanese society, culture, and customs, while the rapid consolidation of a modern centralized state dismantled the hereditary status system on which samurai identity and livelihood had rested. The abolition of the domains, establishment of a conscript army, commutation of hereditary stipends, and prohibition on wearing swords deprived the samurai of their traditional privileges and much of their financial security. Although the resulting social order was far from egalitarian, it promoted greater legal equality and social mobility. In the eyes of many former samurai, however, these abrupt changes left them economically vulnerable, socially marginalized, and stripped of purpose; some also regarded the new order as a betrayal of the ideals they associated with *sonnō jōi* and the imperial restoration.¹⁸

Satsuma, located in southern Kyushu at the southwestern edge of Japan's main islands, became a particular hotbed of resentment, partly because the former domain contained an unusually high proportion of samurai, far above the national average of 5.3 percent. These tensions acquired a powerful personal

18 See Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, pp. 400–404; Orbach, *Curse on This Nation*, pp. 54–68.

and political focus in Saigō Takamori, a leading architect of the Meiji Restoration and a prominent commander during the Boshin War (see Figure 4).¹⁹ In 1873, he advocated a confrontational policy toward Korea, which he viewed, among other things, as a means of providing displaced samurai with honorable military service. When the government rejected his proposal, Saigō resigned from office and returned to Kagoshima. Numerous officials and military officers from Satsuma followed his example, joining a much larger body of disaffected former warriors. As the new government systematically dismantled their hereditary privileges, these men increasingly rallied around Saigō, whose immense prestige made him both a symbol and a focal point of their grievances.²⁰

Back home, Saigō established the Shigakkō, a network of private schools that expanded across the prefecture. Its students received military training, and its leaders gained growing influence over the local administration.²¹ By late 1876, Kagoshima had become increasingly difficult for the central government to control. Tokyo, already troubled by smaller samurai uprisings, sent undercover agents to investigate conditions in the city. Captured agents reportedly confessed under torture to a plot against Saigō, but the alleged confession was later repudiated. The accusation nevertheless inflamed his followers. In January 1877, the government sent a warship to remove arms from its Kagoshima arsenal. Students from the Shigakkō responded by seizing weapons and attacking nearby naval facilities. These confrontations, coming amid the abolition of hereditary samurai stipends, turned mounting distrust into armed revolt. Saigō had not ordered the raids, but his followers persuaded him to take command of their rebellion against the Meiji government.²²

The ensuing conflict pitted a predominantly samurai rebel force against a rapidly developing national military establishment, revealing a stark disparity

19 For a biography of Saigō and his role in the Boshin War and Satsuma Rebellion, see Charles L. Yates, "Saigō Takamori in the Emergence of Meiji Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 449–74; Mark Ravina, *The Last Samurai: The Life and Battles of Saigō Takamori* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004);

20 Ravina, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 179–90.

21 James H. Buck, "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877: From Kagoshima Through the Siege of Kumamoto Castle," *Monumenta Nipponica* 28, no. 4, (1973), p. 428.

22 Ravina, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 191–202.

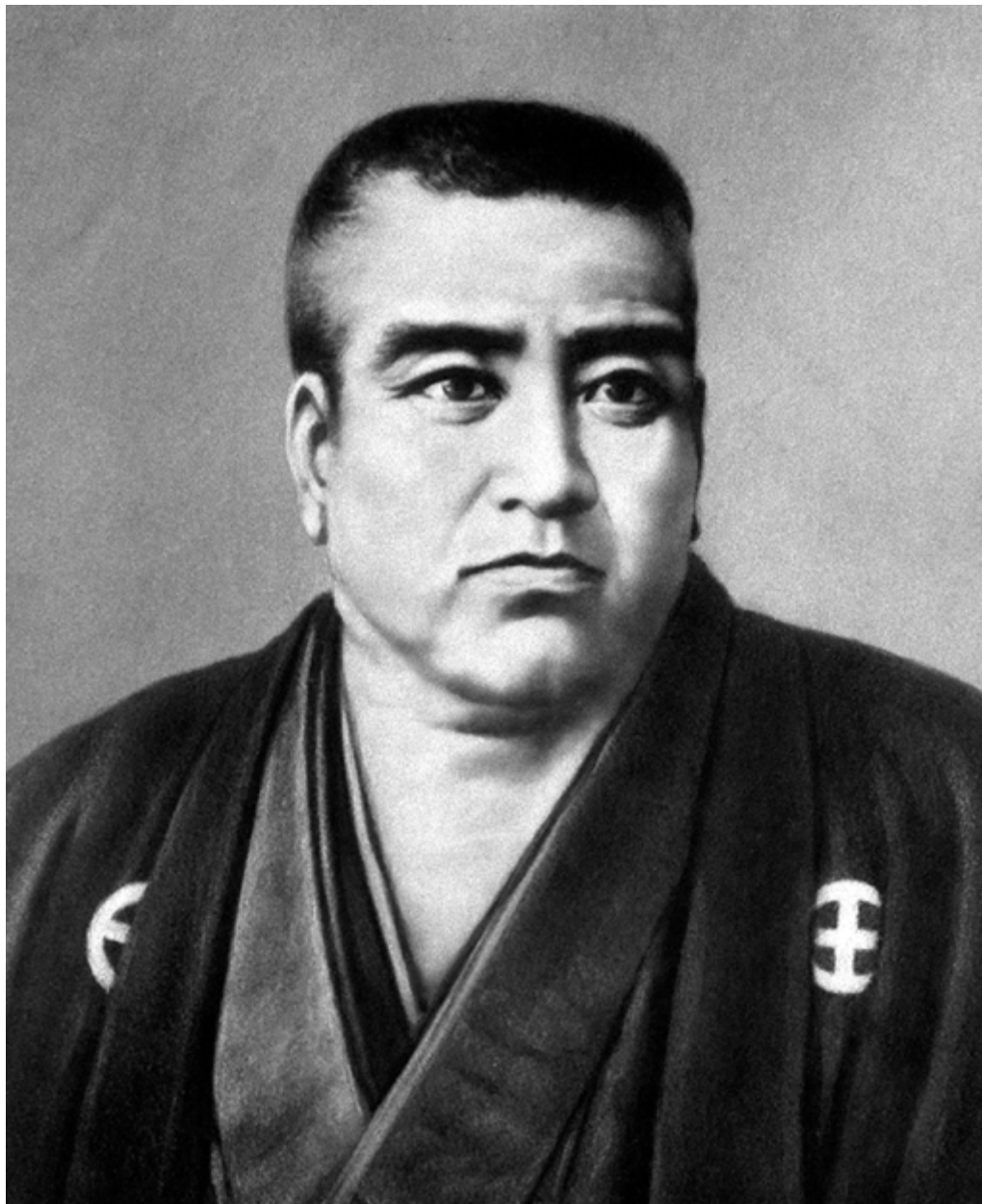


Fig. 4. Modern Japan's quintessential rebel: Saigō Takamori in a posthumous drawing by C. Nakagawa. Source: Kinsei Meishi Shashin Hanpukai, ed., *Kinsei meishi shashin*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kinsei Meishi Shashin Hanpukai, 1935), p. 11

in organizational capacity, manpower, and material resources.²³ Although drawn largely from the traditional warrior elite, Saigō's army was partly modernized and initially organized into six infantry battalions totaling approximately 13,000 well-equipped men. However, it possessed virtually no cavalry and fielded only about 200 trained artillerymen to operate an assortment of sixty mountain guns, field guns, and mortars.²⁴ The rebel army subsequently expanded as disaffected former samurai from other areas joined its ranks. By contrast, the Imperial Japanese Army had been reorganized under the Conscription Ordinance of 1873, which introduced a national draft and established six military districts. Its nominal wartime strength was approximately 45,920 infantrymen, plus artillery, engineering, and transport units, bringing the total to about 60,000. Several thousand volunteers and local recruits supplemented these forces.²⁵

The government could also draw upon an Imperial Guard of slightly more than 5,000 men and several thousand militarized police auxiliaries, many of whom were themselves former samurai. The new conscript army was not uniformly experienced or well-trained as its ranks drew heavily from commoner families previously excluded from the hereditary warrior class, embodying the transition from domain-based samurai forces to a national military. Still, the government ultimately mobilized more than 60,000 troops and possessed an overwhelming advantage in weapons, ammunition, transport, and communications. The vast material disparity between the two sides was vividly reflected in the central government's prodigious expenditure of ammunition. During the Battle of Tabaruzaka, for example, Imperial Army forces reportedly fired an average of 322,150 rounds of small-arms ammunition and more than 1,000 artillery shells per day (see Figure 5).²⁶

23 Edward Zwick's film *The Last Samurai* (2003) presents a highly fictionalized and sympathetic account of a samurai uprising loosely inspired by the Satsuma Rebellion. It depicts the conflict largely from the rebels' perspective through Nathan Algren, a fictional American officer who is initially hired to train the imperial army but, after being captured by the rebels, eventually joins their cause.

24 Colin D. Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier: Remaking Military Service in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 137–8.

25 Jaundrill, *Samurai to Soldier*, 132–7.

26 Buck, "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877," p. 440.



Fig. 5. The Battle of Tabaruzaka, March 1877: An 18-day engagement in which rebel forces resisted government troops despite the state's overwhelming material superiority. Woodblock print by Sensai Eitaku. Source: Wikipedia Commons

In February 1877, as the conflict escalated, the Meiji government attempted one final diplomatic intervention by sending Home Ministry official Hayashi Tomoyuki (1823–1907) and Vice Admiral Kawamura Sumiyoshi (1836–1904) aboard the warship *Takao* to assess the rebellion. Satsuma Governor Ōyama Tsunayoshi (1825–1877) tried to defuse the immediate political tension by blaming the initial uprisings entirely on the government's alleged assassination plot against Saigō, requesting that Kawamura, Saigō's cousin-in-law, come ashore to personally negotiate a peaceful resolution. However, the window for diplomacy closed permanently when a flotilla of small, aggressive rebel boats attempted to board the *Takao* by force, prompting Hayashi to officially break off communications and declare that no peaceful compromise could be permitted.

The Satsuma Rebellion's first major field fighting occurred around Kumamoto, approximately 135 kilometers north of Kagoshima (see Map 2). Initial clashes began on February 19, 1877, and Saigō's main force attacked Kumamoto Castle on February 22 but failed to overwhelm its garrison (see Figure 6). After two days of unsuccessful assaults, the rebels settled into a prolonged siege. The fighting defied a simple contrast between traditional samurai and a modern army: the castle's seventeenth-century walls frustrated rebel artillery and

assaults, while government defenders used land mines against attackers who breached its gates. Beyond the castle, the Satsuma advance stirred widespread anti-government discontent. Thousands of peasants in Kumamoto protested new taxes and local levies, sometimes attacking officials. Saigō had made no direct appeal to them, but his vague political aims allowed villagers to imagine that his victory would address their grievances. Disaffected samurai from neighboring prefectures also joined the rebellion, including both conservatives and members of a radical group influenced by Western political thought.²⁷

The siege of Kumamoto Castle lasted some 52 days (see Map 2). Its relief by imperial forces on April 12 marked a major turning point in the war. Meanwhile, the Battle of Tabaruzaka, fought from March 3 to 20 for control of the northern approaches to Kumamoto, became the war's fiercest and most decisive engagement. The opposing forces committed well over 10,000 men to the battle, with each side suffering approximately 4,000 soldiers killed or wounded.²⁸

27 Buck, "The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877," pp. 430–5.

28 Ravina, *The Last Samurai*, p. 207.

Fig. 6. Kumamoto Castle: The rebellion's initial focal point and an impassable stronghold.
Source: Wikipedia Commons



Map 2. Campaign map of the Satsuma Rebellion, 1877.
 Cartography:
 Hoodinski; source:
 Wikipedia Commons



Thereafter, the rebels suffered a series of defeats and were forced into a grueling retreat across southern Kyūshū back to Kagoshima (see Map 2). The rebellion lasted nearly eight months, from the outbreak of violence in late January until September 24, 1877, when imperial troops overran Saigō's final position at Shiroyama.²⁹ Saigō for one was mortally wounded by gunfire and then beheaded by a follower. Although later accounts portrayed his death as ritual suicide (*seppuku*), modern scholarship generally regards that version as legendary.³⁰

²⁹ Ravina, *The Last Samurai*, pp. 203–10.

³⁰ Mark Ravina, "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori: Samurai, Seppuku, and the Politics of Legend," *Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3 (2010), pp. 692–6.

The rebellion exacted a severe human toll, far exceeding that of the Boshin War. Although contemporary figures vary, approximately 13,000 combatants were killed, divided almost evenly between the two belligerents, while perhaps 18,000 more were wounded. Suppressing the rebellion also imposed an extraordinary financial burden on the young Meiji state, costing approximately ¥41.6 million. The government financed much of the campaign by issuing inconvertible paper currency and obtaining a substantial bank loan. The resulting monetary expansion aggravated inflation during the late 1870s and helped create the conditions that prompted the fiscal and monetary reforms of the early 1880s.³¹

For the Meiji oligarchy, the human and financial cost was worth bearing. Saigō's defeat extinguished the last major organized armed resistance by former samurai and demonstrated the effectiveness of a centralized army composed primarily of conscripted subjects. It also consolidated the state's monopoly over organized military force, and strengthened the emerging military-bureaucratic elite. Although men of samurai origin remained highly influential in political and military affairs, the samurai ceased to exist as an autonomous hereditary military estate capable of challenging the central government (see Figure 7). Militarily, the campaign exposed deficiencies in staff work, strategic coordination, logistics, and command, encouraging further professionalization and contributing to the establishment of an independent Army General Staff in 1878. These reforms strengthened the government's capacity to mobilize manpower and resources on a national scale.

In the long term, the suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion left an indelible mark on the young Japanese state, its society, and its subsequent emergence as an imperial power. Although the rebellion did not itself cause Japanese expansionism, its defeat validated and accelerated the consolidation of the centralized institutions that later sustained Japan's wars against China and Russia and facilitated its growing ambitions overseas. Its domestic political consequences were equally significant. With armed samurai resistance decisively discredited, opposition to the Meiji oligarchy increasingly shifted toward political organization and demands for representative government. The Freedom and People's Rights Movement, led prominently by Itagaki Taisuke, had begun in 1874, but

31 Augustus H. Mounsey, *The Satsuma Rebellion: An Episode of Modern Japanese History* (London: John Murray, 1879), pp. 238–9.



Fig. 7. The twilight of the samurai: Government troops defeat rebel samurai during the final suppression of the rebellion in Kagoshima, September 1877. Woodblock print by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. Source: Wikipedia Commons

the closing of the path of armed resistance enhanced the importance of political mobilization. Its demands for civil rights, an elected national assembly, and constitutional government placed mounting pressure on the oligarchy and helped pave the way for gradual, though carefully restricted, popular participation in politic.³²

Case 3: The February 26 Incident, 1936

The February 26 Incident (Jpn. *Ni-Ni-Roku Jiken*) erupted in 1936 as the most serious attempted coup in twentieth-century Japan. Organized by a radical group of young, junior officers in the Imperial Japanese Army, the insurrection sought to purge the civilian government and military high command of factional rivals and ideological opponents and thereby initiate a “Shōwa Restoration.” For three chaotic days, rebel troops occupied the administrative center of Tokyo and assassinated several leading state officials. Despite these violent initial successes, the rebels failed to assassinate Prime Minister Okada Keisuke

32 George Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868–1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

(1868–1952) or seize control of the Imperial Palace. The key figure in the crisis was Emperor Hirohito (r. 1926–1989), whose unequivocal opposition proved decisive, depriving the mutineers of imperial legitimacy and compelling their surrender on February 29. Although the coup failed, the incident and its subsequent political realignment profoundly altered Japan's political and military trajectory throughout the following decade.

The roots of the February 26 Incident lay in struggles within the Imperial Japanese Army. By the early 1930s, these had hardened into a rivalry between the *Kōdō-ha* ("Imperial Way Faction") and the *Tōsei-ha* ("Control Faction"). Led by Generals Araki Sadao (1877–1966) and Mazaki Jinzaburō (1876–1956), the *Kōdō-ha* advocated spiritual mobilization, emperor-centered national renewal, and a "strike north" against the Soviet Union.³³ The *Tōsei-ha*, associated with General Nagata Tetsuzan (1884–1935), favored centralized planning, technological modernization, cooperation with bureaucrats and industrial conglomerates, and preparation for a prolonged industrial war. Educational divisions sharpened this rivalry. Graduates of the prestigious Army War College dominated senior staff posts, while officers whose training ended at the Army Academy faced narrower prospects for advancement. Some discontented line officers joined a loosely organized young-officers movement. Their grievances extended beyond careers: they were angered by rural poverty, party politicians, the *zai-batsu* (family-controlled industrial and financial conglomerates), and what they saw as the betrayal of the emperor by the army's senior leadership.³⁴

Among them, a radical network known as the *Kokutai Genri-ha* ("National-Polity Principle Faction") drew inspiration from the nationalist and state-socialist ideas of Kita Ikki (1883–1937).³⁵ They believed Japan's crises arose from a departure from its *kokutai*, understood as the sacred unity of emperor, state, and people. In their view, politicians, financiers, bureaucrats, senior officers, and imperial advisers had isolated the emperor and usurped his authority. As a remedy, they advocated a violent "Shōwa Restoration," modeled on the Meiji

33 See Shinichi Kitaoka, *From Party Politics to Militarism in Japan, 1924–1941* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), pp. 169–75, 179–81.

34 See Ben-Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936, Incident* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 37–8.

35 The Kita's role and influence, see Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 72–80.

Restoration.³⁶ A succession of violent episodes strengthened the radicals' resolve. In the May 15 Incident of 1932, young naval officers assassinated Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855–1932).

The comparatively lenient sentences imposed on the perpetrators of the May 15 Incident appeared to demonstrate that political assassination could attract public sympathy and incur only limited punishment.³⁷ The 1934 Military Academy Incident subsequently resulted in the suspension of Captains Muranaka Takaji and Isobe Asaichi, two prominent members of the Kokutai Genri-ha accused of plotting a coup. Although investigators found insufficient evidence to prosecute them, the army later expelled the two officers after they circulated pamphlets attacking Nagata Tetsuzan and the military leadership. Mazaki Jinzaburō's removal as inspector general of military education in July 1935 further deepened the young officers' sense of isolation. On August 12, Lieutenant Colonel Aizawa Saburō, a *Kōdō-ha* sympathizer, assassinated Nagata, bringing the army's factional conflict to a new peak.³⁸ One immediate catalyst for the February 26 uprising was the army's decision, announced in December 1935, to transfer the First Division, of which most of the radical officers were members, from Tokyo to Manchuria the following spring. Furthermore, Aizawa's ongoing trial of the assassin of General Nagata and the favorable publicity it generated encouraged the conspirators to strike before their unit's departure.

In the early hours of 26 February 1936, the coup attempt began with coordinated attacks across central Tokyo. Their objective was to precipitate a "Shōwa Restoration" by eliminating political, court, financial, and military figures whom they regarded as corrupt "traitors" and compelling the emperor to authorize a military-dominated government of national reconstruction. To execute this plan, some twenty radical junior officers of the Imperial Japanese Army led nearly 1,400 troops, including 1,027 recruits who had entered the army just the previous month (see Figure 8). The rebels divided their forces into detachments assigned to assassinate selected officials and occupy strategic government buildings. In the initial attacks, they killed Finance Minister and

36 The Shōwa era is the period during which Emperor Hirohito (Jpn. *Shōwa tennō*) ruled. For the "Shōwa Restoration," see Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, 56–72.

37 See Kitaoka, *From Party Politics to Militarism in Japan*, pp. 178–9.

38 See Kitaoka, *From Party Politics to Militarism in Japan*, pp. 184–7.



Fig. 8. Seizing the capital: First Lieutenant Nibu Masatada and troops of the 1st Infantry Regiment during the opening hours of the February 26 Incident, Tokyo, 1936.
Source: Wikipedia Commons

former prime minister Takahashi Korekiyo (1854–1936), Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and former prime minister Saitō Makoto (1858–1936), and General Watanabe Jōtarō.³⁹

Prime Minister Okada was more fortunate, escaping after the attackers mistook his brother-in-law for him and killed the latter.⁴⁰ The rebels also occupied the Ministry of War and Tokyo Metropolitan Police headquarters and attempted unsuccessfully to gain access to the emperor. At the Ministry of War, they presented demands that included removing rival military figures and appointing sympathetic commanders. Several senior officers expressed sympathy for their motives, while an ambiguous proclamation issued in the war minister's name, followed by emergency orders that temporarily placed the rebel units within the

39 For a list of attacks carried out on February 26, 1936, see Kitaoka, *From Party Politics to Militarism in Japan*, Table 3.3, p. 192.

40 See Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, pp. 139–41.

Fig. 9. Imperial authority asserted: Emperor Hirohito's resolute refusal to support the 1936 February 26 Incident was decisive in suppressing the military coup. Official portrait, 1935. Source: Wikipedia Commons



army's command structure, encouraged the officers to believe that their uprising might receive official sanction. Serious resistance nevertheless emerged almost immediately.⁴¹ At the nearby Yokosuka naval base, opposition to the insurrection was unequivocal. Naval landing forces

were dispatched to guard the Navy Ministry in Tokyo, while warships were prepared to assist in suppressing the rebels.⁴²

Unlike earlier rebellions, the fate of the February 26 uprising depended largely on the emperor's response. Outraged by the attacks on his close advisers, Hirohito unequivocally opposed the insurrection and demanded its immediate suppression (see Figure 9).⁴³ The Army General Staff and the navy also opposed the rebels, but Army leaders hesitated and disagreed over how to respond. Negotiations on 26 and 27 February failed: the rebels sought a military-led cabinet, while those sympathetic to their aims insisted that they first return their troops to barracks.

41 Orbach, *Curse on This Nation*, pp. 244–7.

42 Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, pp. 169–70.

43 For Hirohito's position and actions during the rebellion, see Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 299–301, 303–5; Kitaoka, *From Party Politics to Militarism in Japan*, pp. 194–6.

The following day, an imperial edict placed Tokyo under administrative martial law and ordered the rebel troops to withdraw, while preparations to use force against them intensified. By 29 February, the rebels were surrounded by more than 20,000 loyal troops and 22 tanks. Leaflets and radio broadcasts conveyed the Emperor's order and urged the soldiers to return to their barracks. As their ranks dwindled, the rebel leaders released their remaining troops (see Figure 10).⁴⁴ With the uprising collapsing, several officers attempted or committed suicide; the survivors were arrested. Unlike earlier acts of political terrorism, whose perpetrators had often received comparatively lenient sentences, the February 26 Incident brought fatal consequences for its leaders. The military high command established special, closed courts-martial in which the defendants were denied civilian counsel and any right of appeal. Nineteen men were ultimately executed; dozens more received prison sentences.⁴⁵

The army also conducted a sweeping personnel purge that forced numerous *Kōdō-ha* sympathizers into retirement or marginal positions. With the *Kōdō-ha* destroyed as an effective faction, its rival, the *Tōsei-ha*, emerged more dominant than ever. Paradoxically, although the crisis exposed deep divisions and indiscipline within the army, the armed forces emerged from it politically stronger. The Okada cabinet resigned, and the succeeding Hirota government restored the requirement that army and navy ministers be serving officers. By refusing to nominate a minister or withdrawing one already in office, the armed services could therefore obstruct the formation of a cabinet or force an existing government to resign.⁴⁶

In the years that followed, these institutional and political changes had grave and far-reaching consequences for Japan. The ascendancy of the total-war-oriented *Tōsei-ha* did not eliminate internal disagreements or the army's rivalry with the navy, but it strengthened the military's leverage over an already weakened civilian government and accelerated the erosion of parliamentary politics. Japan was consequently drawn further toward authoritarian mobilization, military expansion, and war in Asia.⁴⁷ This development did not make the conflict

44 See Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, pp. 194–7.

45 See Shillony, *Revolt in Japan*, pp. 198–208.

46 Orbach, *Curse on This Nation*, pp. 252–6.

47 See, for example, Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 313–15.



Fig. 10. An anticlimactic end: Rebel soldiers returning to their units on February 29, 1936. Source: Wikipedia Commons

in China inevitable, however. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937, began as a localized confrontation, but subsequent Japanese determination to dispatch reinforcements and expand military operations transformed it into a full-scale war that continued until 1945. The resulting quagmire in China, together with Japan's mounting confrontation with the United States and other Western powers, drove expansion into Southeast Asia and constituted the principal immediate causes of the Pacific War in 1941. That wider conflict culminated in Japan's surrender in 1945 and the complete loss of its overseas empire.

A Final Postwar Echo of Rebellion: The Mishima Incident, 1970

This chapter focuses on three major rebellions, all of which occurred before World War II. Postwar Japan has experienced no domestic upheaval comparable in scale. Nevertheless, one later attempted coup d'état, known as the Mishima Incident, echoed the dramatic symbolism and political aspirations of these earlier uprisings. Although far more limited in scope and impact, it merits consideration for comparative purposes, if not simply for its sensational character.

On November 25, 1970, internationally renowned author and playwright Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) attempted to incite a military coup in what became

known as the Mishima Incident. Accompanied by four members of his private right-wing militia, the *Tatenokai* (“Shield Society”), he visited Tokyo’s Self-Defense Forces headquarters for a prearranged meeting and took its commandant hostage. From a balcony, Mishima impassionately urged assembled soldiers to overturn Japan’s postwar constitutional order and revoke Article 9’s military restrictions. Mocked and rejected by the troops, he retreated into the office and committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*). The dramatic event stunned Japan and commanded immediate global attention.⁴⁸

The incident began with an arranged visit to Eastern Army Headquarters at Camp Ichigaya in Tokyo. Escorted to the second-floor office of the commander, Lieutenant General Mashita Kanetoshi, Mishima introduced his young uniformed companions and showed Mashita a samurai sword he had brought. As he examined the blade, the *Tatenokai* members overpowered him at knifepoint, tied him to a chair, and barricaded the office entrances. The sudden disruption quickly alarmed neighboring staff members, who tried to force entry, prompting the rebels to slide an official letter of demands underneath the barricaded door. Drawn into immediate close-quarters combat, Mishima wielded his unsheathed samurai sword against the incoming staff, aggressively slashing and wounding several officers who charged into the barricaded office.⁴⁹

When Mishima addressed the gathered crowd of soldiers from the balcony, his fiery speech demanding a constitutional revolution was met with mocking jeers (see Figure 11).⁵⁰ He returned indoors to perform ritual suicide alongside his closest follower, bringing a gruesome and sudden end to the brief insurrection.⁵¹ Although his precise hopes for a wider uprising remain open to interpretation, subsequent investigations revealed that Mishima never genuinely intended to execute a complete government overthrow. Instead, the carefully staged take-

48 For biographies of Mishima and background of his attempted coup, see Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974); John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974); Naoki Inose and Hiroaki Satō, *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1972).

49 For a detailed description of the events at the Eastern Army Headquarters, see Date Muneakatsu, *Saiban kiroku “Mishima Yukio jiken”* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972), pp. 46–115.

50 Hosaka Masayasu, *Mishima Yukio to Tatenokai jiken* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2001), pp. 60–4.

51 Date, *Saiban kiroku “Mishima Yukio jiken.”* pp. 110–15, 118–22.



Fig. 11. Final speech: Novelist Yukio Mishima addresses soldiers from the balcony of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force headquarters in Tokyo, November 25, 1970. Source: Wikipedia Commons

over and his planned suicide suggest the action was meant to serve primarily as a dramatic political statement.⁵²

⁵² Hosaka, *Mishima Yukio to Tatenokai jiken*, pp. 76–7; Date, *Saiban kiroku “Mishima Yukio jiken.”* pp. 252–4.

Despite its failure, the incident shocked Japan and drew attention far beyond its borders. It also gave dramatic expression to ongoing disputes: whether Japan's pacifist constitution had left it dependent on the United States for its defense, what role the emperor should play in national life, and how the country should understand its wartime past. In the following years, Mishima's death became a powerful symbol for certain younger nationalists and helped inspire the emerging Japanese New Right, though that movement had other origins as well. The incident therefore stands as a vivid expression of the ideological tensions beneath Japan's apparent postwar stability. By combining a call for constitutional change with the imagery of samurai sacrifice, Mishima brought to the surface fundamental questions about national sovereignty and identity. His answers attracted little support that day, but the questions outlived him.

Recurring Features of Rebellions in Modern Japan

The major rebellions of modern Japan discussed above differed in their historical circumstances, scale, and consequences. Nevertheless, their shared motivations, goals, political language, and methods reveal broader national patterns in how rebellion took shape. This section examines these patterns.

The notion of "Restoration". All the rebellions examined here advocated restoration rather than revolution. None sought to abolish the imperial institution. Instead, their leaders presented themselves as agents of moral and political renewal, claiming to recover a national order corrupted by self-interested officials and other intermediaries between the emperor and the people. This appeal to an idealized past offered a powerful way to justify rebellion and win support. The Boshin coalition called for the "restoration of ancient imperial rule"; the Satsuma rebels defended an idealized samurai political ethic; the officers of 1936 demanded a Shōwa Restoration; and even Mishima, in the postwar era, sought to revive what he regarded as an authentic imperial and martial Japan. Their aims could be revolutionary in practice, but their language was restorative.

In the name of the emperor. A striking feature of rebellion in modern Japan since the 1860s has been the persistent invocation of imperial authority. Rather than repudiating the emperor, rebels generally claimed to rescue, restore, or vindicate his authority against governments that had supposedly betrayed his will

and the nation's interests. This use of imperial authority was relatively novel in Japanese history and reflected the growing political and, especially, symbolic importance of the imperial institution. By contrast, most premodern rebellions did not claim to act on behalf of the reigning emperor. Taira no Masakado's rebellion (939–940), for example, arose from regional conflict, personal ambition, and defiance of Kyoto. The Yamashiro Ikkoku Ikki (1485–1493) sought to end warfare among local military lords; the Kaga Ikkō-ikki (1488–1580) resisted samurai overlordship under the leadership of a Buddhist movement; and the Shimabara Rebellion (1637–1638) responded to religious persecution and oppressive taxation. The rebellion led by Ōshio Heihachirō (1837) was inspired by famine, official corruption, and a Neo-Confucian sense of moral duty.⁵³ None of these movements sought legitimacy by claiming to defend the reigning emperor's will.

This does not mean that the name of the emperor had never been invoked earlier. The clearest premodern instances of mobilization in his name, however, occurred when an emperor or imperial prince issued a call to arms. In 1180, Prince Mochihito appealed for resistance after the Taira clan had secured control of Kyoto, placed the young Emperor Antoku on the throne, and alienated court nobles and regional warriors. Similarly, between 1331 and 1333, Emperor Go-daigo (r. 1318–1339) mobilized supporters to overthrow the Kamakura shogunate and restore direct imperial rule at the expense of the Hōjō regents. Starting around 1860, in the final years of the Edo era and the ensuing decades, however, rebels increasingly claimed to act for the emperor even when neither the sovereign nor a member of the imperial family had instigated their uprising. Opposition to the established authorities now required the assertion that rebellion served the imperial interest, demonstrating the emperor's growing political status and sacral authority.

This “act in the name of the emperor” first assumed a recognizable pattern

53 See Bix, *Peasant Protests in Japan, 1590–1884*; James W. White, *Ikki: Social Conflict and Political Protest in Early Modern Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Jonathan Clements, *Christ's Samurai: The True Story of the Shimabara Rebellion* (London: Robinson, 2016); Geoffrey C. Gunn, *World Trade Systems of the East and West: Nagasaki and the Asian Bullion Trade Networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 122–42; Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan*.

in the Tenchūgumi Uprising of 1863, when imperial loyalists (*shishi*) rebelled against the Tokugawa shogunate's willingness to sign unequal treaties with Western powers. It reappeared in the Tenguō Rebellion, or Mito Revolt, of 1864, when radical samurai from the Mito domain formed an armed movement to press the shogunate for a more aggressive anti-foreign policy. Thereafter, the claim to act in the emperor's name became increasingly important to political legitimacy, although formal imperial sanction was rarely obtained. The Boshin War was exceptional: the anti-shogunal coalition secured such sanction, strengthening its legitimacy to overthrow the established regime. In the following decades, rebels repeatedly invoked imperial authority or claimed to defend the emperor's interests, but rhetoric alone could not secure victory. The contrast between these claims and the imperial support rebels actually received proved decisive.

National rather limited objectives. Another defining feature of rebellions in modern Japan was their national outlook. Premodern uprisings generally pursued aims tied to a particular domain, region, or social group, such as removing an official, securing tax relief, defending local autonomy, or prevailing in a dispute among regional authorities. Modern rebellions could likewise emerge from grievances within a specific region or group, as the Satsuma Rebellion and the February 26 Incident illustrate. Their leaders, however, cast those grievances as symptoms of a national crisis. They sought to reform the political order or even change the principles by which Japan was governed.

Maintaining and reinventing the samurai ethos. All three prewar rebellions discussed here drew upon, and continually reinterpreted, samurai ideals of loyalty and self-sacrifice, including, in extreme circumstances, the willingness to die honorably. By 1936, such values had been widely articulated under the rubric of *bushido* (lit "The way of the warrior").⁵⁴ Particularly important to several of these movements was the notion of *makoto*, or moral sincerity: the belief that purity of purpose could be demonstrated through decisive, selfless action and a willingness to die.

During the Boshin War, warriors on both sides, most famously the defenders

54 See Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushidō in Modern Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of Aizu, invoked traditions of loyalty unto death, although later commemorations further idealized their conduct. The Satsuma Rebellion likewise came to symbolize the samurai class's final stand against the modernizing state. Saigō Takamori's death was memorialized as an act of sacrifice, even though the familiar account of his *seppuku* is probably apocryphal. The young officers who instigated the February 26 Incident also portrayed themselves as morally pure agents of imperial restoration whose willingness to die affirmed the sincerity of their cause.⁵⁵ The pattern extended into the postwar era, when Mishima consciously reenacted an idealized samurai ethos in his attempted uprising and ended it with *seppuku* at the headquarters of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force.

Reaction against rapid modernization, westernization and materialism. Each rebellion can be understood, at least in part, as a response to political and social change. In some cases, foreign political or cultural influences figured prominently in the rebels' critiques. The forces behind the Meiji Restoration emerged partly from the *sonnō jōi* movement, which opposed the shogunate's concessions to Western powers. Yet the imperial coalition embraced Western military technology and, after its victory, international engagement. In 1877, the Satsuma rebels resisted state-led reforms that dismantled the samurai order. The February 26 Incident was directed chiefly against Japan's political and military leadership, rather than foreign intervention. Mishima, by contrast, protested postwar Americanization, materialism, and the constraints associated with Article 9 of the constitution, portraying Japan's prosperity as concealing spiritual emptiness. Taken together, however, these movements' resistance to particular changes did not amount to a wholesale rejection of modernity.

Foreign participation. As in premodern Japan, the rebellions of the modern era involved little direct foreign intervention and even less foreign participation in combat. This is unsurprising: after all, several of them arose partly in response to Westernization or political institutions their participants regarded as alien to Japanese tradition. The Boshin War was the principal exception. Although the Western powers formally maintained neutrality, foreign individuals, commer-

55 Published one year before the coup, Mishima Yukio's novel *Runaway Horses* (Jpn. *Honba*, 1969) explores themes of political fanaticism, spiritual purity, ritual death, and the nature of reincarnation among political radicals in Japan in the early 1930s.

cial networks, military advisers, and imported weapons affected the conflict. That said, few foreigners took part in the fighting. Most notably, French officers led by Jules Brunet defied orders to return home and joined the former shogunate forces in Ezo, advising their commanders and taking part in military operations (see Figure 12).⁵⁶ The subsequent rebellions saw no comparable foreign involvement and remained overwhelmingly domestic in their participants, resources, and political aims.

Reliance on dramatic action to provoke wider mobilization. In each of the cases discussed, the rebels expected their initial actions to set a broader political transformation in motion. The Boshin leaders hoped to attract additional domains; the Satsuma army expected its march to rally opposition to the government; the February 26 conspirators believed that assassinations and the occupation of central Tokyo would prompt senior commanders and the emperor to accept their program; and Mishima hoped that taking a commander hostage would inspire the assembled troops to revolt. Except for the Boshin War, these expectations proved badly mistaken.

Personal sacrifice and redemptive violence. The rebellions discussed here assigned exceptional moral significance to courage, sacrifice, and death. These ideals aligned with the developing modern conception of the samurai ethic.⁵⁷ Their participants could regard political violence as more than a means to an end: it could demonstrate sincerity and awaken the nation. Even defeat could therefore acquire moral meaning. Saigō's death made him an enduring symbol of samurai virtue; supporters remembered the executed leaders of the February 26 Incident as loyal martyrs; and Mishima ended his failed attempt to incite rebellion with *seppuku*. In each case, self-sacrifice carried significance beyond the prospect of military victory.

56 See Meron Medzini, *French Policy in Japan During the Closing Years of the Tokugawa Regime* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1971).

57 For the modern construction of *bushidō* as an "invented tradition", see Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai*.



Fig. 12. A notable exception to foreign non-intervention: Members of the former shogunate forces with their French military advisers in Hakodate during the Boshin War, 1868–1869. Seated at the center are Jules Brunet and Matsudaira Tarō, vice president of the Republic of Ezo. Source: Hakodate City Central Library Collection

Conclusion: The Declining Arc of Rebellion in Modern Japan and What It Reveals

The course of modern Japanese history, particularly prior to 1945, was profoundly shaped by domestic uprisings. As argued earlier, the Boshin War, the Satsuma Rebellion, and the February 26 Incident marked successive turning points in the development of the modern Japanese state. The imperial coalition's victory in the Boshin War (1868–1869) ended Tokugawa rule and secured the authority of the new Meiji government, opening the way for centralization, modernization, and imperial expansion—thereby laying the foundations for Japan's emergence

as a major power. Less than a decade later, the Satsuma Rebellion (1877) tested that new order. Its defeat ended the last major armed challenge by former samurai, confirmed the effectiveness of a national conscript army, strengthened the state's monopoly over military force, and allowed it to embark on a more systematic imperial expansion.

In subsequent years, political opposition increasingly took the form of organized activity at the national level rather than regional armed conflict. Consequently, the February 26 Incident (1936) unfolded with a fundamentally different dynamic. Although the young officers failed to bring about their proposed "Shōwa Restoration," the crisis they precipitated severely weakened civilian government and gave the army decisive influence over cabinet formation. This accelerated the erosion of civilian authority, pushing Japan toward authoritarianism and ultimately culminating in a disastrous eight-year war and surrender.

The uprisings discussed here varied enormously in scale and duration, ranging from a civil war lasting over a year and an eight-month regional rebellion to a three-day coup attempt and an incident that collapsed within a single morning. Yet a clear trajectory emerges: a shift from a civil war that created a new state, to a rebellion that consolidated it, and ultimately to two brief, failed coups. In other words, over time, these challenges to state authority became smaller, shorter, and less capable of threatening Japan's political order. Only the Boshin War overthrew the existing regime and opened the way for the country's subsequent modernization; the later rebellions all failed. As their scale diminished, the symbolic and moral meaning of rebellion grew more prominent, even as the rebels' prospects of seizing and holding power declined.

The nature of failure also changed. The Satsuma rebels mounted a sustained military campaign, but as defeat became inevitable, Saigō and his remaining followers made their final stand a demonstration of courage and samurai virtue. The officers behind the February 26 Incident assassinated leading statesmen and occupied central Tokyo, yet had no clear plan for governing Japan. Instead, they expected the emperor to recognize their sincerity and authorize a Shōwa Restoration. Finally, Mishima took a military commander hostage with just four followers and called on the assembled soldiers to revolt. They responded with jeers rather than support.

How can we explain this trajectory? How can we account for the fact that

since 1869, for more than 150 years now, only a handful of major rebellions took place in Japan and none was successful? Above all, this trajectory appears to reflect not necessarily the disappearance of radical opposition, but the growing capacity of the modern Japanese state to suppress armed resistance and channel political grievances into institutional forms. Put differently, the diminishing impact of rebellions in modern Japan resulted above all from the progressive consolidation of the state's monopoly over organized violence. The abolition of the domains and the samurai class eliminated the autonomous military forces capable of sustaining regional warfare, while the creation of a conscript army, professional police forces, centralized taxation, and modern systems of communication gave the government an increasingly decisive advantage over its challengers.

The growing power of the Japanese state is even more evident since the end of World War II. Among the cases examined here, the Mishima Incident was the only postwar episode that might plausibly be described as a rebellion, yet it involved very few participants and lasted very briefly. By 1970, Japan had experienced occupation-era demilitarization, institutional democratization, rapid economic growth, and limited rearmament under firm civilian control. Established in 1954, Japan's Self-Defense Forces were substantial but politically constrained, and no revolutionary movement commanded the military resources, regional stronghold, or broad popular support necessary to challenge the state.

By the time Japan's Self-Defense Forces emerged, what historian Danny Orbach calls the "culture of insubordination" in the Japanese armed forces had vanished.⁵⁸ Particularly evident during the upheavals of the 1860s and 1870s and again in the 1930s, that culture did not survive the military collapse and devastation of World War II. Armed rebellion had thus ceased to be a viable means of acquiring power in postwar Japan. Insubordination persisted, but it now belonged to civilian groups. Political violence continued as well: militant student organizations, revolutionary groups, and right-wing activists engaged in riots, assassinations, hijackings, and terrorism. Such violence, however, remained fragmented and never developed into a sustained military challenge to the political order.

⁵⁸ Orbach, *Curse on This Nation*, pp. 257–61.

Equally important, the development of political parties, representative institutions, the press, and organized social movements in prewar Japan provided alternative, albeit restricted, channels for expressing opposition. Consequently, dissent did not disappear, nor did political violence cease; rather, the capacity of dissidents to mobilize independent armies and wage prolonged war against the state steadily diminished.⁵⁹ Rebellion therefore contracted from civil war to regional insurrection, then to military conspiracy, and finally to largely symbolic political theatre.

The postwar Japanese state has been both domestically powerful and democratic, a combination of profound significance. Elections, political parties, an independent press, organized protest, and representative institutions provide peaceful channels through which grievances can be expressed and governments challenged. Democracy did not eliminate political violence entirely, but it sharply reduced its perceived legitimacy and restricted its potential constituency. Japan's postwar stability thus rests on a combination of institutional capacity, democratic legitimacy, economic prosperity, and civilian control of the armed forces. The state possesses the means to suppress rebellion, while the political system gives most citizens little reason to regard armed insurrection as either necessary or justifiable.

Anti-establishment violence has not disappeared; rather, it has adapted to conditions in which collective revolt is exceedingly difficult. Potential threats now come primarily from decentralized extremist networks, lone actors, cults, and cyberattacks. The 1995 sarin attack by Aum Shinrikyō and the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, among many other assaults on the postwar Japanese state, demonstrate the destructive potential of small organizations and isolated individuals, even when operating within a civilian

59 There is extensive literature on dissent and political violence in postwar Japan. See, for example, William Andrews, *Dissenting Japan: A History of Japanese Radicalism and Counterculture from 1945 to Stand-Up Comedy* (London: Hurst, 2016); Stuart Dowsey, ed. *Zengakuren: Japan's Revolutionary Students* (Berkeley: Ishi Press, 1970); Ellis S. Krauss, *Japanese Radicals Revisited: Student Activism in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); George R. Packard, *Protest in Tokyo: The Security Treaty Crisis of 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Wesley, Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Unorganized: Protest and Popular Movement in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Styles of the Japanese Red Army." *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (1989): 724–40.

context.⁶⁰ None of these acts should be classified as rebellions, since they do not necessarily seek to seize and govern the state. They nevertheless show that the disappearance of organized insurrection does not signify the end of violent challenges to the political order.

Does this mean that contemporary Japan is no longer susceptible to rebellion? The country appears largely insulated from large-scale insurrection, though it remains vulnerable to other forms of political violence. Stable democratic institutions, effective administration, strict gun controls, strong security forces, and civilian control of the Self-Defense Forces make it difficult for potential rebels to secure the weapons, territorial bases, military allies, and public support needed to challenge the state. Under present conditions, serious unrest is therefore more likely to take the form of mass protest, terrorism, assassination, or isolated violence than sustained rebellion. Yet political and social conditions can change unexpectedly, making any claim that Japan is immune to rebellion historically unwise.

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60 For these incidents, see Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo* (University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Haruki Murakami, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche* (Vintage International, 2000); Adam J. Lyons, “The Assassination of Abe Shinzō and Japan’s New Cult War: Yamagami Tetsuya and the Second-Generation Problem.” *Nova Religio* 28, no. 4 (2025): pp. 14–37.

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Rebellions and Civil Wars in China, 1910-1950

by HAROLD TANNER

While out hunting one day in late May 1917 the administrator of the Fubian border garrison in Maogong county in the Tibetan Gyalrong region (northwestern Sichuan) missed his mark and put a bullet hole in the golden roof of the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the area, Bajiao Temple. This incident sparked a rebellion led by Tsatö Zöpa (Chadu Ruoba), a Tibetan monk and his two lay Han Chinese accomplices, a carpenter named Fu Nanshan and Feng Ziqing, a plasterer. These three had been planning a rebellion for months, building Zöpa's image as a martial arts master who could equip his followers not only with great fighting technique, but also with spells that would make them immune from harm by swords, spears and bullets. In short order, they issued Zöpa's entirely fictitious claim to the throne of the defunct Qing dynasty, raised an army of some two thousand (later growing to four thousand) and attacked and occupied the local garrison headquarters, several neighboring garrisons, county towns and offices of several *tusi*—local chieftains who administered non-Han populations as agents of the Chinese state.

One of the *tusi* fled to Chengdu, where he requested troops to restore order. The provincial government dispatched a force of around three thousand. Their swords and spears no match for the government soldiers' artillery and machine guns, the rebels retreated to Bajiao Temple, which they defended for two months. When the government troops broke through the walls on 30 August they massacred over 1,000 rebels, looted the temple of valuables, and set it ablaze. Zöpa and 'Grand Marshal' Fu Nanshan were captured, taken to Chengdu, put on trial, and executed on 3 November. Their heads were sent back to Maogong, displayed to the public and then buried in a ditch along the roadside.

The plasterer disappeared.¹

The Bajiao Incident was one of many rebellions that occurred in China from 1910 to 1950—that is, from the last years of the Qing, through the Republican era, and into the first year of the People’s Republic. These local armed uprisings involved anywhere from hundreds to thousands of rebels. Taking place in the context of a weak Chinese state and a highly militarized rural society, rebellions were accompanied by perhaps eleven civil wars, that is, wars fought between the state and organized, nonstate groups seeking to take control of both the state and its territory or (in the case of secessionists) to take control of a part of the territory and make it into the territory of a new sovereign state.² Any attempt to write about rebellions and civil wars in China during these chaotic decades needs to begin with an acknowledgment: it would be impossible to do justice to the topic in one book, let alone one book chapter.

My goal in this chapter is to explore the particularities of local rebellions and how they relate to the grand strategic goals which, as Jeremy Black points out in his ‘Introduction,’ arise from the sense that these civil wars occurred in the context of a national crisis which each of the opposing sides believed that they alone could resolve. In the process I will make choices of inclusion, exclusion and interpretation that some readers will question—beginning with my choice of conflicts that I am going to call civil wars.

Chinese Civil Wars (1910-1950)

I will consider four (or five, depending on how you count) conflicts: 1) the 1911 Revolution (1910-1912); 2) the Second Revolution (1913); 3) Jiang Jieshi and the Nationalist Party’s force-building and subsequent anti-warlord operations, including the Eastern and Northern Expeditions (1924-1927); 4) the two stages of the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalist and Communist parties (1928-1937 and 1946-1950). These conflicts and the combatants involved are

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- 1 Sichuan baike quanshu bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Sichuan baike quanshu* [Encyclopedia of Sichuan], (Chengdu, 1997), p. 94; Sichuan sheng Aba Zangzu Qiangzu zizhizhou xiaojin xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Xiaojin xian zhi* [Xiaojin county gazetteer], (Chengdu, 1995), p. 451.
 - 2 J. Fearon and D. Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.’ *American Political Science Review* 97:1 (Feb. 2003), p. 76.

summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Chinese Civil Wars, 1910-1950

Conflict	Dates	Opposing sides/leaders
1911 Revolution	1895-1912	Qing court/Regent Zaifeng vs. revolutionaries/Sun Yat-sen
Second Revolution	July - September 1913	ROC central government/Yuan Shikai vs. GMD/Sun Yat-sen
Eastern & Northern Expeditions a.k.a. First Chinese Revolutionary Civil War	1924-1927	GMD-CCP United Front/Jiang Jieshi vs. warlord cliques/Wu Peifu, Sun Chuanfang et al.
Rebellion Suppression stage 1 a.k.a. Second Revolutionary Chinese Civil War	1928-1937	GMD/Jiang Jieshi vs. CCP/Mao Zedong
Rebellion Suppression Stage 2 a.k.a. Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War a.k.a Liberation War	June 1945-June 1950	GMD/Jiang Jieshi vs. CCP/Mao Zedong

The 1911 Revolution, notionally led by Sun Yat-sen saw the Qing dynasty overthrown and replaced by the Republic of China under the presidency of the former Qing official and military modernizer, Yuan Shikai. I will be looking at the events of 1911 as the result of sixteen years of Sun's attempts to use rebellion to spark a revolutionary civil war against the Qing dynasty. The Second Revolution was a brief conflict in which the partisans of Sun Yat-sen in southern China tried to overthrow Yuan Shikai.

When Yuan died in 1916, he left China with a weak central government and its national territory divided among independent warlords who fought each other for control of land, resources, transportation routes and the central government itself. In 1924 Sun's Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD) began to build its own military—the National Revolutionary Army—commanded by Sun's younger protégé, Jiang Jieshi. In 1925 Jiang conducted two campaigns (the Eastern Expeditions) to secure Nationalist control over Guangdong province. The Northern Expedition, undertaken after Sun's death, was Jiang's bid to

defeat the warlords and replace the central government in Beijing with a new government under the Guomindang. In the first stages of the Northern Expedition, from July 1926 through August 1927 the National Revolutionary Army defeated warlord factions led by Wu Peifu and Sun Chuanfang. This gave Jiang control of China south of the Yangzi River, including the city of Nanjing, which became the capital of the re-founded Republic of China.

Thus far, Jiang's army-building and campaigns had been accomplished with advice and assistance from the Soviet Union. The Soviets had also, in 1923, pushed the Nationalists and the much smaller Chinese Communist Party into an alliance known as the First United Front. Communist Party participation in the preparation and conduct of the Northern Expedition up until April 1927 is the reason that historians in the People's Republic of China refer to the first part of the Northern Expedition as the 'First Chinese Revolutionary Civil War.'

The First United Front collapsed in April 1927 when Jiang broke off relations with the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party. On Stalin's advice, and in response to Jiang's mass arrests and massacre of Communists, Communist Party members staged hundreds of local rebellions. When these failed, they retreated to the mountains to build base areas for guerrilla war. Mao Zedong and Zhu De's base areas in the Jinggang mountains and then the Jiangxi Soviet are the best-known examples.

There followed two conflicts between the two rival political parties. Nationalist Party historiography refers to these as two stages of one conflict, the Communist-Nationalist Civil War or War to Suppress Rebellion. On the mainland they are called the Second and Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil Wars, with the latter also known as the Liberation War.

In the first conflict (1928-1937) the Communists built rural base areas in southeastern China. The largest of these was Mao Zedong's Jiangxi Soviet. Jiang responded with a series of encirclement campaigns. By 1934 these campaigns had forced the Communists into a retreat—the Long March—which ended in northern Shaanxi 1935 and construction of a new base area in the northwest. Jiang was preparing another round of encirclement campaigns when war with Japan broke out in July 1937. With Stalin acting as broker, the Communist and Nationalist parties formed an alliance—the Second United Front—to fight the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945). During this period the civil war

between the two parties was in a state of suspended animation punctuated by occasional violent clashes.

By August 1945, tensions between the Communist and Nationalist parties were rising. Peace negotiations at the Nationalist wartime capital of Chongqing (August-October 1945) ended in failure. So too did the American George Marshall's attempted mediation. Full-scale civil war broke out in June 1946. Jiang and the Nationalist forces retreated to Taiwan in 1949. Finally, in June 1950, the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula forced the Communist Party to cancel plans for an invasion of Taiwan.

The moral connotations of the names applied to the various civil wars and rebellions of the first half of the twentieth century point us in the direction of the grand strategic goals of the opposing sides and the political particularities of the crisis in which these grand strategic goals were formulated. War in China was political in the sense conveyed by Sun Tzu when he declared that war was '[t]he way of preservation and extinction.'³ This understanding of war resonated deeply at a time when intellectual, political and military leaders believed that the Chinese people faced an existential crisis: they must clearly define the nation and its territory and defend them from internal and external threats, or face literal extinction of China and 'the Chinese race' in the global Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest.

To win that struggle, the multi-ethnic Qing empire would need to be transformed into a cohesive nation-state. Multiple ethnic identities would need to be fused into one national identity. The use of different regional and local policies and institutions to govern different ethnic communities would need to be abandoned in favor of a standardized bureaucracy. The weak, thinly spread, inefficient and under-funded Qing central government would need to be transformed into (or replaced by) a strong, well-funded, efficient, centralized modern state. A backward agricultural economy would need to be transformed into a modern industrial economy. The military would be remade following the best Western models of the day, with modern weapons to match.

But modernity was more than efficiency, professionalism, industrialization, military power and wealth generation. It was about values, morality and justice.

3 Sunzi. *The Art of War: Sun Zi's Military Methods*, (Columbia, 2007), 76.

These abstract ideals need to be made real and to address the concerns of ordinary people at the local level. Similarly, at the national level, the ultimate grand strategic goal of each of the two rival combatants in the Chinese civil wars of the first half of the twentieth century was to seek not just modernity, but a morally and culturally satisfying modernity.⁴ Each of the opposing forces in the four civil wars under consideration here embraced different visions of what Chinese modernity would look like and how to get there. Each war was very literally the ‘continuation of political discourse, carried on by other means.’⁵

While grand strategic goals were pursued at the national level, the operational and tactical action taken in pursuit of those goals took place at the regional and local levels. As political scientist Stathis Kalyvas points out, ‘[c]ivil wars are not binary conflicts, but complex and ambiguous processes that foster the ‘joint’ action of local and supralocal actor, civilians and armies, whose alliance results in violence that aggregates yet still reflects their diverse goals.’⁶ Within the Chinese rebellions and civil wars under consideration there are multiple gaps between the local and the national levels. Civil war contestants who were able to align local and national goals derived an advantage from doing so. Local rebel leaders who either aligned with or became supralocal leaders earned a place among the victors (or the vanquished) in a civil war.

In the next three sections of this chapter, we will consider three examples of the relations between rebellion and civil war. First, we will look at Sun Yat-sen’s attempted use of rebellion to kick-start a revolutionary civil war. Section two addresses challenges of creating unity of interest between local communities and the nation in the context of China’s highly militarized rural society. In section three we shift our gaze to the frontier areas, where issues of local and regional identity become entangled with relations between the Chinese state and its neighbors, and rebellion threatens to re-draw national boundaries and questions which communities are and are not ‘Chinese.’

4 I am indebted to podcaster Kaiser Kuo for the concept of a morally and culturally satisfying Chinese modernity.

5 C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton, 1989), pp. 86-87.

6 S. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars.” *Perspectives on Politics* 1:3 (2003), p. 475.

In Search of Strategy: Sun Yat-sen's Rebellions

Zhang Mingqi, Viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, was entertaining guests in one of the inner meeting rooms of the viceregal office compound in Guangzhou. It was 5:30 in the afternoon of 27 April 1911. Convivial steam and delicate smoke rose from fine tea served in exquisite small porcelain bowls and from the excellent tobacco in the hookah. Suddenly, the sound of gunfire broke out. This was not entirely unexpected. The viceroy's intelligence sources had been reporting on the suspicious activities of certain revolutionary conspirators. Viceroy Zhang had accordingly strengthened security at the office compound and ordered the city gates closed early that morning to prevent rebels from entering Guangzhou.⁷

The rebellion was led and organized by Huang Xing, a collaborator of the more famous Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen. Sun was the theoretician, organizer and chief fund-raiser for the revolutionary movement to oust the Manchu Qing dynasty and replace it with a Han Chinese republic. While enrolled in Japan's prestigious Kobun Institute (a preparatory school), Huang had studied military affairs in his spare time. Returning to China in 1903, Huang joined Sun's Revolutionary Alliance, an organization dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Huang took responsibility for the planning and implementation of assassinations, rebellions and the like.

On the day of the attack, it was Huang Xing who led around 130 rebels, each wearing black rubber shoes and a white armband for identification, on the short walk from their headquarters down the street to the main gate of the viceroy's office complex. One of Huang Xing's officers shouted to the thirty or forty guards: 'We are seeking justice for the Chinese people. You too are Chinese. If you agree, please raise your hands.' Seeing no reaction, twenty-three of the revolutionaries charged the main gate. Guns were fired. Bombs were thrown. The guards retreated to their guardhouse. Huang Xing left most of his troops to secure the area around the front gate. He himself led a team of ten-some men into the viceroy's compound, heading straight for the Grand Hall. The few guards

7 The following account draws on L. Zou, *Guangzhou san yue ershijiu gemingshi* [History of the Guangzhou March 29th revolution] (Shanghai, 1930), pp. 49-51; Z. Feng, *Geming yishi* [Unofficial history of the revolution] (Taipei, 1953), pp. 218-222; C. Hsueh, *Huang Hsing and the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford, 1961), 79-93.

whom they found there raised their hands in surrender and guided Huang and his men as they searched through the remaining buildings. Their target, Viceroy Zhang, had already withdrawn to the nearby naval command station leaving (by one participant's account) the tea bowls scattered about and the hookah still warm.

With nothing further to be gained, Huang and his men set a few fires and withdrew the way they had entered, exchanging shots with another guard unit in the main hall before exiting via the main gate. Huang's next challenge was to get out of Guangzhou. The revolutionaries made another attempt to win the Qing soldiers over: 'We are all Han people—we should work together with one heart and one mind to expel the alien race and restore our Han domains. Don't fire, don't fire!' When this appeal to the soldiers' Han identity failed, the vastly outnumbered revolutionaries fought their way through the city streets, with (in the words of one veteran) 'bullets falling like raindrops through the smoke-filled air.'⁸ It was sometime after midnight when Huang Xing and what remained of his small band of revolutionaries escaped and the battle came to an end. Huang had lost all but ten or so of his men and two of his own fingers.

One of the ironies of this, the Huanghuagang Uprising, as it came to be known, was that it was very thoroughly planned. The idea had been broached at meetings between Sun Yat-sen and his supporters in the Overseas Chinese community in British Malaya. A headquarters was set up in Hong Kong, with Sun Yat-sen himself in charge. Funds were raised from Overseas Chinese communities in Malaya and in the United States of America. Arrangements were made to manufacture explosives, purchase handguns and rifles, and smuggle the weapons into Guangzhou. Fifth columnists rented rooms in the Manchu Banner quarter in the city. The Qing New Army unit in Guangzhou, part of the dynasty's military modernization program was infiltrated. There would be simultaneous attacks on ten distinct targets in the city.

After they took Guangzhou, the revolutionaries (including the New Army unit) would march north, defeating more Qing armies and inspiring copy-cat uprisings in other cities. The Qing would fall. The Manchus would be chased back to Manchuria. China would become a republic. Instead, weapons ship-

8 Feng, *Geming*, p. 222.

ments were delayed. Deadlines were missed. The uprising was postponed, then postponed again. Participants dropped out and went home. When Huang Xing and his men attacked the viceroy's compound, they knew they were on a suicide mission. The only reason to persist was so that Sun Yat-sen could report to the donors that their money had not been entirely wasted.

The Huanghuagang Uprising was the last of ten failed uprisings credited to Sun between 1895 to 1911. These were not the comical failures of an incompetent political grifter. Sun and Huang Xing were grappling with a difficult problem. They were confident that China was ready for a revolutionary civil war, and that they alone had built the theoretical basis for transforming the Qing empire into a nation-state capable of winning the global struggle for the survival of the fittest. The problem was that to win a civil war they would need a successful strategy, a conceptual framework that would explain how to use their very limited financial, organizational, propaganda, military and other resources to build an army with which they could achieve the desired result.

Sun's strategy was composed of three elements. First, fund-raising from Overseas Chinese donors to support small-scale local rebellions. Second, the confidence that China was "ripe for revolution" so that if the revolutionaries could take over a key administrative centre or strategic chokepoint, the whole province would fall in line and become a base area from which the revolutionaries could build and project military power. Third, belief that the revolutionaries would be able to use existing organizations (rural militia, organized crime, secret societies, Qing turncoats) to build the revolutionary armies. As we have seen, Sun's strategy led to a series of failed rebellions.⁹

Some of these rebellions were deeply embedded in rural society. For example, as Winston Hsieh describes, the Huizhou Uprising of 1900 was conducted through the 'hierarchical structure of nested local systems of economic life . . . local troops first gathered at small towns . . . then congregated at the central market town of Tan-shui, and finally concentrated as the siege of [Huizhou].'¹⁰ Local people were recruited through local networks, and their willingness to join

9 H. Schiffrin, "The Enigma of Sun Yat-sen." In M. Wright, ed. *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900-1913* (New Haven, 1968), p. 447.

10 W. Hsieh, "Triads," 156-157.

a rebellion against the Qing was rooted in local issues—in this case, the Qing state's crackdown on a significant sector of the local economy: salt smuggling. It was this local issue that inspired rural people in the Huizhou area to support a national movement whose revolutionary ideology they did not necessarily understand. For all their efforts, Sun and Huang had not overcome the disjuncture between the local and the national, between rebellion and civil war.¹¹

Less than six months after the failed uprising in Guangzhou came another rebellion, this one in Wuchang—one of the three cities in the tri-city Wuhan metroplex, capital of Hubei province. The planning was shambolic. The organizers were low-ranking officers in a Qing New Army unit. They had studied the writings of Sun Yat-sen and other revolutionaries but had no close connection with Sun or with Huang Xing. When their uprising gained traction, the organizers put a gun to the head of their brigade commander and forced him to join them because they thought his rank and his ability to speak English gave him the *gravitas* they needed in a leader.

The Wuchang uprising sparked the nationwide 1911 Revolution: a cascade of local uprisings in the capital cities of one province after another, all occurring between 10 October tenth to 8 November. Sun was right in his belief that China was ripe for revolution. But these uprisings did not conform to the strategy that he had been developing. The proof was in the pudding: the new 'revolutionary' provincial governments were dominated by members of the traditional land-holding gentry-scholar elite, wealthy entrepreneurs, and former Qing military officers. The revolution had no central leadership and no vision of the future. It gained only a façade of ideological coherence in December when representatives of the new provincial governments gathered in Nanjing to form a national government and choose Sun Yat-sen as their leader.

Another problem was that the revolutionaries did not defeat the Qing. In military terms, the 1911 Revolution consisted of various small-scale clashes and a few massacres of Manchus, but only two real battles. In the Battle of Yangxia (18 October-27 November), the Qing defeated a revolutionary army led by Huang Xing and thus recovered control of Wuhan. The revolutionaries were triumphant in the Battle of Nanjing (9 November -1 December). Neither

¹¹ Ibid., 158-164.

battle was decisive. The standoff between the revolutionaries and the Qing was resolved through negotiations in which the Qing prime minister, General Yuan Shikai, talked the Qing imperial household into abdicating and the revolutionaries into accepting him as their new president. This was more like the result of a palace coup than the defeat of one side and the victory of the other in a civil war.

The 1911 Revolution ended Manchu minority rule and established a republic, but the contradiction between two models of modernization remained. Yuan, like the Qing court he had served wanted a centralized authoritarian state—he even tried to establish a constitutional monarchy, with himself as emperor. Sun and his followers envisioned a representative democracy with a strong parliament. The stage was set for further civil war. Sun and the revolutionaries, however, still did not have a winning strategy. The lessons of ten failed rebellions and the 1911 Revolution were, first that neither *ad hoc* armies built through local networks nor suborned enemy units were sufficient to win a civil war and second, that more had to be done to win popular support. The revolutionaries would need to build, train and command their own army, and they would need to show the Chinese people that their solution to China's national existential crisis was also the solution to local existential crises.

Banditry, Rebellion, and Civil War in the Heartland

In a classified telegram dated 21 March 1913 President Yuan Shiki told General Duan Qirui that it was taking far too long to suppress the bandit gang led by one Bai Lang or “White Wolf,” as the government and the foreign press called him. The rebellious Guomindang was egging the bandits on, and the foreign press was accusing the government of weakness and failure to maintain public order. This was undermining the government's prestige. Government bond prices had collapsed, and it was increasingly difficult to negotiate loan renewal. President Yuan hoped that Duan would exert himself in the task of restoring peace.¹²

Bai Lang (1873-1914) was from Baofeng county in western Henan province. The area was known for poorly maintained irrigation and flood control infra-

12 C. Du, *Bai Lang qiyi*. [The Bai Lang Uprising] (Beijing, 1980,) p. 146.

structure, natural disasters, poverty and banditry. Bai worked the family land with the help of a few hired labourers to support his wife, five children and his mother. He was barely literate. Like any other man in the village, he was regularly mobilized for unpaid corvée labour and worked side jobs to make ends meet. Bai's family was wealthier than average, but the years 1908-1912 were difficult: natural disasters: floods, drought, a crop-destroying hailstorm and, in 1911, a breakdown of social order. By then the family had lost half its land in an altercation with a powerful landlord family and been robbed by marauding soldiers. In these circumstances, Bai made the same decision as thousands of men in western Henan: he became a bandit.¹³ Bai's charisma, his marksmanship and tactical skill drew men to him. So too did his supply of the modern "quick guns" (breech-loading rifles and pistols) that every bandit coveted.¹⁴ Bai's organization grew fast. By May 1912 he was an independent bandit leader, with over seventy followers. Farmers and coal miners from western Henan were his core constituency. He also recruited already-established bandits and former soldiers.¹⁵

From late 1912 through May 1913 his forces raided in western Henan and northern Hubei, recruiting, capturing more weapons, and drawing on their familiarity with the terrain to evade or break through attempted encirclement and annihilation operations. Meanwhile, in the south, Sun Yat-sen and Huang Xing were planning the "Second Revolution." The scale of Bai Lang's operations and his use of the slogan "take from the rich to help the poor" made the revolutionaries see the bandits as possible allies. Some revolutionaries joined Bai Lang, offering advice, but no material support. A plan for the bandits and the revolutionaries to rendezvous in Nanjing and then conduct a joint northern expedition to Beijing was cancelled when the Second Revolution fell apart in July. Bai's force, 20,000-strong, then pillaged and looted their way through five provinces. In May 1914, running low on food and ammunition in resource-poor Gansu, Bai led his now-dwindling band of followers back to Henan, where many of them

13 E. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China*. (Armonk, 2002), pp. 113-116; S. Cai (1993). *Minguo shiqi de tufei* [Bandits of the Republican era] (Beijing, 1993), pp. 150-152.

14 L. Duan, *Weapons of the People: The Culture and Politics of Guns in Modern China* (Ann Arbor, 2027).

15 Cai, *Minguo*, pp. 153-156.

returned to their homes. Bai, mortally wounded, ended with his head on display in the provincial capital.¹⁶

The alliance between Sun's revolutionaries and Bai Lang's bandits was not successful. There was no significant tactical, operational or strategic coordination between the two sides. Guomindang advisers joined Bai's forces, but their attempts to convey a sense of their grand strategic goals fell on deaf ears. The bandits remained focused on banditry: their ideology remained 'take from the rich and give to the poor.'¹⁷ Once again, Sun had not made the link between the local realities with which bandits and rebels were concerned and the overarching issues of national survival and social justice.¹⁸

The Bai Lang affair was the last time that Sun Yat-sen would try to conjure up an army from the resources of the militarized Chinese countryside. The Bolshevik Revolution and ensuing competition between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the Western powers and Japan on the other presented Sun with a new option: in the context of global great power competition, assess the state of play and align with one of the great powers in return for assistance in building a professional but also ideologically trained modern army. In this model of force-building, the foreign sponsor supplied weapons, instruction, advice and money. However, the Chinese side would still need to extract labor, tax revenue, recruits, and support from rural China. The need to bridge the gap between local and national existential crises remained. Jiang Jieshi's Nationalists and Mao Zedong's Communists would approach this task in different ways, which varied with time and context.

As commandant of the Soviet-sponsored Whampoa Military Academy, Jiang Jieshi had built the National Revolutionary Army. The NRA was designed to conduct conventional military operations. However, it was also designed as the military instrument of the Guomindang. Jiang saw conflict as 'total war' which required that officers, soldiers and civilians understand and support his war aims. He also believed that in a modern society, the army would be a moral role model, and that civilian society would be imbued with military virtue.¹⁹ Ac-

16 Perry, *Challenging*, pp. 123-124.

17 Cai, *Minguo*, p. 156; Perry, *Challenging*, p. 122.

18 E. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945*. (Stanford, 1980) p. 6.

19 H. Tanner, *War in Modern China: A Military History*. (London, 2026) pp. 121, 148, 169.

cordingly, the Northern Expedition had a component of grassroots mobilization. The Communists, however, dominated the Peasant Training Institute and labour union work.

During the first stage of his war to suppress rebellion (the Second National Revolutionary Civil War, 1927-1936), Jiang declared that the war against the Communists was “three parts military, seven parts political.” His approach to rural work was to rely on the existing structure and personnel of local government and on the existing social hierarchy to strengthen the *baojia* system of mutual surveillance and mutual responsibility.²⁰ The system contributed, along with an economic blockade and a blockhouse strategy, to a Guomindang victory in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign: in October 1934 the Communists retreated on what became the Long March to a new base area in the far northwest. However, in the long run, the Guomindang’s alignment with the status quo in rural China widened the gap between Jiang’s national strategic goals and the interests of most rural people.

The Communist Party did a far better job of winning rural support than did the Nationalists. It took time, however, for the Communists to bridge the gap between their grand strategic vision for the Chinese nation and the practical goals of rural Chinese. Immediately after the United Front collapsed Joseph Stalin advised the Communists to stage rebellions to take advantage of what he claimed was a “high tide of revolution” in China. The strategy resembled that which Sun and Huang had pursued from 1895 to 1910. CCP members led 637 uprisings from 1927-1936, with 80% occurring in 1927-1930. The leaders were generally men of high standing in local clan or kinship systems, which they drew on to organize and mobilize armed peasants to attack local landlords and to seize control of township and county governments. They knew that the party center encouraged uprisings, but it is unlikely that many of them knew about Stalin’s directive. Local issues and clan identities played a greater role in mobilizing peasants for rebellion than national ideological issues.²¹

20 S. Jin, ‘Guomin zhengfu shiqi baojia zhidu de zhankai yu shishi’ [The Expansion and Implementation of Baojia System During the Period of the National Government]. *Tainan keji daxue tongshi jiaoyuxue kan* 7 (2008), pp. 324-355.

21 J. Jiang and X. Lan, ‘From Kin to Comrade: Rural Clan Society and the Rise of Communism in China.’ (2023). <https://sccei.fsi.stanford.edu/events/sccei-fall-seminar-profes->

All these rebellions were defeated. In some cases, the rebels fled to remote mountainous areas, where they built base areas from which to conduct guerrilla warfare against the Guomindang government. The most significant of these were the Nanchang Uprising, led by Zhu De (1 August 1927) and Mao Zedong's Autumn Harvest Uprising in Hunan (9-21 September 1927). Defeated by the Guomindang, Mao withdrew to the Jinggang mountains, where Zhu De later joined him. It was there that Mao and his comrades developed their own way of bridging the gap between local and supralocal strategic goals. While Jiang Jieshi tried to strengthen and work through existing rural institutions and socio-economic hierarchies, the communists built base areas where they used the tools of propaganda, class struggle and land reform to destroy existing social hierarchies and local government and to build, in their place, new, Communist Party political and economic power.²²

This violent transformative process showed how the Communist Party's grand strategic goals were relevant to the solution of local crises. It also enabled the Communists to extract from the rural economy the labour, grain, and soldiers they needed to keep on fighting and to make the transition from guerrilla to conventional forces. The huge armies that defeated Jiang in the Liao-Shen, Ping-Jin and Huai-Hai campaigns were made possible in part by the communists' ability to convince rural Chinese that their national agenda was relevant to the solution of local problems. This was "people's war" in the service of conventional combined arms operations. As they crossed the Yangzi and pursued the retreating Nationalists south, the People's Liberation Army no longer needed to build base areas and "surround the cities from the countryside." Instead, they marched straight into Shanghai, Nanjing and other major cities, took over, and then extended their control into the Chinese countryside, west to Tibet, and Northwest to Xinjiang. It is to the frontier, then, and to Xinjiang, that we next cast our gaze.

[sor-junyan-jiang](#). (Accessed 25 July 2026), pp. 2-10; e-mail correspondence with J. Jiang, 13 July 2026.

22 B. DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford, 2019).

The Ili Affair: Rebellion or Civil War?

Eighth War Zone Commander Zhu Shaoliang spent the day of 7 November 1944 celebrating the anniversary of the October Revolution at the Soviet Consulate in Dihua (Urumqi—the capital of Xinjiang province). The festivities continued late into the night, the vodka flowed freely, and Zhu became too drunk to read an urgent telegram. The next morning, he learned that an armed rebellion had begun in Yining (Ghulja), the administrative seat of Ili (Yili) district.²³ The attackers—mostly Uyghur, Kazak and White Russian fighters—clearly had the support of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Consulate in Yining supplied weapons and ammunition. Soviet soldiers were directly involved in fighting and in blocking roads to prevent government reinforcements from entering the city. Within a few days the outnumbered Guomindang government troops were compressed into three isolated positions northeast of the city. On 12 November the insurgents announced the founding of the East Turkestan Republic.²⁴

The Yining Rebellion was an uprising of Xinjiang's Turkic Muslim majority (92 percent of the total population of 3,730,000) against the Han Chinese ruling minority (5.3 percent).²⁵ Xinjiang, a region long considered crucial to China's defense, was conquered by the Qing in 1759. Although a part of the Republic of China, Xinjiang had been ruled by virtually independent warlord governors since 1912. Like other warlords, the governors faced internal and external threats, which they addressed through suppression and balancing respectively. To defend themselves and their territory, they needed a strong modern army and infrastructure. They sought to build these through a state-directed modernization program 'heavily weighted toward the military and its ancillary accoutrements.'²⁶ Heavy-handed extraction of resources to fund military modernization increased the disjuncture between the provincial government and the

23 D. Wang, *Under the Soviet Shadow: The Yining Incident—Ethnic Conflicts and International Rivalry in Xinjiang, 1944-1949* (Hong Kong, 1999), p.132.

24 Wang, *Under*, pp. 127-128; K. Wang, *The East Turkestan Independence Movement, 1930s-1940s* (Hong Kong, 2020), pp. 128-129; L. Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang, 1944-1949* (Armonk, 1990), p. 45; D. Zhang, *Xinjiang feng bao 70 nian* [70 years of storms over Xinjiang], (12 vols. Taipei, 1982) vol.11, p. 6268.

25 Forbes, *Warlords*, p. 6.

26 J. Jacobs, *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State* (Seattle, 2016), pp. 78-79.

people. So too did the endemic corruption, brutality, and arbitrary arrests, imprisonment and execution with which the provincial government attempted to maintain control.

While internal conditions were important causes of the Yining Rebellion, the events and their outcome were also affected by external forces. The Soviet Union played a crucial role in helping General Sheng Shicai become governor of Xinjiang from April 1933. Sheng accordingly leaned heavily toward the Soviet Union and expressed support for the Chinese Communist Party. Then came 1941. In Europe, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In China, the Communists had experienced setbacks, while America's entry into the war against Japan held the promise of increased aid for Jiang Jieshi. Determined to be on the winning side, Sheng Shicai broke relations with the Soviets and aligned himself with the Guomindang.²⁷

Sheng's realignment had tremendous consequences for Xinjiang and for Sheng himself. The Guomindang's heavy-handed assimilationist ethnic policies and encouragement of Han immigration alienated the Turkic majority. Oppression of Turkic intellectuals was intensified. Many of them fled to the Soviet Union. Demands that every family donate a horse to the government angered the Kazaks of Xinjiang's Altai (Ashan) district. The United States stepped up its presence in Xinjiang with an American consulate in Dihua and an attempt to make Ili into a base for anti-Soviet operations. Sheng also ended trade with the Soviet Union, thus contributing substantially to the collapse of Xinjiang's economy.²⁸

The Soviet Union responded with a concerted effort to use the alienation of the Muslim Turkic majority as a tool to advance Soviet interests. Pamphlets advocating pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideology, print media touting Turkic ethno-nationalism and anti-Han sentiment were produced in the Soviet Union and circulated in Xinjiang. Uyghur and Kazak intellectuals studied in the Soviet Union. Soviet agents in Xinjiang made contacts with Turkic leaders, encouraging Turkic nationalism and gathering intelligence. Weapons and ammunition

27 Y. Xu, *Xinjiang sanqu geming shi* [History of the Xinjiang three districts revolution] (Beijing, 1998), pp. 12-13.

28 Xu, *Xinjiang*, 13, 26, 30; Forbes, *Warlords*, pp. 166-167.

were smuggled across the border, some of them stockpiled in the Soviet consulate in Yining. Soviet propaganda and support for Turkic independence activists focused on Xinjiang's 'Three Districts,' all of which bordered on the Soviet Union: Ili, Tacheng (Targabatai) and Altai (Ashan).²⁹

It was in the Three Districts that significant armed uprisings were already under way before the Yining uprising took place. Nomadic Kazaks in Altai had launched an uprising in 1940. Their leader, Osman Batyr, hated the Soviets but was willing to accept Soviet aid and the advice (some would say domination) of a Soviet-trained Kazak agent named Delilhan. The Republic of Mongolia both supplied military assistance and acted as a conduit for Soviet aid. Mongolian Prime Minister Choibalsan saw Osman's rebellion against China as part of his campaign (supported by Stalin) to take over Inner Mongolia.³⁰ In Ili, a Soviet-supported guerrilla movement in Gongha (Nilka) county began attacking government forces in August 1944. By October, the guerrillas, numbering around 2,500, had captured the county town and were prepared to support the Yining uprising.³¹

The Soviet Union did not create these uprisings out of whole cloth. Brutal authoritarian minority rule, oppression, economic mismanagement, confiscatory taxation and rampant corruption led to genuine alienation of Muslim Turkic people of Xinjiang. This alienation made it possible for local leaders to present armed resistance to the Chinese in both the language of *jihad* against domination by non-Muslim Han Chinese and as modern pan-Turkic ethnonationalism.³² Nobody, however—neither Turkic leaders nor Choibalsan in Mongolia, nor provincial governors, nor Jiang Jieshi himself, could escape the fact that they acted within the constraints of Joseph Stalin's pursuit of Soviet strategic interest in the context of the emerging Cold War. The best anyone could do was to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of all the other players, make the decision that seemed most advantageous, and live with the consequences if they got it wrong.

Sheng Shicai was one of those who got it wrong. In 1942, perceiving Soviet weakness, Sheng had switched his allegiance to Chongqing. By late 1943, So-

29 Y. Xu, *Xinjiang*, pp. 17, 35-36; Wang, *Under*, pp. 102-106.

30 S. Radchenko, 'Choibalsan's Great Mongolia Dream,' *Inner Asia* 11:2 (2009), 231-258.

31 Wang, *The East*, pp. 122-125.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 108-114.

viet victories in the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk had convinced Sheng that he should switch back to the Soviets. But the world had changed. Moscow and Beijing were talking with each other. Sheng had outlived his usefulness. In September-October 1944 Jiang replaced Sheng with a more reliable man.³³

In the long run, the leaders of the ETR in Yining and Osman's Kazaks in Altai would be just as disposable to Stalin as Sheng Shicai. Factionalism in the ETR was also a problem. The leadership consisted of three factions: Soviet-educated secular modernists, modern industrialists and businessmen, and traditional religious leaders. Each had a different vision of the society, culture, economy and government of the independent Turkic ethnostate that they all worked to establish. For the moment, it was the Muslim traditionalist vision that resonated the most clearly with the people. Thus, Ilhan Tore, a religious leader, was put forward as president because his reputation as a religious leader. That commitment had two results: one was indiscriminate massacres of Han people.³⁴ The other was support for a war to unify Xinjiang.³⁵

That war would require an army. With Soviet support and advisors, the ETR quickly reorganized the guerrillas and other fighters into a conventional force (infantry, cavalry and a few artillery units) of 15,000 men, using Soviet manuals and Soviet-style uniforms.³⁶ Equipped with Soviet and captured GMD weapons, the Ili National Army conducted operations on multiple fronts. On the northern front, the goal was to unify the Three Districts by seizing Tacheng and coordinating with Osman and his Kazaks in Altai. On the southern front, the Tarim Basin, the goal was to disrupt the enemy's rear area. The major effort was on the central front, where the main force advanced toward the provincial capital of Dihua.³⁷ The war went well for East Turkestan, largely thanks to extensive Soviet assistance—advice, weapons, armor, air support, officers and even troops. By mid-September 1945, the ETR controlled Tacheng, Osman dominated the Altai district, and the East Turkestan Army had reached the Manas River, posing a direct threat to the provincial capital. And at just that point, the Soviet Union

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58, 120-121.

34 Xu, *Xinjiang*, pp. 17-18; Wang, *The East*, pp. 132-134.

35 Xu, *Xinjiang*, p. 41; Benson, *The Ili*, p. 5.

36 Xu, *Xinjiang*, pp. 64-67; Wang, *Under*, pp. 151-152.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 149-159; Xu, *Xinjiang*, pp. 58-60

ordered a cease-fire, and negotiations began on a coalition government of Xinjiang.

What had happened? At the Yalta Conference in February 1945 and then in the process of negotiating the Sino-Soviet Treaty with Jiang Jieshi's government in August, Stalin had gained what he wanted on China's northern frontier: port and rail privileges in Manchuria, Mongolian independence, and recognition of Soviet interests in Xinjiang, particularly in the Three Districts. Osman and the ETR were no longer of any value. In practice, the coalition government fell apart. The ETR continued to rule the Three Districts virtually independent from the Guomindang government but dominated by the Soviet Union. On 15 August 1949, with Communist victory over the Guomindang virtually assured, the key leaders of the ETR boarded a Soviet airplane bound for Beijing, where they were to attend the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. They never arrived. Only in December did the authorities reveal that the airplane had crashed, killing all aboard.

Meanwhile, the PLA entered Xinjiang in October and began establishing a provincial government. The ETR regime and its army were dismantled. The Three Districts were reintegrated into the province of Xinjiang. The PRC, like the Guomindang, adopted assimilationist policies and encouraged Han immigration. The ETR, dependent on Soviet support, could never have become independent. Still, the attempt leaves us with a question: what do we call a secessionist movement which controls an area (the Three Districts) around the size of Poland for five years? Is it a rebellion? Or a civil war?

Conclusion

I have suggested that China's civil wars of 1910-1950 can be understood as contests conducted at the national level between the partisans of opposing visions of Chinese modernity, and that the perception of China and the Chinese people as facing an existential crisis—modernize or be subjugated and obliterated—lent those contests a certain intensity. I have also suggested that rebellions were local events, and the participants motivated by local concerns. More than 80 percent of Chinese lived in the countryside, their identities and interests shaped in the local context. One of the tasks of civil war protagonists in this era

was to bridge the gap between local and national interests, which they attempted by various means, and with varying results.

Whatever the methods employed, to bridge the gap between the world of rebellion and the world of civil war was ultimately an act in which local narratives were assimilated to national narratives. The end of China's decades of rebellion and civil war in 1950 did not mean the end of the process of national assimilation of local narratives: the process continued beyond mere military victory as the definition of Chinese modernity continued to be contested in (among other places) the field of history. For an example, let us return to Bajiao.

In the 1950s, Chinese historians labeled the Bajiao incident as a "peasant uprising," an "anti-imperialist, anti-feudal uprising movement of unprecedented scale." This placed the Tibetan monk Zöpa on the progressive side of the Communist Party narrative which told the story of modern China as the Chinese people's struggle against "feudalism" and imperialism. In the 1990s, a Chinese historian pointed out that Zöpa had promised to return the Gyalrong region to its halcyon days—the early eighteenth century, when the Qing had ruled this Tibetan area indirectly, through local elites who, consequently, had a lot of power and became very wealthy. In mid-century, the Qianlong emperor fought the two very expensive Jinchuan Wars to bring Gyalrong under the central government's standard administrative system. Not coincidentally, the historian claimed, Zöpa's major supporters were local elites. He thus recategorized the Bajiao incident from peasant uprising to feudal separatism.³⁸ In doing so, he assimilated to the approved metanarrative of the Xi Jinping era in which the Qianlong emperor's empire-building and centralization are viewed in a positive light.

Scholars working and publishing outside the boundaries of officially sanctioned CCP-approved metanarrative hegemony are free to compose alternative narratives. For example, a scholar publishing outside of China agrees with the Chinese historian that Zöpa's promise of a return to the pre-Jinchuan Wars golden age motivated his followers. However, he describes those followers not as Tibetan elites, but as a mixed group of Tibetan monks and lay people, Han Chinese supporters of Qing restoration, and 1,000 gold miners. And while the Hui

38 X. Zhang, "Minchu xizangqu bajiao shijian shi yichang fubi de naoju," [The Bajiao incident in the early Republican Tibetan area was a restorationist farce], *Xizang yan jiu*, (July 1993), 102-107.

historian clearly approves of the Jinchuan wars and the Qianlong emperor's centralization, the Tibetan scholar points out that the Jinchuan wars were conducted with extreme cruelty, ended with a deliberate massacre which nearly eliminated the Tibetan population, and was followed by waves of state-sponsored Han migration into Gyalrong.³⁹

In a process hardly unique to China, local narratives are assimilated to national narratives. The purpose is to achieve unity of will in war and morally and culturally satisfying modern societies in peace, but at what price? Historians working within the parameters prescribed by the state must write the stories as required. Those working outside of those parameters strive to show that different decisions in the first half of the twentieth century could have led to different outcomes, to alternative modernities that would be more pleasing to us than those we face in our time. Perhaps some of those alternatives are still possible.

39 J. Tenzin, 'Memory Politics at Work in a Gyalrong Revolt in the Early Twentieth Century,' *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 1:19 (2016), pp. 174-201.

Tagore, Gandhi and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre 1919: Civil Military Conflict and Nationalist Narratives in Post WWI India

by PRADEEP P. BARUA¹

On May 31, 1919 Sir Rabindranath Tagore penned a letter to Lord Chelmsford the Viceroy of India. In the letter Tagore took the extraordinary step of renouncing the Knighthood bestowed upon him in 1915 by the then Viceroy, Lord Hardinge. Prior to that Tagore had become the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize – in his case for Literature. Hardinge in fact referred to him as the “Poet Laureate of Asia”. Tagore was easily the most well-known Indian in the world aside perhaps from Gandhi, and his renunciation of his knighthood was a significant move. In his letter Tagore made his reasons clear:

The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments,.....Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organisation for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification.....This callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings, without receiving the least check from the same authority,.... Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion of vengeance is blinding

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the noble vision of statesmanship in our Government,...The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen, who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings.And these are the reasons which have compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of Knighthood.²

Tagore, however, ends the letter with a respectful thank you to Lord Harding “for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration.”³

Tagore’s gesture was clearly political, but it was also to be symbolic. Chelmsford and Whitehall rejected it. Chelmsford refused to accept the renunciation of his title, noting that it had been bestowed upon him for his literary services and not for political reasons. As a result, Tagore could not dispense with it to make a political statement. The British government continued to refer to Tagore as “Sir Rabindranath” until his death in 1941. Despite these objections, Tagore’s letter to the Viceroy quickly entered the global public domain via numerous newspaper reprints and caused the embarrassment that the Government had sought to avoid.

When Gandhi launched the non-cooperation movement later in 1919, he followed Tagore’s lead by noting that the first stage of not cooperating with the British was “the giving up of titles and resignation of honorary posts. The British government bribes you into consenting to its will by awarding titles, medals and ribbons, buying the loyalty of Indians with the offer of status, alongside the promise of commercial advantage if they accepted the British system.”⁴ Both Tagore and Gandhi were reacting to unrest in the Punjab that served to crystalize the oppressive relationship between the English and the Indian – The Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 13, 1919. This paper examines the causes and the conduct of the massacre, with a focus on Brigadier Dyer the military commander who ordered the attack. The paper will explain how the massacre opened a

2 *Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, eds.*, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 215-33. Letter published in *Modern Review* (Calcutta monthly), July 1919.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Quoted in Tobias Harper, “The shame of ‘Sir’: British honours and decolonization” <https://aeon.co/essays/the-shame-of-sir-british-honours-and-decolonisation>. Accessed 8/11/2026.

new chapter in the civil military relations in India. It will also analyze debates on nationalism between the two most prominent Indians of the period – Tagore and Gandhi.

The Massacre

In the late afternoon of April 13, 1919, the citizens of Amritsar observed an enhanced mixed company of 50 riflemen and 40 Gurkhas armed with Khukri knives, as well as two armored cars moving through the streets of their city. These forces' commander was Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer who had arrived in the city just two days earlier to take command of a deteriorating law and order situation. From the British perspective, Amritsar was a city under siege by rebels and was cut off from the rest of the Punjab.

The seeds for this unrest were planted during the First World War. Ironically when the war began in 1914, Indian nationalists of a variety of backgrounds supported Britain's cause. The hope amongst Indian nationalists was that a quick victory would result in significant political freedoms. The war, however, dragged on until 1918 causing tremendous loss of life and economic hardship to India. In response to the hardships and the tremendous financial and military man power contributions that India made to the British war effort, Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu in 1918 sought to bring about increased Indian participation in provincial government. This was to be achieved via the principal of diarchy whereby several provincial governing bodies were transferred to ministers elected by legislative councils. However, important departments such as finance and law and order were "reserved" for British officialdom. Ultimately no such reforms would be made, although the Imperial Legislative Council was to be enlarged and made more representative.⁵ Any positive impact these mild reforms might have had, however, was removed by the subsequent Rowlatt Acts. In response to growing Indian nationalist unrest, the Rowlatt Committee (established in 1917 by the British-Indian Government) and led by Justice Sidney Rowlatt proposed the complete gutting of individual rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The act effectively made permanent the wartime

5 Shane Ryland, "Edwin Montagu in India 1917-1918: Politics of the Montagu Chelmsford Report," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1973, Vol 73 No. 1, 79-92.

Defense of India Act of 1915. By that act, individuals suspected of revolutionary activities could be detained without trial for an indefinite period. The two bills the Rowlatt Committee proposed in February 1919 went even further. They allowed arrests without warrants, a two-year detention period without trial, and strict press censorship. Despite protests from the Imperial Legislative Council's Indian members, the act was rushed through in March 1919. Many of the council's Indian members including Jinnah resigned. The "Black Acts" added to the Indian nationalists' general frustrations and in April 1919 Gandhi launched a national *Satyagraha* or non-cooperation campaign.⁶

Unrest spread throughout several Indian cities and Amritsar became a hotbed for political action organized by Drs. Saifuddin Kitchlu and Satya Pal. The Deputy Commissioner Miles Irving had them arrested on April 9 on the pretext of meeting him in his bungalow for discussions. By 11:00AM the detainees were transported to Dharamsla. News of the arrests leaked out and crowds gathered to protest the arrests. The crowds gathered near the railway lines and moved to the European Quarters in the Civil Lines. The thinly spread police and army units available opened fire at several locations killing several demonstrators. This triggered off a wave of riots and attacks on English property and individuals. Three British bankers were killed and Miss Marcella Sherwood, a missionary school teacher, was viciously beaten and left for dead.⁷

Into this cauldron, British troop reinforcements poured in and on the 11th, Brigadier Dyer (who had been commander of the 45th Brigade at Julundhar) arrived to take overall command. On April 12th at 10:00am Dyer ordered an aerial reconnaissance of the city and at 10:00AM with his entire force of 125 British, 315 Indian troops, and two armored cars marched through the city. Dyer noted that the mobs refused to disperse and shouted slogans. That evening he issued a proclamation banning meetings and gatherings with a warning that violators would be dispersed at once under military law. On the 12th, Dyer, taking stock of the situation believed that the city was being isolated with railway and telegraph lines being cut. Dyer thought that his little force could only be effective if he

6 Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904-1924*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 175.

7 Kim A. Wagner, *Amritsar 1919: An Empire of Fear and the Making of a Massacre*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1919), 74-6, 249.

could convince the rebels to come out into the open where he could take decisive action against them. At 9:00AM on the 13th, Dyer marched into the city and read his proclamation at nineteen locations. Dyer noted the crowds were jeering at his force as the proclamations were made and yelled slogans to the effect that the British Raj was dead. At 12:40AM Dyer received news that a meeting of Indian nationalists was to be held at Jallianwala Bagh (a seven-acre garden near the Golden Temple) that afternoon. For Dyer this was a decisive moment. Hindus and Muslims were allied against the British in Amritsar. The Sikhs were an unknown, but Dyer understood the Sikh's "love for loot and a fight".⁸ If the Sikh villagers from the surrounding country side joined the uprising they would have a situation unparalleled since the mutiny. Dyer's biographer John Colvin notes that Dyer would also have been aware of the "wider view" that Amritsar was part of a general series of *hartals* or strikes across the country in cities such as Delhi, Lahore, Kasur and Ahmedabad. Beyond India was a wider threat of a Muslim *Jihad* including the potential threat of invasion from Afghanistan and possible links to the revolution in Egypt. For Dyer the need for immediate action was imperative, he had to act. The rebellion was spreading and the forces at his disposal were small, and "they [the Amritsar mob] had tasted blood, they had not been punished, they began to feel themselves masters of the situation."⁹ Dyer was determined to go on the offensive, but he lacked a viable target. The rebels were interspersed in the city's narrow streets and any fighting there would be bloody, inconclusive, and potentially involve civilian casualties. The open act of defiance at Jallianwala Bagh gave him the very target he had been seeking. By meeting at the Bagh, the rebels had separated themselves from the innocent public and offered themselves as a target. His biographer Ian Colvin quoting Cromwell at the battle of Dunbar noted "The Lord hath delivered them into my hands".¹⁰

On April 13th Dyer had almost 1,200 British and Indian troops at his disposal. However, unrest elsewhere, reliefs, regimental guards, and duties left him with a usable force of 400 men. Out of these he had determined to keep 50 to guard

8 Ian Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, (London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1929), 170.

9 Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 171.

10 Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 172.

his headquarters at Ram Bagh, and posted five pickets of 40 men each around the city. This left him with a mobile force of 50 riflemen, 40 unarmed (Khukri) Gurkhas and two armored cars. At 4:00PM upon receiving confirmatory reports that more than a 1,000 people had gathered in Jallianwala, Dyer set out from Ram Bagh with his forces in a mini convoy. The Brigadier and his Brigade-Major Captain Briggs rode in a staff car with a police car and the two armored cars following them. The infantry detachments marched in front and behind the vehicles. Accompanying picket forces dropped off at points along the way, but Dyer's force headed straight into the city via the nearest city gate. They passed the Town Hall, the garrisoned Kotwali (police station) and through a warren of narrow city streets until they came to a lane between houses that was so small that all the vehicles had to be left behind. The Brigadier led his men along this narrow path until he emerged into the Jallianwala Bagh. Captain Briggs described the scene that greeted them "an immense crowd packed in a square, listening to a man on a platform, who was speaking and gesticulating with his hands."¹¹ The Bagh was no longer a garden, instead it was a large oblong piece of dusty waste land ringed by houses. It was 200 yards in length and had several entrances with the main one at the furthest end from Dyer's force. Dyer himself had entered the Bagh from a high point entrance and was able to look down upon the gathering.

In his testimony to the Disorders Inquiry Committee (Hunter Committee), Dyer noted that the crowd was composed entirely of men and that they were mainly townspeople and some from the country. Dyer did not acknowledge that in fact many people from the countryside had poured into Amritsar to celebrate Baisakhi, a Sikh religious and harvest festival. When Dyer arrived on the scene, Durga Das, the editor of *Wakt* and considered to be an instigator of the "Amritsar Conspiracy", was addressing the crowd. Dyer admitted to the Inquiry Committee that the crowd was not armed, but that he had never known an Indian crowd of that kind to not have a good supply of *lathis* at hand. He described the *lathi* as a five foot long wooden staff shod with iron "and capable of battering out a man's brain in a few seconds."¹² Dyer turned to Captain Briggs and asked

11 Captain Briggs Report quoted in Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 174.

12 Dyer's testimony to the Disorders Inquiry Committee quoted in in Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 177.

him for his estimation of the number gathered to which the Captain answered “about five thousand or so.”¹³ This number would later be amended to fifteen to twenty thousand.

Dyer perceived the crowd as a threat that could rush and overwhelm his little force. He deployed his riflemen to the right and left, and gave the order to open fire without any prior warning. In his testimony to the Inquiry Committee he noted “I considered from a military point of view that I should fire immediately; and that if I did not do so I should fail in my duty.”¹⁴ Captain Brigg’s noted the men did not hesitate to open fire, and he saw no man firing high. The crowd panicked and split in two groups as they desperately sought a way out. Captain Brigg’s thought they might rush them, and Brigadier Dyer agreed, ordering the soldiers to direct fire on the two groups. Amidst further panic and back and forth movement, the crowd gradually vanished as they located exits from the Bagh. Only the dead and wounded remained. The fifty riflemen fired a total of 1,650 rounds of ammunition or 33 rounds per man. Dyer ordered a halt to the firing since the men were running out of pouch ammunition, additionally, since a large part of the mob remained in the city square he needed to reserve some ammunition. In all, the firing lasted 10 minutes according to a civil servant Mr. Polmer who arrived as the firing stopped. The weapon that the troops used was the bolt-action magazine fed Lee-Enfield MK1 SMLE (short magazine Lee Enfield) the standard issue rifle for all commonwealth soldiers in World War I. It used the .303 Mk VII cartridge that was loaded into a 10 round magazine in five round clips. The bullet fired was the 174 grain SAA pointed bullet that had a muzzle velocity of 744 m/s. Its effective range was 550 yards making it very accurate in the 200 yard confines of the Bagh. A well trained soldier could if needed fire up to 30 aimed shots a minute. At Jallianwala the ten minute firing time gave the soldiers ample time to select targets and deliver fire. As soon as the cease fire order was given, Dyer ordered a withdrawal back to his base in Ram Bagh without counting or inspecting the casualties since he expected any delay would result in his force being ambushed in the narrow side streets.¹⁵

On April 14, the Government, now in Shimla, announced martial law in Am-

13 Ibid, 177.

14 Ibid, 177-8.

15 Ibid.

ritsar and Lahore districts to extend from April 15 to April 16. In Amritsar itself the situation remained calm after April 13. On the 24th, Dyer's superior General Sir William Beynon visited Amritsar and went to the park with Dyer. There he agreed with Dyer's assessment that he had to fire once in the Bagh due to the potential danger of the crowd rushing his small force, however, the General added "But what I do not understand is why you shot so many".¹⁶ Major S.R. Shirley the Provost Marshal of the District also organized the flogging punishments in Amritsar some twenty-five in number. Six of them were carried out on the street but away from the public eye. These were six men implicated in the attack on Ms. Sherwood. Dyer himself was responsible for the infamous "crawling order" punishment. Dyer had visited the gravely injured teacher on the 19th and immediately issued the punishment order. He closed the narrow lane the "Kucha Tawarain" on both ends with armed piquet under a sergeant. Any one going through the street would have to crawl through it on their hands and knees. The order was enforced between 6AM and 8PM from April 19th to the 24th. In his testimony to the Disorder's Commission Dyer noted he came up with the idea after recalling Indian devotees went on all fours when approaching a sacred place.¹⁷ Ironically the people whom the crawling decree most impacted were the local Hindu shop keepers, who at great risk, had rescued Ms. Sherwood from the street, hid her in a house, tended her wounds, and then smuggled her to the fort at night.¹⁸

The Reaction in India and England

Following the Punjab's pacification Brigadier Dyer and his 45th Jullundhar Brigade were sent to Afghanistan in May to participate in the Third Afghan War.¹⁹ It appeared that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre had been forgotten. Indeed on May 16, 1919, when the Secretary of State for India, Lord Edwin Montagu, was questioned about the situation in India in the House of Commons he made no mention of Jallianwala Bagh. He did, however, inform Parliament that an inquiry commission would be set up. On October 29, 1919 the Government of India's Legislative

16 Ibid, 194.

17 Ibid, 197.

18 Ibid, 157.

19 Ibid, 216.

Council established the Disorder's Inquiry Committee under the chairmanship of the former solicitor general of Scotland Lord William Hunter.

It is only now that the press in Britain became aware of the massacre in Jallianwala. On December 13, 1919 the *Manchester Guardian* printed a story titled "An Astonishing story from India" with a subheading "Punjab meeting dispersed by fire in April troubles. Over 400 natives killed. Three times as many wounded".²⁰ A follow up editorial on December 15 noted "It was known of course, that serious disturbances had occurred and that measures of considerable severity had been taken in their suppression, but no accounts which had hitherto been allowed to see the light can have prepared people in this country or in India for the truth as made known before the commission....It may be said at once that few more dreadful incidents can be found in the history of British rule in India than the story of their suppression".²¹ The other London newspaper *The Observer* stated "Some grave features of the disorders in the Punjab last April are brought out for the first time by reports of Lord Hunter's inquiry committee, which arrive by Indian mail. Among other things it shows that at Amritsar a crowd of 5,000 people closely packed in a square, was fired on by troops, and between 400 and 500 were killed and about 1,500 wounded".²²

In India the first stories did come out in April, but were staunchly pro-government. *The Times of India* reported the massacre, but not as a front page headline. It was a single column four line reproduction of a note from the *Associated Press*. "News has been received from the Punjab that the Amritsar mob has again broken out in a violent attack against the authorities. The rebels were repulsed by the military and they suffered 200 casualties."²³ The paper went on to publish a series of articles criticizing the "Satyagraha riots". Ten days later the paper published another story on the massacre but with no mention of the shooting. Titled "Tribute to Indian Sepoys" the story added "It is reported that the Amritsar mob collected on the 13th in spite of the prohibition as they had been assured by the leaders that the Indian troops would not fire on them. As a matter of fact, the Indian Army has behaved splendidly and though some individual

20 *Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1919, 11.

21 *Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1919, 6.

22 *The Observer*, 14 December 1919, "2000 Indians shot down", 14.

23 *The Times of India*, 14 April 1919, 10.

sepoys have been disturbed by the persistant attempts to corrupt them their conduct has been wonderful in very difficult circumstance".²⁴ When the nationalist newspaper *The Bombay Chronicle* criticized the "Torture and terrorization by the Punjab government" *The Times of India* rejected this and called for the cancellation of the paper's license. In its response *The Times* unwittingly gave a hint of the scale of the military crack-down in Punjab. "What our contemporary thus denounces as 'atrocities' are the use of bombing from aeroplanes, the use of machine guns, arrests and deportations and whipping in the public streets. When a paper begins to talk of torture and terrorization exercised by the government, the time has come to protest against the lenience of the regime which permits the circulation of such statements at such a time as well as against the license of the journal which has thrown all thoughts of responsibility to the wind.... The nearer we get to the truth the better it will appear the reason for these acts which have been committed under Martial Law".²⁵ Two days later on April 26, 1919, the Bombay Government deported Benjamin Guy Horniman the editor of *The Bombay Chronicle*.

Tagore's letter of May 21, 1919 to the Viceroy is all the more remarkable within the context of the muzzled press in April 1919. The "Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi" record the first mention of Brigadier Dyer in *Navjivan's* issue of December 14, 1919. Jallianwala Bagh is first mentioned in *Navjivan's* issue of December 28, 1919, both well after the findings of the Disorders Inquiry Committee were made public.

The Disorder's Inquiry Committee submitted two reports to the Government of India on March 8, 1920. These reports were split along racial lines. The majority report, that four British members created, only sought censure for Dyer for opening fire without a prior warning and for continuing to fire after the mob sought to flee. The minority report, that the three Indian members was more scathing condemning Dyer's action as comparable to German atrocities in Belgium and France. The minority was also critical of Governor Michael O'Dwyer's and the civil authorities' actions.²⁶ The Viceroy's executive council

24 *The Times of India*, 23 April 1919, "Tribute to the Indian Sepoys", 7.

25 *The Times of India*, 24 April 1919, "Torture and Terrorization", 6.

26 Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of India to Investigate the Disturbances in the Punjab, Parliamentary Papers, 1920, Cmd.681. pp.1034, 1935, 1087.

accepted the majority report and decided to retire Dyer without being either cashiered or prosecuted. This was done in order to not “arouse the sentiments of the services”.²⁷

Dyer arrived in England on May 3, 1920 to an adulatory welcome from the conservative press. In Parliament, during the Commons’ debate on Jallianwala, the government survived a vote to censure its handling of Dyer. Much of the debate about Dyer became a veiled discussion of the events in Ireland. Most of the votes against the government came from the Unionists coalition. The eventual vote of 230 to 129 came about largely due to the unprecedented support of 66 Labour and Independent members who voted for the government.²⁸

Civil Military Relations in the British Empire

The backdrop of Ireland during the Dyer debate in Parliament brings forth the larger issue of why the massacre occurred in the first place. During the House of Commons debate, Winston Churchill the Secretary of State for War noted the massacre was “without precedent or parallel in the modern history of the British Empire.....it is an extraordinary event, a monstrous event” However, Churchill went on to add that it was “an event that stands in singular and sinister isolation.”²⁹ Whether Dyer’s actions were an isolated case or if the colonial state as a whole was responsible has been the cause of much scholarly debate over the years. One writer ascribes Dyer’s judgement in Amritsar was impeded by disease – arterio-sclerosis.³⁰ Others have thought that Dyer’s actions were not singular, but part and parcel of the constant confrontation between ruler and ruled, and the repressive and collective punishments that the British colonial state carried out in its colored colonies.³¹ More informative is possibly an examination of British and Indian military systems that enabled and even sanitized

27 Vishwa Nath Datta, *Jallianwala Bagh*, (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1969), 134.

28 Derek Sayer, “British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre 1919-1920”, *Past & Present*, No. 131 (May 1991), 155. [130-64]

29 Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Commons 5th Ser., vol. 131 (28 June 1920-16 July 1920), 1725.

30 Rupert Furneaux, *Massacre in Amritsar*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), 176-7.

31 Helen Fein, *Imperial Crime and Punishment: The Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and British Judgement, 1919-1920*, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977), pp.xii-xiii; Vishwa Nath Datta, *Jallianwala Bagh*, ix.

such violence against unarmed civilians.

Dyer's military career provides part of the answer. Dyer graduated from the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in July 1885 with a proficiency in Military Law and Tactics. He also took leave from the army to study military law and military history in order to prepare for the Staff College entrance examination.³² In his statement to the Army Council upon his return to England in 1920, Dyer specifically referenced his expertise noting that he had held the staff appointment of Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General for instruction in military law, and administration of martial law during civil disturbances.³³ As a student of military law Dyer would have been familiar with the *Manual of Military Law* the official word on such matters. Indeed Dyer used the manual to justify his actions. The 1914 edition of the manual contains a vague reference to the use of force in quelling civil disturbances "The law which commands the suppression of unlawful assemblies, riots, and insurrections necessarily justifies the civil power in using the necessary degree of force and the danger of making a mistake in the matter is serious, as any excess in the use of force constitutes a crime."³⁴ Dyer himself referenced chapter XIII of the manual, which specified rules regulating the action of the military during civil disorders. The manual made three case differentiations 1. Unlawful assembly; 2 Riot; 3. Insurrection.³⁵ In his statement to the Army Council Dyer stated "It is conceded that I was faced not with unlawful assembly or riot but with an insurrection...of insurrection it is said..... The existence of an armed insurrection would justify the use of any degree of force necessary effectually to meet and cope with the insurrection."³⁶

While Dyer was familiar with the *Manual of Military Law*, he would also have been aware of C.E. Callwell's *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*.³⁷ First published in 1896 this unofficial manual became the principal guide for colonial warfare. Callwell stated that "The lower races are impressionable. They

32 Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 32-3

33 Great Britain, House of Commons, "Statement by Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer, C.B." *Parliamentary Papers*. Cmd. 771 (London: HMSO, 1920), 5.

34 War Office, *Manual of Military Law* (London: HMSO, 1914), 223.

35 Ibid, 224.

36 Great Britain, House of Commons, "Statement by Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer, C.B." *Parliamentary Papers*. Cmd. 771 (London: HMSO, 1920), 12.

37 C.E. Callwell's *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (London, 1906).

are greatly influenced by a resolute bearing and a determined course of action”.³⁸ He went on to add that “Uncivilized races attribute leniency to timidity.”³⁹ The need for resolute and forceful action was a hallmark of Dyer’s reasoning for his actions on April 13, 1919.

Ireland was also central to Dyer’s military experience prior to Jallianwala Bagh. As a young subaltern in the 1st Battalion of the Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment, he served in Belfast in the summer and autumn of 1896 during the “disturbances”. Here was his first experience of acting in aid of the civil services. Dyer’s battalion was “employed for several months in the unpleasant duty of picketing the streets to prevent disturbances between the Orangemen and the Nationalists”.⁴⁰ Colvin does not mention the actions Dyer might have taken part in, however, the quelling of the 1896 “disturbances” resulted in the death of 50 people, 370 police injuries, the expulsion of 190 Catholics from the shipyards of Belfast, the looting of 31 public houses and extensive property damage.⁴¹

In 1916 when the Easter Rebellion broke out in Ireland, Dyer was in the restive frontier region quelling other disturbances. However, he would have been fully informed about the Uprisings suppression. The rebellion broke out on April 24, 1916 when 1,200 members of the Irish volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army under the leadership of Commandant James Conolly and Commander-in-Chief Patrick Pearse managed to seize some key locations in Dublin including the GPO (General Post Office).⁴² The British were initially taken by surprise, but moved quickly with an overwhelming force of 16,000 soldiers with artillery to crush the rebels. Pearse surrendered at the GPO on April 29. The rebellion caused 485 deaths, 260 of whom were civilians killed by shelling and indiscriminate machine gun fire, or outright, shot by British soldiers. In two incidents soldiers deliberately rounded up civilians and shot them. Between April 25 and 26, six civilians, including two journalists, were executed at Portobello

38 Ibid, 72.

39 Ibid, 148.

40 Colvin, *The Life of General Dyer*, 12.

41 Andrew Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast*, (Belfast: Pretani Press, 1987), 143-50; Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: An Illustrated History* (Dundonald, Belfast: Blackstaff, 1982), 149-50.

42 Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland Easter 1916*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34; Michael T. Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 1999), 192, 195.

Barracks. In North King's Street, soldiers of the Staffordshire Regiment killed 15 male civilians on the night of April 28-29. No action was taken against the soldiers.⁴³ The quick and ruthless suppression of the rebellion was followed by a series of closed court-martials and the execution of 14 leaders and members of the rebellion (including Conolly and Pearse). The army saw this firm hand as a victory, and Dyer would undoubtedly have paid heed to it. He would also have followed up on the deteriorating situation in Ireland in 1919. Far from squelching dissent, the execution of the Irish rebels and the news of British atrocities, triggered a wave of sympathy for the defeated rebels. In 1917, Republicans came together under Sinn Féin's banner, and won a majority of the seats in the 1918 general election. The new majority refused to sit in the British Parliament and set up the first Irish Dáil or parliament.⁴⁴ The Irish volunteers would gradually be formed into the Irish Republican Army and take on the para-military Royal Irish Constabulary. On January 21, 1919 the very day the Dáil convened for the first time, the IRA killed two RIC constables and seized a quantity of explosives triggering off the Irish War of Independence.⁴⁵

The scale of the casualties in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre dwarfed the events in Ireland and was closely studied by the British armed forces after the war. In 1934 Major-General Sir Charles Gwynn's *Imperial Policing 1934* became the primary doctrinal text for the use of the military in police duties. Gwynn devoted an entire chapter to Dyer and Amritsar. As with the majority report in the Disorder's Commission Inquiry, Gwynn faults Dyer for opening fire without giving specific warning, and by continuing to fire as the crowd tried to disperse. Dyer violated the principle that the minimum amount of force only should be used. Gwynn goes further to then reject Dyer's motives for his action - that he could affect the entire situation in the Punjab and even through all of India. According to Gwynn this exceeded Dyer's orders to deal with the immediate situation in Amritsar and established a dangerous precedent. Gwynn goes on to add "It would appear that General Dyer's motives were based on his own

43 Max Calulfied, *The Easter Uprising: Dublin 1916*, (New York: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995), 154, 166-167, 186-187.

44 Brian Farrell, "The Legislation of a "Revolutionary" Assembly: Dáil Decrees, 1910-1922" *Irish Jurist*, Vol 10, No. 1, (Summer 1975), 112-27.

45 Joe Ambrose, *Sean Treacy and the Tan War*, (Cork: Mercier Press, 2007), 89-98.

judgement of the situation and not on the consensus of opinion of those round him. In this he appears to have departed from the general rule that the military commander called in to replace the civil power should make the utmost use of the civil authority he replaces. Decisions must rest with him, but consultation and cooperation are necessary to provide the data on which decisions are based. Firm measures to restore order are essential, but the situation must be desperate indeed before drastic punitive action can justifiably initiated by the judgement of a single individual".⁴⁶ Gwynn's work enshrined the doctrine of minimum force military policing in the Commonwealth. This was reinforced in the 1960s in a training manual that the Staff College in Camberley issued which stated "the lessons to be drawn from this account are as applicable today as they were a half century ago".⁴⁷

Jallianwala and the Punjab unrest also had another lasting long civil-military legacy. The events in the Punjab reinforced the mistrust the Congress political elites had of Indian soldiers. Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's father who had been elected to preside over the Amritsar Congress in December 1919 remarked "Our army is a mercenary army employed by foreigners to put down their own countrymen, and to keep them under foreign heels".⁴⁸ His son Jawaharlal Nehru, the future Prime Minister of the Republic of India, inherited this distrust of the military and its increasingly Indian officer corps. In the decades following independence, he would neglect it and ignore the council of its commanders leading to the disaster of 1962.

Tagore and Gandhi on Nationalism

In the aftermath of the Disorder's Inquiry Report, Gandhi relaunched his non-cooperation movement. Following in Tagore's footsteps Gandhi would also give up his Kaiser-i-Hind medal on August 1, 1920 with a statement that read "I can retain neither respect nor affection for a government that has been moving

46 Major-General Sir Charles W. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing, 1934*, (London: MacMillan & Co., 1934), 60-2.

47 Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-1960*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 24.

48 Quoted in George Morton Jack, *Army of Empire: The Untold Story of the Indian Army in World War I*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 506.

from wrong to wrong in order to defend its immorality”.⁴⁹ At a special session in Calcutta in 1920 under Lala Rakpat Rai’s leadership, the Indian National Congress would also adopt Gandhi’s resolution on non-cooperation. Tagore, however, rejected the path of non-cooperation. He saw it as an inflexible path towards a straight jacketed rift between east and west. In an essay in *Modern Review* (October, 1921) titled Satyer Ahvan or “An appeal to truth” Tagore calls for a rejection of such blind obedience. Tagore did not support Gandhi’s Charka cult which also called for the boycott of foreign goods. Tagore favored positive actions like promotion of indigenous industries. Instead of boycotting schools and universities he wanted a greater assimilation of Indian culture.⁵⁰ Tagore made his views on non-cooperation clear in a letter to C.F. Andrews (Christian missionary and educator, Philosophy teacher at St. Andrews College New Delhi) in September 18, 1920. He stated “It would be an insult to humanity if I use the sacred energy of my moral indignation for the purpose of spreading a blind passion all over the country. It would be like using the fire from the altar of sacrifice for the purpose of blind incendiersim”.⁵¹ Gandhi’s retort came in *Young India* (October 13, 1921) where he agreed with Tagore that the maintenance of the “free spirit” is essential, but also noted that “The poet lives in the morrow, and would also have us do likewise.”⁵²

After this initial brush with politics, Tagore retreated to the sanctuary of Santiniketan near Calcutta. He returned to the political arena in 1938 in support of Subash Chandra Bose a rising young Bengali leader in the Indian National Congress. Despite initial reservations, by 1937 Tagore had come to regard Bose as the best hope for principled political leadership in Bengal and India. Bose has indeed emerged as a new young leader of the nationalist movement and in 1938 accepted the nomination as President of the Indian National Congress. However, Bose’s willingness to use force to remove the British brought him into confrontation with Gandhi who opposed his Presidency. Tagore expressed his views about Bose in a write up titled Deshanayak or “The Leader of the Country” in May 1939 – “I am a Bengali poet; on behalf of Bengal I hail you as leader of

49 K. R. Kirpalani, *Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru*, (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1947), 19.

50 Dr. Sachin Sen, *The Political Thought of Tagore*, (Calcutta: General Printers & Publishers, 1947), 25.

51 Ibid, 104.

52 Kripalani, *Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru*, 21-22.

the Nation.” In a concession to the revolutionary ardor of the times Tagore went on to add “We have seen the fiery beauty of the will in the hearts of the Bengali youths of the next generation. They were born with light to kindle lamps within the country, but ignited a fire by mistake.... But even in that heart rending failure we have witnessed the superb grandeur of the heroic heart.....They, in their fearlessness, have established for all time to come the indomitable will power of Bengal”.⁵³ Despite Tagore’s appeals to Nehru and Gandhi on behalf of Bose, the latter was forced to resign the Congress Party’s presidency despite being reelected to the position at the 1939 meeting. Tagore made a final plea to Gandhi in a letter on March 29, 1939 – “At the last Congress session some rude hands have deeply hurt Bengal with an ungracious persistence; please apply without delay balm to the wound with your own kind hands and full of tenderness”. Gandhi’s reply on April 2nd was polite but firm “I have your letter full of tenderness. The problem before me is difficult. I have made certain suggestions to Subhas, I see no other way out of the impasse.”⁵⁴

The political struggle between Tagore and Gandhi masks the deep bonds of respect and friendship these two most famous Indians shared. In late September 1932 when Gandhi undertook a fast unto death at Yeravada Prison to protest separate electorates for untouchables Tagore was at his bedside when news came through that the British had relented (actually Ambedkar dropped his request fearing violence against untouchables). In 1940, when Tagore lay desperately ill in Shantiniketan, Gandhi dispatched his personal secretary Mahadev Desai with a letter that brought tears of joy to the poet’s eyes.⁵⁵

Tagore’s political differences with Gandhi stemmed from his lifelong aversion to nationalism and the nation-state system. It is here that he saw a main difference between the West and Asia. In a 1901 essay on Eastern and Western civilizations Tagore stated “The word nation does not appear in our language nor does it exist in our country. We have learnt of late to prize national greatness by virtue of European education. But its ideals cannot be found in our minds. Our history, our religion, our society, our family, none of them have recognized

53 Quoted in Agha Kr Banerjee, “Tagore, Netaji and Spirituality,” *The Statesman*, 15 May 2019, <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/tagore-netaji-spirituality-1502726784.html> Accessed 8/11/2026.

54 Ibid.

55 Kripalani, *Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru*, 24.

the ascendancy of the cult of the Nation. Europe prizes political independence; we set store by spiritual liberation. . . . The civilization as manifested in the cult of the nation has yet to be tested. But it is clear its ideals are not ennobling; they carry the evils of injustice and falsehood.”⁵⁶

Tagore delivered a series of lectures on “the nationalism of the west” during his travels in the United States in the winter of 1916-17. And two lectures on “nationalism in Japan” at the Imperial University and the Keio Gijuku University in June and July 1916. These lectures along with essays on nationalism in India were published in the United States in 1917.⁵⁷ In his essay on nationalism in India, Tagore clearly stated “Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years had been at the bottom of India’s troubles.”⁵⁸ The lectures were not well received either in the United States or in Japan where he cautioned Japan against imitating the West.⁵⁹ Tagore was pained by the reaction to his speeches and was dismayed when his implication in the Hindu-German conspiracy case in San Francisco in 1918 denied him entry into the United States.

However, it is his interaction with Japan that seems remarkable in the context of nationalism. In addition to his 1916 visit Tagore would return to Japan for four more visits in 1917, 1924 and twice in 1929. During his visits to Japan he made many friends among artists and intellectuals including the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi whom Tagore invited to visit India in 1935-6. Through it all Tagore expressed a growing concern for the rise of Japanese nationalism and then later outright militarism after the outbreak of war in 1937. During his last visit in 1929 he spoke openly about Japanese atrocities in Korea noting “May I be frank with you and say that when I chance to hear of some instances of ill-treatment of Koreans and to others who are less fortunate than yourselves, it hurts me very deeply causing keen disappointment.”⁶⁰

In October 1937, in the wake of the Battle of Shanghai, Rash Behari Bose an India revolutionary (no relation to Subash Bose) who was staying in Japan

56 Sen, *The Political Thought of Tagore*, 130-31.

57 Sir Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*, (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1917).

58 Ibid, 133.

59 Ibid, 70.

60 Sisir Kumar Das (ed.), *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume III a Miscellany*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1996), 608.

sought to enlist Tagore's support for the Japanese cause. Tagore replied "Your cable has caused me many restless hours, for it hurts me very much to have to ignore your appeal....I know, in making this request you counted on my great regard for Japan for I along with the rest of Asia, did once admire and look up to Japan.....But Japan has not taken long to betray that rising hope...and has now become itself a worse menace to the defenseless peoples of the East. Worse than its economic exploitation, worse indeed than its geographical aggression, is this daily perpetration of its pitiless massacres and its unashamed championship of its inhumanity."⁶¹

In July 1938 Tagore's friend Yone Noguchi sent a letter to Tagore pleading Japan's case. In a textbook variation of the Japanese Government's rationale for Japanese aggression Noguchi cast the blame on the west and Chiang-Kai-Shek. Japan he said had initiated the war "not for conquest....but for uplifting her [China's] simple and ignorant masses to better life and wisdom." Noguchi also asserted that this was a war of "Asia for Asia" which Japan would pursue "With a crusaders determination".⁶² Tagore in his reply of September 1, 1938 noted with dismay Yone's intellectual capitulation "It is sad to think that the passion of collective militarism may on occasion helplessly overwhelm even the creative artist, that genuine intellectual power should be led to offer its dignity and truth to be sacrificed at the shrine of the dark gods of war." Tagore went on to state somewhat prophetically "I speak with utter sorrow for your people; your letter has hurt me to the depth of my being. I know that one day the disillusionment of your people will be complete."⁶³ Yone was not dissuaded, and in October 2, 1938 he responded once again laying the blame for the war on Chiang-Kai-shek's militarism. With regard to Japan's war he still saw it as being beneficial for China, even bringing in the Hindu philosophy and the God Shiva with his statement "The slaughterer's sword is never so unkind as it appears."⁶⁴ Tagore replied the same month "I am flattered that you still [see it] worthwhile to take

61 Ibid, 823-4.

62 The letters between Noguchi and Tagore are reproduced in Zelko Cipris, "Seduced by Nationalism: Yone Naguchi's "Terrible Mistake". Debating the China Japan War with Tagore," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 5 no. 11 (Nov 03, 2007), 3-4.

63 Ibid, 7-8.

64 Ibid, 10.



Rabindranath Tagore, Portrait by Georges Chevalier, 26 July 1929.

such pains to convert me to your point of view, and I am really sorry that I am unable to come to my senses, as you have been pleased to wish it. It seems to me that it is futile for either of us to try and convince the other.” Tagore went on to add “You must forgive me if my words sound bitter..... because I can no longer point out with pride the example of a great Japan.”⁶⁵ By now Tagore was in poor health. In 1937 he had briefly become comatose and nearly died. In 1940 he suffered a similar attack and never fully recovered. After a long and painful illness he passed away on August 7, 1941 aged 80. He did not live to see Indian gain independence, although the horror of partition would have caused him immense pain.

The period from 1919 to 1940 represents a pivotal moment in Colonial Indian history. The ensuing debates between the civil and the military, the pro-Indian vs the pro-British press, the debates between the nationalists and the British, and finally the debates between Tagore and Gandhi highlight and explain what turned out to be the twilight moment of the British Raj. The massacre itself caused a permanent rupture between the Indian National Congress and the British Indian Government. At the outbreak of World War Two, Gandhi would launch the “Quit India” movement seeking an immediate end to British rule. The government responded with mass arrests of all Congress leaders and supporters until the war ended in 1945. After India gained independence in 1947, the Congress led Constituent Assembly of India drafted a new constitution that made India a Republic on January 26, 1950 – thus making complete the break from the Raj.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 12-13.

The Civil War in France and its Empire, 1940-44

by ROBERT GILDEA and DOMINIQUE TANTIN

I n January 1944 a court martial was set up by the Vichy regime in the prison of Limoges in the Massif Central, where French resistance to Vichy and the German had been active. Over the next six months the Milice, which spearheaded the regime's anti-resistance activity, condemned to death batches of resisters, who were immediately executed by firing squad. Altogether there were twenty-six victims.¹

Then, following D-Day on 6 June 1944, resisters of the maquis came out of hiding in the forests and mountains of France to attack German forces. General Lammerding, commander of the SS Panzer Division Das Reich, stationed near Montauban, was ordered on 8 June to move to the area of Tulle and Limoges because 'the emergence of bands in the Massif Central must be met by an immediate and brutal strike by powerful forces'. The division combed the region to flush out and destroy these bands and terrorised the population to dissuade it from supporting the maquis. On 9 June 99 inhabitants of Tulle were hanged in the street and 311 hostages removed to Limoges to be executed in the event of further attacks. 'The French authorities are rendered powerless by the terrorists, the incapacity of German positions borders on the shameful, and a new Communist state is being formed', reported Lammerding. Another act of terror was required and here the Milice came to the aid of the Germans. 'On 9 June', said SS captain Heinz Werner of the staff of the Der Führer regiment, 'Miliciens and members of the Sicherheitsdienst informed us that a headquarters of the Communist Party was located in a place called Oradour'. On the morning of 10 June, while the officers of Der Führer and the SS met at the Hôtel Central in Limoges,

1 Michel Thébault, Limoges, 'Maison d'arrêt (janvier-juin 1944)', in *Maitron des Fusillés*. <https://fusilles-40-44.maitron.fr/>, consulted 28/07/2023.

Lammerding, SS major Adolf Dickmann of SS-Panzerdivision Das Reich, Joachim Kleist of the Sicherheitspolizei, his interpreter Eugène Paty and four leaders of the Limoges Milice met at the Hôtel de la Gare at nearby Saint-Junien, to finalise plans. That afternoon, two motorised columns under major Dickmann encircled the village of Oradour-sur-Glane and massacred 643 people – 190 men, 246 women and 207 children. Most were local but a fifth were not, including Alsatian refugees, Spanish republicans who had fled Franco's Spain and Jews in hiding.²

The German retreat continued and on 19 August 1944, when the German garrison at Annecy on the Swiss border surrendered to the resistance, about a hundred members of the Milice were found collaborating with them. They were taken before a court martial at Grand-Bornand, set up by the president of Haute-Savoie's Departmental Liberation Committee, who was also acting prefect, and accused of treason under article 75 of the Penal Code. Of 97 Militiamen, 76 were found guilty and, after being allowed to write a last letter to their families, were shot in groups of five.³

These acts were clearly violent and bloody, motivated by the vengeance of enemies. They were evidence of civil war in France at the moment it was liberated from four years of German occupation, when one side collaborated with the Germans to defeat what it considered the greater threat of communism, while another resisted them. This civil war can be traced back to the collapse of the French Republic after the German invasion of 1940, and the fight for the French Empire between forces loyal to the Vichy regime and the Free French loyal to General de Gaulle. Beyond that, it can be traced back to the 150-year struggle between the French Revolution and counter-revolution, which divided France between 1789 and 1799, and which flared up periodically in 1815, 1830, 1832, 1848, 1871, described by Marx as *The Civil War in France*, and in 1936.

The question of whether the events of 1940-44 actually constitutes a civil war has nevertheless been hotly debated among French historians. At a conference

2 Dominique Tantin, Oradour-sur-Glane (Haute-Vienne), 10 juin 1944, in Maitron des Fusillés, consulted 27/05/2026 ; Guy Penaud, *La 'Das Reich' : 2^e Panzer Division* (Périgueux : la Lauze, 2005).

3 François Rouquet and Fabrice Virgili, *Les Françaises, les Français et l'Épuration* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018) 127-128.

in Clermont-Ferrand in April 2022, entitled 'Mourir au maquis, mourir pour le maquis', Dominique Tantin, using the database of the Maitron des Fusillés et Exécutés, which logged individuals executed by the Vichy regime and German occupiers, gave a paper on the involvement of Vichy and collaborationists in the repression of the resistance. An opposite view, defended by historians such as Jean-Marie Guillon, Fabrice Grenard and Cécile Vast, argued that French resistance was so generalised while Vichy and collaboration commanded so little support, that the case for civil war could not be made.

This article returns to the debate. It assesses the events of 1940-44 events in the light of definitions of civil war, and places the French case in the context of Europe's mid-century crisis, which set defenders of democracy and socialism and communism against proponents of fascism and Nazism. It will also trace the vicissitudes of the historical and historiographical debate which has been going on since the Liberation of 1944 itself.

According to political scientist Dimitri Nicolaïdis, civil war is a 'radical confrontation between two conflicting representations of social organisation, in which the whole of society is implicated'. In French history, he argued, this included the French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, 'the period of the [German] Occupation, which was the paroxysmal moment of the 'French fever'', and the last two years of the Algerian War'.⁴ Another definition, offered by Professor of the History of the French Revolution, Jean-Clément Martin, drawing on Italian historian Gabriele Ranzato, is that civil war is 'recognisable from four main characteristics: the exclusion of the enemy, a politics defined by friends versus enemies, an ideological justification of vengeance and vendettas, and a questioning of the legitimacy of violence'.⁵

In the French case, two competing national projects emerged very quickly after the traumatic defeat May-June 1940. On 17 June, Marshal Pétain, who had become head of a government in complete disarray, announced that he was

4 Dimitri Nicolaïdis, 'Guerre civile et État-nation : une approche structurelle, in Jacques Lévy and Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan (eds.), *De la guerre. Un objet pour les sciences sociales, Espaces Temps*, 71-73, (1999), 100-113.

5 Gabriele Ranzato ed., *Guerre fratricide. Le guerre civili in età contemporanea* (Turin: Bollati-Borhigienri, 1994); J.-C. Martin ed., 'La guerre civile entre Histoire et Mémoire', *Enquêtes et Documents*, n°21, Nantes, Ouest-Éditions, 1995

suing for an armistice. On 20 June, he attempted to explain to the French what had gone wrong. 'All peoples have experienced in turn successes and setbacks. Their greatness or weakness is measured by how they react. We are learning the lesson of these lost battles. Since the victory [of 1918] the desire for pleasure has replaced the spirit of sacrifice. Service had been overtaken by greed. We have preferred laziness, and we have been punished.'⁶ He blamed the French Republic, set up after a previous defeat in 1870, and the Popular Front government of 1936, which had rewarded the working classes with a 40-hour week and paid holidays.

On 10 July 1940, the National Assembly, also in complete disarray, met in the casino of the spa town of Vichy and granted full powers to Pétain, with only 80 politicians voting against. Pétain immediately abolished the Republic and its motto of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, replacing it by an *État français* defined by Work, Family, Fatherland. In August he published a manifesto saying that 'Life is not neutral. One has to take sides decisively. There can be no possible neutrality between truth and falsehood, good and evil, order and disorder, France and Anti-France.'⁷ Anti-France was defined in terms of minorities: foreigners, Freemasons, Communists and Jews. Freemasons were seen as the vanguard of the movement that had excluded the Catholic Church from education under the Third Republic (1870-1940); their lodges were closed and freemasons excluded from public office under laws of 13 August 1940 and 11 August 1941. The Communist Party had been banned after the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August-September 1939, even before the Vichy regime, and communist mayors were sacked, but now communist militants were interned in concentration camps. Jews were removed from public office and the professions under statutes in October 1940 and April 1941, Jewish businesses were 'Aryanised', foreign Jews who had fled persecution were interned and Jews in Algeria were deprived of citizenship.

In response to the armistice, on 18 June 1940, General de Gaulle, who had been undersecretary of defence in the previous government and had flown to London, broadcast on the BBC that France would not surrender. The war would continue, and he invited soldiers, sailors and airmen to come and join him. This

6 Pétain, broadcast of 20 June 1940, in Pétain, *Actes et Écrits* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 450

7 Pétain, 'La Réforme de l'Éducation nationale', *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 Aug. 1940, in Pétain, *Actes et Écrits*, 486

initiative was at the origin of the Free French forces which were pitted against those of Vichy for control of the French Empire and for the eventual liberation of France from German occupation. Whatever happens', the General announced that day, 'the flame of French Resistance must not and will not be extinguished'⁸

Between 1940 and 1944 these two sides battled for power. The Vichy regime, set up in a few weeks, claiming legality and legitimacy, and initially enjoyed wide international recognition, not least from the United States. The other emerged from the Resistance movement, led by de Gaulle and the Free French but was also developed by Communist and non-Communist resistance within France, and received growing help from the Allies. Eventually the Resistance became the provisional government of the French Republic, and passed an ordinance on 9 August 1944 which declared 'null and void all the constitutional, legislative and administrative acts, together with the measures taken for their execution, in whatever form, promulgated in metropolitan France from 16 June 1940 down to the establishment of the provisional government of the French Republic.'⁹ Vichy was erased from history. And yet.

A first sphere of civil war between Vichy and the Gaullists was in the colonies, for control of the French Empire. The Free French attempted to seize control from the Vichy regime vast swathes of the empire in Africa and the Middle East. With the help of the British a Free French force of 3000 men commanded by de Gaulle tried to seize Dakar from Vichy forces on 23 September 1940 but after two days were driven back into the sea.¹⁰ French West Africa remained loyal to Vichy while, after limited skirmishing, the Free French took control of most of French Equatorial Africa – Chad, Cameroon and Gabon.¹¹ De Gaulle founded a Conseil de Défense de l'Empire at Brazzaville on 27 October 1940, the embryo of a new power to rival that of Vichy. In May 1941 there was a battle for control of the French mandates of Syria and Lebanon, with the Free French clashing with Vichy forces before Damascus, before the British took control

8 De Gaulle, speech of 18 June 1940, in *Discours et messages I, juin 1940-janvier 1946* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 4

9 <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000006071212>. Consulted 27/05/2026

10 Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, vol 1 (Paris: Gallimard, Folio Histoire, ?1996?, 150-155.

11 Ibid., pp. 168-170; James Barr, *A Line in the Sand. Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 207-17

over their heads.¹² Finally, In November 1942 when the Americans and British landed in Morocco and Tunisia French North Africa in Operation Torch, Vichy forces fought back against them and against pockets of pro-Allied resistance. In response to Torch, the Germans occupied the remainder of metropolitan France and Tunisia, where a collaborationist Phalange africaine fought oncoming Allies and Free French forces in April 1943, before Tunis fell to the Allies. At the celebratory march past there were tense relations between the Free French and Vichy's Army of Africa, which were now combined ahead of the campaigns to liberate Italy and France.

A study by Jean-François Muracciole establishes the numbers of Free French involved in the struggle. French citizens and foreigners were joined by colonial troops furnished by the empire.¹³

Table 1. The Free French: political status and function

French citizens	39 300
Colonial subjects	30 000
Foreigners and members of the Foreign Legion	3 800
Total	73 100*
Networks in France	5 700
Committee members	1 900
Army	50 000
Navy	12 500
Air Force	3 200
Total	73 300*

A second, metropolitan, sphere of civil war was created by the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. This triggered violent resistance in France by communists who saw themselves as opening up a second front

12 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, 196-201

13 Jean-François Muracciole, *Les Français libres, L'autre résistance* (Paris, Tallandier, 2009), 36.

(*) inconsistency in the source.

against the German forces of occupation; a first German officer was shot dead at the Barbès Metro station in Paris on 21 August 1941.

The communist struggle on French soil was in many respects a continuation of the Spanish Civil War. The republican war on fascism had been supported by 30,000 International Brigaders, drawn from all over Europe. After Franco's victory in January 1939, tens of thousands of Spanish republicans and International Brigaders – Italian, German, Yugoslav, together with Poles and Romanians, often of Jewish origin, fled across the Pyrenees to France or across the Mediterranean to Algeria, where they were interned in French concentration camps. After the German invasion of the USSR many escaped and provided the leadership of Communist armed resistance organisations, the *Francs Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP) and the FTP-MOI (*Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée*). Ljubomir Ilić, a Yugoslav who had also fought with the XIV Army Corps in Spain and was interned in the high-security French Pyrenean camp of Le Vernet, escaped to become one of the commanders of the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* in France. Spanish republican Vicente López Tovar commanded the XIV Army Corps, named after the guerrilla corps of the same name in Spain, in south-west France. Norbert Kugler, who came from a working-class Jewish family in Bavaria, fought with the *Thaëlmann Brigade* in Spain and later commanded the FTP-MOI in the Lyon area.¹⁴

The Germans reacted to Communist resistance with pitiless repression – taking and executing hostages, and deporting resisters to German camps – and in this they received the loyal support of the Vichy regime. The French police hardened by anti-communist campaigns between the wars were well equipped for the task. They included the *Brigades spéciales de Renseignements Généraux* (BS 1 et 2) in the Paris region, and the *Sections des Affaires politiques* (SAP) of the *Brigades régionales de sûreté* in large provincial cities. Joseph Darnard, a hero of the Great War, former member of the anti-communist *Cagoule* in the 1930s and leader of Vichy's *Légion Française des Combattants* in the Nice area, decided that the *Légion* needed a militant wing, the *Service d'Ordre Légionnaire*, which he founded in August 1941. The oath sworn by its members to defeat 'democracy, the Jewish leprosy and Gaullist dissidence' articulated a civil war based on exclusion, an ideology of vengeance and the use of vio-

14 Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows. A New History of the French Resistance* (London: Faber&Faber, 2015), 223-39

lence.¹⁵ Members of the SOL invested in Nice in February 1942 declared war on Gaullism, ‘the Jewish leprosy’ and Communism.¹⁶ Communists, often defined as Judaeo-Bolsheviks, were the main target: In August 1941 the Vichy regime set up sections spéciales alongside the Appeal Courts and Tribunal d’État which condemned communists to death. After the assassination of the Feldkommandant of Nantes by a communist hit squad on 20 October 1941, the Vichy regime, personified by Interior Minister Pierre Pucheu, decided which hostages were to be shot by the Germans.¹⁷ Pierre Laval, returning to power in April 1942, declared the following 22 June, anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, ‘I desire a German victory, for without it Bolshevism would tomorrow install itself everywhere’.¹⁸

Frenchmen also fought against communism in the German offensive against the Soviet Union. In July 1941 collaborationist movements founded a *Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme*, which grew to about 3000 strong. A Vichy law of 22 July 1943 permitted French citizens to join the *Waffen SS*, so that down to the summer of 1944 around 9000 Frenchmen fought in German uniforms on the Eastern front. Against these the Free French formed a Normandy-Niemen Squadron which fought alongside the Soviet air force on in the East. Back in France, another 10000 French people wore German uniforms in auxiliary or specialised units such as the *Kriegsmarine*, the *Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps (NSKK)* or *National Socialist Motor Corps*, and armed guards protecting the *Todt* installations, such as the Atlantic Wall.¹⁹

For a long time, the historiography of the Second World War and resistance, and that of the Holocaust remained separate. The French Resistance marginalised the role of Jews in their ranks. A monument was unveiled in Père Lachaise cemetery by the association of Auschwitz survivors in 1946, but the communists who controlled it highlighted the role of political deportees like themselves and

15 Pascal Ory, *Les Collaborateurs, 1940-1945* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 249

16 Eric Alary, Joseph Darnand. *De la gloire à l’opprobre* (Paris: Perrin, 2023), 206

17 Robert Gildea, *Marianne in chains. In Search of the German Occupation* (London: Macmillan, 2002), 248

18 Julian Jackson, *France. The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 215

19 Thomas Fontaine and Denis Peschanski, *La Collaboration, Vichy, Paris, Berlin, 1940-1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 2014), 236-238.

dedicated it to 180,000 ‘victims of Nazi barbarism’, without any reference to Jewish victims.²⁰ On 16-17 July 1942 the Vichy police arrested 13,000 Jews who were held in the Vélodrome d’Hiver stadium in Paris before deportation to the camps. The French state nevertheless subsequently denied any role in the Holocaust: President Mitterrand argued that any crime was that of Vichy, not of the Republic. It was not until 16 July 1995 that President Jacques Chirac acknowledged the role of the French state in the destruction of the Jews. Painsstaking research now shows that the Vichy regime was responsible for 80 per cent of the arrests of 74,000 Jews, and thus of sending around 59,000 Jews to their deaths.²¹

Table 2. Vichy complicity in the Holocaust

Jews deported to concentration camps	74,070
Arrested by Vichy (80% of total)	59,200
Died in concentration camps (95% of deportees)	56,240
Jews who survived deportation (5%)	4.000

For a long time too Holocaust narratives highlighted the victimhood of the Jews, rather than their resistance. Yet Jewish communities did not go ‘like lambs to the slaughter’. They set up networks of both rescue and resistance, which in the event overlapped. David Diamant, a member of the Solidarity network set up in Paris in July 1940, which helped to save 14-15,000 Jews from the roundup of 16-17 July 1942, argued that ‘to survive meant to fight’. His colleague, journalist Adam Rayski, said that ‘The concept of a “war within the war” appeared very early in our writings’²²

Some resistance organisations were confined to Jews and concentrated on rescue. Such was the Armée Juive set up in Toulouse by Abraham Polonski, whose family had fled the Russian pogroms in Białystok in 1910 and which endeavoured to ferry Jewish children over the Pyrenees to Spain.²³ Others became involved in armed resistance, such as the FTP-MOI unit Carmagnole in Lyon,

20 Annette Wieviorka, *Deportation ou genocide* (Paris: plon, 1992), 136-9

21 Alexandre Doulut, *La déportation des Juifs de France, changement d’échelle* (Paris, CNRS Editions, 2025).

22 Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 230-1

23 Renée Poznanski, ‘Armée juive’ in François Marcot, Bruno Leroux and Christine Lévisse (eds), *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance* (Paris : Robert Laffont, 2006), 164-5

formed by young Jews who saw their parents arrested on 16-17 July 1942 and fled south to fight back. One of them, Henri Krisher, of Polish-Jewish origin and brought up in Nancy, later explained that 'No generation of people were beaten as they were. Trained in the hard school of Polish illegality, they were the Yiddishland revolutionaries' who would destroy Nazism and found 'a socialism that would free the Jewish people.'²⁴ Their revolutionary actions began by executing collaborators and ended in armed insurrection. When a young member of Carmagnole who had fled Paris, Simon Fryd, was condemned to death by a Lyon section spéciale and guillotined in St Paul's prison on 4 December 1943, his comrades sought out the magistrate responsible and executed him. On 23 August 1944 Krisher led a Carmagnole unit which set up a liberation committee in the Lyon suburb of Villeurbanne and took part in its armed liberation.

The descent into civil war was hastened by the Allied landings in Italy and France. American and British forces crossed from North Africa to Sicily in July 1943 and the Italian fascist army surrendered on 8 September 1943. This provoked a German occupation of the northern part of the country and a civil war in which the Italian resistance engaged both Germans and Italian fascists. Luigi Longo, who had begun his fight as commander of the XII Garibaldi Brigade in Spain and had been imprisoned in Le Vernet before being handed back to the Italian fascist authorities in 1942, threw himself into the same anti-fascist struggle in Italy as commander of the Garibaldi Brigades.²⁵ The Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944 was accompanied by calls for a 'national insurrection', and maquisards emerged from hiding to engage German forces, often – as we have seen – with disastrous results as the Germans and their French collaborators riposted with terror and collective reprisals. The civil war became even more intense after the Allied landings in Provence on 15 August 1944, which drove German forces north, and led to insurrections in Lyon and Paris.

The numbers of those involved in resistance increased over time, with a massive leap in the first semester of 1944 and a more than a doubling in July and August, as Olivier Wieviorka and his team have established on the basis

24 Interview with Henri Krisher, Lyon, 6 July 2000, cited by Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows*, 209

25 Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames (eds), *Fighters across Frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe, 1936-48* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 61

of those awarded the title of Combattant volontaire de la Résistance (CVR) by the Ministry of Veterans and Victims of War. This was granted individuals who could demonstrate that they had been involved in resistance activity for ninety days before 6 June 1944. Awards were made over time and in 2008 this number had reached 1, 960 597, including 260 000 maquisards, 22 000 activists in the internal resistance who were not maquisards and 72 000 who had been deported and interned for resistance activity.²⁶

Table 3. Rise in numbers in organised internal Resistance

	11 Nov 1942	Autumn 1943	First half of 1944	July 1944	End of August 1944
Estimated number of underground militants	30 000	50 000 to 60 000	175 000 to 200 000	400 000	480 000

What has been less studied is those French people who worked alongside the Germans against the resistance. The Germans needed to ensure the security of their forces and their lines of supply, but they had a serious lack of men as more and more were sent to the Eastern front. The German police in the shape of the Sipo-SD and the Abwehr were only a few thousand strong. The Brehmer division improvised in the Dordogne-Limousin area to track down maquisards and Jews in hiding was inadequate. Vichy support was therefore more than necessary, and was forthcoming. Maintaining order, and hunting down and arresting resisters and Jews was the task of the gendarmerie, Groupes mobiles de réserve (GMR), a paramilitary police force founded in 1941, and the First Regiment of France set up in July 1943, 2700 strong and based in the Indre-Cher region of central France. The gendarmerie and First Regiment of France turned out to be not totally reliable, some going over to the maquis in the summer of 1944, but the overall numbers established by Jean-Marc Berlière were nevertheless impressive.²⁷

26 Olivier Wieviorka, Julie Le Gac, Raphaël Spina and Anne-Laure Ollivier (eds) *La France en chiffres de 1870 à nos jours* (Paris; Perrin, 2015), 598.

27 Jean-Marc Berlière, *Polices des temps noirs, France 1939-1945* (Paris, Perrin, 2018), 294.

Table 4. Vichy forces of order not including the Milice and collaborationist groups

Garde	5 840
Gendarmerie	36 606
Garde de Paris	2 758
Groupes Mobiles de Réserve (GMR)	11 617
First regiment of France	2700
Municipal police	26 183
Communications watch	7 033
Prefecture of Police	17 392
Total	110 129

The Milice française, set up in January 1943 under the command of Joseph Darnand, was a totally reliable counter-resistance force. ‘In memory’, said historian Jean-Pierre Azéma, ‘the Milice symbolises the final incarnation of Vichy, the Vichy that generated civil war.’²⁸ It is not straightforward to calculate the numbers of those who served in it but four sources point in the same direction.²⁹

Table 5. Numbers in the Milice

Source	Total	Of whom front line	Of whom Francs-gardes	Of whom staff
Wieviorka et al	29 000 to 34 000	15 000	6 000 à 8 000	1943 : 980 – 1944 : 5 000
Henry Rousso	35 000		15 000	
JM Berlière	26 000 to 30 000		6695	1955
Atlas historique	30 000		6 000 to 8 000	

28 Jean-Pierre Azéma, *La Milice*, in *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire*, n° 28 (Oct-Dec. 1990), 100.

29 Wieviorka et al., *La France en chiffres de 1870 à nos jours*, 584 ; Henry Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy* (5th edition, Paris, PUF, 2023) 99 ; Jean-Marc Berlière, *Polices des temps noirs*, 294, 618 ; Jean-Luc LELEU, Françoise, Passera, Jean QUELLIEN, Michel Daeffler, *La France pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale, Atlas historique* (Paris: Fayard/Ministère de la Défense, 2010), 96-97.

The total number of Miliciens may this be calculated as between 26000 and 35,000. These included 15,000 front line, 2000 to 5000 staff, and 6000 to 15,000 Francs-Gardes, described by Holocaust historian Tal Bruttman as ‘the pretorian guard that copied the SS’.³⁰ Some of the leaders had fought in the Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme on the Eastern front, taking part in the massacre of Jewish communities in the borderlands of Russia, and in France increased the brutalisation of the repression of resisters. Collaborationist movements dedicated to a Nazi victory, such as the Parti Populaire français of Jacques Doriot and the Rassemblement national populaire of Marcel Déat, organised their own paramilitary groups and were breeding grounds for informers against resisters and Jews. To these may be added the thousands of French people under German orders, double agents who infiltrated the resistance, and auxiliaries attached to the Nazi machine of repression such as the Bezen Perrot in Brittany, or French members of the 8th Brandenburg company that was active in Provence.³¹

The conditions of civil war became harsher. On neither side was quarter given. The *ius in bello* - international humanitarian law regulating the conduct of war - was ignored. There was an ideological justification of vengeance and vendettas. For resisters those who defended the puppet Vichy regime and the collaborationnistes devoted to German cause were traitors who deserved death. The other side saw resisters as ‘villains’ (*canaille*), ‘rebel bands’, ‘bandits’ or ‘terrorists’ and equally deserving of death if they fell into their hands. If they did they were summarily executed or deported to German camps with little hope of survival. Milicia chief Joseph Darnand became Minister of the Interior in Laval’s government in January 1944 and exercised almost total power in what was effectively a fascist regime. Alongside him were collaborationists Marcel Déat as Minister of Labour with responsibility for Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO), drafting young men of military age and sending them to work in German war factories, and Milicien Philippe Henriot as Minister of Informa-

30 Tal Bruttman in *La France pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale, Atlas historique*,. 96.

31 Patrice Miannay, *Dictionnaire des agents doubles dans la Résistance* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2005), gives 300 biographies; Daniel Leach, Bezen Perrot: The Breton nationalist unit of the SS, 1943-5’, *E-Keltoi: Journal of Interdisciplinary Celtic Studies*. 4 (2008), 1–38; Olivier Pigoreau, *Sanglante randonnée - la 8e compagnie Brandebourg contre la Résistance* (Konfident, 2021)

tion and Propaganda. Darnand set up courts martial which executed over 200 resisters after a parody of justice. Between February and May 1944 he also handed over to the Nazis over 2800 prisoners in French prisons – mainly communists – in an operation which became known as ‘*Fruhlingwind*’, or Spring Wind.³² Miliciens and French Nazis brutally murdered prominent Jews such as Georges Mandel, Jean Zay, and Victor Basch and his wife. At Rillieux-la-Pape Paul Touvier, head of the second bureau of the Milice in Lyon, had seven Jews shot to avenge the assassination of collaborationist broadcaster Philippe Henriot by a resistance commando in Paris on 28 June 1944. Pétain, still head of state but reduced to a cipher, wrote to Laval on 6 August 1944 to distance himself from this bloodbath. ‘The Milice is exercising a police terror in this country, the like of which has not been seen before’, he protested. Unless Laval could bring Darnand and his men under control, he warned, ‘the territory of France, once liberated, would become a battleground for settling scores and the French, divided into two camps, will again pay the price of this new fratricidal war’.³³

How severe this repression was has been established by historians such as Olivier Wieviorka and Thomas Fontaine and calculated by the Maitron des Fusillés project, inspired by the biographical dictionary of the labour movement edited by Jean Maitron and commonly known as le Maitron. They include victims of Vichy and its collaborationist forces in France and its Empire, deaths in internment camps, those deported as resisters or Jews, those arrested by the French and shot by the Germans, and men sent to work in Germany under the Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) who did not return, often bombed by the Allies.³⁴ To these should be added the Jewish victims of Vichy, excluded as ‘the Jewish leprosy’, targeted as Judaeo-Bolsheviks, arrested, interned and deported to their deaths

32 Thomas Fontaine and Denis Peschanski, *La Collaboration, Vichy, Paris, Berlin, 1940-1945*, 286.

33 Pétain, letter to the head of government, *Actes et Écrits*, 608-9

34 Olivier Wieviorka (ed), *La France en chiffres de 1870 à nos jours XXX*; Thomas Fontaine, *Déporter : politiques de déportation et répression en France occupée : 1940-1944* (2013), <https://theses.hal.science/tel-01325232>
<https://fondationmemoirededeportation.com/livre-memorial/> (consulted 15 October 2024).

Tableau 6. Victims of Vichy and of the collaborationists

1. Direct victims of Vichy and collaborationnists	Exact number * or extrapolation	Minimum figure	Total number of victims of Vichy and collaborationists, either direct or in collaboration with the Germans
Executions after sentence	226*	226*	226
Killed in fighting in metropolitan France, by the French alone or with Germans	3 600	3 600	3 600
Killed in fighting in the Empire	170*	170*	170
Deaths in internment camps	5000*	5000*	5 000
2. Shot by the Germans after arrest by the French alone or with Germans (sentenced or hostages)	2 269	2 269	2 269
3. Deportation deaths			
Arrested by Vichy	Between 31 604 and 61 645		
Of whom died in German camps	Between 12 631 and 24 637	12 631	12 631
Forced labourers (Service du Travail Obligatoire, STO) handed over by Vichy and died in Germany	20 000 à 30 000	20 000	20 000
Jewish victims of Vichy			56240
Total			100,136

On the other side of the civil war may be measured the Vichy and collaborationist victims of the Free French – who became the French Committee of National Liberation after 3 June 1943 and the provisional government of the French Republic after 25 August 1944 – and of the metropolitan resistance. These combined the 1200 casualties of the Franco-French civil war fought in the Empire, the 700 or so killed or wounded in fighting in metropolitan France in the summer of 1944 and the victims of the *épuration*, or purges of collaborators in the ‘new fratricidal war’ that Pétain predicted. These were both the extra-legal victims of the vengeance and vendetta known as the *épuration sauvage*, and the legal victims of the Cours de Justice set up by the provisional government to try cases of collaboration. The total comes to about 15,000.

Table 7. Vichy and collaborationist victims of the Free French
and metropolitan resistance

French victims of the Free French, French Committee of National Liberation or Provisional Government of the French Republic	Numbers
<i>Killed in fighting in the Empire</i>	
Dakar	100
Gabon	36
Levant	1066
<i>Killed and wounded in metropolitan fighting</i>	693 to 716
Épuration	
Extra-legal épuration	c. 10 000
Judicial purgation	1540
Total	13, 435 to 13,458

These statistics – 44,000 victims of Vichy and the collaborationists, or 100,136 if Jews handed over by Vichy and murdered by the Nazis, together

with between 13435 and 13458 victims of the Free French and metropolitan resistance, create a powerful case for the presence of a civil war in France between 1940 and 1944. But these events have been interpreted and reinterpreted through historiographical lenses and, indeed, myth-making, which has caused this interpretation to find a public and then lose it again.

*

The Gaullist myth of resistance was constricted to save the French people from the trauma of defeat, occupation and civil war. It claimed that the thread of resistance had been sown with de Gaulle's BBC broadcast on 18 June 1940 and reached an apotheosis when he marched down the Champs-Élysées in liberated Paris on 25 August 1944. It claimed that the French had liberated themselves, with very little help from the Allies. And it reassured that French people that they been at one with the Resistance, apart from 'a handful of wretches' who had collaborated and had been promptly dealt with by the courts.³⁵

There was an initial attempt by the defeated partisans of Vichy to create a black legend of the resistance, which, interestingly, endorsed the narrative of a French civil war. In 1947 the Abbé Jean-Marie Desgranges, a prewar deputy of the Morbihan, denounced 'the masked crimes of *résistantialisme*'. By this he meant banditry of the maquis, fomented by Spanish republican brigands, and the *puration sauvage* that had killed 80,000 French people after the Liberation by a summary justice that made Danton and Robespierre look like 'little boys'.³⁶ It did not, however, manage to undermine the more potent narrative of what historian Henri Rousso called the 'resistancialist myth', spelled this time with a 'c', which celebrated a people united in resistance behind de Gaulle and which lasted until the General's death in 1970.³⁷

At this point what has also been called the 'pink legend' of 'resistancialisme' began to lose its grip on French minds. This may be traced back to a documenta-

35 The term used by de Gaulle in his radio broadcast of 14 October 1944

36 Abbé Desgranges, *Les crimes masqués du "Résistantialisme"* (Paris, L'Élan, 1948), 9-16, 69-74

37 Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome. History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, CUP, 1991), 16-18, 303

ry film, Marcel Ophuls' *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (1971), which showed how badly many French people had behaved during the German occupation, a book, *Vichy France*, by American historian Robert Paxton and immediately translated into French,³⁸ which showed how the Vichy regime had positively sought collaboration with the Nazis, and to the painstaking research of Serge Klarsfeld, president of the Association of Sons and Daughters of Jewish Deportees from France, who chronicled the names of each of the 75,000 Jews – 24,000 of them French Jews and 51,000 of them foreign – who had been arrested by Vichy and sent on train convoys to the death camps, from which only 4000 returned in 1945.³⁹

This revival of the history of collaboration and Jewish memory demanded a rethinking of French behaviour under the occupation and justice for those Vichy individuals who could now be sent for trial for crimes against humanity. The dictatorship of Vichy, and in particular its antisemitism, now became an obsession, and the French became very uneasy about their past, as Henri Rousso demonstrated in *The Vichy Syndrome*. The cult of heroes was replaced by the story of victims, of Jews deported because they were Jews. The Resistance narrative was pushed into the shadows.

All this happened against a historical background of the re-emergence of the extreme right, which had largely been silenced after 1945, in the form of the Front National. Bringing together former Petainists, collaborationists – including one member of the Waffen-SS – and many who regretted the loss of French Algeria after the long war of 1954-62, it was nationalist, xenophobic and antisemitic. It enjoyed a breakthrough in the local elections at Dreux, west of Paris, in 1983, and in the European elections of 1984. The old demons had returned.

Such a shift in the historical landscape had a striking effect on the historiography of Vichy, linking it back to the French Revolution as another example of civil war. In 1985 the leading contemporary history journal, *Vingtième siècle* brought out a special number on 'Les guerres franco-françaises', 'The Franco-French Wars'.⁴⁰ In it, Henry Rousso published 'Vichy, le grand fossé', which argued that between 1940 and 1944 France had indeed been in the grip of

38 Robert Paxton, *La France de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

39 Serge Klarsfeld, *Le Mémorial de la déportation des juifs de France* (Paris, the author, 1978)

40 *Vingtième siècle*, revue d'histoire, n° 5, Janvier-mars 1985, *Les guerres franco-françaises*

a civil war, 'the archetype of the Franco-French wars, a geometric place where most of the divisions which structured contemporary French society came together, a civil war that was not simply verbal or latent, but one which physically opposed the different camps' He argued that 'the Franco-French war ... is thus a real civil war, an ideological war on top of everything else, including class tensions, which were in play'.⁴¹ This contribution was reinforced by that of Jean-Pierre Azéma, who argued that 'the defeat [of 1940] acted to accelerate and reveal : under the eye of the German occupier there was a formidable settling of accounts'. These, he said, went back not only to the Popular Front but to the Dreyfus Affair, republican institutions, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.⁴²

Significantly, the French historical debate had an impact on Italian historian Claudio Pavone, who was then writing a major work on the struggles in Italy after the overthrow of Mussolini, the armistice with the Allies and partial occupation by the Germans. This was, he said, a threefold war: a patriotic war against the German occupiers, a civil war against the vestigial fascist Italian Social Republic, reprising the conflicts of 1919-22, and a class war against landowners and industrialists. He welcomed the invention by French historians of the term 'Franco-French wars' in this number of *Vingtième siècle*, 'thereby bracketing together all the fractures which, in armed and unarmed conflict, have divided their people, at least since the great revolution'.⁴³

Pavone's *A Civil War*, published in Italian in 1991, was not translated into French until 2005 or into English until 2011.⁴⁴ By that time the historiographical debate and myth-making had moved on, and restored to a safer position the 'pink legend' of the French Resistance. A series of trials of perpetrators of

41 Henry Rouso, 'Vichy, le grand fossé', *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire*, n° 5, Janvier-mars 1985, 55-80

42 AZÉMA, Jean-Pierre, 'Une guerre de deux cents ans', *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire*, n°5, janvier-mars 1985, 147-53

43 Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War. A History of the Italian Resistance* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 272

44 Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), French edition, *Une guerre civile: essai historique sur l'éthique de la résistance italienne* (translated by Jerome Grossman, preface by Bernard Droz. Paris: Le Seuil, 2005).

Jewish persecution racked France between 1987 and 1998. Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo chief in Lyon, was tracked down by Klaus and Beate Klarsfeld and brought to trial in Lyon in 1987. René Bousquet, the Vichy secretary-general of Police largely responsible for the roundup of Jews in 1942, was shot by an assassin on 8 June 1943 before he could come to trial. But French collaborators Paul Touvier, the head of the Milice in Lyon, was sent for trial in 1994, and Maurice Papon, secretary-general of the prefecture in Bordeaux, tried in 1997-8.

The story of the French Resistance did not do well in all this, but after the Barbie trial there was a concerted attempt to rebrand it, not as a physical battle fought with guns and explosives, but as a humanitarian response to Nazi ideology, in defence of the rights of man. To this end in 1992 a new national Resistance Foundation was set up and a Centre for the History of Resistance and Deportation set up in Barbie's former premises in Lyon. Attention now centred on the Righteous among Nations, non-Jews who had saved Jews and been honoured since by Yad Vashem, the body in Jerusalem responsible for memorialising the Holocaust. The search was now on for individuals who had saved Jews and indeed whole communities, like Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in the Cévennes, recognised in 2004.

This gave the green light to the president of the French Republic to begin to rewrite the history of the French Resistance. On 16 July 1995, while recognising that 'the criminal madness of the occupier had been assisted by the French state', he argued that resistance meant not the armed men of the maquis but the individuals and communities those who had worked to save Jews from arrest and deportation. On 18 January 2007 he presided over a ceremony in the Panthéon to commemorate the Righteous of France, whose number has risen to about 4000. Thrusting the blame on Vichy, a law of 10 July 2010 inaugurated a National Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Racist and Antisemitic Crimes of the État français and of Homage to the Righteous of France. Under presidents Hollande and Macron the cult of Resistance was deepened by a series of ceremonies transferring the remains of former resisters to the Panthéon, now including women like Geneviève Anthonioz-De Gaulle and Germaine Tillion (2015), and Josephine Baker (2021), and Jewish resisters Jean Zay (2015), Misak et Mélinée Manouchian of the FTP-MOI (2024) and Marc Bloch (2026).

As the pink legend of Resistance gained greater hegemony by rewriting itself

as saving Jews, so the concept of a French civil war lost ground. In 2005, the year Pavone's Civil War was finally translated into French, Olivier Wieviorka argued in *Vingtième Siècle* that

the concept of civil war... seems neither pertinent nor heuristic to characterise France in the Dark Years, unless any use of violence against a civilian population may be called civil war. For ideological, tactical and strategic reasons the Gaullist authorities – for the whole period – and the État français –for 1944 – avoided plunging France into a bloodbath, avoiding the dramas that engulfed Spain, Greece or the United States.⁴⁵

At no point in the *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, edited by François Marcot, Bruno Leroux and Christine Lévisse-Touzé, which brought together a wide spectrum of historians, is there any mention of civil war. Armed struggle, armed resistance, epuration, national insurrection, maquis, repression by the Germans and Vichy, yes, but not civil war.⁴⁶ While Olivier Wieviorka highlighted the importance of 'Resistance-organisation', and its relationship with London, this group of historians, including that late François Marcot and Pierre Laborie, together Jean-Marie Guillon, Cécile Vast et Fabrice Grenard preferred the notion of 'Resistance-social movement'. This was much broader and affected large parts of French society. These rejected the idea of a civil war because of the disequilibrium between the two camps in 1944. Arguing that the Resistance enjoyed the popular support of the majority of the population, and was faced by a discredited regime with very little support, they could not concede the idea of civil war, which would diminish the importance of the Resistance presented as representing the immense majority of the French people.

These defenders of what has been called 'neo-résistancialisme' carried the day in the 2022 conference 'Mourir au maquis, mourir pour le maquis'. And yet the database of the Maitron des Fusillés giving names to and quantifying those individuals executed by Vichy and the German occupiers, often hand in glove, and recent work on deportation and repression, and the persecution of the Jews, most of whom were arrested by Vichy, provides evidence for a Franco-French

45 Olivier Wieviorka, 'Guerre civile à la française ? Le cas des années sombres (1940-1945)', *Vingtième Siècle* n° 85, Jan. -Mar. 2005, pp.5-19.

46 François Marcot, Bruno Leroux and Christine Lévisse-Touzé (eds), *Dictionnaire historique de la Résistance*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2006).

war that began in the Empire in 1940, reached its apogee in 1944 and was prolonged by large-scale *épuration*.

History and historiography often go hand in hand. The ‘Franco-French war’ was first suggested by historians in the context of the rise of the National Front in the mid-1980s. It disappeared from view when the Republic seemed to stabilise after Jean-Marie Le Pen was seen off in the presidential elections of 2002. In the mid-2020s there was a confrontation between the Rassemblement National, heir of the Front National, and La France Insoumise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who in the right-wing press is likened to Robespierre. The centre ground forged by Emmanuel Macron since 2017 contracted as the political wings grew more extreme, and Bally Bagayoko, elected mayor of Saint-Denis for La France Insoumise in March 2026, declared, ‘it’s either us or them’. The presidential elections of 2017 may well oppose extreme left and far right. Significantly, perhaps, this is already having an effect on the historiography. Henri Rousso published *La France sous l’occupation* in 2026 with a powerful chapter on civil war in 1940–44, happy with the definition that ‘in a civil war two camps of the same country face each other, bearing weapons’. ⁴⁷ Perhaps what might be called the neo-revolutionary interpretation of French history is making a comeback.

⁴⁷ Henry Rousso, *La France sous l’Occupation* (Paris: Cerf, 2026), 89–97

Civil War in Italian Contemporary History

by VIRGILIO ILARI

The only Italo-Italian wars today known as “civil” are the Milanese war of 1447-50 and the Piedmontese war of 1638-42. But only because no one paid attention.

The reader rightly expects the ‘Italian’ chapter of a collection of comparative history entitled *Rebellions and Civil Wars* to be a concise account of the anti-fascist war of 1943–45. But I don’t possess the gift of *breuitas*,¹ whilst my *passion predominante* is the history of historiography, which, like literary criticism, is a refuge for the lazy and the envious, we who feed off the labour and creativity of others. I shall therefore begin by taking a broader view, discussing the civil war as an unresolved – and indeed removed – issue in the historiography of contemporary Italy, from the Risorgimento to the present day. We shall therefore begin with the history of the civil war as a historiographical and legal criterion.

What ‘civil war’ means.

In the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre, Written by Thucydides the sonne of Olorus* (1629) Hobbes translated στάσις and πόλεμος ἐμφύλιος² with “sedition” or “revolution”, while to qualify the history and the political lesson of the conflict between the King and the English Parliament he resorted to the Roman³ concept of “civil war.”

1 For a summary see Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance. Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies*. London: Pluto Press, 2009.

2 ἐμφύλιος means “within the same blood (φῶλον)”, or “fratricidal.”

3 David Armitage, *Civil Wars: an history in ideas*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 2017.

Indeed, *ciuile bellum* appears for the first time, in a speech delivered in 66 BCE by Cicero supporting the tribune Gaius Manilius' plea to give Pompey the command (*imperium*) against Mithridates VI, king of Pontus (Cic. *Man.* 28). Later Caesar qualified *ciuilia* his campaigns of 49-45 against Pompey and his followers, and Cicero the wars of the Second Triumvirate⁴ (not to Sulla's wars against the *populares*, euphemistically defined as *civiles dissensiones*). Sallust qualified Catiline's as *Coniuratio*, although aiming to unleash a civil war as Cicero already claimed.⁵ Augustus wrote in his *Res Gestae* (34, 1) that he "extinguished" the civil wars. Lucan gave this title, as complementary to *Pharsalia*, to his poem on Caesaricides' fate.

Later Greek *glossae* of *ciuile bellum* as πόλεμος πολιτικός are known, but Appian used the Thucydidean terms (στάσις and ἐμφύλιος) to regroup all Rome's internal conflicts in books 13-17 out of 24 original of his *Roman History*. Such selection created a true historiographical category within which to interpret the social and constitutional crisis of the Roman Republic from the Gracchi to the Augustan Principate, including the "social" war (the revolt of the Italian allies) and the "servile" war against Spartacus. But, once latinized as "civil wars", the Appian category spread beyond his lecture of Roman History.

Marx read Appian (in Greek) in February 1861, but it's hard to deduce that it was the Alexandrian historian who suggested him calling the Southern "Bonapartist" secession a "civil war." Newspapers and President Lincoln himself had already done so, although the official Union term was "war of rebellion" (while the Southerners called it "war between the states" to claim international recognition). What Marx may have taken from Appian was a confirmation of his vision of the "class struggle" as civil war,⁶ as he later characterized the Parisian

4 Cic. *Marc.* 18 e 24; *Brut.* 324. *Phil.* 2, 23; 5, 26; 11, 34. Lucio Luceio in Cic. *fam.* V, 12, 1-2. Valentina Arena, "The Notion of *Bellum Civile* in the Last Century of the Republic." In: *The Triumviral Period: Civil War, Political Crisis, and Socioeconomic Transformations* (Francisco Pina Polo ed.). Editorial Universidad de Sevilla: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2020: pp. 101-126. Henning Borm, Ulrich Gotter, Wolfgang Havener (eds.) *A Culture of Civil War? Bellum civile and Political Communication in Late Republican Rome*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag: 2023.

5 Cic. *Catil.* 3 19.

6 Matteo Battistini, "Karl Marx and the Global History of the Civil War: The Slave Movement, Working-Class Struggle, and the American State within the World Market." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 100, 2021: pp. 158-185.

Commune of 1871.

But it was *Vom Kriege* who suggested to Lenin, in 1916, that the ongoing war between states, with all its horrors, was still a tournament of chivalry (*igra*) compared to the impending ‘real’ war (*vojna*), that is, the “civil war”: absolute, unlimited and global.⁷ Hobbes already noted that “a civil war never ends by treaty, without the sacrifice of those who were on both sides the sharpest.”⁸ And indeed, the Peaces of Paris (1919) and Riga (1921) proved to be a simple truce followed by an even more radical conflict. And the lesson of the Cold War and the post-historical *forever wars* of the first quarter of the 21st century is that, once unleashed, global civil wars can be frozen, but not ended with pedagogical justice and rule-based orders.

Lenin’s idea of civil war as “armed, global and revolutionary class struggle” explains why the communist winners of the Russian (1917-1921) and Chinese (1927-1949) civil wars had no difficulty in formally qualifying them as such (respectively *Гражданская война* and *Nèizhàn*). Instead, in Western legal thought the expression “civil war” constitutes an oxymoron, insofar as it designates the fragmentation of the political community (*ciuitas*) into two mutually exclusive claims to legitimacy. Each party, when considered from the standpoint of the other, assumes the status of a rebel and is therefore, in principle, not governed by the law of war (*jus belli*), but rather by criminal law (*jus gladii*) and by the regime of the “state of siege” or “of exception” (*Ausnahmestand*).⁹

From a Schmittian perspective, the nature of a civil war is not determined by the material dimensions of the conflict, but by the radical nature of what is at stake. Such conflicts, even if potential, virtual, or nonviolent, concern sovereignty (whether it belongs to the people or the Senate, the king or the parliament, the Union or the states, the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, the natives or the colonists). Religious wars, and more generally all those forms of political violence that don’t call into question the unity, identity, and existence of the state and can therefore end with an agreement of truth and reconciliation, are not.

7 C. Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen. Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen*, Berlin, Dunker und Humblot, 1963: p. 56.

8 *Behemoth Dialogue* 3 (ed. Tönnies, 1889: p. 115).

9 C. Schmitt, “Sovereignty lies with whoever decides on the state of emergency.” (C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, 1922).

To recognize an internal armed conflict as “civil war” instead of rebellion therefore implies a certain degree of estrangement from the belligerents. Only estrangement makes it possible to think a special legal regime for this type of conflict. This is now provided by international humanitarian law, in particular Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949¹⁰ and the Additional Protocol of 1977. But its concrete application still implies external interference (imposed, accepted, or requested by one or both parties) in the conflict. Not to mention that instigating, fomenting, fueling, or exploiting civil war is a well-known practice of imperialism and war by proxies, not only tacitly permitted by international law but even theorized as meritorious and dutiful in the name of the so-called responsibility to protect (R2P).

Recognizing the “civil” nature of an internal armed conflict implies a posthumously “reconciliation” between the parties or at least some tolerance for the memory of the vanquished, as occurred in America at the end of the nineteenth century, allowing for the Southerner monuments erected between 1890 and 1920. But the Memory War that broke out in 2017 demonstrates how reconciliations can be disavowed. The same happened in Spain regarding the 1936-39 war. Under Franco, the war was defined as *Alzamiento* or *Movimiento Nacional* and regulated by the infamous *Ley de responsabilidades políticas* of 9 February 1939, although later toned down by gestures of tolerance such as the common cemetery of *Valle de los Caídos*. In 1978, after the end of Francoist regime, there was the illusion of filing the problem away with an amnesty of francoist crimes of war. But *Ley 20 de Memoria Democrática* of October 19, 2022, purged all public memory of the francoist side, starting right from the hated *Valle de los Caídos*, in a much more radical and widespread way than the American Memory War. The discriminatory intent against the former victors is increased by the posthumous recognition of Spanish citizenship to the fighters of the International Brigades and their descendants, and from the denial of the “civil” character of the 1936-39 war, now officially designated as “guerra de España” (but maintaining the pre-republican flag and anthem, albeit without the Francoist lyrics).

Damnatio memoriae and trials of corpses also suit political parties that capture the predictable reaction of dispossessed and discriminated identities and memories. But history knows no “parentheses” nor “reopening the game.” Ev-

10 C. Schmitt, *Theorie*, cit.: p. 37.

Fig. 1. Leonardo da Vinci - *Hanging of Bernardo Baroncelli* (1479). Il 29 dicembre 1479 Leonardo assistette in Firenze all'impiccagione del mercante Baroncelli, che il 26 aprile 1478, durante la congiura dei Pazzi, aveva assassinato nel Duomo Giuliano de' Medici, fratello minore di Lorenzo il Magnifico

ery "restoration," authoritarian or democratic, is nothing but repeating the tragedy in farce form, played out by those who believe (or need) the enemy has never died or hasn't died enough, and by those who delight in embodying the caricature of the enemy painted by the opponents. Grand Guignol and puppet theater, if only occasional real deaths weren't involved. Monumental history, as Nietzsche called memory, is produced by states. But when memory replaces history, states have already ceased to exist.¹¹

11 "The reduction to puppets, whose every gesture and every line is rigidly predicted, so much so as to arouse, in the presence of great and remote epics, the impatience of the public, anxious for the reassuring conclusion, is the extreme and caricatural outcome of every story that has become 'sacred'." (L. Canfora, *La sentenza. Concetto Marchesi e Giovanni Gentile*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1985.)



Unwarlike but Fratricidal. A Literary topos?

Many, from Gabriel Naudé¹² to James J. Sadkovich, contested the caricature of the unwarlike Italian, codified by Erasmus.¹³ As Sadkovich rightly argues, this commonplace is also fueled by Italians. And not only out of “revolutionary defeatism” or posthumous anti-fascist denunciation, but also by generals to shift the fear or blame for defeat onto the troops¹⁴ (unaware of the Chabrias’ sentence that an army of “deer led by lion” is more fearsome than “an army of lions led by a deer” – or by a donkey, as in Napoleon’s version).¹⁵

In the past, however, foreign Powers were happy to recruit in Italy. And not just engineers, generals, armchair strategists and influencers, but also a lot of mercenaries, exiles, rented, auxiliaries, conscripts, contractors and freedom fighters. And even now, it seems, we don’t look out of place in international missions. Perhaps, as Machiavelli foresaw, we enjoy to give off “our” ill-fated weapons, for carrying those of who defeated us. This selective unwarlikeness, limited to “one’s own weapons,” does not contradict, but rather explains, our supposed inclination to fratricide.

But this darkest side of the “Italian character” was born here, not abroad. It’s not part of the international stereotype, which presumes us, if anything, to be cunning and treacherous, no more violent than average. The idea of fratricide arises from mourning the *morte della patria* (death of the fatherland) as Salvatore Satta defined it and Luchino Visconti painted it. *De Profundis* (1945) and *Senso* (1954) are perhaps the pinnacle of literary and artistic awareness of the epochal nature of our defeat, which concluded and judged not only the last twenty years, but the entire century of our history and our historiography¹⁶ which ended in 1943. But this awareness pervaded at the time the entire po-

12 *Syntagma de studio militari*. Romae: Facciotti, 1637.

13 Erasmus, “Myconius Calvus” (*Adagia*, 1508). V. Ilari. “L’ossimoro di Erasmo.” In: Id. *Clausewitz in Italia e altri scritti di storia militare*. Roma: Aracne, 2019: 227-240.

14 Not only the infamous Proclamation of General Cadorna on the “troops who cowardly surrendered” at Caporetto. Even before the war, parliamentary reports and the military press were filled with shameful indictments of socialist defeatism and the unreliability of the troops (Filippo Cappellano, *Il fronte interno durante la grande guerra*, Roma: Nadir Media, 2026).

15 Plut. *Sayings of Kings and Commanders* (Stephanus: p. 187d).

16 Eugenio Di Rienzo, *Un dopoguerra storiografico. Storici italiani tra guerra civile e prima Repubblica*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2004.

litical, social, literary and artistic life of Italy which was “reborn from the ruins”, as the wonderful poem by Johannes Robert Becher states.¹⁷

For the Italians of 1946, the only fratricide in national history was the one they had experienced and never wanted to relive. Therefore, having to quickly replace the royal anthem, among the scores of the Risorgimento they chose the one that providentially began with *Fratelli d'Italia* (“Brothers of Italy.”) Only later did criticisms resurface, on the one hand from those denouncing incomplete national unity, or the interrupted or “betrayed” revolutionary palingenesis; on the other from those who wanted the rights and dignity of the vanquished recognized. And finally, there was what Guido Panvini, a historian of political violence in Republican Italy, has defined as “a true and proper rhetoric of civil war” and “of fratricidal violence as an anthropological element of Italian identity,” “anomalous” respect to that of “civilized” European countries.¹⁸

But the problem of fratricide and civil war in Italian history is not limited to a futile academic dispute between opposing identity prejudices. There are, in fact, two other dimensions that have so far remained unaddressed. The first concerns the endogenous, exogenous, or mixed origin of the violent phases of our national history. The other concerns the way in which the syndrome of civil war and the internal enemy has defined political cultures and influenced our foreign and security policy.

The Risorgimento as Civil War?

Let's begin with the Risorgimento. In 1965, criticizing the attempts made between the two world wars by Savoyard and nationalist historiography to back-date the Risorgimento to the post-1748 Savoyard reformism or even to the Bourbon-Farnesian revanchism (interpreted by Cardinal Alberoni),¹⁹ Guido Quazza

17 The Becher's poem (*Auferstanden aus Ruinen*), which exalts German national unity, was chosen in 1949 as lyrics for the anthem of the Democratic Republic (GDR).

18 Guido Panvini, “L'abuso della categoria di guerra civile per definire il carattere nazionale italiano. Dall'Unità ai nostri giorni.” In: *Il discorso della nazione nella letteratura italiana* (Rosaria Iounes-Vona and Daniele Comberiati eds.). Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2012: pp. 171-182.

19 V. Ilari, “La Quadruplici e il Protorisorgimento. Con una bibliografia” In: *Una battaglia europea. Francavilla di Sicilia 20 giugno 1719* (Elina Gugliuzzo & Giuseppe Rstifo, eds). Fvcina di Marte N. 2. Roma: Aracne, 2020: pp. 19-30.

rightly defended the liberal thesis of the Risorgimento as an Italian adaptation to the great European revolutions of 1789-1870.²⁰ It is enough to mention Franco Venturi and Lucio and Rosario Villari to demonstrate how masterfully European interaction and the specificity of Italian developments from the Enlightenment to the Risorgimento have been studied in their intellectual and social aspects. Among the merits of social history is its liberation of the Risorgimento from national hagiography, however overestimating the importance of national thinkers and patriots over real geopolitical and geostrategic factors.

Undoubtedly, the political cartography of Italy from 1648 to 1870 shows a continuous adjustment, encouraged or imposed, to the precarious balance of European “preponderances.” And the decisive one, which finally led to political unity, was not determined only by ideas, but also by the interests of the Western Powers and by industrial and commercial developments, with the Eastern Question at its centre, the development of communications (railways, submarine telegraph cables, the Suez route) and the affirmation of British hegemony: the First West, based on the Anglo-French colonial partnership and Italy and Turkey as satellites.²¹ And, when compared with the parallel German story, Italian unification shows not only a greater dependence on external support, but also an internationalist ideology more deeply rooted than in Germany.

Precisely this external reference is the main argument of the devotees of the Italian Anti-Risorgimento, a weak and far less incisive version of French and Spanish counter-revolutionary thought. The liberal interpretation of the Risorgimento, itself an Italian version of the “Wigh interpretation” of history, ignores or ridicules the neo-legitimist controversy, paradoxically rekindled in 1990s precisely by liberal overcoming national sovereignty. However, the liberal critique risks becoming contradictory when it minimizes the scope, duration, relative successes, and social roots of resistance.²² Indeed, to the extent that the Italian Risorgimento was part of the French Revolutions (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871) and

20 Guido Quazza, *Il Problema Italiano e l'Equilibrio Europeo, 1720–1738*, Torino, Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, 1965 (Premessa).

21 For my thoughts on this, see Ilari, “Italy as a Geographical Expression, The Italian Risorgimento in a Geopolitical Perspective.” In: *Geopolitics & War* (Jeremy Black ed.) Fucina di Marte N. 20. Roma: Nadir Media, 2025: pp. 243-268.

22 Salvatore Lupo, *L'unificazione italiana. Mezzogiorno, rivoluzione, guerra civile*. Roma: Donzelli, 2011.

of wider European and American Revolutions,²³ it was also, inevitably, part of French and wider European and American civil wars, in both the Marxist and Schmittian senses of the term. And not only between the New and the Old, but also between different reasons and outcomes of both.

Avoiding to generalize, however, my studies²⁴ suggests to me that the term “civil war” should be applied only to specific cases, as in Tuscany, Rome, and Naples (1798–99, 1806–09, 1848–49, 1860), Piedmont (1797–99, 1821, 1834), Romagna (1831), Genoa (1849), and both reactionary and revolutionary conspiracies and terrorism. In my view, it should not be extended to Sicilian separatism (1812–1860), Naples in 1820–21, Lombardy and Venice (1848–49), southern brigandage (1810–25, 1861–65), Garibaldi’s Roman attempt (1862, 1867), nor to Italian volunteering abroad in the Greek War of Independence, the South and North American civil wars, the second Polish insurrection, and the Franco-Prussian War. Transnational voluntarism was in fact born more from the defeats and exile of radicals than from a real capacity to export revolution, and was tacitly useful to governments as a purge of veterans and asocials or indirect intervention abroad, like the British legions in South America (1817–24) and Spain (1835–37) and in Garibaldi’s campaign of 1860.²⁵ The politicization acquired by Italian Napoleonic officers in the Peninsular War nevertheless remains significant, both regarding the notion of “doing as in Spain” and to the substantial Italian production of manuals on insurrectionary and guerrilla warfare.²⁶

The only all-out and merciless civil war of the Italian Risorgimento, howev-

23 Enrico Dal Lago, “The age of Lincoln and Cavour: Comparative perspectives on nineteenth-century American and Italian nation-building.” New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Id., *Transnational Comparisons in Nineteenth-Century History. Theory and Cases Study*, New York: Routledge, 2026.

24 V. Ilari et alii, *Storia militare dell’Italia giacobina* (Roma: USSME, 2001); *Le Due Sicilie nelle guerre napoleoniche* (Roma: USSME, 2008); *Storia militare del Regno Murattiano* (Invorio: Widerholdt, 2007); *Il Regno di Sardegna nelle guerre napoleoniche e le legioni anglo-italiane* (Invorio, Widerholdt, 2007); *Vita e tempi del Colonnello Forbes* (Fvcina di Marte N. 8): Roma: Nadir Media, 2022.

25 Nir Arielli, Bruce Collins (eds.), *Transnational Soldiers. Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Ilari, Viviana Castelli, *Forbes*, cit.: pp. 209–261. Simon Sarlin, “The Anti-Risorgimento as a transnational experience.” *Modern Italy*, Taylor & Francis (Routledge), 2014, 19 (01): pp.81–92.

26 Ilari, Castelli, cit.: pp. 345–353.

er, in my opinion, was that of 1799 between the *Sanfedisti*²⁷ and the Neapolitan republicans. Because *Sanfedismo*, far from being reduced to fanaticism or exalted as legitimism, had its own political structure, independent and rightly feared by the Bourbon court far more than the republican conspirators. *Sanfedismo*, indeed, combined class hatred with echoes of Masaniello's populist revolution (1647), which, through his mentor, the abbott Giulio Genoino, traced back to Tommaso Campanella's anti-Spanish conspiracy (1599). A Calabrian, rather than Neapolitan, tradition, understood and exploited by Calabrian Cardinal Ruffo and later evolved into the Carbonari conspiracies. Among the republicans, the only who really understood the nature of the war, was Gabriele Manthoné, the last commander of the republican cadre-army, who tried in vain to escape from the capital and ouflanking the Sanfedists by revolting Puglia. On the other side, Nelson was the one who purposely determined the political failure of the Ruffo's success by hanging Admiral Caracciolo and preventing the far-sighted Cardinal from granting a general amnesty.

In the remaining phases of the Risorgimento, Italian society revealed a deeply ingrained capacity for pragmatic, and often opportunistic, adaptation to changing circumstances—an attitude later designated as “leopardism” after Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's posthumously published novel of 1958. Once the hard Austro-Sardinian resistance in the Alps (1792–96) had come to an end, the sovereigns—apart from the Pope—either abdicated or took flight, while the aristocratic republics were transformed into Jacobin “sister” republics, though they were sisters of France rather than of one another. These regimes collapsed in 1799 during the brief Austro-Russian reconquest. Between 1805 and 1806, republicans in both the North and the South became monarchists and barons of the Empire; in 1812, reports of the Russian catastrophe were allegedly received in Florence with cries of “hurrah, hurrah!” Conscription, together with the even more severe consequences of the Continental Blockade, exacerbated by the Royal Navy's economic warfare, progressively eroded support for the Napoleonic regime among those who had benefited most from it. Yet, in contrast to Germany, Italy experienced no “war of liberation” (*Befreiungskrieg*). The response to the proclamations issued first by the Austrian and British liberators,

27 From *Armata della Santa Fede* (Army of the Holy Faith).

and subsequently by Murat, was instead characterized by passive expectation: the attitude later described as *attendismo*, or “wait-and-see.”

Italy 1918-1925 in the beginning of the European Civil War

The dismantling of the great multi-ethnic autocratic empires—the Habsburg, Tsarist, and Ottoman empires—and the liberation of “oppressed peoples” had long been Mazzini’s apostolate. It also became a defining feature not only of Garibaldi’s transnational voluntarism, but also of Italian irredentism and, later, of interventionism during the First World War. Yet above all the totalitarian character of the war – acutely caught by Carl Schmitt in 1937²⁸ – allowed nationalism and communism to eclipse liberalism, sharpened class consciousness among middle-ranking cadres as well as workers and peasants, and accustomed European societies to palingenesis and violence. Civil wars and conflicts between successor states²⁹ continued for another three years along the eastern fronts of the Great War, from the Intermarium to the Far East, while ill-conceived Western interventions served only to spread the contagion further. In 1919-20 violent social unrest erupted not only within the losers,³⁰ but also within the winners (Italy, France, Britain) and even neutrals (Switzerland).³¹

In November 1918, the only European government still able to use conscripts to control a general strike was Switzerland, but even there, civic security militias (*Bürgerwehren*) were later created. In Italy, the conscripts were replaced in 1919 by a Royal Public Security Guard³² and 18 mobile battalions of the Carabinieri,

28 C. Schmitt, “Totaler Feind, totaler Krieg, totaler Staat” (3 February, 1937). In: Id, *Positionen und Begriffe im Kampf mit Weimar – Genf – Versailles 1923–1939* (Hamburg, 1940), Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 2014⁴: pp. 268-273.

29 Jochen Böhrer, *Civil War in Central Europe: The Reconstruction of Poland, 1918–1921*. Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2018.

30 Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016. (It. transl. *La rabbia dei vinti. La guerra dopo la guerra 1917-1923*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2018).

31 Maarten Van Alstein, “La perpétuation de la violence après 1918,” *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire*, 127, | 2018: pp. 42-49. Christophe Charle, *La crise des sociétés impériales. Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne 1900-1940. Essai d’histoire sociale comparée*, Paris: Seuil, 2001.

32 Luca Madrignani, “Tra psicosi rivoluzionaria e guerra civile. La Regia guardia nella crisi dello stato liberale, 1919-1923.” *Contemporanea*, 15/2, 2012: pp. 205-235.

and in France in 1920 by the *Pelotons Mobiles de Gendarmerie* (later the *Garde Républicaine*), while the repression of the Spartacist and Irish insurrections was entrusted to the infamous *Freikorps* and *Black-and-Tans*.³³

The Western European “Red Biennium” is now considered as the origin of the “European civil war”, an expression coined by Karl Löwith in 1940 (when he was refugee in Japan,) and later exploited by Ernst Nolte in the not particularly new attempt to apply to the Nazi-Bolshevik conflict the wishful thinking of German liberals (as Delbrück and Spengler) of Germany as the Western “bulwark” towards barbaric Russia.³⁴ But “European civil war (ECW)” could only truly be accepted as a historiographical concept with the end of the Cold War and Soviet communism and the happy liberal conclusion of history, when it seemed that the process of nationalization of the masses³⁵ that had begun in 1789 could finally be demobilized and reversed. It’s no coincidence that the concept of ECW popularized at the London School of Economics (LSE) through departmental curriculum design (such as course code HY101) syllabus broadens the chronology to the entire century 1890-1990.

ECW has been interpreted from various perspectives, with some ending in 1949³⁶ or dating its beginning back to 1905, referring to both the First Russian Revolution and the Russo-Japanese War, considered “World War Zero.”³⁷ The reason why LSE traced ECW back to the 1890s is unclear, perhaps, trivially, to include the social unrest of the *Belle Époque* and the Edwardian era. Yet, unwittingly, to begin in 1890s evokes George Kennan’s thesis on the Franco-Russian “fateful alliance.”³⁸ But the most important aspect is that ECW is not an abstract

33 Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, Oxford: Oxford U.P. 2012.

34 Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917-1945 : Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*. Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1987.

35 Georg L. Mosse, *Die Nationalisierung der Massen : politische Symbolik und Massenbewegungen von den Befreiungskriegen bis zum Dritten Reich*, 1974.

36 Enzo Traverso, *A ferro e fuoco. La guerra civile europea 1914-1945*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008.

37 Stanley G. Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905-1945*. Madison, University of Wisconsin, 2011.

38 George F. Kennan, *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the Coming of the First World War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. “Fateful” because, financing the extension of the Trans-Siberian Railway into Manchuria would have produced the *casus belli* with Japan, the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the proxy war and the Russian defeat and revolution which placed

idea, but a category suggested by the comparison of individual national events,³⁹ which has also “historicized” ideological models, relativizing the centrality that the struggle between fascism and anti-fascism had in previous historiography.

ECW also helps address the nature of political violence in post-war Italy.⁴⁰ The Italian 1917—the Turin workers’ strikes and later Caporetto’s so-called “military strike”—deepened anxieties about the possible spread of Bolshevik Revolution in Italy. These concerns were shared by the Italian government but were especially pronounced among the Allies, who were among the first to identify Mussolini as a political actor capable of containing trade unionism and socialism. In this respect, more revealing than the financial support provided by MI5 in 1917 was the decision of the American consulate in Milan to entrust Mussolini, on April 6, 1918, with the commemorative address for the first anniversary of the United States’ entry into the war.⁴¹

But the Allies’ fears also concerned Italy’s reliability in controlling what in 2021 the very influential geopolitical magazine *Limes* defined as “the Isthmus of Europe” between the Baltic and the Black Sea. This explains the Allied concern against an Italian control of Fiume, the only strategic Adriatic port from which to support the Czechoslovak government and the Hungarian counter-revolution, at a time when German communist dockworkers’ strikes in Gdansk were paralyzing Allied support to Warsaw. These fears were not unfounded, considering

the Tsarist regime at the mercy of the West and removed the Russo-German *katéchon* that since 1813 had guaranteed the balance of power in Europe.

39 A global comparative history is now proposed by Javier Rodrigo, David Alegre, *Comunidades rotas. Una historia global de las guerras civiles, 1917-2017*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2019.

40 Fabio Fabbri, *Le origini della guerra civile. L'Italia dalla Grande Guerra al fascismo. 1918-1921*. Torino: UTET, 2009. Enrico Acciai, “Italia 1918 – 1922: sull’uso della categoria di guerra civile”. *Officina della storia* 7, 2011. Marco Bresciani, “L’autunno dell’Italia liberale: una discussione su guerra civile, origini del fascismo e storiografia ‘nazionale.’” *Storica* XVIII, n. 54 2012/2013: 1-35. Id., “Tra ‘guerra civile europea’ e ‘crisi eurasiatica’: Benito Mussolini, la Rivoluzione russa e il bolscevismo (1917-1922) *Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa* (vol. XXXI, 2016-2017): pp. 217-241. Giulia Albanese, “Il primo dopoguerra: una guerra civile?”. In: *Il fascismo, un regime di guerra* (Lucia Ceci et alii, eds.). Roma: Viella, 2025: pp. 49-64.

41 Ilari, Piero Crociani, “Il Palazzo dello Zio Tom. Gli anni romani di Thomas Nelson Page.” In: *Over There in Italy. L'Italia e l'intervento americano nella grande guerra* (V. Ilari ed.). Quaderno SISM 2018, Roma: Nadir Media, 2018: pp. 83-116.

that the provisional government created by D'Annunzio in Fiume was the first to recognize the Bolshevik government, as well as the Red Days of June 1920 in Ancona, triggered by the refusal of the 11th Bersaglieri (the very regiment in which Mussolini had served) to be deployed to suppress the anti-Italian insurrection in Albania.⁴²

The fascist movement (March 1919) and D'Annunzio's Fiume endeavor (September) were also part of the Italian Red Biennium. Despite their proximity to monarchist nationalism and anti-socialist violence, the ideological matrix of the fascist program⁴³ and the Fiume Constitution⁴⁴ it was Sorel's theory, the same one that briefly and superficially prevailed among the working masses: the anti-bourgeois and anti-rationalist palingenesis, the decisive Napoleonic battle, the 1793.⁴⁵ Just enough of a predicted civil war to terrorize the people of order and organize repression. But, as Benedetto Croce understood, the working masses had been too parliamentarised and moderated by socialist reformism.

After the electoral defeat of November 1919, fascism "turned right" in May 1920.⁴⁶ In June, embarrassed and scared by the spontaneous anarcho-socialist revolts in Albona (Istria), Viareggio and Ancona, the unions suspended the general strike. In August, socialists, trade unionists, and fascists signed a short-lived pacification pact. In September, the unions disarmed the Red Guards and returned the occupied factories; and in November, the Fiume legionaries surrendered to the Royal Navy. In January 1921, the socialists paid the price with a split and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy, Section of the Third In-

42 Marcello Paolini, "I fatti di Ancona e l'XI bersaglieri (giugno 1920)." *Memorie storiche militari*, Roma: USSME, 1981: pp. 445-463. Ruggero Giacomini, *Va da Valona! La rivolta dei bersaglieri e le «giornate rosse»*. Roma: Castelvechi, 2020.

43 The *Manifesto di San Sepolcro*, published in June 1919 on the *Popolo d'Italia*, the Mussolini's newspaper. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920*, Torino: Einaudi, 1965.

44 The Carta del Carnaro, redatta nel 1920 dal sindacalista Alceste De Ambris. Marco Mondini doesn't weigh the strategic context and minimizes the ideological matrices (*Fiume 1919. Una guerra civile italiana*. Roma: Salerno editrice, 2019.)

45 C. Schmitt, "Die politische Theorie der Mythos" (1923). In: *Positionen*, cit.: pp. 11-21.

46 Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista: I La conquista del potere (1921-1925)*. Torino: Einaudi, 1966. On the different interpretations of fascism, see Giulia Albanese (ed.), *Il fascismo italiano. Storia e interpretazioni*. Carocci: Roma, 2021. Claudia Baldioli, *Italian Fascism, 1914-1945: Themes and Interpretations*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

ternational. In February, the Arditismo⁴⁷ also split between fascists and “Fiume legionaries” which in June gave rise to the Arditi del Popolo, the first armed anti-fascist organization. But Gramsci’s hope of turning it into an insurrectional vanguard against the bourgeois state⁴⁸ was dashed. Lenin never arrived, and the Arditi del Popolo limited themselves to opposing the fascist squadristi,⁴⁹ which was increasingly tolerated by the state security forces or even integrated within. The “armed party” was not created by the PCd’I, but by Mussolini (November 1921). A year later, the King disavowed the state of siege that would have stopped the March on Rome and entrusted the government to Mussolini. In 1923, the fascist militia, remaining under the exclusive control of the Duce, was legalized and entrusted with internal security functions, and the Royal Guard was disbanded.⁵⁰

Although it took perhaps two thousand lives⁵¹ and compromised civil and political liberties, the postwar political violence did not cause the collapse of the state. The Mussolini’s dictatorship, therefore, was not born from an ongoing civil war, but from the resignation of the liberals themselves to accept limited and pragmatic constitutional and socioeconomic transformations capable of channeling and draining very real and fearful social conflicts. In this sense it can be said that the Fascist Revolution was the specifically Italian bloom of the

47 The political movement inspired by the ethos and myth of the assault units created after Caporetto to remedy the declining combativeness of the infantry.

48 Antonio Gramsci, “Gli Arditi del popolo.” *L’ordine nuovo*, 15 luglio 1921.

49 Eros Francescangeli, *Gli arditi del popolo. Argo Secondari e la prima organizzazione antifascista 1917-1922*. Roma: Odradek, 2000. Antonio Sonnessa, “Working Class Defence Organization, Anti-Fascist Resistance and the Arditi del Popolo in Turin, 1919–22.” *European History Quarterly* 33(2), 2003: pp. 183–218. Marco Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi! Dalle trincee alle barricate: arditismo di guerra e arditi del popolo (1917-1922)*. Roma, BFS 2011. Alessandra Grasso, “L’Arditismo dopo Fiume: Arditi d’Italia e Arditi del Popolo.” *Humanities*, 3/5, 2014: pp. 38–47.

50 Elvira Valleri, “Dal partito armato al regime totalitario: La Milizia.” *Italia contemporanea*, 141, 1980: pp. 31–60. Ilari, “Il partito armato del fascismo: la Milizia dallo squadristi alla RSI.” In: Ilari, Antonio Sema, *Marte in orbace. Guerra, esercito e milizia nella concezione fascista della nazione*. Ancona: Nuove Ricerche, 1988: pp. 277–414.

51 Only recently has the Ferruccio Parri National Institute launched the project of an *Atlas of political violence in the first post-war period*. Alessandra Grasso, “Storia e memoria delle violenze nello spazio digitale.” *Novecento.org*, 15 May, 2024.

Soviet Revolution.⁵²

The constitutionalizing of the fascist revolution was a masterpiece of Italian legal virtuosity, imitated in Germany in 1933-34, and repeated in Italy in the no less epochal turning points of 1946 and 1993, always leveraging the powers of the head of state and the popular will expressed or deduced from plebiscites or referendums. Italian society accepted dictatorship and welcomed corporativism and imperialism, but the fascistization was merely a facade. Potential civil war was averted because no one was able or even truly willing to lead a Bolshevik revolution. But it was replaced by a war between fascists and anti-fascists, which had its dress rehearsal during the Spanish Civil War. On March 14, 1937, during the Battle of Guadalajara, Blackshirts and Garibaldinians faced each other at the Palacio de Ybarra with daggers and hand grenades, just as in the August 1922 battle at Parma's Oltretorrente between squadrists and *Arditi del Popolo*.

Was the Italian Resistance a civil war?

Undoubtedly, the “settling of scores” and fratricide were central aspects of the Italian events of 1943-1945. But the War of Liberation—as that conflict was officially called in Italy—and the Resistance, which was only one aspect of it, cannot be reduced to simply “war to fascist.” This is also because the Resistance was not an insurrection against a regime that had legally and spontaneously abdicated a month and a half earlier (on July 25, 1943), but against the German occupation, and led by a six-parties national liberation committee⁵³ recognized by the Kingdom's legitimate government, which had also delegated to it the exercise of government in occupied territory, including a unified command of all partisan forces presided by a monarchic regular general.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the very

52 C. Schmitt, “Wesen und Werden des faschistischen Staates.” (2019). In: *Positionen*, cit.: pp. 124-130.

53 Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CNL) formato dai sei partiti antifascisti (Comunisti, socialisti, democratico-cristiani, repubblicani, liberali e “azionisti”).

54 Comitato di Liberazione Alta Italia (CLNAI) and Corpo Volontari della Libertà (CVL) that resumed the shrewd criterion used in 1860 to feed and regularize the turbulent cadres of Garibaldi's Southern Army, placing them in a cadre “Volunteer Corps” that later was mobilized for the third war of independence (1866). This first VC was immediately dissolved after the symbolic “victory” of Bezzecca which led the Redshirts to the real and final defeat of Mentana (1867).

proclamation of a fascist Republican state undoubtedly constituted the “completion of acts aimed at provoking civil war,” foreseen and punishable by death by art. 286 of the penal code.

This significantly differentiates the Italo-Italian War from the Franco-French War of 1940-1944 and the Spanish Civil War. In the latter two cases, the legitimate governments (of Madrid and Vichy) were confronted and defeated by insurrectionary governments (of Franco and de Gaulle) that were “effective” and representative of significant and motivated social forces. These characteristics cannot be attributed to a collaborationist tragedy that Mussolini played out under constraint. The political definition of civil war requires that both sides be truly able to exercise sovereignty, not merely claiming it. Although, at least in the first few months, the Italian Social Republic (RSI) enjoyed sufficient support to ensure routine administration and initiate socialization, its total dependence on the German government alone undermined its claim to sovereignty.

But things are different when it comes to a radical conflict between opposing visions not only of history and national identity, but also of individual stories and identities, in which mutual hatred leads to the verbal or physical dehumanization of the enemy of the country, party, or class, to the point of desecration of the corpse and the prohibition of mourning.⁵⁵ Here we can speak of civil war, even if only in a moral, ideological and psychological sense. It was in moral sense that Ferruccio Parri, Actionist president of the CLNAI and then the first prime minister after the liberation, defined as civil war the attempt to eradicate the last version of fascism, which combined a return to anti-bourgeois origins with Nazi influence.

But there was also a true virtual civil war among the anti-fascists, opposing the revolutionary communist, socialist, and actionist impulses and the moderate and anti-communist parties, supported by Italian and Allied governments.⁵⁶ The

55 Yiannis Kokosalakis, Francisco J. Leira-Castiñeira (eds.), *Violence and Propaganda in European Civil Wars Dimensions of Conflict 1917-1949*. London/New York: Routledge (Taylor & Francis), 2025 (here Nicola Cacciatore, “Patriots, Traitors, and Rebels: Mutual Portraits of Partisans and Fascists in the Italian Civil War, 1943-1945” and Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, “The Italian Civil War: An Explosion of Brutality”, pp. 273-288.)

56 For a French comparison see Henri Michel, *Les courants de pensée de la Résistance*, PUF, Paris, 1962; *La guerre de l'Ombre. La Résistance en Europe*, Grasset, Paris, 1970 (ed. it., Mursia, Milano, 1973).

risk that the war of liberation would turn into a civil war between communists and anti-communists, as had been happening in Greece since 1944,⁵⁷ was real. But this eventuality was averted by the communist leader Togliatti, who returned from Moscow in March 1944 with the mandate to establish national unity among all anti-fascist forces and recognize the legitimacy of the monarchist government that had taken refuge in Salerno, in accordance with the tripartite decisions of Tehran (November-December 1943).

Prioritizing the war against German occupiers and avoiding a civil war against the anti-communists it was also the Stalin's directive. The Soviet leader preferred to keep a postwar Italy in a neutral position by rooting a strong pro-Soviet component in society (which, moreover, until the Spanish civil war, had been present in the fascist regime itself.) Moreover, Stalin was also concerned about Yugoslav influence on the Greek and Italian resistance (in the Italian North-East). After all, patriotic war and Redshirts tradition were also the best way to fight the Black Brigades, even forcing the anti-communist resistance to call them as "Nazi-fascists," "servants of the enemy" and "traitors to the fatherland."⁵⁸ However, Togliatti should downgrade the armed and revolutionary class war to a class struggle with social and political means, without formally renouncing the idea of a classless society. This line met with no opposition in liberated Italy, where the communist presence was a minority and everything depended on the Allies. It was much more difficult to impose it on the communists beyond the lines, who controlled two-thirds of the partisan forces and all the urban guerrilla warfare, and in the Northeast, where Yugoslav designs on Trieste and the Isonzo River caused a split between the communist and nationalist resistance groups. The same Communist leaders in Northern Italy, Luigi Longo and Pietro Secchia, obeyed primarily out of party discipline. But in July 1948, after the Popular Front's electoral defeat, it was they who prevented the

57 Nicola Cacciatore, "'A few factional clashes are inevitable': le conseguenze della crisi greca sulle relazioni tra Regno Unito e Resistenza italiana nell'inverno 1944-1945." In: *Grecia e Italia, 1821-2021: due secoli di storie condivise. Atti del Convegno*, ETPbooks, 2023: pp. 686-670.

58 Nicola Cacciatore, "Partigiani, patrioti, soldati. La Resistenza e gli alleati di fronte al problema dello status dei combattenti italiani (1944-1945)." *Italia contemporanea*, 300, 2020: pp. 180-204. Id., "'La vera Italia siamo noi.' Gli antifascisti e le loro riflessioni sul patriottismo e sulla storia nazionale." *Rivista Storica del Socialismo* 1, 2022.

general strike and the bloody street clashes that followed Togliatti's wounding from degenerating into civil war.⁵⁹

Togliatti's line, later accused of "duplicity," also arose from his realistic assessment of the Italian and global balance of power⁶⁰ and the priority of establishing the legitimacy of the pro-Soviet Party as a democratic, national and responsible force, rooting it in Italian political life as the guardian of anti-fascist unity and an interpreter of demands for social justice, also recovering those that had found expression in "leftist fascism."

For Togliatti, the PCI's legitimacy to rebuild republican Italy did not rest on settling accounts with the fascists, but on its militarily important and morally decisive role in liberating the nation from German occupation. To define the Resistance as a civil war would give support not only to nationalist and "qualunquist" scepticism and reproach⁶¹ and neo-fascist claims,⁶² but also to anti-communist discrimination by Catholic and moderate antifascism.⁶³ The jacobine, more than liberal-labour view of the Action Party was different: it saw the Resistance as a double war—external against the Germans and civil against the fascists—a democratic, transnational Second Risorgimento, and a palingenetic extirpation of the secular moral vices that had culminated in fascism.

Togliatti's formula of "anti-fascist unity"⁶⁴ also served liberals and Chris-

59 Giuseppe Pardini, *Prove tecniche di rivoluzione. L'attentato a Togliatti, luglio 1948*. Milano, Luni editrice, 2018.

60 "When I asked myself why the Communist Party did not seize power by force, given its deep penetration into all state apparatuses, there was only one explanation: Togliatti's irrevocably democratic and parliamentary choice and the division of the world in two. The Italian state would have been incapable of preventing the Communist Party from seizing power through infiltration or violence. I have no doubt about this. This is the reason for my democratic assessment of the Communist Party: because the Communist Party did not do what it could easily have done. And it did not do so for two reasons: because Moscow would not have allowed it, indeed it would have abandoned them, and secondly because Togliatti's democratic and parliamentary choice (the "new way") was irrevocable." (Francesco Cossiga, Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into Terrorism in Italy and the Causes of the Failure to Identify Those Responsible for the Massacres, 27th Session, Inquiry into Massacres and Cover-ups: Hearing of Senator Francesco Cossiga, Presidency of President Pellegrino, 1997.)

61 Attilio Tamaro, *Due Anni di storia*. Roma: Tosi editore, 1948-1950.

62 Giorgio Pisanò, *Storia della guerra civile in Italia*, FPE, Milano, 1965.

63 Sergio Cotta, *Quale Resistenza?* Rusconi, Milano 1977.

64 Togliatti's interpretation was codified by Roberto Battaglia nella *Storia della Resistenza itali-*

tian Democrats. It acknowledged their organic political weight regardless of the scale of their contribution to historical anti-fascism or to the armed struggle, and it made them the necessary representatives of those forces that stood outside historical anti-fascism—above all the military, industrialists, and clergy—as well as of the widespread distance of most Italians from the Resistance, described as the “grey zone” or “attendismo.”⁶⁵ This attitude was especially condemned by the Action Party and later reassessed above all by Catholics. No doubt that the Resistance eventually acquired a “broad and transposed legitimacy” for the entire republican political system and its ruling class.

In this process, the link between Resistance and anti-fascism lost much of the political and ideological meaning assigned to it by the Actionist view. Anti-fascism no longer identified only, or even mainly, the people, parties, programmes, and ideas that had opposed Mussolini during the Fascist *Ventennio*.⁶⁶ It came to include all regulars, combatants, POWs or internees of 1943-45, and, in perspective, all those who had not supported the RSI. Over time, the label was extended to postwar newcomers of the CLN parties and sometimes even to former RSI fascists readmitted into democratic political life. In practice, it came to embrace almost the entire Italian people, except those who explicitly rejected it and placed themselves at the margins, though not outside, republican democracy and legality.

The Action Party intellectuals, who had “desisted” from political struggle by dissolving the party in 1947, cultivated resentment toward the Togliatti formula, accusing it of “desistency.” After Togliatti’s death, dissatisfied communists began to speak of a “betrayed Resistance.” But in the 1970s, the Togliatti formula, modified to “anti-fascist national unity,” presided over the policy of the “historic compromise” between the DC and the PCI, which accepted NATO and supported the modernization of defense and the draft, balanced by increasing economic and cultural cooperation with the USSR. Ultimately, the PCI’s firmness and

ana (Torino: Einaudi, 1953; 1964). Id. “La storiografia della Resistenza. Dalla memorialistica al saggio storico”, *Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*, 1959, n. 57, pp. 80-131.

65 Pascal Oswald, *Narrow ‘Grey Zones’: a History of Italian Civilians’ Experiences under German Occupation (1943-45)*. PhD project at the Saar University (Germany) in co-supervision with the University of Padua.

66 The twenty-years of Fascist Regime (1922-1943).

vigilance were decisive in defeating Red Brigade terrorism.⁶⁷ Beyond the political rhetoric, the climate was such that in 1984 it seemed almost obvious that Pino Romualdi and Giorgio Almirante, the historic founder and secretary of the neo-fascist party, both veterans of the RSI, would pay homage, without being contested, to the body of the secretary of the PCI Enrico Berlinguer.

In the peaceful ocean of contemporary Italian historiography, disturbances are limited to “rough seas.”⁶⁸ The only storm, even more terrifying than the German *Historikerstreit*, concerned a ramshackle 1975 interview that summarized a monumental yet illegible attempt to “historicize” and “demystify” fascism, anti-fascism and the Resistance.⁶⁹

The collapse of the First Republic, the justicialist homologation of Italian society to the American liberal model, and Italy’s plebiscitary abdication to democracy and sovereignty had, among countless marginal consequences, also the posthumous resurrection of the Actionist mentality. The book by former Actionist partisan Claudio Pavone, whose title, from its opening, endorsed the “moral” interpretation of the Resistance as a “civil war,”⁷⁰ barely elicited a few grumbles. After massive doses of “demystification” and “pacification”, in 1997 the eight and posthumous volume of the author demonized in 1975 was able to

67 Elio Susani, *Quarant’anni dopo. Memorie di piombo, caffè e sigarette* (with a preface by V. Ilari). Roma: Tab edizioni, 2021.

68 The turnover of Sea Lions occurs quietly. Eugenio Di Rienzo delightfully tells some stories about (*Un dopoguerra storiografico. Storici italiani tra guerra civile e prima Repubblica*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2004.)

69 Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo* (di Michael A. Ledeen). Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1975. (Engl. Transl. *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to Its Theory and Practice* (An Interview with Michael A. Ledeen). New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1976.) Denis Mac Smith, “A Monument to the Duce”, and Ledeen reply, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1975-76 (It. Transl. *Un monumento al duce? La polemica Mac Smith/Ledeen*, Piero Meldini ed. Firenze-Rimini: Guarraldi, 1976). Maurice Bardèche *et alii*, *Sei risposte a Renzo De Felice*. Roma: Giovanni Volpe, 1976. A. James Gregor. “Professor Renzo De Felice and the Fascist Phenomenon.” *World Politics* 30 (3), 1978: pp. 433-449. Marco Brando, “E Ledeen racconta ‘l’Intervista’ a De Felice sul fascismo.” *patria indipendente* 1 30 settembre 2005, pp. 11-12. Francesco Germinario, “Fare storia del fascismo. Appunti su una recente biografia su Renzo De Felice.” *Materialismo Storico* 18/1 2025: pp. 25-31. Further documentation in it.wikipedia entries “Controversie su Renzo De Felice”, “Intervista sul fascismo”, “Il rosso e il nero”, “Storiografia della guerra civile in Italia.”

70 Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991 (1994, 2006, 2011).

definitively establish that the Italo-Italian war of 1943-45 had been “civil.”⁷¹

I’ve written about these events elsewhere, almost contemporaneously and somewhat off-the-cuff.⁷² An old trunk in the attic full of bibliographical junk now forgotten. The puppet theater is more thriving than ever, now that it no longer needs an audience.

* * *

Recognizing the civil character of a war is the prerogative of the victor alone. It means acknowledging the ethical and political dignity, if not formal legitimacy, of the values and reasons of the vanquished; renouncing, if not extermination and persecution, at least *damnatio memoriae*; reconstructing the integrity of the national historical memory as a shared tragedy and not as a partisan epic, destined for permanent political use. It means, in a word, letting the past pass to reopen the future. But precisely for this reason, recognizing the victor presupposes that he already possesses, or that he wants and can, through that very posthumous recognition, a true historical vision and moral authority, in which political foresight and service to the country are imbued with a sacred element. The past that does not pass is the clearest sign that the war is not over, that the nation has not been regenerated, that the victor has no authority, that the vanquished still inspires fear.

71 Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. II: La guerra civile (1943-45)*. Torino: Einaudi, 1997.

72 V. Ilari, “Das Ende eines Mythos. Interpretationen und politische Praxis des italienischen Widerstands in der Debatte der frühen neunziger Jahre.” In: *Tabu und Geschichte. Zur Kultur des kollektiven Erinnerns*. (Peter Bettelheim and Robert Streibl eds.). Wien: Picus Verlag, 1994: pp. 129-174. *Storia militare della prima Repubblica (1943-1993)*. Ancona, Nuove Ricerche, 1994 (Invario: Widerholdt Frères, 2008: pp. 519-560). *Il generale col monocolo. Giovanni de Lorenzo 1907-1973*. Ancona; Nuove Ricerche, 1995. *Inventarsi una patria*. Roma: Ideazione 1996 (debated with Lucio Caracciolo and Carlo Jean on Radio Radicale, 11 November, 1996). *Guerra civile*. Roma: Ideazione, 2001.

Tigers in the Trenches: The End Phases of the Sri Lankan Civil War

by JOHN H. GILL

Between 1983 and 2009 the idyllic island nation of Sri Lanka was embroiled in a brutal civil war between the forces of the government and those of a totalitarian, cult-of-personality separatist organization known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or LTTE. Featuring several internationally brokered ceasefire periods and a lengthy Indian intervention, this bitter struggle spanned the spectrum of conflict from multifarious acts of terrorism by the LTTE to “classic” guerrilla battles in the jungle to conventional combat that resembled World War One trench warfare in miniature. There was also a critical and unique naval dimension along the island’s lengthy coast, in its major harbors and in its numerous large lagoons. For many years, the LTTE, tenacious, skilled and innovative, repeatedly inflicted humiliating defeats on Sri Lanka’s armed forces and, by the early 2000s, the organization controlled nearly one-quarter of the country, running their territory like a nascent state. After more than two decades of successful resistance to the government, therefore, stalemate seemed the likely outcome when fighting resumed in late summer of 2006; many Sri Lankans and most outside observers (including the present author) expected the result to be a repeat of the preceding spasms of violence: a standoff would ensue after months or years of intense but sporadic combat. On the one side, the army, navy and air force would oscillate between skill and ineptitude. On the other, the Tigers, generally regarded as one of the most ruthless, fanatical, and competent insurgent groups in the world, would be unable to achieve the independent state, the “Tamil Eelam,” that they sought. Greater government resources, indifferently employed, would not result in a military defeat of the LTTE, and Tiger tenacity, barring massive foreign intervention, would suffice

for survival, but not for success. Both sides, it was assumed, would be able to hold their own, but neither would gain a true “victory” on anything resembling its own terms. The struggle was commonly considered, as BBC journalist Frances Harrison wrote in 2001, a “hopeless war,” wrapping the island in “the depressing monotony of a war that neither side can win.”¹ There thus emerged the pervasive assumption that the war could not be “won” in any military sense, that the Tigers were an immutable fact of life in Sri Lanka, and that, as a consequence, the only way to conclude a quarter-century of warfare and suffering was negotiation, even if those negotiations edged close to the creation of a second independent state on the island.

Coming out of the most recent ceasefire period (2002–2006), most observers were therefore surprised when the war ended on 19 May 2009 with the definitive military defeat of the LTTE. This chapter offers some key factors behind this unanticipated government triumph. It will begin with an overview of the civil war through its first three phases (commonly known as Eelam Wars I, II, and III) to provide the backdrop against which one may contrast the changes that manifested themselves from 2006 through 2009. During these previous periods, government forces had expanded dramatically in size, equipment, and missions to cope with the threat of state dissolution. These enhancements, however, did not suffice to bring military victory, or even to push the Tigers into serious negotiations. Although the military often won battles (a fact lost on many commentators), gross lapses in security led to costly and embarrassing debacles, while ground once gained was frequently abandoned after great exertion and heavy casualties. The Tigers, on the other hand, had consistently demonstrated resilience, innovativeness, and tactical skill, highlighted by dexterous manipulation of the open media. Whether conducting terrorist attacks against civilian targets inside Sri Lanka, extorting funds from the Tamil diaspora overseas, or crushing internal dissent, the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and his adherents also displayed a complete lack of scruples in pursuing their aim. This ruthlessness inspired a pervasive atmosphere of fear to ensure compliance among wavering supporters and to undermine their opponents; it also helped cement an aura of invincibility that informed international as well as Sri Lankan views of Prabha-

1 Frances Harrison, “Sri Lanka Renews Hopeless War,” BBC, 29 July 2001.

karan and his organization.

With the renewal of hostilities in 2006, however, the government's forces managed to overcome their formidable opponent. In a series of successful offensives, they drove the Tigers into a small corner in the northeast of the island where they could be surrounded and eradicated, but generated accusations of war crimes and human rights violations in the process. These claims of government brutality have garnered a great deal of scholarly, journalistic, and diplomatic attention from the United Nations, foreign governments, and numerous international organizations, not to mention the Sri Lankan government and Tiger sympathizers of every stripe.² Unfortunately, this commentary has often been tendentious if not mendacious, obscuring or misdirecting rather than illuminating, even when well-intentioned. Most accounts, especially those originating outside Sri Lanka, concentrate on these war crimes allegations, centering on the closing three weeks or three months of the war. The government victory, however, was not achieved in those intense final weeks, rather its success was the result of developments over a much longer period. In other words, the government did not "blast its way to triumph" with indiscriminate shelling and bombing in the late spring of 2009, it earned its victory through the careful—and often costly—application of leadership, strategy and resources over three years against an enemy that had lost its previous dominance but remained tenacious and committed to the very end. This chapter will therefore broaden the aperture to focus on the military dimensions of the concluding three *years* of combat to outline some of the key elements behind the government's achievement of what one Sri Lankan general called "this miracle."³

2 Starting points for this literature include: UN, "Report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka" (31 March 2011); Sri Lanka, Ministry of Defence, "Humanitarian Operations Factual Analysis, July 2006–May 2009" (July 2011); Sri Lanka, "Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation" (November 2011); UN, "Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Actions in Sri Lanka" (November 2012); UN, "Report of the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)" (16 September 2015); Independent Diaspora Analysis Group-Sri Lanka, "The Numbers Game" (Colombo, May 2013); Marga Institute, "The Last Stages of the War in Sri Lanka" (Colombo, 2014).

3 Author interview, November 2009.

Background: A Quarter Century of War, Intervention and Peace

The Sri Lankan civil war arose from a sense of deprivation and discrimination on the part of the island's Tamil minority vis-à-vis the majority Sinhalese.⁴ There were and are numerous other cleavages, fractures, and differentiations in the society, including caste and class distinctions as well as the presence of a sizeable Muslim population. For our purposes, however, the key is that many of the largely Hindu Tamils, feeling disadvantaged or actively under attack, turned to armed resistance during the 1980s. Out of this turmoil arose a number of militant groups, and in fairly short order, the LTTE became the most prominent among these, ruthlessly wiping out its rivals and growing skilled at both guerrilla warfare and terrorist techniques. With all its competitors quite literally exterminated, the Tigers fought a long, bitter struggle against the Sri Lankan state, their aim being the establishment of a separate state—"Eelam"—under the control of their unchallengeable leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran.

This term "Eelam" also lends its name to the four phases of the war:

Eelam War I (EW1, 1983–87): anti-government violence had flared as early as the 1970s, but the killing of thirteen Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers in an LTTE ambush ignited a fierce anti-Tamil reaction in the capital Colombo in July 1983. For several days, Sinhalese mobs rampaged through Tamil neighborhoods in a paroxysm of murder, assault, and destruction that became infamous as "Black July." Several hundred, perhaps several thousand, Tamils were killed, and many more injured, while looting and arson caused enormous damage to property. Most Tamils and many other observers assumed at least some degree of government complicity. Seen as a pogrom, Black July sparked a tremendous surge in attacks by a variety of Tamil militant groups. These actions soon led to a "typical" insurgent contest between Tamil guerrillas and the armed forces of the state, largely ceremonial organizations that had to adapt desperately but awkwardly to the exigencies of counterinsurgency. Although there were as

4 In the wake of Tamil flight after the 1980s, "Sri Lankan Tamils" comprised no more than 9 per cent of the country's population by 2006, Neil DeVotta, "The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Lost Quest for Separatism in Sri Lanka," *Asian Survey*, 49/6, November/December 2009, 1024. In addition to these "Sri Lankan Tamils" the so-called "Indian Tamils" (descendants of workers brought in during the British colonial period) make up approximately four per cent of the population, but this group, living in the country's south-central tea regions, was considered apart from the "Sri Lanka Tamils" to whom the LTTE appealed.

many as 34 militant outfits, the LTTE were always the largest, most dedicated and most effective.⁵

IPKF (1987–90): EW1 came to an end in mid-1987 when India intervened militarily on the island. There then transpired an “interregnum” during which an Indian expeditionary force, the Indian Peacekeeping Force or IPKF, fought a painful guerrilla war with the Tigers until early 1990. It was during EW1 and the IPKF interphase that the LTTE expunged all its major Tamil rivals, surviving to renew the war with the government in the summer of 1990 after a brief period of negotiations.

Eelam War II (EW2, 1990–94): lasted from the summer of 1990 to the end of 1994 and saw pitched battles between the adaptive, aggressive Tigers and the slowly evolving government forces. Terrorism remained a key component of Tiger strategy, claiming such prominent figures as former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (killed) and Sri Lankan Presidents Ranasinghe Premadasa (killed) and Chandrika Kumaratunga (wounded), as well as thousands of others, Sinhala, Muslim, and Tamil alike. During this period, the Tigers created a littoral navy (the “Sea Tigers”), began to construct a sophisticated international arms supply network, and gradually acquired many features of a conventional military force.

Eelam War III (EW3, 1995–2002): the third round of combat broke out in early 1995 after another short period of abortive talks. Though government forces gained some remarkable battlefield victories, leadership was generally indifferent, morale often poor, equipment inadequate, and overall numbers insufficient for the task. Furthermore, political guidance frequently seemed inconsistent if not capricious. The Tigers smuggled in arms with relative ease and captured significant quantities, while expanding their forces and inflicting several severe—and severely embarrassing—catastrophes on their opponents. In just one example, the LTTE overran an SLA base at Mullaitivu in the northeast in July 1996, killing nearly 1,500 men (only 66 survived) and capturing large quantities of weapons and ammunition. Army morale plummeted and recruiting dropped off badly. At the same time, there were limits to the Tiger offensives and the war settled into a bloody stalemate punctuated by LTTE terror attacks.⁶

5 Adrien Fontanellaz and Tom Cooper, *Paradise Afire: The Sri Lankan War, 1971–1987* (Solihull, 2018), I, 16–39.

6 After initial successes, LTTE offensives soon reached what Prussian military theorist Carl

EW3 thus proved the longest and likely the costliest phase of the conflict, lasting until a ceasefire brokered by Norway was implemented in February 2002.⁷

Ceasefire (2002–2006): the 22 February 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) introduced a period of relative calm between the warring parties with Nordic countries providing a Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to oversee its execution. The CFA also opened the door for several rounds of negotiations but these predictably foundered owing to Prabhakaran's rejection of a federal solution proposed by the government and his unbending insistence on the creation of an independent Tamil state.⁸

The 2002 ceasefire seemed to serve the LTTE well. The Tigers controlled most of northern Sri Lanka (the Vanni), minus the Jaffna Peninsula, and large parts of the East. The organization functioned as a virtual state, imposing "taxes," charging "customs fees," instituting conscription, and establishing a judicial system in the territories under its control. It also continued its active fund-raising among Tamil diaspora groups overseas (both voluntary and coerced) and refined its sophisticated arms supply network, notably by acquiring oceangoing merchantmen and stationing these far out in the Indian Ocean as "floating arsenals" presumably beyond the reach of the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN).

Unlike previous ceasefires, however, this time the government in Colombo also profited from the hiatus in the fighting. As talks with the Tigers stalled, elections brought Mahinda Rajapaksa to power as president in late 2005. Though seen as a "hardliner" as far as the Tigers were concerned, Rajapaksa came into office inclined towards but not committed to a military solution to the conflict. That is to say, the new government was prepared to negotiate under appropriate conditions but also wanted to ready itself for military action should that prove

von Clausewitz called their "culminating point" or "the turning point at which attack becomes defense," that is, where casualties, detachments, logistical strain and enemy resistance bring the attacking forces to a halt: Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. (Princeton, 1976), 566–73.

7 On Norway's role, see Gunnar Sørbo et al., "Pawns of Peace: Evaluation of Norwegian Peace Efforts in Sri Lanka, 1997–2009" (London, 2011); and Mark Salter, *To End a Civil War* (London, 2015).

8 At one point, LTTE negotiators claimed to be willing to accept a solution that would leave Sri Lanka intact as a unitary country, but Prabhakaran later boasted that this was a ruse to gain time for rearmament, recruitment and training.

necessary to preserve the unitary state. Moreover, the new Rajapaksa government was not bound by the previous assumption that the LTTE was invincible and was not convinced that a battlefield victory was impossible. These attitudes became important as the ceasefire gradually fell apart in 2005-2006. By the time the LTTE provoked a renewed military confrontation in the summer of 2006, Rajapaksa had assembled a remarkable team of like-minded individuals with one of his brothers as defense secretary and three experienced, talented, and determined senior officers as commanders of the three services. Although bitter political frictions would arise after the war, the LTTE erred badly in underestimating both their resolution and their competence. These qualities would become evident as Eelam War IV began in July-August 2006.

The ceasefire period also saw two other major developments in the military sphere. First, the drearily tragic routine of murders, assaults, disappearances, and intimidations perpetrated by both sides acquired additional complexity in March 2004 when a skilled Tiger combat leader known as "Colonel Karuna" (*nom de guerre* for Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan) split with the LTTE. Karuna, an easterner, had earned a reputation as a successful, if ruthless, military commander and administrator, but like many of his fellow rebels from the Eastern Province, he had come to the conviction that the organization, dominated by Tamils from the Jaffna Peninsula, was relying on eastern troops without devoting enough attention to eastern interests or recompensing easterners with senior positions and other rewards. He thus challenged Prabhakaran's leadership and disputed the proposition that the extant LTTE was the sole representative of the Tamil peoples' aspirations. Such independence was anathema to the despotic Prabhakaran and, given his proclivities and sensitivities when faced with dissension, it is hardly surprising that the LTTE leader soon announced that "it has been decided to get rid of Karuna from our soil."⁹ Karuna's break with the main LTTE leadership thus exposed a serious fracture in the organization and led to vicious internecine warfare between his followers and Prabhakaran loyalists across the Eastern Province.

Karuna's shift had important repercussions. First, he took with him many eastern cadres, depriving the Tigers of several thousand experienced fighters and

9 Peter Popham, "Tamil Tigers Issue Death Warrant for Former Leader," *The Independent*, 27 March 2004.

leaders (variously estimated between 2,000 and 8,000).¹⁰ Moreover, Sri Lankan army officers unanimously rated the easterners as appreciably more skilled, dedicated, and tenacious than the Tiger cadres from Jaffna.¹¹ Most of these did not join the government's forces or align themselves with government troops as combatants, but their absence from the LTTE's ranks amounted to a significant diminution of its combat capabilities. Second, Karuna's defection represented a blow to LTTE unity and Prabhakaran's personal prestige. Not only had a proven combat veteran changed sides and denounced the Tiger "supremo" for undermining the Tamil cause, but the much-feared Prabhakaran had been unable to prevent the defection or effectively penalize Karuna afterwards. Additionally, Karuna's shift to the government likely provided a considerable intelligence benefit for Colombo, albeit one that probably eroded after a few months. At the strategic level, Karuna's action not only resulted in a depletion of combat power and prestige for the Tigers, it also produced a severe disruption in their already limited presence on the Eastern Province, alienating the local populace and paving the way for some of the government's first successes in Eelam War IV.¹²

The second major event of 2004 was the deadly December tsunami that devastated much of Sri Lanka's coastline. Beyond the vast human misery and enormous property damage that resulted from this disaster, it also had a military impact. First, the wave caused a not inconsiderable number of casualties among the insurgent fighters and reportedly damaged or destroyed between 30 and 50 per cent of the Sea Tigers' watercraft.¹³ Government forces seem to have suffered less and recovered more quickly. Second, the tsunami generated intense friction and suspicion between the government and the Tigers, with the LTTE claiming that the bulk of disaster assistance was being funneled to the Sinhala-majority south and Colombo asserting that the Tigers were using donated construction materials and earthmoving equipment to dig defenses and build runways for their planned air force. Additionally, Prabhakaran likely would have reignited

10 Iqbal Athas, "Sri Lankan Peace Bid Hit by Tamil Rift," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 24 March 2004; M. R. Narayan Swamy, *The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE's Story* (New Delhi, 2010), 9.

11 Swamy, *Tiger Vanquished*, lxxvi; author interviews, November 2009.

12 D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "Tigers Get a Taste of their own Bitter Medicine," *Sunday Leader*, 24 July 2005.

13 "Naval challenge," *Frontline*, 6 April 2007; B. Raman, "The Tsunami & the LTTE," Observer Research Foundation, 11 January 2005.

hostilities in 2005 had his organization not been recovering from the disaster. The tsunami thus seems to have delayed the renewal of full-scale hostilities leaving the war still temporarily “frozen” under the auspices of the CFA.

From the East to the End: Eelam War IV (EW4, 2006–2009)

The battlegrounds of Eelam War IV were determined by the two areas the insurgents controlled or influenced during the ceasefire period. In the East, the insurgents maintained a significant presence in the jungles south of Trincomalee, even after Karuna’s defection. As such, the LTTE was able to draw on the East for recruits and funds while threatening the SLN’s Trincomalee base that was vital for seaborne supply to the Jaffna Peninsula. The East had long been a zone of “classic” guerrilla warfare between the Tigers and the government as the two sides struggled to exert dominance. In contrast, the heart of Tiger country, the area where the organization managed its quasi-state, was the Vanni (or Wannī), the broad swath of rice paddies, farmland and dry-zone evergreen forests that stretched from coast to coast across the north-central portion of the island. Government forces held the city of Jaffna and its eponymous peninsula, and both sides had constructed intricate defenses across the narrow isthmus that connected the peninsula to the Vanni. The southern “border” of the LTTE’s zone was also fortified with trenches, bunkers, berms and extensive minefields known regionally as “ditch-cum-bund” defenses. As Eelam War IV progressed and the army breached these initial lines in the south, the Tigers repeatedly employed forced civilian labor to erect new ditch-cum-bund lines. Some of these stretched for tens of miles across the countryside and the use of landmines was so common that demining groups, despite intensive efforts, were only able to celebrate the removal of the first one million mines in the summer of 2026.¹⁴

The sea and air domains were also important in Eelam War IV. Combat in the littoral zones was intense as the Sea Tigers sought to interrupt supplies to Jaffna and threaten the island’s major ports, while the navy endeavored to block Tiger smuggling of arms and equipment from overseas. As discussed below, the SLN’s actions would be especially important to the outcome of the war. In the

14 “Rosamund Pike Visits Sri Lanka as Mine Clearance Reaches One-Million Milestone,” *Daily Financial Times*, 8 August 2026.

air, the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) remained a significant combat-multiplier in support to ground and naval forces but also provided crucial intelligence with its small fleet of drones and carried out essential casualty evacuation and transport missions. Uniquely for an insurgent group, the Tigers introduced a handful of small fixed-wing aircraft; the several attacks of these “Air Tigers” were militarily insignificant by themselves, but the publicity attached to them forced the government to scramble to enhance its air defenses.

All of these factors would be important when the war resumed in earnest just over four years after the signing of the CFA. Indeed, despite the SLMM’s presence, as early as summer 2004 the “frozen war” had begun “to melt at the edges”¹⁵ and ceasefire violations increased as 2005 came to an end and 2006 opened, most committed by the LTTE.¹⁶ Tiger terrorism also resumed, highlighted by successful assassinations of Sri Lanka’s foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar (August 2005) and the army’s deputy chief of staff (June 2006) as well as a failed attempts to kill the Army’s commander, Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka (April 2006,) and Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa (December 2006). Although technically still in effect, the CFA became nearly meaningless in reality as fighting escalated through 2007. Unlike previous phases of the war, this time the government forces accumulated a series of successes and suffered few serious setbacks.¹⁷ By mid-2007, the East had been reclaimed, and, by the end of the year, the SLN had crippled the Tiger maritime supply network. Colombo formally abrogated the CFA in January 2008 and marched from victory to victory starting in April that year until the final battles in May 2009. In less than three years, therefore, the government’s forces had accomplished a military triumph that had eluded their predecessors for nearly two decades. This requires an analysis that goes beyond the claims of human rights violations and war crimes as these questions, as legitimate as they are (and to whatever extent they are accurate), cannot explain the government’s success.

15 A Norwegian observer referring to LTTE terror acts, quoted in V. S. Sambandan, “Striking Terror, Again,” *Frontline*, XXI/17, 14–27 August 2004.

16 B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Ceasefire Agreement a Meaningless Paper,” *The Hindu*, 3 January 2008; author’s interviews in Sri Lanka, 2002 to 2009.

17 The Jaffna Peninsula front was an exception for both sides as neither could achieve success against their entrenched opponents: see “Situation Report” columns by Iqbal Athas, *Sunday Times*, 15 October 2006, and 27 April 2008.

The Ingredients of Success

The dynamics behind the dramatic turn-around in Sri Lanka (again, something almost no one would have predicted in 2006 and only a few recognized even in 2007) were many but may be approached through a loose analytic framework of changes in leadership, strategy, and resources as the basic ingredients of any war or campaign. Furthermore, there were shifts in the nature of the enemy as well, and the character of the LTTE must be considered to provide an outline assessment of the war's final years.

a) Leadership

One of the key elements from Colombo's side was leadership. Here it is difficult to overemphasize the impact of the Rajapaksa brothers: President Mahinda and Defense Secretary Gotabhaya. Once they had decided to pursue a military course (which seems to have evolved in the autumn of 2006), they provided the political will behind the government's actions, proving relentless, resilient, and adroit, infusing the entire system—civil as well as military—with purpose and motivation. Despite serious flaws or dubious aspects of their approach, despite military and political setbacks, combined with pressures from all corners, they persevered and their inspiration, propagated by the subordinates they selected, was felt throughout the government. The notion that military success was attainable and the clear guidance that flowed from overturning the assumption that it was not, represented a significant break with the past. The military found this determination refreshing and invigorating, especially when coupled with adequate resources within the context of a well-conceived strategy. This leadership team was thus the foundation for success, influencing the selection of junior leaders, the allocation of resources, and the crafting of strategy.

In addition to this crucial shift in mindset, the brothers erected a political framework to support the military strategy that would be implemented in the field. This had domestic and international dimensions. Internally, they mobilized broad-based popular support, engaging the Sinhala population that had often seemed strangely detached from the war in the past. Though the margin of victory in the 2005 elections that brought the Rajapaksas to power was slim, they also managed to keep the domestic political opposition off balance, helped by the fact that their opponents were in disrepute and disarray. Internal politics

remained a challenge, but the Rajapaksa regime was largely secure on the home front. Indeed, polling indicated strong support for the government's determination to finish the war with a military victory, at least among the majority Sinhalese and non-Tamil minority groups.¹⁸ Despite significant military casualties, this popular support increased as battlefield successes accumulated. Unfortunately, there was also a dark side to the new government's domestic approach as it proved intolerant of criticism and actively sought to silence public debate of its policies. This intolerance led to pervasive media suppression, including widespread and plausible accusations of beatings, killings and disappearances inflicted on several prominent journalists.

Although outsiders deplored the authoritarian tendencies displayed by the Rajapaksa government, Colombo was largely successful on the international front as well as the domestic. The government certainly benefited from the broad global revulsion against terrorism during the early 2000s after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, but this attitude was strongly reinforced by the general repugnance generated by the LTTE's totalitarian character, its unwillingness to negotiate any solution other than separation and its unremitting campaign of terror against all manner of civilian targets, including fellow Tamils at home and abroad. Colombo was thus able to hold off those outside actors who might have sought to intervene politically. At the same time, it successfully solicited support from others, notably China, Pakistan and, to a lesser degree, Israel. Colombo also maintained careful relations with Washington, garnering military assistance, albeit constrained, in equipment and training as well as some crucial naval intelligence.¹⁹ Most importantly, the Rajapaksa brothers carefully kept India on side. Although Tamils represented an important domestic political force in India, New Delhi had no interest in seeing Sri Lanka divided and was never likely to intervene militarily (the memory of the IPKF fiasco remained powerful).²⁰ Nonetheless, Colombo cultivated the Indian government to minimize misunderstandings and received some limited military and intelligence support

18 Keith Noyhar ("Senpathi"), "Troops Push for Foothold in Wanni," *Nation*, 11 November 2007.

19 Admiral J. S. K. Colombage, "Asymmetric Warfare at Sea: The Case of Sri Lanka," dissertation, Kotelawala Defence Academy, 2015, 202–8.

20 India's Tamil population numbered more than 60 million, dwarfing Sri Lanka's entire population and playing a significant role in India's domestic political arena.

in return. The Tigers, on the other hand, hoped for Indian intervention but this was a case of wishful thinking as they would neither change the basic nature of their organization nor undertake any actions that might affect Indian policy in their favor. Moreover, the LTTE had indelibly tarnished its cause by assassinating Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and hopes that India's 2009 general elections would oust the Gandhi-legacy Congress Party (led by his widow, Sonia Gandhi) proved just another exercise in LTTE self-delusion.

b) Resources

The political leadership's other major contribution was resources, both material and human. On the material side, the government seldom balked at delivering what the armed forces needed despite the often-heavy economic cost and some flagrant instances of fraud and corruption.

For the Army, the key was sufficiency, not technology. There was no high-tech answer to the insurgency, but the ground forces finally had most of the hardware they needed to perform their missions. Some new weapons were acquired, including items such as additional tanks and armored personnel carriers, multiple-barrel rocket launchers, artillery-locating radars, and anti-tank guided missiles (for use against enemy bunkers). Much of the new equipment, however, was very basic soldier gear, including such seemingly humble necessities as special vans to allow men to dry themselves and their gear during monsoons. Technology was more important for the SLAF, which received a variety of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), attack helicopters, and sufficient combat aircraft to support the army. The key recipient on the technical/hardware front was the Navy. This was the one area where there was a real technological competition between the government and the Tigers; the SLN prevailed with a combination of indigenous and imported technology including small boats, radars, weaponry and a few ocean-going vessels. Overall, perhaps just as important as technology were reliability and speed of delivery. This was a particular province of Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. A former army officer, he worked energetically, cutting red tape to ensure rapid purchase and certain distribution to all the services. "The entire country," he would write, "was effectively on a war footing."²¹

21 Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, "Sri Lanka's National Security," *Prism*, 4/4, 2014.

The other aspect of resources was manpower. Colombo supported major troop increases across the armed services. The army was understandably the biggest beneficiary, growing from some 116,000 to more than 200,000, but the SLN and SLAF also doubled in size (to 55,000 and 36,500 respectively) between 2005 and 2009. The supply of military personnel—all volunteers across all services—was not inexhaustible, leading commanders to be cautious with casualties, but the government forces could afford an “enemy-centric” attrition strategy against the Tigers whose demographic base was far more constrained.²² Furthermore, dramatically greater numbers meant the army could create new formations, raising the number of divisions from 9 to 20 with corresponding increases in the number of brigades and battalions. These new formations granted the army much greater operational flexibility and also allowed it to secure territory that had been retaken from the Tigers. Village defense, rear area security and counterterrorism were the responsibility of 85,000 police bolstered by the country’s modernized and vastly expanded Civil Defence Force (41,000).²³ The Defense Secretary and the service commanders also instituted a wide variety of reforms to “professionalize” the armed forces, making them more attractive and boosting morale by improving living conditions for serving personnel, elevating their position in society and establishing welfare programs for veterans and families.²⁴

Beyond simple numbers, the government also provided and empowered a new brand of military leaders. That is, the government carefully selected the service commanders and granted them the latitude to operate as they thought best within policy guidelines. These service commanders, in turn, picked subordinates based on merit, a drastic change for very traditional services where seniority had always been the key to promotion. The impact of these changes was felt down to the lowest ranks as non-commissioned officers were also empowered, granted greater independence and, in many cases, promoted to fill the gaps in the officer corps caused by intensive combat. Facilitated by popular

22 Ahmed S. Hashim, *When Counterinsurgency Wins* (Philadelphia, 2013), 42–6.

23 Shamindra Ferdinando, “Lanka’s Triumph over LTTE Terrorism,” *Island*, 4 Dec 2009; Udeshi Amarasinghe and Thilini Kahandawaarachichi, “Shielding the Innocent,” *Business Today*, May 2009.

24 “The Steely Hand Behind Demise of LTTE Terrorists,” *Daily News*, 3 September 2009; Shamindra Ferdinando, “Lanka’s Triumph over LTTE Terrorism,” *Island*, 4 Dec 2009.

engagement in the struggle and the new notion that the government could win, this interplay of good leadership, genuine concern for soldiers' welfare and improved recruiting generated far better morale than had been the norm in the past.

c) Strategy, Operations and Tactics

Leadership and resources require a comprehensive strategic framework if they are not to be wasted. At the upper levels, two decisions were key in Sri Lanka's case. The first of these was the decision to start by clearing the Eastern Province while containing the LTTE in the Vanni. The choice of the East was somewhat accidental as this was where the LTTE chose to act first, but it was also logical because the loss of this region would weaken the Tigers materially and psychologically. On the psychological side, the notion of "Tamil Eelam" was premised on controlling both the northern and eastern portions of the country. The symbolic value of the East prompted commentators on all sides to conclude that "without the East there would be no Eelam."²⁵ Moreover, the population in the East was a mix of Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils. Unlike the Vanni where the Tigers managed a quasi-state, this variegated population meant that the LTTE had less traction in the East and the defection of Karuna's faction further undermined the Tiger presence across the region. In a material sense, the East was a critical source of revenue and some of its best fighters. In addition to depriving the insurgents of funds and fighters, reconquest of the East would prevent the Sea Tigers from exploiting the long coastline and would remove the threat to the SLN's base at Trincomalee. As the security forces on the Jaffna Peninsula relied on supplies by sea from this base, securing it was a matter of crucial importance for the government.

The second major strategic decision was to destroy the Tiger's overseas logistic chain. The LTTE, almost entirely dependent on overseas supplies for arms, had constructed an extensive and effective network of international contacts that supplied everything from artillery pieces, ammunition and swimmer delivery vehicles to the small aircraft that would form the insurgent's air wing, the "Air Tigers." This supply system was founded on "arsenal ships" that would load equipment in foreign ports and then loiter in the Indian Ocean up to 1,600

25 G. H. Peiris, *Twilight of the Tigers* (New Delhi, 2009), 152.

nautical miles off the Sri Lankan coast until an opportune moment for delivery arrived. They would then sail closer to the island to transload their supplies to trawlers and barges for movement to the Tigers ashore. This system functioned well for many years as the SLN had few ocean-going vessels and was fully engaged tackling the Sea Tigers in the island's littoral spaces. From 2006, however, breaking this supply chain became one of Colombo's key objectives. Under the new Navy commander, Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, the SLN assembled ad hoc seagoing task forces that virtually eliminated the LTTE arsenal ships in a series of remarkable operations between 2006 and 2007.²⁶ The insurgents had some stocks on the island and continued to receive limited supplies through smuggling, but these extraordinary SLN actions greatly curtailed the LTTE's capabilities.

At the next level of granularity, there were four key features of the government strategy as it played out on the operational level. First, in addition to constant pressure from the SLN along the coast and in the lagoons, the army advanced on multiple axes. Previous army offensives had concentrated on narrow frontages allowing the LTTE opportunities to outflank and cut off their opponents with sudden surprise attacks. With new leadership and adequate manpower, the army now pressed the Tigers from several directions simultaneously. With the army striking north into the Vanni after securing the East, the LTTE found itself stretched thin trying to defend its "border" across the width of the island while fending off the government's abortive assaults out of the Jaffna Peninsula. Second, this army pressure was relentless. Combined with the thrusts on multiple avenues, this meant there were no pauses during which the Tigers could recover, recruit, train and plan. The insurgents thereby lost their ability to shift forces in response to government moves. Third, unlike the past, the military's aim was now to inflict maximum casualties on the LTTE while minimizing its own losses (and minimizing civilian casualties as well).²⁷ In earlier operations the army had seemed to be in the business of "coloring the map," taking

26 Author's interactions with SLN officers, 2006 and 2008; Paul A. Povlock, "A Guerrilla War at Sea: The Sri Lankan Civil War," *Small Wars Journal*, September 2011.

27 As noted above, the issue of civilian casualties in the final few weeks of the war is a subject of intense controversy; from 2006 through 2008, however, losses among the civilian population, howsoever regrettable, were relatively low.

territory to demonstrate progress but eventually having to vacate the liberated areas under LTTE counterattacks.²⁸ Fonseka and Gotabhaya, on the other hand, were willing to appear methodical as far as terrain was concerned if they could orchestrate operations that drained the LTTE's human and material resources. In the brutal arithmetic of battle, a corollary to this objective of inflicting insurgent casualties was eliminating LTTE commanders and "officers," including Prabhakaran and his principal associates. "We are after him," the defense secretary told a reporter, "We are specifically targeting their leadership."²⁹ Although only a few top targets were killed, this fourth feature of the new government strategy meant that the insurgents lost numerous junior and mid-level leaders to army special operations actions deep in the "shrinking Tiger habitat."³⁰ These government successes not only degraded Tiger command and control, but they also sowed suspicion in the ranks, sapped morale, and helped to alienate the LTTE from local Tamil populations.

Finally, on the government side, there were critical changes at the tactical level. These included improved artillery use and better army-air force coordination (army-navy joint operations lagged), but the key element was training regular infantry to fight unconventionally behind enemy lines in small four-, eight- and twelve-man teams called "special infantry operations teams" (SIOTs) as a supplement to the SLA's special forces and commandos. The army invested tremendous effort in training and equipping these SIOTs and eventually deployed 1,500 of them so that "the jungles were flooded with small teams."³¹ Infiltrating into the jungles at differing depths for anywhere from a few days to a several weeks at a time, these teams collected intelligence, called in artillery and air strikes, ambushed LTTE patrols, attacked Tiger commanders and generally undermined security in the previously untouched Tiger rear areas. The

28 Author interview in Sri Lanka, November 2009.

29 Senpathi (Keith Noyhar), "Injuring the Invincible: Ripple Effect," *Nation*, 23 December 2007.

30 "Habitat" from G. L. Peiris, "The LTTE in Crisis," *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 6/35, 10 March 2008.

31 Sergei Desilva-Ranasinghe, "Sri Lanka's Experience in Counter-Insurgency Warfare," *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, 35/8, October 2009; Ivan Welch, "Infantry Innovations in Insurgencies: Sri Lanka's Experience," *Infantry*, May-June 2013; author interviews, November 2009.

army was not alone in introducing significant reforms. The SLN also proved itself adaptive and innovative in countering Sea Tiger tactics. Additionally, Admiral Karannagoda established a naval intelligence branch and supplemented the navy's conventional actions with highly successful operations by its elite Special Boat Squadron and Rapid Action Boat Squadrons. These dramatic improvements in the navy, combined with the progressive loss of coastal bases, meant that the number of major maritime engagements dropped from 21 in 2006 to 4 in 2008.³² Indeed, all three services showed themselves to be learning organizations, assessing their own past performances to derive tangible lessons that could be applied to the future.

Tiger's Decline

The Tigers remained a tough, tactically competent, dedicated and often truly fanatical opponent until the very end as attested by the losses suffered by Sri Lanka's security forces. In General Fonseka's words: "It never became easy." As the government's forces were improving, however, the LTTE was declining in capability and losing legitimacy among the people it claimed to champion.³³ The sinking of their arsenal ships was a debilitating blow logistically while devastating casualties among their commanders and veteran cadres in combination with the army's unrelenting, multi-pronged offensives reduced the organization's ability to respond on the battlefield as it had in the past. The Tigers had lost much of their tactical edge, their ability to innovate waned, and they seemed to have become complacent, underestimating the government and believing implicitly in their own propaganda of "invincibility." Filling the ranks became increasingly problematic leading to desperately draconian measures to conscript men, women and children (the latter a long-standing Tiger crime). Many were thrown into battle with nothing resembling a uniform and as little as a few days of "training," while others found themselves forced to dig trenches, ditches and bunkers near the frontlines as the Tigers steadily retreated. Under

32 Channa Wickremesekera, *The Tamil Separatist War in Sri Lanka* (London, 2016), 218.

33 For the LTTE's decline as the principal factor, see: Stephen L. Battle, "Lessons in Legitimacy: The LTTE End-Game of 2007–2009," thesis, Naval Post-Graduate School, June 2010; Peter Stafford Roberts, "The Sri Lankan Insurgency: A Rebalancing of the Orthodox Position," thesis, Brunel University, April 2016; author interviews, November 2009.

such circumstances, the fuzzy line between “civilian” and “combatant” become irredeemably blurred. The magnitude of these problems exploded as the LTTE was forced back into an ever-dwindling enclave and dragged the Tamil populace along human shields. The insurgent’s harsh treatment of its co-ethnics (especially conscripting children), the deepening privation and the undeniable evidence of an impending government victory prompted many to desert or find other ways to evade their imposed “duties” despite the threat of death or punishment of their families.

Beyond Sri Lanka’s shores, the Tigers had managed to isolate themselves internationally. Foreign governments might sympathize with legitimate Tamil grievances, but none wanted to see Sri Lanka broken in two through violent insurrection, particularly when perpetrated by a vicious, militaristic organization like the LTTE. Outside of the small but passionate Tamil diaspora, therefore, there was no global support for “Tamil Eelam,” Prabhakaran’s foundational, nonnegotiable goal. Moreover, the LTTE’s many objectionable characteristics left it few friends (reliance on terrorism, assassination of international leaders, utter intolerance of dissent, cult-of-personality nature, intransigence in negotiations, involvement in international crime, etc.). In the post-9/11 atmosphere, these characteristics made the organization unappealing if not toxic. Some in the Tiger hierarchy perceived the danger as the security forces closed in, but Prabhakaran remained obdurate, refusing all compromise and persisting in the increasingly hopeless military approach to the detriment of political options.³⁴ The prevailing view, likely encouraged by fervent but unrealistic members of the diaspora, continued to favor the “strategy” of creating a humanitarian catastrophe to prompt foreign intervention. As one senior Tiger told European friends: “...just as in Kosovo, if enough civilians died in Sri Lanka, the world would be forced to step in.” Or, in the words of another LTTE member, the organization “had to magnify the humanitarian crisis.”³⁵ “Prisoner of Prabhakaran’s person-

34 Paul Moorcraft, *The Total Destruction of the Tamil Tigers* (Barnsley, 2012), 107; Hashim, 193.

35 Frances Harrison, *Still Counting the Dead* (London, 2012), 62–3; D. B. S. Jeyaraj interview with former LTTE leader “K. P.” (Thambaiya Selvarasa Pathmanathan) at Thuppai’s Blog, “Fashioning a Spectre of Disaster with Aid from Humanitarian Agencies,” 13 April 2014, <https://thuppahis.com/2014/04/13/fashioning-a-spectre-of-disaster-with-aid-from-humanitarian-agencies-tamil-marvels/#more-12285> [July 2026].

ality,”³⁶ what passed for LTTE “strategy,” therefore, devolved into a desperate, delusional hope that the international community would somehow intervene to preserve their leader’s dream of a separate, independent state on the island under his undisputed rule. With this bankrupt strategy, deprived of its logistical links, and rapidly losing veteran leaders and fighters, the LTTE eventually succumbed to the government’s relentless attacks at great cost in lives to its own ranks, to the advancing security forces and to the thousands of helpless Tamil civilians it had corralled into the crucible of its diminishing coastal enclave.³⁷ As a Jaffna professor had surmised nearly two decades earlier “The Tigers’ history, their theoretical vacuum, lack of political creativity, intolerance and fanatical dedication will be the ultimate cause of their own breakup.”³⁸

Concluding Observations

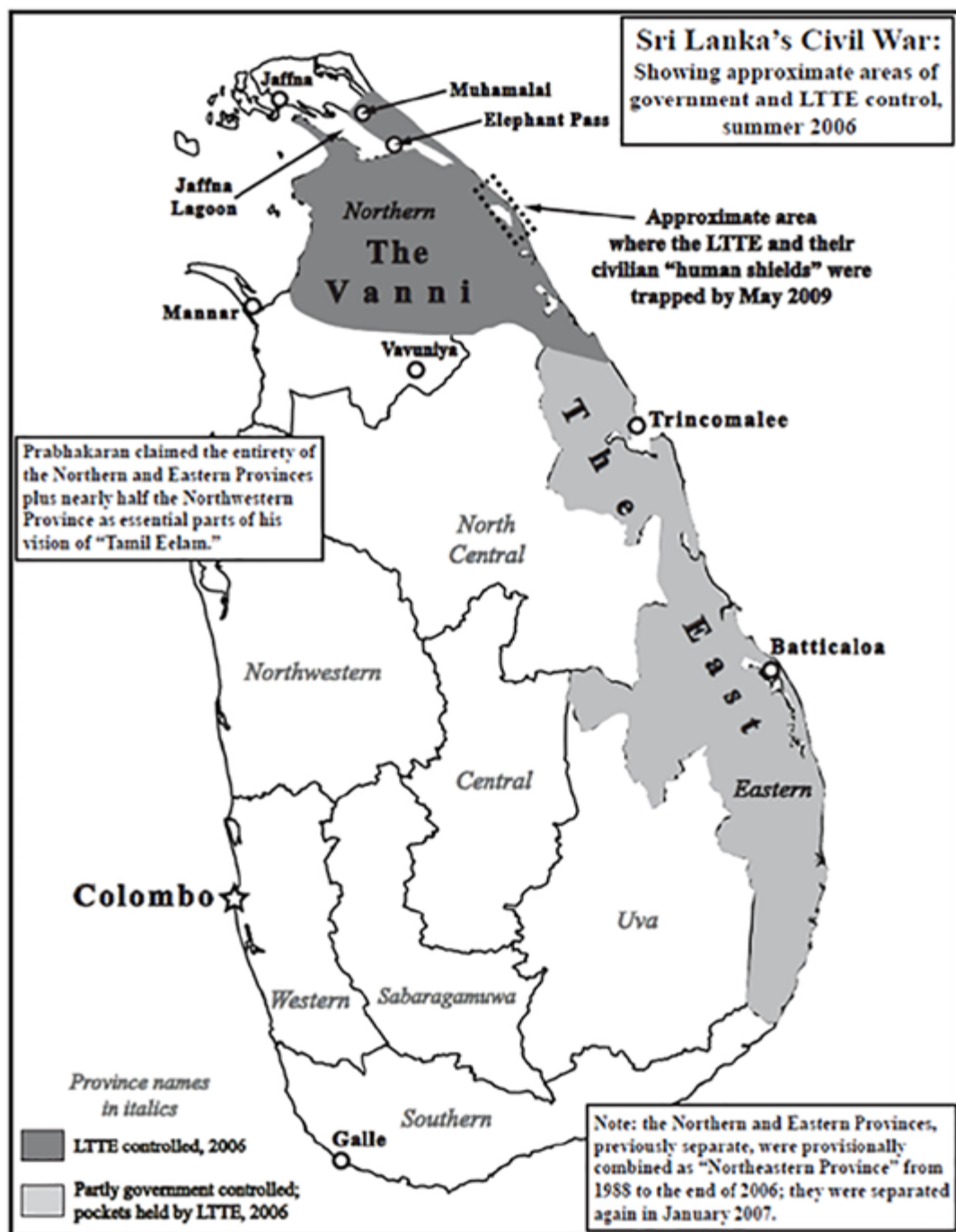
In summary, the government’s victory resulted from dedicated, resilient leadership that weathered setbacks and maintained focus, combined with adequate resources (both new and enhanced), intelligently applied through a comprehensive strategy. The government certainly benefited from the enemy’s weaknesses, but the regime had clearly assembled the formula for military success that likely would have prevailed even if the LTTE had not become somewhat ossified.

Contingency is always in play, and historical outcomes are seldom inevitable. Nonetheless, given how the Sri Lankan Civil War was resolved, one must ask how so many thoughtful and knowledgeable observers, both outside and within Sri Lanka, missed the signals that pointed towards an eventual government victory? From an historiographical perspective, the aversion toward the solidifying Rajapaksa dynasty harbored by some commentators should not be overlooked;

36 M. R. Narayan Swamy, *The Rout of Prabhakaran* (New Delhi, 2024), 61; Jon Lee Anderson, “Death of the Tiger,” *New Yorker*, 17 January 2011.

37 On the horrifying conditions in the collapsing LTTE zone: “Numbers Game,” Harrison (2012); Gordon Weiss, *The Cage* (London, 2011); University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), Special Reports 32 and 34 (10 June and 13 December 2009), <https://www.uthr.lk/special-reports>; SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda, “Crossing the Line,” *Daily Mirror*, 18 May 2017.

38 Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan, Rajani Thiramagama, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka, an Inside Account* (Jaffna, 1992), at <http://www.uthr.org/BP/Content.htm> [April 2012].



this attitude allowed the skeptical to dismiss the regime's pronouncements as braggadocio or propaganda.³⁹ This consideration, however, only applied after 2005 and emphasizing it would ignore nearly three decades of accumulated experience and analysis. More important were two factors. First, Sri Lanka's armed forces *did* have successes during the earlier Eelam Wars, but the glare of the underdog LTTE's victories—what might be called the “advantage of the insurgent”—blinded most observers to government's military achievements. Second, this blindness led many to succumb to the “carefully nurtured image of invincibility” around the LTTE. That is not by any means to suggest that the Tigers were inept, rather to place their competence in a more realistic light.

The presumed impossibility of the government ever “winning the war” in any fashion thus became an undisputed, allegedly authoritative, assumption, one that had important consequences for all concerned. In the first place, there was an obvious impact on policy—in Colombo as well as in foreign capitals. If the Tigers were assumed to be unbeatable, then the only solution was some form of negotiated settlement with the LTTE to the exclusion of other Tamil voices on the island. Policymakers, analysts and others therefore continued to promote the laudable but chimerical goal of a peaceful outcome even though any resolution other than the creation of a separate state on the island was virtually impossible given Prabhakaran's monomania. Second, the LTTE also succumbed to this alluring conviction. That is, they came to believe their own propaganda and lost the ability to make clear-eyed assessments of their own situation. This blindness became a major factor in the organization's downfall. Finally, the fact that so many both inside and outside of Sri Lanka were late in recognizing that the situation was changing fundamentally illustrates the importance of rigorous analysis, especially paying close attention to details in assessing security questions—including at the operational and tactical levels where most of this information was hiding. Annexed to this conclusion, of course, is the foundational importance of military factors: particularly a comprehensive appreciation of military capabilities and options grounded in an objective understanding of the military history of the situation under examination.

39 A corollary is that the legitimate grievances of the Tamil minority led many to ignore or excuse the LTTE's reliance on terrorism and its “the totalitarian predilections ... fascistic disposition” (DeVotta, 1023).

Conclusions

by JEREMY BLACK

The present offers an established variety in the nature of warfare; one that matches situations in the past and doubtless in the future. This variety cuts across the tendency in present discussion not only to see ‘modern warfare’ as a standard form, but also to argue that technology, from drones via hypermissiles to AI, is taking war in the same direction even if the detailed local manifestations may vary.

That stance, seen for example in the techno-centred, indeed defined, *Economist* essay in May 2026,¹ however, is not an approach that adequately links international conflict, as between America and Iran in 2026, to civil warfare, as in Sudan. Drones may be used in each, but the context is far from identical, while the tactical level of usage has operational consequences but does not determine strategy. There are overlaps between types of conflict, as with international powers playing a major role in Sudan while America calls for an uprising in Iran. Yet, there are also differences, and along more than the continuum established by the interactions of changing policies and governments.

In contextual terms, it is apparent that the axes are provided by the increases in two criteria: the number of individual states and that of the global population. The latter provides a measure of pressure, with more people expecting outcomes and willing to use pressure to obtain them. In turn, the number of states means that there are more units within which rebellions and civil wars can occur.

There is no simple ruling between and from these factors. The four most populous states (India, China, America, Indonesia) have avoided rebellions (although there are small-scale ones in India, notably the Maoist (Naxalite) In-

¹ Anon., ‘Modern War,’ *The Economist*, 30 May 2026, pp. 17-22.

surgency, but also in Kashmir and Manipur). This avoidance is despite their populations having surged over the last 65 years. A major sectarian division in India combined with a rise to become the world's most populous state has not led to a civil war comparable to those in neighbouring Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

Yet, resource pressure is clearly a factor in many civil conflicts, and notably so in Africa, where, unlike in the other continents, the most populous state, Nigeria, has had quite a high level of civil war² or at least internal warfare. Resource pressure exposes existing fault lines, political, ethnic, social and religious, with clashes over grazing land, water, jobs or other factors, provided accordingly with energy and numbers. Violence is directed against rival claimants and also against those who presided over the system, and thus benefited from it. This raised echoes of earlier peasant and similar uprisings.³

This socio-environmental model of rebellion and civil warfare has an anthropological dimension and may, as with discussion of grazing rights, for example in Nigeria, appear very dated. However, in practice, such disputes are an aspect of the modern resource-based political itinerary of civil conflict. With Africa having the population with the highest rate of population increase, it is there that this pattern of conflict is most established. To not write about civil warfare at present and in the future without considering Africa would be mistaken.

This might seem a long way from the Ukraine conflict of 2022- and the Taiwan might-be conflict, but they also have elements of civil war for one of the respective sides. As with Nigeria and Biafra, and, later and differently, Sudan and South Sudan, there is on the part of Russia and China a sense that they are dealing with separatist struggles. This sense helps underline the role of the causes of war as helping explain its outbreak, length, nature and determination of success. The last helps in the fixing of outcomes and aftermaths.

That might appear a problematic way of looking at such conflicts if one is a military historian. Nevertheless, reasons/causes deserve as much attention as means. Furthermore, in these and other cases there is a considerable ambiguity of legitimacy over civil wars, rebellions and coups, past, present and future.

More fundamentally, violence is a central aspect of politics in many states,

2 R. Doron, *Biafra: A Military History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2025).

3 J. Firnhaber-Baker, *The Jacquerie of 1358: A French Peasants' Revolt* (Oxford, 2021).

and, as such, part of the hybrid nature of civil conflict. That is possibly the best conceptualisation in political terms. Moreover, this approach to civil conflict captures the extent to which there is a battle for control over people, with this battle taking different forms. This approach also invites due consideration of the hostile response to attacks, as in Iraq from 2003 and Ukraine from 2022, and, potentially, in Taiwan. In the case of Iraq, conquest and resistance were sequential, but in Ukraine there was no conquest. The response helps determine the nature of a conflict and also how it will be viewed, both contemporaneously and subsequently.

The latter is a key element of definition. However, often this element is a matter of rhetorical division arising from the contest at the time and/or the subsequent public history, rather than any particular analysis in what may appear to be objective terms. This issue underlines the difficulty of considering the subject. Aside from definitions, there are also the politics of the discussion of causes, events and consequences.

We may seem here to be a long way from military history or at least from any aspect of it other than the context. Just so, but contexts are crucial determinants not only of causes but also of successes. Indeed, ultimately, there can be a circumventing, with rebellions and civil wars, of some of the standard ‘rules’ of warfare in so far as set by international conflict.

In particular, there is the move away from battle as necessarily the prime stage of conflict. Such a statement can underplay the varied nature of both international and non-international conflict, but the latter does tend to be more hybrid and less battle-oriented than the former. That can entail particular consequences in analysing reasons for success and failure; but, more realistically, there is always a number for both. That will doubtless continue to be the case in the future. This should encourage caution when assessing claims that particular weapons systems have transformed options. In practice, it has always been difficult to maintain authority and wield power. It is simply that the forms of challenge and response both vary and change.

This situation invites attention to how civil wars and rebellions will develop in the future. At one level, there are calls about the prospect of civilisational decline, as with those by Vice-President J.D. Vance and the American State Department in June 2026 when referring to ‘the mass invasion of migrants’ and

arguing that there was a continuance in terms of a definitional opposition to international liberalism and in favour of what President Trump in May 2026 referred to as ‘the central liberties and ancient rights of the Anglo-Saxons’. The 2025 American National Security Strategy referred to Europe as facing the ‘stark prospect of civilisational erasure’ and pledged that America would support ‘patriotic’ parties to prevent a future in which ‘certain NATO members’ will become ‘majority non-European.’

This approach is a variant on the civilisational clashes discussed by Samuel P. Huntington in the 1990s, clashes that go back to earlier ideas of wars of religion as well as to ideological clashes as between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries from the 1790s on to the twentieth century. These span international and domestic, the communal and the family, and do not necessarily match notions of limits. The rhetoric from the Trump administration can be actively misleading, but that does not mean that the idea of a clash of civilisations lacks some basis.

That is very different to the standard approach to rebellions, one that is far more specific in character. The reality, however, is that the historiography is one of longstanding debates about attempts to find commonalities, as with the supposed ‘general crises’ of the mid-seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries. The degree to which there was a shared rhetoric in these and other ‘secular’ cases (as opposed to those that emphasise religious and other ‘ideological’ factors) vary but there are commonalities. So more particularly in the modern age when the Cold War established a pattern of shared interest and encouraged a drive for interventionism.

The latter made/makes it easier to provide weapons, the drone of today being the equivalent of the SAM-7 of the 1970s, and the Kalashnikov of the 1950s. Each weapon can be seen as transformative, which raises questions about the definition of transformations and also about what the future may bring. The greater-ease of manufacturing in the present age, and specifically the ending of dependence on the iron-and-steel stage of industrialisation, makes it easier for non-state actors to produce potent weaponry with the implications for easing rebellion. Although overlapping, civil wars are different in scale, and these make it harder to sustain the necessary requirements. That does not make the nature of conflict clear and there is a continuing degree of uncertainty about the

likely 'result' in military terms, with a corresponding rise in the emphasis on specification of outcome. Yet, there will be a continuing desire to group for the purposes of alliance.

The conclusion of this volume emphasises caution in analysis rather than the appeal of rhetorics of common trends not least alleged transformations in the means of warfare. Those certainly exist. In particular, we no longer fight with spears or bows and arrows. Yet if the last are rephrased as thrusting or firing weapons, or simply seen as relevant at the tactical level, then we have a situation in which 'transformations' are not necessarily 'transformative.' And that would be a scepticism that is appropriate in this important field.

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Rebellions & Civil Wars

All-too-much of the writing on military history looks solely at the warfare between states and underplays the central role of rebellion, and therefore also counter-insurgency, in past, present and, presumably, future. This valuable collection seeks to correct this bias by showing not only the importance of such conflicts but also their variety. In their course, both contextual and contingent factors play major roles. These factors underline the folly of assuming that some simple Social-Science type analysis will work. Instead, it is necessary to grasp not only the centrality of this subject to military history but also the need to see it as protean, at once shaping other aspects of history but also being shaped by them.

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