THE FRONTIERS OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: SETTLERS, ELITES, AND THE
STANDING ARMY IN AMERICA’S INDIAN WARS

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THE FRONTIERS OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY: SETTLERS, ELITES, AND THE STANDING ARMY IN AMERICA’S INDIAN WARS

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ABSTRACT

Much work on U.S. grand strategy focuses on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If the United States did have a grand strategy before that, IR scholars often pay little attention to it, and when they do, they rarely agree on how best to characterize it. I show that federal political elites generally wanted to expand the territorial reach of the United States and its relative power, but they sought to expand while avoiding war with European powers and Native nations alike. I focus on U.S. wars with Native nations to show how domestic conditions created a disjuncture between the principles and practice of this grand strategy. Indeed, in many of America’s so-called Indian Wars, U.S. settlers were the ones to initiate conflict, and they eventually brought federal officials into wars that the elites would have preferred to avoid. I develop an explanation for settler success and failure in doing so. I focus on the ways that settlers’ two faits accomplis—the act of settling on disputed territory without authorization and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations—affected federal decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for military intervention, by causing federal officials to fear that settlers would create their own states or ally with foreign powers, and by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. All of this, moreover, was made possible by the federal government’s commitment to a very small standing army. At times, however, an unfavorable local balance of power and identity-based cleavages between settlers and elites inhibited federal military intervention. To adjudicate between my proposed explanation and plausible alternatives, I identify several observable implications across which
the explanations can be compared, and I examine three least-similar cases—the Northwest Indian War (1790-1795), the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), and Utah’s Black Hawk War (1865-1872). I conduct process tracing in each case, for which I rely on records of Congressional debates, archival documents, and interviews with enrolled members of relevant tribes. I conclude with implications for ongoing debates on U.S. grand strategy and International Relations more broadly.
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Chapter 1

Introduction, Theory, and Methods

There is a large and growing literature on U.S. grand strategy—on its sources and content, on variation therein, and on plausible alternative grand strategies for the United States.1 This literature, however, tends to focus primarily on grand strategy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While this makes some sense given the country’s rise to superpower status during the twentieth century, this perspective omits a significant portion U.S. history to our detriment. In this dissertation, I argue that bringing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the study of U.S. grand strategy can help us to better understand how political elites have articulated grand strategy across time and why elite plans have not always worked in practice. Specifically, I use the history of U.S. wars with Native American groups—some of America’s most frequent, costly conflicts in its first century of independence—to demonstrate how divergences between the general public and political elites can shape the practice of the state’s grand strategy.

Studies of grand strategy—American or otherwise—often begin by providing an overview of definitional debates.2 What is “grand strategy” exactly? Should the scope of the term encompass tools of statecraft beyond the military? Is strategy only “grand” when great powers are formulating it? As Silove (2018, 28) observes, “The method used by most scholars to address these foundational questions is simply to stake a claim one way or another.” I follow Silove in taking an approach that allows for multiple meanings of the term. For Silove (2018, 29), “grand strategy” now has “three distinct meanings. First, scholars use grand strategy to refer to a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals. Second, they employ it to refer to an organizing

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2 See, e.g., Lissner (2018), Martel (2015), and Brands (2014).
principle that is consciously held and used by individuals to guide their decisions. Third, scholars use the term to refer to a pattern in state behavior” (2018, 29). For the purposes of this piece, which focuses on a time period when explicit foreign policy planning was less standardized than it now is in National Security Strategies and similar documents, I will focus on the second and third meanings of grand strategy—principles and practices. That said, I must still clarify the sort of principles and practices to which my analysis pertains. I take a broad view here in adopting Trubowitz’s definition of grand strategy as “the purposeful and planned use of military, economic, and diplomatic means by states to achieve desired foreign policy ends, whether in peacetime or during wartime” (2011, 2). Any such plans and practices will be of relevance to my study.

In an independent United States, expansion across the North American continent often involved settlers attempting to capture the state for their own purposes. In many of America’s so-called Indian Wars, for example, U.S. settlers were the ones to initiate conflict, and they eventually brought federal officials into wars that the latter would have preferred to avoid. In this dissertation, I develop an explanation as to how settlers did so. I argue that the settlers’ two faits accomplis—both the act of settling on disputed territory without authorization and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations—affected federal decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for military intervention, by making non-intervention more costly for federal officials, and by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations.

The settler faits accomplis, moreover, were made possible by an important permissive condition—the lack of a large standing military. While these dynamics pushed policy-makers to intervene in conflicts they sought to avoid, two additional factors sometimes cut against U.S.
intervention—the perceived distribution of power (which was not always in the government’s favor) and identity-based cleavages that sometimes separated settlers from federal elites.

I would limit the scope of my argument to the years from 1783 through 1890, though as I will discuss in the concluding chapter, a study of this period may shed light on later developments as well. Because I am studying relations between settlers and federal elites as they relate to conflict initiation through the lens of early U.S. foreign policy, I begin in 1783 rather than going any further into the past. There were indeed militarized disputes between colonists and Native nations prior to the recognition of U.S. independence, but I do not explore those in depth here because the different actors involved in those conflicts would speak to different research questions. The date of the last Indian War depends on what one counts as such a conflict. The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, which resulted in the death of roughly 300 Northern Lakotas, is frequently described as the last major episode in the Indian Wars despite the casualties being non-combatants and despite the various forms of Native contestation that have manifested since then (Grua 2016). There were, however, intermittent skirmishes with various Native nations for some time after that, and the Battle of Bear Valley in 1918 was the last time U.S. Army personnel engaged a group of armed Native people, though only one Yaqui individual was killed in this “battle” precipitated by cattle theft (Keenan 1997; Treuer 2016).

**Settlers, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Conflict Initiation**

Westward expansion was a defining feature of early U.S. foreign policy. Previous studies on U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy, however, have often ignored this process. Most studies omit this portion of U.S. history entirely and begin in 1898 or 1914 (Layne 2006; Dombrowski and Reich 2019). Even those studies that do address this period generally give only
a brief overview of roughly a century of U.S. history, and they tend to downplay the role of settlers and Native nations (Trubowitz 2011; Miller 2016). Green (2019, 24), for example, notes in describing early U.S. interest in trade with Asia that, “The Founders’ vision of an Empire of Liberty from coast to coast became intertwined with the more distant dream of a commercial empire in the Pacific.” Nonetheless, even when such works in this literature discuss the importance of U.S. expansion, they tend to locate the substance of grand strategy in relations primarily with European states, thereby leaving Native nations out of the story.

In addition to writing Native nations out of stories of U.S. grand strategy, IR scholars have also overlooked the role of settlers in shaping early U.S. foreign policy. This may be in part because International Relations (IR) scholars have typically assumed that the making of U.S. foreign policy is relatively insulated from public pressures. For one reason or another—whether, e.g., the seemingly abstract nature of foreign policy when compared to “pocketbook issues” or the extent of executive powers in foreign policy—public opinion is believed to have less weight in the calculations of policy-makers in foreign policy than it does in other issue areas.3

In contrast with IR scholarship that has largely ignored the means of U.S. expansion, historians and Indigenous Studies scholars have often emphasized the genocidal nature of early U.S. foreign policy (Stannard 1992; Blackhawk 2006). Given that writing from those other disciplines would suggest that there was plenty to study in early U.S. foreign policy, IR’s inattention to early U.S. history seems arbitrary and perhaps a product of enduring myths about American exceptionalism (Kakel 2019). The puzzling phenomenon that I examine—the process by which settlers brought elites into wars they wanted to avoid—thus undermines IR’s

3 See, e.g., Baum and Potter (2015, 2), which summarizes the conventional wisdom as follows: “Nowhere is the gap between elected representatives and the public larger than in the ‘high politics’ of international affairs, particularly in matters of war and peace.”
assumptions about early U.S. foreign policy and draws our attention to the ways in which civilians can shape the practice of grand strategy beyond simply voting for or against leaders. Moreover, it disaggregates the unitary American state and highlights the shared desire for expansion among settlers and elites as well as the simultaneous disagreements on how expansion ought to proceed. To the extent that U.S. grand strategy was indeed catastrophic for Native nations, as I will show, the push to remove Native populations sooner rather than later often came from settlers who had no patience for federal elite plans to “civilize” those populations (Hine and Faragher 2007, 34-35, 47-48; Wilm 2016).

Similarly, previous studies on conflict initiation have typically focused on interstate wars or civil wars involving dueling claimants to legitimate rule at the expense of conflicts involving “non-state” actors such as indigenous peoples and settlers or militias (Levy 1998; Walter 2009). Despite global patterns of settler colonialism, a process often bound up with the expansion of empire, IR scholarship has at times focused on actors such colonial elites and intermediaries without typically focusing specifically on the role of settlers in state expansion and conflict initiation (MacDonald 2014; Barnhart 2016; Grynaviski 2018). Native nations similarly receive scarce attention in IR, perhaps because they are taken to be entities lacking the sort of sovereignty that makes Westphalian nation-states deserving of study (Ferguson 2016). But as historically-oriented literature in IR has shown, non-state political forms with varying ways of claiming sovereignty have been important in shaping the trajectory of world politics since at least the Medieval period (Spruyt 1994; Blaydes and Paik 2016; Grzymala-Busse 2020; Lopez 2020).

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4 As noted in Carvalho et al. (2011), however, even Western European states did not become “Westphalian” immediately upon signing the treaties associated with the Peace of Westphalia.

5 A useful forum on this point (Lopez et al., 2018) highlights varying conceptions of sovereignty and the related times at which one could plausibly claim that some political actor possessed sovereignty.
By focusing on patterns of settler-Native disputes, I bring to the foreground actors that have often been overlooked in scholarship of U.S. Foreign Policy and IR.

Even if there were violent disputes between the U.S. and Native nations, one might still question whether this is properly considered an issue of U.S. foreign policy—or whether anyone at the time thought of it as foreign policy. Indeed, to the extent that political scientists in the United States have studied U.S. relations with Native nations, this work has largely been confined to studies of American Politics and Political Theory.6 From the early colonial period until well into the nineteenth century, however, private citizens and the American government alike often treated Native nations as distinct (if not always independent) peoples (Schultz 1972; Saler 2015). The federal government formed treaties with Native nations until 1871 and made frequent use of military force in interactions with them both before and after its own independence (Prucha 1994).7 Congress delegated relations with Native nations to the Department of War in 1789, and this became a more formal arrangement when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was created and placed in the same department in 1824.8 Finally, until 1924, Native individuals as a class were not eligible for U.S. citizenship, and the federal government still characterizes relations with federally recognized tribes as government-to-government relationships (Deloria, Jr. and Wilkins 1999). Such relations, I argue, should indeed be studied as international relations, especially when discussing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

6 For recent examples, see, e.g., Evans (2011), Martens (2016), and Orr (2017).
7 See also: Drake (1999) and Deloria, Jr. and Wilkins (1999).
8 Moreover, both Secretary of War J. M. Schofield and the Indian Peace Commission, a small group established by Congress to negotiate peace treaties with western tribes, issued public reports in 1868 to recommend that the Bureau of Indian Affairs be returned to the War Department. (Prucha 2000, 72).
To further underscore this last point, militarized disputes between the U.S. and Native nations constituted a significant, costly experience for early U.S. policy-makers. The “Indian Wars” that the U.S. participated in after independence varied in the extent of federal involvement, casualties, and expenditures. That said, “wars against Native Americans were the most common kind of conflict involving the United States. These were costly affairs…and were a primary American security concern” (Grynaviski 2018, 48). Roughly 50 conflicts between 1783 and 1890 were considered serious enough to be called “wars,” and these conflicts—not to mention civil administration of Indian Affairs and veterans’ benefits—were costly. As reported in an appendix to the 1890 U.S. Census, military spending between March 1789 and June 1890 totaled $4,725,521,495; the Census Bureau attributed about 17% (or $807,073,658) to the Indian Wars (Census Bureau 1890, 644). I will return to this document when describing what I count as a war.

The Argument

My argument begins with two premises or principles that defined early U.S. grand strategy. First, settlers and political elites alike generally saw territorial expansion as the proper course of action for the United States. In hindsight, it may appear obvious that the desire for expansion was widespread across U.S. classes, but this premise is still the subject of scholarly

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9 I draw the estimate of 50 wars from government and secondary sources, including the following: Census Bureau (1890), Keenan (1997), McDermott (1998), and Treuer (2016). I am not concerned with casualty thresholds; I believe it is sufficient for the belligerents involved to have understood themselves to be taking part in wars. In some cases, as in the Black Hawk War of 1832, policy-makers debated whether a given conflict should be called a war. See, e.g., Calhoun (1835, 476). Note that this is not the same conflict as Utah’s later Black Hawk War of 1865-72.
debate. However, both before and after U.S. independence, political elites saw and articulated expansion as the natural and appropriate future of the United States.

To briefly survey expansionist sentiments among elites, Benjamin Franklin authored a 1751 pamphlet, “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,” in which he predicted that U.S. population growth would naturally lead to westward expansion—a good thing in Franklin’s estimation (Dahl 2018, 26-27). Similarly, George Washington believed that a well-managed process of Western settlement could be lucrative so long as the government worked to join Western and Eastern markets. On October 4, 1784, at the end of a trip that took him through Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, Washington wrote in his diary that, “[In order] to fix the trade of the Western country to our markets…the way is plain. …It is to open a wide door, and make smooth a way for the produce of that country to pass to our markets” (1784, 67). A contemporary of Washington, Thomas Jefferson, was even more explicit when writing to then-Virginia Governor James Monroe in November 1801. Still in the first year of his presidency, Jefferson wrote that, “It is impossible not to look forward to distant times when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent” (1801, 420). As one recent history summarizes the elite consensus of the day, “Expansion was central to America’s political identity as a unique experiment in republican liberty” (Ostler 2019, 85).

Anderson (n.d.), for example, characterizes U.S. expansion as “inadvertent”. In a manner similar to my emphasis on settler-driven conflict initiation, he makes the case that settlers pushed policy-makers to expand into areas where they would not otherwise have done so. While I agree on the importance of settlers in bringing elites into conflicts with both Native nations and European powers alike (in, e.g., Spanish Florida), I am less inclined to describe U.S. expansion as inadvertent for reasons I describe in the main text.
It was not only political elites who saw expansion in the future for the U.S. Sentiments such as those articulated by the elites described above spurred settlers westward as well. Both before and after U.S. independence, Anglo-American settlers saw the lands to the west as theirs for the taking. This settlement became sufficiently problematic that in 1763, eager to avoid territorial disputes that might trigger a repeat of the French and Indian War, the British Crown banned settlers from squatting on or purchasing Native lands west of the Appalachian Mountains (Frymer 2017, 43). Likewise, the Crown increased taxes on the colonists and sought to more reliably enforce its tax laws in order to make the fur trade and smuggling—the core of the frontier economy—less profitable (Hixson 2008, 34; Andreas 2013, 29-44). Such actions gave Anglo-American settlers all the more reason to support a rebellion, and once the U.S. had won its independence, population growth and immigration rebounded from war-time declines, which yielded a dramatic acceleration in westward settlement that would be sustained for decades (Kluger 2007, 185).

Second, despite their desire for territorial expansion, political elites in the original thirteen colonies generally wanted to avoid war with Native nations. This may seem contradictory, but private and public statements alike support this interpretation of elite intentions. Policy-makers differed in their justifications for this approach—some thought it a matter of justice; some cited the cost of military engagements. Regardless of their reasons, it was indeed the case that political elites often saw themselves as trying to manage a process of controlled expansion, a term that I find to be a fitting description of early U.S. grand strategy. Indeed, George Washington structured much of early U.S. “Indian affairs” policy by articulating

11 For general sources on the balance between elite desires to expand and to avoid militarized conflict with Native Nations, see, e.g., Banner (2005, 26-29, 114-115), Rockwell (2010, 23-25), and Guyatt (2016, 48-60).
an early mandate to expand without initiating violent conflicts. In a letter that Washington wrote to Congressman James Duane in 1783, he summarized his position as follows: “In a word there is nothing to be obtained by an Indian War but the Soil they live on and this can be had by purchase at less expense, and without that bloodshed, and those distresses which helpless Women and Children are made partakers of in all kinds of disputes with them.”

Duane, a New York delegate to the Confederation Congress and the Chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, presented the Congress with a report based largely on Washington’s lengthy letter, and this report would be the Congress’s primary statement of its position on Indian Affairs for decades. Again, Ostler (2019, 86) succinctly summarizes the conundrum: “While all Americans agreed they were entitled to Indian lands, they differed about how these lands should be acquired.” Washington himself would struggle and ultimately fail to achieve expansion without war, a process that I will explore in a case study of the Northwest Indian War (1790-95). But future presidents would continue to pursue expansion with a strong preference for doing so by purchase. As Stephanson (1995, 23) characterizes the view of policy-makers in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase, “Henceforth, purchase would indeed become the preferred and morally correct American way of expansion. Even when adding territory through war, the United States would often insist on paying something.”

Elites had their own theories as to what—short of military force—would best ensure peace amidst expansion. They tried financial incentives such as inducements through a federal licensing system for trade between U.S. persons and Native nations as well as a “depredation claims” process that sought to disincentivize reprisals by reimbursing settlers and Native

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individuals whose property was damaged by those on the other side (Skogen 1996). They also tried at times to “civilize” Native nations in an effort to foster a shared identity that could dampen conflict and encourage cooperation Prucha (2000, 29, 59, 81). This civilizing effort often manifested in treaty clauses that guaranteed U.S. agricultural assistance to Native nations; from the perspective of U.S. elites, turning these populations into patriarchal agrarian societies would civilize them in a way that would make friendlier coexistence possible, but it would also have the positive side effect of allowing Native nations to live on much smaller parcels of land (Lee 2019, 213-215). Such programs and policies, however, all proved costly and ineffective while settlers poured into the West (Flint 1833, 8).

The Practice of Early U.S. Grand Strategy

Despite the principles of early U.S. grand strategy emphasizing a desire for expansion while avoiding wars with Native nations, the U.S. nonetheless found itself in such wars quite frequently—as noted above, it fought in 50 such wars in roughly the first 100 years of its independence. This dissertation focuses on federal intervention in settler conflicts with Native nations. That is, I am interested in cases in which settlers initiated violent conflicts with Native nations and in which the federal government had to choose whether to intervene. What is it in

14 I cite Flint for his description of settler emigration patterns: “In 1790 the population of this [Ohio] valley, exclusive of the country west of the Mississippi and of Florida, which were not then within our territorial limits, was estimated by enumeration, at little more than one hundred thousand. In 1800 it was something short of three hundred and eighty thousand. In 1810 it was short of one million. In 1820, including the population west of the Mississippi, rating the population of Florida at twenty thousand, and that of the parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania included in this valley at three hundred thousand. The present population may be rated at four millions.”
these cases that affected federal intervention decisions? Studying this outcome and the process leading to such decisions entails focusing on multiple sets of actors, including settlers themselves, local and state officials, federal elites such as presidents and secretaries of war, and Native nations that often had relatively decentralized political structures. That is, the outcome was shaped by a complex concatenation of factors. These factors led to a divergence between the principles and practice of early U.S. grand strategy.

**Explaining the Outcome of Interest**

The decision of whether to authorize federal intervention into settler-led conflicts with Native Nations was the product of the interaction between a number of factors, but the most consequential way for settlers to garner federal assistance was for them to simply initiate conflict after seizing territory. This two-fold *fait accompli* of settling on land and initiating violent conflict with Native nations who claimed that same land as their own or, e.g., as their hunting ground, had multiple effects that combined to push federal officials toward military intervention. I will describe some of the motivations of different groups of settlers in each of the case studies, but to borrow one historian’s very broadly applicable statement here, “The dominant motive for moving West was improvement and opportunity, not injury to others. Few white Americans went West intending to ruin the natives [sic] and despoil the continent. …The ends abundantly justified the means; personal interest in the acquisition of property coincided

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15 Indeed, Adler (2013) establishes that on matters of war, presidents were quite powerful vis-à-vis Congress in the early republic.
16 Relatedly, recent literature has examined the *fait accompli* and the way states use it in world politics (Tarar 2016; Altman 2017). I add to this literature by showing how non-state actors can make use of this tactic.
with national interest in the acquisition of territory, and those interests overlapped in turn with the mission to extend the domain of Christian civilization” (Limerick 1987, 36).

To elaborate on the ways that these settler *faits accompli* affected U.S. decisions on military intervention in disputes with Native nations, first, settler actions put pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for military intervention. Land speculation has been defined as “an economic activity which included, at one extreme, land purchases which involved great risk and the possibility of large profit and, at the other extreme, land purchases of limited risk and smaller but more certain profits” (Haeger 1981, 75). That is, the precise approach of different speculators varied, but it always involved the purchase of land with the goal of resale at a profit. In the American context, land speculation dates to at least the 1730s on the western Connecticut frontier, an area in which settlers often doubled as speculators (Limerick 1987, 68). More broadly, settlers helped to establish that there was widespread demand for territory that the U.S. had not yet claimed or that the U.S. still held as the public domain. The speculator is an important figure in the history of U.S. expansion, but speculation would not have been a very profitable venture if not for settlers, real and anticipated. Speculators, as one historian puts it, “were attempting to anticipate settlers' needs,” (Gates 1942, 321), though others caution that the financial rewards varied widely: “the speculative losses of some real-estate plungers were canceled by the speculative gains of others” (Bogue and Bogue 1957, 24). Regardless of actual profitability, the belief that land speculation could be lucrative sufficed to encourage the practice (Murtazashvili 2013, 67, n.6). This actual and presumed settler demand helped to create an additional class of people beyond the settlers—that is, speculators, many of whom were relatively wealthy and well-connected—who had an interest in rapid U.S. expansion.
When Native nations resisted settler expansion, speculators often felt that lobbying for federal military intervention was the best way to protect their investments (Shannon 1991, 407).

Settlers similarly put pressure on local elites to lobby federal officials for intervention by settling on disputed territory and initiating conflicts with Native nations intervention. Settlers typically believed that they had perfectly fair claims to the lands they occupied, but the federal government was often skeptical of such claims. As noted above, federal officials generally sought a more controlled process of expansion. Settlers thus relied on intermediaries to make the case for federal intervention in the militarized disputes that settlers started (Wilm 2017). While the pressure on speculators was more often indirect, settlers often directly appealed to these local officials, whether administrators of city, county, state, or territorial offices, most of whom had good reason to support settler requests for federal military intervention. Supporting such requests was a good way for office-holders to retain popular support given the widespread view that settlers were appropriately serving to advance U.S. expansion, as was calling for federal intervention instead of pressing local militia men into service.

Second, settler *faits accomplis* made federal officials perceive non-intervention as increasingly costly in some cases. In short, as low-level conflict between settlers and Native nations dragged on, political elites came to fear that settlers might want to pursue independence or alliance with a foreign power if the federal government did not intervene. In such cases, federal officials sometimes saw military intervention as a useful way to signal to those on the frontier that federal elites did indeed want them to remain Americans and that elites could offer settlers reason to remain in the Union. These fears, as we will see in Chapter 2, were especially prominent in the earliest days of U.S. union.
Third, settler *faits accomplis* pushed federal officials toward war by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. That is, settler land seizures and violence gave Native nations good reason to doubt the federal government’s ability to keep the promises it made in treaty negotiations. In so doing, settlers made some Native nations—or groups within such nations—less likely to agree to bargains or to come to the bargaining table in the first place. Once confronted with apparently untrusting peoples, the federal and territorial (civilian and military) officials that U.S. decision-makers sent to treaty talks interpreted well-founded Native distrust as a determination on their part to make war. Upon learning from such interlocutors that Native nations were reportedly disinclined toward peace, federal elites frequently determined that the proper way to protect settlers and deter further conflict was with a show of military force.

**A Permissive Condition**

One significant permissive condition that gave settlers outsized influence in the initiation of conflicts with Native nations, I argue, was political elites’ long-time refusal to create a large standing army. As just noted, the civilian policy-maker often assumed a display of sufficient military force (without the actual use of violence) would suffice to impress upon Native nations that a settlement was preferable to war. Many early political elites, however, thought that the lack of a large standing army was only appropriate for a (relatively) liberal democracy. I argue that this absence—whatever its salutary effects on U.S. civic life—also gave settlers outsized power vis-à-vis the federal government in relations with Native nations. Specifically, the lack of a large

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17 For various versions of this debate, including its British predecessors, see, e.g., Schwoerer (1974), Shalhope (1982), and Martin (2006).
standing army gave settlers more opportunity to provoke conflict in up to four different ways. First, political elites lacked the ability to prevent widespread settlement in disputed territory. Second, political elites also lacked the ability to deter settler attacks on Native nations and vice versa. Third, political elites often lacked the ability to reliably and accurately assess the intentions and capabilities of Native nations groups. Fourth, the lack of a large standing army meant that settlers often relied on local militias as a first line of defense. Individuals in these militias—often drawn from settler communities—would have more personal interest in initiating conflict and seizing land than professionalized soldiers would have had.

While U.S. political elites have since come to support a large defense establishment, this development only occurred well after the United States “closed” the frontier in what is now the contiguous United States. For the entirety of the time the U.S. was expanding across the continent and making new territorial claims, U.S. political elites were seeking to empower militias while keeping the standing army relatively small (Whisker 1999, 12-14). It is telling, for example, that the ratio of U.S. military personnel to total population remained quite low throughout the period from 1783 to 1890; brief surges in military personnel during major wars quickly gave way to the traditionally small standing army after the fact. Absent a larger military that could enforce federal directives designed to keep settlers and Native nations apart, “Presidential policies of restraint carried only so much weight. ...State militias and citizen-

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18 On this point, see, e.g., Richter (2001, 224-228) and Agnew (1980, 3-10, 22-25).
19 After the Civil War, as Whisker (1999, 338) notes, the militia system began its decline, though the National Guard that arose in its place would not be crafted until the early twentieth century.
20 This ratio stood at .031% in 1790; conflicts such as the War of 1812 helped boost this number to .093% by 1835, but it was only at .089% in 1875. Momentary spikes for the Mexican-American War and, more notably, the Civil War, were followed by drastic reductions in military personnel. I draw this data from Singer (1987).
soldiers acted with substantial autonomy, even to the extent of ignoring presidential proclamations on Indian Policy” (Fisher 2013, 20).

**Inhibiting Factors**

I conclude this section by discussing factors that, unlike the *faits accomplis* of settlers and their effects on the political system, discouraged federal intervention in settler-driven conflicts with Native nations. I identify two factors that often gave federal officials pause when considering using military force to aid settlers. First, federal officials generally tried to determine whether the distribution of power would be in the government’s favor based on assessments of Native nations’ fighting forces compared to potential combinations of militia men and federal troops. Although such assessments were often skewed by racialized conceptions of “primitive” Native military techniques, some federal officials learned not to underestimate Native nations. The perceived local distribution of power could thus be an inhibiting factor for political elites.

Second, intervention decisions accounted for settler identities. It was typically the case that federal officials saw frontier settlers as less civilized than Eastern city folk (Saler 2015, 22). But settlers and intermediary officials often explicitly made the case to federal officials that military assistance was warranted given that settlers were regular, even ideal Protestant Americans dedicated to improving the land and expanding the boundaries of the state—something that they often claimed was in line with God’s clear intention for Americans to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth (Wilm 2017). On rare occasions, however, settlers could not so credibly claim a shared identity with elites, and such cleavages cut against federal intervention. For example, both of these factors—the distribution of power and identity cleavages—cut against federal intervention in Utah’s Black Hawk War (1865-72), in which
greatly belated federal intervention aimed less at assisting settlers than it did at asserting U.S. control over the territory’s Mormon community.

**Methods**

I frame this dissertation with the puzzle noted above—what explains the ability of settlers to get federal officials to intervene in militarized disputes with Native nations that the elites preferred to avoid? The question I seek to answer thus takes the form, “What Xs explain Y for one or more specific cases,” and this “causes-of-effects” approach leads me to the method of process tracing (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 43). I thus trace the process by which such wars occurred in order to adjudicate between rival explanations. The notion of “process tracing,” as Bennett and Checkel (2015, 7) outline, entails “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purpose of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case.” The bulk of the empirical work here will thus focus on within-case analysis rather than, e.g., the sort of cross-case comparison amenable to statistical modeling.

This dissertation focuses primarily on three case studies. First, I examine the Northwest Indian War (1790-95). I then compare this with the cases of the Second Seminole War (1835-42) and the aforementioned Black Hawk War of 1865-72 (which is not to be confused with an earlier, unrelated conflict involving different Native and settler populations known as the Black Hawk War that took place in 1832). These dates come with the caveat that, “Only some of the Indian wars involved pitched battles, ascribable combatants, identifiable outcomes, and obvious start and finish dates” (Spirling 2012, 91). Some, for example, put the starting date of the Northwest Indian War as early as 1785 or 1786. I opt for 1790 as this is when Washington orders the first major U.S. military offensive after years of low-intensity conflict involving settlers.
casualties, tribes involved, and political leadership—that is, using a “least similar” case design (George and Bennett 2005, 82-83)—will allow me to better compare my argument with plausible alternative explanations. I outline some of the key aspects of the cases below in Table 1.

To further discuss the relevant universe of cases, there are many instances of militarized conflict between Indigenous peoples of the Americas and settler groups. A working paper that aims to produce a dataset of such conflicts in Canada, the United States, and Mexico, for example, identifies 136 conflicts of at least twenty battle-related deaths since 1500, though the author notes the likelihood that this is a low estimate (Urlacher 2020, 3, 11). By contrast, Friedman (2014) surveys all military engagements (with no casualty threshold) involving the United States and Native nations between 1776 and 1890, and he compiles a dataset of 2,537 “separate engagements” that yielded 25,643 Native and 10,476 U.S. casualties. Armed with this dataset, Friedman (2014) uses power laws to estimate how many engagements and casualties are missing from the existing records, and his models produce estimates of 16,678 unobserved engagements, 27,718 unobserved Native casualties, and 1,413 unobserved U.S. casualties. Many of these casualties, however, were inflicted in engagements that neither IR scholars nor the participants themselves likely would have described as wars. I am interested primarily in those conflicts involving the United States that participants understood to be wars, and although Urlacher’s twenty-death threshold strikes me as reasonable, especially given the often small populations of Native communities, I do not rule out conflicts below that threshold.

To provide an example of how I will examine each case, in studying the origins of the Northwest Indian War in Chapter 2, process tracing entails identifying “a configuration of

For facts such as casualty numbers, I rely on secondary sources, including Sword (1985), Mahon (1991 [1967]), and Greene (1993), as well as Census Bureau (1890, 638).
densely linked causal factors,” factors that I have already outlined above (Blatter and Blume 2008, 29). I collect data on relevant sequences of events and focus on within-case analysis to identify plausibly causal factors and the ways in which they interact (Waldner 2012). I collect this data from both primary sources where those are available and, when necessary, secondary sources.

Given that policy-makers have at times used prior research on Native nations to legitimize their marginalization in the U.S. political system, I seek to ensure that this research cannot be used for such purposes (Deloria 1988 [1969], 78-100; Pevar 2012, 2-3). In assessing the cases, I thus rely in part on secondary sources, but I put a premium on primary sources, including archival documents and interviews with members of relevant federally recognized tribes. When using secondary sources, I seek to ensure that their claims rely on verifiable evidence in primary sources. The interviews serve as a source of data in their own right but also as a check on the biases of the documentary sources I have been able to attain, most of which were written by U.S. officials and settlers. It is true that, “During the early years of white-Indian contact, oral transmission of knowledge faced overwhelming disruption” (Trimble, Sommer, and Quinlan 2008, 16). This orally transmitted knowledge, just as with writing, will thus be an imperfect record of the past, but that does not provide any disincentive to determine if the stories in both media align.

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23 I use the following secondary sources for historical data on settlements, military postings, and Native nation populations: Lavin et al. (2011), Waldman (2009), Bradford (2003), Carnes et al. (1996), and Fernald et al. (1992). I received approval from the Georgetown University Institutional Review Board (IRB study number: 2018-0630) to make audio recordings of the interviews, which I did. I asked each person how they would like to be identified if cited, and I rely on those descriptions here.
Unfortunately (but understandably), there are some tribes from which I have been unable to interview anyone to date. In conducting research on the Northwest Indian War, for example, I contacted governmental bodies of multiple tribes involved in that conflict. The Cultural Resources Office of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma directed me to two historians who have worked with the tribe and who agreed to have an off-the-record conversation, but I was unable to contact any tribe officials or members for any on-the-record interviews. By contrast, I visited the Shawnee Tribe Cultural Center in Miami, Oklahoma from May 30 to June 2, 2019 to conduct interviews that the staff members of the center arranged and to examine their archival materials. Even there (and in subsequent correspondence with some individuals I met there), I was only able to interview six individuals. Moreover, all six individuals were men—the only woman to whom I was introduced by way of “snowball sampling” (Cohen and Arieli 2011) ultimately decided not to go forward with an interview; she expressed doubt that her knowledge of the relevant history would be sufficiently helpful. Some of these men I interviewed are (or were) affiliated with the tribe’s government; others are enrolled tribe members but otherwise private citizens. Their statements, while informative, ought not to be taken as representative of anything other than their individual views—like all other polities, tribes are not monoliths. I cite some but not all of these interviews in the second chapter, but even those that I do not cite were helpful in providing background knowledge and in helping to establish the face validity of my proposed

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24 The Miami nation played a significant role in the Northwest Indian War—to the extent that the war is sometimes referred to as “Little Turtle’s War” after a Miami leader, Mishikinakwa, or Little Turtle. While the Shawnee appear to have been the most significant Native nation involved in the war as far as the fighting forces go, some of the early Native victories are indeed attributable to Mishikinakwa (Carter 1987, 38).

25 Orr (2017) is especially effective in illustrating current intra-tribal divisions.
mechanisms (Adcock and Collier 2001).26 I provide further detail on these interviews in the appendix.27

While I was able to conduct at least some interviews for the first case study, I was not able to conduct interviews for the latter two case studies—those on the Second Seminole War and Utah’s Black Hawk War. The general practice in human subjects research involving Native nations—a norm that has come especially from Indigenous Studies—is to abide by the relevant tribal government’s decision on interviews and other such methods of data collection.28 That is, it would be possible but not advisable for me to independently contact tribe members to solicit interviews. I contacted the Seminole tribe’s Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum and was able to make a brief trip there from July 31 through August 2 of 2018 to look through their archives. I was not able to conduct interviews, but I did receive permission to listen to several recorded oral histories (though I was unable to listen to an undefined quantity that are available to tribe members only).

However, when individuals spoke about the Second Seminole War in those recordings, they generally did so briefly; the only extended discussion of the war that I reviewed focused on arms used by Seminole warriors.29 This was helpful in broadening my own understanding of this

26 Adcock and Collier (2001, 538) prefer not to use the term “face validity” as there is no definitional agreement on what this means, but they outline two basic questions that I have in mind here: “First, are key elements omitted from the indicator? Second, are inappropriate elements included in the indicator?”
27 I thank Marnie Leist, Director of the Shawnee Cultural Center, for her willingness to put me in contact with potential interviewees. The Shawnee, it is worth noting before getting to the Northwest Indian War in which they were involved, comprised one of the key players in that war. However, not all Shawnee individuals were involved. As Sugden (2000, 9) notes, “Authority of any kind was limited among the Shawnee, for they were a liberal and egalitarian people who generally reserved the right to make decisions to individuals.”
28 Perhaps more than any single work, Deloria (1988 [1969]) has been a chastening influence on scholarly practices of data collection among Native nations.
29 I thank Mary Beth Rosebrough and Justin Giles of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum for their assistance in locating those oral histories as well as various documentary sources of relevance to this project.
conflict and its place in Seminole narratives, but it did not speak much to the causal mechanisms I examine. Among the tribes involved in Utah’s Black Hawk War, I focused on soliciting assistance from the primary tribes involved, now the Ute Tribe and the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, but I did not receive any response, and I thus did not conduct any field work in Utah. The documentary sources that I use in that case should suffice to answer the question I pose, but my findings in Chapter 4 have not been informed by tribe members to the same extent as those in Chapters 2 and 3.
Table 1. Case Summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>U.S. President at War Initiation</th>
<th>U.S. Real GDP per capita in year of Initiation(^{30})</th>
<th>Ratio of U.S. Military Population to U.S. Total Population in year of Initiation(^{31})</th>
<th>U.S. Casualties(^{32})</th>
<th>Native Casualties (approx.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Indian War</td>
<td>1790-95</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>$1107.32</td>
<td>.031%</td>
<td>814 deaths</td>
<td>120 deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Seminole War</td>
<td>1835-42</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>$2,047.65</td>
<td>.093%</td>
<td>1,590 deaths</td>
<td>540 deaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hawk War</td>
<td>1865-72</td>
<td>Johnson(^{33})</td>
<td>$3,394.00</td>
<td>2.98%(^{34})</td>
<td>75 deaths(^{35})</td>
<td>300 deaths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{30}\) In FY 2012 dollars (Johnston and Williamson 2018).

\(^{31}\) For the year 1790, which the Correlates of War national capabilities dataset (Singer 1987) does not include, I substitute census data (Census Bureau, 2017) on total population (3,929,214), and I set the number of military personnel at 1,216 (McDermott 1998, 9).

\(^{32}\) I include deaths of combatants even if they died of, e.g., disease rather than being killed in action. I include U.S. Army and militia soldiers alike, but I do not include civilian deaths, about which historical records offer little certainty. For similar reasons, I do not list the number of wounded combatants.

\(^{33}\) Here I list Johnson as the U.S. President at war initiation because the federal government did not take any military action until 1868. The initial incident that set off this long-running conflict between settlers and Utes (though other tribes became involved as well) occurred on April 8, 1865, a week before Johnson’s predecessor, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated. It was not until the Grant presidency, however, that federal officials became more directly involved in this conflict.

\(^{34}\) This especially high number is due to the Civil War. A rapid draw-down, however, would see the military-to-total-population ratio reduced to about 0.2% by 1866.

\(^{35}\) It is worth noting here—given the apparently light settler casualties—that many Native raids were aimed at stealing or driving off livestock rather than killing settlers.
Alternative Explanations and Observable Implications

I consider two alternative explanations here. First, one might claim that where settlers succeeded in drawing federal officials into militarized disputes, it was the lack of the early U.S. republic’s state capacity that prevented elites from more robustly deterring conflict and enforcing agreements that they made with Native nations.36 Importantly, this first alternative puts an emphasis on material constraints rather than ideological commitments when explaining the lack of a large standing army. Second, one might suggest that this phenomenon is not actually as puzzling as I suggest—despite public hand-wringing, U.S. presidents were not truly hesitant to use military force against Native nations and instead saw settler provocations as useful opportunities to seize land. (One might push this further and suggest that elites incentivized settler provocations). That is, elites were at best ambivalent about whether expansion proceeded violently.37 To adjudicate between my proposed explanation and the two plausible alternatives, I identify several observable implications across which the explanations can be compared. As Musgrave and Nexon (2018, 15) put it, “In its Bayesian reformulation, process tracing focuses on evaluating the likelihood that given evidence would be observed if one theoretical explanation were true compared to others,” and I offer such evaluations at the end of each empirical chapter when addressing alternative explanations.38

If the effects of settler faits accomplis outlined above best explain settlers’ ability to bring political elites into militarized disputes with Native nations, we would expect to see the following: (1) costly, protracted elite attempts at non-violent territorial acquisition; (2) costly

37 For arguments along these lines, see, e.g., Hixson (2013), Anderson and Hill (2004), and Stannard (1992).
38 Here Musgrave and Nexon cite Bennett and Checkel (2014).
elite punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with strict instructions and rules of engagement designed to avoid conflict initiation; (4) elites not providing incentives for settlement on disputed territory (and/or actively disincentivizing such settlement); (5) settlers initiating violent conflict with Native nations prior to U.S. military intervention; (6) elite support for only a small standing army based on stated concerns about a larger army’s potential effects on the nation’s politics.

If low state capacity offers the best explanation for this phenomenon, we would expect to see the following: (1) less costly, protracted elite attempts at non-violent territorial acquisition; (2) limited punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with strict instructions and rules of engagement designed to avoid conflict initiation; (4) elites not providing incentives for settlement on disputed territory; (5) settlers initiating violent conflict with Native nations prior to U.S. military intervention; (6) elite support for only a small standing army based on concerns about the financial burden of maintaining a larger military.

If, however, the best explanation is that U.S. political elites had a comparatively weak preference for non-violent territorial acquisition, we would expect to see the following: (1) little if any elite attempts at non-violent territorial expansion (e.g., they are quick to resort to violence if initially denied in their non-violent attempts at expansion); (2) little if any elite punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with loose instructions and rules of engagement designed to encourage or at least allow for conflict initiation; (4) elites providing recognized incentives for settlement on disputed territory and not actively disincentivizing such settlement; (5) the military initiating violent conflict with Native
nations prior to settlers and/or the military rapidly joining conflicts initiated by settlers; (6) no particular pattern with respect to statements for or against a small standing army.

Terms

By “Native nations,” I mean the Indigenous peoples of North America who settled there well before the European “discovery” of the continent.39 Because my focus is on early U.S. foreign policy, however, I am generally not referring to peoples outside today’s U.S. borders such as Canada’s First Nations or Indigenous peoples of Central and South America. Similarly, because the timing and patterns of territorial acquisition that affected Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians differed substantially from those in the contiguous United States, I do not address the experiences of those peoples here. That is, the scope of my inquiry only extends to those groups that live(d) in what is now the contiguous United States. When speaking generally of such peoples, I refer to them as Native nations, a term that has become increasingly widely used in academic work in accordance with conceptions of tribal sovereignty and nationhood, and I capitalize “Native” and “Indigenous” in line with current reporting guidelines (NAJA 2018). I generally refer to distinct peoples as “groups,” “nations,” or “tribes,” with the latter being used especially in the context of federal policy, which recognizes tribes through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. All that said, I try to use specific tribe names as frequently as possible, and individuals differ in the terminology they prefer—I thus refer to interviewees in whatever way they asked that I refer to them.

39 As Smith (2012 [1999], 7) notes, “‘Indigenous peoples’ is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalizes the experiences…and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples. The final ‘s’ in ‘peoples’ has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination.”
By “settlers,” I mean non-governmental, non-military U.S. persons (usually citizens, sometimes on their way toward citizenship) who emigrated from one place in what is now the continental United States to another, generally from existing states to more sparsely populated territories to claim land for themselves with the goal of establishing legal permanent residence. Some settlers (like late nineteenth-century homesteaders) were explicitly sanctioned by the government, but many were not, especially in the antebellum period. Executive and legislative elites repeatedly passed laws that would ban, for example, settlers from living on certain disputed lands or from trading with certain groups absent federal authorization. Nonetheless, “in those instances where [the government] tried to restrict settlement, it almost uniformly failed” under relentless pressure from settlers that thought it better to ask forgiveness than permission (Edwards et al. 2017, 7-9). Furthermore, while federal officials often sought to prevent settlement in disputed territory, state and local officials were rarely, if ever, as discouraging.

I refer to the militarized disputes between Native nations and the U.S. as the “Indian Wars” in keeping with the historiography on the subject. This, however, prompts the important question as to whether an IR scholar should categorize these conflicts as wars. There are three likely objections to this terminology. First, there are those who would argue that I ought to use well-established casualty thresholds that other IR scholars have used to define “war” and to separate it from less serious militarized disputes (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). As discussed above, I contend that it is sufficient for the purposes of this dissertation to examine militarized disputes that the participants thought of as wars. Settlers and elites alike saw both possible and realized conflicts with Native nations as serious, costly events that ought not to be initiated.

40 Settlers by this definition are neither agents of the government nor intermediaries in Grynaviski’s sense of the word (at least not necessarily). An intermediary for Grynaviski “bridges a structural hole through the use of her weak ties” (2018, 27). See also: Veracini (2013).
frivolously. A second and somewhat different position might hold that these were not wars *per se* but are more appropriately thought of as counterinsurgency campaigns. Scholars with an interest in U.S. military policy have occasionally sought to study the Indian Wars as counterinsurgency campaigns from which today’s military could learn (Birtle 2009; Schake 2013). More recently, American political pundits have used the Indian Wars as a historical analogy to advance their arguments on the purported necessity of maintaining U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan (Boot 2019; Goldberg 2019). I have articulated my objections to the comparison with Afghanistan elsewhere (Szarejko 2019a), but I would note here that some of the Indian Wars more closely approximate today’s conception of a counterinsurgency campaign than others, and war and counterinsurgency are not mutually exclusive concepts.

Third and finally, one might argue that these are not properly considered wars but should instead be discussed in terms of genocide. This raises the difficult questions of whether or how current frameworks for identifying a genocide ought to be applied to a somewhat distant past in which settlers and political elites had similar goals of displacing Native peoples that they sought in different ways while sometimes positioning their preferred policies as a way to save Native peoples from extinction. Indeed, even supporters of policies like “Indian removal” often justified their positions by claiming that Native nations had to be protected from settler contact in order to ensure their survival. There were many political elites who saw themselves as being charitable for supporting Indian removal, the creation of reservations, allotment, and other such policies in American history (Schultz 1972; Hoxie 1984; Holm 2005). In some cases, we have evidence to suggest that a person’s supposed desire to protect Native nations was sincere, even if paternalistic and misguided—as in the case, for example, of the missionary Isaac McCoy’s proposed Indian state (Schultz 1972). In other cases, bad faith—even genocidal intent—is more
readily discernible. Andrew Jackson, as I will discuss in the third chapter, wanted to enforce the Indian Removal Act without warring with Native nations, but that impulse came from a sensitivity to the economic costs, not any seemingly sincere sympathy for Native claims to sovereignty.

Ultimately, my view is that political elites, settlers, and their various policies directed at the supplanting of Native nations can generally be described as genocidal, albeit as variable in the extent to which that intention is clear, and principal-agent problems add to the difficulty of ascribing intent and responsibility. As Wolfe (2006, 387) puts it, “Even in sites of wholesale expropriation such as Australia or North America, settler colonialism's genocidal outcomes have not manifested evenly across time or space.” The history of California, for example, includes violence that certainly appears to fit modern understandings of genocide (Madley 2016). As I will discuss in the second chapter, however, George Washington appears to have thought of the authorization of the use of force in what would come to be known as the Northwest Indian War as targeted bargaining behavior akin to that involved in any other military conflict. Military and militia men in that campaign, however, would take it upon themselves to perpetrate genocidal acts (Ostler 2019). In short, I do not treat war and genocide as mutually exclusive phenomena.

**Implications for International Relations**

In this dissertation, I will trace the processes by which settlers brought federal officials into conflicts they sought to avoid. I will argue that the settlers’ two *faits accomplis* of settling on

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41 The case for referring to U.S. policies toward Native nations as “genocide” is strengthened by later policies that I do not discuss at length here. In the late nineteenth century and through even the 1970s, the federal government implemented forced sterilization of Native women and forced Native children to attend boarding schools designed to “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Lawrence 2000; Churchill 2004).
disputed territory and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations affected federal
decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for
intervention, by making non-intervention more costly for federal officials, and by eroding the
credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. The lack of a large standing military, which
was primarily an ideological commitment on the part of political elites, constituted an important
permissive condition for settler-led conflict, and political elites were not especially concerned
about either the distribution of power or settler heterodoxy in the Northwest Indian War and the
Second Seminole War. Combined with the Utah’s seemingly anomalous Black Hawk War, these
cases will support my argument about the principles of early U.S. grand strategy and the ways
that settlers complicated the practice thereof by bringing the federal government into unwanted
disputes with Native nations.

To elaborate on the implications for IR scholarship, the case studies below suggest that it
is not the case that U.S. foreign policy has forever been uniquely isolated from public pressures.
Indeed, it may be that early U.S. foreign policy was overly responsive to such pressures. If it
seems that today’s foreign policy is excessively insulated from the public, we ought not to
attribute that to immutable characteristics of the U.S. system of government but to changes that
have taken place since 1783. The practice of U.S. grand strategy today may be less susceptible to
the influence of civilians, but many, especially advocates of “restraint” or “retrenchment,” now
argue that American foreign policy is insufficiently responsive to a public that would prefer a
less militarized grand strategy (Porter 2018; Walldorf and Yeo 2019). If this is true, the question
is not whether but how a more balanced approach can be found.

Moreover, this research has an implication for long-running debates about the character
of U.S. foreign policy and, in particular, whether U.S. grand strategy has ever been oriented
toward a set of policies that could plausibly be described as isolationist. The interwar period of the twentieth century is sometimes held out as an isolationist moment in U.S. foreign policy, though the case for this is dubious (Braumoeller 2010). In the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, scholars and policy professionals sometimes point to George Washington’s farewell address or John Quincy Adams’ statement that America “goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy” (1821) to suggest that this was a period of isolationism. A broader look at early U.S. grand strategy—in particular, a view of this period that incorporates U.S. relations with Native nations, not just with European powers—indicates that political elites have long had a generally expansionist outlook, but that does not necessitate a militarist disposition. An examination of three of the Indian Wars across time and space makes this especially clear. Early U.S. grand strategy may have been based on faulty assumptions about what Native peoples would be willing to accept, but it does suggest a degree of continuity in the principles of U.S. grand strategy—it has been opportunistically expansionist from the beginning, though given increasing economic and domestic political costs of taking territory, this principle has shifted in more recent decades to a different sort of expansion into new markets and toward a foreign policy that would seek to make other states look more like the United States (Monten 2005). The practice of grand strategy, however, will always be more improvisational than political elites would prefer because they cannot fully control the American public (and, perhaps more importantly today, the same applies to multinational corporations).

I conclude with a pedagogical implication here. If bringing under-studied indigenous and early U.S. experiences can help to shed light on ongoing debates in IR, it can also spur useful in-class discussion. In research and teaching alike, political scientists still all too frequently ignore Native nations as political actors (Ferguson 2016). There are some positive examples of such
work in IR, but these are still relatively scarce (see, e.g., Crawford 1994; Beier 2005; Cha 2015; Lightfoot 2016). In this dissertation, I have sought to demonstrate that IR scholars can build on this work and use Indigenous experiences to shed new light on questions of continuing relevance to our understanding of world politics. But we can also introduce our students to these experiences to broaden how they think about U.S. foreign policy and world politics. Studying the rise of the United States and its relations with Native nations, for example, may make for a useful comparison with the rise of China that we so often discuss in IR classes today. By broadening the range of actors that instructors of IR treat as worthy of our attention, we likely provide students with more opportunities to discover those things that we cannot simply convey in a lecture: “their own sense of vocation, their deepest commitments, and their most potent passions” (Jackson 2020, 50).

Outline of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I have introduced a puzzling phenomenon—the fact that U.S. settlers were able to bring elites into wars they wanted to avoid—and I have described the theory and methods I will use in making my argument. I have also identified plausible alternative explanations and some implications this research will have for International Relations theory and education. In the next three chapters, I will trace the processes by which settlers brought political elites into wars with Native nations. I proceed in chronological order—first with the Northwest Indian and then to the Second Seminole War and Utah’s Black Hawk War. I will provide some

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42 Even if there was nothing especially novel that Indigenous experiences could bring to International Relations classrooms, it may be the case that Indigenous students would be better served by courses that explicitly takes such experiences as meaningful representations of international political dynamics.
relevant background to establish in each case that political elites approached these conflicts with a preference for territorial acquisition without war and that the permissive condition of a small standing army was indeed permissive in these specific cases while being driven primarily by ideological considerations. To the extent that any inhibiting factors are present within individual cases, I will discuss how those inhibited action by policy-makers. I will then discuss each aspect of my argument—the ways that settler *faits accompli* put pressure on speculators and local elites, increased the perceived costs of non-intervention, and eroded the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations.

I will conclude each chapter with a discussion of contemporaneous explanations for the outbreak of each war, and I will describe how the evidence aligns with my explanation as compared to the plausible alternatives. After these three case studies, I will conclude with a chapter that summarizes my findings, elaborates on the implications for the study of International Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy, and addresses avenues for future research at the intersection of IR and Indigenous Politics.
Chapter 2

The Northwest Indian War

In this chapter, I trace the process by which the Northwest Indian War began. I structure the case study in line with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, though I order it slightly differently. I begin with some relevant historical context. I then introduce my case study by making the case that policy-makers in particular wanted to expand into the “Old Northwest” while avoiding war. These lands, acquired from Britain after U.S. victory in the Revolutionary War, cover what today is Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota, though Ohio and Indiana saw the bulk of the early settlement simply by virtue of being closer to existing U.S. territories and having fewer ongoing jurisdictional disputes than lands farther south. I then assess the permissive condition—the lack of a large standing army—that would help enable settler-driven conflict in this region. I then examine the three mechanisms through which settlers nudged political elites toward war in this case. I conclude by discussing the alternative plausible explanations and the degree to which their observable implications align with the evidence in this case study.

Historical Context

The Northwest Indian War would ultimately take place primarily in land that now forms the state of Ohio. Before the United States claimed the territory from Great Britain, however, the land had been inhabited and contested for centuries by various Native groups. Most prominently, the Iroquois (or Haudenosaunee) and various Algonquian tribes fought for control of the territory. Although the Iroquoian ethno-linguistic family includes a range of tribes, among them the Cherokee and Wyandot, when referring to the Iroquois, I am referring to the Iroquois
Confederacy, which was comprised of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, and Seneca peoples—and beginning in the early eighteenth century, the Tuscarora, who had suffered military defeat at the hands of the North Carolinian colony (Fenton 1998, 4-5, 382). Across North America, Iroquoian peoples were often in direct conflict with peoples of the Algonquian ethno-linguistic group or on opposing sides of European conflicts. These disputes were exacerbated both by the introduction of European diseases that dramatically reduced Native populations even before substantial Anglo-American settlement and by the quite intentional aspects of settler colonialism, including practices of slave labor (Sugden 2000, 29; Thornton 2000). By the time of the Northwest Indian War, the Iroquois had largely left the Ohio region under pressure from Anglo-American settlers and policy-makers, leaving incoming settlers to contend primarily with local Algonquian tribes.

The Algonquian ethno-linguistic group includes a wide array of peoples that Anglo-American settlers encountered from their initial settlement to their expansion across the continent. These groups included, e.g., the Wampanoag of the Massachusetts Bay area, other Great Lakes region tribes such as the Kickapoo and Sauk (or Sac), as well as upper-Midwest tribes such as the Cree of Wisconsin and Minnesota and Great Plains tribes such as the Arapaho and Cheyenne. Where such tribes existed in close proximity to each other, as those of the Ohio River Valley did, members of these different tribes often lived amongst each other in “intensely multiethnic” villages (Warren 2014, 20). By the late eighteenth century, two Algonquian tribes, the Shawnee and the Miami peoples, constituted the most powerful tribes in the Ohio region.

Although the precise origins of the Shawnee are uncertain, there were Shawnee settlements across what is now the United States by the seventeenth century—from Pennsylvania to Illinois and from there to Georgia, the Shawnee population was so dispersed that their
language was often used by other Algonquian peoples to facilitate intertribal contacts (Calloway 2007, 4-5). By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the threat entailed by expanding American settlements and the simultaneous lure of retaining access to European goods via trade would prompt many Shawnee to move farther inland to Ohio (Warren 2014, 179).

The Shawnee, like many other Native groups, occasionally allied with European powers in their various conflicts. In the French and Indian War, for example, many of the Shawnee originally allied with the French before switching to the British side in 1758. In the aftermath of the war, however, the French ceded their territory in the “Old Northwest” to the British, and the Crown quickly enacted policies designed to treat the Native populations as conquered peoples. The Shawnee (and many other tribes) would thus go to war against the British once again in Pontiac’s War of 1763-66, and although the military conflict was not decisive, the Native confederation would successfully gain policy concessions that would make for a less coercive relationship with the British (Middleton 2007, 167-182).43 Perhaps most importantly, as noted in Chapter 1, the British Crown enacted the Proclamation of 1763 early in the conflict—this was, in no small part, an effort to try to assuage the Native communities and to prevent settlers from provoking new conflicts (Coates 2004, 176). This edict carved out a portion of the lands west of the Appalachians as an “Indian Reserve” and barred any Anglo-American settlement west of the line (as seen in Figure 1 below). Although this did not prevent every interested settler from going beyond that line, it did appear to deter at least some settlers and, more clearly, most speculators

43 The war is named for Pontiac, a leader of the Ottawa (or Odawa) people, an Algonquian group that resided primarily in the Great Lakes region at the time, in modern-day Michigan and Ontario, though there is ongoing debate about just how large a role Pontiac played in inspiring the war effort.
because their entire enterprise depended on establishing clear legal title to parcels of land (Holton 1994, 454; Calloway 2007, 44).

The Miami (or Myaamia) people, in contrast with the Shawnee, appear to have long had a relatively concentrated population in areas now occupied by Wisconsin and Michigan, though migration brought them to the Ohio region around the same time as many of the Shawnee. Although the Miami lived further west than many of the Shawnee and thus were not migrating due to the direct pressure of U.S. expansion, they had come into conflict with the Iroquois during the Beaver Wars of the seventeenth century. Over the course of the eighteenth century, disease would significantly reduce the Miami population such that the tribe’s various bands would merge into three primary bands—the Miami (the primary band having previously been called the

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44 Start and end dates for this conflict vary, but it is widely agreed to have been comprised of intermittent conflict lasting nearly the entirety of the seventeenth century.
Atchakangouen and located at Kekionga), the Piankeshaw, and the Wea. All three of these bands would play a role in the Northwest Indian War, though the Miami based at Kekionga as well as the Wea at Ouiatenon would be the primary targets for the U.S. military.

Shortly after the British ceded all land east of the Mississippi River, north of Florida, and south of Canada to the United States in 1783’s Treaty of Paris, U.S. negotiators sought treaties with various Native nations, the Iroquois among them. The Iroquois by that time had already ceded territory in what is now Kentucky, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania to the British in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768. For those Native nations whose land the British had ceded without their consent, the U.S. position was that their new claim to the land was valid by right of conquest (even when tribes had not supported the British or when only parts of tribes had done so). Nonetheless, given that many tribes did not recognize the British cession of their lands, U.S. officials generally thought it was most prudent to negotiate directly with tribes to acquire their lands, and they often portrayed this as a sign of their generosity and good faith (Prucha 1994, 24-27). Among these efforts included the conclusion of a treaty between Iroquois and U.S. negotiators—a new Treaty of Fort Stanwix in which the Iroquois ceded their claimed lands in Ohio (Sugden 2000, 84). The Iroquois council refused to ratify the treaty, however, as its representatives had not been authorized to make such concessions, and a group of Algonquian tribes sometimes referred to as the Western Confederacy—which included the Shawnee, Miami, and other Ohio region tribes—likewise denied the validity of the treaty because the Iroquois by that point did not actually live in Ohio (Calloway 2007, 77-78). Nonetheless, the Confederation Congress of the United States ratified the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1785.

*The Desire for Expansion—without War*
In 1783, as noted in Chapter 1, George Washington communicated in a letter to Congressman James Duane of New York that the newly independent United States would do well to avoid any wars with the Native nations that inhabited the territory England had just ceded in the Treaty of Paris. “To suffer a wide extended Country to be over run with Land Jobbers, Speculators, and Monopolisers or even with scatter’d settlers,” he wrote, “…is pregnant of disputes both with the Savages and among ourselves” (Prucha 2000, 1). He argued in this same letter for the purchase rather than the conquest of Native nations and—until such lands could be purchased—federal restraint of settlers. “We will…establish a boundary line between them and us beyond which we will endeavor to restrain our People from Hunting or Settling. …I am clear in my opinion, that policy and economy point very strongly to the expediency of being upon good terms with the Indians, and the propriety of purchasing their Lands in preference to attempting to drive them by force of arms out of their Country.”

The principle was expansion, to be sure, but elites wanted “to regulate the pace of expansion” (Ostler 2019, 93).

As in his private correspondence, Washington pressed for a relatively pacific Indian policy in relations with Congress. He spoke of his desire “that all need of coercion in future [sic] may cease and that an intimate intercourse may succeed…to advance the happiness of the Indians and to attach them firmly to the United States” and “for the improvement of harmony with all the Indians within our limits by the fixing and conducting of trading houses upon the principles then expressed”.

By June of 1790, however, just a year into Washington’s first term as President, he had decided that the U.S. would need to use military force against “certain banditti of Indians from the northwest side of the Ohio” (quoted in Sword 1985, 82). He, like

45 Italics in original.
46 The respective quotes come from his third and sixth annual addresses to Congress (Washington 1791; Washington 1794).
many of his successors, tried and failed to promote U.S. expansion without going to war with Native nations.

To elaborate on the steps early political elites took in trying to avoid war in this case, Congress—both under the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution—authorized multiple rounds of treaty negotiations. This would result in, for example, the Treaty of Fort McIntosh, a treaty signed with Ohio-region Wyandots and Delawares in January of 1785, as well as attempts to negotiate treaties in 1787, 1788, and 1790 and early Congressional revisions to the Northwest Ordinance designed to make explicit the U.S. desire to acquire Native land by purchase rather than conquest (Sword 1985, 28, 50, 62). Moreover, policy-makers would occasionally authorize the military to punish settlers on disputed territory. Among the new federal lands, the Ohio region in particular saw relatively frequent attempts to push settlers off lands to which they had only dubious claims. In 1785, for example, Henry Knox authorized Colonel Josiah Harmar “to expel from the public lands, those lawless men who have acted in defiance of the orders and interest of the United States”. For policy-makers, however, the mass removal of squatters “was never an attractive political option,” and even if they had wanted to do it at a larger scale, they did not have the military to do it (Limerick 1987, 61). Indeed, when Harmar was first tasked with removing the squatters, he had fewer than six hundred men under his command (Anson 1970, 99).

47 For more detail on one such Congressional authorization of expenditures related to the “promoting a friendly intercourse, and preserving peace with the Indian tribes,” see U.S. Congress (1790, 2241).
48 Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, June 1, 1785, in SCP, 6-7; Henry Knox to Josiah Harmar, May 12, 1786, #38, Vol. 3, JHP; Josiah Harmar to Henry Knox, August 4, 1786, Harmar Papers, pp. 144-45, Letterbook A, Vol. 28, JHP.
In addition to these attempts to negotiate land cession treaties and to evict settlers in violation of existing territorial laws, the federal government also sought to prevent violent disputes between settlers and Native nations and to punish settlers who might instigate such conflicts. As Knox wrote to Washington in 1789, “If so direct and manifest contempt of the authority of the United States be suffered with impunity, it will be vain to attempt to extend the arm of Government to the frontiers.”\(^4\) It was in line with this thinking that the Confederation Congress had adopted the Northwest Ordinance in 1787.\(^5\) The ordinance had several features designed to discourage conflict between settlers and Native nations, including administrative reorganization and restrictions on trade, travel, and residence. Policy-makers sought to ensure a more unified relationship to tribes by consolidating three previous Indian Affairs departments into two (for the northern and southern regions), both with superintendents who reported directly to the Secretary of War (Anson 1970, 101). Traders needed a government license to operate in the Northwest Territory, and citizens would need to secure a permit to travel to there; non-citizens were barred from residence entirely.

Once the Northwest Territory was organized as such, negotiations with tribes in the region came under the purview of the territory’s first governor, Arthur St. Clair, a major general in the Continental Army and later President of the Continental Congress. St. Clair had routine communications with Henry Knox and John Jay, Secretaries of War and Foreign Affairs, respectively, during the late Confederation period (Saler 2015). Knox and Jay stayed in their posts once Washington entered office in early 1789 (though Jay only stayed in an acting capacity


\(^5\) The first United States Congress reaffirmed the ordinance in 1789.
through March of 1790; his successor, Thomas Jefferson, would be the Secretary of State through 1793. Regardless of which policy-makers St. Clair was receiving orders from, they were consistently oriented toward expansion without war. Indeed, the federal government took steps to ensure that settlers could not scuttle treaty negotiations, even going so far as to drive settlers off the land from time to time, especially ahead of treaty negotiations (Sword 1985, 56; Tate 1999, 238-39). The ultimate goal, however, remained expansion—at the same time that the military was being tasked with driving off illegal settlers, policy-makers were authorizing land surveys, making plans to pay off U.S. debt with land sales, and so on.

Over the course of multiple treaty negotiations, U.S. political elites came to believe that they were successfully balancing their desire for expansion with their desire to avoid war. As late as January 1789, it seemed to these decision-makers that a non-violent resolution was soon forthcoming. But they often misunderstood who they were bargaining with and what their counterparts were able to authorize—some tribes signed away land without soliciting the agreement of other tribes that properly should have had a say in negotiations, for example, and the parties involved in negotiations sometimes did not represent all relevant decision-makers within their own tribe (Sugden 2000, 7-9).

A Permissive Condition

Before continuing to the argument that settler faits accomplis in the Old Northwest led elites to reluctantly intervene, I discuss the permissive condition that I have argued is conducive to such patterns of behavior. The United States began its political existence under the Articles of Confederation with an exceptionally small standing army—deliberations of the Continental Congress yielded a 700-man military drawn from state militias for the purpose of protecting “the
northwestern frontiers of the United States, and their Indian friends and allies, and for garrisoning the posts soon to be evacuated by the troops of his Britannic Majesty” (Dalton 1784, n. 2).

The primary consideration in these deliberations—a point most forcefully made by New Englanders—does not appear to have been whether the U.S. could afford a large standing army but whether “the principles of republican governments…[and] the liberties of a free people” could be maintained if the state relied on a larger standing army (Ibid). That is, this permissive condition came about due to ideas about the role of a military in a democracy, not because of limited state capacity. Indeed, those in the federal government tended to assume that opposition to a large standing army was a given. During Virginia’s state convention on the ratification of the new U.S. Constitution, for example, then-Governor Edmund Randolph noted that, “With respect to a standing army, I believe there was not a member in the federal Convention, who did not feel indignation at such an institution” (Randolph 1788, 401). The military would grow incrementally for the next two decades—spurred in part by conflict with Native Nations as well as domestic uprisings such as Shay’s Rebellion—but a more substantial change in military personnel and organization would not come until the War of 1812 (Katzenelson 2002, 95-96).

Despite this opposition to a large standing army, political elites still needed some way to enforce prohibitions on settlement in certain areas. U.S. political elites simultaneously codified the right of American Indians to occupy their lands (in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787) and sought to persuade American Indian groups to sell the lands they occupied. Until the lands were sold, however, it would be necessary to prevent settler violence from undermining federal negotiations. The U.S. sought to discourage settler incursions on the lands of the Miami,

51 See also: Millett and Maslowski (1984, 85-87).
Shawnee, and others, and at times the military even used their limited means to evict squatters (Tate 1999, 238-239). Congress left this task to Josiah Harmar, Lieutenant Colonel Commandant of the First American Regiment (the aforementioned 700-man force). His task, at least when he was first sent to the Northwest Territory in 1784, was to keep the peace, and he understood a prominent part of this to be the prevention of settlement in disputed territory (Sword 1985, 89).

As he wrote about two-and-a-half years into his assignment, “I humbly conceive that the great objects I have to attend to, will be, to prevent illegal encroachments on the public lands, to secure happiness to the inhabitants, and to protect private property from arbitrary invasion, and to remove, if possible, diffidence, fear, & jealousy from the minds of the Indians; to these points I shall lend my attention” (Harmar 1787, 120). Harmar was at the same time being urged to avoid any actions that would produce a general war—that is, a war between the U.S. and the various tribes of the Old Northwest. Immediately prior to a 1788 treaty council, Knox relayed to St. Clair that he must avoid provoking a war; to Harmar, Knox noted that a war “would at present be embarrassing beyond conception” (quoted in Sword 1985, 67). Harmar and his hundreds of soldiers were ill-equipped to deal with thousands of settlers and Native individuals.

*Settler Faits Accomplis*

While political elites debated the virtues of the standing army, settlers were moving in droves to the territory that England had ceded to the United States in 1783. The United States claimed to exercise sovereignty over the ceded territory (east of the Mississippi and south of Canada, excluding Spanish Florida) by virtue of conquest, though Americans had been moving

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52 Here “the public lands” refers to those lands claimed by both the United States and Native nations.
in fewer numbers onto the land of what is now Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana for decades before the war (Hurt 1996, 76-80). As noted above, however, the British Crown banned the private purchase of Native lands in the eastern Ohio Valley in its Royal Proclamation of 1763. This important development nonetheless had some unintended consequences. “The Crown’s prevention of Indian-European sales encouraged settlers and speculators to argue that American Indians had as much, if not more, sovereignty than the British government, and the British government could not prevent a sovereign people from exercising their rights as sovereigns” (Pawlikowski 2014, 337). But the Royal Proclamation did change the incentives facing settlers, and, “In all, 1768 to 1773 marked a period of peace in the eastern Ohio Valley. ‘Alarms’ of disunion between Indians and Euroamericans ‘blew over’ without a disturbance to the greater interethnic community” (Pawlikowski 2014, 277). To the extent that settlers instigated acts of violence during this time, outsiders—that is, non-residents or very recent settlers—perpetrated most attacks on Ohio-region Native communities. (Ibid., 280).

Throughout the Revolutionary War, Britain encouraged some of the worst violence the between settlers and Native nations that the region had seen to that point. Moreover, it continued to do so even after the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War (Hurt 1996; Sword 1985, 98-99). But the end of the war would see a rush of new settlers, including military veterans who sought (and sometimes received) land grants as a reward for their service (Hildreth 1852; McGlinchey 2006, 129). These were mostly relatively poor individuals who left the more populous original colonies for the prospect of abundant, fertile farmland. “Many of them,” wrote Judge Jacob Barnett (quoted in Hall 1905, 495), “had exhausted their fortunes in maintaining [the war effort], and retired to the wilderness to conceal their poverty and avoid comparisons mortifying to their pride while struggling to maintain their familiarizes and improve their
condition.” The most accessible paths for settlers ran through the Cumberland Gap, which is at the intersection of modern-day Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, and along the Ohio River by way of modern-day Maysville, Kentucky, about 180 miles north of the Cumberland Gap. Most early settlers who reached Indiana or Ohio thus tended to establish residence in southern portions of Ohio, where there were already substantial Native population; that later settlers would need to claim lands further north put all the more pressure on Ohio region tribes (O’Malley 1987, 19).

In addition to economic factors that encouraged settlement in the Old Northwest, settlers often migrated with certain beliefs that justified the move—many were “schooled in a view of the world which described indigenous peoples as savage, uncivilized brutes” as opposed to the civilizing presence the settlers saw themselves as bringing (Saler 2015, 47; Coates 2014, 181). Similarly, many migrated with a Biblical justification for their behavior—the command to, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it,” was one of many such passages that served to legitimize their work to settle new federal lands (Stephanson 1995, 25). But regardless of their reasons for seeking lands in the West, federal lands to which no states made any claims were of particular interest to settlers. Given their desire to rapidly establish land ownership, fewer ongoing jurisdictional disputes were better (Ablavsky 2016, 41-42). For many, this made the Old Northwest more desirable than lands farther south, to which states like Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia made various claims.

Much of the United States’ small military was stationed in the Ohio region at that time in an effort to keep the peace between settlers and Native nations, but the hundreds of soldiers posted to a few frontier forts were not well-equipped to confront tens of thousands of much more

53 The quotation is an excerpt from Genesis 1:28 in the King James Version of the Bible.
diffuse settlers (Ostler 2019, 85). Indeed, as a Shawnee delegation reported to officials in Spanish Louisiana in the summer of 1784, the U.S. settlers entered the Ohio Valley “like a plague of locusts” (quoted in Calloway, 1995, 166). Given that the military could deter neither settlement nor Native attacks against settlers, locals often responded to violence with violence of their own (Wooster 2009, 6-8). Brigadier General George Rogers Clark, for example, led an unauthorized force of mostly volunteer Kentucky militia members in a series of attacks on Shawnee towns (Prucha 1969, 8-11). As Secretary of War Henry Knox reported shortly thereafter, “The injuries & murders have been so reciprocal, that it would be a point of critical investigation to know on which side they have been the greatest” (1789, 3).

Is it, however, fair to say that settlers brought political elites into wars that the elites would have preferred to avoid? I make the case below that the three mechanisms outlined above did indeed help settlers push political elites into the Northwest Indian War against their better judgment. Gary Henson, a Shawnee sculptor and storyteller, articulated exactly this sort of causal priority. As he put it, “[The U.S.] government and the military were pretty bad. But all of that was driven by these settlers.”

Settlers, Speculators, and Local Elites

For much of the latter half of the eighteenth century, American colonists and political elites dreamed of expansion westward across the Appalachians, beyond which the British Crown had sought to restrict American settlement. Even before the U.S. sought and gained independence, political elites and land speculation corporations occasionally sent surveyors into

54 Ostler notes that the settler population of Kentucky grew from 12,000 in 1783 to 74,000 in 1790, and other frontier territories saw similar growth in the same time period.

the Ohio region to assess the viability of the land for settlement (Johnston 1898, 106-107, n. 2).

Demand for this land was real, but it was also assumed. For the federal government’s part, independence came with a heavy burden of debt, which it believed it would be able to minimize with sales of newly acquired territory, including grants to members of the Continental Army who might be compensated with land. In other words, political and business interests alike had an interest in making the territory of the Ohio region ready for sale and settlement, but it was settler demand that preceded these interests and made land speculation a (sometimes) profitable venture. As Rodabaugh (2015, 10) puts it, “Post-revolutionary western speculation only mirrored a near-consensus that the national expansion of markets and territory offered incomparable benefits to any man willing to pursue them.”

Settlers did not always respect the claims of speculators (of which they were not always aware). “The attraction of choice locations led regularly to settlement in advance of purchase—squatting, in short. …Thousands of such petty faits accomplis all over the Northwest frontier could hardly be reversed, no matter how powerful the petitioners” (Elkins and McKitrick 1954, 337). The relationship between settlers and speculators in the Northwest Territory was thus not always mutually beneficial, but there does appear to have been a degree of positive feedback. There was settler demand for land, which made land speculation a potentially profitable pursuit, but competition among speculators meant that they sometimes had to improve their lands to maintain and spark further settler demand (Hurt 1996, 171). While “improving” the land often meant mundane work like building fences or clearing fields, it was often the case that improving lands meant taking steps to remove Native populations or secure it from potential Native attack. For settlers and speculators alike, the ideal means of securing their lands was to offload that cost on to another actor—the federal government. Thus, settlers and speculators alike would lobby for
federal military intervention in the Northwest Territory were with increasing frequency as the 1780s progressed.

From Samuel H. Parsons, a one-time Indian Commissioner, to Cleves Symmes, a New Jersey Chief Justice, wealthy elites used their fortunes to buy and sell lands in the Northwest Territory, and they used their political connections to push for federal military intervention to quell the violence being directed at settlers (Sword 1985, 45-49). To take the example of Parsons, he had served as a general in the Continental Army and was appointed a Commissioner of Indian Affairs by the Confederation Congress after being elected to the Connecticut General Assembly in 1782, a legislature in which he had also served before the Revolutionary War. In 1787, however, he would become directly invested in the practice of speculation by taking a position as a director of the Associated Ohio Company in 1787 (Shannon 1991, 396, 399). Together with a number of other prominent veterans of the Revolutionary War, Parsons would help to oversee one of the most expansive land purchases in the Ohio region—a purchase of hundreds of thousands of acres made possible by the means and status of the respective investors. In describing the purchase in question, a delegate of the Confederation Congress, Nathan Dane of Massachusetts, noted that:

If the lands can be immediately purchased on the terms the Company propose, we have the fullest assurance that the subscription for one million dollars well be completed in a short time. Many of the subscribers are men of very considerable property, who intend to become residents of that country.

Some of the land (in Marietta in particular) was indeed meant in part for settlement by investors in the company, but much of it was meant for speculative sale (Clayton 1986). Manasseh Cutler,

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56 Note that this is not the same entity as the Ohio Company, which was organized primarily by wealthy Virginians under the British Crown in the mid-1700s (Saler 2015, 52-55).
57 Hall (1905, 497). Hall’s edited collection of the “life and letters” of Parsons is listed under primary sources in the bibliography.
a minister who had served as an occasional military chaplain during the Revolutionary War and who worked with Parsons on this new venture, noted in correspondence that their purchase would be amenable to “private speculation in which many of the principal characters of America are concerned” (Hall 1905, 509). In short, many speculators were relatively prominent people—they generally had to be wealthy to come up with the money for such large purchases, and this meant that they had the social capital necessary to mingle with and influence policy-makers.58

The experience of Parsons demonstrates a seemingly self-interested shift from a preference for purchase of Native lands to a view that war would be necessary to make the Ohio region safe for speculation and settlement—a shift that would mirror that of other political elites. In 1785, Parsons wrote to William Samuel Johnson, who represented Connecticut in the Confederation Congress. Even if the United States officially held the position that the lands ceded by Britain was indeed its own by right of conquest, Parsons argued, purchase would be the most appropriate and efficient way forward:

Suppose the land to be our own, is it not more expedient to give content to the Indians by purchasing such tracts as they will sell, than to hold out an idea which fires their pride and alarms their fears and will probably deluge our frontiers with blood? …I am convinced this is the only proper route to be taken to get a knowledge sufficient to settle the Virginia accounts with justice; and Congress ought by no means to be in haste to close that account.59

By 1788, by contrast, Parsons would again write to Johnson, by that time one of Connecticut’s first incoming senators under the new Constitution:

The Indian Treaty is yet in suspense. They refuse to come here and the Governor refuses to go to them. …[A] war must be the issue, which, though it will probably terminate favorably, will be more expensive than a purchase of the lands as we


59 Hall (1905, 475).
want them. But in present circumstances, I don’t see but that they must be driven away and dispersed, if they refuse to treat.

Whether by purchase or by force, extinguishing Native land claims in the Northwest Territory would allow Parsons to “sell in the counties of Pennsylvania and Virginia on this side of the mountains, so that a settlement would take place next year which will open the way to rapid sales both in and out of the State” (Hall 1905, 535).

As for Symmes, he petitioned Congress for a purchase of land in the Ohio region, and once Congress authorized the purchase, he promptly solicited buyers for small tracts of the land by advertising its “rich easy soil for tillage” and led some settlers there himself (Rodabaugh 2015, 6; Hurt, 2003, 17). He later worked with Governor Arthur St. Clair to determine county legal codes for the territory, and after early U.S. defeats in the Northwest Indian War, he sent a long letter on Indian policy to an acquaintance of his—Elias Boudinot, a Congressman from New Jersey. There Symmes—a man with only limited military experience—offers Boudinot a lengthy list of suggestions for continued military attacks on the territory’s Native peoples. The U.S. ought to focus on recruiting soldiers of less prone to “blasphemies, drunkeness and lewdness” than those who had been defeated in earlier engagements, he argued, and cavalry “armed with a rifle-gun, two horse pistols fixed to a girdle buckled round the waist of the mean, and not fixed as usual to the saddle” would be more effective than infantry given Native tactics. “I tremble lest Congress should determine that the defence of the western country costs the nation more than it is all worth to them, and leave us to our own defence in the best manner we can make it” (Greve 1910, 97-99).

While it is unclear if speculator pressure would have been sufficient in its own right to trigger federal intervention—and indeed, I can only show here that speculator lobbying in this case passes a sort of hoop test (Van Evera 1997, 31) in which the phenomenon was present but
of indeterminate significance—this pressure likely shaped federal decisions about military intervention. Although there is little recorded acknowledgement by policy-makers that they were swayed by speculator appeals, the evident patterns of behavior suggest some speculator influence. Among my interviewees, Benjamin (Ben) Barnes, currently the elected Chief of the Shawnee Tribe (and, at the time of the interview, the Second Chief), attributed the most culpability to speculators. “People [are] selling titles for lands they know they don’t hold. …You sell the land, then you go to the government to do [something] about it? I think those people are really the ones who…should hold a lot of responsibility.”

While this settler pressure on speculators was indirect—it was not typically the case that settlers had any direct connections to wealthy speculators—settlers could more directly bring pressure to bear on local elites who could, in turn, lobby federal policy-makers. In the case of the Northwest Indian War, these were often county, city, or state officials—or the relevant equivalent in territories that were not yet states. Settlers could pressure such officials both through elections and through petitions. Kentucky District settlers, for example, brought enough such complaints to their district administrators that these local elites eventually compiled a list of “grievances” to present settler concerns to the Virginia state legislature (to which the Kentucky District was beholden before Kentucky became a separate state). Among other complaints, the inability of Kentucky officials “to call out the militia” without approval from Virginia officials was the first item (Clark 1993, 58-62).

In the course of our enquiries, we find that several laws have passed the legislature of Virginia, which, although of a general nature, yet in their operation are particularly oppressive to the people of this district; and we also find, that from our local situation, we are deprived of many benefits of government, which every citizen therein has a right to expect; as a few facts will sufficiently

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60 Interview with author, May 31, 2019.
demonstrate. We have no power to call out the militia, our sure and only defence to oppose the wicked machinations of the savages, unless in cases of actual invasion.

Likewise, after an especially costly Native attack on Kentucky settlers (probably by Shawnees or Miamis), settlers pressed their concerns with local officials, who in turn expressed their complaints to the federal government. As one such official wrote to the governor of Virginia, “It is inexplicable to some why the Indians attack our frontiers with such fury, destroying all where they come, when at the same time we are told the Governor of the Western Territory made peace with the Northern Indians last winter. …Will not Congress adapt some effectual measures before long respecting Indian affairs” (Campbell 1789, 631).

Lest there be any doubt that settlers could effectively push federal policy-makers to take actions they would have preferred to avoid, settlers occasionally did the same basic thing to state policy-makers. The Kentucky settlers, as I have already suggested above, sought to do this with Virginia officials. For as long as the “Kentucky District” remained under the jurisdiction of the Virginia state legislature, its state militia could operate within its own jurisdiction (i.e., nearly the entirety of modern Kentucky). By July 1786, however, Kentucky settlers had resolved to attack Ohio region Native nations with whom the settlers had long been engaged in low-level violent conflict. Kentucky District militia leaders asked the Virginia state legislature for permission to attack beyond its borders, and once it became clear that such permission would not be forthcoming, these same Kentuckians—more specifically, settlers in Jefferson Country—distributed a call for military aid from other Kentucky settlers. Although framed in terms of defending settler populations, the appeal was clearly oriented toward actively seeking out and attacking Native nations. Then-Virginia Governor Patrick Henry felt that he had little choice but to authorize the creation of “some system for their own defense” (Sword 1985, 33).
Federal officials evinced increasing awareness of settler pressure. While the young Washington administration sought to give Ohio tensions time for negotiations, St. Clair pushed the administration for clear decisions in the summer of 1789. At an in-person meeting with Washington, St. Clair told him that the pace of negotiations was allowing for retributive violence to occur. “It is not to be expected, sir, that the Kentucky people will, or can, submit patiently to the cruelties and depredations of those savages; they are in the habit of retaliation” (quoted in Sword 1985, 83). All the while, federal officials struggled to remove illegal squatters to minimize violence. At times, the most that military contingents based in the Northwest Territory could do was refuse assistance to settler raiding parties (Anson 1970, 107). As early as the summer of 1787, Knox had warned Congress that the number of settlers was making it increasingly difficult to remove them (Sword 1985, 45). It would have been possible for state and federal officials to resist settler pressure. Indeed, the federal government sought for years to avoid war with the Ohio Valley tribes before ultimately deciding to intervene. The next mechanism I discuss, however, often made elites feel compelled to enter settler-driven conflicts that they would have otherwise ignored or downplayed.

Costs of Non-Intervention

Once settlers conducted the faits accomplis of settling on land and initiating violent conflict—and especially once settlers asked for federal intervention on their behalf—they created a situation in which political elites had to decide whether to intervene. The costs of intervention—the various resources a government needed to conduct a military campaign in the 1780s and ‘90s, which all told would be a steep price for any government, let alone a recently independent one—are fairly straightforward. We thus see federal policy-makers especially cite
the likely costs of military intervention as a reason to give time for negotiations to play out. Less immediately obvious, however, are the potential costs of non-intervention that elites believed they could face. More specifically, these potential costs included the loss of territory that would come with secession and/or, perhaps even worse, with settler alliances with foreign powers. If the United States did not ultimately intervene militarily to assist settlers, federal elites risked a situation in which either Native nations reclaimed their land or settlers took the land for themselves and no longer saw much need for the federal government. Moreover, Knox saw it as necessary to prevent any such settler rebellions so as not to create in other settlers the belief that secession was preferable and practicable. As he wrote to the Congress shortly after the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, “If such audacious defiance of the power of the United States be suffered with impunity a precedent will be established, to wrest all the immense property of the western territory out of the hands of the public” (Knox 1787, quoted in Lindberg 2015, 130).

As early as 1781, political elites expressed concern that settlers, once they had moved West and established communities of their own, would want independence. It was in that year that an American military commander at Fort Pitt argued to his political superiors that a settler-led “invasion” of the Ohio territory would be the best way of dealing with the “Indian problem,” but civilian officials rejected the idea for fear that these settlers might seek independence or come under British sway (Sword 1985, 55). Given ongoing hostilities, it was an unnecessary risk. But this remained a concern well past U.S. independence. Knox, for example, expressed his concern in July of 1787 that the “whole western territory is liable to be wrested out of the hands of the Union by lawless adventurers, or by the savages” (quoted in Sword 1985, 47). Such concerns were commensurate with the grievances put forward by local officials in newly acquired lands—for example, Walker Daniel, the attorney general of the Kentucky District,
wrote to Benjamin Harrison V, then the governor of Virginia, that the federal and Virginia
governments’ inability “to prevent the cruelties & Depredations of the Savages,” was the primary
source of separatist sentiment in the west (quoted in Leadingham 2016, 343).

Contemporaries from George Washington to James Monroe echoed such concerns about
the rise of “rival settler nations” (Saler 2015, 14; Frymer 2017, 46), and they had reasonable
cause to do so. Indeed, Washington himself owned land in western Pennsylvania that a small
Calvinist group called the “Seceders,” so called because they rejected all civil authority, claimed
by right of residence. After initiating legal proceedings to validate his claim to the land in 1784,
Washington would eventually win his case and evict the squatters, who simply moved further
west (Larson 2014, 43-45). A more serious issue arose when settlers in what is now Tennessee—
on land then claimed by North Carolina—established what they declared to be the state of
Franklin. There the administration of Governor John Sevier actively courted Native and
European allies. The administration sought the alliance of the Chickasaw and Cherokee peoples
in exchange for protection against the Creek, and it eventually turned to the Spanish to seek at
least a trade agreement (Flaherty 2012, 72). Sevier even authorized negotiations for a land
cession treaty with the Cherokee. Franklin’s diplomats only ever achieved a tentative agreement
that a group of young Cherokee men said they would bring to their elders for consideration, and
while the Franklinites would declare the treaty to be valid and begin settling on Cherokee lands,
their fledgling state would dissolve by 1788 (Ablavsky 2016, 100-101). Settler efforts such as
these were part of Madison’s rationale for the design of the Constitution—among other things,
he argued that it would give western settlers a greater stake in the government and all the more
reason to remain a part of it (Leadingham 2016, 364). Six years later, however, the Whiskey
Rebellion would reignite federal concerns of settler secession.
Just as political elites had good reason to believe that settlers might seek independence from the United States, they had some reason to fear that settlers might turn to foreign powers for assistance. U.S. diplomats, for example, “could not cajole Britain to abide by its treaty obligation to evacuate forts in the Northwest Territory so long as Congress remained powerless to force states and individuals to return property from Tories during the American Revolution as mandated by the same treaty” (Larson 2014, 68). The British remained officially neutral in U.S. relations with Native nations, and the Crown’s representatives gave only non-committal replies when presented with Native requests for overt aid, though British officials did hope that it could assist in subtly nudging Native nations toward the creation of a unified coalition that could provide a buffer state between the U.S. and Canada (Calloway 2007, 91-92). George Washington, Trubowitz (2011, 48-49) notes, “worried most about British power,” especially because of its continued occupation of its forts and its much more powerful navy, and these fears were exacerbated when Spain created a diplomatic crisis by seizing a British trading ship in what is now British Columbia in 1789 (Merk 1978, 145-146). Parent (2011, 62-63) agrees with this assessment in characterizing broader elite fears:

Whether or not foreign powers were actually intriguing against the former colonies, elites constantly perceived threat. . . .[M]align British influence was seen everywhere. A nonaligned or mal-aligned state could be a base for foreign intervention, an encouraging example to groups contemplating secession, and a resource drain on the Confederation’s already meager aggregate power.

Despite all these concerns about the British, perhaps the most notable instance of settler collaboration with a European power came in James Wilkinson’s collusion with Spanish colonial officials. Wilkinson had been a general in the Continental (and later United States) Army, but after settling in Kentucky, he became disenchanted with a government that he felt promoted eastern business interests at the expense of developing the frontier. Thus, in 1787, Wilkinson
contacted Esteban Rodríguez Miró, the governor of Spanish Louisiana, and pledged loyalty to Spain if they would aid his effort to create an independent nation in Kentucky (which was still under Virginia’s jurisdiction at the time) (Linklater 2010, 85-86). If Spain did not assist in this venture, however, Wilkinson noted that he and his fellow Kentuckians would likely need to turn to the British for support (Narrett 2012, 108). Within a little over a year, Miró’s superiors in Spain had decided that there was little to be gained from such plans and discontinued assistance for Wilkinson’s short-lived separatist movement in early 1789—the strength of which Wilkinson had inflated in his talks with Miró—but Wilkinson would continue to feed the Spanish sensitive information to remain in their favor (Ibid., 112; Linklater 2010, 99).

Although little ultimately came of Wilkinson’s effort to cultivate Spanish support for this project, he was not the only one to make such an effort. William Augustus Bowles, a Maryland-born loyalist, fought for the British during the Revolutionary War and was captured by a Creek party after deserting in West Florida. He cultivated positive relationships with the Creek, however, and he eventually found his way back into the British military, after which he was tasked with developing trade relations with the Creek. He would maintain this relationship as something of an intermediary for the British well after the war, although it is not clear to what extent he was acting on orders when he declared the independence of the state of Muskogee in 1799. With the support of some members of various Florida and Georgia-area tribes, including the Creek, Seminole, and Muscogee, Bowles sought to establish a state from which the British could fight against U.S. expansion. Both the United States and Spain found this development to be a nuisance, however, and they cooperated to ensure the capture of Bowles and the end of the state of Muskogee. Hapless though these examples may seem, U.S. political elites feared the possibility of a genuine threat to the Union emerging on the frontier, and these cases help to
illustrate exactly the sort of settler secessionism mixed with foreign intrigue that political elites feared.

Ultimately, federal elites often interpreted the question of intervention on behalf of settlers as a question as to whether they should side with the “lawless adventurers” or the “savages,” and although they believed any such wars would likely be costly, they suspected that a victory for Native nations could be even more costly in the long term (Ostler 2019, 119). Although I have suggested above that elite concerns about settler-led secessionism or alliances with foreign powers had some evidence to support them, these fears were ultimately not realized. Whether that is because of any federal policy is beyond the scope of my inquiry.

*Settlers and Credible Commitments*

The notion that an inability to credibly commit to uphold international agreements—most importantly, the commitment not to attack or otherwise take advantage of another—can be a cause of war is a well-known argument in IR scholarship (Fearon 1995). One thing that the Northwest Indian War helps to illustrate is that the credibility of one’s commitment may not be entirely up to oneself. In this case, the federal government repeatedly sought treaty negotiations with Ohio region tribes while simultaneously being undermined by the settlers for whom it was trying to peacefully acquire land. All the while, Knox was aware that settlers were subverting federal Indian policy in both the misleading commitments they made to Native nations and their continued expansion and violence aimed at securing territory for themselves. “The Indian tribes,” he wrote to St. Clair, “can have no faith in such imbecile promises, and the lawless whites will ridicule a government which shall, on paper only, make Indian treaties, and regulate Indian
boundaries.” He thus gave St. Clair standing orders to prevent any such settler expeditions and to punish any participants therein, but there was only so much the small frontier army could do.

After decades of violence, divisions had emerged among and within tribes of the Ohio River Valley. There were both pro-British and pro-American sentiments within the Miami tribe by 1785, though any support for accommodation with the United States eroded through the rest of the decade as even the Miami bands most aligned with U.S. interests suffered attacks by settlers (Rafert 1996, 47). Most tribes in the Western Confederacy appear to have believed by the late 1780s that the U.S. and its settlers would continue trying to expand at their expense, but different groups disagreed as to what they should do about that. Some believed their respective tribes should seek peace and content themselves with relatively small reservations that were at least on or near their traditional homes. Some however, believed that the United States could not credibly commit to leave them alone even after making any such concessions—among the Ohio region tribes, these were the groups that ultimately decided for war, which included substantial numbers among the Shawnee and Miami nations.

By April 23, 1790, the Northwest Indian War was close to breaking out. St. Clair and Harmar dispatched two final messengers with a mandate to seek peace—one of British lineage, the other French. Antoine Gamelin, the French messenger, eventually made it to a Miami town at which he met Blue Jacket, a principal warrior of the Shawnee. Blue Jacket’s response indicates the distrust that had formed after repeated U.S. promises and settler-initiated episodes of violence: “From all quarters we receive speeches from the Americans, and not one is alike. We suppose that they intend to deceive us” (Sword 1985, 85; Sugden 2000, 96). Some among the Shawnee would no longer listen to American promises, especially when they came from St.

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Clair, who displayed little understanding of Native cultures during negotiations and who often took a harder line in pushing for treaties than his superiors requested (Ostler 2019, 95).

Indeed, when asked today about the causes the Northwest Indian War—and whether any particular segment of U.S. society (i.e., settlers, political elites, or military officials) deserved a greater share of blame for the war than others—interviewees differed in their opinions but often returned to settler encroachment and the perception of bad faith on the part of the United States. George Blanchard, an elder of the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, was unsure if any such group deserved more blame than others, though he cited repeated treaty violations by settlers as the primary cause of the conflict insofar as they eroded trust in the federal government.62 Jeremy Turner, an enrolled Shawnee tribal member, similarly noted the decline in the credibility of U.S. commitments over time that stemmed from this dynamic: “Every time there’s a treaty and a line is drawn, people always want to move on the other side of that line.” 63

Conflict Initiation and Contemporaneous Explanations

After years of unfruitful negotiations and increasing violence between Northwest Territory settlers and Native nations, President Washington came to the conclusion that only a decisive but narrowly targeted military victory could stop the mutual depredations (Owens 2007, 16). In consultation with Henry Knox, Washington authorized Harmar to use whatever force necessary to attack those groups believed to be responsible for depredations on settlers. By this point, the size of the military had increased slightly to 1,216 men (McDermott 1998, 9). U.S.

62 Interview with author, May 30, 2019. The Absentee Shawnee Tribe, along with the Shawnee and Eastern Shawnee, is one of three federally recognized Shawnee tribes. The tribal governments are based on trust lands in Miami, Oklahoma, where I conducted field work in late May and early June of 2019.
63 Interview with author, July 1, 2019.
civilian leaders sought to avoid a broader war by ordering Harmar to punish only specific groups that had been involved in violence against settlers and by communicating their intentions to British officials still in the region to avoid unnecessary escalation (Sword 1985, 94). Knox, who remained skeptical of the virtues of settlers, nonetheless explained to Washington that their decision to intervene would not only “strike terror into the minds of the Indians” but also would be “highly satisfactory to the people of the frontiers” (Quoted in Sword 1985, 87).

From Harmar’s inaugural defeat through the deciding battle at Fallen Timbers and the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, the United States frequently sought an end to hostilities and a negotiated settlement (Owens 2007, 19). The most sustained period of negotiations came between the fall of 1792 and the spring of 1793—in no small part because the earlier defeats had significantly reduced the number of soldiers available to the already very small U.S. military. In a proclamation made in April of 1793, for example, General Anthony Wayne noted that, as per instructions from President Washington and Secretary Knox, he would seek a treaty with the Northwest tribes and would therefore prohibit any violence against Native settlements (Knopf 1960, 218). But the Shawnees in particular insisted that treaty boundaries be redrawn—to accord with the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix as opposed to the more circumscribed 1785 Treaty of Fort McIntosh—and that the U.S. government remove settlers north of the Ohio River. Neither was a winning proposition to U.S. representatives given the steadily increasing settler presence, nor were U.S. demands that the Ohio tribes simply sell the land that settlers were encroaching on (Calloway 2007, 98-101). Once Wayne had led U.S. forces to victory and

64 One exchange of speeches between U.S. and Native officials is recorded in George Washington’s papers. See: Putnam et al. (1792).
the defeated Native nations had signed the Treaty of Greenville, settlement and land speculation in the Ohio Valley accelerated (Scheerer 2014, 10).

Secretary of War Henry Knox’s letters and reports to Washington offer glimpses of the roles that settlers played in decision-making. In December of 1790, Knox wrote to Washington to inveigh against a proposal by Arthur St. Clair. “It will be our true wisdom to condense our population instead of dispersing it. Besides the expense of protecting such distant settlements greatly exceeds the value of them, whether considered as purchases of the land, as consumers of articles contributing to the revenue, or as constituting a strength of any real use to the empire.” After making the case that the United States could not afford to protect even more expansive settlements, Knox asserted in the same letter that to turn the war into a land grab would sully the virtue of those involved: “To grasp an additional territory will give the expedition an avaricious aspect. …The motives of the expedition ought to appear as they really are—A clear and uncompromised dictate of Justice to punish a banditti of robbers, and murderers, who have refused to listed to the voice of peace and humanity” (Knox 1790). In their correspondence, it is often this “banditti” to which Washington and Knox refer in articulating their war aims—they appear to have wanted a rather narrow, punitive strike against a circumscribed population designed to bring reluctant bands back to negotiations.

Two years after the war began, Knox (1792) provided his view of how the war started, and it is worth quoting at length (italics are my own):

It appears, that the unprovoked aggressions of the Miami and Wabash Indians upon Kentucky and other parts of the frontiers; together with their associates, a banditti, formed of Shawanese and outcast Cherokees, amounting in all to about one thousand two hundred men, are solely the causes of the war. …The frontier settlements were disquieted by frequent depredations and murders; and the complaints of their inhabitants, (as might be expected) of the pacific forbearance of the government, were loud, repeated, and distressing—their calls for protection incessant—till at length they appeared determined by their own efforts to
endeavor to retaliate the injuries they were continually receiving, and which had become intolerable. ... But notwithstanding the ill success of former experiments, and the invincible spirit of animosity which had appeared in certain tribes, and which was of a nature to justify a persuasion that no impression could be made upon them by pacific expedients, it was still deemed advisable to make one more essay. [Between 1783 and 1790, Native nations] on the Ohio, and the frontiers on the south side thereof...killed, wounded and took prisoners, about one thousand five hundred men, women and children; besides carrying off upwards of two thousand horses, and other property to the amount of fifty thousand dollars. A frontier citizen possesses as strong claims to protection as any other citizen. The frontiers are the vulnerable parts of every country; and the obligation of the government of the United States, to afford the requisite protection, cannot be less sacred in reference to the inhabitants of their Western, than to those of their Atlantic Frontier.65

While Knox maintained that aggression by the Ohio region’s Native nations was the sole cause of the conflict, he acknowledged several important things. The purported aggressions in question were directed at settlers, he said, and settlers sought to respond with violence of their own, apparently without any direct federal assistance or encouragement. Furthermore, he reported that 1,500 men, women, and children were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner in a seven-year period, which speaks to the volume of settlement and the related violence in what was clearly disputed territory. Knox also mentions that settlers actively sought federal intervention on their behalf, that the federal government was aware of these requests and still sought to negotiate for peace, and that in his view settlers were ultimately Americans with a legitimate claim to federal aid.

By the time he wrote a similarly lengthy letter to Washington in 1794, Knox was more explicit about the role of settlers in pulling the government into militarized disputes. “The desires of too many frontier white people to seize by force or fraud upon the

65 As noted in the report itself, Knox wrote this report in response to a January 16th, 1792 request by President Washington that he “prepare and publish, from authentic documents, a statement of those circumstances [that led to the war], as well as of the measures which have been taken, from time to time, for the re-establishment of peace and friendship.”
neighbouring Indian lands has been and still continues to be an unceasing cause of jealousy and hatred on the part of the Indians,” he wrote, “and it would appear upon a calm investigation that until the Indians can be quieted upon this point and rely with confidence upon the protection of their lands by the United States no well grounded hope of tranquility can be entertained” (Knox 1794). In other words, Knox is suggesting here that the United States would continue to find itself at war with Native nations for as long as the federal government could (or would) not reliably protect Native lands, and he appears to have been quite right about that.

Washington himself also came to express resignation at the federal government’s inability to control settlers. He wrote in 1796 to Timothy Pickering, then his Secretary of State (and earlier the successor to Knox as Secretary of War), “I believe scarcely anything short of a Chinese wall, or a line of troops, will restrain Land jobbers, and the encroachment of settlers upon the Indian territory.”66 Absent a sufficiently long line of troops, there was little else Washington felt he could do to prevent the settler *faits accomplis* that would continue to bring the United States into conflict with Native nations.

*Alternative Explanations*

Alternative Explanation 1—that low state capacity prevented the U.S. from restraining settlers—receives less support from the available evidence than my own argument. It seems clear given earlier and subsequent military expansions that the U.S. could have afforded a larger

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standing army from the beginning had political elites felt such a thing appropriate for a liberal democracy; their objections to such a force were more ideological than practical. Indeed, Ostler (2019, 97) notes that U.S. political elites were often quite willing and able to raise larger armies to suppress what they considered “domestic” insurrections such as Shays’ Rebellion. These, however, were perceived to be temporary exigencies; relations with Native nations were presumed to be a constant in early American political life, which meant that any military force dedicated to the management of the frontier effectively would have been a standing army. This would have entailed material costs, but the more ideological concerns about standing armies appear to have been more salient for political elites. This first alternative explanation, moreover, would find it somewhat difficult to explain the routine use of the very small military to punish settlers on disputed territory, an endeavor that political elites saw as relatively costly both in material terms and in the prospective loss of political support from settlers.

Alternative Explanation 2—that elites were ambivalent as to whether expansion led to violent conflict with Native nations—similarly does not match the evidence discussed here. The Northwest Indian War was preceded by lengthy, partially successful attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement, and even if the goal was to arrive at a settlement palatable to the United States, political elites did manage to negotiate land cession treaties elsewhere around this same time. Indeed, they did spend much time and money into the successful negotiations with many Algonquian tribes of the Ohio region, and for years they remained optimistic that they could arrive at a similar deal with the Shawnee, Miami, and others. Moreover, political elites actively sought to punish and deter illegal settlement in the Northwest Territory to discourage settler-initiated violence and to try to enhance its credibility in negotiations. Paired with the very direct instructions civilian elites provided to military officials during negotiations to avoid any actions
that would lead to conflict initiation, all these factors suggest that elites in this were not
ambivalent about the prospect of war with Native nations.

In short, the effects of settler *faits accomplis* outlined above best explain settlers’ ability
to bring political elites into the Northwest Indian War. The observable implications outlined in
Chapter 1—especially costly, protracted elite attempts at non-violent territorial acquisition, elite
punishment of settlers on disputed territory, and elites provision of strict instructions to military
officials designed to avoid conflict initiation—suggest a concatenation of factors that aligns more
closely with my explanation than with alternatives. This includes an absence of inhibiting factors. In this case, there was no salient identity-based cleavage between political elites and
settlers, nor was the local distribution of power believed to be so unfavorable that a military
intervention would be unsuccessful. As later case studies will explore in more detail, policy-
makers differed in their assessments of different Native nations across time and space, but
especially in the early years of U.S. independence, it was quite difficult for elites to reliably
assess the capabilities and intentions of the many Native nations residing on the continent.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have focused on the earliest major conflict in which an independent
United States fought against Native nations—a war in which settlers exercised seemingly
outsized influence in shaping the U.S. decision to intervene militarily. I have described the
mechanisms through which settlers put this pressure on federal political elites, and I have shown
that the observations in this case study provide support for my argument as opposed to the
alternatives.
The Northwest Indian War was especially notable in some ways, including the relatively high amount of sustained inter-tribal cooperation and the significant losses the United States incurred at the beginning of the war. As Ben Barnes describes the experiences of other Native nations, however, “All the details are different. …But I think in the general treatment of our land issues, they’re all going to have echoes of each other.” Indeed, the process discussed above is similar to the pattern of conflict initiation that one can observe in other Indian Wars, including the Second Seminole War, a war begun under Andrew Jackson’s administration. It is to this conflict that the next chapter turns.

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Chapter 3

The Second Seminole War

In this chapter, I trace the process by which the Second Seminole War began. I structure the case study in the same way I structured the previous chapter. I will thus begin with relevant historical context, on which I will spend more time here as the narrative of the Second Seminole War necessitates an overview of the First Seminole War. I will then make the case that policymakers wanted to expand in Florida while avoiding war with the Seminoles. Indeed, American settlers and policymakers alike desired this territory, which Spain controlled in its entirety following British cession of West Florida in 1783. I then examine the persistence of a permissive condition—a still very small standing army—that would allow for settlers to instigate a militarized conflict with the Seminole people. I then turn my attention to the three mechanisms by which settlers gradually brought political elites into a war that would ultimately prove to be a long and costly quagmire. I conclude by discussing the alternative explanations and the ways in which the observable implications of my argument compare with the evidence and the alternatives.

Historical Context

Native populations had long lived on broad swaths of Florida territory, but European colonization—first by the Spanish and then by the British—significantly harmed these Native communities. Due to disease and Spanish violence, Florida’s Native population dwindled significantly over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Arnade 1962; Hixson 2013, 39-40). As Europeans killed and displaced these tribes, patterns of migration in the region would see a new Native community take up residence in Florida—the Seminoles. The people
now known as the Seminole likely came from groups elsewhere in the southeast—from areas that either the British or the French controlled at the time. Descendants of the Creek and the Mikasuki are believed to comprise the bulk of the population that came to be known as the Seminoles in the eighteenth century (Mahon 1991 [1967], 2-4). I will indeed use the term “Seminole(s)” to describe these peoples as a whole although there remain important political and cultural distinctions between those who are descended from Creek and Mikasuki peoples. Moreover, there are important, ongoing debates between tribe members and non-Native scholars, the crux of the dispute being the nature of Seminole origins (Covington 1968; Jensen 2015). Ultimately, this debate has little bearing on my findings here, which focus on later developments involving the Seminoles, but it remains important for today’s tribe members in relations with federal and state governments.

The Second Seminole War, as the name suggests, was preceded by another dispute between the United States and the Seminoles of Florida, and I will thus spend part of this section discussing the origins of that war. For most of the eighteenth century and through at least 1810, Florida was an “under-funded and over-hyped afterthought” to Spain and England, and it remained mostly “Indian country” until U.S. settlers took up residence and the federal government followed (Frank 2005: 26-27). Indeed, this long-standing ambivalence toward Florida would help give rise to some of the conditions that allowed for the First Seminole War. More specifically, Florida would very quickly change hands in the latter half of the eighteenth century—from Spain to Britain in 1763, then back to Spain in 1783. All the while, the British and Spanish invested little in pursuing more intensive settlement in Florida, though British military officers were sufficiently connected to the Seminoles to enlist some of them in raids on Georgia amid the Revolutionary War (Parker 2011). Just as importantly, regardless of whether
Spain or Britain was the nominal owner of Florida, the relatively light governmental presence there and the proximity to the British colonies made it an attractive destination for escaped slaves (Kokomoor 2009). Indeed, it was in part the fact that the Seminoles would allow escaped slaves to join their communities—sometimes still as subordinates, albeit as ones with more freedoms and subjected to less abuse than they would have been by Anglo-American slavers (Ibid., 217)—that would first bring the United States directly into conflict with the Seminoles.

In addition to Britain, Spain, and the United States, the French remained a relevant actor in the Southeast. To add to the complications of rapidly shifting British and Spanish claims to Florida, the Spanish also swapped claims to Louisiana with the French. Here I am referring to the lands now known as comprising the Louisiana Purchase, a vast territory in which these European claimants occasionally traded and allied with Native nations but tended to avoid substantial conflict given the paucity of large, sustained settlements (Vidal 2009, 73-74). The Europeans, however, would find their own ways into war, and it was the end of the Seven Years’ War (or the French and Indian War) that saw both the Spanish cede Florida to Britain and the French cede Louisiana to Spain (Narrett 2015, 2-3). In the course of later negotiations for the Louisiana Purchase, the United States would inquire repeatedly with the French about the status of West Florida—did they consider it part of Louisiana (Ibid., 264)? Upon being rebuffed by the French, at the direction of President Thomas Jefferson and Secretary of State James Madison, U.S. negotiators would inquire with Spanish representatives as to whether they could also purchase Florida—at least West Florida. Given its easily navigable ports and waterways, Albert Gallatin wrote to Madison in 1803 (180), “The possession of West Florida, even without New Orleans island, is extremely important.” The U.S. government would initially seek to purchase West Florida outright but would later take a more aggressive position in negotiations—rather than a
straightforward purchase, the United States called on the Spanish government to cede Florida in exchange for the U.S. government’s assumption of the debts to U.S. citizens the Spanish had purportedly incurred by offering assistance to the French in the Quasi-War of 1798-1800 (Belko 2011, 161-165). When the French initiated war against the Spanish in 1808, however, settlers and elites alike felt that the Spanish position in the Americas was weakening. I will return to the settlers, but I continue with elites below.

In the run-up to the War of 1812, the political elites of the day felt they had reason to desire expansion into Florida—forcing the Spanish out of Florida would allow for greater mobility of goods and people across the southeast and would prevent European powers from using Florida as a sanctuary from which to attack the young United States (just as the British had done across the continent) (Belko 2011, 173). U.S. policy-makers aggressively sought to push the Spanish out of Florida, but they were nonetheless hesitant to force the issue with through overt military conquest. Instead, the U.S. government sought to purchase Florida and, when their efforts met with resistance, they sought leverage through creative interpretations of existing treaties, especially through the Louisiana Purchase. In 1810, while Spain was reeling from French military victories in the Peninsular War, a group of American settlers residing in land still claimed by Spain declared their independence as members of the “West Florida Republic,” through which they requested the protection of the U.S. government and annexation; having debated the legalities of such a move with his Cabinet and members of Congress, President James Madison would accept the settlers’ request (Scallions 2011, 194-195; Belko 2011, 157-158). Madison declared that the United States would annex West Florida on the grounds that it had actually been a part of the Louisiana Purchase. In practical terms, however, this declaration produced little change; the U.S. military was tasked with ensuring that disgruntled settlers did
not spark a war, and Spain maintained *de facto* control of Florida for the time being (Watson 2013, 104).

In the months ahead of the June onset of the War of 1812, the U.S. administration continued to seek control of Florida. President Madison worked with the Congress to pass and sign a bill that would allow the United States to accept “temporary” ownership of West and/or East Florida if the respective governors gave their consent to such an arrangement or if there was any evidence that either the French or the British were preparing to take any part of Florida for themselves (Belko 2011, 185). Indeed, the public justification was that this was necessary to deter British intervention in Florida amid the Peninsular War and rising tensions with Britain (Cusick 2003, 38-39). Unfortunately for the U.S. government, however, neither Spanish governor was inclined to grant the United States this custodianship. General George Mathews, who had been tasked with bringing the American request to the Spanish governors, responded with actions that likely exceeded his mandate—he raised a volunteer militia in Georgia (the “Patriots”) and ordered them to take and hold Fernandina, a prominent smuggling center in East Florida, after which Mathews would march 250 federal regulars to Fernandina to have the Patriots surrender the town to him (Merk 1963, 7). As Mathews and the Patriots continued their March down the coast of East Florida, Congress received word of his actions and promptly reversed course—they wanted Florida, but they did not want war with Spain (Cusick 2003, 126-128). As William Harris Crawford, then a senator from Georgia and later Secretary of War to Madison, wrote to Secretary of State James Monroe at the time: “[T]he affair is worse than I had expected.”

68 Crawford to Monroe (1812) https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-04-02-0310
To try to avoid provoking Spain any further, Monroe publicly disavowed the actions of Mathews and the Patriots, and the United States entered peace negotiations with Spain (Cusick 2003, 140). It is in these negotiations that the Seminoles first came to be directly involved in conflict with the United States. Both Mathews and Spanish representatives met with Seminole leaders during the protracted negotiations—Mathews with the goal of persuading the Seminoles to remain neutral, the Spanish with the goal of persuading the Seminoles to enter the conflict on their side. The Seminoles were not especially favorable toward either group, and the tribe was divided on the question of how best to proceed. Ultimately, it was Patriot leaders—that is, volunteer militia men—who threatened that giving aid to the Spanish would result in the Seminoles’ destruction and who thereby turned the Seminoles more firmly against the United States (Cusick 2003, 215). 200 Seminole warriors as well as 40 escaped slaves RAIDed the Patriot camp and prevailed in pushing the Americans out of Florida. U.S. reprisals against the Seminoles in late 1812 and early 1813—campaigns led by federal regulars but composed primarily of volunteer militia men—encountered few Seminoles and failed to do anything to improve the American position in Florida (Cusick 2003, 256). The U.S. military officially departed Fernandina on May 6, 1813.

Although there is debate as to when exactly the First Seminole War commenced, I will continue with the earliest plausible initiation, which would date it to 1814. The First Seminole War, as historians have argued, is inextricably tied to the Creek War, which began as a civil conflict between Creek factions—those opposed to military resistance to an expanding United States and those in favor of military resistance, the latter being in part the result of organizing by Tecumseh, a leader of the Shawnee (Hall 2011, 65-66; Mahon 1991 [1967], 21-22). This conflict eventually took aim at the subject of the original dispute—the United States. In July of 1813, a
group of militia men sought out a group of “Red Sticks” (as the pro-resistance Creeks were known) who were visiting Tallahassee to request Spanish assistance, but the militia men were successful only in inflicting roughly equal casualties—each group lost about twelve men (Blackmon 2014, 14-15). A month later, the Red Sticks would kill about 500 settlers and allied Creeks in the “Fort Mims Massacre,” a day-time ambush on a fort in what is now southern Alabama (Hixson 2013, 78).69 The United States military, however, was focused primarily on fighting British forces in the War of 1812. Violent conflict between militias and Native groups continued until early 1814, at which point Andrew Jackson, who had been appointed as a colonel to lead the Tennessee militia, received reinforcements in the form of the 39th U.S. Infantry Regiment (Rucker 1995, 327). This regiment, under orders from Major-General Thomas Pinckney, was to fight under Jackson’s command in an effort to end the Creek War. Indeed, Jackson’s first military engagement with the new regiment (and with several hundred Cherokee and Creek allies) was a victory that would end the war (Mahon 1991 [1967], 22).70

Jackson took this opportunity to pursue territorial expansion—he pressured leaders of the defeated Red Sticks to cede large portions of what is now Alabama and Georgia, and he did so against the expressed wishes of the Creek leaders who had supported Jackson and the United States (Rucker 1995, 325; Davis 2002, 634). Only after all this did Jackson invade Spanish Florida. The British still had a presence in West Florida, and there they had united with some Seminoles and Creeks to launch raids on the United States from Pensacola (Rucker 1995, 326; 69 As Davis (2002, 612-63) makes clear, the Red Sticks targeted this settlement primarily to punish those Creeks who had allied with the white settlers and had taken up some of their economic, political, and religious practices. 70 Contemporaneous accounts of Jackson’s actions in this conflict were often laudatory of Jackson and his “gallant confederates” (Sanders 1828, 195). “General Jackson,” another contemporary wrote in assessing his actions in this case, “is destitute of ambition, save that of advancing the welfare and happiness of his country” (Overton 1819, 96).
Mahon 1991 [1967], 22). For some, Jackson’s successful attack aimed at pushing the British and their Native allies out of Pensacola constituted the beginning of the First Seminole War, though this was aimed more directly at the British, and Jackson had little additional contact with the Seminoles until after the War of 1812.

By 1816, having further burnished his reputation at the Battle of New Orleans, then-General Andrew Jackson decided that he wanted to eliminate an abandoned British fort being used by escaped slaves and Seminoles in the Florida panhandle (Wooster 2009, 46). As Hixson (2013, 79) puts it, “Jackson…would brook no opposition in his determination to ‘liberate’ the peninsula from the Spanish and the Indian ‘banditti.’” Indeed, the extent to which Jackson was ignoring civilian authorities and free-lancing in this context remains debated (Mahon 1991 [1967], 24-28). Like Jackson, many settlers and elites alike feared this so-called “negro fort” for clearly racist reasons; they were concerned that it would inspire more slaves to attempt escape into Florida or even to revolt against slave-holders, and the fact that it was in foreign territory made it all the more threatening to Jackson (Clavin 2019, 76). Indeed, the Haitian Revolution was on many American minds at the time—many saw the success of former slaves in driving the French out of Haiti in 1804 as a threatening precedent (Karp 2016, 13). The threat to slavery was not just a threat to the economic fortunes of slave-holders but to white supremacy itself.

Jackson acknowledged that under the Treaty of Ghent the fort was in Spanish territory, but he relayed the message to Spanish officials in West Florida that he would take the fort if they refused to do anything about it.71 The Spanish officials made no offer to accommodate Jackson’s

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71 Jackson wrote to his superior, General Gaines, in May of 1816 to communicate his view that this fort “has been established by some villains for the purpose of rapine and plunder, and that it ought to be blown up…and if your mind shall have formed the same conclusion, destroy it and return the stolen negroes and property to their rightful owners” (Quoted in Giddings 1858, 37). As the Giddings (1858, 37) subsequently notes, the fort in question was “at least sixty miles from
wishes but could do little to stand in his way. Jackson instructed his subordinates to take the fort, and they devised a plan that they hoped would give their aggression the appearance of self-defense—they would travel openly by the fort to goad the escaped slaves and Seminoles into firing the first shot. This was indeed how the brief conflict occurred—once a cannon shot came from the fort, the detachment under Jackson’s command fired back (Clavin 2019, 116-117). The complete destruction of the fort (occasioned by a heated cannon ball that struck a store of gun powder) was the single most deadly event in the First Seminole War and for many is seen as the conclusion thereof, though sporadic violence between settlers and Seminoles continued thereafter (Mahon 1991 [1967], 23).

While Jackson’s efforts to take the “negro fort” may have been free-lancing, it is clearer that Jackson received orders in 1817 to invade Florida once more. The occasional violence between settlers and the Seminoles had become sufficiently troubling to then-Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, who gave Jackson his orders “with full power to conduct the war as he may think best” (quoted in Mahon 1998, 64). Jackson and his force of federal regulars, militia men, and allied Creeks attacked Native, Spanish, and escaped slave settlements alike on their way through East Florida. Satisfied with the damage they had dealt, Jackson decided to return home roughly a month after they had entered Florida, albeit not without detaining and executing two purported British agents, thereby sparking a diplomatic incident that I need not detail here (Rosen 2008). Moreover, the planned departure did not actually happen—just about two weeks after reporting that he would be returning to Nashville, Jackson apparently received word that Seminoles and Creeks were planning retributive raids with the Spanish in Pensacola (Ellisor

the border of the United States” and from all appearances was a gathering place for refugees, not scheming militants.
2017, 211). Before leaving, he would thus seek to end the war with a blow that he hoped would suffice to deter future attacks on American settlers. The Spanish abandoned the city, and a short U.S. raid on a nearby fort produced a Spanish surrender and a U.S. military government ensconced in West Florida.

While Jackson seemed to think he was doing his part to help enable U.S. expansion—an expansion that he saw as necessary if the United States was to be secure from any European threats that could grow in Florida—his actions complicated ongoing negotiations with Spain. While Calhoun’s instructions to Jackson had indeed been capacious, it is not clear that either Calhoun or Monroe had envisioned such a substantial assault on Spanish claims to Florida, and the execution of British agents threatened to bring another European power into the contest for Florida. The Monroe administration would ultimately disavow Jackson’s actions, though this may have been more about saving face and mollifying the British than anything else. A House committee condemned Jackson’s “invasion” of East Florida as unlawful, and although neither chamber formally censured Jackson, members of both chambers were especially critical his orders to execute the two British agents (Clavin 2019, 162; Mahon 1991 [1967], 27). Jackson may have made war on Spain without the approval of Congress, but the inconclusive fighting served mainly to encourage Spain to cede Florida to the United States (Heidler 1993, 527-528). Despite Spain’s diplomatic protests, the government eventually offered to cede East Florida and renounce its claim to West Florida.72

72 In an review of the different language that scholars have used to describe this settlement, Warren (1941) clarifies that the terms did not constitute a straightforward sale—rather, Spain ceded East Florida to the United States on the condition that the U.S. federal government would assume $5,000,000 in liabilities that the Spanish government had allegedly incurred toward U.S. citizens in previous conflict. Importantly for the government, this would be a hard cap on its payments. In West Florida, Spain simply changed its stance to accept the U.S. claim that the Louisiana Purchase had included that territory.
The Adams-Onis Treaty would officially see the Spanish relinquish Florida to the United States, but U.S. negotiators treated Seminoles and other Florida Native peoples as separate parties. A part of the Adams-Onis Treaty (quoted in Mahon 1962, 315) stipulated that:

The inhabitants of the territories which his Catholic Majesty cedes to the United States shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States, as soon as may be consistent with the principles of the Federal Constitution, and admitted to the enjoyment of all the privileges, rights, and immunities, of the citizens of the United States.

But on March 31, 1821, the U.S. government commissioned a French national, Jean A. Pénières to serve as an Indian Agent in relations with the Seminoles, and the federal government would continue to treat the Seminoles as outside of the terms of the treaty in practice—even though some in Congress called for the Seminoles to be recognized as covered by the treaty’s language (Mahon 1962, 359). These conditions would help to establish the conditions for the initiation of the Second Seminole War in 1835 amid the context of then-President Andrew Jackson’s “Indian Removal” policies.

**The Desire for Expansion—without War**

As the historical context that I have just provided would suggest, the federal government continued to seek expansion well beyond the early years of U.S. independence, and they were quite willing to do so opportunistically in the wake of settler *faits accomplis*. Moreover, they sought this expansion at the expense of Europeans and Native nations alike while avoiding militarized conflict.

For his part, Jackson did not believe that Native nations living in U.S.-claimed territories possessed valid claims to sovereignty, and he did not believe that settlers would abide the nearby presence of rival self-governing groups. Moreover, he was first elected President in 1828, which
gave him all the more power with which to enforce these views. As he explained while advocating for the Indian Removal Act in 1830, “It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites,” which he saw as a necessary condition for the security of the United States, the end of settler-Native violence, and the continued existence of Native nations as distinct peoples. 73 Indeed, in Jackson’s first message to Congress in 1829, he had framed removal as something necessary to avert “calamity” for Native populations. Historians still debate whether or to what extent any such concern on the part of Jackson or his Cabinet was disingenuous, but one point of broad agreement in the literature is that in proposing “removal” of Native nations to the west of the Mississippi River, Jackson sought what we would today call ethnic cleansing, and his primary interest was in territorial expansion and, relatedly, enhanced security vis-à-vis European powers (Anderson 2014, 151-156). 74 Indeed, when it became clear that members of various tribes were dying during these forced migrations, Jackson expressed no hesitation in continuing with the policy.

The Second Seminole War would eventually begin in late 1835 as Jackson pushed for removal of the Seminoles. Jackson, however, was not the first to contemplate such a policy—many others had thought that something along those lines might be necessary to aid settlement of “new” lands across the continent. Indeed, prior presidents had begun to think that some such effort would be necessary—John C. Calhoun, who served as Jackson’s vice president until resigning in 1832, traced the idea to Thomas Jefferson. 75 For these political elites, the difficult

74 See also Haveman (2016, 4), in which the author argues that these two different logics—removal as a means of preservation—are mutually exclusive.
75 Calhoun, “Remarks on the Executive Patronage,” (Feb. 13, 1835): 472. As Calhoun puts it in an exchange with another senator, “Is it possible that the Senator could have been ignorant that it
part of implementing this policy would be doing so without instigating wars. When the Indian Removal Act eventually passed (28-19 in the Senate and 101-97 in the House), this concern was still on the minds of policy-makers. The bill, which Jackson did indeed sign into law, did not specifically allow for the forced removal of Native nations, nor did it void previously established treaties (Cave 2003; Haveman 2016, 84). The text of the legislation, which includes provisions for federal aid to any affected tribes and perpetual guarantees of security in their new lands, speaks to the desire of political elites to acquire land while avoiding war.

But how exactly does one demand that Native nations leave their homes and settle in unfamiliar, often less desirable territory while avoiding war? The answer, to Jackson and his fellow policy-makers, was to use a mixture of incentives and, if necessary, threats. In commanding individual tribes to move westward, federal representatives often promised a number of things—first and most important of any such inducements, parcels of land were generally promised to tribes in perpetuity, but the incentive package typically included some amount of food for the trip westward as well some set amount of food, farming equipment, was Thomas Jefferson...who was the real author? Can he be ignorant that Andrew Jackson himself...in the treaty with the Cherokees, in 1817, acknowledges this fact, if my memory serves me? To come to a later period, is he ignorant that Mr. [James] Monroe recommended in one of his messages, in the fullest and most explicit manner, the adoption of the policy of the removal of all the Indian tribes within our limits?"

76 The legislation (Prucha 2000, 42), for example, includes the following passages: “it shall and may be lawful for the President of the United States to cause so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the river Mississippi, not included in any state or organized territory, and to which the Indian title has been extinguished, as he may judge necessary, to be divided into a suitable number of districts, for the reception of such tribes or nations of Indians as may choose to exchange the lands where they now reside, and remove there; and to cause each of said districts to be so described by natural or artificial marks, as to be easily distinguished from every other.” After further specifications, including the provision that federal aid would be given to nations directed to remove, the text concludes: “nothing in this act contained shall be construed as authorizing or directing the violation of any existing treaty between the United States and any of the Indian tribes.”
and/or financial aid once the tribe resettled. In some cases, individual leaders were promised especially large plots of land as part of the tribe’s broader parcel (Davis 2010, 67). When leaders expressed doubts, negotiators would often note that if the tribe did not accept removal, the federal government would not be able to protect them from state governments or other tribes (Pevar 2012, 265).

Of the many tribes that the federal government sought to “remove” using the Indian Removal Act, most did indeed respond to this mixture of incentives and threats by emigrating without resorting to military resistance. The flurry of treaty-making activity in this period represented a substantial acceleration therein—the federal government ratified forty treaties between Jackson’s signing of the Indian Removal Act in late May of 1830 and the end of 1835, the point at which the Second Seminole War would begin (Prucha 1994, Appendix B). In first seeking and attaining a treaty with the relatively powerful Choctaw nation by September of 1830, the Jackson administration intentionally sought and appears to have had a strong precedent-setting effect; most smaller tribes would acquiesce to the federal government’s demands (Davis 2010, 65-68). In that respect, for the U.S. government, the policy was largely successful in securing territorial expansion without war. It was in Florida that it would ultimately meet the most resistance.

A Permissive Condition

The promises and threats that the Jackson administration used in seeking to convince the Seminoles to leave Florida are helpful in demonstrating why the relatively small standing army played a role in making war possible in this case. I will return to earlier negotiations between the administration and the Seminoles below, but by 1835, efforts to “awe” the recalcitrant Seminoles
into leaving Florida were accelerating. On March 27, 1835, Indian Agent Wiley Thompson (appointed to the position in 1833) read an address from President Jackson to a crowd of 150 Seminole chiefs and warriors: “My Children, I have never deceived, nor will I ever deceive any of the red people. I tell you that you must go, and that you will go. Even if you had a right to stay, how could you live where you are now?” If they emigrated, Jackson promised that they will be treated fairly and will find the new lands to their liking. He concluded:

But lest some of your rash young men should forcibly oppose your arrangements for removal, I have ordered a large military force to be sent among you... If you listen to the voice of friendship and truth, you will go quietly and voluntarily. But should you listen to the bad birds that are always flying about you, and refuse to move, I have then directed the commanding officer to remove you by force. This will be done. I pray the Great Spirit, therefore, to incline you to do what is right.77

According to later correspondence between U.S. military officials, however, this “large military force” that Jackson eventually deployed to Florida would initially be about 700 infantrymen.78 Given the extent of the frontier and ongoing fears of European powers, the federal government did not generally dedicate significant numbers of soldiers to any one issue. It was only after the Seminoles struck the first blow in the war (as discussed below) that Jackson would direct more military resources to Florida—by May of 1836, the U.S. force facing the Seminoles was comprised of 8,000 men, including federal regulars, volunteer militia men, and allied Creeks (Wooster 2009, 86).

77 Andrew Jackson, “Address to the Chiefs and Warriors of the Seminole Indians in Florida,” (February 16, 1835) in American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1861): 524.
78 Lewis Cass, “Letter from Secretary of War Lewis Cass to Brigadier General Joseph M. Hernandez,” (Nov. 10, 1835) in Carter (1960, 194). As Cass writes, “The force under General Clinch will probably exceed seven hundred men, and in addition to these, one of the public armed vessels has been ordered to Tampa Bay on his suggestion, to co-operate with him. It is hoped that these arrangements will be sufficient to induce the Indians to remove peaceable, agreeably to their treaty stipulations.”
Like earlier politicians, Jackson had publicly articulated the virtues of maintaining only a small standing army and relying primarily on localized militias for defense. Indeed, he addressed the topic in his first annual message to Congress. I quote the entire passage here:

> Considering standing armies as dangerous to free governments in time of peace, I shall not seek to enlarge our present establishment, nor disregard that salutary lesson of political experience which teaches that the military should be held subordinate to the civil power. The gradual increase of our Navy, whose flag has displayed in distant climes our skill in navigation and our fame in arms; the preservation of our forts, arsenals, and dockyards, and the introduction of progressive improvements in the discipline and science of both branches of our military service are so plainly prescribed by prudence that I should be excused for omitting their mention sooner than for enlarging on their importance. But the bulwark of our defense is the national militia, which in the present state of our intelligence and population must render us invincible. As long as our Government is administered for the good of the people, and is regulated by their will; as long as it secures to us the rights of person and of property, liberty of conscience and of the press, it will be worth defending; and so long as it is worth defending a patriotic militia will cover it with an impenetrable aegis. Partial injuries and occasional mortifications we may be subjected to, but a million of armed freemen, possessed of the means of war, can never be conquered by a foreign foe. To any just system, therefore, calculated to strengthen this natural safeguard of the country I shall cheerfully lend all the aid in my power.79

In seeking to implement the policy of Indian removal, Jackson thus had a relatively small military to give force to his administration’s threats. Andrew Jackson himself, as well as civilian and military officials in his administration, seemed to believe that removal of the Seminoles could be undertaken peacefully. This may seem like wishful thinking, but two theories on this matter appear in the historical record. First, some officials articulated a sort of theory of compellence according to which a sufficient (non-lethal) display of military strength would “awe” the Seminoles into leaving because they would deem fighting useless.80 Thus, for

80 See, e.g., Wiley Thompson, “Letter to Elbert Herring,” (Oct. 28, 1834) in Clarence Edwin
example, negotiators would bring as many federal regulars as could be spared to summits with the Seminoles—if only they saw the number of soldiers and the armaments available to them, the Seminoles would understand that resistance was futile, or so the thinking went. Second, some theorized that there was a tipping point at which all the Seminoles would leave if officials could only get some cooperative number to emigrate. This was an argument focused more on cultural factors like kinship networks among the Seminoles. Those who espoused this theory did not typically specify exactly what proportion would need to be convinced to emigrate to induce the

Carter (1960): 58-63. As Thompson wrote, “An imposing force [posted at Tampa Bay will]...awe the Chiefs into a proper respect for the Government—Afford protection to the neighbouring white settlements, and supercede the necessity of Holate Emartla [a pro-removal Seminole chief who felt threatened by the larger number of anti-removal chiefs] & his followers fleeing the country.” See also: General Duncan Lamont Clinch, “Letter to the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, Brigadier General Roger Jones,” (January 22, 1835) in Carter (1960): 99-102. “If a sufficient military force, to overawe them, is not sent into the Nation,” Clinch wrote, “they will not be removed.”

81 Lewis Cass, “Letter to Gen. Duncan L. Clinch,” (Oct. 22, 1835) in Carter (1960): 188-189. “It is very desirable to accomplish the object of removing the Seminole Indians without the application of actual force, and I cannot but hope that such will be the result. You will of course proceed to embark and remove those first who are willing to go, postponing any decisive course with relation to the refractory ones till the others have set out. My impression is that they will then all peaceably follow.” Well before the attempt to remove the Seminoles, Florida’s Governor Duval had made a similar argument when writing to one of Cass’s predecessors, James Barbour: “Permit me to Suggest that if Congress Should mak [sic] any arrangement with the Creek Nation So as to remove them entirely, The Siminole Indians would be willing to go with them, and that a Treaty might be made with the Florida Indians highly advantageous to the United States. …The Indians on the Appalachiocola [River in Florida] whose lands were reserved to them by the late Treaty would no doubt be willing also to emigrate.” Duval, “Letter to James Barbour,” (Dec. 12, 1825) in Carter (1958): 385. Such thinking was evinced in other removal processes as well. For example, then-Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark wrote of the removal of the Shawnee in a letter to the Commissary General of Subsistence, Brevet Brigadier General George Gibson, “I am aware that this mode of emigrating in small parties is not so desirable as if all who should emigrate, could be induced to remove in a body, but I am likewise satisfied that even this mode of removal should not be checked, because the removal of one party, however small, necessarily induces other and larger parties to follow.” Clark, “Letter to George Gibson,” (July 6, 1836), Manuscript accessed at the National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC), Record Group 75, Entry 201, Box 15. As my citation of Cass’s letters with both theories suggests, the compellence and tipping point theories were not mutually exclusive.
remaining Seminoles to follow their lead, but officials communicated this reasoning as late as October of 1835. Ultimately, war would begin as officials tried to give these theories time to be proven correct, and given the federal government’s success in persuading other tribes to emigrate, it is plausible that one or both of these theories might ultimately have been borne out. A larger standing military may well have helped to validate the compellence theory.

*Settler Faits Accomplis*

American settlement in Florida began before European powers had relinquished their claims to the territory. Indeed, Madison’s aforementioned attempts to claim West Florida for the United States were related in no small part to the settler population in the territory. Madison—and the Congress—could justify their claims to West Florida not so much because the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase were truly ambiguous but because American settlers constituted about ninety percent of West Florida’s population as of 1809 (Currie 2000, 8). The Madison administration expected diplomatic protests but not significant popular resistance. While some have portrayed American settlement in Florida as something that happened “[f]ollowing the organization of Florida as a U.S. territory in 1822,” the fact is that American settlers had been moving to Florida in significant numbers well before that (Hall 2011, 66). It is true that Florida’s incorporation into the country made it a more attractive destination for more settlers, but plenty were there already.

Moreover, these settlers, as similarly situated Americans did elsewhere, started fights with the locals. West Florida settlers, in particular, were at the forefront of American efforts to

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82 This disagreement with Hall’s characterization aside, this book chapter on the Second Seminole War is a useful resource that I cite elsewhere in this chapter.
expand into Florida. They would, for example, seek to overthrow local European officials in Baton Rouge, Mobile, Pensacola as early as 1810, but perhaps the most ambitious settler in the region, Buckner Harris, had been a member of the Patriots that helped General Mathews seize Fernandina in 1812 (as discussed above). Once the United States retreated out of Florida in 1813, Harris set out to persuade the Georgia legislature to support an effort to establish an American settlement in Alachua County of north-central Florida. Together with money from Georgia, a land cession treaty with the Seminoles, and a Spanish land grant, Harris thought that such a settlement could both serve as a buffer between Georgia and the Seminoles and as territory that would help settlers catch escaped slaves seeking refuge with the Seminoles. Despite Georgia’s inability (or perhaps unwillingness) to provide financial support as well as the Spanish and Seminole lack of interest in any such bargaining, Harris gathered a group of seventy men who would cross into East Florida with him to establish a settlement. They faced relatively little active resistance from the Spanish and Seminoles at first—their settlement grew to about 160 people between January and March of 1814, and many of these citizens of “the District of Elotchaway of the Republic of East Florida” signed a petition to Congress asking for recognition as a U.S. territory (Monaco 2012). It was, however, a short-lived venture. A group of Seminoles killed Harris while he was riding his horse near the settlement, and the remaining settlers quickly disbanded.

Indeed, violent encounters such as these between settlers and Native nations were rather common for those who sought land in Florida. The fact that settlers had to use well-known land routes and waterways if they wanted to trade made these encounters a regular occurrence. As Ellisor (2017, 202) describes the state of Anglo-American settlement in Florida as of 1817:

Their increasing numbers stressed available resources, which had to be brought in from a distance. Similarly, the settlers had trouble getting their marketable
produce out of the county. The farmers near Fort Crawford, for example, grew pears and pumpkins, which they could trade at Pensacola for coffee and other items; however, they could only take a limited amount of their produce there in wagons because the Indians harassed their boats if they tried to float their cargo down the Conecuh-Escambia waterway through Spanish territory to Pensacola.

Jackson’s actions in the First Seminole War gave settlers all the more reason to seek land in the still-disputed territory of Florida. While political elites chided Jackson publicly and privately for his actions in that war, white settlers recognized the receding Spanish influence and took advantage of the situation. William Duval, Governor of Florida from 1822 to 1834, would later complain that, “Citizens have purchased property from the Indians shortly before the surrender of Florida, by allarming [sic] the Indians by telling them that the americans were coming immedeately to take possession of the country and that they would take from the Indians their slaves, Horses, and cattle, and urging them to sell, in order to save some part of their property.”83 Unable and unwilling to maintain possession of Florida by force, as discussed above, Spain would ultimately cede the territory to the United States, Jackson would serve briefly as its first military governor, and the promise of relatively cheap land spurred continued settlement as it had elsewhere.

Settlers, Speculators, and Local Elites

The Jackson administration faced patterns of land settlement and speculation in Florida that differed substantially from those in Ohio. Once the British Crown ceded the Northwest Territory to the United States, most of that land was bereft of any remaining European land claims; relatively few loyalists had settled in the region. Even though British soldiers remained

in their forts for some time after the land had been ceded to the United States, it would not seriously press the issue. This gave Americans significant incentives to quickly stake claims to that land and to purchase parcels of territory of the purpose of speculation. Thus, as seen in Chapter Two, tens of thousands of settlers rushed into areas that would later become the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, among others. In Florida, by contrast, there was more substantial European settlement before the United States gained control of the territory. As noted above, substantial American settlement would begin in Florida well before Spain ceded the territory, but in addition to the Native population, there remained many British and Spanish settlers in Florida at the times of its cession. U.S. land policy in Florida therefore had to begin by dealing with the claims of Spanish and British settlers.

When Spain ceded Florida to the British in 1763, the British largely disregarded treaty stipulations in order to buy, sell, and settle lands previously held by private Spanish actors (Parker 2017). This was in part due to the British decision to reserve land for Native nations beyond the Proclamation Line—British citizens would need somewhere else to settle (Mowat 1943, 359). When Britain returned Florida to Spain in 1783, Spain would treat British citizens and land claims in much the same way—as “conquered populations” (Wright 1975). The United States would continue this pattern of behavior when Spain ceded Florida by taking possession of all Spanish forts in the region (Dibble 1999, 209), and patterns of American settlement in Florida would also be shaped by speculation. Land speculation among the earlier European settlers was often a pursuit of privileged classes—the typical pattern here was that “men in high places used their influence to expand their private interest” (Rogers 1976, 485).

84 As Wright (1975, 123) observed, “The 1783 peace treated British subjects in the Floridas almost the same way as the 1763 treaty dealt with Spanish subjects,” i.e., as “conquered populations.”
This remained true for the Americans. Indeed, after the cession of Florida to the United States, it was generally the well-connected and wealthy who saw speculation as a viable opportunity. John Bellamy and Benjamin Chaires, for example, were government contractors who engaged in land speculation in central Florida at the same time that they were supposed to be fulfilling contracts to provide the Seminoles with food and other grants, though they were often negligent in that regard (Brown 1995, 423-424). Speculators such as these, who made their money through settler demand for land, had strong incentive to push for the removal of the Seminoles, and they had the social capital necessary get that message to territorial and federal officials alike.

American settlers in Florida did not wait for the Adams-Onis Treaty to start requesting federal military intervention on their behalf. Indeed, Andrew Jackson and other military officers were receiving requests for assistance from settlers during the First Seminole War. In one such instance, settlers had somehow provoked an attack from a local Creek band.85 Brigadier-General Edmund P. Gaines received notification of their petition for military assistance, and Gaines forwarded the request to Jackson on August 25, 1817 while noting why he had declined to intervene:

Having received several communications from persons settled upon the public land in the tract of country acquired by the Treaty of Fort Jackson, containing general accusations against the Indians—that they had killed cattle and hogs, stolen corn etc, from the settlers—and requesting the interposition of Military force; I have uniformly refered them to the civil authority: because I have in no case during the present year been informed of any thing like an assemblage of force among the Indians in this quarter of the Territory. Nor could I see any reason why persons who had obtruded themselves upon the public land, contrary to law, should be allowed military protection against the petty offences of which they complained: especially as it did not appear that the civil authority had been opposed; nor even resorted to by the complainants.86

85 The precipitating circumstances in this particular dispute are unclear.
86 https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/mss/maj/01045/01045_0278_0281.pdf
Despite their lack of success in that instance—this being in part attributable to their status as illegal squatters—Florida settlers continued to petition state and federal officials for military assistance. Given the quite numerous aforementioned settlers in Florida by the time of U.S. acquisition of the territory, federal and territorial officials did often seek to ensure that these preexisting and future settlers would find land to be accessible and secure. Once Spain ceded Florida, this meant negotiation with the Seminoles, who would cede some of their territory in northern Florida for a larger parcel of land farther south in the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek (Klos 1989, 56).\footnote{As Klos (1989, 56) notes, this agreement also involved a census of the Seminole population, which the Seminole leader Neamathla recorded as 4,883 individuals, not including escaped slaves living with the Seminoles.} From the beginning of Spanish cession of Florida, however, settler petitions were so numerous that the federal government would ultimately help to fund the construction of 250 military forts in Florida (Dibble 1999, 209), and in the 1820s, the territorial government established a process similar to the federal depredation claims system mentioned in Chapter One (Skogen 1996).\footnote{Dibble (1999, 209) is direct in saying why the federal government funded the creation of these forts: “Inhabitants pressured the government for protection and provisions.” The high number of forts is, as Dibble specifies (1999, 212), due to the fact that these were often constructed on an ad hoc basis in response to settler petitions.} Like that federal system, this local variant frequently found claims of Native depredations to be lacking in sufficient evidence for officials to act on them, but by mid-1826, Governor William Pope DuVal had become convinced that enough of the claims were sufficiently credible to warrant some sort of federal action (Mahon 1991 [1967], 61).\footnote{To the extent that “depredations” were occurring, many of them were raids intended by increasingly impoverished Seminoles to steal cattle (Monaco 2012, 18). DuVal became the first civilian governor of the Territory of Florida in April 1822.} By the early 1830s, federal officials were trying to give negotiations with the Seminoles enough time for
their theories of “peaceful” removal to succeed, and they consistently pressured Florida officials not to do anything that would start a war.  

**Costs of Non-Intervention**

In addition to the ways that settlers would exert their influence through petitions to policy-makers and more indirectly through speculators, settlers in this case also made the prospect of non-intervention seem increasingly costly to those in the federal government. It was in January of 1832 that the War Department would authorize the use of a special agent to negotiate with the Seminoles; James Gadsden would be the negotiator, and his mandate was to convince the Seminoles to move west (Mahon 1991 [1967], 74). Indeed, the options Gadsden presented to the Seminoles were as follows: 1) remain in Florida and come under the jurisdiction of Florida (which would not become a state until 1845), or 2) emigrate west of the Mississippi to an area they would share with Creeks in what is now Oklahoma, an area that was then meant to be a perpetual “Indian Country”. In the course of Gadsden’s meetings with Seminole leaders and after touring land for a proposed reservation in Oklahoma, seven chiefs eventually signed the Treaty of Payne’s Landing on May 9, 1832, but it was not submitted to the Senate for ratification.

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90 Wiley Thompson, “Letter to Florida Governor John Eaton,” (Jan. 10, 1835) in Clarence Edwin Carter (ed.), *Territorial Papers, Vol. XXV, The Territory of Florida, 1834-1839* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960): 90-91. Thompson writes, “It has been suggested to me that an attempt (perhaps a determined effort) will be made during the pending Session of the Legislative Council of Florida, to subject the Seminole Indians to the jurisdiction of the Territory. …You are apprised, no doubt, of the extremely delicate state of our present relations with these people—If the interposition which I thus deplore, should be attempted, it will aid the commission of a fraud upon these people; and irritated as they now are, may exasperate them so as to produce a sudden eruption—I therefore have to appeal to Your Excellency to interpose (should such an Act be passed) and arrest it by exercise of Your Executive Perogative.”

91 As Mahon (1991 [1967], 75) notes, neither Gadsden nor his secretary took notes of his one major meeting with Seminole leaders, or they at least submitted no notes that have been preserved in the historical record.
until December of 1833 (Prucha 1994, 175-176). The Senate would take until April 8, 1834 to vote its approval, and Jackson announced four days later that the treaty would henceforth come into effect. The treaty had stipulated that the Seminoles were to move west within three years, but the language was ambiguous—it was not clear whether that was to be three years from the date of the chiefs’ signing or from the date of its approval by the Senate and the President (Mahon 1991 [1967], 75-79). As political elites sought Seminole removal, they remained conscious of the prospect that public opinion might turn against them if they could not successfully persuade the Seminoles to emigrate.

Political elites were sensitive to the continued demands of settlers and sought to hasten the process of the Seminoles’ removal. American officials, including Agent Thompson Thompson and Attorney General Benjamin Franklin Butler, made the case that the treaty language meant that the Seminoles had to move three years from the date of the chiefs’ signing, giving the Seminoles until May of 1835 to begin their emigration.92 The Seminoles, even those who still accepted the treaty by that point, believed that they should have until 1837. By this point, fears of settler secession appeared to be less prominent for federal elites—in this case, that may be because earlier Florida settlers had sought annexation by the United States.93 But foreign intrigue was still a concern, and by failing to protect settlers and by failing to remove the Seminoles, the United States might allow for alienated individuals in these two different groups to make common cause with European powers. As had been the case in the Northwest Territory, most U.S. policy-makers saw the British as presenting the greatest perceived threat to their new possession of Florida. Indeed, Jackson himself brought to the presidency a long personal history

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of military conflict with the British and with Native groups supported by the British (Rogin 1991 [1975], 160-161).

Ultimately, however, in shaping the federal decision for military intervention in Florida, perhaps the most important factor—or at least the factor most clear from available records—was the cost of escaped slaves. For both the former owners of these slaves and the Florida settlers who feared the beginning of a slave revolt in the territory, it was the fact that many escaped slaves found community among the Seminoles that made military intervention so important. Thus, federal officials intensified their efforts to push the Seminoles into emigrating in 1834 and 1835. They were still hesitant to initiate a war given the likely costs, and indeed, it would be a group of Seminoles that would fire the first shots of the war, this was only after federal elites had spent years pushing hard for removal, very much in the service of those who profited from slavery and who feared a slave revolt.

**Settlers and Credible Commitments**

After the U.S. government acquired Florida from Spain—and after about a year of rapid turnover in territorial officials—DuVal became the first civilian governor of the territory, and from the beginning of his term and for all twelve years thereof, the status of the Seminole nation was a constantly pressing issue. Just as federal policy-makers had recognized that settlers were undermining federal promises in the Old Northwest, so too DuVal recognized that settlers were complicating relations with the Seminoles. In addition to the depredation claims system described above, he thus spent some of his tenure in the 1820s taking steps similar to those that federal policy-makers had implemented in the Northwest Ordinance—he ordered that any U.S.
persons who wanted to trade with Florida’s Native peoples would need a license from the state, and he barred settlement near Native lands (Mahon 1962, 356). In so doing, he sought to ensure that the federal government could credibly bargain with a Seminole nation that territorial and federal officials alike wanted to see removed west of the Mississippi River.

Upon the cession of Florida, meanwhile, federal policy-makers were initially unable to come to a decision on what sort of accommodation they would seek with the Seminoles as conflicting state preferences and ongoing land purchases in the southeast complicated matters (Ibid.) When they finally were able to arrange for a round of negotiations with Seminole leaders in late 1822, Acting Governor George Walton (DuVal was in Kentucky at the time) received little instruction from federal policy-makers and therefore had to provide his Indian Agent, Major Gad Humphreys, with very vague guidelines. Humphreys was to communicate to Seminole leaders that they should “prevent animosity and dissension among themselves, and suppress apprehension of severity or injustice from our Government, and of violence from the Creek Indians” (quoted in Mahon 1962, 358). In that middle clause—the request that Seminole leaders “suppress apprehension of severity or injustice from our Government”—makes clear that even if they could not yet produce specific proposals, U.S. officials were trying to communicate their credibility to the Seminoles as early as 1822.

After the passage of the Indian Removal Act and the federal authorization of negotiations for removal with the Seminoles, federal officials would likewise try to communicate the credibility of their promises to the Seminoles. In addition to a plot of land in Oklahoma, federal negotiators promised grants in food and other supplies that amounted to about $80,000 worth of goods at the time, and they escorted several Seminole leaders to Oklahoma to view what federal
officials hoped they would accept as their new home. This would satisfy some but not all Seminole leaders.

Conflict Initiation and Contemporaneous Explanations

In early 1835, several months before the outbreak of the Second Seminole War, sixteen Seminole leaders would sign a document accepting the validity of the Treaty of Payne’s Landing. Meetings between Thompson and the remaining, reluctant Seminole leaders continued, and these meetings became more and more volatile over time. In June, Osceola (a corruption of the Creek “Asi Yaholo”), one of the Seminole leaders most vociferously opposed to the Treaty of Payne’s Landing, purportedly pulled out his knife during a particularly fraught argument with Thompson. Thompson therefore had Osceola taken into custody, and although the record is unclear as to whether Thompson or Osceola first made the proposal, Osceola eventually declared he would accept the treaty in exchange for his release (Mahon 1991 [1967], 25-26). Thompson was convinced to release Osceola after the leader also promised to persuade some of

95 Shortly thereafter, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Alexander C. W. Fanning (temporarily replacing Gen. Clinch during a 2-month leave of absence) wrote to Adjutant General Roger Jones, “The General [Clinch], before his departure, and in conjunction with Gen Thompson, the Indian Agent, effected an arrangement with at least one half of the Seminole Chiefs, by which they and their followers and their negroes are to leave Florida for their new homes on the 1st of December next. …I much fear that the harmony of this arrangement…will be destroyed by the cupidity of our own citizens. Under an impression that the Indian negroes can be bought for little or nothing, speculators will shortly be flocking in the Country. …Under the circumstances, Gen Thompson has particularly requested me to write and obtain, if possible, orders to turn back every white man who shall attempt to cross the Indian boundary, and whose business is not immediately with the troops or public agents here.” Alexander Fanning, “Letter to Roger Jones,” (April 29, 1835) in Clarence Edwin Carter (ed.), Territorial Papers of the United States, Vol. XXV, The Territory of Florida, 1834-1839 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960): 132-133. (Alexander Macomb, Commanding General of the U.S. Army from 1828 to 1841, granted this request.)
his followers to emigrate as well, but it became clear that Osceola never intended to leave when he and his followers killed Thompson a short while later.

When Thompson’s report of these frustrated endeavors made it to the president, Jackson wrote, “Let a sufficient military force be forthwith ordered to protect our citizens and remove and protect the Indians agreeable to the Stipulations of the Treaty” (Mahon 1991 [19767], 93)

Amid escalating tensions, the War Department thus sent ten companies of troops to Florida, and the remaining Seminoles were given a January 1836 deadline to report to the Tampa Bay area for removal. However, neither the Secretary of War nor President Jackson himself seem to have given military officers in Florida a hard deadline for the removal of the Seminoles. Indeed, they allowed the deadline (the one that they believed to be in accordance with the treaty) to pass without forcibly removing anyone. The officers in command in Florida were urged to carry out the Seminoles’ removal as quickly as practicable, but they were also authorized to delay any action until the spring of 1836 (Ibid., 94). All the while, settlers did what they could to press for decisive federal intervention.⁹⁶

Military officials were still being told to avoid violence that could create a wider war, but in late December of 1835, “[when] ordered by the U.S. Army to gather at Tampa Bay in early January 1836, the Seminoles and their black allies chose instead to strike first, attacking sugar

⁹⁶ Joshua Stafford, Daniel Simmons, et al., “Memorial to the Secretary of War by Inhabitants of Hillsborough County” (Nov. 1834) in Carter (1960, 69-70). The “memorial” or petition attracted 26 signatories and reads, in part, as follows: “We the undersigned Inhabitants of Hillsborough County Tampa Bay view our situation in a very perilous light in consequence of the non compliance of the Indians with the wishes of Government to remove from the Territory…[and] therefore deem it a necessary measure to ourselves and our families to present you this memorial praying that a sufficient number of Troops may be stationed at Tampa Cantonement Brook in order to keep the Indians in check and to protect the lives and property of the now helpless settlers.” Wilm (2017) offers an overview of this sort of petition and the frequency with which settlers used them.
plantations along the St. Johns River and annihilating an army command of a hundred men, initiating what has come to be called the Second Seminole War” (Hahn 2016, 35). Even as the federal government maintained a substantial military presence in Florida over the next several years, settlers would continue to petition for and receive government assistance in the form of both military protection and food aid (Shire 2013, 495-499). By 1842—well after the end of Jackson’s second term in March of 1837—many of the Seminoles had indeed moved to a reservation, whereas others had retreated farther south onto less desirable land. This hurting stalemate was sufficient for President John Tyler to conclude that, “Further pursuit of these miserable beings by a large military force seems as injudicious as it is unavailing.”

While many Americans—public officials and otherwise—attributed the war to the Seminoles’ refusal to move, there were some at the time who believed that the small military was making it difficult to “awe” the Seminoles into emigrating. As Brevet Lt. Col. Alexander C. W. Fanning wrote to Gen. Duncan L. Clinch on Nov. 27, 1835, “We have fallen into the error committed at the Commencement of every Indian War: The display of too little force—The attempt to do too much with inadequate means.” Not long thereafter, Florida’s Acting Governor G.K. Walker complained to Secretary of War Lewis Cass, “The regular troops stationed in the nation, consisting entirely of infantry and very limited in number, I regard as incompetent to protect so extensive a line of contry [sic].” Indeed, Cass himself agreed and had pushed Congress to increase the size of the standing army before the war had started; Congress

97 Quoted in Knetsch (2011, 151). Although most Seminoles were ultimately forced to emigrate, a small minority escaped farther south into the Everglades. Enough of them remained that a Third Seminole War began in 1855, and Seminoles now have reservations in both Florida and Oklahoma.
would only belatedly and incrementally do so in 1838 (Wooster 2009, 84-93). In the aftermath of the war, the United State Congress would pass the Florida Armed Occupation Act in order to incentivize settlement in Florida. More so than the Northwest Ordinance, this act was directly intended to advance white settlement, and it would serve as a something of a template for later legislation like the Homestead Act.

*Alternative Explanations*

Among the three cases I have selected, this is likely the hardest test for my theory—here we have a president who appears more prejudiced against Native nations and their claims to sovereignty than many of his contemporaries, including his predecessors. Nonetheless, this case also includes a relatively lengthy period of negotiation in which federal authorities continued to postpone the use of military force well past the date by which they thought they had the authority to compel the Seminoles to leave Florida. Moreover, military officials were given permission to evict settlers in disputed territory and to prevent any new ones from entering, and until the outbreak of violence in December 1835, it was settlers rather than federal regulars who were most frequently engaged in conflict with the Seminoles.

The first alternative explanation, that low state capacity prevented the U.S. from restraining settlers, again receives less support from the available evidence. The federal government supported the growth of a more robust military for the War of 1812, and John C. Calhoun spent much of his later time as Secretary of War seeking to update what he saw as an antiquated force unsuited to the needs of the young republic. His requests for additional funding, however, did not receive much support in a Congress that still had ideological opposition to a large standing army in peace-time. Moreover, when it became necessary, the federal government
did seek to use the military to prevent settlement on disputed lands in Florida and to punish those who violated federal commitments to the Seminoles. As in the Northwest Territory, this was a relatively costly endeavor.

The second alternative explanation, that elites were ambivalent as to whether expansion led to violent conflict with Native nations, receives more support here than it did in the Northwest Indian War, but as I have argued above, it still receives less support than my own argument. Like the Northwest Indian War, the Second Seminole War was preceded by protracted attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement, and for the U.S. government, these were partially successful in convincing many of the Seminoles to accept land in Oklahoma. Moreover, political elites took costly steps to try to prevent settlers from sparking a war, and they asked local officials to do the same thing. As in the case of the Northwest Indian War, the most compelling piece of evidence here is the fact that federal elites evinced awareness that settlers were undermining their commitments and therefore sought to punish squatters who illegally sought to claim Seminole lands. Settlers were, in this case, working with the president most likely to sympathize with their aims—a president who sought and implemented mass ethnic cleansing through legislation—and yet, even under these circumstances the federal government sought to avoid war and may well have done so if not for settlers.

Here we have a president who appears more negatively predisposed to Native Americans than his predecessors (or successors) were. Nonetheless, we also have a relatively lengthy period of negotiation in which it remains unclear where the government continued to postpone the use of kinetic military operations. Moreover, military officials were given permission to evict settlers in disputed territory and to prevent any new ones from entering, and until the outbreak of violence in December 1835, settlers and Seminoles were the ones attacking each other.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the process by which the Second Seminole War came about. I have argued that the conflict initiation in this case was similar to that of the Northwest Indian War insofar as both were significantly influenced by the settler-driven mechanisms I identify. This case was surely a harder test for my explanation given Jackson’s lack of interest in claims of Native sovereignty, but I have made the case that this was nonetheless a war that might not have happened—or would have happened later—if not for the role of American settlers in Florida. I now turn to my final case study, Utah’s Black Hawk War of 1865 to 1872, a conflict that looks quite different than my first two case studies.
Chapter 4

Utah’s Black Hawk War

Unlike my first two case studies, this chapter focuses on a conflict in which the federal government never truly did come to the aid of settlers who had initiated militarized disputes with Native nations. In this chapter, I thus trace the process by which settlers initiated Utah’s Black Hawk War, and I examine federal decision-making that ultimately led not to military assistance but to an assertion of the government’s authority in Utah at the expense of the Latter-day Saints. I structure this chapter in mostly the same way as I structured the previous two chapters. That is, I begin with some historical context on the relevant actors in this case, and I continue by making the case that although the federal government wanted to expand into the Great Basin region, political elites wanted to do so while avoiding war with local Native nations like the Utes. I then show that the permissive condition I have noted previously—the lack of a large standing army—still structured U.S. relationships with settler populations in this period. I then examine the three mechanism by which I have argued that settlers elsewhere brought the federal government into their conflicts with Native nations—to what extent were they still there in this case? Then, in a departure from the structure of the previous two chapters, I examine the inhibiting factors that resulted in non-intervention in this case. Finally, I conclude by asking whether any of the contemporaneous explanations help illuminate the dynamics of this conflict or whether alternative explanations might better explain the outcome of this case.

Ultimately, I find that before the initiation of Utah’s Black Hawk War, patterns of settler behavior were similar to those in the earlier cases I discussed, and these could have pushed the federal decision toward intervention through the same three mechanisms. The behavior of political elites, however, differed substantially in this case. Specifically, federal officials allowed
the conflict to fester for seven years before “intervening,” and the government did not make any attempt to negotiate or otherwise put an end to hostilities before that. Moreover, I consider this to be a non-intervention because the federal government was not interested in intervening military on the side of the settlers so much as it was interested in asserting control over the Latter-day Saints.

**Historical Context**

As in the Northwest Indian War and the Second Seminole War, the settlers who would ultimately spark Utah’s Black Hawk War encountered Native peoples with longer histories of residence in a territory that was new to them. As I will demonstrate, however, perhaps the most important factor to have shaped relations between this group of settlers and the local Native populations was the fact that Utah’s early Anglo-American settlers were Mormons, or members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Here terminology is again an issue as leaders of the Church had long used the “Mormon” label, but President Russell M. Nelson released guidelines in mid-2018 stating that it would be more appropriate to refer to adherents as “members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” or “Latter-day Saints”). On the other hand, Church guidelines allow for the use of the term “Mormon” “in proper names such as the Book of Mormon or when used as an adjective. In such historical expressions as ‘Mormon trail’. When describing the religion itself, the guidelines discourage the use of the term “Mormonism” and instead encourage the phrase, “the restored gospel of Jesus Christ”.

However, not all Mormons see the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as *the* Mormon...
church; most do, but there are several smaller denominations that still accept “Mormon” and “Mormonism” as appropriate terminology, as do some members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints despite the leadership’s recent change (Launius and Thatcher 1994; Riess 2019). As I do in discussing Native nations, I will generally aim for clarity and brevity of expression while remaining sensitive to terminological preferences, even as those differ within communities.

In moving to the territory that now constitutes the state of Utah, the Latter-day Saints were seeking a refuge from religious persecution that they faced as the founder, Joseph Smith, led the movement first from New York and then to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. The heterodox community, which purported to offer a new divine revelation that superseded the text of the Bible and which differed most visibly from other Christian communities of the day in its early acceptance of polygamy, faced state violence in Missouri, where Governor Lilburn Boggs ordered citizens to treat the Latter-day Saints “as enemies” who “must be exterminated or driven from the state if necessary for the public peace”.  

Joseph Smith then fled with his followers to a town they would name Nauvoo, Illinois, but here too they faced distrust from the locals. Between 1839 and 1844, tensions would rise to the point of violence—Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were arrested, and while they were in jail awaiting trial, they were shot and killed by members of an armed mob on June 27, 1844. It was at this point that many of today’s divisions among Mormon denominations arose—absent a clear successor, most but not all ultimately

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101 The statement was made public on October 27, 1838 (Howe 2007, 319). On the practice of polygamy, Howe (2007, 730) notes that this was not a widespread practice—only about ten percent of Mormon men had multiple wives—but many of the religion’s early leaders, including Brigham Young, did practice polygamy.

102 Five men were tried for these murders, but they were all acquitted (Howe 2007, 726).
chose to follow Brigham Young, who had served in a high position under Smith and who would lead the community first to Nebraska before settling in what would become Utah.

In the Utah Territory, Brigham Young and the Latter-day Saints would encounter a number of Native nations, the most prominent being a group that would come to be known as the Utes. By the time of Young’s arrival in the Great Basin and the community’s settlement on a site in the Sanpete Valley they called Manti, the Utes had been interacting with European settlers for over two centuries, primarily through trade with Spanish and, to a more limited extent, French merchants. Ute bands occupied a relatively wide range of territories from modern-day Utah to California and thus differed in the sort of goods they sought for themselves and for trade, but buffalo, slaves, and horses were among the most important commodities (Zappie 2012, 200). The Utes were one of several Native communities in the Great Basin region, which included a number of other groups in the Uto-Aztecan ethnolinguistic group like the Apache, Comanche, Hopi, Paiute, and Shoshone. The Utes, moreover, were comprised of several bands, including the Timpanogos (or Tumpanawach) and the Sanpitch (or Sanpits, today known as the San Pitch Ute, from whom the name of the Sanpete Valley is derived). By the time of Latter-day Saints’ migration into the Great Basin, the Sanpitch were led by Wakara and a number of other more localized leaders, including Wakara’s brother, Sanpitch, who was the father of Black Hawk (Jones 2019, 6-11, 65).

The Sanpitch and other Utes with whom the Latter-day Saints first had sustained contact generally maintained amicable relations with the settlers and with other local tribes alike. Wakara

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103 Indeed, many of the slaves the Utes sought were Southern Paiute women and children (Zappia 2012, 200-201, 211).
104 As Walker (2002, 217) notes, Wakara was Timpanogos by birth, but after his father was killed by fellow members of this band for failing to join in a battle, Wakara killed those responsible and took refuge with the Sanpitch.
had led men from other bands and tribes in battle and at times spoke on behalf of them, which ultimately meant that he would be a key intermediary between local tribes and the new settlers. Indeed, Wakara met with a settler delegation in 1848 and invited the Latter-day Saints to settle in an area local tribes had used as a hunting ground for some time, likely due to Ute interest in learning about the settlers’ farming techniques (Walker 2002, 219). A year later, Wakara would receive correspondence from Brigham Young for the first time while meeting with other settler leaders in Provo. Young was interested in developing a friendly relationship with the local Native population, and he said as much in his letter: “we want to be friends to you and will not do you or your people any hurt. We are the friends of the Indians, and we want them to be at peace with us” (quoted in Walker 2002, 220). Wakara was favorably disposed to such a relationship (Rogers 2017, 98). According to another settler present at Wakara’s Provo meetings, he described the Latter-day Saints as his “father[s], mothers, brothers, and sisters,” and he promised that Mormon livestock would not be subjected to Ute raids (quoted in Walker 2002, 221).

Later, in June of 1849, Wakara met with Young in person for the first time. Here the two leaders and several other high-level officials on each side outlined a number of avenues for cooperation between the settlers and the tribes. Many of the proposals to which Wakara would agree were, for the settlers, means of converting the Native peoples. By instructing them in

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105 See Grynaviski (2018) for a more detailed examination of the role intermediaries such as this could play in settler-Native relationships.
106 The settlers often referred to Wakara with the closest name familiar to them—“Walker,” hence the name of the later Walker War.
107 Prominent Latter-day Saints, including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, often sought positive relationships with (and sent missionaries to) Native nations in part because of they believed these peoples to be the “Lost Tribes of Israel” discussed in the Book of Mormon, peoples who would need to be reconverted “back to the authentic faith their ancestors had known in ancient times” (Howe 2007, 317).
farming and in how to construct buildings as the settlers did and by providing schooling to
Native children, the Latter-day Saints hoped to perform the same sort of “civilizing” that federal
policy had sought elsewhere on the continent (Walker 2002, 222). Wakara, however, was less
concerned with the intentions of the settlers and more interested in the long-term survivability of
his fellow tribe members. He was aware that the buffalo on which they depended was in
decline—it had been since before the arrival of the Latter-day Saints (Walker 2002, 222;
Isenberg 2000). In short, both sides had good reason to seek cooperation in their early contacts.

As with some other Native nations, Ute practices had changed significantly over the years
due to their adoption of the horse and firearms, both of which were especially useful in making
raiding of other nearby Native and settler communities a more practicable way to subsist (Walker
2002, 217-218). Moreover, here in the interior of the continent, disease had not affected
Native communities as disastrously as it had closer to the more populous coasts. The Latter-day
Saints thus encountered Indigenous peoples whose military capabilities were not drastically
different than their own at first, and Wakara was not afraid to use the bargaining power he had.
Although he had committed not to raid settlements for livestock at the Provo meetings, he had
(again, as reported by settlers) declared that the waters of the area belonged to his tribe; the scope
of this claim, however, does not appear to have been clear to the settlers (Walker 2002, 221).

But the once-friendly relationship between Utes and the settlers had started to take a
negative turn in the spring of 1850, during which Wakara requested but did not receive settler
assistance in avenging the deaths of several of his compatriots, likely at the hands of Shoshones
or Bannocks (Walker 2002, 228). At the same meeting in which Wakara made this request,
Brigham Young also asked if the settlers could purchase—rather than just settle on—Ute lands.

108 For a comparable case further south among the Comanches, see Hämäläinen (2008).
Each side’s denial of the other’s request at this meeting constitute a plausible locus at which relations started to drift apart.

Perhaps the most significant and persistent strain on Ute relations with the Latter-day Saints, however, was the slow-moving ecological disaster that afflicted other tribes across the United States as settlers spread across the continent. In the decades following the establishment of a friendly relationship, numerous issues would make coexistence harder to manage. An 1849-1850 measles outbreak, which (as far as we know, unintentionally) spread from travelers moving west through the area and/or from the Utah settlers to the Sanpitch and other Ute bands, was the first wave of disease to weaken these local Native communities (Stoffle et al. 1995). The winter of 1850-1851, moreover, was especially difficult due in part to abnormally high levels of snow. Through all this, the settler relationship with the Utes remained relatively positive—the Latter-day Saints, who also struggled through that winter, provided the Utes with some of their own food to help them through it (Walker 2002, 224). Nonetheless, relations between the settler Native communities remained mostly positive for the first few years—Wakara even publicly converted to Mormonism and took on a new name, Awist, although it is not clear to what extent the settlers and Utes shared an understanding of what the baptism associated with conversion meant (Walker 2002, 226). Ultimately, it was another natural disaster of a sort—a drought—that in 1864 would strain Ute relations with the Latter-day Saints to the point that war would become thinkable.

Before continuing to the next section, it is also worth noting that although the Utes would be the Native group most significantly involved in the Black Hawk War, relations with other tribes were also on a negative trajectory for the Latter-Day Saints. Relations between the settlers and Southern Paiutes had also soured over time. In that case, it was religion that was a cause of
enmity—the settlers would purchase Paiutes that the Utes had enslaved in order to “redeem” the captives (Zappia 2012, 212). While this sort of missionary impulse was not uncommon even in more orthodox Christian groups at the time, most Paiutes did not see this as liberation, and some would eventually make common cause with the Utes in resisting further settler expansion.

The Desire for Expansion—without War

Long before the initiation of the Black Hawk War in 1865, the Utah Territory (which I will typically refer to here as Utah) was part of the expansion that political elites envisioned for the United States. The territory itself included all of what is today the state of Utah as well as most of present-day Nevada and parts of Colorado and Wyoming, and it was organized as part of the Compromise of 1850—a bargain that also saw the admission of California as a state and the creation of the New Mexico Territory in the Congress’s efforts to maintain a balance between free and slave states. All of these states and territories had been ceded by Mexico to the United States in the wake of the Mexican-American War—the readiness with which Latter-day Saints were able to settle in Utah was due to the previous vision of national expansion that had been put into practice by President James K. Polk (Leonard 1992, 114). As Maass (2020) details, these northern territories of Mexico were of particular interest to U.S. political elites because these territories were likely to be conducive to white settlement. They were sparsely populated and would be of sufficient interest to settlers to quickly tilt the demographics in favor of the white population. By contrast, federal elites debated seeking additional territory in the more populous core of Mexico—exemplified by the relatively densely populated Mexico City—but precisely because of the dim prospects for white settlement, they opted not to do so.
In the newly acquired territories, however, political elites would still have to deal with relatively substantial Native populations. Many of the tribes on the Pacific coast would see substantial deaths in this period due to diseases brought by an influx of settlers, but instances of settler-initiated violence in this region were some of the clearest examples of genocide in the history of U.S. relations with Native nations (Madley 2016). Such violence was often motivated by the prospect of gold on Native lands and was sometimes instigated by local officials, sometimes more directly by settlers. The federal government, meanwhile, still in possession of only a small standing army and preoccupied with settling boundary disputes and clarifying the status of slavery in the new territories, did not keep up with the pace of settlement associated with these gold and land rushes. Federal Indian agencies based in Upper Missouri and Council Bluffs were transferred to Santa Fe and Salt Lake in March of 1849, and agents were appointed about a month later (Morgan 1948, 383-384). John Wilson, the agent appointed to the new Salt Lake agency, resigned his appointment by September of that same year, and the position remained vacant for another year. Once someone was appointed to the position, Congress created the Utah Territory and thereby abolished the Salt Lake agency before the new agent even began to travel to his post. The territorial governor would now be the federal government’s *ex officio* Indian agent for the territory—in Utah, that meant that Brigham Young would be in control of Indian affairs for just over seven years starting in February of 1851.109

If the Great Basin region was spared the same degree of avaricious behavior as was seen on the Pacific coast for the time being, this was in part because there there were no known major

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109 As Morgan (1948, 385) notes, other federal officials relayed their concern about Young to superiors in Washington, DC. Henry Day, a Missourian bureaucrat in Indian affairs, had been posted to the new Utah superintendency and within a year would submit his resignation on the grounds that Young was purportedly serving his own community’s interests, not those of the federal government.
deposits of precious metals and because earlier explorers of the region publicly described it as barren territory unsuited for significant agricultural development. Indeed, the Latter-day Saints would have to commit much of their energy to the construction of infrastructure for irrigation (Arrington and May 1975, 4-6). But it was also the case that in staking their claims to this uninviting territory first, the Latter-day Saints likely deterred some degree of settlement by those who were accustomed to being in a religion shared by a majority of their community members.

A Permissive Condition

Despite increasing Native resistance to settler encroachment in the West, political elites sought to return after the Civil War to the relatively small military to which the United States was accustomed. Even Ulysses S. Grant’s position, as characterized by an unspecified author in *The New York Times*, was that reverting to a small standing army was desirable:

Grant does not desire a large standing army. …It is never very hard to find work for soldiers, and the temptation of putting them to service is one of the strongest objections to a large standing army. Another excuse for a large army can always be found in pretended preparations for the possible contingencies of the future. …But Grant sets aside or ignores all pretension and speculation. He shows how few are the purposes for which troops are really needed in this country as a permanent thing, and how simple are their duties. They are needed to protect the settlers and travelers on the Western Plains from the savages, and they are needed to preserve order in the South. …He therefore endorses emphatically the Senate bill…which will give us a military force of all arms somewhere in the vicinity of fifty thousand men” (1866).

Grant and other contemporaries still allowed that the military would be needed to police the frontier, but they argued that it could be done with a small standing army and supplementary local militias. Moreover, this was again articulated as an ideological issue rather than an issue of
resource constraints. The quick and substantial reduction of total military personnel would ultimately leave the armed forces hard-pressed to defend all major frontier settlements. This would surely be a larger standing army than the 700-man force the U.S. first employed, but as a percentage of the total population, little had changed in decades—elites remained hesitant to shift to a larger standing army. This left local militias to attempt to keep the peace in most places on the frontier.

In the Utah Territory, the primary militia seeking to protect settlers was the Nauvoo Legion, a force comprised of Latter-day Saints that answered to the head of the Church. Named for Nauvoo, Illinois, the settlement in which the militia was first created, the state of Illinois (which had been a state since 1818) authorized the operations of this militia within its borders in 1840 before rescinding this order just a few years later. The Legion survived the killing of Joseph Smith and then came under the command of Brigham Young, though losing the support of the Illinois state government meant that they had to return state-issued firearms. Young would seek to reconstitute this militia in the Utah territory, where it would officially be referred to as the Deseret Militia and, later, the Utah Territorial Militia while still colloquially being called the Nauvoo Legion by many. By the time of the Black Hawk War, it was, by the standards of the day’s militias, relatively powerful—it consisted of about 2,500 well-equipped men who, as far as such comparisons can be made, appear to have been better-trained than those in other militias (Garnder et al. 1961). Indeed, as I describe below, the federal government would ultimately see the Nauvoo Legion’s proficiency as a problem.
Settler Faits Accomplis

The migration of Latter-day Saints into the Utah Territory would involve the staged but rather rapid influx of nearly 14,000 settlers into the Great Basin region. In the first wave of the Latter-day Saints’ migration, Brigham Young and about 3,000 others would depart from Nauvoo in March of 1846. Starting in April, the largest part of this migration would begin with about 10,000 Latter-day Saints leaving for the Great Basin over the course of three monthly waves through June, and a final group of 700 or so would begin their trek in September (Hartley 1997). Despite this relatively large, quick process of settlement, as I have noted above, relations between the settlers and Great Basin tribes were initially relatively friendly. The Utes and others in the region had previously interacted with French and Spanish settlers with only occasional incidents of violence between them—raiding of cattle and horses was the most frequent source of violence, but the fact that the Latter-day Saints could offer useful advice on farming helped to delay any significant friction between the Native and settler communities.

The Latter-day Saints, moreover, did not remain in their isolated Utah settlements. “By the end of 1847 Mormon parties had explored the country along both the southern and northern routes to California, and had explored the valleys west of the Wasatch Mountains from Cache Valley, Utah-Idaho, on the norther, to San Bernardino Valley California, on the south” (Arrington 1958, 42). Of particular interest to the Latter-day Saints was extending their territory far enough westward to have ready access to a port city; they would settle on San Diego as the direction in which to aim (Crawley 1989). As I will discuss further below, however, Congress was not inclined to admit such a large Mormon-dominated state into the union, but this speaks to both the rapidity and the scale of the settler fait accomplis in the form of claiming land for themselves. In other words, Utah may have presented unique challenges to settlers, but the patterns of
settlement here were not drastically different than the patterns observed in the Old Northwest and in Florida. In that regard, the experience of the Latter-day Saints had much in common with those earlier settlers.

Although the relationship between the settler and Native communities began rather constructively, it deteriorated even before the Black Hawk War. As had happened in other areas where Anglo-American settlers claimed land that Native populations had previously seen as their own, competing claims and strains on local resources made violence more possible over time. The Sanpitch and Timpanogos Utes in particular were affected by increasing settler demands for land, and while leaders of settler and Native communities often tried to prevent their people from committing acts of violence, such attempts at restraint did not always work, and leaders were sometimes willing to retaliate. Thus, between 1849 and 1865, there were several instances of violence between settlers and Native groups. While leaders had resolved earlier periods of discord with promises to punish offending community members, the first recorded incident of clearly leader-authorized violence involved the Ute killing of cattle and theft of horses. Wakara had warned against this, but a group of Latter-day Saints exacted revenge in the “Battle Creek Massacre,” in which they killed several Utes (the range of reported deaths varies, but there were likely fewer than ten deaths). The settlers’ stated goal was to deter any further killing or theft of their livestock—importantly, according to one of the participants, Brigham Young had provided the orders “to take such measures as would put a final end to their depredations in future” (quoted in Christy 1978, 220).

The two most significant periods of violence, however, came to be known as the Walker War and the Tintic War. This Walker War was essentially a cycle of retributive violence that

110 Walker, as noted above, was a common settler name for Wakara.
began in 1853 with a minor trade dispute involving settlers and Wakara’s Sanpitch Utes in which one of the Mormon settlers killed a Ute. When the settlers refused Ute demands for compensation, the Utes killed another settler, and this tit-for-tat violence continued through 1854 until leaders of the Latter-day Saints sought to end the violence with offers of further assistance to the Utes (Christy 1978, 233). The short-lived Tintic War of February and March of 1856 also involved settlers and Utes—in this case, those of the Timpanogos band—though this again involved violence of rather low intensity. No more than ten individuals were killed on each side (Walker 2016, 35). This conflict was significant less for its casualty numbers and more for the split between Mormon and non-Mormon territorial officials—between more conciliatory policies Young sought as opposed to the more punitive policies other federal officials sought, about which I provide more detail below.

To provide a Ute perspective on these conflicts, several days before the first acts of violence associated with the Walker War, Wakara would meet with leaders of the Latter-day Saints in 1853 in what was then known as Great Salt Lake City. As one settler transcribed it, Wakara explained his grievances through an interpreter:

[H]e had always been opposed to the whites set[t]ling on the Indian lands, particularly that portion which he claims; and on which his band resides and on which they have resided since his childhood, and his parents before him—that the Mormons when they first commenced the settlement of Salt Lake Valley, was friendly, and promised them many comforts, and lasting friendship—that they continued friendly for a short time, until they became strong in numbers, then their conduct and treatment towards the Indians changed—they were not only treated unkindly, but many were much abused and this course has been pursued up to the present—sometimes they have been treated with much severity—they have been driven by this population from place to place—settlements have been made on all their hunting grounds in the valleys, and the graves of their fathers have been torn up by the whites. … He said he has always been opposed to the whites settling on his lands, but the whites were strong and he was weak, and he
could not help it—that if his great father did not do something to relieve them, he could not tell what they would do.111

While this does not appear to be entirely consonant with Wakara’s early behavior with respect to the settlers, tensions had certainly grown as the settler population grew in strength and ambition. The settler who transcribed this exchange, Will Bagley (1853), followed Wakara’s description of the problem with his own view on the proximate cause of then-escalating tensions:

One prominent cause of the present excitement is the interference of the Mormons with their long established Spanish trade, and the killing of an Indian trader by the name of Bowman, from Santa Fee, and charging the murder to the Indians. I greatly fear that much difficulty will grow out of the present excited condition of the Indians,—should the Mormons continue their unkind treatment.

Indeed, the Latter-day Saints found the “long established Spanish trade,” by which they meant the raiding of Spanish settlements for horses and cattle to be sold elsewhere, to be sinful but also dangerous (Jones 2019, 66-67). This relatively isolated community was not interested in giving Spanish settlers—who remained a significant presence in the American Southwest despite the cession of Mexican lands—any reason to quarrel with them.

**Settlers, Speculators, and Local Elites**

As noted above, one of the unusual things about the territorial government in Utah was the fact that the line between “settlers” and “local elites” was blurry. Most territorial governors were military officers or public servants with long records of employment in the government. Many—such as Andrew Jackson in his brief time as military governor of Florida—may have sympathized with settler claims, but Brigham Young’s status as the governor of Utah was qualitatively different. In this case, the governor was someone who had led the settlers to the

territory—someone who felt a deep obligation to the settlers and someone to whom settlers were not just citizens but members of a shared religious community.

These local elites, however, were not as quick to request federal intervention as state and territorial officials elsewhere. In most other cases, local elites had good reason to request military assistance in conflicts with Native nations—doing so was a signal to constituents that they were tending to settler interests, and most of these other local elites had little reason to fear the misuse of federal power. The Latter-day Saints, however, were more hesitant to invite the federal government into their territory. As Arrington and May (1975, 6) describe it, by settling in the unwelcoming Great Basin, “Brigham Young sought isolation and independence above all else.” Indeed, Young’s choice of territory may have been influenced by Joseph Smith, who wrote in 1842 that, “I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction, and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains” (quoted in Arrington 1958, 39). Moreover, land speculation was a less prominent factor in this case given the Church’s discouraging of the practice—given the desire for rapid and expansive settlement, leaders communicated that members of the community should only claim as much land as they could cultivate (Sauder 1996, 63).

Leaders of the Latter-day Saints did, however, overcome this reluctance to make requests of the federal government on occasion. Even before the community set out for the Great Basin later in the 1840s, Joseph Smith and his advisors considered trying to establish settlements across across the American west as far south as Texas and as far north as Vancouver Island, and they submitted petitions to Congress and to the War Department to help fund these ventures. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these requests were unsuccessful (Arrington 1958, 40). However, they—as well as “gentile” officials—would ultimately make similar requests throughout the Black Hawk War. While leaders among the Latter-day Saints vacillated on the question of whether and to what
extent they should request military assistance, they did ultimately decide to make such requests at several points throughout the conflict. As Peterson (2011) puts it, “Requests for federal troops went unheeded for eight years.” Brigham Young himself was reluctant to make any such request, but federal officials received early requests for military assistance from individual settlers as well later requests from lower-level officials among the Latter-day Saints such as Daniel H. Wells (Peterson 1998, 139, 367).

**Costs of Non-Intervention**

As in the Northwest Indian War and the Second Seminole War, the U.S. government was aware of rising tensions between local Native nations and settlers in Utah. And, indeed, we see evidence similar to those prior cases to indicate that the federal government did indeed see potential costs in non-intervention. While some felt it might not be bad to let the heterodox Latter-day Saints fend for themselves, others believed that the settlers would eventually win regardless of whether the government provided assistance. When that came to pass, the federal government would be in a better position to assert its authority over the settlers if it had intervened on their behalf.

As noted above, there were earlier hints of a divide between Mormon and non-Mormon territorial officials on matters of Indian affairs. In light of the Tintic War, Brigham Young wanted to pursue a relatively conciliatory policy toward the Utes that would include an offer of farming equipment as a sign of good faith. Non-Mormon officials such as Indian agent Garland Hurt wanted a more punitive approach and felt that Young was placing his religious community’s interests—more specifically, its desire to win converts among the Utes—ahead of those of the federal government. Young pushed back—he was the *ex officio* superintendent of Indian affairs
in the territory, and he would take advice but not commands from any lower-ranking federal officials (Walker 2016, 43, 49). Hurt and John F. Kinney, a non-Mormon Chief Justice on Utah’s court, could do little in response, but they did write to President Franklin Pierce and Attorney General Caleb Cushing asking them to remove any Latter-day Saints from the territorial government and to prevent any such future appointments (Walker 2016, 65). While Young would be pushed out of office two years later—due to more general concerns federal elites had about the heterodox Latter-day Saints—most appointed to positions in Utah’s territorial government remained a part of the Church. There were few by that point who knew the territory as well and who could maintain an amicable relationship with the settlers.

Among those who argued most consistently for federal intervention was Colonel (and, later, General) Patrick E. Connor, one of the few federal military officers who was stationed at various posts in the area in the years preceding and throughout the Black Hawk War. Connor, an Irish-American Catholic, viewed Brigham Young’s “ecclesiastical monarchy” as a heretical sect composed primarily of “ignorant dupes” whose potential for secessionism posed a threat to the United States (Peterson 1998, 34-35). Indeed, he was so convinced of the necessity of federal intervention in Utah that he sent some of the soldiers under his command on prospecting missions in the hope of inciting a gentile gold rush, and he established a newspaper called The Daily Union Vedette with the mission of promoting “an unyielding and unrelenting warfare against…Polygamy and the one man power of Utah” (Peterson 1998, 35-37). Although it is not clear if any particular federal policy-makers read the Vedette, it did circulate in Washington, DC, and it surely did not help allay public concerns about the heterodox Latter-day Saints.
Settlers and Credible Commitments

For both territorial and federal officials, it was clear that individual settlers were taking actions that undermined the commitments the federal government sought to make to alleviate the concerns of the Utes. Federal policy-makers were most interested in the Utes and other Great Basin tribes insofar as it wanted to protect westward migration routes, and settler actions such as the beheading of Utes at Fort Utah in 1850, the Bear River Massacre of 1863, and the Grass Valley Massacre of 1865 demonstrated to federal elites that the Latter-day Saints might create more trouble for other settlers moving west.

Moreover, to the extent that leaders among the Latter-day Saints were supposed to enforce Indian law, federal elites sometimes found themselves disappointed at the implementation thereof in Utah. Federal policy-makers, especially those in the War Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (by that point in the Department of the Interior), felt that Brigham Young and other such leaders in the settler community were failing to enforce federal law and instead using the powers of the territorial governorship to instead benefit their religious community (Rogers 2017, 97-99). Perhaps most importantly to some of the non-Mormon Indian agents in the Utah Territory, Brigham Young was reportedly not clear in communicating to the local tribes that the territory in which they resided was under the jurisdiction of the federal government (Rogers 2017, 100).

The federal government faced something of a dilemma in the Utah Territory. Federal policy-makers could have tried to enhance their own credibility in upholding federal Indian law and perhaps in bargaining with Great Basin tribes by asserting control of the territorial government. On the other hand, doing so threatened its credibility in another way—if the federal government alienated the Latter-day Saints who constituted the majority population in Utah, the
settlers could themselves feel all the more justified in going their own way in Indian affairs. As Morgan (1948, 404) captures this dilemma succinctly:

Yet would higher efficiency have resulted from a superintendency wholly Gentile or wholly Mormon? With the one, the problem of relations with the community, central to the handling of frontier Indian affairs, would still have remained to be solved; with the other, the separatist factor working in Mormon culture would have been granted fuller scope. …Only great patience and understanding on both sides could have evolved a better working relationship, and once the social forces were set in motion, working at cross purposes became inevitable. Thus the Indian Office in Utah was the product of a larger social situation even as it helped to shape that situation.112

Inhibiting Factors: The Local Distribution of Power and Identity-Based Cleavages

What made this case different than the others I examine here was the presence of significant inhibiting factors. Political elites did generally prefer to acquire territory without going to war over it, but this hesitance could be overcome through the three mechanisms I have outlined earlier in this dissertation. In this case, there were indeed some similar patterns in those first three mechanisms—settler faits accomplis did, e.g., provoked conflict with Native nations, however, countervailing pressures came in the form of a local distribution of power unfavorable to federal military intervention and identity-based cleavages that made federal officials exceptionally hesitant to intervene.

There was little federal presence in the Great Basin region that federal officials could call upon at the time, especially given that the military draw-down in the wake of the Civil War; the closest military fort was in present-day Idaho on the Oregon Trail (Farmer 2008, 71). On the local distribution of power, I have also discussed above the relatively high quality of the Nauvoo

112 I would dispute the characterization of this as “inevitable,” but it was certainly made more and more likely as the federal government and state governments alike pursued policies that sought to marginalize the Latter-day Saints.
Legion as a territorial militia, and I have noted the military proficiency of Great Basin tribes that had readily adopted European horses and firearms. These two aspects of the distribution of power in the Territory of Utah had two implications for the federal government when considering intervening in the Black Hawk War. First, given the post-Civil War drawdown of the military and the small military’s preoccupation with other matters like Reconstruction, the federal elites had few soldiers to spare, and given the state of the Nauvoo Legion, there was likely little difference that another few federal regulars would make. Second, the fact that the Great Basin tribes were relatively strong did not make political elites any more eager to intervene militarily. A prospective loss here in a territory occupied primarily by Latter-day Saints—a group with their own capable militia—was not something federal elites wanted to risk (Peterson 1998, 359).

But just as importantly, there was little interest—among elites and the public alike—for intervention on behalf of a Mormon community that most considered heterodox if not heretical (Peterson 1998; Park 2018). Years earlier, the migration of the Latter-Day Saints and their concentration in what would become the state of Utah, would complicate federal plans for the absorption of these territories into the Union. While political elites wanted the territory, they were not especially interested in allowing members of a heterodox religion to be the dominant group in a given state. Ultimately, however, there was little they could do about the concentration of Latter-day Saints in Utah, and when Congress debated the boundaries of Utah in the late 1840s and early 1850s, it delineated the boundaries it did in large part with the goal of

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Maass (2020) outlines the ways that a similar logic helps to explain the federal government’s decision to annex certain territories (or not). Where the local population was perceived as non-white and too large to displace with white settlers, the government opted not to annex territory where it otherwise could have done so.
limiting the extent to which the predominantly Mormon communities could expand (Leonard 1992, 132-134). The relatively small Utah—as opposed to the more expansive vision of Deseret—meant that the Latter-day Saints could perhaps expand into other states, but they would likely remain a minority group outside of Utah.

This cleavage between the heterodox Latter-day Saints and the heavily Protestant decision-makers in the federal government was not surprising. Indeed, as noted above, the Latter-day Saints had already been the victims of state-sanctioned violence at multiple points in their westward movements, and no one was held accountable for the killing of their founder. The response from the Latter-day Saints was ultimately similar to many other settler groups that had come into conflict with Native nations. Most of them, including members of the Nauvoo Legion, were insufficiently familiar with the different local tribes to understand the positions that different tribes—and different bands within those tribes—took with respect to the use of violence against settlers. Moreover, many Latter-day Saints accepted views of Native nations found in the Book of Mormon and articulated by their leaders—views of Native peoples as peoples in need of divine salvation. Regardless of any historical importance the Latter-day Saints attributed to the

114 One of the novelties that Joseph Smith’s Mormonism offered in contrast to orthodox Protestant denominations then prominent in the United States was its telling of Christianity that linked ancient Israel to North America. The Lamanites, as they were called, are described in the Book of Mormon as being descended from a group of Israelites who migrated to North America by boat around 600 BC. After their arrival, this group is said to have split into the Nephites and Lamanites, named for the brothers Nephi and Laman. The Nephites are portrayed as a generally virtuous people, whereas the Lamanites are portrayed as a mostly wicked people, albeit with a small subset of believers in the Abrahamic God. It is the Nephites and the subset of Lamanites to whom Jesus Christ appeared after his resurrection according to the Book of Mormon. In the centuries after that, however, the text describes the fall of the Nephites at the hands of the Lamanites, the latter of who, were also characterized by darker skin. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, texts of the Latter-Day Saints, including the Book of Mormon, described the Lamanites as being the “principal” ancestors of Native nations, and Church leaders and missionaries thus saw Native nations as historically important peoples who were in need of
Indigenous peoples of North America, the settlers were often indiscriminate in battle (Farmer 2009, 86). They did not always distinguish between members of different tribes or bands, nor did they always distinguish between combatants and non-combatants.

Some leaders among the Latter-day Saints feared that requests for federal intervention would harm their own cause; others made such requests only for military officers based at western forts to decline to intercede (Peterson 1998, 250-251). It took years for the federal government to intervene, and even then, it did so primarily to assert federal authority over this heterodox community. Federal authorities arrested Brigham Young and one of his associates, Daniel Wells, and they installed a new non-Mormon territorial governor in 1871. Among the most important policies in establishing federal authority and depriving the Latter-day Saints of significant independent power was disbanding the Nauvoo Legion. By July 4, 1871, the militia was effectively defunct; after initially refusing to disband, members planned to march in a traditional Fourth of July parade, but they averred when informed that the local federal regulars would not allow it (Peterson 1998, 359-360). The new governor, George Lemuel Woods, took steps such as these while trying to create similar institutions less directly subordinate to the Church. In his 1874 message to the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, for example, he described the Nauvoo Legion as having been “a fruitful source of trouble in the past” and proposed legislation that would create a new territorial militia (Woods 1874, 6).

Several months later, the new territorial governor ordered troops to disperse a growing gathering of Native peoples. These Utes, Shoshones, Bannocks, and others were inspired by the Ghost Dance about which they had learned from the Nevada Paiutes. The Ghost Dance, a

redemption. The text was amended in 2006 to describe the Lamanites as being “among” those ancestors (Reeve 2015, 55-56).
spiritual movement of sorts with traditionalist and relatedly anti-colonial messages as key components thereof, would cause concern among territorial officials in Utah and in other territories where similarly movements arose (Peterson 1998, 388-389). It was not the content of the Ghost Dance itself so much as the effects of it that worried territorial officials—they got nervous seeing several thousand Native individuals from different tribes gathering in one place. Indeed, Latter-day Saints were similarly frightened of these large gatherings, and there were at least some Utes among the crowds who agitated for war against the settlers. While only a few isolated killings of settlers and Native individuals took place during this period, the potential for further escalation led settlers to lobby the local garrison’s commandant for intervention on their behalf. The federal government was by this point willing to step in and end the crisis. Ultimately, when met with the prospect of state violence, the Native peoples would return to their reservations without any military confrontation. If this was federal intervention of a sort, it certainly differed from the interventions in the Northwest Indian War and the Second Seminole War, most importantly insofar as federal officials ultimately ordered soldiers to Utah not to protect settlers but to affirm federal authority over them. “The army’s 1872 success in quelling the Ghost Dance crisis,” as Peterson (1998, 374) summarizes, “brought a new commitment to employ troops against the Indians in Utah, if for no other reason than to keep the Nauvoo Legion from having an excuse to function.”

The waning days of this war—and the federal assertion of power in Utah—took place amid an effort by the Ulysses S. Grant administration to implement what has come to be called an “Indian peace policy”.115 The widespread antipathy toward the Latter-day Saints, however,  

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115 Grant (1869) made his first significant statement on this policy in his first annual message to Congress: “From the foundation of the Government to the present the management of the original inhabitants of this continent—the Indians—has been a subject of embarrassment and
complicated the Black Hawk War for the Grant administration, in which most political appointees working on Indian affairs shared the view that the settlement of the West was the priority and that the U.S. could “civilize” Native groups without starting wars (Levine 1985, 349). When it finally there was a significant plausible threat to the settlers, federal officials did not let the crisis go to waste—they intervened in such a way that would deter any potential Native offensive while also depriving the settlers of their means to resist federal control.

**Conflict Initiation and Contemporaneous Explanations**

Amid a federal military draw-down and growing ecological distress in the Great Basin, tensions between Native nations and Latter-day Saints in the Utah Territory were accelerating. The origins of these disputes, as I have suggested above, can be traced to early Mormon settlement in the late 1840s when the Mormons fled from Illinois to the Great Basin region due to the religious persecution their heterodox faith (and concentrated political power) incurred (Park 2020). Their effort to craft the state of Deseret would ultimately prove to be incommensurable with Native continuance of their everyday patterns of behavior (Leonard 1992, 118-119). As in many other places in North America, competition for scarce resources—especially for land that the settler and Native communities tended to use, respectively, for hunting and agriculture—promoted an environment conducive to conflict (Metcalf 1989). Indeed, as noted above, there were some initial skirmishes between Native groups and Latter-day Saints in the 1850s, but casualties were generally in the single- or low double-digits. Early expense, and has been attended with continuous robberies, murders, and wars. From my own experience upon the frontiers and in Indian countries, I do not hold either legislation or the conduct of the whites who come most in contact with the Indian blameless for these hostilities. The past, however, cannot be undone, and the question must be met as we now find it.”
Mormon leadership was generally able to successfully placate the Natives to avoid further violence. The often-cited dictum of Brigham Young was that it was “cheaper to feed the Indians than fight them” (Coates 1978, 428).

The incident that is recognized as starting the Black Hawk War would not come until 1865, but there were several phenomena converging in the 1860s that made this conflict more and more likely over time. Zappia (2012, 216) lists the mounting pressures on the Great Basin tribes and the Utes especially:

Several factors made raiding unsustainable and convinced Utes to negotiate with the Americans. Occupations by both Mormons and the U.S. Army, a drop in the demand for slaves (due to a redoubled federal effort to curb the trade), completion of the transcontinental railway at Promontory, Utah (1869), droughts, disease outbreaks, a glut in sheep, and more intensive stock raising (with greater protection against raiding) together precipitated the Utes’ withdrawal from raiding. Simultaneously, Ute raiding within the New Mexican borderlands came to an end.

After years of occasional killings and reprisals, the Black Hawk War began with an incident on April 8, 1865—just a day before Robert E. Lee would surrender to Ulysses S. Grant in Appomattox, Virginia. While the Civil War was nearing its end, Antonga (or Black Hawk), Chief Jake Arapeen (the successor to Wakara), and several other Utes took the unusual step of appearing at a town council meeting being held by the Latter-day Saints in Manti.116 By this point, Antonga’s uncle, Wakara, had been dead for about a decade after having succumbed to illness in 1855. This meeting was apparently premised on a misunderstanding—Antonga’s father, Sanpitch, was among many of the Ute community members who had recently died of smallpox,

116 Black Hawk’s Ute name was Antonga, but Brigham Young dubbed him “Black Hawk” after the famous Sauk leader who unsuccessfully fought against U.S. expansion in Illinois and Wisconsin in the early 1830s. Black Hawk is the name by which Antonga has come to be referred in much of the historiography; I use his Ute name. In 1865, he would have been about thirty-five years old.
and Antonga believed that the settlers were spreading the disease supernaturally (Peterson 1998, 17). Similar beliefs among Native communities had led to misunderstandings and conflict elsewhere, including in early Oregon (Boyd 1994). The settlers met them outside their lodging and apparently expected an apology of some sort from the Utes for a recent killing of fifteen cattle. The Utes, however, had come seeking recompense of their own—Wakara had died the previous year due to smallpox, and Arapeen blamed the settlers. The conversation escalated, and a man named John Lowry, Jr., who was an interpreter for the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Utah, came to blows with Arapeen. Lowry pulled Arapeen off his horse by the hair and continued beating him until other settlers and Utes were able to separate the two. Although no one was killed at this meeting, the Utes would ambush another group of settlers just two days later, and it was in this attack that a settler named Peter Ludvingson became the first person killed in the Black Hawk War (Peterson 1998, 17-19).

It is not clear why this particular instance of violence was the one to produce sustained conflict. It certainly did not help that members of Antonga’s family had been killed in some of the early violence between settlers and Utes in 1849, and Antonga himself had lived among the Latter-day Saints for some time, during which he came to see their reprisals for acts such as cattle theft as disproportionately violence (Savage 2010). Nonetheless, the next seven years would see scores of intermittent raids by settlers and Native groups—Antonga officially made peace with the settlers in 1868 and promised he would seek to persuade other Utes to cease hostilities, but he failed to do so and ultimately died in 1870 of diseases likely related to an infected gunshot wound (Jones 2019, 172). Other Ute, Paiute, and Navajo bands continued their raids into the early 1870s (Wells 2016, 288). In scores of attacks, there were ultimately relatively

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117 This was a conflict at Battle Creek (Simmons 2000, 91).
few people killed in the Black Hawk War—about 75 settlers and 300 Native individuals. As I suggested earlier in this dissertation, however, this does not fully capture the violence involved in this war. The objective of Antonga and his fellow Utes was often not to kill settlers *per se* but steal their property—namely, their horses and cattle. The Latter-day Saints of the Utah Territory had brought with them and continued raising thousands of cows and horses, and considering the time and resources that went into raising even one of them, taking these from an enemy was a rather efficient means for the Utes to hurt the settler communities while very directly benefitting their own people (Savage 2010, 37-38).118 Many of the actions targeted at settler communities in this war were thus attempts to take livestock—a second-best option was to deprive the settlers of the livestock by killing them or driving them far from the settlements (Jones 2019, 167). It may simply be the case that perceptions of the Native groups had changed such that they had come to see the settlers as an existential threat; the written record offers little firm ground on which to speculate.

*Alternative Explanations*

In this case, my explanation for federal non-intervention—or, rather, a qualitatively different type of federal intervention—focuses on the local distribution of power and the identity-based cleavage between settlers and elites. That is, the posited mechanisms by which settlers were able to bring federal officials into conflicts they wanted to avoid were overwhelmed in this case by these inhibiting conditions. Alternative Explanation 1—which focuses on low state capacity preventing the federal government from restraining settlers—receives less support from the available evidence than my own argument. As I noted above, the substantial post-Civil War

118 See also Hämäläinen (2008) on similar practices among the Comanches.
reduction in the size of the military seems to have been more ideologically than practically motivated. Furthermore, this first alternative explanation does not anticipate the notion that the federal government—as it was here—might simply be unwilling to come to the aid of some populations rather than being unable.

As for Alternative Explanation 2, the notion that elites were ambivalent as to whether expansion led to violent conflict with Native nations, that similarly does not match the evidence discussed here. Ulysses S. Grant, as I noted above, came into office seeing conflicts with Native nations as being costly and, perhaps just as important, unbecoming for a democratic nation. This administration would still be led by settlers into conflicts elsewhere—driven by a gold rush in the case of the Great Sioux War, for example—but the government did take costly steps in Utah and elsewhere to try to avoid war with Native nations, and it would ultimately provide several of the Great Basin tribes with relatively large reservations to try to avoid a recurrence of the Black Hawk War.

In short, while the effects of settler *faits accomplis* best explain settlers’ ability to bring political elites in the Northwest Indian War and the Second Seminole War, there were rare occasions where a confluence of inhibiting factors led the federal government to avoid military intervention on behalf of settlers who could otherwise exercise a surprisingly high degree of influence over federal decision-making.

**Conclusion**

By 1872, the Black Hawk War was over, and the federal government was in the early days of establishing reservations for tribes of the Great Basin. The Northern Utes signed a treaty that entailed their acceptance of life on the Uintah Valley Reservation (which would later be
merged with the Ouray Reservation), although settlers would acquire some of this supposedly reserved land through purchase enabled by the Dawes Act (or the General Allotment Act) of 1887. As the federal government pushed these Native communities on to reservations, the Latter-day Saints expanded their settlements, although continued elite skepticism toward the religion meant that Utah would not be recognized as a state until 1896 (indeed, between 1878 and 1891, the Supreme Court ruled in the government’s favor in several prominent cases regarding various federal efforts to restrict the practice of polygamy) (Linford 1964).

All of this stands in stark contrast to the earlier cases I have discussed as well as contemporary cases that the Grant administration faced. For example, when prospectors accompanying General George Armstrong Custer on an 1874 expedition into South Dakota discovered gold, “The lure of gold started a rush to the Black Hills. Brig. Gen. George Crook, acting by direction of the president, attempted to keep the gold seekers out of the Black Hills by use of an armed force, but public opinion did not condone such drastic action.”

While the U.S. government authorized the military to remove squatters and prevent further settlement on disputed territory, it was again the case that the relatively small Army contingent in the Dakotas could not prevent violence perpetrated by and against settlers (Hedren 2011, 53-54).

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119 National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, “Custer Battlefield National Monument,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954). Scanned copy provided by the McCracken Research Library at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, George Armstrong Custer Collection, 1876-1963: Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4. This description is worth citing both as the Department of the Interior’s representation of events but also as a fair rendering thereof as far as I can tell from secondary sources.

120 Hedren (2011, 54) notes that, “The army’s most astute Indian fighting general [George Crook] wanted more troops and quietly confessed to [General] Sheridan that he did not know what to do.” It should also be noted that Hedren makes the case that the military men deployed in the Dakotas were experienced and well-equipped, or at least more so than they are usually assumed to be, assessments with which I do not quibble. The size of the military, however, was still lacking.
any salient ideological cleavages between the settlers and elites, the U.S. government intensified its efforts to purchase the Black Hills and surrounding areas from the tribes that had been reserved this land in previous treaties. In reaction to attacks on gold-mining parties, the Grant administration ordered Lakota to stay within the bounds of the Great Sioux Reservation, and within two years of prospectors finding gold, Grant had authorized offensive military operations to push the offending bands on to the reservation (Greene 1994, xv). Custer’s disastrous defeat speaks to the limited military resources the U.S. could dedicate to such frontier expeditions, but with more time, the U.S. military would eventually prevail (Hämäläinen 2019, 370-379).
Chapter 5

Conclusions: On Grand Strategy and Indigenous Politics

In this dissertation, I have traced the process by which settlers brought federal officials into some of America’s Indian Wars even though political elites preferred to avoid this conflict. I have compared three dissimilar cases in the Northwest Indian War, the Second Seminole War, and Utah’s Black Hawk War in an effort to explain how settlers affected elite decision-making. I have argued that the settlers’ two faits accomplis of settling on disputed territory and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations affected federal decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for intervention, by making non-intervention more costly for federal officials, and by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. The lack of a large standing military, which was primarily an ideological commitment on the part of political elites, constituted an important permissive condition for settler-led conflict, although this could in some contexts be undercut by elite concerns about the local distribution of power or settler heterodoxy, as in the Utah case here. In short, the cases presented in this dissertation support my argument about the principles of early U.S. grand strategy and the ways that settlers complicated the practice thereof by bringing the federal government into unwanted disputes with Native nations. In this conclusion, I elaborate on theoretical and policy implications of my work, the state of Political Science’s engagement with Indigenous Politics, and directions for future research, including practical recommendations for scholars with little prior exposure to Indigenous Politics.
Theoretical and Policy Implications

To elaborate on the implications for International Relations scholarship, I noted in Chapter 1 that one such implication is that U.S. foreign policy has not been always and uniquely isolated from public opinion. Indeed, it may be that early U.S. foreign policy was overly responsive to such pressures. If the advocates of “restraint” or “retrenchment” are correct in arguing that U.S. foreign policy is dangerously detached from public sentiments, then proponents seem to be testing one plausible theory of change now—that a more restrained, less militarized foreign policy can be articulated and perhaps eventually implemented by vigorously promoting such proposals in the public sphere through a well-funded think tank, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft (Bender 2019). Indeed, I noted in Chapter 1 that this research suggests that U.S. grand strategy, even if it has often been complicated by private actors, has long been oriented toward expansionism of one form or another. The John Quincy Adams statement I cited earlier—that America “goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy”—is now being used as an aspirational statement about U.S. foreign policy (hence the Quincy Institute).121

On the other hand, this is not to say that the United States has been maximally expansionist. Rather, the contours of American expansion have long been contested in ways that do not easily fit with existing IR theories, especially offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2001; Elman 2004). This is especially clear when U.S. policy-makers had to consider whether to absorb new territories inhabited primarily by non-white populations (Maass 2020). Among others, the historian Frederick Merk (1963, 261) once came to a similar conclusion: “A thesis that continentalist and imperialist goals were sought by the nation regardless of party or section, won’t do. It is not substantiated by good evidence.” U.S. policy-makers sought to control the

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121 On “aspirational” politics, see Finnemore and Jurkovich (2020).
process of territorial expansion so as to keep settlers—or the public more broadly—from, in their view, exercising undue and likely pernicious influence over the state’s foreign affairs. If the principles of early U.S. grand strategy can be characterized as controlled expansion, the practice of its grand strategy suggests that foreign policy will always be more improvisational than elites would prefer because they cannot fully control private, non-state actors. Moreover, future research could build on the “new hierarchy studies” to further examine the nature of U.S. territorial expansion (McConaughey et al. 2018). Cross-national comparisons to other Anglophone settler societies as well as, e.g., the modern settler movement in Israel would be especially fruitful in addressing the notion of American exceptionalism. Go’s (2011) examination of the imperial formations of the British and American states, for example, would offer an especially useful point of departure.

This work also has implications for scholarship on the relationship between publics and elites. The case studies that examine the origins of the Northwest Indian War and the Second Seminole War in particular should draw our attention to the ways that regular citizens have directly influenced the course of U.S. foreign policy. While elites preferred to avoid war with Native nations in the Northwest Territory, Florida, and elsewhere, an aggressive, land-hungry public was often able to force the hand of political elites and receive military intervention on its behalf. Moreover, settlers had this effect in part because of the way that they undermined the credibility of federal promises to Native populations, a phenomenon that suggests that commitment problems may be even more common than prior research suggests given that third parties—often not the focus of dyadic models—can create such problems for others. There may be fewer opportunities for regular citizens to provoke militarized disputes today, but findings here suggest that we ought to reevaluate two common assumptions: 1) that it is political elites
who initiate militarized disputes, whereas citizens serve primarily as an audience capable of rendering judgment on elite decisions after the fact, and 2) that the public, especially in a democracy, generally acts as a constraint on elites who would otherwise initiate militarized disputes more frequently.

Relatedly, the U.S. experiences in the Indian War similarly speak to a long-running debate—does possession of a large standing army (or, rather, a disproportionately high percentage of a state’s spending on arms) make a state more or less likely to engage in militarized conflict? Scholars and public intellectuals of differing ideological stripes—most frequently those of the political left and self-described libertarians—have made arguments to the effect that militarization makes conflict more likely.\textsuperscript{122} “When all you have is a hammer,” as the saying goes, “everything looks like a nail.” There is some evidence to suggest that militarization does indeed make states more likely to go to war (Schofield 2007). Recent research on an analogous issue—the militarization of U.S. policing—similarly suggests that more militarized policing causes more civilian deaths (Lawson, Jr. 2019). But the cases here complicate such findings by raising the possibility that the \textit{absence} of a larger standing army may have provided conditions that allowed settlers to instigate conflict and to thereby draw federal policy-makers into wars that could plausibly have been avoided with more reliable federal enforcement of its agreements with Native nations. The United States could not adequately police its citizens and thereby became embroiled in conflicts it did not seek. These cases suggest that the relationship between a state’s degree of militarization and its propensity to initiate militarized disputes may

\textsuperscript{122} See, e.g., Friedman (2016) and Quiggin (2016). For a discussion of these points that tends to align with the “militarization leads to war” theory, see Bacevich (2008).
not be as linear as we might expect—or that the question of whether militarization leads to more conflict might better be framed as an “under what conditions” question.

Finally, U.S. grand strategy in the context of its own rise may be able to provide some counsel on how the United States ought to react to the rise of China. Holding all else constant, newly available surveillance technologies and the authoritarianism of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may mean that Chinese political elites will have greater capacity to control the ways that Chinese citizens influence with the state’s foreign policy-making than U.S. elites did during its expansion. Nonetheless, U.S. political elites should be aware that although Chinese citizens and companies may sometimes do things deleterious to U.S. national interests at the direction of the government, such actions will not always be undertaken at the behest of the government. Indeed, China scholars have noted that Chinese state agencies, including the five agencies with overlapping coast guard duties, do not always coordinate with the central government (or with each other) as much as one might assume (Yahuda 2013, 453; Ye 2019). If there is a policy implication here—and I offer it tentatively given the very different historical contexts—political elites should not be too quick to blame the actions of private Chinese actors on the CCP when doing so could counterproductively escalate tensions. This is all the more reason to invest in the collection of high-quality human and signals intelligence and to avoid politicizing the U.S. Intelligence Community so as to ensure public confidence in high-level intelligence assessments.

On Studying Indigenous Politics

As I noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, many political scientists, especially in the past couple decades, have sought to diversify the objects of their study so as to counteract biases believed to enter scholarship through the lenses that a relatively homogeneous
professoriate consciously or otherwise previously applied to its work. In a word, this has been described as an effort to “decolonize” political science (Jones 2006). As was recently noted in a provocative symposium in *Perspectives on Politics*, however, political scientists still often overlook Native nations as political actors (Ferguson 2016). While one can find the occasional article to demonstrate that Native nations have not been completely and forever ignored by political scientists generally or IR scholars specifically, it is relatively new to see a burgeoning literature within political science that takes Indigenous experiences seriously. Nonetheless, much of this valuable literature has been produced by scholars working within other subfields; International Relations appears to be lagging behind.123

I will elaborate on this gap in the literature before coming to directions for future research.124 Some simple data collection provides additional context to the claim that Political Science and IR in particular have largely ignored Indigenous experiences. Table 2 below lays out the number of search results on journal websites for four terms that I suspect would indicate a focus on Indigenous peoples, especially Native nations of the Americas—Native American, American Indian, Indigenous People(s), and Indian Affairs. In each case, I included quotation marks around the term so as to narrow the scope of the search, but I was otherwise relatively inclusive. I counted original articles as well as book reviews, special issue contributions, and so on; the only thing I excluded, when given the opportunity, were “images,” which were typically duplicative of publications, including one result that was a list of an issue’s contributors. I make an exception for the *Western Historical Quarterly* given the volume of its content—I include only “research articles” there. Indigenous People(s), for which I ran searches with and without

123 See fn. 6.
124 This portion of the conclusion is based on an unpublished working paper of mine that became, in part, a blog post for *The Duck of Minerva* (Szarejko 2019b).
the s at the end, is the broadest term I use. Indeed, some of the results focused on Indigenous peoples of other regions—among them Central and South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Xinjiang—so higher numbers here are not necessarily indicative of a substantive focus on Native nations in the United States.

Because I wanted to focus on the subfield of International Relations, I picked three prominent subfield journals—*International Security*, *International Organization*, and *International Studies Quarterly*. I sought subfield journals with relatively high impact factors as well as long histories of continuous publication—each has been in print since at least 1976. In order to compare the subfield with the broader discipline, other subfields, and a different field that would more directly focus on American Indian groups as political actors, I also collected data from the *American Political Science Review*, *Comparative Political Studies*, the *Journal of Political Philosophy* (the youngest journal of the bunch having started in 1993), *American Politics Research*, and the *Western Historical Quarterly*.

In addition to counting the results for each term mentioned above, I also provide a rough sense of whether the listed articles had Indigenous peoples as a substantive focus or whether the search results were basically spurious or picking up cursory mentions. The final column in the table describes whether “none,” “some,” or “most” of the results were relevant. “Some” means that at least one result but fewer than half of the total were directly relevant; “most” refers to results in which more than half of the articles were relevant. The table suggests that the correctness of my hunch—that other subfields outperform IR in terms of their attention to Indigenous peoples—may depend on what journals one thinks are best representative of the different subfields. *International Studies Quarterly*, for example, has much more work that offers a substantive focus on Indigenous peoples than do *International Security* and *International
Organization. If, however, the latter two are taken to be the more “mainstream” or prestigious journals, one might be more pessimistic about IR’s status vis-à-vis the other subfields. These searches are clearly not capturing everything—examples such as Crawford’s 1994 article in International Organization, which does not appear in the search results, attest to that—but there is no reason to believe that results in the other journals are being suppressed any more or less.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>“Native American”</th>
<th>“American Indian”</th>
<th>“Indigenous People(s)”</th>
<th>“Indian Affairs”</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None relevant</td>
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<td><em>IO</em></td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>None relevant</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>ISQ</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Some relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>APSR</em></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>CPS</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Some relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>JPP</em></td>
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<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>APR</em></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Some relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>WHQ</em></td>
<td>340</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>Most relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

125 These journals were founded, from top to bottom, in 1976, 1947, 1959, 1906, 1968, 1993, 1973, and 1969. There may be overlap across search terms. I conducted the search for the initial working paper with which this table was associated in the fall of 2018. The figures here are current as of June 18, 2020.
I have already made the case in the first chapter that Indigenous experiences can and should be studies as international relations. Even if IR scholars can claim that at least some aspects of these experiences fall within their subfield’s purview, however, it does not necessarily follow that there is any new or useful data to be gathered here. I have already sought to demonstrate through this dissertation that there are indeed Indigenous experiences that can shed light on ongoing debates in IR. In the remainder of this section, I discuss a number of additional issues relevant to IR scholars in which Indigenous experiences could indeed provide useful experiences with which to make sense of international political phenomena. First, however, I outline some brief vignettes that serve to provide examples of where such experiences might be found. These vignettes are focused on various Indian Wars, which should only be taken as a signal of my own scholarly focus on these conflicts, not as a suggestion that early U.S. military conflicts with American Indian groups are the only aspects of these relationships worth studying. I provide three brief vignettes, and I then discuss four issue areas within IR that these and other such contestation might illuminate.

First, in the case of Tecumseh’s War (so named after the Shawnee leader), a division emerged among the Native nations of the Northwest Territory (which by then had been broken into smaller states, including Ohio, and territories, such as Indiana and Michigan). Some felt that security could best be attained by accommodating U.S. settlers and adopting some of their cultural practices. Others, including Tecumseh’s brother, Tenskwatawa, began to articulate anti-assimilationist arguments focusing especially on the preservation of Native religious practices (Saler 2015, 79-81). As other nearby groups began to sell lands or otherwise provide U.S. persons with settlement rights, Tecumseh sought allies, especially with members of tribes that had fought against the United States in the Northwest Indian War as well as the Creeks discussed
in Chapter 3. The eventual military confrontation would cost Tecumseh his life, and the loose confederation he built would not survive his loss either.

Second, the Black Hawk War of 1832 would be fought a bit farther west—in the territories of Illinois and Michigan. In this case, a Sauk (or Sac) leader by the name of Black Hawk would rally a group of predominantly Sauk and Fox individuals in opposition to a disputed land cession treaty that had been signed in 1804. It is not clear whether the earlier Sauk and Fox leaders had the authority to sign away the lands discussed in the treaty, nor is it clear whether they fully understood the terms of the treaty. Black Hawk would indeed claim that the land purportedly ceded to the United States had not been legally surrendered, and hostilities—including occasional killings—provoked in part by settlers would lead the U.S. to send the military to force a resolution to the situation. When Black Hawk sent a small group of men carrying a white flag to seek negotiations with U.S. military personnel, a group of militia men either mistook their approach for a display of hostility or decided to ignore the flag and fired on the party (Prucha 1969, 211-23).

Third, the Cayuse War of 1847-55 took place in Oregon Territory, and while low-level violence between the Cayuse and settlers persisted for several years, the initial spark appears to have been a genuine misunderstanding (Ruby and Brown 1972, 105-112). Specifically, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman went as missionaries to Oregon, and they preached to the Cayuse and other American Indian groups in the area where they settled. The Whitmans were not the first settlers in the area, but they were relatively early among those who took this trail. The Whitmans had little luck in converting the Cayuse, who reportedly remained suspicious of the culturally alien missionaries. When larger groups of settlers started to arrive in Oregon in the late 1840s, the Cayuse suffered from widespread outbreaks of diseases that may have killed up to half the
population. Marcus Whitman, both a missionary and a physician, was believed by some to have been responsible for casting diseases on those who had been unwilling to convert (Keenan 1997, 249). The war began when a group of Cayuse attacked and killed the Whitmans in their home, and local officials raised a militia for a reprisal.

Further research into these conflicts and the broader array of interactions between Indigenous peoples and settler societies can improve our understanding of IR in at least four areas along with those already described above. First, IR scholars have occasionally debated the question of whether war can ever be truly accidental. As I have discussed at length elsewhere, the Black Hawk War and the Cayuse War should demonstrate that accidental war is at least possible (Szarejko 2020). In the Black Hawk War, one side appears to have fired unauthorized shots on a party seeking an end to hostilities. Likewise, the Cayuse War may have started with the entirely intentional killing of the Whitmans, but this was, to the Cayuse, not so much an initiation as a reprisal based on a mistaken attribution—an error akin to a faulty radar reading triggering a military response to a non-existent threat. Further research in similar contexts might help to establish the conditions that make accidental war more or less likely.

Second, one of the oddities of Tecumseh’s War, at least from the perspective of a modern IR scholar, is that Tecumseh and his brother were unable to get much support from other tribes. Surely, there were obstacles to such alliance formation—not least historical rivalries and technological limits on individual tribes’ abilities to assess the capabilities and intentions of an expanding United States. But given what would seem to be a clear and existential threat, more research is warranted on alliance formation (or the lack thereof) in this crucial period for Native nations. Why did some choose to offer military resistance to U.S. expansion while others did not? How did Native nations assess the threat presented by the United States? Examining such
questions could yield novel insights into debates about the conditions that stimulate (under)balancing in world politics.

Third, it is separately worth noting that the original impetus for Tecumseh’s War came when Tecumseh’s brother, who became widely known as The Prophet, initiated a religious movement premised in part on an anti-assimilationist view toward the U.S. Balancing and bandwagoning in modern IR literature tends to focus on military aspects of such practices (Parent and Rosato 2015). But when we survey the historical record for instances of balancing or bandwagoning, we should perhaps be looking beyond specifically military actions and toward prophecies and prominent conversions. Religious movements such as The Prophet’s were often seen as a threat by the United States. On the other hand, promises to convert to one form or another of Christianity often sufficed to assuage policy-makers of any such concerns and even to win alliances, both with the United States and with earlier colonial powers such as Spain. Indeed, Apaches swore to join Spanish missions if the Spaniards would help to defend them against Comanches (Hämäläinen 2008, 36). In short, Indigenous experiences could likely teach us much about the ways that actors use religion in international politics as, among other things, a source of symbols with which to signal one’s intentions.

Fourth and finally, to depart from the Indian Wars and speak more generally about U.S. relations with Native nations, securitization theory might benefit from engagement with the processes of settler colonialism. For early U.S. political elites, “Indian Affairs” was considered to be a foreign policy issue of paramount importance, but the policy-making apparatus for this issue area was eventually transferred from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior, and Indian policy is today typically discussed as a domestic issue. Additional research

126 See, e.g., later fears surrounding the so-called Ghost Dance (Blackhawk 2006, 270).
could examine bureaucratic actions and policy-maker rhetoric to determine what conditions allowed policy-makers to begin to treat relations with Native nations primarily as a domestic issue and to shed light on the ways that Native communities can contest that designation to this day. In other words, in the United States and elsewhere, there exist histories of “desecuritization” that look very much like states bringing “foreign” populations into their domestic populace, often against their will. Here I would note that in the recent controversy surrounding securitization theory, I would not go as far as Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2019, 17) in asserting that an irremediable racism “is baked into securitization theory’s conceptual apparatus and, in particular, its core concepts of politics and security”. However, Indigenous experiences could provide grounds for a critique similarly directed at the normative assumptions that tend to be built into securitization theory. That is, we need not assume that “desecuritization” is normatively preferable to securitization or even that it has any intrinsic moral valence.

**Practical Considerations for Future Research**

Given that there is very little work focusing on American Indian groups in International Relations and that I have just outlined what I believe would be fruitful avenues for research, I now turn to some things that future scholars undertaking such research, especially those new to the subject matter, ought to keep in mind—some seemingly simple suggestions to make clear the obstacles or issues that one might face in initiating work on this subject and coming from a background in IR.

First, there is the necessity of venturing outside of Political Science. Given how little education many Americans receive on the varied Native populations that inhabit(ed) what is now the United States, many individuals will enter graduate training in Political Science without
having extensive knowledge of the histories of American Indian groups and U.S. relations with them. For me and, I would expect, for many others studying this area, it takes time to gain an adequate grasp of the relevant historical facts. Moreover, given that doctoral students are socialized into the discipline by other political scientists, one will not immediately know where to find the best work being done by scholars of History and Indigenous Studies. As opposed to, say, Cornell University Press and Princeton University Press, both of which publish a great deal of work in IR and on international security more specifically, those studying Indigenous experiences would want to look at the catalogues of presses they otherwise might not think to examine—e.g., those from the University of Nebraska Press, the University of Oklahoma Press, and the University of Arizona Press. For resources on specific groups or events—such as those focused on the Seminoles of Florida—university presses from that state will likely have useful offerings (as does the University Press of Florida in this case). Like learning the history itself, it takes time to learn how to productively work with resources outside of one’s usual field of study.

Second, research on Native nations—even if it is purely historical work involving no contact with human subjects—should be treated as work involving a sensitive population, and university institutional review boards (IRBs) should consider treating it as such. Even if individual IRBs do not treat such research that way, the marginalization of these peoples in the U.S. political system means to me that it is worth the effort to, first and foremost, determine whether your research could be used to justify further marginalization of those populations and to scrutinize both your research design and your language accordingly.127 Relatedly, researchers should go out of their way to make connections with individuals in the communities about which

127 See, e.g., the following research resources collected by the National Congress of American Indians’ Policy Research Center: <http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/research-regulation>. 
they are writing (i.e., beyond the archivists). Discussing one’s research with current tribe members can be an invaluable source of feedback both on the research itself and on the way that one is presenting the research. “Do no harm” would seem to be a useful guiding principle from which to start, and individuals within the relevant population will best be able to say if some piece of research could be used to do them harm.

Third, many tribes have little in the way of written histories extending farther back than the twentieth century, and for those that do, it is even rarer for these histories to be recorded in English. This can make it especially difficult to acquire the sort of evidence that most social science journals and university presses would want to see in adjudicating between hypothesized explanations for political phenomena of interest, and this means that scholars will often use more resources produced by the U.S. government than by Native nations or individuals—as, indeed, I have done here. If we are to take Indigenous experiences seriously, however, we also need to take seriously the obligation not to unduly privilege records created by individuals with a vested interest in the dispossession of Native lands. To the extent possible, therefore, scholars interested in this subject ought to make use of sources produced by Native nations while also being skeptical of government or settler sources that purport to present the whole truth. Cross-referencing sources where possible can be helpful in this regard.

Here the aforementioned work of historians can be especially useful—in many cases, they have already spent the requisite time in the archives and can contribute to our understanding of the views and intentions of the politicians we political scientists also study. When it comes to sources produced by Native nations, oral histories can be a useful source against which official accounts can be compared. In some cases, as with the Seminole of Florida, interviews with tribe members have been recorded and maintained in centralized museums or archives. As for settler
sources. I am thinking especially of newspapers and the personal papers of U.S. settlers, many of which are preserved in state, county, or city archives and historical societies as opposed to national archives. The surest (perhaps obvious) way to identify such sources before actually undertaking research is to inquire exhaustively with any archivists at such institutions who will know the status of the historical record and who will know where to point a researcher if they lack relevant materials.

Fourth and finally, while research conducted in the continental United States can be more feasible for graduate students than travel abroad, the costs of travel required to conduct field work can be more expensive than one might expect given the rural locations of many reservations and other Native institutions. The Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, for example, is located on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation in Florida. To get there from Washington, D.C., I flew into Ft. Lauderdale, and I then had to rent a car to drive about sixty miles through the Everglades. Adding up the costs of even a short research trip—in this case, a stay in Clewiston, Florida for four days—quickly gets expensive, especially when taking into account photography and recording equipment and digital storage (if that is how one plans to conduct archival work and/or interviews). I was lucky to receive sufficient financial support from the Department of Government at Georgetown University to make this trip feasible, and other scholars may similarly find ways to procure the necessary funding. But in other cases, I opted to purchase scanned or printed photocopies of relevant records rather than making trips to all the potentially relevant locations. This latter option is, I think, a second-best option when compared to physically going to a museum, archive, or reservation, which allows for greater spontaneity and relationship-building with staffers, but for graduate students especially, ordering copies be the most cost-effective option. All of this may be more affordable than, e.g., running a large-scale
survey experiment or doing extended fieldwork in a foreign country, but the costs are not negligible, and scholars and funding institutions alike ought not to treat it as such.

**Conclusion**

I have concluded by trying to articulate some of my thoughts on where to go from here—on theoretical and policy implications, on plausible directions for future research, and, finally, on how one might go about conducting such research. If Indigenous Politics is at first an unfamiliar topic for most IR scholars, as indeed it once was to me, that need not be the case in perpetuity. In this dissertation, I have argued that Indigenous experiences can help provide IR scholars with a clearer understanding of early U.S. grand strategy and the ways that settlers affected the practice thereof, and as I have noted in this concluding chapter, these histories may offer opportunities for research in many additional areas of IR—areas of research that to date have largely been unnecessarily deprived of attention to these important international histories. Moreover, bringing these experiences into our teaching can help complicate the received wisdom of the field and broaden the ways our students engage with IR. This dissertation constitutes one small contribution to a vast discipline’s literature. The task is now to bring Indigenous experiences closer to the center of the discipline.
Appendix: Interview Information

All interviews were semi-structured interviews, and I recorded each one with a digital audio recorder. I do not have any interviewee’s permission to share complete audio recordings—only to quote from the interviews as necessary. In the table below, I provide the names of interviewees, the date of interviews, the interviewee’s tribe and relationship to it, location and length of interviews, and the source that referred me to each interviewee.

Table 3. Interviews on the Northwest Indian War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Tribe and Affiliation</th>
<th>Location of Interview</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Blanchard</td>
<td>May 30, 2019</td>
<td>Absentee Shawnee Tribe, Member and Elder</td>
<td>Miami, OK</td>
<td>35:42</td>
<td>Referred by Shawnee Cultural Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Henson</td>
<td>May 31, 2019</td>
<td>Shawnee Tribe, Member</td>
<td>Miami, OK</td>
<td>1:04:58</td>
<td>Referred by Shawnee Cultural Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Barnes</td>
<td>May 31, 2019</td>
<td>Shawnee Tribe, Member and Chief [Second Chief at time of interview]</td>
<td>Miami, OK</td>
<td>32:00</td>
<td>Referred by Shawnee Cultural Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Lee</td>
<td>June 21, 2019</td>
<td>Shawnee Tribe, Member</td>
<td>Phone Interview (Rockville, MD and Tulsa, OK)</td>
<td>35:51</td>
<td>Met at Shawnee Cultural Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Turner</td>
<td>July 1, 2019</td>
<td>Shawnee Tribe, Member</td>
<td>Phone Interview (Rockville, MD and Eminence, IN)</td>
<td>1:04:56</td>
<td>Referred by James Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Carlyle Hinshaw</td>
<td>July 12, 2019</td>
<td>Shawnee Tribe, Member</td>
<td>Phone Interview (Rockville, MD and Maytown, PA)</td>
<td>1:16:16</td>
<td>Referred by James Lee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below I include a list of questions for interviewees. In some cases, I asked slight variations of these questions or omitted questions entirely if interviewees had already addressed
some of the later questions in their initial replies. All interviewees signed informed consent forms in accordance with IRB policies, and I gave each interviewee a brief summary of my research before conducting the interviews without giving them any information that might have biased their answers in favor of my theory.

Table 4. Sample Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could you tell me about yourself and your family history?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your relationship to the Shawnee Tribe?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could you tell me about the origins of the Shawnee people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various European groups settled in what is now the United States. Based on your knowledge of the period, how did life change for the Shawnee when they first started interacting with these European groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting more specifically to the Shawnee Tribe’s relations with English settlers, do you know if the Shawnee of the time saw those settlers as any different than settlers from other countries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the U.S. War of Independence, it claimed territory that Britain had previously claimed, including the Ohio Country in which the Shawnee, the Miami, and other peoples already lived. In response, many U.S. settlers moved to the territory and claimed land for themselves. How did the Shawnee react to this pressure from settlers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among the Shawnee, how were decisions about relations with other nations made? How did Shawnee leaders assess the intentions and capabilities of the U.S. and ultimately, how did they decide to go to war to protect their lands?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The so-called Northwest Indian War—or Little Turtle's War—in which the Shawnee fought, is usually dated as taking place from 1785 to 1795, or from 1790 to 1795. Did the Shawnee—or do they now—see the violent conflicts associated with this period as a single, 5- or 10-year war? Or did they see that period as part of a longer-running conflict?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the Shawnee refer to this conflict?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your knowledge of this late-18th century time period, who or what would you say caused the conflict between the U.S. and the Shawnee and other Ohio tribes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following up on that last question, there were at least three distinct, relevant groups involved in the conflict on the U.S. side—there were settlers, political elites, and military officials. Given what you know about the conflict, would you say any of those groups were more responsible for the war than others, or would you hold them equally responsible?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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