DEVOLUTION FROM ABOVE:
The Origins and Persistence of State-Sponsored Militias

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the proliferation of militias and other armed groups who act in conjunction with, but outside, the state’s military apparatus. Groups like the Sudanese janjaweed, the Serbian paramilitaries, and Colombian self-defense forces figure prominently in a host of contemporary conflicts in the developing world. They are widely identified as banes of human and international security and harbingers of anarchy. Their very existence violates the Weberian ideal-type of the state as a monopolist over the use of force. I argue, however, that reliance on non-state violence-wielders has been a common form of military development and is not necessarily associated with state failure.

I use small, medium, and large-n methods to develop a theory of how and why developing states rely on non-state actors to implement coercion. Through historical case studies of Indonesia and Iraq, regional comparisons of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and statistical analysis across eighty-five cases, I draw the following conclusions: First, decolonization was a critical juncture that led states to adopt different techniques for organizing coercion. Specifically, revolutionary states tended to decentralize coercive power by assimilating former revolutionary fighters into informal local militias. In contrast, non-revolutionary states directly inherited European-trained armies with more
conventional, centralized organizational patterns that placed the use of force firmly in state hands. Second, post-colonial conditions of regional competition compelled some states to continually upgrade and centralize coercive power, while states facing weaker external challengers could co-opt militias for counterinsurgency without needing direct control over coercion.

By exploring the dynamics of state-militia relations and the historical and structural factors that inhibit or enable the use of state-sponsored militias, I highlight the futility of many efforts at state reconstruction aimed to regain the illusory monopoly over coercion. The emergence of both centralized and decentralized institutions of violence are responses to the international system and can scarcely be addressed through piecemeal efforts at the country level. Rather, I suggest that violence devolution may alleviate, rather than cause, some of the dangers commonly attributed to frail or failed states.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My interest in the Middle East dates to my undergraduate training at Brandeis University under Kanan Makiya and Yitzhak Nakash. Subsequently, I was lucky to receive further guidance from Amatzia Baram, Phebe Marr, and Ken Pollack. A novice and interloper in Southeast Asia, I am grateful to David Steinberg and Fred Von Der Mehden from indulging and correcting me, as well as the staff of the Sudirman Museum in Yogyakarta and Museum Proklamasi in Jakarta for their patience and assistance.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2003, a new word entered Western parlance, drawn from colloquial Sudanese Arabic—janjaweed (devil-horsemen). The term connoted a phenomenon that seemed suddenly to catch the world’s attention: nomadic tribal bands rampaging through Sudan’s Darfur region, attacking villages and destroying the crops of the sedentary population. Despite protestations by the Sudanese Defense Minister that they are nothing but “gangs of armed bandits” whom the government is unfortunately powerless to stop, the United Nations commission of inquiry has well-documented the way the janjaweed is a “militia acting, under the authority, with the support, complicity or tolerance of the Sudanese State authorities, and who benefit from impunity for their actions.”

Groups like these are becoming ever more typical in contemporary warfare, which Mary Kaldor observes tends to involve a host of “paramilitary units, local warlords, criminal gangs, police forces, mercenary groups, and also regular armies including break away units” each “operat[ing] through a mixture of confrontation and cooperation even when on opposing sides.” Concurrently, John Mueller and Martin Van Creveld argue that conventional armies are moving toward obsolescence and that today’s conflicts are mostly carried out by a sundry mix of thugs whose allegiances to the state and adherence

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to long-established norms of conduct are weak. The Sudanese *janjaweed*, the Rwandan *interahamwe*, the Colombian *autodefensas*, among many others examples, are today recognized as being capable of inflicting severe damage on civilian populations and are deemed to pose at least as profound a danger to international and human security as conventional armies.

Underlying this bleak depiction of the present and future scenarios is the fear that states, the entities that have been the authoritative arbiters of violence in and between societies for over three centuries, are moving to irrelevance if not extinction. Max Weber’s famous ideal-type definition of the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” provides the touchstone for contemporary understanding of the state. Of course, no state is without some illicit use of violence in its society by criminals, and many rebellions and insurgencies challenge states’ supremacy over force. But the idea that any state entity would encourage a vigilante group like the *janjaweed* to deploy

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violence on its behalf seems to indicate a novel and dramatic degradation of the most
fundamental and basic of state functions.\(^6\)

In this study, I contend that the devolution of state control over violence to non-
state actors, like many of the features of the so-called ‘new’ wars, is hardly new and not
necessarily a harbinger of chaos.\(^7\) I follow Michael Mann in recognizing that “most
historic states have not possessed a monopoly of organized military force and many have
not even claimed it.”\(^8\) Indeed, key features of ‘state-ness’—including the monopoly over
coercion and legitimacy itself—are empirically variant, not ontologically set.\(^9\) Rather
than begin with a normative assertion about the qualities of ‘weak’ versus ‘strong’ states,
I seek to answer a series of questions about the paths of military development and the
various ways states have historically organized institutions of coercion: Why do some
states enjoy centralized and bureaucratized control over violence in the form of
conventional armed forces? Why do others rely more on militias and other quasi-official
paramilitary units, whose allegiance and source of support extend not to the state but to

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individual leaders, warlords, tribes, and ethnic groups? Finally, what is the impact of this devolution of violence on the internal and international stability?¹⁰

These are not new questions, but rather go to the heart of a long-standing tradition of inquiry into the sources of social order.¹¹ A plethora of historical studies describe Europe’s transition from decentralized feudal militias to modern, bureaucratic armies. While varying in their emphasis on different combinations of technological, political, social, and economic factors, they all argue that states that could not manage the transition to military centralization suffered predation and dismemberment at the hands of their more powerful neighbors.¹² The most sophisticated and elaborate theories of the bellicist school of historical sociology, such as Otto Hintze, Charles Tilly, and Samuel Finer, argue that the complimentary fiscal and military expansion of European states contributed to the establishment of various forms of state-society bargains. Ultimately, the hyper-competitive environment led to an isomorphic response, with all surviving states adopting the irresistible format of large, bureaucratic, and centralized armies.¹³

If in Europe war made the state and the state made war, though, the relative absence of war in the developing world suggests profoundly different trajectories of state formation.\textsuperscript{14} This is not to say that violence has not been intrinsic to non-European states—in fact, quite the opposite.\textsuperscript{15} But the subordination of late developing states (LDSs) to Western control, initially as colonies and then as peripheral dependents within the international system, distorted the process of interstate competition. Even as normative concepts of statehood have been eagerly appropriated by post-colonial elites to bolster their privileged status, historical studies emphasize how processes of decolonization left states materially bereft of the coercive and administrative capacity needed to govern their own territory. After independence, the provision of superpower protection and international norms guaranteeing the sanctity of state boundaries along with the weakness of any potential regional rivals diminished LDSs’ need to engage in more thorough forms of rationalization and centralization.\textsuperscript{16}

Scholars focused specifically on military and security affairs in the Third World make similar arguments on a narrower scope. Many states were born without the infrastructure to extend control over their territory.\textsuperscript{17} Given the protection of the


international system, LDSs could avoid the difficulties of bureaucratizing violence.\textsuperscript{18}

Left to focus on internal challengers to regime and state, decentralized paramilitaries offered a more cost-effective way of maintaining order.\textsuperscript{19} The isomorphism prevailing in the developing world is of the opposite mode: LDSs could deal with internal challengers in a manner akin to that of pre-modern European lords, using a combination of coercion and enticements to establish patron-client ties between the center and peripheral agents of violence, thus avoiding ever having to seek a monopoly of violence within their own territories.

But recognizing these now well-established differences between the developed states of the global north should be seen as invitation to study the differences amongst LDSs. When the axis of comparison is within the developing world, there is not only profound variation in the size of military forces, the degree of technological sophistication, and levels of centralization, but also in the intensity, frequency, and type of conflict by state and by regions. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show just an initial snapshot of these stark contrasts. Why, for instance, do Middle Eastern states devoting more of their national wealth to military spending and face higher incidents of interstate and internationalized conflict than states in any other region? By comparison, why has Latin America seen far higher rates of internal wars and less military spending?


Table 1.1: Conflict by Type and Region, 1945-2006 (Tally and Crosstab by Row)\textsuperscript{20}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Extra-territorial (Decolonization)</th>
<th>Interstate</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Internationalized Internal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>11 (15%)</td>
<td>8 (11%)</td>
<td>36 (49%)</td>
<td>19 (26%)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>6 (9%)</td>
<td>15 (22%)</td>
<td>38 (56%)</td>
<td>9 (13%)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>11 (34%)</td>
<td>12 (38%)</td>
<td>7 (22%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>5 (19%)</td>
<td>18 (69%)</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>20 (10%)</td>
<td>39 (20%)</td>
<td>104 (52%)</td>
<td>37 (19%)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Military Expenditures/GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Average</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N. Korea</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Average</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Average</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>15.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Average</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In this study, I build and then test a theory that connects the process of LDS military development with the crystallization of different regional systems that reinforce modes of violence devolution and centralization. I make two interrelated arguments: First, that the *origin* of state devolution of violence to non-state actors often depends on different legacies of decolonization, particularly whether decolonization occurred through violence or through negotiation. If guerrillas were active, new-born states tended to appropriate the networks of local violence wielders, converting them from anti-colonial insurgents into pro-state militias. If, on the other hand, decolonization occurred through negotiation, new states inherited the military organizational patterns of the departing colonial powers, which tended to be of a centralized, bureaucratic format. Second, that the *persistence* of these differing forms of coercive institutions depends on the permissive conditions of the external environment. If states face strong external competitors and the threat of war, then they are forced to adopt (or retain) centralized military format in order to defend against external predation. If, on the other hand, the regional environment is pacific, either because of the ongoing intervention of great powers or the relative impotence of regional rivals, then these states can persist in devolution.

I use a combination of deductive and inductive logics to advance this argument. Chapter 2 begins by defining the crucial terms and concepts of violence devolution. I use organizational theory to show how different patterns of principal-agent relationships in military organization constrain or enable states to succeed or even engage in certain forms of conflict. Centralized, conventional military forces have the capacity to engage in large-scale interstate war, while more decentralized, less-bureaucratic formats
employing non-state militias face more severe problems of control and coordination.

Nesting this theory into more dynamic neo-institutional understandings of generation and reproduction, I show how the prevalence of one form of coercive institution depends on the initial endowment of state institutions and the configuration of neighboring states and why certain institutional forms become self-perpetuating.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer contextualized comparisons of two historically-linked but discrete sites in the developing world: Indonesia and Iraq. These countries share many similar traits that make them good candidates for comparison, yet they differ dramatically and crucially in their paths of military development. In Indonesia, the sudden vacuum of power during World War II allowed a network of gangsters and revolutionaries to come to the fore to resist the re-establishment of Dutch colonialism. Once sovereignty was obtained, the Indonesian state saw little danger from its regional neighbors and thus adapted to relying on local brokers to deploy violence internally on behalf of the state. Changes in organizational culture and institutional innovation accommodated and deepened this from of military decentralization.

By comparison, Iraq had no shortage of anti-colonial force but these never had the window of opportunity to displace colonial domination. Instead, in the 1930s and 1940s Iraq saw a drawn-out process of negotiated decolonization that involved the direct bequeathal of a centralized, British-modeled military. Surrounded by states with roughly similar military capacities and facing strong internal challengers, the Iraqi state was compelled both to continually expand its use of coercion and to avoid ever permitting non-state actors access to violence. Even when internal enemies had been subdued,
efforts to retreat from this centralized organizational format were stymied because of deeply held norms of military elitism and the perpetual need to rearm to fight the next interstate war. In the post-Ba’th era, when the Iraqi state is denuded of its army and has reverted to a reliance on the occupier’s military power and a collection of local warlords and militia leaders, the element of external threat continues to impinge upon the hopes of creating stability through devolution.

Any effort in comparative historical analysis necessarily comes with important caveats, particularly the tension between idiographic explanations of individual events and outcomes and nomothetic generalizations about classes of events and outcomes. Chapter 5 expands on the model built from case comparison through further qualitative studies of regionally proximate states and quantitative analysis across a wider set of LDSs. It adds controls for other potential causal factors, such as levels of economic development, ethnic fragmentation, democracy, and other crucial variables in order to establish external validity. It offers a more general model of Third World military development.

Finally, Chapter 6 considers the implications of this model for the study of military development, state formation, and the prospects of peace. On one hand, it argues against the jeremiads about impending global anarchy in which states dissolve and violence is left in the hands of undisciplined and unaccountable non-state militias. While non-state actors have been implicated in some of the worst atrocities of recent decades, including genocide, this is not the inevitable or only outcome of violence devolution. In a wider historical perspective, reliance on non-state actors as violence
brokers can and has yielded an adequate level of stability and security in many circumstances. On the other hand, it also critiques proposals for improving state capacity through domestic reform. Both violence devolution and the opposite form of state domination of society through violence are suborned and supported by the international system and can scarcely be addressed through piecemeal efforts at the country-unit level. Only be revisiting fundamental components of this system can violence devolution be appreciated or addressed. Instead of resisting the proliferation of militias and privileging state over non-state violence-wielders, I argue for integrating realms of mediated state control as a solution for enduring problems of human and international security.
Chapter 2

A Theory of Violence Devolution

Violence, as Max Weber says, is a means specific, but not exclusive, to the state.22 Late developing states (LDSs) have varying capacities to control the means of violence throughout the territories they claim and are constantly surrounded by internal and external rivals who have or seek the ability to use violence independently.23 This study treats Weber’s ideal-type as a metric with which to categorize and measure, as well as a launching point to discuss the way rivalries over the use of force are managed. It is through this discussion that I begin to cull the concept of violence devolution, differentiate state from non-state violence-wielders, make propositions about the etiology of violence devolution, and devise empirical tests of their validity.

A Typology of Coercive Institutions

In a contemporary gloss on Weber, Michael Mann notes that few states have ever sought, much less possessed, a monopoly over military force. What matters is the way force is organized—the degree to which the state centralizes or decentralizes coercive power. As shown in Figure 2.1 below, these dimensions form a continuum, flanked on one side by the hypothetical Weberian ideal-type of total control over violence, and the equally hypothetical Hobbesian ideal-type of total anarchy on the other. Between these

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poles are two organizational forms, which Mann dubs the *extensive* versus *intensive* organization of coercion. The *extensive* organizational format involves large numbers of people over far-flung territory engaged in minimally stable cooperation, but with limited mobilization for positive commitments or penetration of everyday lives. Chains of command are mediated, with incomplete to negligible oversight and monitoring of local agents. Medieval Europe’s feudal states are exemplary of this form. On the other hand, *intensive* organization of coercion involves tight command and control and a direct chain of command extending from the sovereign to the lowest subaltern. This kind of organization—typified by the rational-bureaucratic state—is capable of deploying violence on both large and small scales.  

Figure 2.1: Continuum in the Organization of Violence

**Decentralized**----------**Extensive**----------**Intensive**----------**Monopoly**

Hobbesian ideal-type  Feudal State  Modern State  Weberian ideal-type

Mann’s analysis is useful for beginning to think of the kinds of control states hold over the deployment of violence in a wide number of historical cases, but it obscures the state’s relationship with other violence-wielders.  

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25 For historical cases, see David Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,
historical literature on Latin America, Robert Holden offers a three-part classification of the perpetrators of violence and their relationship to one another which adds an important dimension to the analysis, shown in the conceptual map in Figure 2.2.26

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Map of Violence Devolution27

First, there is the state, a purveyor of violence through agents deemed legally entitled to enact coercion, such as the army, police, judges, and their accessories. Even when despised by the citizenry it purports to represent, the state has the imprimatur of

27 The diagram is my invention, based on Holden and other sources.
international norms of sovereignty and the domestic legal system on its side. For many LDSs, sovereignty is more assumed than actual, owing more to the bestowal, recognition, and acknowledgment of other sovereign entities than their real capacities to govern.\textsuperscript{28} Reliance on international standards for validation of sovereignty has led to a dramatic diffusion of common patterns in the formal institutions of coercion.\textsuperscript{29} The rituals of militarism—parade ground marches, salutes of submission, the changing of the guard—are known the world-over. Soldiers and police wear uniforms bearing epaulettes and insignias indicating their positions in the bureaucracy of violence. Armed forces are divided into the familiar tripartite functional groups (army, navy, air force), with each branch clamoring to obtain the best military technology it can afford. Ministers of war and interior meet regularly to mutually acknowledge and reinforce each others’ standing as the sole legal purveyors of violence within their designated territory. Even clandestine security services or praetorian guards qualify as part of the state apparatus, though they also represent a limited decentralization of the state’s coercive power.\textsuperscript{30}

The second type of purveyor of violence is explicitly anti-state: the coup-plotter, the guerrilla, the criminal, and the insurgent. If the state monopolizes the legal claim to violence, then their actions are necessarily illegal. They specifically seek to displace or


replace the state’s authoritative position and use violence to compel changes in state
behavior. Again, the level of domestic support for insurgents matters less than the heavy
normative weight granted to the state over these challengers. Even when the formal state
is entirely supplanted by another entity capable of offering protection services, the
international system tends to deny authority to any entity that fractures existing designs
of sovereignty.31

The third type of purveyor of violence shares characteristics of both the state and
counter-state actors: para-institutional agents of violence. Initially used to denote so-
called “autodefensas” in Colombia, the term can be expanded to apply to any violent
actor loosely or covertly affiliated with organs of the state. Para-institutional agents
collaborate in the intimidation or elimination of the state’s enemies, but remain outside
the state’s legal bureaucratic boundaries and without the recognition offered by
international norms or domestic law. Thus, groups like the Sudanese janjaweed, the
Ulster loyalists, the Sierra Leonean Kamajers, plus all manner of bandits, vigilantes, and
warlords who make accommodations with the state can be considered para-institutional.
So, too, would the armed wings of political parties, since parties per se have standing to
employ violence in the international system. In some instances, para-institutions emerge
organically from civil society, in others they are cultivated by the state. While there can
be some elision in the distinction between the extra-legal components of militia behavior
and that of state organs, there remains strong normative grounds to differentiate what is

31 Öserud, Öyvind “The Narrow Gate: Entry to the Club of Sovereign States,” Review of International
Studies, 23:2 (1997); For an illustrative case, see Mark Bradbury, Becoming Somaliland: Reconstructing a
sovereign and what is not. Para-institutional relationships are an example of what
William Chambliss calls “state-organized crime,” in that the state is complicit as
accessory before or after the fact in acts defined by law as criminal. As a leader of the
striking teacher’s union in Oaxaca, Mexico recently expressed,

sicarios [hired gunmen] paid by the PRI [the ruling Institutional
Revolutionary Party] could do things the police legally couldn’t do—grab
people without cause, beat them, torture them… The only authority they
had was the money they were getting, but who was to stop them? The
government? The government was paying them!

The nomenclature attached to para-institutional groups is often highly subjective and
tainted by derogatory or euphemistic connotations. What could be called a “warlord
army” can just as easily be dubbed a “village protection force.” For the purposes of this
study, then, it useful to describe them merely as state-sponsored militias or paramilitaries,
which denote that their activities are in some way outside the state’s legal boundaries, but
still working at its behest.

Conceptually, the devolution of violence entails a state establishing a collusive
relationship with para-institutional entities, rather than relying entirely upon its legally-

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35 Para-institutional activities are conceptually related to but distinct from the activities of private contractors active in many developed states. As their name denotes, the latter are private bodies directly in the pay of the state whose activities are explicitly pronounced by a legal contract. By contrast, para-institutions involve collusive and semi-covert relationships. See Deborah Avant, The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); P.W. Singer, Corporate Warriors: The Rise of Privatized Military Industry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
sanctioned agents. Abandoning the ontological assumption of the state’s monopoly over violence invites further etiological and empirical questions about the causes of violence devolution. To proffer answers, we must examine this institutional format’s capability to perform the complex tasks of deploying force in competition with other coercive institutions. What Abdelkader Sinno writes of insurgent groups applies equally to states: “the range of [coercive] strategies that can be initiated and the range of those that can be countered can be limited by the structure of the organization….” A structure conducive to different types of coordination among individuals in pursuit of a common purpose is thus necessary (though not sufficient) for success.³⁶

In his seminal study of LDS military development, Morris Janowitz argues that the prevalence of various types of coercive institutions reflects different state priorities of internal and external defense.³⁷ In Europe, the transition from “small, decentralized, self-equipped” militias raised by feudal lords to the “large, centrally-financed and supplied armies” of modern states was spurred by the perpetual threat of interstate war.³⁸ Soldiery became a dedicated profession, requiring technologists with skill in managing more advanced and expensive forms of weaponry. States that did not match their neighbors in

military power suffered predation, subjugation, and eventual destruction. But LDSs do not inhabit a similarly hypercompetitive environment. The presence of larger powers to protect client states and enforce norms against violations of state sovereignty by neighbors mitigates the need to engage in the systematic acquisition of a monopoly over violence.\textsuperscript{39} Some scholars offer that this allows political elites (regimes) in LDSs to focus on diffusing domestic opposition without regard for the external threat posed to the state as a whole. This omni-balancing, as Steven David puts it, involves a complex series of responses to both internal and external threats.\textsuperscript{40} However, the theoretical distinction between regime and state tends to overlook their empirical proximity. Regimes \textit{inhabit} states and will rise and fall with the fortunes of the other. Regimes cannot be oblivious to the fate of the state, since when a state is defeated by an external challenger or by internal subversion, the regime is likely to be destabilized if not eliminated with it.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Omni-Balancing and the Genesis and Reproduction of Military Institutions}

Organizational theory provides a powerful tool for understanding the capabilities and limitations of different organizational forms in omni-balancing environments.

Militias map onto what Oliver Williamson categorizes as a multidivisional-form (M-}


\textsuperscript{40} Steven David, \textit{Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); See also Mohammed Ayoob, \textit{The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System} (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

form) organizational structure, while conventional, centralized military forces are organized along the lines of a unitary-form (U-form) organization. The former is characterized by a number of quasi-autonomous, territorially-specific and self-contained units, with each overseeing all steps in the production of violence. The latter is organized around functional lines, each unit devoted to a single task in the production chain. The differences between these forms are shown visually in Figures 2.3 and 2.4.
Figure 2.3: M-form Military Organization

![M-form Military Organization Diagram]

Figure 2.4: U-form Military Organization

![U-form Military Organization Diagram]
These different organizational forms introduce specific constraints on supervision and opportunities for deception. Table 2.1, borrowed from Alex Cooley, summarizes these differences.

Table 2.1: Comparison Between U-form and M-form Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State-Sponsored Militia: M-Form</th>
<th>Conventional Military: U-Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Capabilities</strong></td>
<td>Extensive: Minimally stable cooperation for small-scale, decentralized operations</td>
<td>Intensive: Coordinated operations in large or small scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational Principle</strong></td>
<td>Units organized by territory</td>
<td>Units organized by function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governance Cost</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informational &amp; Command Flows</strong></td>
<td>High core-subdivision asymmetries; Divisional encapsulation</td>
<td>Low core-subdivision asymmetries; Divisional decomposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risks &amp; Dangers</strong></td>
<td>Principle-agent problems</td>
<td>Departmentalism/Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M-form organizations give the sub-unit director the ability and incentive to innovate. Their decentralization, however, exacerbates the tension between principal and agent, since it is harder for the state’s core management to monitor and control militia leaders who work independently. In fact, competition between sub-units is often promoted in order to incite better performance. On the other hand, U-form organizations are easier to control, since each unit is responsible for only one operational task, but are

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less flexible, since a unit leader can become myopic and focus solely on his particular
tasks rather than the larger organizational goal.\textsuperscript{43}

State-sponsored militias represent the “mirror image” of their insurgent
adversaries.\textsuperscript{44} The devolution of command and control gives commanders latitude to
improvise techniques of repression and surveillance that are suited specifically to their
environment. Since the commanders are local elites, they have superior knowledge of
physical and political terrain. Raised and retained on a part-time and \textit{ad hoc} basis, they
are also cheaper than regular militaries to deploy for long-term engagements in low-
intensity warfare.\textsuperscript{45} Collusion with non-state actors also gives the state plausible
deniability for flagrant violence committed against civilians in the course of often brutal
counter-insurgency campaigns.\textsuperscript{46}

But as in any M-form arrangement, the trade-off for this increased effectiveness at
counter-insurgency is a loss of control by the state as principal over its agents in the

\textsuperscript{43} Oliver E. Williamson, \textit{Markets and Hierarchies, Analysis, and Antitrust Implications: A Study of}
\textit{Economies of Internal Organization} (New York: Free Press, 1975); See also, Patrick Bolton and John

\textsuperscript{44} The idea of “mirroring” comes from John J. McCuen, \textit{The Art of Counter-revolutionary War: the
Strategy of Counter-Insurgency} (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), 50. On the cellular organizational of
insurgent groups, see Sun-Ki Chai, “An Organizational Economics Theory of Antigovernment Violence,”

\textsuperscript{45} Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman, \textit{Warfare and the Third World} (New York: Palgrave,
2001), 198; Sunil Dasgupta, “Understanding Paramilitary Growth: Agency Relations in Military
Organization,” Paper presented at the Centre for International Relations, Liu Institute for Global Issues,
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, November 13-15, 2003; Usman A. Tar, “The Perverse
Manifestations of Civil Militias in Africa: Evidence from Western Sudan,” \textit{Peace, Conflict, and

\textsuperscript{46} Bruce B. Campel, “Death Squads: Definition, Problems, and Historical Context,” in Bruce B. Campbell
and Arthur D. Brenner, eds., \textit{Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability} (New York:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Stanley Cohen, \textit{States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering}
periphery. Devolution of violence entails the risk that militia leaders will become so empowered as to rival the state. Militia leaders can subvert central authority in a number of ways. They can amass their own power base, by setting up their own ‘state-within-a-state,’ seceding, or even marching on the capital to depose the regime. Often militias claim to represent or protect entire ethnic communities. They can refuse to comply with state demands, either by neglecting to target groups the state identifies as dangerous or by attacking those the state identifies as friendly. This danger increases when militias can collaborate with one another and when they have an autonomous source of revenue or support. While many studies have pointed out how militias can gain autonomy by embedding themselves in a black-market economy of diamond or drug smuggling, it is important to note that the economic threshold for self-sufficiency is relatively low and not necessarily dependent on world markets.\footnote{In Somalia and Sudan, for instance, militias have gained ascendancy mainly by seizing control of cattle. See William Reno, \textit{Warlord Politics and the African States} (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).}

LDSs manage militias with techniques familiar to any sixteenth century European monarch beset by unruly barons. Joel Migdal identifies three critical tactics of state survival: first is to continually and haphazardly remove and relocate the local elite. Those with too strong a foothold in a particular region or group are co-opted to serve in higher office, where they will be isolated from their domestic constituency. Second, and closely related, is granting non-merit appointments to those with kinship or patronage ties to state elites over those with greater expertise or competence. This ensures that the
state’s local agents have an incentive to remain loyal. In the Middle East, for instance, states replace tribal chiefs they considered too autonomous with more pliable uncles, cousins, or other kin. If one clan becomes too powerful, the state sanctions the creation of a rival tribe. The third tool is turning state coercive organs or other militia groups against one another, creating a mini-civil war between two erstwhile state agents. As shown in Figure 2.5 and 2.6 below, these techniques amount to efforts by the state to maintain exclusive brokerage relationships with local non-state actors while blocking individual militia leaders’ capacity to unite in collective action against the state.

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Figure 2.5

Militia Mobilization with Competing Sources of Clientage and Brokerage

Figure 2.6

Militia Mobilization With Limited Clientage and Brokerage
In Figures 2.5 and 2.6 above, the width of the lines connecting different nodes represents the strength of the ties between them, and the size of each circle represents the absolute coercive and fiscal power held at that level. In Figure 2.5 the central government and regional commands are of equal in absolute power and have numerous ties and connections of various magnitudes. Each stands in some position of access to a local militia (marked by capital letters), although the militias within each region may have multiple ties. Stated in terms of networks, there are numerous rims connecting local hubs, allowing the formation cross-regional alliances against the center. Figure 2.6 shows how the elimination of cross-regional ties allows the state access to local militias through the brokerage of the regional commanders while limiting each militia’s choice of sponsors to the state alone. This reduces the network to a single hub extending spokes to numerous peripheral agents, without a rim connecting any local agents directly to another.

While problems of internal control over various militia agents can be solved through careful manipulation to block coordination among the various agents of violence, the limitation of M-form organizations also has profound implications for external security. In U-form coercive institutions, internal hierarchy and centralized chains of command allow for maximum coordination among different functional units. Historically, this coordination has been crucial to allowing conventional armies to mass and apply overwhelming force, combining the forces of air, land, and sea power. By comparison, indirect control among M-form organizations prevents inter-unit coordination and hinders coercive capacity. Unlike standardized conventional military
units, militia groups are not interchangeable. Since many of their fighters serve on a part-time or semi-voluntary basis, they lack the logistical capability and training to operate far from their home regions or with complex technology. Additionally, they are loyal primarily to a single local leader and may refuse orders in a conventional chain of command. Ultimately, these limitations mean that militias may be able to patrol the rear echelons, but not capture strategic positions or withstand a concentrated attack. The practices that ensure internal stability via violence devolution exacerbate a state’s susceptibility to external attack. States that move too far toward decentralization and reliance on non-state actors become easy targets for aggressive neighbors.

Organizational theory explains the sustainability of violence devolution versus centralization based with the environment in which states compete. It is, in this sense, highly functionalist and evolutionary. The level of centralization in the use of force has a profound influence over the viability of competitive strategies with respect to internal and external challengers. Insurgents can be fought through violence devolution, provided the state can prevent any agent or coalition of agents from moving against the center. But interstate challenges require greater coordination among coercive institutions that can only come through more centralized organizational formats. When states lack this, they are left profoundly vulnerable to external attack. Thus, low levels of external threat form

a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for devolution, while high levels of external threat compels centralization. The forms of coercive institutions that exist in the world do so because they are effective in defending states from a combination of internal and external adversaries. Those forms that do not work are eliminated through competitive pressure.\(^5^3\)

Beyond the functional boundaries which limit institutional success or failure, neo-institutionalism complements organizational theory by focusing on the dynamic material and ideational factors that drive coordinated interactions. Without eschewing effectiveness as a bedrock condition for institutional survival, this approach makes inferences about both mechanisms of institutional change and stability, disaggregating the conditions that generate state institutions at inchoate critical junctures from those conditions responsible for reproduction when patterns of behavior are consolidated.\(^5^4\) A crucial insight is that successful institutions are stable but not static. Rather, institutions become self-sustaining by becoming self-correcting. One important mechanism is organizational inertia. Particularly for militaries, where repeated drilling is key for large-scale operations, once procedures are set through incentive structures and normative rules, it becomes progressively harder to replace and easier to duplicate them.\(^5^5\) At the same time, strategically-minded actors within an organization find new applications for

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old institutionalized patterns and manipulate existing organizational norms to redefine the institutional identity and mission. Such bounded innovation involves continually borrowing, imitating, and learning from past experience and from the example of others.\textsuperscript{56} As Martin Van Creveld argues, “war represents perhaps the most imitative activity known to man,” with LDSs in particular constantly seek out military technology and training from other states in an effort to gain competitive advantage.\textsuperscript{57}

The pressure of competition with other violence wielders can be seen as a catalyst of military institutional innovation whose trajectory depends on the type of security web in which states are ensconced and the threats which they face.\textsuperscript{58} On one hand, a militarily devolved state facing considerable risk from neighbors possessing a larger, centralized army capable of force projection has two choices: The first is self help, undertaking the difficult process of building a larger, more potent military of its own to deter or defeat its external challenger. The second is to seek the protection of a larger power. Many LDSs became proxies in the Cold War’s bipolar competition and depended heavily on their provision of military, diplomatic, and economic assistance. Some sponsoring states actually recommended that their clients focus exclusively on internal security and adopt


military devolution. But the guarantees offered by great powers to client states are never absolute. In fact, the goal of the superpower sponsor is always to use the client to its own advantage and thus the imposition of superpower rivalry as often aggravates as ameliorates regional conflict. Ultimately, states facing hostile neighbors risk predation, loss of status, territory, or elimination if they do not borrow or develop centralized military capacity. On the other hand, a state surrounded by relatively innocuous neighbors can afford to have only a loose hold over the use of force internally. Under such conditions, no state has the capability to conduct aggression against the other and thus no reason to adopt military centralization.

The sensitivity of these pathways to contextual conditions requires examination beyond the periods of institutional consolidation to prior moments of institutional configuration at critical junctures, when powerful and willful political actors seized opportunities to establish norms and construct incentive structures that defined organizational behavior. Among LDSs, it is difficult to underestimate the role of colonial and imperial interventions in setting the trajectories of political and social conditions.

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59 Superpower support is key feature in the maintenance of sultanistic regimes, where there is little beyond the patrimonial control over force. See H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, “A Theory of Sultanism I: A Type of Non-Democratic Rule,” in H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., Sultanistic Regimes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 12; For historical discussion of U.S. involvement in setting up militias in Latin America, see Adam Jones, “Parainstitutional Violence in Latin America,” Latin American Politics & Society, 46:4 (2004); On the Soviet’s propagation of peasant or party militias, see Adam Roberts, Nations in Arms: Theory and Practice of Territorial Defense (New York: Praeger, 1976).
development. For militaries, early combat experiences locked-in organizational
structures, procedures, and identities, often with unintended long-term consequences.\textsuperscript{62}

For many LDSs, the inheritance of a conventional, European-style army was part and
parcel of the imperialist legacy, either when directly implanted by a European overlord or
imported by an indigenous elite aiming to stave-off foreign domination. Even when
poorly equipped, under-funded, and distrusted by their colonial masters, these armies
were decisively conventional in format, generally imitating the coercive institutions that
had emerged through centuries of European war. The colonial military was a dedicated
career track, where competence and professionalism, while not always present in fact,
were at least valued in theory. Its mission was to prevent the bulk of the population from
obtaining the means of violence to use against the ruling elite. The recruitment of
soldiers from preferred or loyal ‘martial races,’ typically minorities, insulated the military
from the masses.\textsuperscript{63} The negotiation of decolonization, then, involved a bequeathal of
models taken directly from Europe’s unique military development to post-colonial
successors.

In contrast, when colonial states broke down in the face of revolutionary
insurgency, LDSs inherited very different structures. Anti-colonial struggles activated
locally-based networks of coercion and self-defense, producing overlapping networks of
opportunists and politically-motivated ideologues, all of whom had reason to resist the


imposition of the colonial states. Mingling criminal and political motives, local actors vied to appropriate the revolutionary mantle, claiming a connection between their own cause and that of the national struggle. Revolutionary elites acted as brokers who knit together a fabric of local violence wielders into the revolutionary army and bestowed nationalist legitimacy on essentially parochial interests. Thus, both top-down and bottom-up processes in violent decolonization combined to make the ranks of the new revolutionary army a ready-made militia force, flexible, expansive, and holding an identity and sense of mission distinct from a conventional, professional fighting force.  

**Puzzle and Propositions**

Given the common properties of state sovereignty in the international system and the diffusion of similar models of formal state attributes, the question remains of why some states exercise greater control over violence than others. Are states that collude with non-state actors necessarily doomed to fail, as many who examine the prevalence of militias allege?  

While many states not only accommodate but also encourage militias,

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relatively few succumb to failure. A better way to frame the puzzle, then, is to ask why LDSs organize coercion differently, along the spectrum from centralized to decentralized control. Rather than identify violence devolution as a symptom of state dysfunction, the synthesis of organizational and neo-institutional theory provides a more nuanced perspective on the processes that drive military development and locates specific historical episodes of state formation that spur such development. This synthetic theory, then, helps account for both violence devolution and centralization and examines what causes the emergence and durability of each over time. Formally, these hypotheses can be articulated as follows:

1. The origin of violence devolution depends on different legacies of decolonization, particularly whether decolonization occurred through violence or through negotiation. If guerrillas were active, a new-born state tended to appropriate the networks of local violence wielders, converting them from anti-colonial insurgents into pro-state militias. If, on the other hand, decolonization occurred through negotiation, new states inherited the military organizational patterns of the departing colonial powers, which were generally centralized and bureaucratic in format.

2. The persistence of these differing forms of coercive institutions depends on the permissive conditions of the external environment. If states face strong external

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competitors and the threat of war, then they are forced to adopt (or retain) a centralized military format in order to defend against external predation. If, on the other hand, the regional environment is pacific, either because of the ongoing intervention of great powers or the relative impotence of regional rivals, then these states can persist in violence devolution.

The pathway diagram in Figure 2.7 summarizes these arguments schematically.
In pathway N1, a centralized state faces high external threat and thus remains centralized. This pathway represents a recapitulation of Europe’s trajectory. In pathway R1, a revolutionary state is initially reliant on decentralized coercive control but is then forced by external pressure to centralize. This pathway is best described by Theda Skocpol’s work on the impact of international pressure on regime consolidation during and after the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, where external threat compelled new elites to

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build up infrastructural control. Pathway R2 represents the opposite effect, where decentralized states face little pressure and thus continue the devolution of violence. In their respective studies of Latin America and Africa, Miguel Centeno and Jeffrey Herbst depict how low initial endowments of military capacity at the time of decolonization stymied efforts to centralize control over force. Shielded from the pressure of interstate competition, though, leaders focused on the enemy within without having to subjugate force to the state’s bureaucratic controls. Limited wars, then, led to limited states. Finally, the endpoint of pathway N2 is indeterminant, as states that begin with military centralization but little external pressure can remain centralized or devolve violence with little risk.

**Methodology**

In order to address the etiology of violence devolution, I use a mixed method research design that links qualitative and quantitative techniques. Since the hypothesis elaborated in the previous pages highlight contingent critical junctures as the initiators of military development, qualitative and inductive methods of contextualized, historically-
bounded comparison is the first step of model-building. Chapters 3 and 4 present paired case studies of Indonesia and Iraq. The logics used in developing the theory from these cases are two-fold. The first is within-case process tracing. This involves in-depth examination of the chain of social and physical mechanisms connecting antecedent and outcome, and makes extensive use of counterfactual reasoning to identify potential and actual outcomes of social change. In order to probe the limits of path dependence, I pay particular attention to moments of institutional generation, successful and failed efforts to change institutional models, and exogenous shocks. The bulk of the data for these sections is derived from the works of historians and social scientists, as well as U.S. and British government archival material. In interpreting such data, I take particular care to mitigate confirmation bias by examining and triangulating within a wide swath of sources, explicit citation, and highlighting contention within the relevant historiography.

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The second logic is of John Stuart Mill’s Method of Difference. This logic moves away from the idiographic tendencies inherent in historical narratives to a more explanatory and analytical comparison between cases as they evolve in parallel over time. Indonesia and Iraq share important commonalities that make them compelling candidates for comparison. Both obtain sovereignty at same point in world-historical timing during the mid-20th century exhaustion of the European colonial enterprises. Both saw their borders fixed by outside imperialists, incorporating extremely heterogeneous polities that shared little in the way of common national identity. Legitimacy was at a deficit from the outset. Both faced difficult geographical terrain over which to project power but also enjoyed natural resource rents that gave them each enormous power to launch projects for economic and social development. Both were also significant regional powers, but still subordinates in global affairs. Yet Indonesia and Iraq differ considerably in their military development, the former relying heavily on militias and violence devolution, the latter on centralized, conventional forces. The logic of the most-similar comparison seeks to isolate key differences among cases to account for their varying outcomes.

In Chapter 5, I try to generalize and test the model of military development across a wider set of cases. This begins with a regional comparison of states in Southeast Asia

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and the Middle East. This regional level of analysis is useful for testing some of the theory’s additional observable implications. While the hypotheses and case-studies focus on individual countries as units of analysis, they can be extrapolated into a theory of regional military development. A region of impotent peace is likely to emerge when clusters of states are commonly affected by revolution and adopt decentralized military models. As most states in this situation will focus on internal competitors without reason to worry about external threat, interstate war is rare and devolution remains the regional mode. On the other hand, when clusters of states inherit centralized militaries, they pose an immediate risk to their neighbors and launch into a competitive dynamic where arms races escalate and the chance of interstate war is high. This regional level of analysis is also particularly useful for understanding the cases of Iran and Vietnam (both in R2 pathways), where revolutionary regimes initially adopted state-sponsored militias but were compelled by circumstances of external threat to adopt more centralized formats.

Chapter 5 concludes with a statistical analysis of impact of decolonization and war on military developing in eighty-five LDSs. Regression analysis adds an important check on potential omitted variable bias. However, the scarcity of historical statistics on LDS militaries makes longitudinal analysis of a pathway model impossible. The

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76 By focusing on regional levels of war and peace, the study takes another perspective on the puzzle Etel Solingen identifies of the origins of war and peace in these two similar regions. See Etel Solingen, “Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina: The Foundation of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East,” *American Political Science Review*, 101:4 (2007).


79 Tarrow, “Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide”; King, Keohane, and Verba, 56, 20.
quantitative approach has more breadth but less depth than that of the qualitative case studies. I rely on the same data Janowitz uses to devise his initial theory of Third World military development, the 1974 International Institute for Strategic Studies report. This was the first study of Third World security to explicitly examine and compare paramilitary and militia forces. I use regression analysis to test hypotheses about the impact of decolonization and warfare on military development, adding control variables for a country’s level of development, democracy, ethnic fractionalization, and terrain.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss how the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis provides a broader and more historically nuanced perspective on the factors that hinder or abet violence devolution. Using these findings as a guide, I suggest new ways of dealing with the myriad of states that continue to rely on non-state militias. While many prescribe policies that seek to strengthen states’ control over violence and eliminate militias, I argue that such measures are both impractical and counterproductive. A better approach is to recognize that structural conditions promote violence devolution and begin finding ways to incorporate non-state violence-wielders in the international system in a way that encourages them to provide greater degrees of protection for the populations under their de facto, if not de jure, control.

Chapter 3

Limited Wars and Limited States: Violence Devolution in Indonesia

Created *ex nihilo* by colonial caprice, encapsulating a highly fractious population spread over an enormous and disparate territory with an economy slowly moving away from natural resource rent to industrialization, Indonesia in some sense represents the epitome of late development. It is perhaps for this reason that Indonesia occupies such a prominent place in so many studies of the Third World. Few works go without mentioning the singular role of violence in the process of Indonesia’s state formation, typically dividing Indonesian history into long periods of tranquility punctuated by outbursts of disorder. Indeed, Clifford Geertz’s seminal 1963 essay on the dilemmas of “new” states focuses on the failure of Sukarno’s post-revolutionary regime to establish state authority in the 1950s and 1960s, when militias spawned of the anti-colonial upheaval of World War II continued to resist demobilization and integration under state control. As Geertz describes in his postscript, it was only with Suharto’s imposition of the so-called ‘New Order’ in 1966 and its severe curtailment of political openness that the worst centrifugal tendencies were overcome.\(^{81}\) Characterizations of Suharto’s thirty year rule, which ended abruptly in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1998, diverge wildly.\(^{82}\) Some consider the installation of Jakarta-based technocrats and the prominence

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\(^{82}\) On the various interpretations of the New Order, see Dwight King, “Indonesia’s New Order as a Bureaucratic Polity, a Neopatrimonial Regime, or a Bureaucratic Authoritarian Regime: What Difference Does It Make?” in Benedict Anderson and Audrey Kahin, eds., *Interpreting Indonesian Politics* (Ithaca:
of the military-backed GOLKAR (Sekretariat Bersama Golongan Karya) as tilting Indonesia toward bureaucratic authoritarianism. In 1978, Ulf Sundhaussen declared emphatically that in the first decade of the New Order, “effective control over their combat troops transferred to the center [and] the panglimas [regional division commanders] have ceased to be independent sources of power. Warlordism has thus arrived at its final conclusion.” Yet, as Syarif Hidyat argues more recently, a de facto “hidden autonomy” of non-state violence wielders always remained encapsulated within the New Order’s de jure centralization. Total bureaucratic control over the use of force may have been the regime’s ambition, but it was far from ever an accomplishment in a state where patrimonialism was so deeply entrenched. Indeed, since Suharto’s downfall, the endemic collusion between the state and non-state violence-wielders that passed relatively unnoticed in the midst of Indonesia’s economic renaissance has gained renewed attention.

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86 Perhaps the best example of this revisionism comes from the series of studies on violence and the state published by Cornell University Southeast Asia series. See Benedict Anderson, ed., *Violence and the State in Suharto’s Indonesia* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2001).
This chapter proceeds in three sections to examine the emergence and durability of violence devolution in Indonesia as an institutional mode. The first section discusses the conflicting impulses of Dutch imperialism both to supersede and to utilize militias, leading to a systematic herniation of coercive power to non-state actors in colonial Indonesia. The second section describes how the sudden displacement of the Dutch during World War II and Japanese efforts to mobilize Indonesian society provided a window of opportunity for Indonesian nationalist to activate local networks of violence in resistance to the colonial order. The Indonesian Revolution of 1948 and 1949 thus comprised a critical juncture in which the pattern of decentralized interaction between the newly independent republic and local strongmen was established. The third section describes how the Indonesian state managed to routinize and perfected the techniques of militia mobilization in order to overcome the inherent risks of devolution. On one hand, by relying on militias in a host of situations, the state became more adept at eliminating alternative sources of patronage for existing militias. On the other hand, Indonesia’s leaders also gradually learned the limits of militia mobilization when attempting to project force outside its borders. What Theda Skocpol observes of the way a hostile regional environment forced revolutionary regimes to centralized state power works in the exact opposite way for Indonesia: the absence of foreign threat proved a crucial factor permitting violence devolution to become a stable organizational form, consolidating the model that had emerged amidst revolutionary chaos.  

Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 23, 173.
**Indirect Rule and the Herniation of Coercive Power in Colonial Indonesia**

As in many imperial endeavors, the Dutch tried to rule Indonesia, a collection of thousands of islands forty times larger than the Netherlands located at the other side of world, with as little effort as possible. The practice of indirect rule left minor sultans to serve as vassals in the outer islands; in Java, Madura, and Sumatra, where the Dutch claimed direct sovereignty, they retained local aristocrats and village heads to serve as the primary agents of colonial administration.\(^8\) The logic of this system was two-fold: first, it reduced the cost of dispatching (and paying) enough European personnel to manage Indonesian affairs directly at a village level. Second, the Dutch believed in principle that “like rules like,” meaning that the indigenous peoples would likely respond more obediently when the face of authority was familiar rather than alien. In practice, however, indirect rule produced a paradoxical and undermining effect. Even as the Dutch tried to build rationalized bureaucratic structures within their domain and to centralize coercive control in state hands, traditional patterns of decentralized coercion persisted at the margins of the colonial state and were invoked by the Dutch themselves when their control was challenged.

The first two centuries of Dutch domination of the East Indies (1602-1798) involved only modest changes in the modes of institutional control. Like its counterpart

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in British India, the Dutch United East Indian Company had a potent but relatively small military arm and found that its mercantile interests could be met without significantly altering the balance of indigenous social life. Thus, the Company preserved the indigenous structure of power, using the potentates, village headmen and chiefs as vassals in a manner roughly similar to those practiced indigenously before the Dutch arrival. Indonesia’s kingdoms retained the organization of the mandala state; different levels in the political hierarchy posses different amounts of power, but the powers available to the leaders at all levels were essentially the same. The magnitude of the king’s power varied inversely to its distance from the inner circle of the royal court. In the outlying villages, local lords served as proxies for the sovereign. In return for patronage from a more powerful king, each lord was responsible for raising and contributing his own village army to the king’s cause during wartime.

Only with the Company’s bankruptcy in 1798 and the formal establishment of the Netherlands East Indies as a crown colony did a more thorough-going transformation of the administrative structure of rule began. The successive governorships of Herman Willem Daendels (1808-11) and Thomas Stamford Raffles (1811-16) broke substantially with the old policy, for the first time attempting to centralize power in Batavia (Jakarta). The subjugation of the Indonesian potentates began with the sack of Yogyakarta in 1812.

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and continued through the Java War (1825-30), the conquest of Bali (1840), and the successive campaigns against Sumatra, which began in 1873 and culminated in the final suppression of the Muslim rebels at Aceh by 1904. In most of these campaigns, the Dutch forces were outnumbered by indigenous armies, but superior technology, especially steam navigation, and organizational and logistical innovation eventually led to success. Specifically, as Gayl Ness and William Stahl note, it was the repeated ability of the Dutch armies to maneuver in small units and then rapidly concentrate firepower that proved critical. During the Java War, they created a system of strategically fortified outposts backed by small mobile columns to defeat the guerrilla-style attacks. Seventy years later, during the Sumatra campaigns they developed a new mobile rural police force that roamed the countryside intimidating local villages into compliance.\footnote{Gayl D. Ness and William Stahl, “Western Imperial Armies in Asia,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History}, 19:1 (1977). On the Java War, see M.C. Ricklefs, \textit{A History of Modern Indonesia, c. 1300} (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 1993 [2\textsuperscript{nd} edition]), 111-16. On the Aceh suppression, see Ricklefs, 144-7; Robert Cribb \textit{Gangsters and Revolutionaries: the Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution} (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 31. On the importance of steam navigation, see J. a Campo, “Steam Navigation and State Formation,” in Robert Cribb, ed., \textit{The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands Indies, 1990-1942} (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994).}

At the cornerstone of Dutch control was the Royal Dutch East Indies Army (\textit{Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger}, KNIL), established by Governor General Johannes van den Bosch in 1830. By the eve of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, KNIL forces numbered 16,000 Europeans and 26,000 Indonesians. Unlike vassalage-based armies of the pre-colonial period, who were temporarily conscripted to fight under the command of a local lord, the Dutch emphasized both the professionalism of their colonial army and its differentiation from Indonesian society at large. Where the warriors of the pre-colonial
period were limited by their economic dependence on the local community, the Dutch
purposefully recruited Ambonese Christians to fill a large role in the KNIL ranks, making
its soldiers linguistically and ethnically distinct from the population they patrolled and
dependent on the Dutch colonial administration for salaries and supplies.\footnote{H.W. van
den Doels, “Military Rule in the Netherlands Indies,” in Robert Cribb, ed., The Late
Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands
of KNIL’s Indonesian troops were Javanese, 20 percent Ambonese, and the remainder
Sundanese, Madurese, Bugis, and assorted Malays (mainly Timorese). Ricklefs, 131-47;
David Chandler et al., In Search of Southeast Asia (Honolulu: University of Hawaii
Press, 1987), 193-4.} The police
was organized in a similar manner, with recruits serving in ethnically-mixed units,
remaining isolated from the location under patrol, living in barracks, and serving under
European officers.\footnote{Elsbeth Locker-Scholten, “State Violence and the Police
in Colonial Indonesia,” in Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad eds., Roots of
Violence in Indonesia: Contemporary Violence in Historical Perspective (Leiden:
KITLV Press, 2002), 92-3.}

Despite their clear military predominance over the width and breadth of
Indonesian territory, however, cooptation, not domination, remained the ultimate end of
Dutch rule. The Dutch regarded village chiefs as crucial bulwarks against popular
agitation and nationalist unrest and sought to uphold their claim to traditional authority
even as administrative rationalization demanded the diminishment of the aristocracy to
junior administrators of Batavia’s policies.\footnote{J.S. Furnivall, Netherlands
India: A Study of a Plural Economy (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 255; Sutherland,
130.} Deprived of the customary right to peasant labor for personal use, to raise an army
and make war independently, and to practice hereditary succession, the chiefs’ prerogative
was steadily circumscribed. By 1930, only thirty-three of the seventy-five regents in Java
had succeeded their fathers and only twenty-four others had aristocratic blood. The
establishment of Dutch-language schools
to train the sons of the elite and the installation of Dutch residents to serve as the regents’ “elder brother” further transformed the local aristocracy into adjuncts of the Western bureaucratic apparatus.\(^\text{95}\)

As J.S. Furnivall points out, Europeans played far more significant administrative roles in the Dutch East Indies than in British India. The Binneland Bestuur (BB) interior ministry had two to three times as many officials per square mile in Indonesia than the British in India.\(^\text{96}\) The “Ethical Policy” — described by Queen Wilhelmina in 1901 as the acceptance of the Netherlands’ “moral obligation” to alleviate the exploitative and impoverishing effect of existing economic policy and tax code— was more successful in embellishing the colonial state’s bureaucratic and military domination than in actually helping the masses of Javanese peasants. Revenue-farming, particularly from the sale of opium and pawnshop licenses to Chinese traders, was already beginning to be phased out by the 1880s due to wide-spread indigenous antipathy toward the Chinese merchants. By 1915, the BB abolished tax farming and assumed direct control over the opium trade and tax collection from it.\(^\text{97}\) Convinced that increasing agricultural output would create more revenue for the peasantry, the Dutch focused on investing in irrigation and impounded

coolie labor to work on plantations. Spending on native education and social services remained miniscule.\textsuperscript{98}

Suspicion of subversive intent led the Dutch to guard the means of coercion jealously. In 1913 and 1914, as the Dutch readied for a possible attack on the colony by Germany or Japan, they offered Indonesians seats in a newly-established legislative council, but rebuffed the suggestions of allowing natives to prove their loyalty by forming a home defense force to augment KNIL. While supportive of groups like the Sarekat Islam and Muhammediyah who to provide modernized Islamic education to the masses, the Dutch were keenly aware of the dangers of letting any organization, particularly secular nationalists like Sukarno or the communists, organize a mass-based constituency.\textsuperscript{99} In contrast to British India, even during the period of administrative devolution and “de-tutelage” of the regents in the 1920s and 1930s, control over the local police force was even kept out of the regents’ hands. Indeed, the Dutch reluctance to permit indigenous control over the means of violence seems well-founded, as the eruption of rebellions in southern Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi during and immediately after World War I demonstrated the continued need for a strong, reliable military presence.\textsuperscript{100}

Yet alongside the impressive display of bureaucratized violence, the Dutch also retained the extensive coercive institutions vestigial from the mandala state. The key component of this institution was the relationship between the local aristocracy and violence-wielders known as *jago* (literally, fighting-cock). Distinguishing the mythical from the social component of his role is difficult. Mythically, he was a warrior-prince, a retainer of the king, and a social bandit who protected his community from intrusion and exploitation. The meaning of the word itself connotes potency and virility. In practice, however, he was just as easily a predator as a revolutionary.101 Trained in guilds in the arts of thievery and cattle-rustling, these bandits traded exemption from land tax and the corvée in return for protecting the village from their own ilk, a sort of mafia-style extortion racket. Social histories of Dutch colonialism point out frequent collusion between the regents and bandits, conducted at least with the knowledge of the BB, despite its flaunting of the established criminal code. At one time the bandit could be an informant or enforcer for the state, at another a leader of resistance against unjust rule.102 Robert Cribb notes that in the outskirts of Jakarta, such criminal gangs—deracinated from their rural environs—were both hired muscle for landowners and capitalists and also

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crucial leaders and participants in numerous minor labor disturbances and messianic uprisings.\textsuperscript{103}

The dual nature of these methods of violence enforcement can be appreciated by considering the Dutch response to the rise of Indonesia’s communist party (PKI) in the 1920s. PKI specifically drew a mass following by appealing to concepts of social justice drawn from Javanese-Hindu mythology of the just king (\textit{ratu adil}). In some cities, PKI cadres worked with members of the underworld to organize pickets and strikes. The growth of this movement understandably alarmed the Dutch and their Indonesian protégés. The native aristocracy was instinctively hostile to any efforts to agitate among the peasants. Indonesia’s Islamic leadership had only recently abandoned their political alliance with the socialists, but began to identify communism as a rival to Islamic orthodoxy. In order to combat this threat, the Dutch administration and the regents encouraged local clerics to recruit their own bands of local toughs and youth gangs that could disrupt PKI meetings, destroy the homes and property of its members, and target its leaders for intimidation and assassination. By 1925, some 20,000 had joined \textit{sarekat hijau} (green union). During the outbreak of the nation-wide communist rebellions of 1926-27 both the government-backed Islamic vigilantes and pro-PKI criminal network fought against one another. By the end of the rebellion, 13,000 were arrested, 4,500 imprisoned, and 1,308 exiled to prison camps on the outer islands.\textsuperscript{104}

The Dutch colonial administration in Indonesia was renowned for the intensity and scope of its coercive and bureaucratic power, bringing *rust en orden* (tranquility and order) to a volatile country. Indeed, we should not underestimate the proficiency with which the colonial administration alone could mete out draconian punishments or overestimate the extent of the collusion between colonial officials and violence entrepreneurs. It is clear, however, that specialized intensive coercive institutions like KNIL and its police adjuncts did not replace the diffuse coercive networks comprising the brigand and his indigenous elite patrons. On the contrary, to some extent the Dutch co-opted these networks, using the indigenous elite to contract-out the enactment of violence to a social-type of dacoit whose very existence was a peril to the stability and legitimacy of the Dutch bureaucratic system. Observed one Islamic leader, “the government… was playing with fire in encouraging violence and placing its opponents beyond the protection of the law. In the end, such a course could sabotage all respect for authority.”105

Of course, the boundary between state and society is always permeable to some degree. But this herniation of coercion from the state to societal sphere is striking because it went against so much official colonial policy. The availability of state-sponsored militias, even in the limited extent seen in the late colonial order, was made possible by the system of indirect control, maintaining the traditional social patterns of village life under the aristocracy—including the underworld—alongside a rationalized and specialized colonial administrative structure. Contracting with militias, however,

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105 Cited in Locker-Scholten, 47.
required deliberate and strategic choice on the part of state elites about ways to maintain control. The colonial administration had the option to deploy the army and police directly to quell the rebellions of the 1920s and indeed relied on these official arms of the central administration as insurance that vigilantism would not turn to outright anarchy. Yet this colonial-era collaboration proved a harbinger of the model of coercion Indonesia would see in the near future.

Decolonization, Revolution, and Rupture

Harry Benda observes that it is impossible to be “sure that, without the Japanese cataclysm, Dutch colonialism would or could have been forced into far-reaching concessions, let alone seriously challenged, by Indonesian nationalism at an early date.” On August 17, 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender, Sukarno and Mohammed Hatta, acting as representatives of the Japanese-established Committee for the Preparation of Indonesian Independence and meeting at the home of a Japanese vice admiral in Jakarta, announced Indonesia’s independence. But while the Japanese had sought to recruit locals to participate in their struggle against the Dutch and other European colonialists, they had never intended to foment a nationalist revolution within the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Yet this was exactly the result, not only in Indonesia, but throughout Southeast Asia. In the few months of the winter of 1941-42, the Japanese forces swept away many of the most important features of the colonial administrative apparatuses in the region, particularly the coercive institutions that had been the defense

against local uprisings. The suddenness of the Japanese withdrawal in 1945 left a power vacuum in which assertive nationalists seized the opportunity to establish new state institutions before the return of the European powers.

Whereas the Dutch saw Indonesian nationalists as intractable enemies and tried to ensure quiescence by blocking mass-based political mobilization, the Japanese purposefully treated nationalists as junior partners in their imperial venture. As early as the 1930s, when Japan began to consider a southward advance into Asia, it began disseminating pro-Japanese propaganda among the local nationalist through a series of economic and cultural initiatives. By offering influential leaders like Sukarno and Hatta a role in self-government within the Co-Prosperity Sphere and holding-out the promise of eventual independence, the Japanese empire harnessed anti-colonial nationalist antipathy in their favor. They made inroads among the masses by establishing a host of paramilitary, youth, and other organizations, anathema under the Dutch, to increase political participation and mobilization. The best trained and most important militia was Volunteer Army for the Defense of the Fatherland (Tentera


108 Although Japan professed to be fighting for the liberation of the Asian people, Japanese attitudes toward Indonesian nationalism and the Indonesian people in general were still highly pragmatic and at some points extremely exploitative. In Java and Sumatra, the Japanese army forced an estimated 10 million Javanes into forced labor, where 1 to 2 million died of starvation and disease. On the eastern islands, the Japanese navy was known for being far less severe in its treatment of the local population. For diverse perspectives on Japan’s relationship with local nationalism, see Paul Kratoska, ed., Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006); Joyce C. Lebra, ed., Japan’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in World War II: Selected Readings and Documents (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Roman H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
Sukarela Pembela Tanah Air, PETA), which had 40,000 members in Java and 30,000 in Sumatra. PETA soldiers were given arms and basic training by Japanese NCOs and officers and organized regionally, so its members were already serving close to home and could keep watch on behalf of the Japanese. Other less diligently trained groups included the Heiho (Auxiliary Forces), the Seinendan (Youth Corps), the Keibodan (Vigilance Corps), and the Barisan Pelopor (Vanguard Corps), which in total may have enlisted over a million people. As the outlook for the war turned bleak in the summer of 1944, the Japanese also allowed Masyumi, the union of Islamic groups, to organize a specifically Islamic militia, called Hizbollah (Troops of God). Masyumi declared Japan’s struggle part of the holy war and used Islamic schools as recruiting centers. Like PETA, Hizbollah functioned on an extremely localized basis, led by local preachers. Estimates of its size range from 20,000 to 25,000 up to 50,000 men during the war.

Unlike the Japanese-allied India National Army under Chandra Bose, these Indonesian troops were not intended for heavy combat or deployment abroad. The Japanese envisioned these forces as a home guard that could relieve the approximately 100,000 Japanese soldiers occupying Indonesia and Malaya from the drudgeries of garrison duty. To the Indonesian nationalists, who were granted nominal command


responsibilities under strict Japanese supervision, however, these forces formed the kernel of the revolutionary armed forces they hoped to use to obtain independence. Most importantly, as Benedict Anderson emphasizes, the advent of these mass movements systematically unleashed a new social force in Indonesian politics—the pemuda (youth).

Before the war, only a small number of aristocratic Indonesians and even fewer commoners had received secular education at Dutch-language schools. These new forces were younger and less educated, combining a prescient if unsophisticated nationalism with a willingness to use violence.\(^{111}\)

As with all cases of large scale contentious political actions, the revolution that even a few days before Sukarno and Hatta’s announcement consisted of an untold multitude of sundry violent acts of varying severity and levels of coordination. The classic historical account by George Kahin, followed by many others, highlights the complex and frequently indistinguishable acts of nationalists, radicals seeking full-on social revolution, restorationists seeking to re-install aristocratic rule (with or without the Dutch), and opportunists who used the outbreak of violence as a cover for settling grievances or seizing property.\(^{112}\) After the surrender announcement, some Japanese troops tried to maintain law and order until the Allies arrived, but others simply retired to

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their barracks, abandoning their weapons to the locals either willingly or under duress. Amsterdam lobbied Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia, to establish a European presence in Java quickly, but he lacked the logistical capability or available forces to accomplish this rapidly enough to quash the outpouring of nationalism sentiment. Looting, rioting, and assassinations were rampant, targeting the indigenous Sino-Indonesian landlords, Europeans imprisoned in concentration camps, and the beleaguered Japanese. Beside the already established militias like PETA and Hizbollah, new armed gangs sprang up spontaneously, mixing criminals and other violence specialists with political entrepreneurs, many bearing the red and white banner of the new republic but all competing for weaponry, material, and manpower.

At least at the outset, the republican government existed solely on paper. On August 29, the government announced the formation of a republican army that would incorporate PETA, dissident members of KNIL, and all the new militias. Still, local revolutionary committees had at best weak control over the fighting units in their area and little ability to monitor or control military actions from the center. The fact that the republican army repeatedly changed its name over the course of a few years is an indication of the rapidity with which new organs were incorporated or developed and the political orientation changed. Abdul Harris Nasution, at twenty-eight years old already a divisional commander in the new army, describes “hundreds of TKR [militias] had

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113 Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, 140-2; Peter Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command, 1945-46 (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1987).
114 Cribb, Gangsters and Revolutionaries, 43, 49-62; Reid, Indonesian National Revolution, 22-3.
115 Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, 141. Van Dijk, 134-5.
sprung up locally, acting entirely on their own. The leadership of the central headquarters was not felt at all.\footnote{116}

Among the youth, the lines of command were defined by personal relationships and the demonstrated skills and charisma of individual commanders, not the sanction of civilian leadership. The success of a commander was not based on his military prowess necessarily but the ability to attract young men into service.\footnote{117} The most militarily potent militias were associated with established political formations. By early 1946, Hizbollah’s ranks had swelled tenfold to 300,000, although its core of fighters was still limited to about 25,000 men. Other militias had no strong political affiliation but were fiercely nationalist, refusing to abide by the commands of the civilian leadership that they saw as wavering in commitment. Others took on more ethno-sectarian dimensions while still expressing loyalty to the republic, as in the 6,000 man militia formed to protect Sulawesi Christians.\footnote{118} In the absence of funds from the state, these militias gained self-sufficiency by smuggling rice, opium, and weapons between the zones of Allied and republic control. Some of the more socially-conscious established rice-boards to ensure adequate food distribution for the local civilian population, but it remained difficult to distinguish politically from criminally-motivated acts of expropriation.\footnote{119}

\footnote{119} Cribb, \textit{Gangsters and Revolutionaries}, 70-71, 94-5; Robinson, \textit{Dark Side of Paradise}, 157-8.}
Recognizing that lack of military preparation and unity had left the republic vulnerable to attack, Prime Minister Sjahrir and Defense Minister Sjarifuddin tried to increase control over disparate militias by appointing Urip Sumohardjo, a retired KNIL officer, as chief of staff. The ministry of defense envisioned a reformed army, slimmed from approximately 400,000 to 160,000 men organized into more hierarchical and professional units. Individual warlords were offered ranks and salaries within the new army, allowing whole units to integrate into the republican army. Emulating the Soviet Red Army, political commissars were dispatched to monitor and indoctrinate these units and a central headquarters created to manage logistics, payment, and supply of each of these territorial units. At the same time, the central government devoted new resources to build up an elite corps of shock-troops, primarily the West Java Siliwangi Division under Nasution’s command, to form the new army’s core. Due to their training in KNIL, these troops were the best equipped and most professional in the republican arsenal.  

Conflicts between the center and periphery continued, however. Even divisional commanders refused to follow orders, especially when they involved demobilization. A month after Sumohardjo’s appointment as chief of staff, the militias themselves elected Sudirman, a thirty-three year old PETA battalion commander, as commander and chief. The split between the civilian leaders in Yogyakarta and the various military units in the field reflected profound generational, ideological, and doctrinal fissures. It

120 Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, 184-5; Cribb, Gangsters and Revolutionaries, 118-25.
121 Reid, The Indonesian National Revolution, 78-9; Salim Said, Genesis of Power: General Sudirman and the Indonesia Military in Politics, 1945-49 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991); In other parts of the country, the process of appointing commanders was even more “bottom-up.” See Audrey Kahin, “Introduction” in Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution, 16-7.
was PETA platoon and squad leaders that formed the core of the republican’s field officers. In contrast to the ex-KNIL soldiers, the Japanese-trained officers were younger and not Western-education. Japanese training emphasized that a warrior’s élan could overcome any advantage in technology or armature and structured the forces in a decentralized, rather than hierarchical, manner. The availability of extra-budgetary resources from smuggling, seizures, extortion, and solicitation of support from the local population allowed individual commanders unprecedented degrees of autonomy.\(^\text{122}\) In some instances, radicals threatened or kidnapped civilian ministers they perceived as threatening military autonomy or selling-out the nationalist cause.\(^\text{123}\)

To complicate matters further, the Dutch foothold was growing steadily more menacing, amassing 65,000 troops freshly dispatched from Europe and 35,000 members of KNIL.\(^\text{124}\) In the midst of these attempts at military restructuring, the Dutch launched a surprise armor and air assault from Jakarta, quickly overrunning the chaotic republican lines on July 20, 1947. Most of the 400,000 revolutionary forces melted away in favor of passive guerrilla resistance. To emphasize the return of colonial law and order, the Dutch dubbed their invasion a “police action.” By August the Dutch had seized the agricultural heartlands of Sumatra and Java and in some areas were winning popular support by ameliorating the excesses of the occupying republican militias. Said one Dutch official,

\(^{122}\) McVey, “Post Revolutionary Transformation, Part I,” 133-6; Lebra, 170-1.

\(^{123}\) An example of this anarchic situation: in June 1946, radicals of the Barisan Banteg (Buffalo Legion) affiliated with the 3\(^{rd}\) TKI Division kidnapped Sjahrir and several other ministers favoring a conciliatory negotiating posture with the Dutch. See Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, 186-9.

the gangs have become more numerous and more dangerous, and are equipped with all kinds of weapons which formerly one did not find in their possession, such as hand-grenades, landmines and aerial bombs. In mopping-up operations most victims fall not in open battle, but as a result of all kinds of mechanical devices such as wires stretched across the road, booby-traps, and pitfalls. The desa [village] population knows all about this, but has no patriotic sympathy for the bands as is found elsewhere in the case of guerrilla and underground resistance movements; it welcomes our intervention with feelings of great relief and keeps mum.\textsuperscript{125}

As an alternative political framework to the Republic, the Dutch recruited local aristocrats throughout the archipelago to federate into the United States of Indonesia, which the republicans denigrated as merely a collection of Dutch puppets, but which enjoyed some real independence of action.\textsuperscript{126}

The success of the first police action increased the fragmentation of the republican cause. Sukarno and the republican leadership met with Dutch representatives aboard the U.S.S. \textit{Renville}, accepting the military \textit{fait accompli} and agreeing to withdraw the republican forces from beyond the Dutch line of control. For them, a negotiated settlement seemed the only way the republic could survive, even on a minimal scale. For many fighters, however, acceptance of the Renville Accord represented a betrayal of the cause. At least four thousands irregulars refused the order to withdraw and launched

\textsuperscript{125} P.M. van Wulffen Palthe, cited in Van Dijk, 71-72
individual guerrilla efforts against the Dutch. The fissure between the advocates of diplomacy and of warfare remained deep.127

The republic now faced a multi-sided conflict, fighting simultaneously the Dutch and their quasi-sovereign allies in the United States of Indonesia, as well as the dissidents within its own camp. In the area of West Java ceded to Dutch control, Kartosuwiryo, a former affiliate of the Islamic Union, declared the Republicans infidels for making concessions to the Dutch and turned the Islamic militias into an army for his newly-proclaimed Indonesian Islamic State. This movement—called Realm of Islam (Darul Islam, DI)—was as fiercely anti-Republican as it was anti-Dutch. On several occasions, the republican military commanders proposed cease-fires with the Dutch in order to concentrate their efforts against DI.128 Inside the Republican zone, PKI splintered into pro- and anti-Soviet wings, launching major protests, strikes, and land seizures in the hopes of fomenting a social revolution in the midst of the nationalist struggle. The PKI insurrection came to a head with a 25,000 man rebellion at Madiun in September and October 1948. When the republic had to redeploy the Siliwangi Division from the front lines to suppress it, it was only the U.S., eager to see a blow struck against Third World communism, that restrained the Dutch from seizing the opportunity to seize the moment to attack. Ultimately, the Siliwangi Division and the mobile police killed 8,000 PKI-

127 Kahin, Nationalism and Revolution, 228-9.

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affiliated fighters. For many Indonesians, especially in the military, PKI was indelibly marked as betrayers of Indonesia at the most critical moment.\textsuperscript{129}

Perhaps only slightly too late, the Dutch launched a second police action on December 18, 1948, believing it could deal a deathblow to the weakened republic and force it to accede to a more limited union with the Dutch empire. With the unceasing guerrilla skirmishes as a pretext, the Dutch broke through the Republican lines and advanced deep into Java and Sumatra. Within a day, Dutch paratroopers landed in the Republican capital at Yogyakarta and captured Sukarno, Hatta, Agus Salim, and Sjahrir. But while the Dutch were able to maintain strongholds in cities and towns, the militias and the regular army continued to fight, attenuating Dutch control over the country-side. Without civilian leadership, the revolution became more and more localized in individual acts of sabotage and civil disobedience as militia infiltration in nominally Dutch held territory increased. Tried and true counter-insurgency tactics of intimidating the local population only aggravated resentment and drove the population closer the rebels. On two occasions the republican army raided the heart of Yogyakarta. The war became an embarrassment to the Dutch on the world diplomatic stage. The U.S., impressed that the republican government was sufficiently anti-communist, threatened to cut off Marshall Aid if the Dutch continued to undermine the new government. After a year of seemingly fruitless efforts to quell the insurgency and facing increasing international pressure, the

Dutch finally agreed to cede sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia on December 5, 1949.\textsuperscript{130}

The republican leadership drew important lessons about the organization of coercion and military forces from the fighting. For the civilian cabinet, reining in and neutralizing the militias was a top priority.\textsuperscript{131} Nasution, probably the best trained and best regarded republican general after Sudirman’s death from tuberculosis, tended to see the militias as unprofessional, undisciplined, and disorganized. However, he also recognized the difficulty of demobilizing them and envisioned a role they could play in national defense.\textsuperscript{132} While still working to disarm the least reliable units, Nasution developed plans for a military apparatus of two distinct but complementary parts. One part would be a small mobile strike force, composed of the Siliwangi Division and other highly-trained and heavily-armed units that could amass force and take offensive action. Alongside it would be three “territorial divisions.” These divisions would remain lightly armed (having one weapon for every three soldiers) and function as a kind of nationalized militia, mobilizing the population in mass struggle in case of internal subversion or external attack and offering passive defense until the strike force could arrive in reserve.\textsuperscript{133}


\textsuperscript{131} McVey, “Post-Revolutionary Transformation, Part I,” 137


\textsuperscript{133} Reid, \textit{Indonesian National Revolution}, 135.
The type of revolutionary war the Indonesians waged against the Dutch would have been unthinkable just a decade before, when a small but strong and centralized colonial force remained firmly in place, deterring if not repressing any uprising. It is important to note that in eastern Indonesia, where the Allies were able to regain control quickly, the republican revolution was quickly snuffed out. But in Java, as in most of Indonesia, there was no countervailing force to forestall the rupture that granted non-state actors the ability to wield violence. The youth who incited local rebellions and led the nationalist militias represent a historical and cultural bridge, linking the bandit’s parochial role as village-protector (and extorter) to a more catholic and grander nationalism. The ability to finance activities through expropriation and smuggling only increased the independence of these militia forces. In his war memoir, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces T.B. Simatupang quotes Mao’s famous dictum stressing the importance of mass mobilization, saying “[h]ad the Dutch in fact faced only the TNI [regular republican army], without the territorial organization which allowed it to move everywhere like ‘fish in water,’ then they might have achieved their goal of eliminating our army.”

The fact that Indonesian forces would carry on despite a decapitation strike during the second police action is a testament to the resilience and effectiveness of ‘people’s war’ as a strategy for mass mobilization.

Yet the functional limitations were also obvious to Simatupang, who goes on to note ominously that “autonomy and financial independence on the part of troops and

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regions is to be applauded in a people’s war situation. But might it not become a ‘habit’ hard to eliminate once life had returned to normal?” Internally, factional alliances between militias and members of the political elite continually raised the threat of coups and domestic fragmentation. Lack of coordination and communication and internal rivalries further limited the military effectiveness of the militia army. The Indonesians could use their advantage in sheer manpower for low intensity insurgency, but lacked the organizational structure to withstand a concerted Dutch attack, much less launch and offensive themselves. As with so many wars of liberation, victory came mainly by elevating the diplomatic costs of continuing in occupation, as Sukarno and the civilian ministers had argued, not by attaining outright military victory, as the most trenchant rejecters of the Renville Accord alleged. In the historical heyday of decolonization, however, that was enough.

Consolidation

Waging a revolution and building a state are sequentially linked but in many ways contradictory tasks. Fervor and ferment—assets to a revolutionary movement—become obstacles on the road to the post-revolutionary construction and consolidation of state institutions. In Indonesia, the localization of violence in the revolutionary militia-based army proved successful in winning independence, but was hardly conducive to running the country afterward. From 1949 to the mid-1960s Indonesia faced profound instability

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135 Simatupang, 62-3.
and social fragmentation, as the newly established Republic tried to rule over a society that had experienced hyper-mobilization since 1942. Beside the continuation and expansion of the DI rebellions, Indonesia faced a string of military mutinies in the outer islands known collectively as the PRRI/Permesta revolts (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, The Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia), led by officers and warlords who claimed to carry on the revolutionary tradition against the domineering central government. Many regions were essentially outside Jakarta’s control. Civilian political parties representing a wide range of ethnic and regional factions vied for the support of the various fractious wings of the military in order to strengthen their negotiating power with the central government. In 1956 Sukarno made a bid to end the infighting and stamp out military mutinies by suspending parliament and establishing Guided Democracy (1956-66). Yet Sukarno’s charismatic and mercurial leadership only deepened the divisions between the nationalist, religious, and communist strands he claimed to be uniting under the banner of Pancasila. The military’s response to the failed (and perhaps contrived) communist coup on September 30, 1965 culminated in the mass killing of PKI members and sympathizers in 1965 and 1966 and Sukarno’s ouster. Speculation abounds about the roots of the conspiracy that brought President (Maj. Gen.) Suharto and his military cronies to power, establishing a ‘New Order’ of

controlled, authoritarianism that lasted nearly three decades. But as Ruth McVey aptly puts it, given the profound politicization within the military ranks and the fragmentation within the Indonesian polity, the coup itself was less puzzling than the fact that it took fifteen years after independence to occur. The revolution produced new boundaries of identity, reinforcing cleavages between Javanese and the various outer islanders, between Muslims and Christians, between orthodox and heterodox Muslims, and between the military and civilian politicians. It also drastically redistributed power, taking coercive control out of the hands of the state and devolving it among hundreds of smaller local militias, gangs, and paramilitaries. These conflicts and asymmetries of power would have a long-lasting impact on Indonesia’s military development.

Moving from the contingent and unstable moments of political refashioning at revolution to the long duration of institutional reproduction, replication, and maintenance, invites new questions about Indonesia’s political, economic, and military development. What spurred the military seizure of power in 1965 and how was the New Order able to overcome the centrifugal forces that had dominated the Sukarno era? Why and how did the New Order retain violence devolution as an institutional format after having witnessed the proclivity of local actors to use force at their own volition rather than at the orders of their state?

138 In 1965, Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey famously argue that the CIA and Suharto fabricated the September 30 Untung coup against leading generals as pretext for the anti-communist violence and deposition of Sukarno. Rebuttals have been fairly resounding and are backed up by newly accessible declassified documents. A general consensus now holds that the coup was in fact genuine, if badly executed, and that Suharto was an opportunist, but innocent in the conspiracy. See Harold Crouch, “Another Look at the Indonesia ‘Coup’,” Indonesia 15 (1973) and more recently, Helen-Louise Hunter, Sukarno and the Indonesia Coup: The Untold Story (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007).
Four factors contributed to the consolidation of violence devolution as the predominant format for organizing coercion in post-revolutionary Indonesia. First, at the military level, Indonesia’s military leadership drew on the revolutionary example to offer tactical and doctrinal innovations which continued to stress the conjunction and mutual reliance between state and non-state violence-wielders. Second, at the economic level, both the military drew on the revolutionary practice of “off-budget” funding to accumulate enormous economic power which it used to ensure that militias and regional commanders alike had incentive to remain loyal. Third, at the political level, the New Order regime developed political institutions that simultaneously mobilized and isolated the masses, preventing any rival to the state from being able to patronize the work of local militias. Fourth, at the strategic level, Indonesia’s leadership learned the functional limitations of militia mobilization in foreign conflicts and instead free rode on the assurance of regional security.

For analytical purposes, I discuss each of these elements separately, but it is important to note how they were functionally interwoven and temporally concurrent. Rather than a deliberate and planned path of military development, they reflect the accumulation of steps taken in the context of specific competitive dynamics between various actors each intending to protect and expand their own power positions. At various points these actors learned from experience, activated existing but dormant alternative institutional models, and imported institutional models from other sources. Cumulatively, these mechanisms had the effect of simultaneously empower militias while winnowing down the resources that had permitted them autonomy of action. Thus, as
violence devolution remained a key component of the state’s coercive strategies, it came to be stringently controlled through the brokerage of the high command.

**A- The ‘Fence of Legs’: **Tactical Basis of Territorial Warfare

The crucial question the Indonesian leadership faced in the 1950s was how to manage the demobilization of the hundreds of thousands who had taken up arms either in the military or through militias during the revolution. In the early 1950s Prime Minister Wilopo and Gen. Nasution announced plans for massive force re-organization and downsizing, shrinking the army to about 150,000 men, establishing regular hierarchies and standardized training programs, and formalizing state control over the regional commanders. This plan bore the obvious imprint of the slim group of ex-KNIL and, to a lesser extent, PETA officers who had the professional and administrative experience to staff the top-echelons of the new army. Even before this formal reorganization plan was announced, the army launched programs for retraining and re-equipment. A paratrooper regiment was established in 1952. By the mid-1950s a number of Indonesia’s top officers, including future army chief of staff Gen. Ahmed Yani, had received infantry and staff training in the United States and Indonesia’s newly established military academies and technical courses had adopted American curricula.140

Yet these plans engendered enormous resistance. Dismissal forced tens of thousands of ex-soldiers and militiamen into the uncertain civilian labor market. The new military drew heavily from Javanese, leaving out those on the outer islands who had joined the revolutionary struggle. While militiamen were invited to enlist in the new army once they stood down, about two-thirds failed the medical and psychological examinations requisite for re-commissioning. Some senior military commanders argued that a technology-intensive, professionalized army was inappropriate for an underdeveloped country like Indonesia, especially considering that manpower was the one readily-available resource at the country’s disposal. Regional commanders in the outer islands were especially reticent to submit to Jakarta and made allies with civilian politicians to block expansion of the unitary central government.

In 1953, Nasution published what would be the guiding doctrinal document of the Indonesian army, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare*. While hardly path-breaking in its reformulation of Maoist doctrines of “people’s war,” the book provided an interpretation of the revolution that could accommodate both advocates of force modernization and the non-state militias through territorial defense. On one hand, he proposed building up a strategic reserve force of small, highly-mobile, and heavily armed elite troops who could respond to trouble anywhere in the archipelago. On the other hand, he advocated also

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maintaining a multitude of lightly-armed local militia groups who would act as first
responders to attacks or outbreaks of disorder in the provinces. Drawing on the lessons
of the revolution, the key for territorial defense was the integration of the army with the
people. This was evident as early as the 1950s, when government troops battled DI
rebels in Sumatra and organized some 6,000 local PKI fighters in an auxiliary militia.
Mohammed Natsir, a leader of the Islamic party Masyumi and former prime minister who
joined the rebellion in dismay over Sukarno’s growing authoritarian tendencies, observed
that

[a]s long as we were fighting just Javanese troops there was no problem
about maintaining our guerilla bases and controlling areas just outside
towns such as Padang and Bukittinggi. While I was in the jungle we got
food every day from the market in Bukittinggi… But the situation was
dramatically altered when the Javanese troops developed a technique for
using members of the local PKI’s Pemuda Rakjat [Youth Militia] as scouts
to track down guerrillas in the jungle. Being local lads they knew every
creek and path just as our people did and could guide the Javanese
forces.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ For a translation of Nasution’s work, see Abdul Haris Nasution, *Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare*
(New York: Praeger, 1965). For an extensive discussion of Nasution and the impact of his doctrine on
Indonesian military thinking, see C.L.M. Penders and Ulf Sandhaussen, *Abdul Haris Nasution: A Political
Biography* (New York: University of Queensland Press, 1985); Robert Cribb, “Military Strategy in the
Indonesian Revolution: Nasution’s Concept of ‘Total People’s War’ in Theory and Practice,” *War &
Society*, 19:2 (2001); Barry Turner, Nasution: Total People’s Resistance and Organicist Thinking in
Indonesia, doctoral dissertation, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, 2005.
¹⁴⁴ Mohammed Natsir, quoted in Audrey Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian
Polity, 1926-1998* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1999), 221.
Under Guided Democracy, both the PKI and various nationalist and ethnic parties all built ties with locally-raised militias and paramilitaries. Innovation in the mobilization of civilians continued into the late-1950s with the tactical innovation called the “fence of legs” (*pagar betis*). First used during the campaign to suppress the Islamist rebellion in Java, village heads were forced to submit a number of villagers each day to form a cordon extending every few hundred yards between advancing soldiers. As the government troops advanced using the villager as human shields, the insurgents were forced either to surrender or fire on their own. While obviously brutal, this innovative technique proved extremely successful in turning the tide against DI. It was soon to be a recurring feature in all of Indonesia’s counterinsurgency campaigns, including Aceh, West Papua, and East Timor.

By the 1960s and 1970s, the practice of militia mobilization became a quotidian feature in village life under the New Order, even after most regional rebellions had been extinguished. Civil defense corps, night-watchmen, and the local branches of the retired serve association were all involved in hunting mobilizing against thieves, ruffians, sorcerers, and any unsanctioned political display. In twice daily tours, the guidance officer—typically an NCO attached to the sub-distric command—met with representatives of various groups, collecting information and providing instructions about the government’s expectations for the village’s economic and political performance. The

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state’s primary power in the village did not emanate from the guidance officer’s side-arm, but his ability to co-opt these societal agents through offers of political and economic privileges such as ensuring that the village received new roads, electricity, and construction projects.\textsuperscript{147} Whereas in the 1950s political parties sent representatives to recruit villagers to join militias, under the New Order it was the military itself who played the crucial brokerage role between state and non-state coercion.

\textbf{B- Dwifungsi: “Off Budgeting” and the Economics of Military Self-Finance}

As the depiction of village penetration and cooptation under the territorial defense system just illustrates, economic power worked in conjunction with coercive power to ensure that militias remained active but controlled. Just as Simatupang had predicted, in the 1950s few revolutionary fighters willingly gave up their ability to engage in racketeering and smuggling. On the natural-resource rich outer-islands, regional commanders’ revenue from smuggling made them impervious to orders from the high command, who after all could hardly provision them anyway.\textsuperscript{148} But in a process similar to the re-application of territorial warfare techniques, “off-budgeting” or self-financing changed from a liability into a crucial advantage to the state as it sought to manage the devolution of violence.


The 1950s saw the military’s involvement in economic affairs increase exponentially, beginning in 1957 when Sukarno declared martial law and nationalized all Dutch-owned holdings, placing control over prime agricultural and industrial installations in military hands. By 1967 and 1968, an estimated $200 million in goods was smuggled through military-backed firms. Sino-Indonesian filled the familiar capitalist role they had under Dutch colonialism, making reliable business partners and front-men for military enterprises because they were wholly reliant on their military patrons for protection. Spurred by the doctrine of dwifungsi (dual civilian-military functionality) and reinforced by American exhortations to use economic measures to counteract the appeal of radicalism to the peasantry, the Indonesian military built not only roads, schools, and mosques, but also ran employment-generating ventures like resorts, hotels, and factories.

The need to provide added economic benefits to soldier and veterans justified further expansion of the military’s economic role. In the 1960s, an officer’s monthly salary was considered sufficient only for one week of living. The establishment of cooperative societies and veteran’s pensions, plus secondment officers to private boards of directors brought much needed cash and increased the penetration of the formal sector by military interests. The hodgepodge of charities used to funnel funds from civilians to

151 Evans, 36-9; Rieffel and Wirjasuputra, 106.
local militias during the revolution were refashioned and expanded into massive foundations under the control of senior officers.\(^{152}\)

By the 1970s, it was clear that the military’s economic interventions were often at odds with the precepts of expertise and professionalism upon which the expansion of the military’s economic role was premised. Indeed, although one of Suharto’s first orders of business was to mollify Indonesia’s foreign creditors, the New Order did not see real diminishment in the corruption, but its rationalization, especially surrounding the extremely lucrative natural resource sectors.\(^{153}\) Two crown jewels of military-run businesses, Bulog, the national logistics board for rice, and Pertamina, the national oil and gas conglomerate, functioned throughout the 1970s as slush-funds for senior officers. Bulog, which Suharto established immediately after the military coup of 1966, expanded from its original mandate to purchase rice for the military and civil-service food cooperatives to the more elaborate task of building a national buffer stock. The company used middle-men (typically Sino-Indonesian) to buy-up domestic village rice crops while using government credit to speculate on the international market.\(^{154}\) Similarly, Pertamina, created through the nationalization of Royal Dutch/Shell’s Indonesian holdings in 1957 and controlled for years by Major General Ibnu Sutowo, speculated freely on the international markets and invested in a wide range of side businesses, including airlines, filling stations, and rice plantations. To the dismay of the technocrats


\(^{153}\) Crouch, “Patrimonialism and Military Rule,” 579.

\(^{154}\) Crouch, *Army and Politics*, 280, passim.
Suharto installed to manage Indonesia’s economy, Pertamina’s revenues were funneled to military coffers without oversight from the treasury. When Pertamina faced a short-term credit run in 1975, Indonesia’s treasury found itself liable for an estimated $6.2 to $11 billion dollars in Pertamina debt, doubling (and possibly quadrupling) Indonesian servicing obligations. Only after this disaster did Suharto allow technocrats to run the oil industry as a state-owned industry rather than a military fief, although still pointedly under the military directorship and with an opaque system of financial reporting.\footnote{Crouch, \textit{Army and Politics}, 275-9; Bruce Glassburner, “In the Wake of General Ibnu: Crisis in the Indonesian Oil Industry,” \textit{Asian Survey}, 16:12 (1976).}


William Ascher notes that once the military high command had control over the economic commanding heights, soldiers turned to Jakarta instead of the regional commanders for pay and provisions.\footnote{Ascher, 40.} Still, since the generals treated these assets not as
public but prebendal holdings, there was no bureaucratic apparatus with which to systematize and regularize military funding. While on paper, Indonesia’s military spending has remained steady but modest, even after the ascent of the military in 1966, in the 1970s the official budget accounted for only about half of the military’s funding. By the 1990s, this figure fell to an estimated thirty percent.\(^{158}\) As recently as 2005, military analysts estimated that a general could add $10,000 to his meager $600 per month salary through sideline businesses.\(^{159}\)

While the New Order government did take steps to curb the most blatant and deleterious abuses of public goods for private ends, the practice of grand corruption among the top ranks sanctioned and sustained the petty corruption of small-scale and local military businesses. In fact, one of the main roles of the high command was to ensure that the benefits of this extraction were evenly distributed by circulating commanders.\(^{160}\) Active and retired soldiers in Indonesia were routinely organized rackets that involved collaboration with organized crime. In the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, the military-sponsored youth group Pemuda Pancisila (PP), originally an association of revolutionary war veterans, was known to control movie theaters and casinos throughout Java, its gangs patrolling city streets after curfew on the pretext of catching criminals and


counterrevolutionaries. In the early 1970s, the military outlawed street gangs and dissolved PP’s, but by the 1980s the group had reformed with the government’s blessing, integrating criminals and ex-convicts under the guise of a military-sponsored youth and sporting association.\(^{161}\) Other common small-scale military enterprises include shipping and freight (which utilize one the military’s most plentiful assets, trucks), farming, rice milling, and lumber poaching. In regions destabilized by insurgent activities, such as in Aceh and East Timor, the military’s footprint was larger and its business veered further into the illicit realms of prostitution, narcotics, extortion, and contract killing. An enterprising officer could even request posting to an area where he saw an opportunity to build a local network of influence and then retire there in order to reap the fruits of his labor in uniform.\(^{162}\)

In the initial years of the republic, the legacy of military off-budgeting created during the revolution contributed to the fragmentation of authority within the military and the independence of individual unit commands from the military chain of command. When employed on a much grander scale by the high command, the same methods of economic expropriation provided incentives for junior officers and NCOs to become rent-seekers themselves, defying the oversight of civilians and bureaucrats. It is impossible to determine what proportion of a typical subaltern’s income consists of a regular salary, ‘gifts’ from his patrons up the chain of command with access to large scale operations, or more localized forms of expropriation at his own hand. Still, it is clear that off-

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budgeting, once a bane for Indonesia’s stability, could be used to solidify and strengthen patrimonial ties between state elites and local militias in a way that made violence devolution work.

C- GOLKAR: The Politics of Isolating and Mobilizing the Masses

Territorial defense and off-budgeting drew on the distinctive revolutionary examples of successful militia mobilization and applied them in new conditions. In contrast, narrowing the space of political contestation to mobilize and to isolate the masses seems exactly antithetical to the revolutionary legacy. The hegemony of GOLKAR, the military-sponsored umbrella party of all functional groups, and the insistence on ‘mono-loyalty’ under the New Order is the ultimate counterrevolution.\textsuperscript{163} David Bourchier attributes hostility to political pluralism to the influence of fascist doctrines stressing the organic nature of national integration on Indonesian political thinking from the 1940s onward.\textsuperscript{164} Others blame Japanese militarism fostering the military’s contempt for civilians and specifically to Nasution’s own doctrine for treating civilians as mere instruments.\textsuperscript{165} But juxtaposing Indonesia’s political development alongside its military development shows that the more reliant the state became on


\textsuperscript{164} David Bourchier, “Totalitarianism and the National Personality: Recent Controversies about the Philosophical Basis of the Indonesian State,” in Martin Schiller and Barbara Martin Schiller, eds., \textit{Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture} (Athens: Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1997).


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mobilizing local militias, the more imperative it was to find ways to limit the number of national patrons who had clientage relationships with these militias and could mobilize them as well.

Sukarno and the army high command worked hand in hand to end Indonesia’s the brief span of liberal politics. Sukarno’s vision of Guided Democracy replaced the fractious and unstable political contestation in parliament with a forty-member committee of representatives of Indonesian society’s “functional groups,” which included youth (the revolutionary *pemuda*), workers, women, intellectuals, religious leaders, and regions, made substantive decisions. The move came as the remnants of armed forces active during the revolutionary struggle continued to resist the state’s centralization plans and vied for the support of existing civilian movements. Kartusuwiryo’s DI movement, which had emerged in the midst of the revolution, spread to other peripheral regions. In Sulawesi, South Kalimantan, and Sumatra, demobilized soldiers also linked their anti-republican mutiny to the DI banner, even though Islam was a far less important part of their cause. In Aceh, long the bastion of Muslim orthodoxy, Daud Bereueh joined DI in calling for jihad against the central government and the implementation of Islamic law. The greatest danger to internal order came as civilian politicians like Mohammed Natsir urged the dissident officers of PRRI and Permesta rebellions not only to work together, but to make contact with the DI.¹⁶⁶ As depicted in Figure 3.1, this threatened to establish a cross-hatching of militias that could envelop and overpower the state itself.

With the suspension of parliamentary politics and the marginalization of civilian political parties, the state was able to adopt a classic divide and rule strategy toward these disparate rebellions. The PRRI/Permesta rebellions were more limited in their goals and less expansive in their mobilization. Many of mutineers simply surrendered when offered induction as territorial troops, although the confrontation eventually cost 30,000 lives. The interlocking DI rebellions posed a more severe threat, since its ideological basis negated the premise of the republic and had proven attractive to other aggrieved

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movements inside the country. Leaders of the Indonesia’s Islamic movement failed in efforts to negotiate a ceasefire between the government and the DI. Again, the state’s strategy was to isolate each of the DI branches, pursing a combination of suppression and negotiation intended to draw or force civilians away from the insurgency and to fight for the state. In 1959 an offer of autonomy for Aceh persuaded most the DI fighters to give up their struggle. Only Beureuh and a small hardcore rejected the autonomy plan and continued to fight until exhaustion and surrender in 1962. In Java, where the ‘fence of legs’ technique and other tools of civilian mobilization first introduced, Kartosuwiryo was hunted down and executed that same year. In total, suppression of DI throughout the archipelago took an additional 40,000 deaths.¹⁶⁸

Even after these rebellions succumbed, however, Guided Democracy proved to be an impossible balancing act. The greater the military’s successes in suppressing insurgencies and the more economic resources it had at its disposal, the more Sukarno came to rely on PKI as a counterweight. Held anathema by the military for its betrayal at Madiun and regarded as heretical by Islamic groups, Sukarno’s growing proximity to communism brought even worse tensions to the country. The situation reached a crisis point in 1965, when Sukarno supported PKI’s proposal to establish civil militias as the “fifth force” (alongside the army, navy, air force, and police) that could launch a perpetual campaign against counter-revolutionary elements at home and abroad without obstruction from parliament or bureaucracy. Consciously paraphrasing Mao, Sukarno said in an Independence Day speech on August 17, 1965 that

¹⁶⁸ Friend, 60.
[t]he Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia will form an invincible power if they unite with the people like fish in water. Remember—water can exist without fish, but fish cannot exist without water. Integrate with the people because the armed services of the Republic of Indonesia are revolutionary armed services… we cannot maintain the sovereignty of our State without a people who, if necessary, are also armed—the people, workers, and formers, and other groups, who continue to work in the productive sector but who, if necessary, also bear arms.169

As Sukarno was well aware, from the perspective of the high command, the danger was not in arming civilians, which was already included in the territorial warfare doctrine, but in institutionalizing and solidifying PKI’s ability to arm and mobilize its own three million member youth militia.170

On September 30, 1965, troops affiliated with Lt. Col. Untung and low level PKI cadres kidnapped and killed eight top generals in Jakarta and the garrison commander of Yogyakarta. They claimed to be acting to protect Sukarno from a CIA-planned military coup. Gen. Suharto, commander of the Strategic Reserve, used the assassinations an opportunity for re-imposing order through mass mobilization against PKI. Citizens were instructed to stay in their homes, while the military began to mobilize anti-communist elements from among the leading Islamic movements. With the advice of Western propaganda experts, military-controlled media purposefully disseminated rumors about

170 Mortimer, Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno, 366, 380-94; Reinhardt, 104; Crouch, Army and Politics, 86-7.
the treacherousness and viciousness of the plot they dubbed the “Gestapu” coup. On Bali, local organizations opposed to PKI were provided weapons, ammunition, trucks, and access to detention facilities. As tensions between local PKI supporters and Muslim youth escalated, the military encouraged and assisted machete-wielding vigilantes to hunt down communist sympathizers. Often the vigilantes used this opportunity to settle long-standing grudges and disputes over local matters such as property, land, or religious authority. In some cases, villagers were given the choice of killing their neighbors or themselves becoming targets. Over the course of six months, the killings took the lives of an estimated 500,000 to 2 million people, mainly in Java, Sumatra, and Bali. The lack of a firm number, even after the military itself conducted an investigation into the killings, is an indication of the extent to which this violence was conducted on a very local scale, neighbors killing neighbors, village against village. To see the violence simply as an example of Indonesians’ running amok, the instinctive response of a harmony and hierarchy-loving people against the destabilizing social force of communism, however, is to ignore the extent of deliberate and planned actions used both to induce and limit the violence.

Lt. Col. Sarwo Edhie, who had trained and coordinated the militia’s actions, relates,

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The situation in Bali is different from the situation in Central Java. Whereas in Java I was concerned to encourage people to crush Gestapu, on the other hand, the people [in Bali] were already eager to crush Gestapu to the roots. The important thing was not to let that enthusiasm be misused by certain people, leading to anarchy. That is what we had to prevent.175

Even though some of the violence may have been exorbitant and gratuitous, in most locations the military was in a position to remove or impose restraint at will. When Muslim leaders tried to turn the campaign against communism into a wider effort to purify Indonesia of proselytizing Christians, casinos, and sites deemed un-Islamic, regular troops quickly clamped down.176

By the late 1960s, the military had not only developed the tactical ability to supervise mass mobilization for violence, but also had eliminated other national actors who could also coordinate or sponsor the actions of local militias. On the national stage, with PKI gone, Sukarno’s role as balancer was finished. Unsubtly compelled by the military’s action, on March 11, 1966 Sukarno wrote a letter declaring a state of emergency and turning over control of the government to Suharto. Without a rival source of patronage and brokerage in the center, the power to mobilize or demobilize violence on a large scale defaulted to the military high command. From this point, this was little need for such flagrant coercion.

175 Cited in Robison, Dark Side of Paradise, 296.
With the nascent institutions of political pluralism already curtailed under Guided Democracy, Suharto used the existing functional groups model to displace the idea of parliamentary and party representation entirely. Through GOLKAR the army was able to exclude not only the PKI, but all other political factions that had tried to use militias against the state. GOLKAR did not offer an ideological alternative to the Islamic, leftist, or nationalist parties, but a patronage machine that would overawe an individual’s incentive to affiliate with them. The older parties (forced to merge into one of two government-approved parties in 1973) were systematically blocked from campaigning or organizing below the district level, where village guidance officers and their GOLKAR proxies were a constant presence in contact with the “floating masses.” As Bill Liddle notes, the electoral procedures were themselves scrupulously free and fair, but voters are given few and unattractive options.

For thirty years under the New Order’s autocratic control, Indonesia experienced nearly unadulterated economic growth and unprecedented levels of stability. Whenever a return to the disorder of the 1950s seemed imminent, though, the states first response was to activate the militias that lurked in the shadows. When renewed secessionist agitation occurred in Aceh in the late 1980s, the military responded by adding another 6,000 Javanese troops to the 6,000 territorial soldiers already in place. True to doctrinal form, they began to organize village militias, armed with bamboo spears and other primitive weapons, to form the ‘fence of legs’ and provide additional surveillance and coercion at

177 Crouch, *Army and Politics*, 267
the local level. By the early 1990s, these militias enrolled around 60,000 people. Of course, there were serious drawbacks to this approach: the reliance on the local economy for sustenance drew soldiers into the black market for drugs and hired muscle, making them doubly unpopular with the local population. Police and soldiers were known to sell weapons to rebels. By some estimates, twenty to fifty percent of government-funded development projects, including rice distribution and teachers salaries, were funneled to insurgents. A similar picture of localized rebellions combated through a combination of specialized troops dispatched from Java alongside organic forces of dubious fidelity and effectiveness emerged in West Papua, Kalimantan, and East Timor (see below). What was different about the New Order militias, however, was that no alternative source of sponsorship or brokerage that could connect armed men in Aceh with those from another region. As long as disorder was localized and isolated from one another, locally raised troops, no matter how disloyal or ineffective, did not pose a risk to the state.

D- Strategic Free-Riding: Indonesia in the Regional and World Order

While violence devolution was most commonly and successfully applied in response to internal threats, Indonesia’s military development was not defined entirely by the response to domestic challengers. Rather, the external environment played a crucial role in permitting violence devolution to occur. As Benedict Anderson argues, since

Indonesia faced “no credible military threat… from the state’s point of view, then, there is no point in a large conventional arms buildup….” Yet behind this simple logic is a deeper question of the functional capabilities and limitations of Indonesia’s militia-based model. The techniques of militia mobilization that proved valuable for internal pacification were ineffective if not counter-productive in Indonesia’s external confrontations, leaving Indonesia profoundly vulnerable to attack. Learning to avoid military confrontations with foreign powers and to free-ride on the security guarantees offered by superpowers and regional organizations allowed violence devolution to persist. Stated counterfactually, had Indonesia’s regional environment not been so benign, the menu of viable choices of institutional formats would have been considerably different.

The turbulence that Indonesia experienced following the Japanese withdrawal was echoed among in all of Southeast Asia. To the west, Malaya and Singapore, still under British tutelage, faced a communist insurgency that had its roots in the anti-Japanese movement of the war. To the east, the Philippines, working with considerable American assistance, struggled to suppress the Huk rebellion, another anti-Japanese guerrilla

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army. While Communist China loomed as a potential threat, its most immediate impact on Indonesia was through PKI, not by direct military action.

For its first decade, Indonesia teetered on the brink of dismemberment, but none of its regional neighbors could seize the opportunity of Indonesia’s weakness. During the PRRI/Permesta and DI crises of the 1950s, Singapore, Malaya, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea were all sympathetic to the rebels and provided them covert military assistance and overt diplomatic aid. The U.S. and Britain, apprehensive about Sukarno’s leftward tilt, secretly provided bomber and air re-supply support to the rebels. The U.S. even considered landing troops to protect the Sumatran oil installations. Yet when the Indonesian military finally deployed against the rebellions, neither Indonesia’s neighbors nor superpowers offered any military resistance, allowing the state to re-assert its control over these restive provinces relatively easily.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Indonesia’s civilian and military leadership alike were aware of the country’s subordinate position within the bipolar Cold War world and sensitive to any impingement by neo-imperialist forces on Indonesia’s new-founded

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183 Anwar, 124.

sovereignty. All agreed that Indonesia should play a leading role in Southeast Asia and the Third World more generally, but had no consensus about how to gain such status with the global system. \(^{185}\) In a domestic situation beset by political and economic turmoil, the geo-strategic competition between the U.S. and Soviet Union was refracted in the prism of the domestic political arena. Emboldened by his apparent success in defeating a foreign-backed insurrection in 1957 and 1958, Sukarno hoped that a campaign of what he dubbed the “new emerging forces” (NEFO) against the “old establishment forces” (ODEFO) would provide a focal point for national unity. \(^{186}\) In two virtually consecutive international confrontations, first over West Papua and then over the integration of Malaya, Singapore, and the Kalimantan sultanates into Malaysia, Sukarno instructed the military to adopt a new “offensive-revolutionary” strategy for confronting ODEFO. What the military devised, however, was a re-treading of the doctrines learned during the revolution, recruiting local actors as proxies to wage sustained guerrilla warfare. \(^{187}\) Where the Papua campaign succeeded by combining provocative military feints with skillful diplomatic maneuvers, the much larger confrontation with Malaysia proved an utter failure that ultimately contributed to Sukarno’s downfall.

Sukarno placed West Papua on the national agenda in 1957 at the inauguration of Guided Democracy, a time when he desperately needed an external objective to unify his

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\(^{186}\) On Sukarno’s personalistic leadership and the importance of domestic politics on foreign policy, see Frederick P. Bunnell, “Guided Democracy Foreign Policy 1960-1965: President Sukarno Moves from Non-Alignment to Confrontation,” *Indonesia*, 2 (1966); Jon M. Reinhardt, *Foreign Policy and National Integration: The Case of Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series No. 17, 1971).

fragmented country. West Papua had been an integral to the Dutch East Indies, but was not ceded to Indonesia in 1949. Instead, citing the difference of ethnicity and level of development between (Javanese) Indonesia and indigenous Papuans, the Dutch held the territory in trusteeship and negotiated with Papuan nationalists about establishing a West Papuan state. Sukarno, however, insisted that Indonesia’s 1945 declaration of independence had included all Dutch possessions and asserted sovereignty over the territory, demanding the Dutch evacuate immediately. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sukarno made a series of provocative moves, beginning with the expropriation of Dutch assets in 1957 followed by a series of arms purchase from the Soviet block, including submarines, warships, and more than eighty combat aircraft. The worse Indonesia’s economic and political plight become, the more adamant was Sukarno’s posture. By 1961 Indonesia was the largest non-communist recipient of Soviet military aid. The Dutch responded by dispatching their only aircraft carrier to the region. On the anniversary of the second Dutch police action in December 1961, Sukarno established a new military command and called for volunteers to help liberate West Papua from Dutch colonialism.

Despite the acquisition of heavy weaponry, Indonesia’s military tactics during this escalating crisis basically replicated the techniques of mass mobilization used during the revolution. Indonesian volunteers, mainly drawn from PKI, and military commandos infiltrated West Papua in small boats and planes. Appropriating existing rivalries among the Papuan tribes into the anti-Dutch struggle, they recruited small bands of guerrillas to raid Dutch police and administrative stations scattered in the territory. The effect was
less militarily significant than diplomatically embarrassing to the Dutch and their Papuan allies. The Dutch estimated that Indonesians could at best muster 3,000 men against their force of three destroyers, eight patrol boats, a jet squadron, and two battalions of foot soldiers. As in the revolution, though, the U.S. restrained the Dutch to avert a conflict that would push Indonesia further into the Soviet embrace. The Dutch agreed to let the United Nations take over trusteeship in 1962, but Indonesia was allowed to assume administrative control. Seven years later, Jakarta simply bypassed the UN-mandated plebiscite by holding “consultation” with a select group of village elders who unanimously approved integration.188

Almost immediately after bluffing his way into “returning” West Papua to Indonesia, Sukarno set his sights on a bigger foreign policy target: blocking the integration of Malaysia, which Sukarno dubbed “the product of the brain and efforts of neo-colonialism.”189 Just as in the Papuan gambit, Konfrontasi, as the campaign was called, combined the same elements of diplomatic bombast with military impoverishment. Again, Indonesia sought to co-opt local guerrillas to wreak enough havoc to demonstrate popular antipathy toward the integration plan and prevent domestic


189 Cited in Liefer, 79. For the purposes of this analysis, I will treat Indonesia’s involvement in the 1962 Azhari rebellion in Brunei as part of the same anti-Malaysian campaign, since it represented, in microcosm, the features of the wider struggle. For more details on the abortive Brunei operations, see J.A.C. Mackie, Konfrontasi: The Indonesian-Malaysia Dispute, 1964-1966 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 120-2; Matthew Jones, Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961-1965: Britain, the United States, and the Creation of Malaysia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Chapter 4.
and international consent for accession. This time, however, Indonesia faced far stiffer resistance. While Malaysia alone had only a few thousand troops, the British had 10,000 men in Malaysia and 30,000 in Southeast Asia as a whole (not counting commonwealth forces). At its peak strength in 1965, Indonesia was only able to devote 20,000 to 30,000 men to the fight, many of whom were ill-trained volunteers. As tensions intensified, so did Sukarno’s rhetoric, even going so far as to express his intent to develop nuclear weapons in 1965, possibly with the help of the People’s Republic of China. Yet Indonesia’s actual military capacity remained technologically unsophisticated and reliant on the labor-intensive techniques of territorial warfare. This organizational structure continually hamstrung Indonesia’s army, as conflicts between operational and regional commanders were endemic and some units refused or could not be seconded beyond their territorial base. The Malayan nationalist leader Ibrahim Yaacob, himself a Japanese protégé during the war, promised that thousands of Malays would rise up against British imperialism and in support of Indonesia’s efforts, but these masses never materialized. British patrols repelled most efforts to sneak Indonesian infiltrators through the jungle, limiting the violence to a handful of cross-border raids. More ambitious attempts to coordinate paratrooper landings in Johore with local uprising in Singapore in September 1964 were botched. Indonesian generals were concerned that Sukarno was purposefully drawing it into a quagmire in Kalimantan while PKI was gaining strength in Java. Furthermore, the high command knew that Indonesia had no defense if Britain chose to

retaliate. As Indonesian generals became more dissatisfied with Sukarno’s leadership, they even had smugglers (their long-time business associates) relay messages of reassurance to the Malaysian and British leadership in order to avert escalation.192

Perhaps Sukarno’s greatest misstep, however, was not recognizing the change in the geo-strategic landscape between 1961 and 1965. The Soviet Union cooled in its support for Indonesia, which it saw increasingly allied with China, and was unwilling to allow a proxy war to endanger détente. The U.S. was more suspicious of Sukarno and less inclined to placate him on issues involving another sovereign country than one considered to be part of Indonesia’s struggle for decolonization. Whereas Sukarno had masterfully garnered support for Indonesia’s cause among non-aligned states in 1949, in 1961, the United Nations, to Sukarno’s dismay, accepted Malaysia’s succession to and granted it a Security Council seat in 1965.193

In removing Sukarno in 1966, Suharto and the military acted in part to reduce the risk of further international entanglements for which the military was not equipped or capable. In fact, both before and during the 1965-66 mass killings the military sought (and received) assurances that the British would not seize the opportunity to strike while the army was preoccupied with internal operations.194 The New Order in many ways

194 Easter, 64-5.
returned Indonesia to the neutrality of the early 1950s, although with a decidedly anti-communist leaning. The new regime repudiated konfrontasi as a crisis fomented by PKI and Beijing, and immediately set out to repair ties with its neighbors. In 1967, the Indonesia joined Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines in establishing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. As a regional pact, ASEAN had provisions barring interference in the neighbors’ affairs and stipulating that foreign bases were temporary and not to be used to threaten an ASEAN neighbor. This mitigated the greatest external dangers Indonesia faced and led the region’s path toward ‘neutralization’ of relations.

In marked contrast to Sukarno, Suharto’s government for the most part prospered by steering away from trouble beyond the border. In East Timor, however, trouble found them. With the abrupt withdrawal of Portuguese imperial forces in November 1975, Indonesia feared that the left-wing Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN) would turn the country into a communist outpost at Indonesia’s flank. More tactful in his diplomatic approach to the East Timor problem, Suharto made sure of U.S. support before acting to eliminate the communist threat. Yet Indonesia’s military campaign in East Timor bore all the hallmarks of earlier Indonesian efforts to stimulate and simulate people’s war.

197 For details on the U.S. support for Indonesia, see William Burr and Michael L. Evans, eds., East Timore Revisited: Ford, Kissinger, and the Indonesian Invasion, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing
Indonesia began to infiltrate commandos and volunteers from West Timor to set up pro-integration, anti-communist militias even prior to the Portuguese withdrawal. When FRETILIN won out in an internecine struggle with right-wing Timorese factions, Suharto launched an outright invasion in support of these proxies. In the transition from guerrilla to conventional war, organizational decentralization again contributed to poor performance. Almost immediately there was a breakdown in tactical command. Troops fired indiscriminately at FRETILIN fighters and civilians alike. Unable to distinguish friend from foe, Indonesian units took fire from their own side. There was massive looting of homes and property, driving the population away from the cities and to the FRETILIN mountain strongholds. Just as in the botched Johore paratroop landing of September 1964, attempts to drop paratroopers to block FRETILIN’s retreat proved off the mark, allowing the guerrillas to escape to the mountains from which it took the Indonesian army years to uproot them. The immense violence of the Indonesian occupation, especially in its first five years, when an estimated 120,000 Timorese were killed (about a quarter of the total population), came about not because of any particular genocidal intent or racial animosity but as a result of the attempts of the militia-based

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army to overcome the limitations of its organization and achieve the pacification of a population in which it was decidedly unpopular and unwelcome.\textsuperscript{199}

Indonesia’s foreign campaigns replicated the techniques that had proven successful during the revolution. Just as during the revolution and in the campaign in Aceh, however, there were severe problems of control over and coordination with these militias. In fact, some of the very same forces Indonesia had treated as proxies eventually slipped out of Jakarta’s control. The leader of the Free Papuan movement was a Papuan-born enlistee in the Indonesian army, trained as an intelligence officer at the Bandung military academy.\textsuperscript{200} In Kalimantan, the ethnic Chinese guerrillas Jakarta had recruited during Konfrontasi continued to launch attacks against both Indonesian and Malaysian forces even after Indonesia had abandoned the campaign. In response, the Indonesian military began to rely on autochthonous Dayak headhunters, resentful of the recent migrants to the region, to counter the insurgents.\textsuperscript{201}

In East Timor, the locally-raised garrison was deeply enmeshed in side businesses and racketeering. By the late 1980s, Jakarta came to augment its occupation force with several thousand ex-guerrillas, thugs, and petty criminals serving as auxiliary or


“traditional” forces to intimidate anyone bold enough to display opposition publicly. Yet military intelligence remained keenly aware that Timorese soldiers, civil servants, and militias were unreliable and prone to defection. When the U.S. and other Western powers finally ceased its subornation of the Indonesian occupation in 1999, the Indonesian military activated precisely the same militia networks to intimidate the population. While Jakarta tried to maintain that the violence was an unfortunate but spontaneous popular reaction, Human Rights Watch has established that at least 7,800 men divided among eleven different militia groups were responsible for killing thousands of Timorese and destroying seventy percent of the country’s infrastructure in a matter of weeks. These lightly-armed militias proved brutally effective against civilians, but were no match for the fairly small contingent of peacekeepers (initially just 4,000 Australian and New Zealander light infantry), who quickly extinguished the violence.

Although they employed very different policies, both Sukarno and Suharto believed Indonesia could play a leading role in Southeast Asia. As the most populous country in the region, with enormous economic potential, centrally located both geographically and culturally, however, Indonesia has been a disappointing regional


power. When the diplomatic environment was unfriendly, Indonesia’s efforts at coercive diplomacy or outright coercion failed. Yet this was rarely the case in post-World War II Southeast Asia. As Dewi Fortuna Anwar notes, ending Konfrontasi and promulgating ASEAN freed Indonesia of the burden of having to station large numbers of troops to defend the Indonesian border... Security from immediate external threat allowed the government to keep relatively small armed forces and facilitated the Indonesian military’s pursuance of an inward-looking defense doctrine. Indonesia’s militia-model was sustained by the weakness of Indonesia’s its external competitors. Had Indonesia been situated in a less innocuous regional environment, the results could have been disastrous.

Conclusion: Unguided Democracy?

There is no better indication of the durability of violence devolution than an episode Romain Bertrand relates from June 1999, a year after Suharto had stepped down in the face of a severe economic deterioration and the Indonesian military formally withdrew from politics, allowing Indonesians to vote in the first free elections since the 1950s.

205 Anthony L. Smith, Strategic Centrality: Indonesia’s Changing Role in ASEAN (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), 8; Liefer, 169; Anwar, 129; Crouch, Army and Politics, 339.
207 Anwar, 134-5.
208 Jun Honna, “Military Ideology in Response to Democratic Pressure During the Late Suharto Era: Political and Institutional Contexts,” Indonesia, 67 (1999); Siddharth Chandra and Douglas Kammen, 102
announced the formation of a new 40,000-man auxiliary called *kamra* to augment police efforts in “protecting” highways and “keeping a check on wandering salesmen, prostitutes, and street musicians.” Named after a militia deployed during the campaign against DI in the 1950s, this new force drew heavily from the criminal gangs that had roamed city streets since the 1980s. The kamra promptly began beating up student protesters with their government-issued rattan canes. Almost identical to the pattern of mobilization seen contemporaneously in East Timor, alliances between local military units and militias and gangs, whether the Islamic Laskar Jihad fighting Christian militias in Sulawesi or the Dayak tribesmen attacking Sino-Indonesians and Madurese migrants in Kalimantan, have become a common feature of post-Suharto Indonesia.

Breaking the GOLKAR monopoly returned Indonesia to face the dilemmas of political order witnessed in its first two decades, when multiple principals vied for access to and the support of militias. Now, as forty years ago, national-level political parties compete with the military for the allegiance and service of these local warlords. Administrative decentralization further confounds this problem, as it empowers yet more local players and increases the complexity of patronage and brokerage ties between state and society. All of this has contributed to Indonesia’s plummet from its status as a


Bertrand, 136-9.


Western-backed developmental success story to the ranks of corrupt, weak, and failing states.

Collusion between state and bandit did not occur spontaneously, however. Rather, it represents activation under new circumstance of the networks of brokerage and patronage entrenched in the underbelly of the New Order. The dynamics of these relationships are familiar: At the national level, civilian politicians like Abdurahman Wahid, the country’s first democratically elected president, at once complained of imminent conspiracies among regional commanders and then pleaded for the military’s help against his biggest rival, Megawati Sukarnoputri. Secessionism, successful in East Timor, remains a concern for Aceh, Papua, and even tiny Riau and Bali. At the local level, inter-communal and ethnic violence has skyrocketed, as have incidences of highly ritualized vigilantism enacted by mobs against suspected sorcerers. The discipline and professionalism of the police and military remains abysmal, especially as these forces are known to be involved in the black market and have incentive to prolong conflicts that give them the opportunity for more economic gain. The kamra, for instance, un-ironically confirmed Tilly’s provocative thesis on indistinguishable boundary between state and criminal violence when they extorted local government and...
businesses to give them employment as policemen or private security guards or else be “subjected to fire and sword.”

Many point out the long lineage of this collusion in the cultural figure of the jago and his pemuda successor, strongmen who placed their expertise in coercion in the service of the state on a temporary and ad hoc basis while remaining distinctly beyond the boundary of the law. Later incarnations of urban criminals doubling as security agents carry on this tradition. It seems almost natural then for the modern Indonesia to revert to its heritage of having local satraps loosely and often ambiguously connected to a central power. If local violence-wielders are ubiquitous, why are they more readily controlled at certain moments and by certain actors than others? As Geoffrey Robinson ask, what material factors constrain and trigger the enactment of this cultural script at particular historical points?

Certainly, the Dutch knew and made use of non-state actors to inflict violence. This subversion of legal order by colonial authorities was a result of the contradictions inherent in the system of indirect rule, where an indigenous façade needed to be maintained for the immensely penetrative colonial bureaucratic apparatus. While it is impossible to determine the extent or frequency in which the Dutch resorted to its use, it is clear that they also recognized the peril in authorizing extra-legal violence and were

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217 Robinson, “People’s War.”
careful to maintain strong and centralized military and police forces as bulwarks against anarchy. The dramatic interruption of colonial control after 1945 was the window of opportunity in which the mobilization of extensive coercive networks could occur on a massive scale. More than unleashing mere social havoc, the Japanese occupation enlarged the scope of Indonesian nationalism from the elite to the masses, linking enactments of local violence to a nation-wide struggle. The new Indonesian state quickly found itself struggling to coordinate and control agents who professed loyalty but had gained considerable autonomy by embedding themselves in the local economy of violence and extraction. The very attributes that made militias useful—their flexibility, low cost, and connection to the local population—also made them exceedingly difficult to disarm, demobilize, or reorganize into a cohesive professional army. The country’s civilian and military leaders were profoundly aware of the resultant vulnerability, both to internal subversion arising from coalitions of regional forces acting against the state and to predation by a stronger outside power.

The process that led to the stabilization and consolidation in the use of state-sponsored militias could not have occurred in a more hostile regional environment. Even with its built-up strategic reserve force of paratroopers and other commandos, Indonesia remained profoundly weak militarily, incapable of defending its territory, much less projecting power abroad. The acquisitions of West Papua in 1961 and East Timor in 1975 were more dependent on diplomatic maneuvering than military success, while the confrontation with Malaysia (and later the attempts to subvert East Timor’s secession in 1999) laid bare the Indonesian army’s inability to conduct sophisticated, coordinated
operations given its reliance on diffused, guerrilla-based tactics. Though certain senior military and civilian figures wished to emulate the European model of centralized, intensive coercive institutions, no element in Indonesia’s internal or external environment necessitated the difficult and painful efforts of trying to disband the militias and organize a better-paid, better-trained, better-supplied professional army.

Rather, the revolutionary legacy provided the raw materials for making violence devolution work. The enlargement of off-budgeting used to finance individual units during the revolution gave the central command the resources to reward compliance by its regional forces, even as these forces remained embedded in the local political economy as well. The build-up of the strategic reserve force, already underway during the revolution, provided enough coercive might to subdue smaller-scale violence-wielders if and when they became too restive. The military’s own doctrinal innovations sanctioned and deepened what had already become an expansive agenda for socio-economic intervention. Equally important to the stabilization of the militia system, though, was the progressive narrowing of the national political space from 1957 until the GOLKAR elections in 1971 and the elimination of potential brokers between local and national-level politics.

While driven by powerful and willful actors, these innovations were at best incidental results of competition, accommodation, and improvisation. In the 1940s, Japan never sought to be midwife to an independent Indonesia, nor and the U.S. a prop to an Indonesian leadership that would tilt precariously toward communism for nearly two decades. In the 1950s, Nasution and the military high command saw unit self-financing
as a threat to discipline and at best a palliative solution to military funding, yet utilized its fully to achieve the hegemony of the central command. Furthermore, Nasution’s own engagement in politics in the 1950s and 1960s provided an opening to his rival and subordinate within the ranks to usurp him and assume power for themselves. Sukarno initiated the emasculation of political parties and empowerment of the military in order to break the peripheral alliances between politicians and dissident officers, but this ultimately hastened his own doom by upsetting the delicate balance between the military and the PKI. Finally, as perhaps the ultimate beneficiary of Indonesia’s development, Suharto is a quintessential exemplar of what Mancur Olson dubs a ‘stationary bandit.’

For such a figure, political stability and economic expansion are incidental byproducts of the aim for aggrandizement. Under Suharto, the Indonesian state survived intact by domesticating, rather than disarming, militias, a system which not only survived but prospered because of the unique set of opportunities and constrains offered by the state’s domestic and international competitors.

Chapter 4

Oversized Wars and Overgrown States: Building the Garrison State in Iraq

Violence has always been intrinsic to state formation, particularly in the developing world, where state structures tend to be frail institutions transplanted and imposed by colonial and imperial power. Yet even by these standards, violence has been particularly prominent in Iraq. Indeed, the history of Iraq from its establishment under British mandatory rule in 1921 until at least the late 1980s has been an immensely aggressive effort by the state to centralize control over the use of force. This has allowed the Iraqi state both to marginalize and eliminate its domestic competitors and to cast its influence over its neighboring. As Isam al-Khafaji argues, “the projection of organized violence outside of Iraq’s borders has been augmented in unique ways by the extraordinary routinization of internal violence as an everyday form of governance.”

Kanan Makiya goes so far as to aver that at its apex from mid-1970s until mid-1980s, Saddam Husayn’s Ba’th Party transformed Iraq into a totalitarian regime whose very ideological premise was violence. Such emphatic assertions of control over violence represent a vast maturation from Iraq’s feeble birth, when Britain’s High Commissioner Percy Cox supposedly told Iraq’s first defense minister, Jafar al-‘Askari, “there is nothing

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to defend it and nothing to be defended." While the label of totalitarianism certainly warrants scrutiny and critique, the enormous growth in coercive capacity is recognizable across any number of indicators, one of which is the absolute size and the percentage of Iraq’s population enlisted in the armed forces. As remarkable as the rise of the state’s coercive power has been its profound degradation in the last two decades. Since the defeat in the 1991 U.S.-Iraqi war and accelerating with the 2003 American occupation, this fifty year trend has seen a dramatic reversal, as shown in Table 4.1. The beleaguered Iraqi state now resorts to co-opting tribal and sectarian militias, some barely distinguishable from criminal gangs, in an attempt to devolve violence to non-state agents.


Table 4.1: Changes in the Size of the Iraqi Military\(^{223}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number Enlisted in the Army</th>
<th>Increase from 1932 Base</th>
<th>% of the Population in the Army</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>46,000</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>82,000</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>102,000</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>188,000</td>
<td>1567</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>242,000</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>342,000</td>
<td>2850</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>607,000</td>
<td>5058</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>8333</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>382,500</td>
<td>3188</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>59,600 (108,000)</td>
<td>497 (900)</td>
<td>0.22 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter examines the rise and fall of the Iraqi military behemoth. It proceeds in three sections: The first section discusses the attempts by distant and declining Ottoman and British empires to imprint Mesopotamia with a modern state apparatus. While these reform efforts fomented wide-scale social change and modernization, they fell short of expected transformation of political, economic, and social life. Rather, they had the perverse effect of reinforcing the power of local brokers like tribal elites to

mobilizing violence outside the state’s formal institutional boundaries. The second section of the chapter describes how Iraq’s state makers built upon the meager military institutions fabricated by the British in a manner unanticipated by both. As it was denied control over coercion during its mandatory tutelage but inherited a technology and organization of enormous underlying power, newly-independent Iraq quickly deployed coercion both to suppress its internal foes and to compete with regional rivals. Beginning with the tribal revolts of the mid-1930s through its participation in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, coercion took on increasingly salience in Iraq’s domestic and international affairs. The third section of the chapter details efforts following the 1958 revolution to veer from the path of military centralization by empowering local violence wielders through party and tribal militias that stood outside the armed forces. While successive regimes have attempted to incorporate paramilitaries as a substitute or compliment for conventional military force, each eventually failed because the incessant pressure of external threat required the Iraqi state to maximize control over the means of violence. Thus, a concatenation of internal drivers and external impingements compelled Iraq to consolidate and preserve the bureaucratic infrastructure of violence that had emerged in the course of colonial subjugation.

*Imperialist Inception, 1600-1931*
For four centuries, Iraq was an Ottoman backwater. Instead of a rotation of military governors typical of Anatolia and the Balkans, the Sublime Porte was content to treat the local notables of Mesopotamia as quasi-feudal local lords and tax farmers. In the cities, the writ of the state was small and indirect; in the countryside, where nomadic tribes roamed and periodically raided agricultural settlements, it was virtually non-existent. The nineteenth century Ottoman reform efforts, beginning with the introduction of a centralized professional military and gendarmerie then leading to the wider social and land reforms of the Tanzimat, came late as ever to Iraq.

The provision of public security against nomadic raiders and riverine pirates, the opening up of foreign trade, and the introduction of new agricultural and industrial techniques spurred significant economic and social development in Iraq. Despite these general successes, though, the results in many ways went exactly contrary to the goals of their designers. The cornerstone of the reform agenda was the conversion of traditional collectively-held tribal lands (dira) into small private plots, thereby providing incentive for tribesmen to abandon nomadism in favor of small-scale peasant proprietorship. Few tribesmen, though, would risk submitting their names to government registers that could

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someday be a conscription or tax roster. Registrars could be bribed to block rightful claimants for obtaining deeds to their small parcels. Either by choice, trickery, or duress, tribesmen forfeited their titles to tribal elders or urban notables in return for tenancy. Tribal sheikhs, in turn, moved from the position of paramounts in a relatively egalitarian nomadic community to semi-feudal and often absentee landlords dominating a collection of debt peons. In an increasingly stratified social setting, new foremen emerged to act in the sheikh’s place and could themselves command the local population’s labor and surplus, taking a significant share of proceeds secreted from the farmer to the landowner and organizing village militias for self defense.²²⁵

Disputes over property became the prime means by which the state could manipulate and weaken tribal cohesion, sowing competition among the branches of the various tribal confederacies.²²⁶ But while encouraging factionalism within a tribe’s leading families weakened the capacity of any one of them to challenge the state, it also implicitly circumscribed the state’s power to undermine the tribal system in its entirety. The state became complicit in diffusing coercive control in a new social hierarchy, dislodging but not displacing tribal power. Tribal elites—both those of the old ruling families and the new foremen—gained even more power both as mediators between the state and society and activators of broad retinues of private military retainers. Ultimately,

Ottoman attempts to build centralized coercive and administrative structures led not to the elimination of traditional tribal systems of coercion and extraction, but instead to their encapsulation in a new collusion between the state and local notables.\footnote{Batatu, 150; Stephen Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900 to 1950: A Political, Economic, and Social History} (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 52-4; Tripp, 19-24.}

The limits of the state’s penetration were manifest in the Ottoman Empire’s disintegration. Even as major international threats loomed, the Ottomans could extract little in the way of services and support from the population of Iraq. Shi’i opposition to the Ottomans remained strong, particularly over the issue of conscription. Sheikhs typically obtained exemption for their kinsmen and, in lieu, provided \textit{ad hoc} service as tribal levies like the Kurdish Hamidiya corps.\footnote{Erik Jan Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844-1914,” \textit{International Review of Social History}, 43 (1998); Çentinsaya, 40-3; Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900 to 1950}, 29-1, 40-3.} Even on the eve of World War I, Shi’i clerics supported the Sultan’s declaration of \textit{jihad} and 18,000 Shi’is joined the Ottoman army, but many tribal leaders held out. When the British landed at Basra in 1914, some tribal militias belatedly flocked to the Ottoman banner, but they soon deserted and in some case defected. In Najaf and Karbala and in Kurdistan sheikhs seized the opportunities of weakened central authority to vie for autonomy. Most of the prominent local powerbrokers seemed intent to play off the Ottoman and British for as long as possible.\footnote{Nakash, 60-1, 94-6; Tripp, 33-4; Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900-1950}, 84-5, 104-5; Reeva Simon, \textit{Iraq Between Two World Wars: The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 46.}

The British role in Iraq was even more complicated and riddled with contradictions than the Ottomans. Again, the constraint of finite military and financial
resources was an important factor. Britain intended to gain as much from Iraq with as little exertion as possible. At the same time though, the novelty of the mandate structure invited a chauvinistic but liberal desire to alleviate the effects of the Ottoman’s “Oriental despotism.” There was neither a specific delineation of Britain’s responsibilities, nor a general sense within the Iraqi population inviting such interference. Yet the strokes of the pen at Versailles and subsequent edicts by the League of Nations tasked Britain with a mandate to build a nation-state out of the Ottoman vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra where there had been limited pre-existing state infrastructure and at best a vague sense of regional identity.

At first it appeared the British would draw heavily on lessons of the Raj in managing Iraq. Arnold Wilson, an experienced India hand who served as assistant and deputy political officer, then as acting civil commissioner, favored incorporating Iraq as a protectorate or dominion. Basra, with its strategic position on the Persian Gulf, was considered a prime candidate for annexation. Any nationalist sentiments expressed by Iraq’s urban elites were dismissed as unrepresentative of majority of poor rural peasants. Yet continued unrest within Iraq, culminating in the massive 1920 Intifadah, scuttled all hopes that India rules could be applied. The rebellion took the lives of 500 British soldiers (many of them Indian) and at least 6,000 Iraqi lives. Whether the

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231 For a discussion of the novelty of the mandate concept, see Dodge, Chapter 2; D.K. Fieldhouse, Western Imperialism in the Middle East, 1914-1958 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70-2.

uprising was (as the British believed at the time) a Hashemite plot to pressure the British for concessions to Arab demands, a string of opportunistic tribal revolts against the central government, an expression of Shi’a revulsion against continued Sunni domination, or a primitive articulation of genuine Iraqi nationalism against colonial domination, remains open for historical interpretation.\(^{233}\) Stymied by the problem of imperial overextension and war-weariness on the part of the British public, the empire turned to a new technology to accomplish an old imperial task: control from the air.

In 1920, the Royal Air Force (RAF) began a systematic bombing campaign against the recalcitrant mid-Euphrates tribes. The utility of airpower to suppress tribal revolts soon become a tenant of faith among British officials. Reasoned Air Marshal Hugh Montague Trenchard,

> if the Arabs have nothing to fight against on the ground, and no loot or rifles to be obtained, and nobody to kill, but have to deal with aeroplanes which are out of their reach they are certain to come in and there will be no risk of disasters or heavy casualties such as are always suffered by small infantry patrols in uncivilized countries.\(^{234}\)

The new technology allowed a rapid drawdown of ground forces while maintain British control over the territory. Whereas in 1921-22 the occupation of Iraq had cost 23 million pounds, by the following year the figure was reduced to 7.81 million and by 1926-27, just


\(^{234}\) Cited in Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, 186.
3.9 million pounds. “Air policing” as it came to be known, was a perfect solution for an occupation which sought to retain the mantle of a civilizing mission and avoiding both the cost and stigma of imperial suppression. Advocates such as Winston Churchill claimed that the airplanes were the best and most humane way to deliver the “minimum necessary force” to deter dangerous rebellions by surgically administering warning strikes before attacking people directly. The demonstration effects were enormous; merely the sight and sound of an approaching plane was enough to terrify a rebellious band into submission. Beyond deterrence, though, the airplane represented a force multiplier of untold effect, enabling the occupying power to deploy violence across virtually of all Iraq’s terrain. Within only a few hours, it became imminently feasible to mete out collective punishment not only against unruly raiders, who might scatter for shelter in caves or marshes, but also against their homes, villages, families, livestock and crops. Moreover, concomitant with this expansion in the radius of coercion was a change in the calculus of its deployment. What the British press dubbed “bombing for taxes”—punishing groups who collectively refused to pay taxes or other government-imposed fees—became progressively easier for the state since it entailed both less risk and less cost.

This repression was paired with a reversion to the well-proven technique of cooptation, subsidizing local leaders empowered by customary and tribal law as

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236 Omissi, Chapter 8; Dodge, Chapter 7; Priya Satia, “Developing Iraq: Britain, India, and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War,” *Past and Present* 197:1 (2007).
instruments of internal order. Where tribal power had been eroded by Ottoman land reforms, it was now reinvigorated. In addition to their despotic power over their tenants, sheikhs were now granted immunity from the civil code in managing their land and its inhabitants. The British were able to pry away enough tribal leaders and urban notables from the cause of revolt with offers of further landholdings that the Intifadah eventually crumbled in on itself. By 1921, the Shi’is of the south were the last holdouts and suffered the brunt of British pacification efforts.\textsuperscript{237}

The Intifadah confirmed for the British not only the immaturity of the Iraqi people but also as that the requisite supervision could not come solely or directly from Whitehall. Bound by the terms of the mandate and spurred the specter of continued Arab nationalist agitation, at least the patina of self-rule had to be introduced. The British sought out the support of the Hashemite scion Faisal, whom the French had just unceremoniously expelled from Syria. Faisal was the kind of politically astute but not fanatical leader with whom the British could do business. Though his Sunni clan had no blood connection to Iraq, his status as a descendant of the Prophet made him at least palatable to the Shi’is. His recent arrival on the Iraqi scene allowed him to escape much of the historical familial animosities that drove Iraq’s politics of notables. The British convened a transitional governing council comprised of former Ottoman parliamentarians.

\textsuperscript{237} Vinogradov, 132-3; Sluglett, \textit{Britain in Iraq}, 169-73; Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900-1950}, 106-7.
and local deputies, which duly offered Faisal the crown on July 11, 1921, then a staged plebiscite to accept the presumptive nominee to the throne.\footnote{Tripp, 47; Reeva Spector Simon, “The View from Baghdad,” in Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, eds., \textit{The Creation of Modern Iraq} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).}

Iraq thus began with a precarious regime couched in a precarious state. King Faisal and his entourage of ex-Ottoman Sharifian officers could always be defamed as interlopers and stooges. The state itself had no natural claim to historical legitimacy. In the north, Mustafa Barzani was in near constant revolt seeking Kurdish independence. Iraq’s Shi’a majority were more amenable to the idea of incorporation into the Iraqi state, but after the disaster of 1920-1, felt betrayed and hostile to the potential for continued Sunni dominance. Iraq’s borders were long, porous, and unnatural. British reported near constant smuggling of small arms, and at various times suspected the French mandatory powers in Syria and Fascist Italy of complicity.\footnote{Report by His Majesty’s High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the ‘Iraq for the Period From 1 October 1920 to 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1922 [FO 371/8998] in \textit{Iraqi Administration Reports 1914-1932}, Vol. 7 (London: Archives Edition, 1992); Report by His Majesty’s High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of ‘Iraq for the Period from 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1922 to 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1923 [FO 371/10095] in \textit{Iraq Administrative Reports}, Vol. 7.}

To the north, the rigorously bellicose Turkish Republic claimed oil-rich Mosul. To the east, Iraq inherited the long-standing dispute between the Ottoman and Iranian empires over the Shatt al-Arab river. To the south, the Ikhwan, Wahhabi renegades, were a constant menace. To the west, French mandated Syria continued to be a target of both Hashemite ambition to reunify the Arab region and also a potential rival.\footnote{Raja Husayn Husni Khattab, \textit{Tasis al-jaysh al-’Iraqi wa-tatawwur dawrihi al-siyasi min 1921-1941} [The Founding of the Iraqi Army and Its Political Role, 1921-1941] (College of Arts, University of Baghdad, 1979), 41; Ernest Main, \textit{Iraq: From Mandate to Independence} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), 120-32.}
In such an environment of internal and external threats, the construction of coercive institutions was both a critical test of the mandate’s efficacy and a focal point of a tripartite competition between imperial ruler, the nominal state, and Iraq’s embedded social elite. Contrary to British estimation of his pliability, King Faisal and his ex-Ottoman courtiers proved effective interlocutors and mediators between the British overlord, hovering—in some cases literally—above Iraq, and its deeply divided society. They readily used whatever concessions Britain made toward Iraqi sovereignty to try to build Iraq into a viable state. With so many court officials hailing from the Ottoman military ranks, German-inspired Volk-ish ideologies, stressing martial virtues and organic unity, were already deeply ingrained. Military conscription, they reasoned, would be the furnace in which the Iraqi nation was forged.  

In the first months of the mandate, ‘Askari raised the issue of conscription as a means of building Iraqis defense and readying it for sovereignty. He pointed directly to the Ottoman example as evidence that conscription was already a familiar practice in Iraq and that “the only way to turn the people into satisfactory soldiers was by the control exercised by conscription.” With Ottoman veterans forming the officer corps, the enlistment bureaus were opened in sixteen major cities by 1921.

But both Kurdish and Shi’i leaders were suspicious of any move that would bring them further under Sunni domination. The Kurds, of course, sought an entirely separate political status in the country. For the Shi’a, the plans for conscription seemed overly

241 Simon, Iraq Between the Two World Wars, 8;  
243 Khattab, 95-8.
reminiscent of the Ottoman era, when conscripted Shi’I provided the cannon-fodder. In fact, some Shi’i leaders responded to the 1922 Ikhwan raids by demanding the government reinstate the Ottoman practice of arming tribes for self defense rather than rebuild the army.\textsuperscript{244}

As the mandatory power, Britain had ultimate responsibility for maintaining Iraq’s security and its colonial officers were well aware of the limits of their own power. As early as July 1920 they had come to recognize that the combination of mandatory obligations for Palestine and Iraq and continued colonial rule in Africa and Asia was a debilitating burden. Stated the Chief of the Imperial General Staff,

\begin{quote}
[i]n no single theatre are we strong enough, not in Ireland, not in England, not on the Rhine, not in Constantinople, nor Batoum, nor Egypt, nor Palestine, nor Mesopotamia, nor Persia, nor India.\textsuperscript{245}
\end{quote}

The halving of defense budgets for each year from 1919 to 1923 only added to the sense of imperial vulnerability. Before the World War I, Indian troops had secured, and Indian taxes had paid for, most of the imperial garrisons, but political instability on the sub-continent now made this impossible. The Intifadah demonstrated just how brittle the empire had become.\textsuperscript{246}

This weakness presented a predicament unique in the annals of imperialism. On one hand Britain expected Iraq to pay for its occupation and, through the first Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1922, required Iraq to commit nearly quarter of its budget to defense.

\textsuperscript{244} Nakash 78-9, 110-4; Tarbush, 86.
\textsuperscript{245} Cited in Dodge, 134.
\textsuperscript{246} Dodge, 134; John Darwin, \textit{Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War, 1918-1922} (New York: Macmillan, 1981), 33.
A further military treaty specified that the Iraqi state would assume control over its defenses by 1928. Conscription was the only economically feasible way the Iraqi government could afford to raise a capable army. On the other hand, until military self-sufficiency was obtained, it could not enforce conscription on rebellious and powerful Shi’a and Kurdish tribes. Given the limits of Britain’s military footprint, there was profound disturbed about the possibility of a second uprising. British High Commissioner Sir Henry Dobbs used the threat of withholding military assistance to the Iraqi government as the sheet anchor of British domination. Instead, the British offered the Iraq’s the services of the RAF and a small contingent of British-commanded levies as the mainstay of its defenses.

In 1927, the Iraqi government passed a new National Defense Act and introduced a conscription bill which threatened to upset the precarious balance between state, society, and imperial overlord. The bill specifically stated that “since our neighbors, Turkey and Persia, possess two powerful and well-equipped armies… it is essential for Iraq to raise an army capable—albeit for a short time—of facing either of those two armies.” The British warned that they would not be involved in suppressing provincial disturbances that the Iraqi government itself had precipitated. King Faisal responded that the measure could win parliamentary and public support if it was linked to a British

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247 Report by His Majesty’s High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of the ‘Iraq for the Period From 1 October 1920 to 31st March 1922 [FO 371/8998] in Iraqi Administrative Reports, Vol. 7; Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, 86-90, 182-3; Tripp, 61.
250 Cited in Tarbush 88-90.
announcement favoring Iraq’s admission to the League of Nations in 1928. Alternatively, Britain could continue paying for Iraqi security indefinitely.\textsuperscript{251} Nationalists in Parliament were more overt in attacking the British position.\textsuperscript{252} The Shi’i political leadership made their support conditional on receiving greater representation in the cabinet and the officer corps and appealed directly to the British to impose their demands on the government. The threat of a general tribal revolt loomed. In this atmosphere of political tension, the government was forced to resign in January 1928, scuttling the bill.\textsuperscript{253}

The Iraqi army that did emerge from the mandate, then, was in many ways the bastardization of both Iraqi and British ambitions.\textsuperscript{254} By March 1922, the Iraqi army counted 1,200 in the Mosul garrison, 1,600 in Baghdad, and 829 in Hillah. This would grow to 7,500 by 1925 and around 12,000 by 1930. Still, the fiscal constraints of reliance on volunteers kept the force consistently below the 15,000 to 20,000 the Iraqis believed was necessary for dealing with its myriad internal and external enemies. More importantly, though, the quality of the enlisted troops was generally low, desertion common, and retention of enlistees a constant concern.\textsuperscript{255} Through a network of just a few dozen advisors, Britain oversaw nearly every facet of the Iraqi army’s growth, from

\textsuperscript{251} Dodge 142-3; Sluglett 96-8.  
\textsuperscript{252} See the comment by Yasin al-Hashimi, Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the Year 1929 in \textit{Iraqi Administrative Reports}, Vol. 7.  
\textsuperscript{253} Nakash, 115-121; Tripp, 61-3.  
\textsuperscript{255} Khattab 36-40, 95-8; Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900 to 1950}, 166-7; Tarbush 78-83; Simon, \textit{Iraq Between the Two World Wars}, 107-8; Marr 37.
its recruitment to its armaments to logistical systems. Of the six hundred ex-Ottoman officers who initially sought commissions in the new Iraqi army, two hundred were accepted, provided they agreed to undergo further training at British-run training programs. These programs sought to break pernicious Ottoman habits by re-educating Iraqi officers on subjects from infantry and cavalry tactics to military law. Special courses were established for armor, small arms, and veterinary medicine. Hundreds of volumes of military manuals were translated from English into Arabic. By the mid-1920s the British had established a military academy modeled on Sandhurst, a staff college, and host of specialized programs. Iraqi officers were seconded to India and English for further training and even participated in the age-old British military traditions of soccer and hockey.

The most significant British impact was in their founding of the Royal Iraqi Air Force (RIAF) in 1926. Five Iraqis a year were sent to the RAF training facility at Camberly for flight certification. By the conclusion of the mandate, Iraq had purchased fourteen antiquated but still operable De Haviland DH.60 “Moth” biplanes. Training of Iraqi aircraft mechanics to maintain these crafts was only begun in 1932, however. Yet

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the RIAF was considered an integral facet of Iraqi defenses. In 1929, Iraq’s first combat exercise featured Iraqi troops practicing ground maneuvers with the RAF providing air support.

In British eyes, however, the Iraqis—no matter the extent of their training—constantly underperformed. In combat against Kurdish guerrillas, tribal raiders, and Turkish incursions, Iraqi forces time and again were bailed out by the arrival of British reinforcements. Instead of training the Iraqi infantry, the British set up a separate corps of Levies, drawing heavily from the Assyrian Christian community that had come to northern Iraq after fleeing Turkish atrocities. Once resettled, the Assyrian community was eager and grateful to ally with co-religionists, especially since the British offered them military training they believed necessary for their own protection from Iraq’s Muslim majority. Between 1921 and 1932, the RAF and backed by the levy infantry were called upon 130 times to assist Iraqi forces. Still, British reports to the League of Nations lauded the steady improvement of the Iraqi army, emphasizing its ability to operate competently with only minimal oversight. Confidential assessments were more candid and pessimistic. The Secretary of State for Air wrote in 1925, “without a British commander and an infusion of British officers in its units, there is not in my view, the least chance of the [Iraqi] Arab Army becoming efficient or of the Imperial forces ever

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261 Marashi and Salama, 35.
being able safely and honorably to evacuate the country.”\textsuperscript{262} The British interpreted the failures of the Iraqi army not as an indictment of their own training regiments, but as an indication of the weakness of Iraqis as soldiers. In particular, they particularly blamed the predominance of effete Sunni urbanites in the Iraqi officer corps over the sons of tribal warriors, whom Frederick Peake and John Glubb had used to form the Jordanian Arab Legion. While the British attempted to set up special tracks in officer training school for these “natural” fighters, they were never successful.\textsuperscript{263} Yet Britain kept seeking ways to reduce its military commitments to Iraq. From a peak in March 1921 of thirty three battalions of the British and Indian armies, six cavalry regiments, sixteen batteries, four armored cars and four RAF squadrons, by October 1930 there were only four RAF squadrons and a single armored car backed by just two of levy infantry battalions.\textsuperscript{264} As result, regardless of its weaknesses, the Iraqi army was becoming an ever larger part of the strategies for the defense of Iraq.

Understandably, Iraqi officers had a radically take on the dilemmas of Iraqis military development. Those Iraqis who did enter the military academies were already exposed to Arab nationalism and militarism through the increasingly politicized primary school system.\textsuperscript{265} They joined an upper echelon already roundly hostile to Britain’s

\textsuperscript{262} Secretary of State for Air, “Defence of Iraq,” January 14, 1925 [CO 537/816], in Records of Iraq, Vol. 4; See also, Air Staff Note, “Military Aspects of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty” [FO 371/14205] in Records of Iraq, Vol. 5.
\textsuperscript{263} Heller, 84-85; Dodge 70-1; Eliezer Beeri, Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society (New York: Praeger, 1970), 329-30.
\textsuperscript{264} Special Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Progress of ‘Iraq During the Period 1920-1931 in Iraq Administrative Reports, Vol. 10.
\textsuperscript{265} Marr, 37; For further discussion of the role of nationalism and militarism in Iraq education, see Simon, Iraq Between the Two World Wars, Chapter 4.
overbearing interventions in Iraqi affairs and the disrespect shown to them by British advisors. They saw themselves as the vanguard of progressive Arab nationalism in a country divided by atavistic sectarian lines and deeply resented the implication that they were somehow unfit for self determination.\textsuperscript{266} It was the British, after all, who blocked conscription. As early as 1928, Iraq’s Defense Minister complained, albeit diplomatically, that Iraqi graduates of British staff colleges had “outgrown” the need to be advised by British subalterns.\textsuperscript{267}

Far from alleviating the “pathologies” of Ottoman rule, British mandatory politics deepened the repressive characteristics of the Iraqi state. The ex-Ottoman officers that formed royal entourage had already been engrained with a distinctly Germanophilic nationalism.\textsuperscript{268} Yet it was the British who laid the technological framework for the emergence of a state heavily dependent on despotic power. This went far beyond furnishing the Iraqis with airplanes and other advanced military hardware. Rather, it was an entire project of military training that was contorted, mismatched, and misapplied to suit Britain’s immediate imperial goals. The British generally envisioned the Iraqi army as a glorified police force or gendarmerie. Yet Britain’s own Inspector General Major General Daly recognized that men trained in the manner of a British officer could not be expected to countenance such degradation and that such a policy would emasculate a key

\textsuperscript{266}Fieldhouse, 101-2.
\textsuperscript{267}Extract from Dispatch from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense to the High Commission, Baghdad, June 24, 1928 [CO 730/143/6] in Records of Iraq, Vol. 5, 346-8; Special Service Officer (Captain de Gaury), Baghdad, to Air Staff Intelligence, Hinaidi, July 22, 1930 [AIR 23/120] in Records of Iraq, Vol. 6, 233.
institution of Iraq’s nascent nationalist. Moreover, Britain seemed blithely unaware of Iraq’s sense of regional insecurity and ambition. The British were utterly confident that the service of a few thousand grateful Assyrians and a handful of bombers could protect Iraq completely while keeping it thoroughly under British domination.

King Faisal and the ex-Ottoman entourage followed the British in elevating the status of military as the *sine qua non* of Iraqi sovereignty, but used it as symbol of thwarted ambition and broken promises between the imperial mentor and the tutee. Control over coercion was the very essence of statehood, yet it was denied the aspirant state-makers. There could be no compromise with Shi’i leaders who demanded a greater share of power in return for their community’s service because the very contestation of the state’s right to extract military service imperiled the claim to sovereignty. Both British military doctrine and Iraqi nationalism agreed that control over violence was too precious to be alienated from the state or shared with the people. From both perspectives, the coercive institutions that emerged in Iraq were a disappointment. Yet endowed with new technology and new organizational techniques, this malformed replica of the British army proved to have unforeseen and terrible capacities.

*War-Making and State-Making, 1932-1958*

In a confidential memorandum of March 1933, less than a year after Iraq had joined the League of Nations, King Faisal privately lamented (somewhat hyperbolically) that the Iraqi state was still “far and away weaker than the people… [the people had] 

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260 Hemphill, 96.
more than 100,000 rifles whereas the government possesses only 15,000.” This was the direct legacy of Britain’s mandate, which had purposefully impeded the state’s accumulation of coercive capacity. Indeed, Iraq’s assumption of *de jure* sovereignty in 1932 only obviated the deficiencies in its *de facto* independence, since Britain’s support for Iraqi entry into the League of Nations was conditional on Iraq grant it free access to Iraqi airfields, traversal of Iraqi territory, and continued importation of British armament and military advisors.

It was from this inauspicious beginning that the Iraqi army began its transformation into an institution that would centralize power, dominate society, and project violence abroad. As often happens in processes of complex institutional changes, military development in Iraq began with the accidental exhibition of latent institutional potential, which leaders recognized and subsequently exploited. This involved two interwoven processes of *state-making*, the deployment violence domestically, and *war-making*, the deployment of violence against neighboring states. Iraqi state-makers found that the military institutions bequeathed to them in the post-colonial army were so powerful that compromise between state and society was not only ideologically unpalatable, but also politically unnecessary. The challenges of establishing order in the tribal hinterlands could be solved with substantial amounts of violence and only limited efforts to improve social development or incorporate disparate ethno-sectarian groups into the national community. Because of their success in rural suppression, military

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270 Cited in Batatu, 26.
271 Fieldhouse 94-5; Marr 51.
officers themselves began to assert themselves at the helm of state, reinforcing the utility and of coercion as synonymous with governance. The effort to assert sovereign boundaries in the face of outside encroachment also required constant resort to force. In Iraq’s case, this process was complicated by the state’s continued subjugation to Britain. Thus, war-making entailed not just competition with regional neighbors, but also against Britain itself. In such a complex environment of internal, regional, and global threats, the Iraqi state built upon its initial endowment of a small but highly centralized and technologically advanced army to reinforce and augment its capacity for coercion, making the massive deployment of force into the centerpiece of state power.

While the end of the mandate provided the Iraqi state at least nominal international recognition of its sovereignty, internally the state’s authority remained highly contested. Nothing exemplified this as much as the issue of the Assyrians. The Assyrian community had consciously positioned itself as the nemesis of Iraqi nationalism. They refused to learn Arabic and sought instead direct contact with the British rather than integration within the Iraqi state. As the British readied to withdraw from Iraq, the young Assyrian patriarch Eshai Mar Shimon tried first to press the case of Assyrian autonomy in the League of Nations. When this failed, he traveled to Baghdad to demand that the community of 40,000 Assyrians—a quarter of whom were fully-armed combat soldiers—be permitted to live in enclaves under his discrete temporal authority. While King Faisal tried in vain to reach a compromise, his failing health and the nature of this fundamental challenge within Iraq’s own territory made a confrontation nearly inevitable.
On August 4, 1933 shots were exchanged between a group of Assyrians crossing into Iraq from Syria and an Iraqi border patrol. In the Iraqi army’s first attempt to disarm the Assyrians, it initially suffered its typical ignominious defeat. However, the Iraqi turned to the British script for suppression of internal revolts: Circumventing the handful of British officers still serving as advisors, the Iraqi army deployed independently for the first time. The RIAF provided surveillance and bombing just as the RAF had before it. The instigation of tribal looting against Assyrian villages and property, which Ernest Main labeled an “old Turkish custom,” was actually entirely consistent with the British colonial practices of countering tribal uprisings with locally-raised auxiliaries. The result was the death of several hundred Assyrians and general disarmament of the Assyrian population.272

All-in-all, the Assyrians represented a meager military opponent and the Iraqi army showed no particular acumen by massacring unarmed civilians. But far from the tragedy it was labeled in the West, the campaign was seen in Iraq as the first demonstration that its long-stigmatized army could operation independently. Victory over the much reviled Assyrians gave new momentum to militarism. Celebrations for the triumphant fighters of the Iraqi army and particularly for General Bakr Sidqi, the commander of the Mosul garrison and hero of the campaign, were held in Mosul, Baghdad, and other cities. Tribal sheikhs who had just a few years earlier blocked any

move for mass conscription began volunteering for service. King Faisal’s illness and
death a few weeks later deprived Iraq of the sole political leader capable of standing up to
the army. While he had done everything he could to strengthen the Iraqi army as part of
efforts to promote Iraqi sovereignty and state-building, he also sought to find avenues of
cooperation that might achieve integration of Iraq’s many communities and tribal groups
without violence. In his last days, he was horrified by the uses found for Iraq’s new
military prowess.

The British, too, were shocked and dismayed by the savage decimation of a
Christian community that had so loyally served them, but were also aware of their role in
fomenting the crisis. British intelligence had earlier rated Sidqi the best Iraqi
commander. Born around 1890 in Kirkuk, he had attended the Ottoman Military
College in Istanbul, obtaining the rank of colonel and an appointment to the General
Staff. Sidqi was familiar to the British High Command, having served as a British
intelligence asset in 1919 and 1920. In 1921, it was the High Command which
recommended Sidqi for his Iraqi commission and he proved an exemplary pupil during
his stint at the British staff college. As Mohammed Tarbush shows, Sidqi’s career path
was typical of the upper echelon of Iraqi army. While the Ottoman experience may
have proven the bedrock of individual military training, it was the British who established
the military’s organizational structure, recruited and retrained its officers, and introduced
the technology of airpower and other advanced armaments. It was ironic, but also

274 Marr 58-9; Tarbush 99-101; Khattab, 169.
275 Tarbush, Table 6.
predictable, that the British were particularly perturbed that bombs the RIAF used against
the Assyrians had been manufactured and supplied by the United Kingdom.276

But the British did more than just provide the Iraqis while the means of
destruction; they also provided the motive for the Iraqi army to avenge itself on a small
community that represented the physical insinuation of British domination. Sunni
nationalists led by Yasin al-Hashemi seized upon popular enthusiasm to pass a new
national defense act in the winter of 1933/4, which included provisions for conscription
as well as an expansion of the military budget. A leading figure in the Ikha al-Watani
(Nationalist Brotherhood) party, Hashemi pressed an agenda for greater pan-Arab unity
and national independence. By diverting funds already allocated for an irrigation project
that would have benefited the predominantly Shi’i areas near the Gharraf river, the
proposal obviated the differences between continued reliance on cooptation and
economic incentives as a strategy for national integration and a new one premised on
coercion until submission.277

The progressive-oriented Ahali (Popular) party, based primarily among the Shi’i
population, though, continued to oppose conscription, leading to another rupture in Iraq’s
already fractious parliament. The political crisis in Baghdad soon spilled-over to the
countryside, as politicians in Baghdad incited tribal leaders to resist the state’s
administrative encroachment. Between 1934 and 1936, Iraq saw several waves of rural
violence, with tribes destroying railway and telegraph lines, harassing tax collectors and

277 Marr 62-3.
conscription officers, and sacking police stations. In the north, Barzani used resistance to conscription to conjure up another uprising. In the south, the Shi’i Grand Ayatollah Khashif al-Ghita seized upon tribal disaffection to circumvent the existing political party structure, trying to build direct alliances with mid-Euphrates sheikhs. Far beyond what the Ahali parliamentarians had so ineffectively articulated, Ghita demanded a complete change in Iraq’s socio-economic balance. Among other things, he called for equal Shi’i representation in the parliament, cabinet, and civil service, greater funding for their religious institutions through waqf endowment revenues, the establishment of an agricultural bank, the cancellation of land rents and other changes to the rural south, the replacement of civil servants of dubious character and curtailment of their salaries and pensions, and greater government investment in health and education in the south. Ghita’s demands resonated with British recommendations that the government take steps to address rampant rural poverty.

Yet by mid-1930s the balance of coercive power had already tipped in favor of the state. Under Hashemi’s tenure, the military doubled in size to 23,000 men and the RIAF expanded to three squadrons of seventy two planes. Enhancements in transportation infrastructure allowed troops to penetrate the country’s more remote regions. When early attempts to woo rebellious tribes failed, Bakr Sidqi was dispatched to launch a campaign of aerial bombardment and ground pacification, using martial law to detain and execute rebel leaders. Once the army had subdued the tribes in Rumaytha,
Nasiriyya, and Suq al-Shuyukh, there was no longer a need to negotiate with Ghita and the Shi‘i clerics.278

The mid-1930s proved a turning point in Iraqi history. As Hanna Batatu notes, [t]he ease and grim rapidity with which Bakr Sidqi’s soldiers and airplanes suppressed the tribal outbreaks of 1935 and 1936 presaged the end of the shaikh’s era. Prior to this, Iraq’s history was to a large extent the history of its shaikhs and their tribes. Its problems, its convulsions, its politics were essentially tribal…. After the thirties, the towns came conclusively into their own. The history of Iraq became henceforth largely the history of Baghdad…. In the tribal countryside, only small local risings broke from time to time the reigning uneasy quiescence—rising not under the shaikhs, as in the previous decades, but against them.279

Instead of the tribes, the military was catapulted to the forefront of Iraqi politics. In October 1936, Sidqi launched the first military coup in modern Arab history, using RIAF aircraft to drop pamphlets and a handful of bombs over Baghdad. Military intervention would be a chronic feature of Iraqi politics for the next three decades, inevitably involving ephemeral alliances based on personal grudges, ethno-sectarian and class interests, and sheer ambition.280 But more fundamentally, the period saw a magnification

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278 For a larger account of the uprisings and military response, see Marr 66-7 and Tripp 84-7; On the upgrading of the Iraqi army, see Khattab 63-9; Marashi and Salama 34; Nasry, 76; On the Shi‘a response and the role of Ghita and the tribes, see Nakash 120-5.
279 Batatu 118-9.
280 For a detailed discussion of the many overt and covert military interventions in Iraqi politics, see George M. Haddad, Revolution and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States, Volume 2, Part 1: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1971); Be‘eri, op cit.
of the state’s coercive power and attempts by military and civilian elites alike to assert
the state’s dominion. If the 1930s saw the construction of a political game in which
violence was integral,\(^{281}\) the accrual of automatic weapons, airplanes, and an entire
organizational infrastructure for the deployment of overwhelming and decisive force
clearly gave the state an immediate advantage.

Simultaneous with these exertions to gain hegemony internally, the growth of the
Iraqi army also allowed it far greater activity in the international arena. Until the early
1930s Iraq was an active but incipient player in regional politics. King Faisal’s
diplomatic efforts to regain the Syrian throne and create a unified Hashemite Arab
kingdom were summarily rebuffed by both France and Britain.\(^{282}\) Iraq’s entry in July
1937 into the short-lived Sa’adabad Pact with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan represented
an important step in gaining bilateral recognition from Pahlavi Iran, but the alliance was
basically constructed to reinforce Britain’s position against possible Italian or Soviet
encroachment.\(^{283}\) Desperate to protect the passage to India, British strategists proposed
that indigenous Middle Eastern armies be upgraded so that local forces could defend the
lines for up to two months until imperial assistance could arrive.\(^{284}\)

As Britain sought greater integration and influence over the Middle East,
however, its interests increasingly diverged from the new spirit of Arab nationalism. In

\(^{281}\) Nakash 124; Khalil, 171.
\(^{282}\) Itamar Rabinowitch, “Oil and Local Politics: The French-Iraqi Negotiations of the Early 1930s” in Uriel
\(^{283}\) D. Cameron Watt, “The Saadabad Pact of 8 July 1937,” in Dann, The Great Powers; Ahmad Abd al-
Razzaq Shikarah, Iraqi Politics 1921-41: The Interaction Between Domestic and Foreign Policy (London:
\(^{284}\) Lawrence Pratt, “The Strategic Context: British Policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1936-
Iraq, particularly, the ambition to play the role of a Prussia unifying the Arab world seemed thwarted by British imperialist meddling.\textsuperscript{285} For the Iraqi leadership, particularly the young King Ghazi and the military elite, Britain’s refusal and inability to provide Iraq with the up-to-date armaments was yet more evidence of perfidy. Britain’s efforts to supply Iraq with top-class military technology, including fifteen Gladiator and fifteen Lysander planes were in quantities below what had been requested. Britain pointed to its own supply shortages; as the war loomed in both Europe and Asia, the Iraqi army could not expect to receive higher priority than the Commonwealth.

Britain downplayed Iraq’s need for anything more than an effective organ of internal pacification, while the Iraqi leadership pointed out the country’s external vulnerabilities: In 1937, Turkey had used veiled military threats to force the detachment of Alexandretta from Syria; Iraq’s northern region, with its large Turcomen population was susceptible to similar irredentist threat. Iran, re-invigorated under Reza Khan, had raised claims to Bahrain and could easily block Iraq’s narrow passage to the Persian Gulf. Whereas the Shah could mobilize forty four infantry battalions to its western border in five weeks, the best Iraq could muster was fifteen battalions and an air force half as large.\textsuperscript{286}

But Iraq’s concerns spanned to wider issues of regional primacy and position. Pan-Arab ideology commonly cited Jewish encroachment on Palestine both to depict British betrayal and to stigmatize Arab leftist factions who favored domestic reform over

\textsuperscript{285}Marashi and Ibrahimi, 27-8. 
Arab unity. When the Palestinian uprising erupted in 1936, Fawzi al-Qawuqji, a Beirut-born ex-Ottoman officer, resigned his Iraqi commission to lead a force of international Arab volunteers. The British constantly suspected the Iraqi army of smuggling weapons to support the Palestinians. The activities of Fritz Grobba, the German ambassador to Baghdad and the most active Nazi propagandist in the Middle East, and the Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who came to Baghdad in 1939 after successive expulsions from Palestine and Syria, added to the dissemination of popular antipathy toward the British and, by extension, the Hashemites.287

Beyond Palestine, Iraq resisted British imperial policy in other ways as well. In 1937, Sidqi arranged through Grobba to purchase fifteen Breda fighters and five Savoia bombers from Italy and have the Italians provide military advisors for the RIAF. Given its failure to meet requests for comparable products, Britain was unable to oppose the order. While later Iraqi governments would avoid directly contravening Britain, they also tried to break Britain’s military monopoly, seeking out American, Danish, Czech, and Japanese suppliers for armaments ranging from light arms to antiaircraft artillery. Most of these deals, however, were stymied by Britain’s refusal to convert Iraqi dinar into

sterling in order to make the purchase.\textsuperscript{288} Still, by 1939, Iraq’s army numbered 26,345 men and 1,426 officers, with an air force ballooning to nearly one hundred pilots.\textsuperscript{289}

These new weapons were soon put to new uses. In 1938, King Ghazi launched efforts to annex Kuwait, which he claimed had been artificially dismembered from Ottoman Basra. Kuwait’s stance astride the Persian Gulf and its possession of the islands blocking Iraq’s only sea access lent the claim profound strategic implications. Britain, who had long maintained a special relationship with the as-Sabah clan, suspected that King Ghazi was working at the instigation of the Axis powers, particularly when the young king referred to Kuwait as Iraq’s \textit{Sudeten} territory. At the height of the crisis in March 1939, Iraqi forces drew up plans for an invasion and massed forces at the border. Only the intervention of Saudi forces, at Britain’s behest, forced Iraq to back down. A month later, King Ghazi died in a car crash, adding currency to rampant conspiracy theories.\textsuperscript{290}

After the Kuwait crisis, the Rashid Ali al-Kailani coup and the brief Anglo-Iraqi war of 1941 represented an even more direct threat to British hegemony. The intrigues that brought about the deposition of the new regent and the establishment of a military government of national defense led by Kailani and a cluster of senior military officers (the so-called “Golden Square”) in April 1941 are too intricate to describe here and have

\textsuperscript{288} Marr 74; Silverfarb, \textit{Informal Empire}, 83-4; For an inventory of the various sources for Iraqi armaments, see Khattab 52-85.
\textsuperscript{289} Batatu 27.
been well-covered elsewhere.\footnote{For a review of key Arabic sources on the subject, see Ayad al-Qazzaz, “The Iraqi-British War of 1941: A Review Article,” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies}, 7:4 (1976).} It is clear, however, that the Kailani government worked with the confidence that Axis assistance would be forthcoming at the crucial moment. Thus, Kailani held out against Britain’s demands for Iraq to commit troops to North Africa or the Balkans or even take the nominal step of declaring war on the Axis. Recognizing Kailani’s tilt, Britain insisted on its right to land two to three thousand Indian troops in Basra. Kailani responded by moving to bottle up the British force and besieged the airbase at Habbaniyya, which housed a small contingent of RAF pilots, an armored car company, and 1,200 Assyrians guards still on British payroll.\footnote{Tarbush, 178-9; George Kirk, \textit{The Middle East in the War} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 70.} British force, reinforced by John Pasha Glubb’s Jordanian Legion, broke through and converged on Baghdad in May, deposing Kailani.

Most British military observers attribute their victory over the larger Iraqi forces to the typical irresoluteness and ineptitude of the Iraqi military. Others point to German stinginess in providing Iraqi air support. By the time fighting had begun, the Reich’s was husbanding resources for the invasion of Russia; only two German fighter squadrons and few supply planes ever made the long journey from Salonika through Vichy-held Syria to Mosul.\footnote{Łukasz Hirszowicz, \textit{The Third Reich and the Arab East} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 161-72.} But Iraqi sources maintain that their high command had never developed a specific strategy for fighting the British and were themselves divided about how and even whether to do so. It has been suggested that the Iraqi forces besieging Habbaniyyah purposefully refrained from hitting the base’s water tower, which would have forced an
immediate surrender, pulling their punches in order to avoid escalation of the incident. Equally important, British military advisors had been embedded with Iraqi forces up to a week before the war, giving them untold knowledge about the Iraqi army’s organization and structure. Official British sources confirm that the Iraqi’s use of an armor blocking maneuver at Fallujah was exactly what had been practiced in joint exercises and that the rest of Iraq’s campaign were similarly tentative and unimaginative.

But more than the weakness of the Iraqi military, the Anglo-Iraqi war demonstrated the extent to which the Iraqi army had adopted the techniques of conventional, mechanized warfare and abandoned the repertoire of decentralized insurgency tactics seen in 1920. Glubb commented that none of the tribes of western Iraq made any attempt to hinder his progress. The British resident concluded that the small British column could “scarcely have reached here [Baghdad] had the desert tribes thrown in their lot with Rashid Ali.” Where Kailini and the Golden Square had imitated the fascist nationalist youth groups, they ignored the rural tribes who had been the mainstay of the 1920 uprising. In fact, it was the British who tried to enlist the sheikhs to

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297 Cornwallis to Eden, E/2431/195/93.
At this critical moment, Iraq could have dislodged British hegemony, but had lost the technique of mass mobilization.

After 1941, Britain took substantive steps to defang the Iraqi army. Iraq made the gesture of declaring war on the Axis, but provided little except for oil and foodstuffs to the war effort. Two thousand Iraqi officers were sacked, conscription suspended and equipment budgets and rations slashed. Eager to purge those tied to his political enemies, Prime Minister Nuri as-Said sought to reduce the army to a 10,000-man, all-volunteer mechanized force, backed by a part-time local conscript militia in each province.

But Iraq remained an air and rail transit hub for the Empire, an important counterweight to Iranian influence in the Gulf, and a possible bulwark against both Soviet and American domination of the Middle East. The military disposition of such a pivotal client state could not be neglected. By 1944 the British military advisor in Baghdad, General J.M.L. Renton, adopted less draconian methods of military reform. Like Daly before him, Renton believed that it was Britain’s contempt for Iraqi officers and refusal

to make good on the promises of military supply that had caused anti-British sentiment to fester. He even took the step of replacing the pejorative-sounding post of British “military advisory” for Iraq with a more conventional title of “military attaché.” Above all, though, Renton knew that British forces could not remain in Iraqi indefinitely, protecting the Iraqi state both from hostile neighbors and its own internal challengers. In August 1945, the RAF was again called on to assist in suppressing another Barzani-led revolt. It was imperative, then, that Iraq re-gain the military power of the mid-1930s. While the generation of ex-Ottoman officers was retired, Renton tried to make room for those whose training took place entirely under the British supervision. By the end of the war, military budgets and force strength increased substantially. Revising his previous hostility to the army, Nuri came to see that regaining British favor could both reinforce the Iraqi monarchy’s increasingly precarious position as well as allow Iraqi to pursue its wider regional ambitions.304

Despite the intentions of both British and Iraqi politicians and strategists, though, the same obstacles to integration still remained. Again, Britain prevaricated in meeting Iraq’s demands for fresh arms. Suffering a severe post-war economic crisis, Britain offered reconditioned or retired trucks and tanks, which Iraq rejected. When Iraq did purchase weapons from Britain, like, newly-made fighter planes of a serviceable but hardly state-of-the-art 1936 vintage, supplies were delayed and lacked spare parts. The

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twenty-five pound field artillery piece seems to be the only top of the line category of weaponry which Iraq received, though again in only half the quantities ordered.\textsuperscript{305}

On the Iraqi side, there was no abatement to the demand for national sovereignty and growing dissatisfaction with a closed political system that seemed buttressed by a collusive relationship between its monarchy and Britain. In January 1948, the Iraqi press leaked details of secret negotiations between the British and the government of Prime Minister Salih Jubr over a new Anglo-Iraqi treaty. While the British agreed to withdraw from its Iraqi airbases, it maintained the right to enter Iraq during times of war, bound Iraq to a joint military commission with the British high command, and extended the terms of the Anglo-Iraqi relationship another twenty years. Both the nationalist right and progressive left in Iraq denounced the treaty and led their followers in week-long street protests. The Regent Abd al-Ilah was forced to repudiate the agreement and Jubr to resign. Even after this public humiliation, though, Nuri and others close to the throne and British defense planners continued to seek further integration of Iraq under Britain’s Persian Gulf defense strategy, with the result that Britain would remain Iraq’s principal military supporter and supplier until the revolution of 1958.\textsuperscript{306}

Iraq’s entry into the Arab-Israel conflict in 1948 must therefore be considered in light of its ongoing relationship with Britain and position in the regional and global order. Successive Iraqi governments had tried to find ways to appear resolute on behalf of the

\textsuperscript{305} Silverfarb, \textit{Twilight of British Ascendancy}, 102-6.
Arabs of Palestine without compromising their relationships with Britain. But with
British withdrawal imminent and a Jewish-Arab war all but certain, the future of
Palestine was no longer just a symbolic flag to be waved to foment the passion of the
nationalist masses, but a focal point of intra-regional competition.

There was a general conviction among the Arabs that merely a demonstration of
determination to engage in battle could convince the major powers to intervene and force
the Jews to comply with Arab demands.\textsuperscript{307} Beside their inherent value as strategic
clients, the Arabs also enjoyed some military advantages. Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan had a
combined numerical advantage and had received training and armament under the French
and British mandates.\textsuperscript{308} At the same time, though, there were profound strategic
rivalries at play within the concerts of Arab states. Iraq jockeyed with Saudi Arabia and
Egypt for the leadership in the Arab world, the Hashemite houses of Iraq and Jordan
competed over possible unity with Syria, and nearly all the Arab states were hostile to
Hajj Amin Husseini, who had returned to the Middle East from his exile in Germany to
come the leading Palestinian nationalist.\textsuperscript{309}

Iraq took an aggressive tone in diplomatic settings, demanding coordinated Arab
boycotts and even military action to defend fellow Arabs. Iraq’s army had re-grown to
about 40,000 men, although slightly less than half were specifically designated and
trained for mountain warfare against the Kurds. British evaluations of Iraqi force
readiness were mixed and particularly pessimistic about Iraq’s offensive capacity, but

\textsuperscript{309} Eppel, 154-170.
after joint exercises, the Iraqi army was deemed capable of participating in defensive maneuvers in conjunction with the British army. Of all the Arab armies, Iraq’s held the highest standard of formation training.\textsuperscript{310}

Still, Iraq’s on-the-ground preparation belied its belligerent rhetoric. Over six hundred miles separated Baghdad from Palestine, a distance over which even the most advanced army would have difficulty establishing a supply line (assuming Transjordan even offered Iraq transit rights).\textsuperscript{311} Compounding this problem, Britain had fallen far short in meeting Iraqi orders for weaponry and, after March 1948, embargoed further exports. The Iraqi army was completely bereft of light or heavy tanks, had only half of its planned compliment of armored personnel carriers, about a quarter of its artillery, shortages in all types of ammunition, and most importantly, few functioning trucks.\textsuperscript{312} In his memoirs, the Iraqi chief of staff Salih Jubouri described the difficulties of readying the Iraqi army for a true expeditionary mission. From 1945 to 1947, plans to add mechanized companies and air force squadrons to the Iraqi army had been postponed because of budget shortfalls. Merely massing the Iraqi army at the Jordanian border required the army to make emergency requisitions of trucks and cars, as well significant diplomatic maneuvers to gain Jordan’s acquiescence to the positioning of Iraqi forces on its territory.\textsuperscript{313}

\textsuperscript{310} Ilan, 30.
\textsuperscript{312} Ilan, 120, Table 5 and Table 6.
\textsuperscript{313} Jabouri 142-4.
Given these limitations, Iraq’s first reaction to the prospect of war was to mobilize non-state proxies. Iraqi citizens were urged to join the Arab Liberation Army (Jaysh al-Inqadh al-Arabi, ALA), an irregular force created by the Arab League in December 1947 and placed under the field command of Fawzi al-Quwaqji, the same ex-Ottoman officer who left Iraq to join the 1936 Palestinian uprising. The ALA purported to represent the unified actions of the Arab governments to defend Palestine, but by remaining a volunteer force, its actions could be disavowed by any sponsoring government as the work of private citizens. The absence of a clear chain of authority, however, severely hindered the ALA’s ability to conduct combat operations. Iraq tried to establish greater bureaucratic infrastructure and chain of command as well as increase its influence over this force by seconding its Assistant Chief of Staff Ismail Saffwat and General Taha al-Hashemi to serve as the overall commanders of the Arab forces and inspector general of ALA, respectively. Since the ALA’s funding and supply lines ran through Damascus and Quwaqji’s known allegiance to Syria, however, these positions proved meaningless. In the first months of the inter-communal conflict before the mandate’s expiration, ALA units in different sectors functioned more or less independently of each other, preventing the force from ever pressing the advantage, even when it held larger numbers and superior positions that the Jews.\footnote{Joshua Landis, “Syria in the Palestine War,” in Avi Shlaim and Eugene Rogan, eds., The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Edgar O’Ballance, The Arab-Israeli War, 1948 (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1956), 40.} Equally debilitating was the ALA’s refusal to cooperate with the Mufti and his even more amorphous hodgepodge of village militias.
As Hashimi said in Turkish, “we don’t provide weapons to bashi bazooks (ruffians).”

Despite having drawn from a smaller population base, the better-trained, better-armed, and better-organized Jewish forces routed the irregular Arab militias in the spring of 1948. The prospect of a total collapse forced the Arab states to shift from indirect to direct military intervention.

Just as in 1941, evaluations of the Iraqi performance in 1948 border on lambaste if not ridicule. In his annual report, the British ambassador summarily dismissed the Iraqi campaign as “characteristically inept.” Jewish forces repulsed between three to five thousand Iraqi troops at Gesher on May 15, 1948, taking control of the vital Kirkuk-Haifa pipeline. The Iraqis successfully defended Jenin from Israeli attack in early June, but at considerable cost of men and material. Most damning, once entrenched in the West Bank, the Iraqi army missed the opportunity to split the Jewish forces and drive a wedge to the Mediterranean. The phrase ma’ku awamer (“there are no orders”) came to exemplify the Iraqi army’s passivity through the rest of the war. It is a matter of historical conjecture whether this was due to the incompetence of Iraqi army officers themselves or the vacillation of the entire inter-Arab command system, which failed to

315 Diplomatic records also suggest that at Quwaqji may even have coordinated with the Zionist force to block reinforcements to the Mufti’s forces at the battle of Kastel. Depuy, 12-3; Avi Shlaim, “Israel and the Arab Coalition in 1948,” in Shlaim and Rogan, eds., The War for Palestine, 85–6; O’Ballance, 84.
establish any mechanism to coordinate among the forces of the various Arab national armies.\textsuperscript{318}

Still, the substantial shortcomings of the Iraqi army in the 1948 war must be measured against its unexpected and unacknowledged successes. First, as Edgar O’Ballance notes, the Iraqi army fought considerably better than the ALA or Mufti’s militias. In fact, during the truce of June 11, 1948, the Iraqi army essentially reassigned the entirety of its forces from the ALA to join the rest of the regular Iraqi contingent. Second, the fact that Iraqi forces even took the field at all was a notable feat considering this was their first real deployment outside of Iraq. Massing ten percent of its total forces on the Palestinian border in May 1948, including an RIAF squadron, was probably beyond the capacity of most comparable states. Furthermore, entering into Palestine required the Iraqi army to construct pontoon bridges to cross the Jordan River. After taking Jenin, Iraq committed another ten thousand reinforcements (including some units designated for Kurdistan), one hundred armored personnel carriers, and fifty artillery pieces to maintain Arab control over the Jenin-Tulkarem-Nablus triangle. Almost the entirety of the RIAF was stationed in Jordan, providing close air support for the defense of Jenin. While they did not take the offensive, they did not lose territory either.\textsuperscript{319}

Finally, as Kenneth Pollack points out, Iraqi army units showed strong resolve and cohesion. The fact that Iraqi officers who spent seven years under the thumb of British military advisors failed to seize every tactical advantage is hardly surprising. Despite

\textsuperscript{318} Charles Tripp, “Iraq and the 1948 War: A Mirror of Iraq’s Disorders,” in Shlaim and Rogan, eds., \textit{The War for Palestine}.
\textsuperscript{319} Eppel, 191; Kurzman, 333; O’Ballance, 115-8, 137-8
poor leadership and severe casualties, though, Iraqi units held together in combat, belying assumptions that the ethno-sectarian cleavages present in Iraqi society would be reflected in its military institutions.\textsuperscript{320}

The arrival of the Iraqi army in Palestine represented a culmination in the transformation of a colonial army of internal pacification to a conventional fighting force capable of both domestic suppression and international expedition. The adoption of such a centralized and bureaucratic military structure and the reciprocal abandonment of violence devolution were propelled by a complex interaction of domestic, regional, and global forces. It was not just that the experience of imperialism and denial of Iraqi sovereignty strengthened the resolve of the Iraqi leaders to use force to dominate society and “build” a nation. Iraqi state-makers and military officers looked upon tribal sheikhs and religious dignitaries not as potential subjects of cooptation, whose access to local violence-wielders could be mobilized as in the 1920 Intifadah, but as obstacles that needed to be disarmed, overcome, and overwhelmed. Thus, the colonial legacy endowed the coercive technology and infrastructure to necessary to accomplish just that.\textsuperscript{321}

Regional competition further drove Iraq to intensify its military build-up and to eschew non-state forms of mobilization. Militias like the ALA and the Mufti’s forces proved calamitously ineffective against better-trained and better-armed regional adversaries. The outcome of the first Arab-Israeli war did not diminish confidence in the army as an institution within the Arab world. Rather, after 1948, Iraq strove to match its

\textsuperscript{321} Longrigg, \textit{Iraq, 1900 to 1950}, 382-3.
neighbor’s burgeoning arsenals by importing more and more advanced weaponry, including jet fighters, tanks, and other material, first from Britain and increasingly from the United States and later the Soviet Union.322

Few Arab states, however, could remain stable given the imposition of regional and geo-strategic competition on an already precarious balance of domestic class and ethnic forces. The Egyptian monarchy was the first to fall, with Col. Gemal Abd al-Nasser and the Free Officers promising to usher in a new progressive Arab order in 1952. In Iraq, the monarchy limped on. Rather than ameliorating persistent inequalities and social tension, the mid-1950s oil boom only exacerbated Iraq’s pattern of distorted development, further isolating the monarchy and the slim oligopolistic elite from the rural and urban masses. Among the officer class, who had always considered themselves vanguards of reform, imitators and acolytes of Nasser grew more prominent.323

Ultimately, it was a unique and somewhat serendipitous confluence of domestic and international events that finally toppled the Iraqi throne. With Syria’s ascension to union with Egypt in February 1958, Iraq and Jordan turned to each other for mutual support in a Hashemite confederation. The eruption of a pro-Nasser coup in Lebanon increased the risk of conflict between Jordan and Syria, leading King Husayn of Jordan to request reinforcements from Iraq. While army units were normally forbidden to carry ammunition in Baghdad in order to avert a military coup, this emergency westward

323 Longrigg, Iraq: From 1900 to 1950, 360-5; Samira Haj, The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power and Ideology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 5-6; Batatu’s is certainly the most influential application of Marxist, class-based analysis of the rise of Iraqi Free Officers.
transit on July 14, 1958 allowed two brigade commanders, Abd as-Salam Arif and Karim Abd al-Qasim, to march on the capital. Within hours they dispatched the Royal Guard and killed the royal family in the palace. The next day Nuri was hunted down and shot on the street. However, despite the enthusiasm for radical transformation and rejection of the monarchical legacy, those in command of the new Iraqi republic could never resist resorting to the twin logics of state-making and war-making that had emerged under the *ancien regime*. The centralization of coercive power had become self-sustaining, driven by the combination of internal and external challengers and reinforced by the emergence of norms of military elitism, factors which even the most powerful subsequent Iraqi leader could not defy.

**Consolidation and the Failures of Devolution, 1958-1991**

From 1921 to 1958, a combination of culturally-derived notions about the role and mission of the military and the functional needs to protect the state from internal and external challengers drove Iraq to erect a large, centralized, and bureaucratic army. Successive republican regimes after 1958 sought to modify this model by devolving coercive power to militia forces. These forces were seen as institutions for regime propagation and indoctrination, counterweights to the potentially disloyal official armed forces, and reserves forces that could be called upon to provide additional coercive power in times of crisis. While some were concurrent, for analytical purposes I divide these

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experiments in violence devolution into four different mini-cases, each with its own specific details: First, the parallel efforts by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and Ba’th party to build party militias during the period of inchoate praetorian politics from 1958 to 1968; Second, the use of Kurdish tribal militias raised by the state against the nationalist insurgency from 1961 to 1991; Third, the Ba’th party’s second effort to raise a new militia, the Popular Army (PA, Al-Jaysh ash-Sha’bi), after Saddam Husayn had assumed total control of the state in the 1970 and 1980s; and finally, the “neo-tribal” militias that emerged as Saddam groped to retain control after the successive shocks of the Iran-Iraq, the 1991 Gulf War, and the March 1991 uprisings and continues through the American occupation of 2003.

Ultimately, each attempt by Iraq’s leadership to diverge from the course of military centralization ended in futility and failure. The decentralization that made paramilitaries and militias an attractive option also made them functionally ill-suited to the Iraqi environment. On a cultural level, the idea of arming civilians incited the ire and resistance of Iraqi’s officer corps, who resented any challenger to their own positions as professional wielders of violence. Even after the officer corps was subdued under Saddam, however, militias proved too unstable to be relied upon by the regime’s leadership and too weak to stand up to conventional military force in Iraq’s competitive regional environment.

Dissecting the failure of these experiments is crucial to understanding the factors that made military centralization such a durable and persistent institutional form. As paramilitaries rose and fell, the elaboration of a bureaucratized, conventional military
force meanwhile continued with the same dilemma of balancing reliability and efficacy. But in a context of intense regional pressure, the solution came through innovation within the scope of intensive coercive institutions by establishing a fully-armed and hardened praetorian guard that both garrisoned the capital and protected the border. Thus, despite the aspiration and real achievement of social transformation after 1958, the path of military centralization that had been set under the colonial era continued to hold in Iraq.

_A- Praetorian Regimes and Party Militias, 1958-1968_

The 1958 revolution marked the first venture by military officers in direct rather than mediated domination of the state. However, what had begun as a personal battle for supremacy between the revolution’s leading co-conspirators, Arif and Qasim, soon became a struggle to determine the ideological and sectarian nature of the Iraqi state. Civilian political parties became both allies and adversaries to the principal military antagonists. Both the ICP and Ba’th’s efforts to organize party militias in the late 1950s and 1960s can be seen as mirrored attempts by non-state actors to appropriate the state’s prerogative to control coercion.

The ICP was in a prime position upon the fall of the monarchy. Though illegal, it was by far the largest party in the country, drawing tens of thousands of supporters, primarily from the growing number of Shi’i peasants who had been driven into debt peonage in rural areas or urban shanty towns. On July 14, 1958, the ICP leadership wrote to Qasim asking for the authority to organize popular defense militias. They reminded him of the fate of Iran’s Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953, a revolutionary leader who
ousted the Iranian monarch but was then toppled by military. They urged Qasim to “grant the people the freedom to organize, publish, and assemble… [and] to encourage the formation of People’s Committees for the Defense of the Republic and a People’s Resistance Force (PRF, al-Muqawama ash-Sha’biyya) and arm this force without delay.” As rioting enveloped Baghdad, the ICP had already set up just such a force. Lacking a foothold in the Sunni Arab-dominated military, the ICP was intent on exploiting whatever armament and training offered to them by the state to create a force loyal only to the party. But Qasim was not ready to compromise the military’s ability to control coercion, quickly banning the PRF and imposing a curfew to curb lawlessness.

Within a few weeks, though, after Arif began to ally with the pan-Arab political parties and court the support of Nasser and the United Arab Republic (UAR), Qasim returned to the ICP. There was a natural affinity between the new leader and the left. Qasim was generally sympathetic to social redistribution, especially land reform. As the son of a Shi’i Kurdish mother, he did not share the enthusiasm of many of his military cohort for pan-Arab integration. More importantly, though, Qasim was a pragmatist who quickly came to recognize the potential for disloyalty within the military and the importance of building alternative pillars of support. On August 1, 1958, Qasim authorized the PRF to resume operations. The force was placed under the overall command of Qasim’s personal intelligence chief and kept entirely separate from the

326 Cited in Batatu 847.
327 Batatu 848; Dann, 105.
directorate-general of security, which held many holdovers from the monarchy. Army officers and non-commissioned offers led local PRF units in one month training programs, consisting mainly of two hours of basic small arms training. PRF units were required to return their weapons to the military garrisons at the end of the day.

Despite this semblance of subservience, the ICP quickly hijacked control of the PRF by organizing candidates for election as unit commanders. From a base of around 11,000 members in August 1958, the PRF more than doubled to 25,000 members by May 1959, effectively becoming the ICP’s paramilitary auxiliary, alongside communist-fronted youth and women’s leagues and trade and peasant unions. Throughout Iraq, individual PRF detachments freely roamed the streets, setting up “people’s courts,” attacking nationalist sympathizers, and extorting local populations to give funds for the upkeep of the local militia detachment. Some of these activities were useful to Qasim’s rooting-out pro-Arif elements, but PRF activities became so flagrant that they pushed Iraq to the brink of chaos. After the botched Shawwaf Coup of March 1959, which involved an attempt by Sunni Arab officers backed by the UAR to foment a rebellion among the tribes around Mosul, communist-backed Kurdish militias rampaged through the city killing hundreds. The PRF was also involved in similar vigilante attacks against so-called reactionary elements in Basra throughout the spring of 1959.

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328 Sluglett & Sluglett, 63.
329 Sluglett and Sluglett 69.
330 Dann 167-9, 175.
331 British Consulate-General Basra, Monthly Summary Report-March 1959, Jarman Vol. 8; Monthly Summary April 1959, p. 32
Qasim remained unwilling to concede to open parliamentary elections in which the ICP was sure to triumph and soon deployed the military to curb the PRF’s autonomy and activities. In January 1959, he reiterated that the PRF “shall not carry out any activities before receiving a clear order from the General Commander of the Armed Forces or the Military Governor-General.” He further specified that only PRF units bearing special permits would be allowed to operate.\footnote{Sluglett and Sluglett 53, 62-3; Dann 105-7, 118-20.} By the March 1959, army commanders in Basra forbade further enlistment in the PRF. Army units were dispatched to seize PRF arms depots and the ministry of justice instructed judges to inflict maximum penalties on disturbers of the peace.\footnote{Basra Monthly Summary, May 1959, p. 40; Fortnightly Political Summary No. 7, March 26-April 1959; Dann 210-1.} For its part, the ICP offered its militias forces to augment the army’s efforts to maintain local security, including combating smuggling and infiltration, but regular army and police commanders insisted that the PRF not act independently and defer to state authorities at all times.\footnote{Iraq Political Summary No. 9, April 21-May 8, 1959; Iraq: Political Summary No. 11, May 26-June 8, 1959.} After clashes between ICP-affiliated Kurds and local Turcomen in Kirkuk killed dozens in July 1959, Qasim used this example of “anarchist” excess as a pretext for halting all PRF training.\footnote{Dann 224-25; Sluglett and Sluglett 71-3.} Absent the armed strength of its party militia, the tables rapidly turned on the ICP. By mid-1960 it was ICP activists who were the subjects of violent harassment, including assaults on May Day demonstrations in the conservative Shi’i cities of Najaf and Karbala and attacks on Kurdish ICP rallies in Kirkuk.\footnote{Dann 289-90, 303.} The last gasp for the PRF came on February 8, 1963,
when nationalist officers backed by the Ba’th assassinated the head of the Iraqi air force and began to move on the capital. The ICP, who had warned Qasim that a coup was imminent, offered to mobilize the popular militia, but Qasim refused to provide them arms. ICP members took to the street independently and were cut down by the army’s tanks and machine guns. Jets strafed the ministry of defense where Qasim held out. By the next day Qasim, though, surrendered and pleaded for safe passage out of the country. Instead, the newly constituted Revolutionary Command Council sentenced him to death by firing squad, leaving his bullet-ridden body propped on a chair for broadcast on Iraqi television.

Dovetailing on the ICP’s efforts to establish an independent militia was the Ba’th’s and its National Guard (NG, Al-Hars al-Qawmi). In 1958, the Ba’th party had at most three hundred active members and a few thousand supporters.\(^{337}\) Ba’thism’s core pan-Arab nationalist ideology drew them into immediate alliance with Arif and opposition to Qasim, who was seen as neglecting Iraq’s Arab heritage in favor of an “Iraq-first” policy.\(^{338}\) From 1958 to 1963, it was the Ba’th who organized clandestinely, built ties with anti-Qasim elements in the military, and recruited students into an underground civilian cadre network. With near text-book precision, as the nationalist army officers began their move in February 1963, some five thousand Ba’thi civilian militiamen took to the street with them, engaging in open battles with ICP supporters in Baghdad’s Shi’i slums. Estimates of the two-day death toll are hazy, but somewhere on

\(^{337}\) Sluglett and Sluglett 90.

the order of eighty Ba’thists and between three hundred and five thousand communist sympathizers were killed.  

For the rest of 1963, while Arif held the ceremonial post of president, real power rested with the Ba’th’s civilian leadership, principally Ali Salih as-Sa’di. Without a base of support in the army, the Ba’th, like the ICP, relied increasingly on its party militia, placed under the command of twenty-eight year-old Air Colonel Mundhir al-Wanadawi, to circumvent a potentially disloyal officer corps. The NG’s exact role was described in the Revolutionary Command Council’s proclamation on the day of the coup: the NG was “authorized to annihilate anyone who disturbs the peace. The loyal sons of the people are called upon to cooperate with the authorities by informing against these criminals [supporters of the Communist agent Qasim] and exterminating them.”

For the next ten months, the NG launched what could only be described as a reign of terror, rounding up thousands of suspected Qasim sympathizers into sports stadiums and makeshift prisons, where they faced mock trials, torture chambers, and execution squads. As Sa’di sought to build the Ba’th as an independent force in Iraqi politics, membership in the NG expanded from its originally hardcore of students to youths and workers of all stripes, and part-time volunteers clamored to obtain weapons and a green armband. From February to August 1963, the NG grew nearly seven fold to 34,000 members. Its deployment of violence did not stop at new regime’s opponents. As Eliezer Be’eri describes succinctly, the NG was a “military organization without military

339 Batatu 968-71, 984-5.
340 Cited in Sluglett and Sluglett 85.
341 Sluglet and Sluglett 86; Batatu 1011-2
discipline whose mission was to terrorize the population.” The NG’s excesses outraged the populace and more importantly, alienated the military leaders—including the Ba’thists—who saw it as a collection of ruffian bashi bazook, infringing on the military’s proper role.342 British consular reports from the spring and summer of 1963 depict the NG as a force “virtually out of control.” Not only would NG units attack people in the streets, but fight amongst themselves. Deserters from the NG took their weapons with them, leading to a pervasive sense of lawlessness and anarchy which far surpassed any fomented by the PRF.343 In November 1963, Sa’di was deposed in an intra-Ba’th coup. Wandawi commandeered a jet to attack Rashid air force base and the presidential palace in an attempt to block these maneuvers. The NG rampaged through Baghdad, but could not hold out long against the superior firepower and combined air, artillery, and armor assault of the regular army. With his erstwhile Ba’th allies hopelessly divided, Arif moved to consolidate his personal control, pushing Ba’thists into ceremonial posts away from the levers of power. Communiqué Number One of the November coup ordered all NG members to hand in their weapons on pain of death.344

Ultimately, both the ICP and Ba’th’s bids to create militias that served the regime but stood apart from the state failed for similar reasons. It was extremely difficult for a praetorian regime based on the singular domination of military officers to share coercive power with a civilian force. No matter what ideological banner was flown, arming the

342 Be’eri, 198-9; Marashi and Salama, 95.
344 Mufti, 164; Marashi and Salama, 95-6.
masses ran contrary to the elitist norms that had been deeply ingrained in the military since the colonial period. In particular, the idea that the communist-dominated PRF would somehow replace or eclipse the nationalist army was anathema.\textsuperscript{345} Yet the hostility of the army was a necessary but not sufficient to cause the dissolution of these militias. In destroying the militias, the regular army exploited fundamental organizational limitation of the militia model. The desertions, defections, and various manifestations of unsanctioned banditry were the most apparent indicators of the inability to coordinate or control these forces. Both Qasim and Arif learned that a lightly-armed part-time force like the PRF or NG could not withstand assault by a determined conventional force. While this realization may have come too late for Qasim, Arif managed with little trouble to suppress the NG and assume sole control for himself.

Instead of employing a parallel paramilitary structure, Arif built a security force from within the military itself, converting his old 20\textsuperscript{th} Brigade into the first Republican Guard (\textit{Al-Hars al-Jumhuriyah}, RG). While the RG was placed under the command of loyal members of Arif’s own kin, it was trained and armed as a professional fighting force.\textsuperscript{346} The RG’s rise coincided with the fall of party militias, ending all pretenses of incorporating the masses in security matters. Rather than deliver on the promises of popular sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and democracy, the 1958 revolution brought to full fruition the militarism incubated under the mandate and then the monarchy. As before, two simultaneous and complimentary factors contributed to this. On one hand, the

\textsuperscript{345} Mufti, 127.
\textsuperscript{346} Sluglett and Sluglett 93-4.
highly competitive regional environment reinforced the perception that a strong state with a strong army was essential.\textsuperscript{347} Iraq faced continual regional and geo-strategic pressures in the post-1958 period. For example, Iran responded to Qasim’s withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact by re-asserting its claim to the Shatt al-Arab, pushing Iraq into a series of escalating military-diplomatic postures that again nearly led to the forcible annexation of Kuwait in 1961. At the same time, joining the ranks of the revolutionary states did not diminish Iraq’s traditional rivalry with Egypt and more specifically, Nasserism. This belligerence extended far beyond broadcast propaganda and mutual support for coup-plotters and nearly led to outright military confrontation.\textsuperscript{348} Arif was perhaps more cautious in his foreign involvements, but was still dragged into the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and hastily sent a few units to the Jordanian front.\textsuperscript{349} No matter what regime sat in Baghdad, Iraq could not escape the web of external pressures that surrounded it.

On the other hand, praetorian rule arrived nearly simultaneously with an exponential increase in the state’s domestic resource base. Oil first became a major component of Iraq’s national income in 1952 and became even more important with the nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1964.\textsuperscript{350} Buoyed by oil wealth, military budgets quadrupled from their 1958 base in just ten years, and comprised

\textsuperscript{347} Khafaji, “War as a Vehicle,” 264
\textsuperscript{348} In 1959 Nasser provided air support and radio transponders for the failed Mosul coup. In 1962, Qasim moved troops to the Syria border, ostensibly to join the fight against Israel but really to support Nazim Qudsi’s attempt to succeed from the UAR. See Mufti, 126, 137.
\textsuperscript{349} Marr 201.
between forty to fifty percent of the booming state budget by 1968. The state could afford both lavish spending on military officers and continual expansion and upgrades in the equipment and technologies of coercion. With the British monopoly on Iraq’s arms purchases broken, Iraq could now import the most advanced Soviet and American fighter jets and tanks. Thus, in stark contrast to these early experiments with party militias, the Iraqi state continued to build upon its initial organizational model of military centralization.

**B- Tribal Militias and the Kurds, 1960-1991**

As Qasim began to disband and demobilize the PRF, he simultaneously launched another experiment in violence devolution. Over the next thirty years, the Iraqi state tried repeatedly to build patron-client ties with Kurdish elites who would cooperate in opposing Barzani and Kurdish nationalists. Officially called the National Defense Battalions (Qiyadet Jahafel al-Difa’ al-Watani, NDB), these pro-government Kurdish militias were better known by their Kurdish moniker, jahsh (donkey foal). While premised on fundamentally different ideological principles than the PRF or NG, the NDB militias ultimately failed for very same reason: they were functionally unsuited to carry out the tasks the state set for them. As Martin Van Bruinessen writes, the NDB fighters were consistently

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352 Marashi and Salami 79-82; British observes noted that despite the inflow of Soviet weaponry, the Iraqi “forces are still based on British organization.” See Dispatch No. 1 (1011/1/61), British Embassy, Baghdad, January 2, 1961 in *Political Diaries*, Vol. 8, 448-467.
happy to accept the arms and pay that the government gave them, [but]
their participation in the conflict continued to depend more on the
dynamics of their own relations with the Barzanis… than on policy
decisions by the central government.353

Not only did leaders of the NDB at various times refuse orders from the central
government, but they also outright challenged their state patron for control.

Qasim’s early displays of sympathy for the Kurdish raised hopes and brought
Barzani home from a fifteen years exile. Demands for substantive Kurdish regional
autonomy, however, were soon rebuffed and Barzani began re-assembling his guerrilla
forces.354 Qasim turned to Barzani’s traditional tribal rivals, particularly the Herki and
Surchi tribes, to organize a counterforce.355 In contrast to the PRF, the ideological
premise of the NDB was anachronistic, reinforcing and in some ways reifying the
hierarchies of rural clan and tribal social structure. Chieftains, landlords, and village
heads were granted the title of the state’s mustashar (consultant) in return for mobilizing
their kith and kin into a pro-state paramilitary force. All funding, orders, and commands
were mediated through these local notables.

From 1961 to 1970, northern Iraq was stuck in a classic cycle of insurgent-state
stand-off: A few thousand guerrillas would cut off isolated garrisons in the mountains,
threatening the northern plains. The army responded by rushing to secure the cities, then
mounting artillery and air barrage before pushing back up the mountains, where their

353 Martin Van Bruinesses, “Kurds, States, and Tribes” in Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in
the Middle East, ed. Faleh Abdul Jabar and Hosham Dawod (London: Saqi, 2003), 172-3.
354 Sluglett & Sluglett, 80-1.
355 Van Bruinesses, “Kurds, States, and Tribes,” 172-3; Slugllet & Sluglett, 81

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tanks would bog down and become susceptible to ambushes. With supplies replenished
by Iran and those abandoned or ceded by his opponent, Barzani’s forces would then drive
the army back to the plains, beginning the cycle anew. During this phase of the
Kurdish conflict, the NDB numbered no more than 10,000 auxiliaries who could be relied
upon mainly to loot the villages of rival tribes. When faced with strong resistance, NDB
militias were known simply to surrender their arms.

Following the Ba’th coup of 1968 there was a brief peace accord, but this failed in
1974 as the new regime prevaricated in its promise to implement significant autonomy
measures. As Kenneth Pollack details, the fighting in the 1970s took on a very different
dynamic. Barzani was emboldened by his earlier successes and the support offered by
Israel, the U.S., and Iran, and set out to win a decisive victory by reorganizing his forces
into a conventional, centralized force. This, however, worked directly into the army’s
hands, which had refined its tactics and committed an even larger force to the fight, some
90,000 to 100,000 men, 1,200 tanks and personnel carriers, and 200 combat aircraft, to
the task. Helped by the use of a 700-mile road network built under the auspices of the
abortive peace, the Iraqi army improved its ability to reinforce isolated strongholds.
Rather than blindly charge a position, Iraqi troops were more deliberate in digging and
waiting for massive for armor, artillery, or aircraft support to obliterate the opposition.
As Pollack describes, Barzani’s units “stood, fought, and were blown to bits.” Iran
saw its Kurdish proxy decimated and redoubled its support, not only by supplying U.S.-

358 Pollack 179.
made weapons, but also giving artillery cover from across the border and even sometimes dispatching Iranian troops to serve with the Kurdish guerrillas. Unwilling to risk a major international war, in March 1975 Iraq offered Iran concessions on the Shatt al-Arab in return for Iran’s cessation of interferences in northern Iraq.

Barzani’s forces collapsed almost immediately. Without Iran’s interference, the Iraqi state was able to launch an aggressive pacification campaign, establishing a three mile *cordon sanitaire* on the Iranian border, resettling some 200,000 Kurds to “modern” communes, including 50,000 who were deported to southern Iraq. Some 6,000 former Kurdish fighters were co-opted as border guards while others were brought into the NDB. The defeat of 1975 coupled with Barzani’s death four years later left the Kurdish political leadership deeply fractured, with Barzani’s son Masoud leading the rump Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani leading the break-away Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in addition to various smaller Islamic and leftist splinters.

It was easy to see, then, why in the first years of the Iran-Iraq War the Ba’th had every confidence that it could exploit differences among the Kurds to maintain control. Army units that had garrisoned Kurdistan were redeployed to the southern front, replaced by NDB units who grew to nearly 250,000 men. The Ba’th cultivated ties with Barzani’s rivals through a number of avenues, including the leadership of the various Sufi orders.

When KDP troops joined in the Iranian advance at Haj Omran in July 1983, the Ba’th

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361 McDowall, 355; *Genocide in Iraq*, 38-9
made an alliance with the PUK and other smaller Kurdish factions. Yet by 1985 talks with the PUK broke down, and both major Kurdish parties were soon in open alliance with Tehran. In 1986, Kurdish forces assisted Iranian commandos in raiding the heart of the Iraq’s northern oil fields. By the mid-1980s, the Iraqi army controlled little outside Kurdistan’s major cities.\footnote{Genocide in Iraq, 46-50; MacDowall 352}

In 1987, the newly appointed head of the Ba’th Party’s northern bureau, Ali Hassan al-Majid, began a series of operations called \textit{al-Anfal} (Spoils of War) to permanently depopulate eastern Kurdistan, thus destroying what was considered an intractable fifth column. With access to secret state archives and by conducting witness interviews after 1991, researchers at Human Rights Watch have produced extremely detailed accounts of the circumstances that led to the destruction of some 2,000 villages and deaths of between 50,000 and 200,000 Kurds. While counter-insurgency campaigns are almost always brutal and chaotic, by the last years of the Iran-Iraq war the Ba’th had developed meticulous bureaucratic procedures for coordinating between the army, the party, the RG, the NDB, and various intelligence services in order to systematically exterminate the Kurds.\footnote{Genocide in Iraq, 53, 343-6.} On a tactical level, each phase of the Anfal campaign bore a similar hallmark: first, they conducted aerial or artillery bombardment of a village, sometimes with poison gas, to drive inhabitants to the hills. Then, a combination or regular infantrymen and the NDB militiamen swept the area, arrested the alleged saboteurs, and sent them by lorry to detention centers. There, the secret police
interrogated the detainees, executing those who themselves or whose families were suspected of having ties with the insurgent, deporting the rest.  

Why did this escalation take place at such a moment and in such a form, particularly as it diverted resources from blocking Iran’s looming advance in the south? The fastidiousness evident in the state’s documentation plus Saddam Husayn’s own claim of authorship of such acts belies any suggestion that the destruction was committed accidentally or in the fog of war. Furthermore, when the war ended in August 1988, Iraqi army units in Kurdistan immediately shifted their campaign from the Iranian border to the Turkish border in order to carry the fight directly to the KDP heartland. To point to the exclusionary, racist, and totalitarian nature of the Ba’th vision of national solidarity can only go so far. The Ba’th had previously accommodated the Kurdish presence inside Iraq and did not use such techniques of violence in the mid-1970s, when the Kurdish opposition was far weaker and the state could devote more resources to its eradication. 

A simpler and more immediate answer is that the Ba’th turned to intensive, state-centered violence because the initial techniques of relying on clientage relationships through the mustashar proved insufficient to keep the northern region under the state’s control during wartime. The NDB was always the weakest link in the chain of command that carried out the destruction. For most of the war, NDB militias were consigned to manning road blocks, scouting and patrolling, searching for army deserters and draft

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364 Genocide in Iraq, 12-14.
dodgers, handing over suspected insurgents to the authorities, and other low-level responsibilities. Militias were constantly rotated to prevent them from growing too close to the local community. Any sign of independence or autonomy on the part of the NDB brought harsh recriminations: In Badinan, for example, a certain militia leader who had refused to move his forces from their home district was executed for insubordination, his body publicly mutilated, and his villages burned to the ground.  

At the same time, the Ba’th tried to offer positive incentives for the mustashar’s participation. For each soldier enrolled in his militia, a commander was granted a monthly sum of eighty five dinars ($255) to use as salary and upkeep. Since NDB service was accepted in lieu of regular enlistment, many flocked to the mustashar in order to avoid conscription. This gave ample room for bureaucratic corruption, as local notables inflated their rosters to get larger government subsidies but then kept the money themselves in return for protecting their clients from the draft. Thus, few NDB units could ever be counted upon in terms of force strength or motivation.

The state also encouraged its agents to pillage the property of eliminated villages. This was a well-established custom in tribal warfare and had been part of the incentive for militia-recruitment since at least the 1960s. But the Ba’th sought to imbue this customer with even further meaning by disseminating propaganda that denounced the PUK and KDP fighters as heretics (kafir) deserving annihilation for siding with Iranian Shi’is. The very word Anfal is an allusion to the Koranic battle of Badr, in which nascent Muslim community defeated the unbelievers of Mecca, providing an Islamic basis for

367 Genocide in Iraq, 44-8.
legitimating intra-Kurdish violence that was even more extreme than what had been practiced traditionally.

Still, the state’s demands of its agents rarely superseded the more immediate patron-client relationships between the mustashar and his local community. Both the patron and the client alike hoped that at least a nominal affiliation with the NDB would provide some protection. Indeed, during the transit to detention centers many pleaded with or bribed the NDB militiamen to allow them to escape. In some cases, an ultimatum was issued to families either to “return to the national ranks” by joining the NDB or phase deportation or execution. But this was a two-way exchange. Documents show that at least some NDB battalions threatened to defect if their villages were targeted by for destruction. Cases in which individual mustashar colluded with the advancing KDP and PUK were ubiquitous. Recognizing that even a committed member of the NDB might balk at knowing the fate intended for many Kurdish detainees, the army maintained the fiction that they were merely relocating people to the lowlands. In a 1988 meeting, Majid reportedly threatened to execute a powerful mustashar from Qader Karam who had helped deport thousands for questioning whether the state would uphold its offers of clemency and resettlement.

As the state brought to bear its bureaucracy and technology of coercion directly, the support of the always fickle NDB became dispensable. Just as the mere sight and sound of airplanes had been sufficient to deter a generation of rebels in the 1930s, in the

368 Genocide in Iraq, 138-9, 161-6.
1980s the use of chemical weapons had a similar result. In the words of an Iraqi military intelligence report, gas “has caused casualties among the saboteurs, has terrified and panicked them, and has weakened their morale, forcing many to return to the national ranks.”

An insurgency that had been growing ever stronger for three years suddenly disintegrated in fear of a gruesome death by gas. The implication for the state’s collaborators was the same as for its challengers. As Majid said at a Ba’th party meeting in 1988, “I told the mustashars that the jahsh might say that they liked their villages and would not leave. I said I cannot let your villages stay because I will attack them with chemical weapons. And then you and your family will die.”

There were some nominal policies to show favor to those affiliated with the NDB, but they appear limited and haphazardly enacted. With such a power to destroy in state hands there was no need to be discriminating. This is not to downplay the thousands of NDB militiamen who participated or collaborated in violence. It is impossible to weigh the balance of acts of complicity against those of resistance. Rather, the point is to highlight the extent to which the role of militias became ancillary to the Baghdad’s control over Kurdistan. Much like the NG and PRF, the agents of NDB proved erratic during crisis and were thus abandoned by their state sponsor.

Despite its disappointment of the central government, Kurdish leaders found ways to use the NDB to their own advantage after the war. As the Iraqi army was decimated

371 Genocide in Iraq, 75.
372 See the instructions to only resettle only the mothers—as opposed to the entire families—of Kurds whose fathers, sons, or husbands served either as soldiers or in the NDB. See First Corps instruction, September 16, 1987, in Bureaucracy of Repression, 78-82.
by U.S. airstrikes and ground assaults in 1991, many mustashar joined the resurgent opposition. In some cities, NDB commanders negotiated the surrender of local army garrisons, effectively securing their position as local power-brokers before the anticipated “liberation” by KDP forces. An estimated force of 80,000 men defected. In other places, though, violence turned internecine, with loyalist NDB commanders holding-out against KDP advancement. Tribal feuds and revenge killings were rampant as Saddam’s army re-grouped and re-took much of the southern Kurdistan.\footnote{373} This coda to the NDB seemed to validate the predictions by Iraq’s own chief of staff in the 1980s that arming Kurdish tribes would form the kernels of a Kurdish army.\footnote{374}

\textbf{C- Army and Militia in the Era of “High” Ba’thism, 1968-1991}

The time from the Ba’th seizure of power in July 1968 until Iraq’s defeat in the 1991 Gulf War can be characterized as the period of “high” Ba’thism. This era was characterized by two seemingly contradictory trends. On one hand, there was an exponential intensification of the state’s bureaucratic hold over coercion through the army, the RG, and various overlapping intelligence services. On the other hand, control over these institutions came to rest in the hands of a regime comprised nearly exclusively by Saddam Husayn and his kinsmen from Tikrit. Implanting this patrimonial core in an expanding bureaucratic state institution gave the Ba’th regime levels of power and


control untold in Iraqi history. Among the most important and novel elements of the Ba’th’s grasp on power was its subordination of the military. The establishment of the Popular Army (PA) seemed the pinnacle of this party domination. A successor to the defunct NG, the PA offered the party access to the means of violence circumventing the state’s bureaucratic infrastructure. From its inception of 75,000 people to its expansion during the Iran-Iraq war to nearly one million, the PA promised to rival the regular army. Just like the PRF, the NG, and the NDB, however, the militia’s organizational capacity misfit the tasks that state set for it. In an environment of high regional threat, this decentralized, lightly-armed, and poorly-trained force had to be replaced by a centralized force that could protect the rulers and the state alike.

After being outmaneuvered and overpowered by their military co-conspirators in 1958 and 1963, the Ba’th clique that led the July 1968 coup intended not only to seize power, but to hold onto it. In addition to the now de rigueur post-takeover purges of the top military echelon, the Ba’th went further and installed some 3,000 political commissars to monitor military units. These commissars were directly answerable to Saddam Husayn, then head of the party’s internal security and a cousin of the leading coup-plotter, General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. However, the Ba’th’s early ambitions for a more thoroughgoing transformation, including establishing an alternative armed force

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under the interior ministry, or even replacing the army with a reconstituted party militia, were tabled for fear of weakening Iraq’s defenses.  

Indeed, the new regime faced constant pressure from a myriad of external sources. As early as 1969, Iran seized the opportunity of yet more chaos in the Iraqi ranks to abrogate its concessions on the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq responded by moving troops toward Kuwait, ostensibly to defend it against Iranian invasion but practically to assert its claim access the Gulf. A year later, during the infamous 1970 “Black September” in Jordan, Iraq threatened that it would use its 12,000-man contingent in Jordan, a vestige of the 1967 war, to support the Palestinian cause, but then failed to budge from the barracks. General Hardan at-Tikriti, who was made the scapegoat for failing to aid fellow Arab revolutionaries, claimed he had only acted prudently given Jordan’s military superiority and the need to husband Iraq’s military resources for the Kurdish and Iranian fronts. The close security relationship between Israel and Pahlavi Iran in the 1970s increased Iran’s sense of regional vulnerability. In October 1973, Iraq tried rushed a 60,000 man expeditionary force to the Syrian. Already suffering from a ten day non-stop journey without adequate trucks and tank-transporters and hampered by a lack of coordination with Syrian forces, Iraq lost 480 men, 111 tanks, and twenty-six aircraft before withdrawing with equal haste. 

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376 Khalil 29-32; Sluglett & Sluglett, 113-8.  
378 Marashi and Salama, 117; Sluglett & Sluglett 133; Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, Iran and Iraq at War (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989), 21.  
379 Marashi and Salama, 120-1; Pollack 167.
The shortcomings apparent in the 1973 October War spurred new interest in finding ways to strengthen the army without empowering it to become a political challenger to the regime itself. The 1974 Ba’th Party congress implemented a two-pronged strategy: On one hand, the windfall of oil revenue gained following 1973 was funneled into force modernization and expansion, particularly in critical areas of logistics, anti-aircraft defense, and reconnaissance. Conscription was enforced with greater alacrity, doubling the army’s size to 240,000 men. In the 1970s, Iraq became one of the world’s leading arms importers, acquiring 1,600 Soviet tanks (including advanced T-72s), Brazilian armored troop carriers, French Mirage fighters, Italian frigates, anti-aircraft missiles and batteries, and a host of other advanced weaponry. At the same time, Iraq also initiated the purchase of a French nuclear reactor to jumpstart its nascent nuclear weapons program and significantly expanded its chemical weapons capability with the help of West German firms. At the same time, the Ba’th military commissariat strengthened its hold over the institutions of coercion. Careful recruitment through the Tikriti cabal ensured that only those from within the community gained admission to the military academies or senior commands. All non-Ba’thi political activity was banned within the ranks. While the officer corps remained lavishly paid,

officers were kept away from key positions of economic control, such as the oil ministry and its adjuncts.\footnote{Email correspondence with Amy Jaffe, Rice University, April 3, 2008.}

Alongside of these efforts of political inoculation, by the mid-1970s the Ba’th had also created an entirely parallel force structure which would serve as the party’s counterweight to the army. While seemingly a reincarnation of the NG, the new PA was based on a more ambitious ideological vision of transforming all of Iraq’s citizens into a “fighting people” (\textit{ash-sha’ab al-muqatila}).\footnote{Taha Yasin Ramadhan, \textit{Al-Jaysh ash-Sha’bi wa at-Tajriba an-Namuthaj} [The Popular Army and Exemplary Operation], (Baghdad: Popular Army General Command, 1987), 48-52; For an analysis of the ideological discourse surround the PA, see Bengio 150-2.}

In his memoirs, the first head of the PA, Taha Yasin Ramadhan, described the PA’s unique role, emphasizing that such a part-time civilian mobilization program was necessary to counter neighboring Iran and Turkey’s larger population bases while avoiding a drain on the economy.\footnote{Ramadhan, 62.}

As the Ba’th party incorporated new recruits into its tiered-membership system, full-party membership (the highest standing) was removed as a requisite for joining the PA. The ranks swelled from 75,000 to over 250,000 by 1980. As if to emphasize the significance of this new party organ, Saddam Husayn (who had no actual military experience) was named a PA field marshal in 1976.\footnote{Batatu 1094-5; Sluglett & Sluglett 184-5, 206-7; Khalil 31}

Unlike the PRF, to which the PA was explicitly compared in Ba’th publications, the new militia functioned entirely outside of the army’s purview. The smallest PA unit (\textit{mujtama’}) consisted of fifteen armed members under the leadership of a trusted local Ba’th cadre. While nominally supposed to respect the orders of ranking army officers,
the chain of command went through the political commissars up to the deputy regional party head and then to regional Ba’th party commanders, not than the generals at the battalion or division levels.\footnote{Ramadhan, 121-6.} Similarly, the PA used Cuban advisors to set up its own training programs, comprised primarily of few hours of light-weapons drills and heavy doses of political education. Unlike the PRF, PA personnel kept their weapons at home, giving the force a true autonomy.\footnote{Khalil 31; Marashi and Salama 125-6; Wagner, 73; Bengio 151.} At least as important as the military mission, though, was the initial conception of the PA as institution of ideological conversion, or, as Ramadhan called it, building the “trust of the people.”\footnote{Ramadhan, 56.} The 1977 first edition of the PA’s glossy, full-color official magazine, \textit{Jaysh ash-Sha’b}, bears the striking image of a woman wearing the PA’s uniform striding with the Iraqi flag, a rifle slung over her back, flanked by a handful of similarly armed men. Women’s empowerment was a constant theme in the magazine and in Ramadhan’s memoirs, cited as proof of the Ba’th’s progressivism.\footnote{See Ramadhan, 36-45.} Indeed, the first edition of \textit{al-Jaysh ash-Sha’bi} seems far more interested in demonstrating these credentials—with articles on the triumphs of popular armies in China, Algeria, and Palestine, on the Ba’th party’s social reform, on inter-Arab cooperation, and an extended analysis of the SALT-II negotiations—than discussing practical military issues.\footnote{\textit{Al-Jaysh al-Shabi}, No. 1 (July 1977).}
The Iran-Iraq war was the ultimate test of the PA’s model—a test that the PA utterly failed.\textsuperscript{392} Iraq’s initial attack into Iran’s oil-rich southern province of Khuzestan in September 1979 was intended as a limited operation. Saddam hoped to exploit Iran’s post-revolutionary weakness by seizing enough Iranian territory to force Iran to relinquish its recent gains on the Shatt al-Arab and cease inciting Shi’i rebellion. While the strategic logic was reminiscent of Egypt’s 1973 invasion of Sinai, Iraq’s war plan was modeled on a colonial British contingency of invading Khuzestan and then driving through the Zagros. The initial invasion force of 70,000 soldiers and 2,000 tanks forded the Shatt al-Arab but had little instruction about its targets or routes and quickly bogged down.\textsuperscript{393}

Within months, it was clear that Saddam had underestimated Iran’s strength and resiliency, and, reciprocally, overestimated his own. As hopes for a speedy victory evaporated, PA units—whose duties had initially been limited to manning anti-aircraft batteries and rooting out domestic opposition—were dispatched to fill the lines. The first 35,000 PA fighters were transferred to the front as early as November 1979.\textsuperscript{394} As Pollack summarizes, the PA proved “incapable of standing up to the Iranians and were the favorite target of Iranian assaults. As a result, the Iranians usually were able to push through the gaps or around the flanks of Iraqi defensive lines.”\textsuperscript{395} In April 1982, Saddam authorized his commanders to undertake a strategic withdrawal. The regular army was

\textsuperscript{392} Ramadhan’s analysis describes the war fighting both as both a “difficult” and “great” test of the PA. Predictably, his assessment vindicates the PA’s performance in the war. Ramadhan, 28, 59.
\textsuperscript{394} Marashi and Salama, 132
\textsuperscript{395} Pollack 201.
able to coordinate aircraft and artillery fire to cover its retreat but the poorly trained and ill-equipped PA crumbled, with thousands simply surrendering. Saddam judged the PA a “burden to the regular army because of the enemy’s ability to appear in the rear.” The army high command resented the PA as a collection of unfit amateurs.396

The PA’s separate command structure and low level of training was considered an obstacle to coordination between it and the regular army. By 1980 the PA began receiving heavy weapons, including artillery and anti-aircraft.397 By 1981, army officers had replaced the PA commanders and the entire brigade structure was subjugated within the army’s divisional hierarchy.398 The PA magazine no longer hosted extensive theoretical discussions of Maoist doctrine or geo-political affairs. Rather, it offered crude and often racist anti-Persian propaganda interspersed with sections devoted to practical “military lessons” (ad-dirasat al-‘askariyya). These included discussion of the efficacy of combined air-armor operations derived, ironically, from an analysis of the Israel Defense Force. Other articles explained “military culture” (ath-thaqafa al-‘askariyya) to the PA militiamen, including the various technical terms for armored vehicles, missiles, and other weapons, with a side bar explicitly urging all PA members to observe military orders.399

398 Pollack, 201, 207-8.
399 Al-Jaysh ash-Sha’bi, No. 8 (February 1981). Unfortunately, due to the incomplete nature of Library of Congress’ collection of this journal, it is impossible to thoroughly analyze changes in official discourse of the PA overtime. It suffices to note that this sporadic collection of journals continues this trend into the late 1980s.
With an estimated thirty-five percent of the workforce under arms, severe labor shortages, and the rapidly depleting foreign reserves, Saddam began demanding greater sacrifices of all Iraqi citizens. Saddam complained that university students—who enjoyed exemption from conscription—“lacked enthusiasm” for the war and urged them to join the PA instead. As the PA began inducting students, women, pensioners, and non-Ba’thists, its ideological commitment and *esprit de corps* became diluted. Whereas tens of thousands had flocked to join the PA in the late 1970s, desertion had become rampant by 1984 and people came to re-dub the PA as the “Un-Popular Army.” The PA reportedly raided Baghdad’s working class districts for forced conscripts.400

The pressure of combat forced Saddam and the Ba’th to abandon plans to use a mass-mobilizing party militia. Despite having obtained unrivaled domestic supremacy by the late 1970s, the Ba’th could not rely on a military organization that proved a liability in external conflict. The PA had to be re-equipped, re-organized, and subordinated within Iraq military command hierarchy. By war’s end in 1988, the PA numbered nearly one million people, but had become an essentially hollow institution within the party.401 Ultimately, both the problems of control and efficacy were solved by the state’s returning to the model of the praetorian guard and redoubling its efforts to build up the RG. In 1979, the RG was little but the rump of the 20th Brigade, placed

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under the command of trusted officers from Tikrit. By 1980, however, it had been expanded and dispatched to the brutal urban warfare in Khoramshahr. The RG grew to five full brigades, with the Tikritis comprising the upper level officers but drawing on the best fighters regardless of ethnicity or sectarian background to fill in the lower levels. As a result, the RG was no longer just a praetorian guard garrisoning Baghdad, but an elite combat unit serving at the front alongside the regular armed forces. The contribution of the RG was crucial to beating back Iran’s advances in the south and forcing Iran to accept a cease fire in 1988. In summary, rather than move to an entirely different model of coercive institution, innovation within the organizational structure of the centralized and conventional military allowed the Ba’th to solve the problem of controlling the army without risking state security.402

**D- Neo-tribalism and State Frailty, 1988-2003**

By the end of the Iran-Iraq War it was apparent that the formal structures of the Ba’th party’s penetration of state and society had begun to fray. At the same time, when Iranian forces threatened Basra, Arab tribes spontaneously mobilized to protect the city, declaring their hostility to Persian invaders and loyalty to Iraq. These actions providing a glimpse of the untapped power that tribal institutions held.403 It was not until the defeat and rebellions of 1991, however, that Saddam began putting this “neo-tribalism” to full use. Of course, the nucleus of the Ba’th since the mid-1960s had always been

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402 Marashi and Salama, 155-6; Pollack 219; Bengio, “Iraq,” in Middle East Contemporary Survey, 1984-85, 463.
patrimonial, with the party serving merely as a vehicle for Saddam and his Tikriti kin. But this element remained basically *sub rosa* for the first decades of Ba’th rule. The 1958 Revolution had declared an end to special tribal codes and rights. The first Ba’th communiqué of 1968 similarly disparaged tribalism (*qabaliyya*) as feudal, and in 1976, tribal and regional surnames were banned, thus transforming Saddam at-Tikriti into Saddam Husayn. Tribes were generally treated as a vestige that the new Iraqi man would outgrow with Ba’th tutelage. As Amatzia Baram and Faleh Abd al-Jabbar show, in the 1990s neo-tribalism entailed a radical shift: for the first time in Iraqi history, a regime openly privileged primordial tribal networks over rational and bureaucratic forms of statehood.\(^404\) In place of totalitarian aspirations, the Ba’th degenerated to an overtly patrimonial, quasi-sultanistic regime.\(^405\)

Immediately after the March 1991 uprising, delegations of tribal sheikhs were honored at the presidential palace, and tribal rituals like war dance, oaths, and eulogies gained prominence in the official media.\(^406\) Much like the establishment of the Kurdish militias, where tribal leadership was enervated, Saddam endeavored to elevate new and pliant sheikhs. Sheikhs were obliged to be loyal to Saddam and the state, and encouraged to provide adjudication under tribal law (including the reinstatement of honor killings to expunge shame), levy taxes, and ensure security in their territory. In return, they received


land, rations, diplomatic passports, and, most importantly, weapons. **407**

By transforming himself into the sheikh of sheikhs (and the Ba’th party essentially into the “tribe of tribes”) Saddam found a way to augment his meager institutional basis for social control beyond the demonstrably failed state and party institutions of the peasant and labor unions, the PA, and the even the army itself. Where police protection had broken down along with other public services, the citizenry turned to tribal heads for protection. **408** Tribal fealty became the primary basis for recruitment into the RG and intelligence branches. It also provided the backbone for the newly-established *Fedayee Saddam* (Militants of Saddam, FS), a militia force of 15,000 to 20,000 die-hard loyalists placed under the command of Saddam’s son, Qusay. **409** Tribes received rifles, grenade launchers, mortars, and even howitzers from the state. When a second insurrection seemed imminent in August 1992, southern sheikhs cabled Saddam declaring that they would “remain his men in times and crisis… their guns were at the ready….” **410** After American air strikes on southern Iraq in December 1998, armed tribesmen in civilian clothing were seen patrolling key installations in the capital. **411**

Yet this devolution of violence also undermined whatever bureaucratic structures and power the state had left. Police, judges, and other civil servants were subject to intimidation or threats as tribes attempted to expand their authority even over non-tribal populations. In Anbar province, tribes took to hijacking cars along the Amman highway,

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**409** Cordesman 47.
**410** Dawisha 62.
Iraq’s only open trade route. In fall 1991, an inter-tribal fighting over land killed two hundred sixty six people, prompting an official Ba’th newspaper to complain that “tribes were given weapons to fight the United States… not to fight among themselves.”\(^{412}\) As a result, a 1997 Ba’th Regional Command Council decree forbade the application of tribal legal principles against state officials in an effort to avert a complete supplanting of the state’s civil jurisdiction.

Saddam knew well the impact of neo-tribalism on the regular army and even the RG. While the elite Special RG and FS received more attention, the bulk of Iraq’s forces atrophied. The number of army divisions was cut, there were rampant shortages in material and equipment, and most units were kept at a mere seventy percent of authorized manpower. Even RG units were forced to accept older equipment to replace what had been destroyed in 1991.\(^{413}\) As tension with the U.S. escalated after 2001, Saddam’s hopes hinged on stymieing the American advance through asymmetric warfare. He secreted thousands of arms caches around the country in the belief that the Iraqi masses would rise up to defend him. In fact only the RG and a few thousand dedicated FS eventually took up arms and these were quickly dispatched by superior American forces.\(^{414}\) Though useful in defending the regime from an unknown number of internal coups, conspiracies, and popular uprisings for over a decade, neo-tribalism contributed to Iraq’s external vulnerability. Of course, in both 1991 and 2003, the U.S. held such dominance in men and material that chances of Iraq’s victory were slim. In both


\(^{414}\) Cordesman, 17, 96; Marashi and Salama, 195-6.
conflicts, though, the Iraqi military performed even worse than anticipated due to the competing demands of regime versus state security. Neo-tribalism contributed indirectly to Iraq’s susceptibility.

**Conclusion: The End of Military Centralization and Rise of State-Sponsored Militias in Iraq?**

Iraq’s military development can be summarized as a continuous effort by the state to amass control over the use of force. The process was initiated as Iraq’s new political elite used British-legacy institutions of violence to extend its dominance over Iraqi territory and wrest control both from the colonial overlords and embedded social actors like the tribal and religious leadership. This highly-centralized, bureaucratic, and technology-intensive military model became locked-in, propelled by the adopted norms of military elitism and the necessities of external defense. The 1958 Revolution seemed to permanently displace non-state actors’ access to coercion. Even when a powerful regime like the Ba’th tried to devolve violence, the pressures of regional competition forced a return to the path of centralization and state control. For a state that was born with no defense and nothing to be defended, Iraq’s survival over eighty years following its release from colonial control depended on a continual expansion of the state-held technologies of violence, achieving as close to a monopoly over force as possible. Yet, as the two successive defeats at American hands demonstrate, this alone was insufficient. No matter how daunting a regional power Iraq may have been, it remained a subsidiary state that depended, ultimately, on superpower protection to maintain its sovereignty.
The 2003 American invasion precipitated no less than revolutionary upheaval in Iraq. What began as an effort to remove Saddam Husayn in April became a complete dismemberment of the state in May, when Paul Bremer dismissed Iraq’s army. The exile coalition of Kurds and Shi‘is that followed American tanks into Baghdad thus assumed control of a state that was no longer a direct purveyor of violence, but acted much more like the late 19th century Ottomans, brokering between various embedded social networks. The absence of effective state authority contributed to a dramatic breakdown of security, leading both to endemic ethno-sectarian conflict and all manner of criminality. With the American forces too overstretched to provide protection, whatever stability and security that resulted was due to the volatile interactions between the occupying forces and a host of local coercive forces, from the Kurdish *peshmerga* in the north, to the neighborhood militias loyal to Grand Ayatollah Ali as-Sistani and other Shi‘a factions in the south.415

Like the British before them, the Americans badly underestimated the amount of blood and treasure required to occupy Iraq. They fell back on the familiar imperial solution of coupling aerial bombardment with on-ground assistance of local collaborators. In western Iraq, Sunni fundamentalism and tribalism coalesced to create an insurgent hotbed in 2003 and 2004. Many groups, like the 1920 Battalions, claimed inspiration from their illustrious ancestors’ resistance to the British occupation. With offers of monetary and political rewards, though, U.S. has been able to entice tribal

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sheikhs away from the insurgency, converting them into state-sponsored militias. Employing Saddam’s techniques of the 1990s (and the British of the 1920s), the provision of reconstruction aid and permission to re-assert tribal dominion over territory was contingent upon a sheikh’s willingness raise a paramilitary that would work with the U.S. in rooting-out radicals.⁴¹⁶

On one hand, the co-optation of warlords into an oligopolistic quasi-democratic system has brought some improvement in security. Even Muqtada as-Sadr, the Shi’i *enfant terrible* who rejected any compromise with the U.S., has joined the political process under pressure from other Shi’i factions and the promise of power in the new government. Since emerging amidst the security vacuum in 2003, his Mahdi Army (MA) has combined the elements of a populist political uprising with local networks of extortion. After waging an intermittent four-year war against the U.S. and rival Shi’i factions, the MA joined the ranks of the state’s proxies.

On the other hand, the success of cooptation remains tenuous and comes at the cost of state hegemony. It is impossible to monitor compliance among such a disparate and decentralized network of collaborators. On a local level, even the stalwart Kurds have been implicated for engaging in organized crime rackets and blatant violations of human rights.⁴¹⁷ Furthermore, contestation at the national level has ripple effects in the provinces, as seen with Sadr’s recent abandonment of the 2007 truce and renewal of fighting against a government in which his own parliamentary block is a member. Where

many Iraqi army units disappointed in its inability to dislodge and disarm the MA, the state has turned to mobilizing tribal networks, essentially buying the services of one state-sponsored militia to turn against the other. Just as the British engaged in a complex series of prevarications and self-delusions about the capacity of the new Iraqi army in the 1920s, American promises to re-establish Iraq’s armed forces have amounted to little more than reproduction of what Ahmed Hashim labels “official ethno-sectarian militias in uniform.” The irony of U.S rhetoric deploring the Shi‘i “death squads” and roving religious vigilantes is that these forces work at the behest of the very same political factions that the U.S. placed in control of the state. The very minister of interior charged with overseeing the reconstruction of the police force is a former member of the Da‘wa Party’s Badr Brigade, one of the main culprits in the string of extrajudicial killings. The new Iraqi armed forces remain functionally a collection of independent militia organized along ethnic or clan lines. The army lacks both a unified chain of command and a quartermaster system to distribute pay or equipment, has spotty training, and relies nearly entirely on the U.S. for transportation, air, and artillery support. There is little bureaucratic structure linking

419 Hashim, 303, 306.
the army to the police, civil defense, border patrol or other units. Every provision of
training or handover of weapons from the U.S. to Iraqi forces runs the risk of being used
in internecine fighting or against the U.S. forces themselves. Many Iraqis cynically
accuse the U.S. of blocking the reestablishment of a formidable Iraqi army to ensure
Iraq’s continued dependency.

A modicum of internal stability might emerge through this state devolution, as it
has in so many other parts of world. As Sami Zubaida reminds us, Iraq today is not the
utter artifice that it was when the British created it.

In Iraq (as in many other countries) it is the state that made the nation…. Economic and fiscal administration, education, employment, military
conscription, the media and social and cultural organization—all make the
nation a fact or “facticity” compelling on the cognition and imagination of
its members…

As oppressive as many of these institutions have been to so many, they have bound Iraq’s
fragmented polity together by collective interest if not by collective identity. While some
groups, particularly the Kurds, may seek far-reaching autonomy, none of Iraq’s potential

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421 Salama and Marashi, 219; Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a
422 Galbraith, 186.
423 Solomon Moore, “Secret Iraqi Dealings Show Problems in Arms Order,” *New York Times*, April 12,
2008.
424 Sami Zubaida, “The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq,” *International Journal of Middle

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‘statelets’ would be economically or strategically viable as independent entities. The competition in Iraqi politics revolves around control over the state, not its negation.\footnote{Yitzhak Nakash, “The Struggle for Power in Iraq,” \textit{Dissent} (Summer 2003), \url{http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=485} (Accessed April 23, 2008).}

Yet Iraq still faces the pressure of regional competition and external threat. Warned one senior Iraqi army officer, the collection of gendarmerie and militias dubbed the new Iraqi army may be able successful at counter-insurgency, but it is “a lame horse in the competition with neighboring states.”\footnote{“Iraqi Officer: The Current Iraqi Army is Closer to a Gendarmerie Than a Regular Army,” \textit{Ash-Sharq al-Awsat} (London), May 17, 2007, in Arabic; Abdel-Wahhab al-Qassab, “Rebuilding the Iraqi Army (A Preliminary View),” in Khair el-Din Haseeb ed., \textit{Planning Iraq’s Future: A Detailed Project to Rebuild Post-Liberation Iraq} (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2006); Andrew Rathmell, et al., \textit{Developing Iraq’s Security Sector: the Coalition Provisional Authority’s Experience} (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005), pp. 36-41.} Historically, a strong centralized army has been the mainstay preventing Iraq’s neighbors from preying on its internal divisions and thus turning Iraq’s various factions into proxies in an internationalized civil war. The impact of Iraq’s absent army is already apparent. In its perennial rivalry with Iran, Iraq clearly has become the weaker party.\footnote{Kenneth Katzman, “Iran’s Influence in Iraq,” Congressional Research Service Report, September 12, 2007, \url{http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/92947.pdf} (Accessed April 23, 2008).} For many Arabs outside and inside of Iraq (both Sunnis and Shi’is) this represents a betrayal of Iraqi nationalism and the country’s traditional role in the Arab world.\footnote{Mark Gasiorowski, “The New Aggressiveness in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” \textit{Middle East Policy}, 14:2 (2007); Vali Nasr, “When Shi’ites Rise,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} (July/ August 2006).} Even starker evidence comes from Turkey’s repeated violation of Iraq’s borders in pursuit of Kurdish separatists and support for the Turkomen population. While all of Iraq’s political leaders deplored these incursions, they were obviously powerless to deter them. Only U.S. diplomatic intervention prevented escalation and a possible invasion of northern Iraq. But the American presence
(just like the British), is hardly a perpetual guarantee of Iraq’s territorial integrity. If and when Iraq regains self-determination, the compulsion to resume the course of military centralization in order to compete and survive in a difficult regional environment will be as strong as ever. Thus, while the post-Ba’th period may see an interruption in the trajectory of military development, the level of regional threat remains a significant force mitigating against the success of any strategy of violence devolution.
Chapter 5

Wider Perspectives on Revolution, War, and Military Development

The case studies of Indonesia and Iraq are the building blocks for constructing theories about military development and the phenomenon of violence devolution. This chapter begins by summarizing the crucial insights identified in the paired comparison of Iraq and Indonesia and then situates each country case study in its regional context. This contextual analysis is important for demonstrating the further observable implication of the pathway theory, that individual state’s trajectories of military development are bounded by external constraints and can lead to region-wide military isomorphism. Finally, this chapter employs regression analysis across eighty-five late developing states (LDSs) to test the impact of different types of decolonization and different levels of external threat on military development.

Pathways of Military Development: Iraq and Indonesia Compared

The comparison of Iraq and Indonesia provides both a basis for judging the impact of critical junctures as the cause of divergent outcomes and for examining the common mechanisms driving military development. Both states shared similar histories of colonial state formation, with the incomplete and uneven elaboration of centralized state infrastructure. Only in Indonesia, with a sudden evacuation of imperial control, however, could the nationalists mobilize the networks of non-state actors that had resided in the underbelly of the colonial state. Indonesia’s history since the revolution has been a
series of efforts to harness these networks, building patron-client relations between the central state and local powerbrokers as crucial mediators in the distribution of coercive power. Iraq, by comparison, had no shortage of non-state militias in both the Ottoman and British colonial era, but they were purposefully excluded in the construction of Iraq’s coercive institutions. From its inception, the Iraqi military was organizationally centralized and reliant on advanced weaponry such as aircraft and armor, which obviated the need to integrate with the people.

Beyond this critical juncture of decolonization, these different organizational patterns became locked-in and self-perpetuating through a combination of cultural and material processes. The accretion of repeatedly utilizing the same repertoires for coercion enabled leaders in both states to identify and mitigate inherent problems of their respective organizational form. A comparison of these pathways is depicted in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Pathways of Military Development Compared: Iraq and Indonesia
For Indonesia’s decentralized format, this meant learning how to co-opt militias without allowing them to grow too powerful or autonomous. Using the revolutionary script, the Indonesian military saw itself as organically linked to society but also possessing a special mandate to guide Indonesia’s political affairs. For Iraq’s centralized army, it meant continually upgrading the infrastructure of the conventional army to apply overwhelming force while blocking individual officers from seizing control of the state. Norms of military elitism verging on hostility to civilians made it difficult for the Iraqi army to countenance sharing coercive power with non-state actors.

A crucial factor that prevented states from switching formats was the functional difference they faced in their security environments. Indonesia’s ability to rely on militia mobilization depended on avoiding interstate conflicts. When Indonesia did attempt to
project force outside of its borders, the results were disastrous. Indonesia could not have survived intact had it not been for the weakness of its neighbors. On the other hand, Iraq’s regional environment precluded such experiments in militia mobilization. External pressure exacerbated Iraq’s already fragile internal balance. The Iraqi army was tasked not just with intra-state suppression but with interstate activities as well. Even when Saddam Husayn and the Ba’th regime sought to allow limited devolvement in the guise of party and tribal militias, regional challengers forced them to return to state-domination of the use of force. Iraq’s military developed a dual functionality that enabled the state to confront both internal and external competitors through the creation of elite praetorian guard forces. Ultimately, both paths of military developed reflected not the intentional designs of the leaders as much as the inadvertent accumulation of competitive interaction between the state, its internal challengers, and its external rivals.

Pathways in Regional and World-Historical Perspective

Indonesia and Iraq’s divergent paths of military development are exemplary of the paths of military development seen in their respective regions. As argued in Chapter 2, Southeast Asia and the Middle East are linked in world-historical setting because of their entry into the international system during the mid-twentieth century exhaustion of European colonial powers. In both regions, states faced similar challenges of low legitimacy, economic underdevelopment, and ethnic fragmentation at around the same time. Yet Southeast Asia has seen only rare regional interstate war, only modest military

spending, and heavy reliance on militia and paramilitary forces to control internal territory, while the Middle East was almost the exact opposite, with frequent interstate conflict and conventional armies with high technology furnished at enormous costs. As described by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the authoritative source on Third World militarization, where the Middle East accounted for nearly half the developing worlds arm imports in the 1970s and 1980s, in Southeast Asian states “did not require—or were not granted—the most sophisticated weapons systems available.”

A rough sense of the differences in military development is apparent from Table 5.1 and Graph 5.1. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Middle Eastern states devoted far more of their national wealth to military expenditure than the Southeast Asian states. After adjusting for the exorbitant (and somewhat incredible) increase in Myanmar’s military budget in the 1990s, the trend continues into the following decade. As shown in Appendix A, these regions have seen very different types and severity of internal and external conflicts over the same period of time.

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Table 5.1:

Military Expenditure as a Percentage of Central Government Expenditure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
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<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>31.75</td>
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<td>31.9</td>
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<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>13.8</td>
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<td>11.2</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>21.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papua N. Guinea</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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</table>

Source: Solingen, “Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina”
The different trajectories of these two regions depended a great deal on the exogenous impact of the varying legacies of imperial retreat. In Southeast Asia, Japan’s four year imperium was brief but decisive in dislodging the institutions of social control installed by European colonialism. In Burma, Indonesia, and Malaya, the Japanese purposefully mobilized nationalist forces, long marginalized by the colonial powers, into paramilitaries that they hoped could serve as auxiliaries in the war effort. In Vietnam and

433 Source: Solingen, “Pax Asiatica versus Bella Levantina.”
the Philippines, anti-Japanese guerrilla movements emerged to resist Japanese domination. The sudden Japanese evacuation in 1945 left a vacuum for control in which both types of armed nationalist movements came to the fore to resist the re-imposition of European colonial control. The critical juncture of decolonization led directly to Southeast Asia becoming, in Milton Osbourne’s phrase, “a region of revolt.”[^434] Southeast Asian revolutionary movements graduated into the nuclei of the militia-based national armies.[^435]

The same moment in world history, though, had a very different impact on the Middle East. Unlike in Asia, there was no interruption of French and British control in the Middle East. The colonial powers took a direct hand in constructing the region’s militaries, whether states were under mandatory rule, as in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and mandatory Palestine, or imperial domination, as in Iran and Egypt.[^436] While initially conceived as tools for internal repression, by the 1930s fear of Italian or German advances into the region spurred new interests in integrating these forces into global


[^436]: Israel’s revolution of 1948 against British control could be considered the sole example of successful overthrow of colonial control outside the much later examples of South Yemen and Algeria. However, Israeli forces had already received significant training at British hands during World War II and thus represent a hybrid between conventional and decentralized military formats.
imperial strategies. By the late 1930s, Western military advisors were responsible for
training, equipping, organizing, and even leading much of the region’s armies. Although miniscule and ineffective by Western standards, the technology and techniques employed by the Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Israeli armies in 1948 represented a quantum leap in degree of mechanization, logistical sophistication, and centralization in the chains of command from that seen in the Middle East just two decades earlier.

Following the struggles of decolonization, there was no lack of potential casus belli between Southeast Asian states, including exigent territorial disputes, irredentist claims, personal and ideological disputes among elites, regime insecurity, and intrusion of superpower conflict. But in Southeast Asia the lack of centralized bureaucratic military infrastructure mitigated intra-regional threat. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Konfrontasi demonstrated how limited capability for prolonged interstate conflict on both

the Indonesian and Malaysian sides dampened what could have erupted into a major regional war. Recognizing the potentially destabilizing effects of an Indo-Malaysian war, or other interstate disputes, plus the common danger of domestic insurgency, regional states formed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967 to reinforce and codify norms of non-intervention. The ASEAN structure further dampening interstate competition to the extent that in Desmond Ball observed that despite “much fertile ground for regional conflict…. involving competing sovereignty claims, challenges to government legitimacy, and territorial disputes…. Most of these issues are unlikely to lead to interstate conflict.”

This pacific regional order reinforced violence devolution as a comparatively attractive organizational form for Southeast Asian states. Beyond Indonesia, the examples are numerous. Staunchly isolationist and drawing on a legacy of intermingling military forces with various local criminal elements, Burma continues to use violence devolution in a number of forms: During the pro-democracy protests in Rangoon in 1988 and again in 2007, the regime recruited criminal gangs to intimidate the opposition in the streets, giving the population the choice of accepting rampant anarchy or inviting the military to return to power and restore order. In frontier ethnic areas, the state rewarded defecting guerrillas by organizing ‘people’s militias’ who were granted access to

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government-controlled roads for heroin smuggling. In the Philippines, both Ferdinand Marcos and Corazon Aquino drew on the legacies of private armies to promote the formation of local vigilante committees and civil defense forces—invariably incorporating criminals and thugs—to carry out extrajudicial killings of communists and other regime opponents. In response to an ongoing Muslim insurgency, Thailand has sponsored a host of militia groups in its southern region, ranging from special rangers and several parallel village militias to Buddhist self-defense forces. Poorly-trained and ill-disciplined, these militias have been involved in an escalating series of attacks and reprisals with the Muslim community, as well as selling weapons to the criminal underworld or even to Muslims themselves. Malaysia, too, has seen its state-sponsored militia force, RELA (Ikatan Relawan Rakyat Malaysia), become implicated in brutal vigilante attacks on illegal migrants. While some members of the Malaysian government pay lip service deploiring RELA’s excesses, recent regulations have actually authorized RELA members to take up arms and shielded its members from prosecution.


for any action actions taken in defense of the state.446 In place of external war, Southeast Asian states have for the most part been free to focus on internal dangers.

In contrast, thanks to the inadvertent legacies of European colonialism, Middle Eastern states emerged that had both the capacity and the motive to engage in dangerous and intense interstate rivalries. Table 5.2 shows the spike in military manpower among belligerent states since World War II. The 1948-49 Arab-Israeli conflict set the contours for future conflicts. The Palestinian state was the first victim of this hyper-competitive environment. Unlike their Israeli adversary or any other Arab belligerents, the Palestinians were forced to rely on networks of locally-organized guerrillas similar to those used in their 1936 uprising. Not only were these forces unable to hold out against Israeli attack, but could not even mount a defense of a rump Palestinian state when the remaining areas of the Gaza strip and West Bank were taken over by the Egyptian and Jordanian armies.447 Since then, Middle Eastern states that could not or would not establish themselves as monopolists over force within their own territory became targets of predation from without. On one hand, civil wars and other forms of vacuums of state control—such as in Yemen (1962-1970), Jordan (1970), Lebanon (1975-1990), and most recently Iraq (2003- present)—invited intervention by neighboring states. On the other hand, as Yezid Sayigh points out, Palestinian forces exploited voids in effective state control to establish their own ‘states-within-states.’ The further along the road to

soverignty the Palestinian national movement came, the greater the impetus for *tajaysh* (army-making), the conversion of a loose-affiliation of guerrilla forces into a semi-conventional army.\textsuperscript{448}

**Table 5.2: Growth in Military Size of Selected Middle Eastern Countries\textsuperscript{449}**

<table>
<thead>
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<td>45,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
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<td>70,000</td>
<td>95,000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>80,000</td>
<td>100,00</td>
<td>255,00</td>
<td>447,000</td>
<td>434,000</td>
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<td>70,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>105,000</td>
<td>196,000</td>
<td>190,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Constant preparation for external conflict in the Middle East reinforced elitist attitudes about the privileged role of the military officer made it difficult to accept ceding violence to civilian hands. Like Iraq, Syria saw a proliferation of independent and competing militias and paramilitaries associated with unions and labor federations during the period of praetorian coups and counter-coups in the mid-1960s. Once tensions with Israel escalated in the spring of 1967, the Ministry of Defense used the external threat as a pretext to clamp down on these so-called ‘red guards’, forcing them to integrate under the command structure of the armed forces.\textsuperscript{450} The interaction between militias and the military can also be complicated by underlying inter-ethnic tensions. The officers of the


\textsuperscript{449} Source: Keith Krause, “Insecurity and State Formation in the Global Military Order,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 2:3 (1996); Figures on Israel do not include reserve forces, which can be between three to five times higher. See also, Nadav Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967* (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

Jordanian Arab Legion, recruited by Glubb Pasha from East Bank tribes closely-tied to the Hashemite throne, were deeply hostile toward efforts to incorporate Palestinian peasants into village militias in the 1950s. Hardly trained and poorly armed, these militias failed to repel infiltration across the Israeli border, contributed to the fiasco at Qibya in 1953, and were dismantled shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{451}

Just like Southeast Asian states, Middle Eastern states did not neglect internal security. But as Mehran Kamrava notes, party or popular militias, modeled on the Chinese Red Guard and other examples of “people’s resistance,” have fallen into disuse even among ostensibly revolutionary states.\textsuperscript{452} Rather than rely on militias, states created heavily-armed and highly-trained praetorian guards that paralleled the regular army’s structures. With ranks carefully selected from the ruler’s ethnic kin and chain of command held separate from the regular army, these units have the dual function of being able both to garrison the capital and fight at the front in a way that militia-based forces have consistently failed.\textsuperscript{453} Alongside these forces, Middle Eastern states have outlay billions of dollars to build numerically massive and technologically-intensive armies, requiring a level of military training and professionalism unachievable for a militia-based force. Only such forces, though, are capable of fighting the kinds of wars common in the Middle East. The continual re-armament, though, made these wars all the more likely.

The importance of external threat and timing for locking-in patterns of military development is particularly apparent when examining the aberrant cases of revolutionary Vietnam and Iran. Ho Chi Minh’s initial attempt to use the Japanese evacuation to resist colonial reinstatement was typical of Southeast Asia nationalist movements. What was exceptional, however, was the amount of international pressure the new state felt, first from the French, then from the combination of South Vietnam and its U.S. ally.\textsuperscript{454} The image of Vietnamese communist guerrillas blending seamlessly into the peasant population in a loose-knit, cellular structure is in some sense emblematic of the idea of popular mobilization and people’s war.\textsuperscript{455} But this was only the first phase of Vietnam’s military development. By the late 1960s, forced to contend with a retrenched U.S. military commitment, the North Vietnamese Army (PAVN) grew into a conventional force, making the move from ‘red’ to ‘expert.’ Especially after the decimation of the guerrilla cells in South Vietnam during the 1968 Tet Offensive, PAVN saw irregular paramilitaries as their weakest link. By 1975, when PAVN armor finally reached Saigon, the Vietnamese army had emerged as one of the largest and most advanced LDS militaries.\textsuperscript{456} After 1975, while militia structures were retained, their ranks were systematized and regularized under state control, eliminating the autonomy of individual

\textsuperscript{455} George Tanhan, \textit{Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Vietminh to the Viet Cong} (New York: Praeger, 1967).
units. The PAVN itself underwent technological upgrading, placing even more emphasis on building its conventional capacity for air, land, and sea maneuvers.\textsuperscript{457}

Within the Middle East, Iran’s path is no less exceptional, not because it faced external threat, but because of its revolutionary heritage. Similar to Egypt, Iran’s royal army (the \textit{Artesh}) was schooled by Western experts and advisors. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Khomeini sought a decisive break with the monarchal past. He attempted to dismantle the Artesh and replace it with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), comprised of veteran insurgents and guerrillas. Explicitly emulating the Vietcong, the new regime believed that these small, decentralized, but highly motivated militia that could protect the revolution at home and project it abroad. Dismantling its Western-trained army, however, left Iran vulnerable to its regional rivals, providing an opportunity for Iraq to launch a surprise attack in September 1979. The IRGC fought as guerrillas—valiantly but recklessly, without effective command and control for large scale maneuvers. Said one of the IRGC’s founders retrospectively,

\begin{quote}
when we wanted to send the IRGC to the battlefront, this force did not have the necessary military formation or organization. The IRGC was not created to defend the country’s border but rather the main aim for the creation of the IRGC was to defend the Islamic revolution…\textsuperscript{458}
\end{quote}

Only by ceasing its purges of the Artesh and re-training the IRGC in the conduct of conventional, formation-based tactics was Iran able to repel the invasion and avert

collapse. By the mid-1980s, the IRGC was no longer a conglomeration of militias but a fully-formed professional army on par with the still extant Artesh. The IRGC even began conscripting soldiers, rather than relying solely on volunteers.\textsuperscript{459} Iran had to extend full bureaucratic control over force in order to defend state security, but just as in Vietnam, the IRGC did not abandon its revolutionary lineage. Rather, it created another forces, the \textit{Basij} Corps (mobilization), to work as a civilian auxiliary militia for internal security. Organized locally and relying mainly of young men and pensioners past military age, the Basij is far closer to the IRGC’s first incarnation. As the regime has had to rely on this force for internal repression, though, the militias, too, have had to submit to more hierarchical and conventional chains of command, effectively being brought more directly under the state’s control.\textsuperscript{460}

The Middle East offers a far closer approximation of the Europe’s path of military development and competitive dynamics than Southeast Asia. This is hardly surprising given the respective origins of both regions’ militaries. In the Middle East, once patterns of interstate conflicts were initiated, they had a ratcheting effect on conventional arms build-up. States that could not compete, such as Palestine, Lebanon, and South Yemen, were occupied or eliminated from the system. Those regimes that actively sought to emulate more decentralized models were compelled by regional competitors to hold the course. Superpower involvement in the region introduced more advanced weaponry that necessitated even higher levels of military professionalization, hierarchy of ranks, and

\textsuperscript{459} Katzman, pp. 85-9; Sepehr Zabih, \textit{The Iranian Military in Revolution and War} (London: Routledge, 1988).

centralized command and control. \(^{461}\) In Southeast Asia, by comparison, states could forgo such commitments to conventional military force. Vietnam’s belated emergence in the late 1970s came too late to significantly disrupt three decades of peaceful intra-regional relations. As long as external challengers were muted, internal threats could be met by state-sponsored militias. The absence of interstate pressure in Southeast Asia is both a cause and a consequence of the consolidation of violence devolution in the region, while the presence of interstate pressure in the Middle East forced states to continually centralize, leading into an inescapable security dilemma.

**Militaries and Militias Around the Third World: A Statistical Test**

At both the country and regional-levels, case study logic depends on using world-historical timing as a control on comparisons. Arguing counterfactually, had Japan not advanced to Southeast Asia during World War II, national revolutionary movements would not have erupted in the wake of the Japanese withdrawal and the two regions would have resembled each other far more. But can these findings be generalized to other regions that do not share such a readily available historical linkage? Can the hypothesis withstand the test of external validity?\(^{462}\)


Quantitative analysis offers a complimentary ability to test hypotheses on a wider set of cases and with more a expansive set of controls for alternative explanations. To begin this analysis, I operationalize the concept of military decentralization in statistical terms. A useful metric comes from Morris Janowitz’s early study of LDS military development. Janowitz uses data collected in the early 1970s by the International Institute for Strategic Studies to bring to light the issue of violence devolution and the prevalence of militias. I use these data to construct the dependent variable PARAMILITARY as the ratio of the state’s paramilitary and militia forces to conventional forces. The higher the ratio, the more decentralized a state’s military.

Treating PARAMILITARY as a dependent variable, the case studies provide two key hypotheses: states that experienced violence at decolonization will be more decentralized (H1) and that states that engage in interstate conflict will be less decentralized (H2). The impact of internal war is less certain, since it appears that states can use both centralized and decentralized forces to fight insurgency. This leads to a further (null) hypothesis: States that engage in internal conflict will have no significant difference in decentralization (H3).

I use the dataset of the Peace Research Institute-Oslo/Uppsala Conflict Data Program (PRIO/UCDP) to code each country based on their historical experience with different types and intensities of conflict since 1945. I use the variable INTERSTATE_WAR to indicate the number of interstate conflicts the state has been

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463 Unfortunately, the collection method for these data is changed annually, making longitudinal comparison impossible.
involved in between 1945 and 1974 and INTERNAL WAR to indicate the number of internal conflicts the state has faced in the same time period. I use the variable REVOLUTION to indicate whether a country had an extra-systemic (decolonization) war, with a control dummy for Latin American states, whose decolonization preceded the scope of the dataset.\footnote{It is important to note that many historical works link the prevalence of militias and paramilitaries in Latin America to the legacy of its mid-1800 wars of independence. See Miguel A. Centeno, \textit{Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America} (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Fernando Lopez-Alves, \textit{State Formation and Democracy in Latin America, 1810-1900} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Robert H. Holden, \textit{Armies Without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America, 1821-1960} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).} When a state is involved in an internationalized internal conflict in its own territory, I code it as internal and when it is involved in such a conflict outside its own territory, I code it as external. In Table 5.3a I limit these independent variables to major conflicts only (those involving more than 1,000 deaths) and in Table 5.3b I include all conflicts.

Alongside these hypotheses, I add controls for alternative hypotheses or presumed causal factors. First among these is the impact of wealth on military development. Wealth acts through two mechanisms: First, poverty obstructs efforts to construct an adequate conventional military, making paramilitaries a cheaper, palliative solution to the challenges of both internal and external war. Second, wealth is a crucial factor predicting a state’s susceptibility to civil war, itself posited to be a factor compelling states to use militias. I operationalize the variable WEALTH as measured by the per capita GDP of a country for 1974 and proceed with the following hypothesis: \textit{poorer countries will be more decentralized than richer ones (H4)}. 
Second is the role of regime type and democracy on military development. Studies are divided on whether democratic countries are more or less likely to use violence devolution. At a conceptual level, democracy seems to necessitate a state with a definitive monopoly over force. Yet some deductive studies suggest that it is possible for “warlord democracy” to arrive through the interaction of competing groups.\(^{466}\) I operationalize the variable DEMOCRACY based on a country’s combined Freedom House score (reformatted to a 100 point scale, with higher numbers meaning more democratic) and proceed with the following hypothesis: \(\text{democratic regimes are more centralized than autocratic ones (H5).}\)

Third is the impact of terrain. Several studies show how mountainous terrain make states more susceptible to internal conflict by providing rebels with safe havens for operations outside the state’s reach. Again, the greater risk of internal conflict makes states turn toward devolution as a tool of counterinsurgency.\(^{467}\) I measure the variable TERRAIN using the data provided by James Fearon and David Laitin as the log of the percentage of the country’s terrain that is mountainous and proceed with the following hypothesis: \(\text{more mountainous states are decentralized (H6).}\)

Fourth is the impact of ethnic fractionalization. Few studies have been able to identify a direct impact of societal fragmentation and ethno-sectarian heterogeneity on the risk of civil war. However, many studies of military development and state formation

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468 Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.”
posit that societal fractionalization requires unique divide and rule strategies. The multiple overlapping and duplicate command structures in a paramilitary force constitute a counterweight to disloyal factions in the regular military and a bulwark against rural or urban insurgents. Hillel Frisch posits a curvilinear relationship between the societal polarization and the need for multiple militias: at low levels of fractionalization, the regime sets up competing military and paramilitary forces to block potential collective action by society against the state. In situations of extremely high levels of fragmentation, no mobilization is possible without yoking various sub-national identities into a synthetic national whole. Selected tribal, ethnic, or religious factions within the state must be allocated their own institutions of coercion, co-opting the power of local elites as wielders of power and authority within the boundaries of the state. I adopt the index measure of ETHNICFRAC developed by Fearon and Laitin, using both the direct number and its square, and proceed with the following hypothesis: states with extremely high and extremely low levels of ethnic fractionalization are more likely to decentralize than states with moderate levels of fractionalization (H7).

The results presented in Table 5.4a and 5.4b strongly support H2 on the negative correlation between interstate war and the use of militias and H3 on the lack of correlation between internal war and militia use. In all models, the correlation between the incidence of interstate war and decentralization is negative and statistically

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significant, while the correlation between internal war and militias is weak and statistically insignificant. Support for H1 on the impact of decolonization wars hovers around the cusp of standard statistical significance of ninety percent, but its coefficient proves consistently strong and positive as predicted. The impact of each type of war is greater when restricting consideration to major conflicts only.

Each of these hypotheses withstands the addition of controls for wealth, regime-type, terrain, and ethnic fractionalization. Examining these factors, other important findings become evident. First, as predicted, WEALTH proves to be one of the most important factor contributing to militia usage, with wealthier countries on average using paramilitaries less than poorer ones. Second, as predicted, the relationship between ethnic fractionalization and violence devolution is curvilinear, with states at the extreme ends of ethnic polarization using militias more than those states in the middle of the range. Third, there is no consistent correlation between democracy and military decentralization. Fourth, exactly opposite the hypothesis, more mountainous states tend to have more centralized forces than states.
**Table 5.3a**  
Multivariate Regression Using Robust Standard Error for PARAMILITARY  
Model includes major conflicts only

Dependent Variable PARAMILITARY  
P-values shown in parenthesis  
Stata 9.0

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<td></td>
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<td>(.650)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.863)</td>
<td>(.859)</td>
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<td>(.002)</td>
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Table 5.3b
Multivariate Regression Using Robust Standard Error for PARAMILITARY
(Models includes all conflicts)

Dependent Variable PARAMILITARY
P-values shown in parenthesis
Stata 9.0

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<td>10.09 (.329)</td>
<td>8.901 (.206)</td>
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<td>.060 (.806)</td>
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<td>-0.001 (.03)</td>
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<td>-3.115 (.042)</td>
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<td>-104.671 (.020)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>109.892 (.047)</td>
<td>112.403 (.020)</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>27.596 (.000)</td>
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<td>0.58</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.58</td>
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Conclusion

Due to the limitations of available data and of statistical techniques themselves, quantitative analysis cannot fully capture the complex, multi-layered, and temporally-conditioned process of LDS military development that is suggested by the case studies. It can, however, provide further evidence in support of the external validity of the pathway model. Both the quantitative and qualitative studies strongly suggest that while states facing internal challengers can effectively use both centralized, conventional forces and
decentralized, militia-based ones, the danger of external threat can only be met by conventional forces and necessitates abandoning militia-based models. As many Middle Eastern states have shown, intensive, centralized forces are fungible for confronting both internal and external threat, where militias prove too dangerous and unstable.\footnote{This argument is congruent with Michael Mann’s analysis of the difference between intensive and extensive coercive institutions and with the historical studies of the supremacy of European colonial armies over more decentralized, indigenous forces. See Michael Mann, \textit{The Sources of Social Power, Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Gayl D. Ness and William Stahl, “Western Imperialist Armies in Asia,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History}, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1977); Andrew J. Dowdle, “Civil Wars, International Conflicts, and Other Determinants of Paramilitary Strength in Sub-Saharan Africa,” \textit{Small Wars & Insurgencies}, 18:2 (2007).}

Statistical results are less dramatic but still compelling and supportive as to the historical origins of these formats. Anti-colonial revolutions and other forms of state breakdown provided the opportunity for non-state armed groups to emerge, which new national elites seek to co-opt forces into a militia army. On the other hand, states that directly inherited colonial armies shunned militias in favor of more conventional military formats. By embedding and clustering formats of military institutions in different regions, a concatenation of factors at the moment of decolonization broadly defined the options LDSs had in organizing force. The durability of these models in turn depended on the constellation of regional competitors surrounding the state, which compel hyper-militarization in some cases while enabling violence devolution in others.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Distant Battles, Historical Pathways, and the Future of Violence

Devolution

In this study, I explore how late developing states (LDSs) organize violence, particularly in their utilization of militias and other non-state actors as agents of internal control. Given that paramilitaries and militias have been implicated in some of the worst atrocities from the Balkans to Darfur to Rwanda, there is a new urgency underlying the need to understand this seemingly novel danger. To appreciate violence devolution as an institutional format for organizing coercion requires forsaking common assumptions about militias acting as mere subterfuges to protect violent regimes from censure or as symptoms of a state’s impotence. Rather, just as mass-killing is an instrumental choice made by state elites, so too is state’s reliance on militias a form of military development conditioned by strategic response to constraints and opportunities.

Following Eliot Cohen’s exhortations, I examined the impact of distant battles in shaping the way states organize coercion. Such efforts can not only contribute to a better

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472 Alex Alvarez, “Militias and Genocide,” War Crimes, Genocide & Crimes Against Humanity, 2 (2006). Alvarez points out that militias have been involved in many—if not a majority—of cases of genocide in the twentieth century, beginning with the Ottoman’s use of Kurdish irregulars to attack Armenians from 1915 to 1917.


474 Benjamin Valentino, Final Solutions: Mass Killings and Genocide in the 20th Century (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 29. In the course of his study Valentino notes the differing roles of military versus paramilitary forces across a number of cases, but offers not hypothesis about the relative balance between state and non-state actors in mass killings and at some points treats the two as equivalent.
understanding of the multiple forms that military institutions can take, but also help improve policies for safeguarding human and international security.475

**Historical Pathways of Violence Devolution and Centralization**

Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques, I traced processes of military development in two important cases, compared these processes between these cases, and tested hypothesis generated from case observation across a large sample. Such analysis leads from collection of specific insights to a general, but still historically bounded, theory about the conditions that produce violence devolution versus military centralization in the Third World. This theory has two discrete components relating to the genesis of these types of military institutions and their reproduction over time. First, decolonization is a critical juncture for setting pathways toward military centralization or decentralization. Second, different types of regional environments serve to inhibit or enable the perpetuation of state-sponsored militias. These two interlocking hypotheses have the potential to explain not just pathways of military development, but have wider ramifications for regional security dynamics and state formation processes, subjects that rest at the nexus of international relations and comparative politics.

LDSs that inherited European-modeled militaries or were surrounded by other states possessing such militaries were continually forced to assert control over violence within their territory. Conventional forces were fungible against challengers both within and outside the country. As I argue in Chapters 4 and 5, war indeed made the Middle

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Eastern state. The coalescence of military culture and military capacity bestowed by European colonial powers led Middle Eastern states to adopt military centralization and belligerent, competitive postures toward their neighbors. This external pressure had enormous externalities for state formation in the political and economic spheres, as Middle Eastern states were compelled to elaborate bureaucratic infrastructures that redistributed wealth in order to placate the masses who were forced to fight and die.\footnote{For political economic studies of war in the Middle East, see Steve Heydemann, ed., \textit{War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Michael Barnett, \textit{Confronting the Costs of War: Military Power, State, and Society in Egypt and Israel} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); T. Gongora, “War Making and State Power in the Contemporary Middle East,” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies}, 29:3 (1997).}

On the other hand, states that emerged after anti-colonial struggles in regions where external threat was muted, whether due to their neighbor’s weakness or large powers’ intervention, avoided the costly challenge of subordinating all local violence-wielders to a more centralized state control. Instead, such states could adopt the practices of medieval Europe, maintaining indirect control over local warlords and barons who commanded loosely-organized networks of part-time militia fighters. This latter trajectory of limited wars and limited states is visible across many cases and eras of imperial breakup and LDS succession. In addition to Southeast Asia, which I discussed in Chapter 3 and 5, Jeffrey Herbst’s study of Africa in the mid-twentieth century and Miguel Centeno’s study of Latin America in the mid-nineteenth century both identify conditions at the time of decolonization as propelling pathways of state formation that led to more fragile state-society relationships than those forged by European wars. In the
absence of external threats, states in both regions deputized the existing coercive institutions present in their societies and focused on the enemies within.\textsuperscript{477}

As with any research project that relies more on induction than deduction, testing, extending, and deepening this theory demands further historical observations. This means engaging in an encompassing comparison that explains the similarities and differences of states’ military development based on its temporal and geographic location in the international system, its relationship with greater power, its regional neighbors, and with their societies at large.\textsuperscript{478} To accomplish this, scholars must give up the common juxtaposition of the developing versus developed world. Instead, they must delve within and leap between the various historical waves of nineteenth and twentieth century imperial decline and state formation in order to identify differences and similarities among disparate countries and regions of the developing world.\textsuperscript{479}

A number of cases are prime candidates for such systematic integration into the global conceptual map of Third World military development. For instance, East Asia, the area of the “old” (i.e., pre-1941) Japanese empire, which included parts of China, Taiwan, and Koreas, has taken a trajectory of military development parallel to the Middle East’s, in which external competition forced states to assert and embellish their control

\begin{footnotes}
\item[478] There are only a handful of explicitly inter-regional studies, often using multiple authors or editorship. See Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young, eds., Beyond State Crisis?: Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); R. Doner, B. Ritchie, and D. Slater, “Systemic Vulnerability and the Origins of Developmental States: Northeast and Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective,” International Organization, 59:2 (2005).
\end{footnotes}
over the use of force.\textsuperscript{480} The most recent wave of state formation following the break-up of the Soviet Union is also a potentially important case. It was not the experience of revolution \textit{per se}, but the decrepitude of the Soviet’s Eurasian empire during the late 1980s and 1990s that led successor states in Central Asia and the Caucuses to inherit military models based primarily on militias, self-defense units, part-time fighters, and mercenaries, rather than on conventional armies. The difference between nominal states like Georgia and Moldova and state pretenders like Abhazia and Transnistria is not their respective abilities to establish monopolies over the use of force (none can even come close), but in the international recognition accorded to each. After a flurry of violence in the early 1990s, states and non-state violence-wielders alike have reached an equilibrium in which all lack either (or both) the capacity and the incentive to dominate the other. Instead, they engage in various forms of collusion to divvy up the right to apply violence at the sub-national level.\textsuperscript{481} Further inquiry into the manner and condition in which states gain sovereignty and are integrated into the international system will add to our understanding of the pathways that lead alternatively to military centralization or violence devolution and, in turn, to the interlocking processes that contribute to regional stability and to state formation.


**Policy Recommendations in the Face of Path Dependence**

Highlighting contingency and path dependent political outcomes provides cold comfort to policy-makers concerned with the specter of state frailty and failure. Obviously, history re-enacted to deliver a different outcome. Rather than deter speculation about policy options, however, focusing on the role of historical junctures and the impact of the international system in permitting or preventing the use of state-sponsored militias can guide consideration of the feasibility and desirability of various ameliorative measures.\(^{482}\)

In this vein, Louise Andersen and Brennan Kraxberger each provide useful and complimentary taxonomies of the responses of the international community. These can be grouped under the headings of peace-building, territorial restructuring, shared sovereignty/neo-trusteeship arrangement, and critical analysis/zones of statelessness. As illustrated in Table 6.1 below, each response takes a different perspective on state sovereignty and the role of international intervention.\(^{483}\)

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Table 6.1: Types of International Engagement in Frail States

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reinforce Sovereignty</th>
<th>Retrench Sovereignty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interventionist</strong></td>
<td>Peace-building</td>
<td>Shared Sovereignty/Neo-trusteeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-interventionist</strong></td>
<td>Territorial Restructuring</td>
<td>Criticalism/Zones of Statelessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The international community’s preferred procedure has been to attempt to diffuse internal conflicts while reviving state capacities to manage them. These peace-building efforts are commonly justified by humanitarian concerns and the (still largely untested) belief that internally fragmented states pose a danger to international peace. Often spearheading these efforts are offers by Western powers to dispatch aide, training, technology, and advisors to armies and police forces aimed at making these fragmented and dysfunctional state institutions both more effective in the deployment of force and more accountable to the rule of law. Actualizing state sovereignty over territory, it is believed, obviates the need for continued reliance on militias. But peace-building exercises generally, and security sector reform initiatives specifically, have been dogged by an absence of “political will” on the part of domestic actors to abide by the spirit and letter of reforms and the commitment of the international community to enforce them. Even after formal changes in security institutions are enacted, a repertoire of repression is rarely forgotten. The lines between the formal and informal spheres, and state and non-state actors, remain hazy, allowing security services to continue to outsource violence.

484 Andersen, 28-31; Kraxberger, 1060-2.
deployment. For example, prominent figures in Afghanistan’s parliament and cabinet continue to command significant independent military forces in various provinces. Columbian and Mexican police and army officers are known to collude with drug cartels. The very domestic actors charged as partners in upholding state authority play the subversive role of spoilers. The international community turns a blind eye or even promotes such state-organized crime in so far as it is deemed necessary to enhance stability or for other policy reasons.\textsuperscript{487}

My conclusions suggest that the current peace-building approach relies too much on carrots to entice leaders to exert direct control over force, when it really needs sticks that will force them to do so. Since the international community remains to loath to annul sovereignty, peace-building is fundamentally premised on the need to respect and abide by the wishes of the host states.\textsuperscript{488} International legal cannons are just beginning to take into account the dynamics of violence devolution in penalizing states and regime members for the acts of militias. Significant debate remains as to whether the threshold of culpability for militia violence should be set low, charging those states who enjoy ‘overall control’ in theaters for the crimes of non-state actors, or high, applying only when states have ‘effective control’ over individual agents. This lack of consensus leaves


\textsuperscript{488} Herbst, 264-6.
ample leeway in which leaders can dodge responsibility for their proxies’ acts.\footnote{489 Antonio Cassesse, “The Nicaragua and Tadic Tests Revisited in Light of the ICJ Judgment on Genocide in Bosnia,” 

Allowing the intensification of interstate conflict among LDSs, as Edward Luttwak and other proponents of territorial restructuring argue, would weed-out dysfunctional states and reserve sovereignty to those political entities that successfully approximate the Western model of development. The effect of such a policy, though, would be manifestly perverse.\footnote{490 Edward N. Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” Foreign Affairs, 78:4 (1999); Chester Crocker, “A Poor Case for Quitting,” Foreign Affairs, 79:1 (2000); Sergio De Mello, “Enough is Enough,” Foreign Affairs, 79:1 (2000).} There is no reason to believe that LDSs that enjoy near monopolies over force will be less reticent to use such power than those that share it with non-state actors. Despite their profoundly different organizational formats, both the Indonesian and Iraqi armies were able to engage in mass killings. Iraq’s possession of a centralized, conventional force, however, also enabled it to engage in foreign wars that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands more. Indeed, some studies suggest that, at least in the short term, heightened external threat make states more likely to attack
segments of the population deemed potentially hostile. In Rwanda, for instance, the mobilization of the Hutu-supremacist militias and the subsequent mass killing of the Tutsis was the last gasp of a state that had suddenly been denuded of all external defenses due to the loss of its superpower sponsors. Even as these Hutu militias ravaged defenseless civilians, the invading Tutsi exile army easily overran the country. In a sense, the cure for state weakness may be worse than the disease itself.

If the causes of violence devolution inhere not in individual states but in the opportunities and constrains the international system places upon states, then a more useful perspective would be to reconsider the system’s fundamental features, particularly the normative allocation of sovereignty and the material distribution of power. On a theoretical level, this entails recognizing the enormous and perhaps unbridgeable gap between LDSs’ assumed self-determination and their actual power to govern. Europe’s path toward strong states acting as monopolist over violence was a contingent historical outcome unlikely to be recapitulated elsewhere. On a practical level, it requires eschewing the conventional wisdom epitomized by Ian Loader and Neil Walker’s recent hypothesis that the state and its police are “indispensable to the task of

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fostering and sustaining livable political communities in the contemporary world.” To use Machiavelli’s terms, instead of “imag[ing] republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist,” it requires looking beyond the state for ways to provide security and order to society.

The primary alternative to the peace-building approach has been various forms of neo-trusteeships and shared sovereignty arrangements. These are premised on the belief that when a state falls too far short of providing order in its territory, the international community must ignore the pretensions of sovereignty and intervene directly. The United Nations and other international bodies have mechanisms to revoke a state’s mantle of self determination and authorize a mandate for international trusteeship. International peacekeepers replace the state’s security services, as legions of other international experts assume oversight for other state functions. These interventions, however, suffer from the same practical limitations as peace-building. If it is difficult to get domestic parties to take ownership over security sector reforms when the international community is offering advice and counsel, then resistance is almost inevitable when such reforms are imposed by mandate. Equally important, as shown by the British in the 1920s and Americans in the 2000s experiences attempting to build an Iraqi army in conditions of suspended sovereignty, intervening powers are liable to shirk the necessary investment of time, money, and personnel to make the thorough changes in military

institutions necessary to break patterns of violence devolution. More damning, they may then use the failures of reconstruction efforts as a pretext to continue to insinuate their own power over the subject state. Recognizing the potential that these schemes might be used by Western power to upend their fragile hold on power, China has led many LDSs in promoting a thick, irrevocable concept of sovereignty as a shield against such interventions. Thus, neo-trusteeship rapidly becomes a form of liberal imperialism, with all the pathological trappings of dependence, domination, and defiance of its predecessors.

Critical analysis is most skeptical of the necessity of sovereign states to accomplish human security and in turn invites, rather than resists, the relegation of states to mere minority providers of security. There is an absurdity in the international community’s resistance to recognizing and in turn dealing with non-state actors, given Charles Tilly’s now well-known argument about the indistinguishable nature of state-making and organized crime. Yet the fetishization of the state continues, as expressed recently in the U.S. Army War College’s official journal: “militias are most damaging [to American policy in Iraq] because they weaken government influence by providing unofficial (and effective) security in localized areas using illegal methods.”

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warlords, and other non-state entities actually provide much-needed security to society, then engaging these very forces should be the focus of the international community’s efforts, not resurrecting defective states.  

After all, in much of the world, the state itself is an artificial political framework. As Chris Clapham argues, and my own research demonstrates, some states lack the bare economic resources to build an effective bureaucracy that can oversee and execute the provision of security. Instead, individual neighborhoods, villages, and clans, rely on local indigenous elites and networks of violence-wielders to enforce order, with the formal state apparatus relegated to a distant and mediated patron. In my study, the case of Indonesia provides an empirical example of the viability of such violence devolution, as does the briefer discussion of Central Asia above. Vadim Volkov’s analysis of Russia’s “violent entrepreneurs” in the 1990s details a similar process in which non-state actors supplanted the state as the primary providers of security and were co-opted back under the state’s nominal umbrella. Moreover, the Iraqis’ experience with forced conscription, perpetual domestic terror campaigns, and international intimidation shows that even for relatively wealthy societies, the state itself can be the greatest danger to human life.  

Mancur Olson’s parable of the stationary bandit offers an illustration of the way order can emerge purely out of the self-interested action of societal violence-wielders. Studies of Africa, where states often have far less infrastructural power than Russia or even Indonesia, provide still further illustration. William Reno observes that many rulers can tolerate an end to a state monopoly of coercion and feeble bureaucratic capacity so long as they still enjoy a measure of popular acquiescence. For example, Somalia has been functionally without a state for over a decade, yet the co-optation of armed youth by tribal leaders, businesses elites, religious figures, and non-governmental organizations has been critical to establishing a livable order.

Entrusting violence to non-state agents is no panacea, however. Notwithstanding the theoretical proposition about the possible emergence of “warlord democracy,” Ken Menkhaus documents how reliance on militias reinforces patrimonial and patriarchal relations within society, retarding social development and modernization. Both Indonesia and Iraq today demonstrate the precariousness inherent in attempts to open political contestation when political factions can resort to cooptation of militias outside of the state’s sphere. To paraphrase Sukarno, mixing militias and democracy is the height of living dangerously. At best, such arrangements degenerate into closed bargains

among oligopolistic elites like Colombia, where each regional faction is permitted to maintain its own private militia in manner of a feudal baron. At worst, they collapse into civil war, as in Lebanon. Stateness—the ability to impose the rule of law equally on all citizens—remains a prerequisite for democratic consolidation.

Diluting the concept of sovereignty from an absolute to a relative and divisible dimension of statehood, then, offers a way to normalize the activity of non-state violence-wielders. Herbst advocates an expansive conceptual toolkit for dealing with state frailty that includes subsuming individual state sovereignty under the domain of regional and international organizations, annulling the sovereignty of existing states, and recognizing new emerging claimants to statehood. Such dramatic revisions to the tenets of sovereignty stop just short of Clapham’s prescription for abandoning the homogenizing norm of sovereignty all together. Rather, he suggests that the terra nullius, where the state’s reach is minimal and local warlords, militias, and barons maintain actual control, must also be acknowledged, admitted, and integrated into the international system. Furthermore, contrary to the logic of peace-building, territorial restructuring, and neo-trusteeship, a critical approach identifies a danger stemming from state strength, not weakness. For decentralized arrangements such as in Iraq, Lebanon, Indonesia, and Colombia to work, external threats must remain muted. International efforts, therefore,

513 Herbst, Chapter 9.
514 Clapham, 536-7.
should focus on ways to prevent states from building up military capacities that might threaten their neighbors and incite a spiraling regional arms race. Only the assurance of impotence can deliver the promise of peace.

**Conclusion**

Most of the attention of the policy-making community concerned with state frailty focuses on bringing the state back into the equation as a guarantor of human and international security. The state has been reified and idealized as the sole legitimate coercer, with all other manifestations of violence deplored as illicit or criminal. The anxiety provoked by Western powers that establish contractual relationships with mercenary forces like Executive Outcomes pales in comparison to the fear inspired by the ubiquity of LDSs who collude with tribal and ethnic militias, party paramilitaries, and other ill-equipped, ill-trained, and ill-organized forces. The loss of the presumed state-held monopoly on violence is commonly identified as a harbinger of anarchy.

I have shown, however, that the state-as-monopolist model is neither innate nor innocuous, but rather the result of military development that emerged through historically contingent processes of competition among imperial overlords, neighboring states, and society itself. Different paths of military development initiated at decolonization influence the viability of violence devolution or centralization, leading alternatively to regions characterized by militarily strong states constantly at the brink of war or militarily weak states that do not fear their neighbors but instead the sedition of the very agents they charge with deploying violence internally. While militias may be predatory,
they are frequently no worse than states itself. Thus, the future of peace and stability, at both the local and global levels, rests on the willingness of individual state leaders and the international community to give up the presumption of state supremacy and accommodate these non-state actors.
### Appendix A: Type and Intensity of Conflict of Time: Middle East vs. Southeast Asia

Source: Peace Research Institution-Oslo/Uppsala Conflict Data Set  
Bold indicates major conflicts; † = Conflict added by author

#### Middle East

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<th>Source: Peace Research Institution-Oslo/Uppsala Conflict Data Set</th>
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### Appendix B: List of Variables Used in Chapter 5

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<td>Square of Ethnicfrac</td>
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<td>Log of the percentage of the country’s terrain that is mountainous.</td>
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<td>PRIO/UCDP</td>
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<td>Dummy for states in Western Hemisphere.</td>
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