REPRESSION, RESENTMENT, AND RETRIBUTION:
HOW COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT STRATEGIES AFFECT POPULATION CHOICE IN AN INSURGENCY

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REPRESSION, RESENTMENT AND RETRIBUTION:
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ABSTRACT

Most of the research done on collective punishment in counterinsurgencies reveals that it does not work as a strategy. However, history is replete with examples of collective punishment actually succeeding in extinguishing insurgencies within targeted populations as far back as the Roman Empire. Accounting for these disparate population reactions comprises the central problem of this paper. This study focuses on one particular aspect of culture—the concept of revenge—and examines its effects on population choice in order to determine whether strategies of collective punishment have a greater chance of failure in revenge cultures. By analyzing the Malayan Emergency and Chechen Insurgency as case studies, this paper studies the concept of revenge in both cultures and draws policy implications for future counterinsurgency campaigns.
This thesis is dedicated to my family. To my father, Jose Roblejo, my uncles Rene and Joaquin Roblejo, and my aunt Maritza Roblejo for their unconditional love and tireless support.

To my friends in the SSP Spring Class of 2010, for their encouragement and candid feedback throughout the writing process.

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INTRODUCTION

"It is an inevitable consequence of war that the innocent must generally suffer with the guilty"—Major General James Franklin Bell, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, 1906-1910

Although the use of collective punishment against populations has been a mainstay of counterinsurgency doctrine throughout history and across the world, its utility for the counterinsurgent remains questionable. The majority of existing research done on the topic reveals that collective punishment and other modes of government repression do not work and may actually result in a backlash of violence that ultimately spells defeat for the counterinsurgent. However, history is replete with examples of collective punishment actually succeeding in extinguishing insurgencies within targeted populations as far back as the Roman Empire. Sometimes, collective punishment led to the punished populations actually helping the counterinsurgent root out the militants in their midst.

Understanding this variation in population choices begins with understanding a population’s culture and recognizing that there exists no “one-size-fits-all” mentality in counterinsurgency policy. Merely saying “culture needs to be understood” is not enough. FM 3-24, the manual that outlines US counterinsurgency doctrine, stresses the importance of understanding culture yet provides no guidelines by which cultural studies should inform doctrine. Given that a population’s choices are mostly a product of its mores and values, it is necessary to parse out the aspects of culture most applicable to the counterinsurgency environment being entered.

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This paper seeks to address what accounts for the disparate reactions to the use of collective punishment in societies by looking at how culture shapes those reactions and then drawing out the implications that follow for today’s would-be counterinsurgents. It will focus on one particular aspect of culture—the concept of revenge—and examine its effects on population choice in order to determine whether strategies of collective punishment have a greater chance of failure in revenge cultures. In doing this, it will also provide “guidelines on how to act” as called for in FM 3-24.4

This study begins by defining what constitutes “collective punishment”, “revenge cultures” and “collectivist societies.” Since the Malayan case study underpins much of the current U.S. counterinsurgency strategy by way of FM 3-24, section two will look at Malaysian-Chinese culture to determine whether it fits the criteria for a collectivist society and whether it meets the characteristics of a revenge culture previously laid out. It will then analyze how Britain’s use of collective punishment during that insurgency affected population choice and how the absence of a revenge culture allowed Britain to sustain a successful counterinsurgency campaign. Conversely, perhaps the most notorious use of collective punishment has been Russia’s campaign against the Chechens between 1994 and 2002. Russian failure in this case is often attributed to the extreme brutality it employed and the failure to adopt softer counterinsurgency approaches.5 Thus, section three will look at Chechnya’s feuding culture and analyze how collective punishment backfired and has led to an escalation of the conflict through the present. Finally, the concluding sections will summarize the findings, outline policy implications, and propose areas for future research.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE: WHAT MAKES A SOCIETY VENGEFUL?

Frameworks

Because the terms “collective punishment,” “collectivism,” and “revenge cultures” may be defined in a variety of ways, using pre-existing frameworks to ascribe meaning and measurement to these terms will allow for standardization of definitions between case studies and incorporate an effective analytic baseline.

While there is no official tabulation of the factors that are involved in the term “collective punishment,” it is generally thought to mean punishment of an entire group of people for the actions of a few individuals.6 The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines collective punishment as “all sanctions and harassment of any sort, administrative, by police action or otherwise” against persons that do not bear individual responsibility for criminal acts.7 However, in order to set the definition within the counterinsurgency context and help prevent against multiple interpretations of the data, this study will narrowly define collective punishment as forcible and deliberate actions directed at non-combatants in a society thought to be aiding insurgents.

Similarly, “collectivism” has myriad definitions within anthropology and is characterized by a number of factors. First, as Darwish and Huber point out, collectivist societies place strong emphasis on cooperation for the good of the society. Each member is considered an intrinsic part of the collective whole and, as such, refusing to cooperate is viewed as shameful or dishonorable.8 Second, sociologists Varner and Beamer posit that because the connections that

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6 Shane Darcy, Prosecuting the War Crime of Collective Punishment,” Journal of International Criminal Justice, No. 8, Vol. 1, 12
7 IRIC Commentaries on Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1), 8 June 1977, para. 3055
8 Abdel-Fattah Darwish and Gunter Huber, “Individualism vs Collectivism in different cultures: a cross cultural study,” Intercultural Education, Vol 14, No 1,
bind society together in these cultures are so tight, collectivist societies make strong delineations between in-group and out-group members. While in individualist societies people move in and out of social groups continually depending on how well a certain group is meeting an individual’s personal needs, in collectivist societies group membership involves emotional ties that link members permanently to that group engendering an “us versus them” way of thinking.  

Finally, because societal well-being is seen as more important than that of the individual, there is an inclination toward conformation to a set of norms or a code of conduct. Openly expressing opinions or beliefs that go against these norms is highly discouraged. Therefore, this study will look for an emphasis on community cooperation, existence of in-group versus out-group dynamics and conformity to codes of conduct in order to determine whether a case study’s society is collectivist.

Cultural norms in collectivist societies can also include a code of blood vengeance, in which seeking revenge for perceived wrongs arises out of a societal duty rather than an emotional response. For example, in Afghanistan the Pashtunwali code of conduct calls for badal, or revenge, against any person who has maligned someone else’s honor—even if the wrong had been committed centuries earlier. Hence, rather than viewed as an act of passion, revenge is seen as a way to restore social equilibrium in a community that either lacks a formal system of justice or where such a system is deemed illegitimate by the population. In her study on cross-cultural views of revenge, cultural psychologist Michele Gelfand notes that this is especially true of societies in which the good of the community supersedes the good of the

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individual—collectivist societies—because the in-group cohesion created by the characteristics of that culture perpetuate feelings of revenge amongst members of the community.¹³

Anthropologists Keith Otterbein and Charlotte Otterbein conducted a groundbreaking study which attempted to draw out the characteristics of a revenge culture. Building upon previous research on feuding societies, they posit that a revenge culture exists in societies with the presence of fraternal interest groups (localized power groups of related males), a historically high frequency of threats to a territory, and those having an absence of arbitration systems whereby wrongs are handed off to an uninvolved third party for mediation.¹⁴ The results of their study show that the presence of all three of these variables lead to a greater probability that a society can be characterized as possessing a “feuding culture.” Consequently, this study will build upon their work by using their framework to determine whether a society has a “blood vengeance” culture.

Scope of Project

The case studies investigated will be the Malayan Emergency between 1948 and 1960 and the Chechen insurgency between 1994 and 2002. References or similarities to other insurrections will not be delved into at length due to the space and time constraints inherent to this project. Second, this study will only analyze how collective punishment strategies affect the successful (or unsuccessful) waging of a counterinsurgency campaign based on population reactions. Moral or ethical implications of collective punishment strategies will not be discussed. Third, this will not be a study about population-centric versus enemy centric counterinsurgency strategies. Collective punishment is a particular tactic found within the

enemy-centric school of counterinsurgency. This paper will only look at how collective punishment triggers cultural mores that affect how a population reacts. Finally, this study will not seek to parse out the differences between terrorism and insurgency. In Malaya and Chechnya, the insurrections involved used both irregular tactics and a coordinated propaganda campaign designed to win over popular support. As these meet the characteristics for an “insurgency” as laid out by Bruce Hoffman, both campaigns will be considered as such.

THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY: 1948-1960

After the end of World War II and the subsequent withdrawal of Japanese forces from Malaya, the Malayan economy fell into disarray. Low wages, inflation and skyrocketing unemployment led to strikes and riots against the returning British protectorate government. In response, the British indiscriminately arrested and deported thousands which contributed to increasing resentment and a latent militancy amid the population. In June 1948, the British declared a state of emergency in Malaya and outlawed all parties with communist sympathies, including the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Its leader, Chin Peng fled into the countryside and formed the Malaysian Races Liberation Army (MRLA) which in turn unleashed a guerrilla campaign aimed at the country’s tin and rubber plantations—industries valuable to both the Malayans and the British in terms of their economic rebuilding potential following WWII.

The MRLA elicited most of its support and provisions from the nearly half million strong Chinese squatter population living in the rural areas of Malaya. Understanding that their support was crucial to the MRLA’s survivability, the squatters became the focus of British
counterinsurgency strategies and the fulcrum upon which the success or failure of the insurgency was said to rest.\textsuperscript{20} The following sections will explore Malayan-Chinese collectivism, their conception of revenge, and then turn to an analysis of their reaction to British collective punishment tactics.

\textit{Malayan-Chinese Collectivism}

The Chinese settled in Malaya in a series of waves between the 15\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Most came as traders seeking improved economic opportunities but eventually ended up working in the British tin mines and rubber plantations located in western Malaya.\textsuperscript{21} Despite identifying with, and seeking to preserve, Chinese culture and traditions, the Malayan Chinese did not see themselves as a part of a greater Chinese Diaspora.\textsuperscript{22} For the great majority of these immigrants, the geography of their settlement corresponded roughly to their Chinese dialectical origin.\textsuperscript{23} This resulted in five broad categories of “Malaysian Chinese”: Cantonese, Hakkas, Teochews, Hainanese and Amoy.\textsuperscript{24} Given this pattern of settlement, their collectivism is exhibited at the village or town level in which they reside rather than as a greater “Chinese national collectivism.” This absence of a common national identity was exacerbated by the migration of some communities into the rural areas of Malaya occasioned by the Japanese invasion and the world-wide drop in tin and rubber prices following WWII.\textsuperscript{25}

Within these communities there is a strong inclination toward social and economic cooperation. Agricultural families often assist each other in planting or harvesting their crops and the fostering of a sense of community unity takes precedence over individual needs or

\textsuperscript{20} Nagl, John A., \textit{Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 75
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 27
\textsuperscript{24} Teo Kok Seong, 23
\textsuperscript{25} Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, \textit{The Chinese in Malaysia}, (New york: Oxford University Press, 2000), 259
wants. Although some groups have adopted local Malay traditions and have even intermarried with the Malaysian population, the Chinese attitude toward the native Malay is, on the whole, derisive and they see themselves as a culturally superior race. The trend during the latter half of the 19th and 20th centuries has been toward the preservation of a “pure” Chinese culture. This is most evident in the Malaysian-Chinese commitment to the retention of an entirely Chinese educational system—one that teaches primarily in Mandarin and is funded and built by all the members of a community—no matter how rich or poor. Another illustration of this wish to remain separate from the Malaysian population is the Chinese communities’ adherence to the Chinese lunar calendar rather than the Western calendar native Malayans go by. All of these factors contribute to the formation of a strong in-group/out-group mentality in the Malayan-Chinese communities.

These communities also emphasize conformity to cultural norms and mores—especially when it comes to the preservation of Chinese culture. Intermarriages between Chinese and native Malay, for example, are looked upon with disapproval by both the family and community at large and may even lead to ostracization. Breaking away from traditional roles prescribed to female and males is similarly frowned upon. Thus, given these societal pressures to conform to cultural norms, their emphasis on community over individual and their belief in Chinese exceptionalism it is evident that Malayan-Chinese communities are collectivist in nature; albeit at the village or community level.

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26 Carstens, 78
27 Teo Kok Seong, 3 (footnote 5)
28 Ibid, 4
29 Hing and Beng, 228
30 Carstens, 71
32 Carstens, 72
Revenge in Malayan Chinese Culture

Another cultural norm to which the Malayan Chinese ascribe is the placing of greater value on paternal, rather than maternal, kinship links. In keeping with Chinese tradition, sons are expected to support their elderly parents and settle near them once they marry; women are to become part of the husband’s family upon marriage, settling where he settles. This patrilocal system of residence illustrates that related males tend to live in close proximity to each other—a concept termed “fraternal interest groups” by anthropologists and one of the three criteria for a “revenge” culture as characterized by Otterbein and Otterbein. The presumption is that groups of related males living close to one another will look after each others’ interests and if those interests are threatened they will resort to violence in order to protect them.

However, their second criterion, absence of third party mediation, does not apply in the Malayan Chinese case. Although the British attempted to implement a formal Malayan judicial system, the myriad traditional and familial laws found in the Malayan Chinese culture have made it difficult to use. Consequently, Chinese villages in Malaysia use local leaders and societies to serve as arbiters in community disputes and, if necessary, as mediators between the villages and the Malaysian government. The presence of a system by which to air one’s grievances makes it less likely that a society will be vengeful because legitimate political authorities can prevent relatives from taking revenge.

The final criteria, a history of repeated attacks on a society, is also absent in the case of the Malayan Chinese. Although their relation with the Malayan natives has been turbulent at

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times, the Malayan Chinese have generally lived peacefully amongst the population in both rural and urban areas.\textsuperscript{36} They were more interested in establishing a social and material livelihood then they were in establishing a political order.\textsuperscript{37} The Japanese occupation in the 1940s brought the Chinese community under some persecution stemming from ethnic tensions, but it was of short duration as the Japanese ultimately realized the Malayan Chinese’s value in maintaining the country’s economy. As the war continued and Japanese power dwindled, Japanese repression decreased significantly.\textsuperscript{38}

Since the only criterion to be satisfied in the Malayan Chinese culture is the presence of fraternal interest groups, it cannot be considered a “revenge culture.” This determination is further reinforced by the fact that, prior to the start of the Malayan Emergency, no significant inter-ethnic fighting had existed between the different Chinese societies in Malaya or with the other predominate ethnicities on the peninsula (native Malays and Indians).\textsuperscript{39} Having established that the Malayan Chinese culture is collectivist and not characterized by “revenge,” an analysis of British collective punishment strategies during the Malayan Emergency and how the native Chinese reacted to them will show how the absence of the cultural norm of “vengeance” impacted the course of the insurgency.

\textit{British Collective Punishment}

Initial British strategies in Malaya placed a strong emphasis on “search and destroy” missions and encouraged the continual employment of offensive operations. Although this aggressive stance may be understood in the context of British martial doctrine at the time (just coming off of a conventional military victory in WWII), the continual over-reliance on such

\textsuperscript{36} Sharon A. Carstens, 145
\textsuperscript{39} Sharon A. Carstens, 145
measures eventually transformed into a predilection toward the use of punitive measures. Thus, large-scale arrests, mass deportations, burning down villages and indiscriminate shootings constituted the norm in British counterinsurgency strategies and grew more egregious as time went on. Chinese villagers suspected of supplying guerrillas with food or ammunition were shot on the spot, even if they denied the accusations. Guerrilla attacks on rubber plantations and tin mines would often prompt the British to completely raze the villages thought to be harboring the insurgents—with little or no notice to the civilian inhabitants. Revisions to the Emergency Declarations provided for increasing deportations and allowing the arbitrary use of collective punishment. Seeing that such castigatory measures only served to increase the insurgents’ numbers, the British began seeking other strategies. However, the soldiers’ penchant for using more aggressive tactics was not easily overcome and sporadic cases of collective punishment continued to occur.

In 1950, Lt. General Harold Briggs became director of operations in Malaya and introduced a new strategy. Recognizing that the people formed the insurgents’ primary means of support, his new strategy focused on separating the guerrillas from the population through a massive resettlement scheme in which the 400-500,000 Malayan Chinese squatters would be forcibly removed into new “villages” where the British military could more easily control them. By the end of 1951, close to 400,000 squatters were resettled into 400 “New Villages” throughout Malaya.

40 John Nagl, 67-68
42 Ibid, 165
45 John Nagl, 75
This new approach did not mean that British collective punishment had ended; it just meant that it was applied to a new strategy of population control. The New Villages were far from an improvement for the Malayan Chinese. Not only were squatters compelled to leave their homes and possessions, they were often left without their agricultural livelihood, as access to land in these villages was severely limited. The British also failed to provide for the basic health needs of the population. The British Medical Association claimed the New Villages were a “risk to public health” with a high potential for epidemics and implied that the colonial government’s strategy had been “unsupported by any medical plan and had little or no regard for health.”

The unrestricted searches, strict curfews and food rationing system created a concentration camp-like feel further reinforced by the presence walled enclosures lined with barbed wire.

The colonial government made efforts to improve the living conditions by setting up schools and community centers, creating access to medical services and even organizing Boy Scout associations. The camps saw significant improvement, although not across the board. Despite these changes, the number of guerrillas remained constant and the insurgents continually infiltrated the New Villages. British High Commissioner Sir Henrey Gurney noted the lack of situational improvement at the end of 1951,

“...the whole vast scheme of resettlement has now been almost finished and labor forces regrouped. MCP are trying hard to penetrate and are succeeding. If they are allowed to continue this unopposed by Chinese effort whatever, the whole of the Chinese rural population will soon come under Communist domination.”

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46 Lee and Tan, 260-261  
47 Short, 399  
48 Merkel, 38  
49 Nagl, 75  
50 Short, 302
Two days after writing this report, Gurney was killed in an insurgent attack. In January 1952, the British government named General Sir Gerald Templer as his replacement. Credited with coining the term “winning the hearts and minds,” Templer continued the implementation of Briggs’ plan with an even stronger emphasis on gaining the support of the rural populations. Under his watch, New Villages continued to steadily improve, the military and intelligence services underwent a significant restructuring and the insurgency finally seemed to be suffering real losses as the number of incidents per month steadily declined.\(^5\)

However, despite Templer’s renewed emphasis on the population’s well-being, the use of coercive measures to secure the population’s support persisted and even Templar himself used it as a means of curtailing support to the insurgents. Upon hearing of a village’s refusal to provide information on insurgents, Templer closed the schools, cut the rations in half and instituted a 22 hour curfew policy noting that while it “did not amuse him to punish innocents, many …are not innocent.”\(^5\) These visits to individual communities and the implementation of such measures for those found uncooperative became a habitual theme throughout Templer’s tenure\(^5\)

Additionally, the security forces still showed a preference toward the use of force. A report by the Australian Commissioner’s Office in Singapore noted that instances of police brutality and assaults were still commonplace by the end of 1952—a full year after Templar had taken control.\(^5\)

Clearly, the use of collective punishment permeated the Malayan Emergency from start to conclusion. The particular tactics varied in relation to how much control the British had over the population, but it never ceased to exist as a strategy on the whole. Although couched in

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\(^5\) Short, 472
\(^5\) Nagl, 89
\(^5\) Short,
\(^5\) Karl Hack,
terms of “winning the hearts and minds of the people,” the changes in British strategy in Malaya were designed to change the cost-benefit rationale of the population, not convince them to join the British-Malay cause. An understanding of how the population did and did not react to these methods will provide a clearer understanding on the motivations of the Malayan Chinese.

**Analysis of Malayan Chinese Reactions**

Although British resettlement and the subsequent efforts to improve the lives of the population in the New Villages is often heralded as a success in counterinsurgency, very little attention has been paid to the fact that the Malayan Chinese were very discontented with the situation in which they found themselves and were sometimes even openly hostile toward the British. In fact, a British resettlement officer quoted in a January 1953 article in *The Observer* expressed concern that some 75 percent of New Villagers were “choking with animosity against [the British].”

Even as late as 1956, reporting from the villages indicated that repressive means were still necessary to pacify the population. This seems to indicate that success of the British resettlement policy may be due as much to the cultural factors that facilitated Malayan Chinese acquiescence as it is to the shift toward more

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population-centric counterinsurgency strategies. Contemporary accounts of the Malayan Chinese resettlement highlight the increased economic, safety, and educational opportunities made available to the villagers. However, the negative reactions to resettlement from some villages seem to suggest that positive accounts from areas where the ideal conditions existed may have been extrapolated to the entirety of the undertaking. Only half of the villages had working schools by the end of 1952 and some settlers still did not officially own the land they live on, despite British promises to give the Malayan Chinese title to the land.\textsuperscript{56} The locations chosen were of poor quality, limiting the occupational choices of villagers who had previously subsisted by agricultural means.\textsuperscript{57}

Given this dramatic delay in the start of the “hearts and minds” campaign, it is interesting that the turning point in the Britain’s campaign seemed to start in the fall of 1951—well before Templer’s arrival and the true beginning of efforts to win over the population using a “carrot” approach (see Figure 1).\textsuperscript{58} This suggests that these efforts had at most secondary effects on turning the tide of the insurgency in British favor and that the true determinant in the Malayan Emergency was the ability of the British to exert control over the Malayan Chinese population.

However, despite growing Chinese restlessness and an overwhelming advantage in the population-to-officer ratio, research reveals no attempts made to strike back \textit{en masse} through riots or other forms of collective action. What could account for this lack of action? Malayan Emergency expert Karl Hack attributes this to the unique societal aspects of the Chinese community in Malaya; specifically, the many dialect groups that created a fractured societal

\textsuperscript{57} Short, 397
\textsuperscript{58} Figure 1 was taken from a chart in Karl Hack, “‘Iron Claws on Malaya’: The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency” \textit{Journal of Southeast Asian Studies}, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 1999)
organization. However, as described in the previous section, no matter what dialect group Malayan-Chinese belonged to or what ties they had formed with local communities in Malaya, they ultimately saw themselves as Chinese. It is true that prior to resettlement, these societies existed in small enclaves with little or no inter-group contact, but even after several years of living in close quarters with one another in the New Villages there still seemed to be no indication of taking collective action against British excesses. Hence, something even more fundamental had to also be at work.

Instead, the reason for this lack of collective action may be that Malayan Chinese society had existed in peace under British administrative rule since the 18th century and had established a mechanism, however informal, by which to air grievances both with each other and with the larger government. The idea of taking individual responsibility for the implementation of justice had never been fostered in these societies. On some level, it was understood that this strategy of collective punishment was something out of the ordinary. Additionally, the Malayan Chinese did not share a collective history of oppression that would have facilitated the development of a national identity (as is the case in revenge cultures). Thus, the “in-group” cohesion found in blood vengeance cultures did not exist in this case and feelings of resentment, although explicitly present, failed to translate into collective acts of vengeance. The past administrative relationship with Britain plus a historically peaceful existence created the conditions necessary for the collective punishment strategy of population control to go uncontested at a communal level in the case of the Malayan Emergency.

59 Ibid, 60 Teo Kok Seong, 3 (footnote 5)
On September 6, 1991, in the midst of the chaos preceding the official collapse of the Soviet Union, the small Soviet republic of Chechnya declared its independence. Between 1991 and 1994, thousands of non-Chechen inhabitants evacuated the republic for fear of Chechen discrimination and aggression. Other elements in the region that opposed secession promptly coalesced and unleashed a wave of hostage-taking, shootings and indiscriminate attacks; the situation quickly devolved into a civil war. As the conflict grew, fear of the fragile Russian state’s disintegration prompted Moscow to lend financial, military, and training support to the opposition. An embarrassing series of failed attempts to wrest power from the secessionists impelled the Russian government to intervene. Failing to recognize the situation as a counterinsurgency crisis, the Russians entered the capital city of Grozny using overwhelming force. Although Russia dominated the conflict at first, the counterinsurgency campaign reached a stalemate as Moscow expanded its operations into the highlands. After waging a vicious battle for close to two years, the Russians conceded defeat and signed a ceasefire agreement with the Chechen Republic.

The end of the conflict left the region ravaged by the effects of war. With very loose government control and sporadic outbreaks of violence, Chechnya’s economy plummeted. The combination of unemployed former insurgents, political discontent, and a rise in religious extremism made Russia extremely suspicious of further Chechen attempts at independence. Following a series of terrorist attacks inside Russia in 1996 which were ascribed to the Chechen insurgency, Moscow renewed the offensive into Chechnya and another six years of fighting

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62 Ibid, 275
ensued before any sense of political normalcy would return. Even today, sporadic attacks by Chechen militants continue to plague the region and the surrounding areas. Despite two Russian attempts at countering the insurgency, it is evident that their particular counterinsurgency strategies have failed thus far.

Chechnya provides an interesting case study for analyzing population reaction to collective punishment strategies because Russian failure is often attributed to the extreme brutality it employed and the failure to adopt softer counterinsurgency approaches. Civilian casualties during the two phases of the Chechen insurgency surpassed 60,000 deaths and this has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on Chechen society that may manifest itself in yet another cycle of violence in the future. The following sections will explore Chechen collectivism, their conception of revenge, and then turn to an analysis of their reaction to Russian collective punishment tactics.

**Chechen Collectivism**

Chechen society has been the subject of numerous societal transformations brought about by massive displacement and unrelenting conflict. In February 1944, Stalin oversaw the deportation of the majority of its inhabitants, wrongfully suspecting Chechen collaboration with the Nazi invaders. Once allowed to return a decade later, Chechens found themselves in the position of having to essentially reconstruct their entire societal structure and identity. Despite Russian attempts to define this social construct for them by defining their identity in terms of

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65 “Chechen Official Puts Death Toll for 2 Wars at up to 160,000,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2005
their villages or *tieps*, Chechens predominately identify themselves as part of a Chechen nation made up of numerous communities.\(^67\)

In terms of societal structure, however, the *tiep* is the primary social institution.\(^68\) Members of each clan treat each other as a single family unit and it is the responsibility of each person to assure that tribal and family honor is maintained. A bad deed or action done by one member would reflect poorly on the entire village. Additionally, the concept of communal charity (or *belkhi*) is strongly adhered to. It is not uncommon for farmers to help one another during the harvest and in cases of devastating loss—whether it involves physical destruction, unemployment, or death—the entire community offers its resources to ameliorate the loss.\(^69\)

This sense of community over individual meets the first criteria of a collectivist society.

The second criterion, a strong in-group/out-group dichotomy, is also present in the case of Chechnya, although not to the degree it was in Malaya. Whereas the Chinese communities in Malaya drew distinctions between different dialect groups, Chechens belong to certain *tieps*, but do not actively exclude or look down upon other clans unless embroiled in a vendetta (discussed below).\(^70\) The ready acceptance of marriages between members of different tribes highlights the broader point that social cohesion has taken precedence over clan exclusivity.\(^71\) However, given the state of continual war in which the Chechens exist, their in-group/out-group divisions occur on the national level (i.e. Chechen vs. Russian identities) as opposed to the village level as it did the Malayan Chinese case.\(^72\)

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\(^{67}\) Ibid, 50  
\(^{69}\) Ibid, 90  
\(^{71}\) Jaimoukha, 89  
\(^{72}\) Ibid 93-94
Each Chechen tiep is ruled by an unwritten code of conduct called nokhchalla. This set of societal norms governs virtually every aspect of societal behavior in Chechnya—from the proper way to greet someone to the relationship between a husband and wife. The different clans foster a strong sense of conformity to these norms and Chechens follow them either voluntarily or for fear of notoriety and shame within their clans.\(^{73}\) The pressure to conform is such that it can also elicit feelings of suffocation, as Isa Burzurtdanov describes upon returning to Chechnya after having lived in Siberia a number of years,

“For the first few years in Nazran, I found it difficult to become accustomed to the local norms and conditions of life. I had to submit to many community demands and traditions, whereas back in Siberia I had been more free.”\(^{74}\)

As evidenced, Chechen communities exhibit all the characteristics of a collectivist society—an elevation of the community over the individual, clear in-group and out-group dynamics (at the national level), and an exceptionally strong emphasis on conformation to societal norms. This collectivism is reinforced by a societal structure constantly in the throes of war, thus making social cohesion imperative to the survival of Chechnya as a distinct region.

Revenge in Chechen Culture

Contained within Chechnya’s nokhchalla is the notion of ch’ir p-ha, which demands recompense for acts of violence, murder or mutilation perpetrated against another member of society. Although the norm is highly regulated and most injured parties opt for monetary remuneration, the option to carry through with the retributive act is considered a right and not something that would lead to societal chastisement. The Bolsheviks made efforts to outlaw the

\(^{73}\) Ibid, 123  
\(^{74}\) Tishkov, 35
practice, but a stubborn insistence to exact revenge “the Chechen way” persisted, even when the Soviet government had dispensed its own justice.\textsuperscript{75}

In addition to the actual presence of blood vengeance in their code of conduct, Chechnya also meets all three of Otterbein and Otterbein’s criteria for what constitutes a blood vengeance culture. Group settlement patterns are similar to what they are in Malaysia. It is not uncommon for three to four paternally-linked generations to share the same plot of land. Parents depend on their male heirs to take care of them in their old age and women are expected to go and live with her husband’s clan upon marriage. It the norm for brothers to live near one another and share access to household stocks.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, Chechnya’s societal configuration consists of a highly patrilocal organization.

The second measure of revenge, a lack of third party arbitration, is less clear in the case of Chechnya. Generally, cases of blood vengeance are mediated by a neutral clan or by a special council who would then deliberate the terms of settlement. However, this would only occur if the perpetrator deferred his case to the tribal council, which would subject him to community scrutiny.\textsuperscript{77} However, as Lieven points out, the radical societal displacement that occurred during the Chechens’ deportation and society’s constant subjection to turmoil have weakened social institutions and eroded the authority of tribal elders.\textsuperscript{78} The weakened state of these institutions calls into question their ability to intercede in these cases and whether they can effectively inhibit the cycle of revenge.

Finally, the long history of repeated threats to Chechnya’s territory more than meets Otterbein and Otterbein’s final criteria. Since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the region has been trapped in an

\textsuperscript{75} Jaimoukha, 136-137
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 87
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 136-137
\textsuperscript{78} Lieven,
endless cycle of Soviet-Russian invasion and Chechen resistance. 79 The memory of Stalin’s brutal deportations, Soviet attempts to change fundamental aspects of their culture and constant Russian incursions using indiscriminate violence have traumatized Chechen society and fostered resentments that have perpetuated the instinct of revenge. More than any other aspect of its culture, Chechen society’s shared history of suffering has cemented its national identity and explains its reactions to the collective punishment that it continues to experience. 80

**Russian Collective Punishment**

During the first Chechen War (1994-1996) Russia employed a relatively straightforward counterinsurgency strategy in Chechnya: use overwhelming force to crush the insurgency. Trained in conventional military operations rather than in irregular warfare, the 40,000 troops that descended upon the Chechen capital of Grozny resorted to indiscriminate acts of violence in order to eradicate the insurgents from among the population. The aim of the strategy, to engage the Chechen rebels in a decisive battle, reflected Cold War thinking and did not suit the conditions found in Chechnya. 81 Although no official record of civilian deaths during this time exists, most estimates agree that the number is into the tens of thousands. 82

Although Russian attempts to counter the insurgency took on a number of forms, air bombardments comprised the majority of civilian casualties during both phases of the war. Not only was it employed in the regular course of conflict against the insurgents, it was also used to punish entire villages suspected of lending the insurgency support. 83 Apartment block cellars often provided the only means of shelter in the urban areas and the rural areas were essentially

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79 Jaimoukha, xi  
80 Tishkov, 53  
81 Lieven, 126-127  
83 Lieven, 130
left with no means to protect themselves. Aerial attacks occurred with little to no warning and would last several hours or until Russian commanders felt confident that insurgents had either left the area or been eradicated. If they encountered new resistance, the bombardment would begin again. Hoping to escape the continual aerial campaigns, close to 200,000 people fled to neighboring Ingusheita during the opening stages of the Second Chechen War. Tishov’s narrative illustrates the brutality of these bombardments:

“No one thought they would bomb villages, that was only in Groznyy, but we were mistaken. Suddenly two fighter planes emerged from nowhere, flying low, and began strafing people with their machine guns. Screams, moans, blood, the wounded were everywhere. Some people tried to run for shelter, but the planes returned again and again and cut them down.”

Another favored Russian tactic, security sweeps or zachistka, involved troops entering villages and “sweeping” up civilians suspected of being a part of the Chechen insurgency. Several hundred people would be detained for a number of days and tortured. Civilians would often disappear mysteriously and their bodies would later be found shot to death and showing signs of having been beaten. In conjunction with these “sweeps,” Russian soldiers would burn homes while indiscriminately shooting civilians and looting their possessions. In such cases, the women and children would be separated from the men and used as human shields to protect the tanks and other heavy artillery brought in to complete the destruction of the villages.

As the pillaging of Chechen communities increased, allegations of rape also began to rise. The Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture conducted a study of 35 patients suffering physical or psychological ailments relating to the Chechen conflict. Seventeen

85 Freedom House, 108
86 Tishkov, 134
87 Maura Reynolds, “Russian ‘sweeps’ targeting civilians in Chechnya worsen; torture reported,” Los Angeles Times, July 7, 2001
88 Lieven, 133
reported having been victims of sexual torture at the hands of Russian soldiers. However, finding exact numbers for, or accounts of, rape is very difficult because of the social stigma Chechens attach to it. Women that have been victims of rape would rather commit suicide then have to live with the shame of having been raped.\(^89\) If discovered, those who are married must usually divorce their husbands, and families of unmarried women keep silent about the rape so that her marriage prospects are not harmed.\(^90\)

The strategies during the Second Chechen War did not differ significantly as far as the population was concerned. Although Russian martial doctrine adapted in some ways to account for the particular characteristics of irregular warfare, attempts to “win hearts and minds” stopped at shutting down Chechen propaganda and banning international journalists. In fact, the use of collective punishment actually increased between the first and second wars.\(^91\) According to a report by Human Rights Watch, the second Chechen war saw a spike in house-burning and other repressive attempts at population control.\(^92\)

\(^90\) Jaimoukha, 92
**Analysis of Chechen Reactions**

Not only have these collective punishment strategies considerably altered the societal dynamic in Chechnya; they have also elicited a significant response from Chechens that arises partly as a result of their revenge culture. At first, Chechen reaction to Russian invasion was one of shock and the belief that the incursion was borne more out of a show of intimidation rather than any actual intent to engage the population in war. As Russian brutality increased, however, those perceptions began to change and the population started to engage in their own attacks against Russians.93

Chechen acts of violence toward Russians rivaled those perpetrated against them. Russian soldiers or airman captured by Chechen rebels were summarily tortured and executed, although some were kept alive to be used as slave labor. Chechens also routinely mutilated dead Russian bodies, an act that is considered extremely disrespectful to the deceased in Chechen culture.94 Additionally, acts of hostage-taking became pervasive throughout Chechnya. The practice has its roots during the first Chechen war when it was discovered that taking hostages for ransom could be very rewarding financially. However, the explosion in Russian excesses served to change the motivations behind the actions from one of monetary gain to finding psychological satisfaction in the act of taking revenge. Most of those who engage in hostage takings claim that their primary reason for doing so is that “[the Russians] initiated the practice by making Chechens pay ransoms for their arrested relatives, sometimes even for the bodies of their dead, in order for them to be given a decent funeral.”95

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93 Tishkov, 132
94 Ibid, 139-140
95 Tishkov, 107
As a 2003 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace poll shows, most Chechens are motivated more by revenge than by any sense of nationalism or religious belief. Psychiatrist Anne Speckhard argues that whereas revenge in Chechnya used to be something strictly codified and controlled, it has become even more generalized due to the trauma caused by continual war. In a study of over 600 Chechens, those who had experienced high levels of trauma as a result of conflict had changed their perceptions of revenge the most. As the scale of violence became too massive for revenge to be targeted at individuals, it expanded into resentment of an entire ethnicity. Therefore, attacks against any Russians, whether military or civilian would suffice to settle this “blood vengeance” debt. This is illustrated by Chechen militants’ prevalent use of terrorism. This continuous cycle of repression, resentment, and revenge-taking has led Russian leaders, like Ruslan Khasbulatov, to predict that a rejoining of Chechnya with the Russian Federation is not a foreseeable end-state.

FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the two case studies are consistent with the hypothesis that the use of collective punishment in collectivist, blood vengeance cultures will fail. In the case of the Malayan Chinese, a traditionally collectivist society with no culture of blood vengeance, British collective punishment strategies worked. The colonial government succeeded in cutting off population support to the insurgents through a strategy of population control. Claims that Templar’s “hearts and minds” strategy is what ultimately turned the tide of the counterinsurgency in Britain’s favor are rash, given that the insurgency had started to decline

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98 Jaimoukha, 137
prior to any true implementation of the population-centric strategy. The use of population control vice population persuasion is what ultimately secured victory.

In Chechnya, a society strong in both level of collectivism and blood vengeance, Russia’s use of collective punishment has failed. Although it succeeded in putting down the insurgency for a short while during the first Chechen war (1994-1996), it has not succeeded in eradicating it completely. The brutal tactics employed have alienated the population and fostered feelings of resentment that have manifested themselves in the societal norm of revenge. Threats and intimidation intended to silence and exert control over the Chechen population has only served to increase the militant ranks. Thus, it is evident that the primary Chechen motivating factor for attacks against Russians is revenge.

The existence of strong collectivism in both Malaya and Chechnya help control for the effects it may have had on population reactions to collective punishment. However, one interesting finding of this study is the different ways in which Malayan Chinese and Chechens exhibit collectivism. All Malayan Chinese dialect groups saw themselves as a Chinese nation historically, but their collectivism existed at the village and community level. In Chechnya, they not only identify with their particular clans, but also with the overarching Chechen nation—with stronger emphasis placed on the latter. Although this may account for the divergent reactions in the two case studies, it is more likely that the Chechen version of collectivism has its roots in the cohesion found in societies where existence is constantly threatened—a primary characteristic of a blood vengeance culture.

**Limitations**

Although this study has illustrated that failure of collective punishment strategies is concomitantly present with revenge cultures, it does not definitely draw a correlation between

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99 Ibid, 137
the two. The limitations inherent to this work—including time constraints, lack of access to foreign records and interviews, and an absence of historical counterviews (especially in the case of Malaysia where the majority of primary source information was derived from British historical accounts and government documents) preclude definitive statements. Thus, the conclusions of this study can not authoritatively posit that revenge is the determining factor in the success or failure of collective punishment when used in a counterinsurgency because there may be any number of intervening variables that, when working in conjunction with revenge, exert a greater influence over population choices. Nonetheless, this paper and its conclusions do suggest that there are links between revenge and coercive punishments that are worth exploring in future research.

**Future Research**

This study provides a number of potential areas for future research that would help to improve understanding of revenge cultures and the implications they have on counterinsurgency doctrine. Case studies were employed in this research to garner an in-depth understanding of the societal factors that are at play in populations experiencing collective punishment. However, future studies could analyze this topic from a quantitative perspective by comparing cultures subjected to collective punishment during a counterinsurgency campaign and that either possessed or lacked a revenge culture and seeing if they correlated to counterinsurgency failures or successes.

Additional case studies employing a similar method to the one used in this research could also contribute to greater understanding of this topic since it would mitigate any potential outliers and provide a broader array of cultures that would control against any particular aspect of culture not accounted for in this study, possibly bringing to light factors not previously
considered with respect to revenge’s role on population choices. Alternatively, research could also look at different aspects of culture like religion and how they affect population choice.

Another potential area of research is how different constructions of collectivism affect population choice. Does a fragmented collectivism, like Malaysia, imply a greater chance for collective punishment success? What are the prospects for collective action in such societies versus those with a more cohesive national identity? Looking at different degrees of collectivism may also contribute to the literature by analyzing whether more centralized collectivism makes it more likely for a culture to have retributive attributes and what forms of counterinsurgency perform best against such collectivism.

Finally, this study only analyzed collective punishment strategies targeted at insurgent groups and did not aim to parse out the differences between those targeted at insurgencies and those targeted at terrorist organizations. Conducting a similar comparative study between a counterinsurgency campaign using collective punishment strategies vice a counter-terrorism campaign employing the same means would not only entail looking at how populations’ reactions differed, but also analyzing whether populations view insurgencies and terrorist actions differently. Future studies on this topic would benefit from a more nuanced comparative study between the two.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Although limited in its scope and subject to some limitations, the results of this study suggests that contrary to the findings of prior research, collective punishment strategies employed against an insurgency are not necessarily counterproductive. Not accounting for the moral and ethical considerations that democratic states face in deciding what strategies to implement, a strategy of collective punishment employed to control the population may actually
work if the environment is sufficiently understood and a revenge culture is not present. In Malaya, the absence of retributive cultural norms in conjunction with a stratified collectivism denied both the presence of revenge and the mechanism by which to spread that revenge to all members of a society. Thus, collective punishment could be utilized to a greater degree than it could in Chechnya.

Another implication illustrated in this study is that changing strategies once a collective punishment method has already been employed against a revenge culture may be extremely difficult, if not impossible. During the Second Chechen War, the Russians perfunctory attempts to conduct “hearts and minds” by shutting down Chechen propaganda machines made little difference in Chechen reactions to their strategy. In cultures where the duty to exact revenge is held in the collective memory for centuries, a change in strategy may not be seen as legitimate and is thus, not likely to work. If true, then it is imperative that a culture is fundamentally understood and strategies conceptualized in terms of how a population will react before the start of conflict.

FM 3-24 stresses that an “understanding of the roles, statuses, and social norms of groups within an AO can clarify expected behavior and provide guidelines on how to act. Some norms that may impact military operations include the following: The requirement for revenge if honor is lost…” Consequently, it is research like this that will serve to “provide the guidelines” that will inform future military operations. Given the presence of a revenge culture in a potential counterinsurgency campaign, the US must meet critical intelligence capabilities, institute judicial systems that encompass local norms and find the correct balance between kinetic and non-kinetic operations.

**Intelligence Capability Implications**

As this research has shown, in cultures of revenge, collective punishment ignites strong feelings of retribution in a population that then gets translated into vengeful actions and a subsequent escalation of violence. Thus, it is imperative that violence be targeted at specific individuals and groups and that the counterinsurgent understands how those individuals and groups are connected within the larger society. In order to do this effectively, the counterinsurgent must be able to differentiate between the insurgents and the civilian population, which requires a robust intelligence network that includes anthropological and sociological expertise. Even as the U.S. changes its martial doctrine, the way in which intelligence is gathered requires a fundamental change as well. As the role of culture plays an increasingly larger role in how today’s wars are conducted, it is important to incorporate additional fields of study into the intelligence gathering process in order to enhance current capabilities. Although the U.S. has made significant strides to include the pertinent fields in its decision-making, increased understanding of sociology and anthropology can help policy-makers and military leaders to avoid tactical mistakes that may unwittingly set off cultural forces against the counterinsurgent—leading to strategic failure.

**Institute Judicial Systems Using Local Norms**

Developing strong intelligence capabilities in order to understand existing cultural dynamics is merely the first step. Once those dynamics are understood, a formal system of justice should be instituted whereby the concept of retribution can be channeled through a third party. In order to maintain the legitimacy of those institutions in collectivist societies, where retribution is usually incumbent upon the offended individual, it is important that justice be meted out in a timely manner and that the cultural codes of honor be taken into account when
enforcing it. Although developing a system of justice is usually listed amongst the pillars of successful counterinsurgency operations and should be instituted simultaneously with them, it is often occluded by the enormous task of providing security for the population. In societies with strong retributive tendencies, establishing a system of justice that integrates local codes of honor should be given a top priority right behind the establishment of security.

Finding the Balance

Finally, successful counterinsurgencies find the right balance between kinetic and non-kinetic operations. However, the balance between the two sides does not have to be equal. One of the primary policy implications of this study is that in collective societies with strong propensities toward retribution, the balance should shift toward the non-kinetic side of the spectrum. A certain degree of violence will always be necessary, especially since it is unlikely that the insurgents and even the population will change their behavior without at least the threat of violence, but in these types of cultures the counterinsurgent must be more sensitive to population reactions resulting from their actions.

If there is a primary take away from this study it is that there should be no “one-size-fits-all” mentality taken in developing counterinsurgency doctrine. What has worked for successful counterinsurgencies in the past, may not work in another instance because of cultural attributes, like the presence of a revenge culture that may cause differential reactions to counterinsurgent strategies. With this in mind, it is incumbent upon the counterinsurgent to truly understand the culture in which it is operating and tailor tactics and strategies specific to the cultural nuances found there. The common theme across all the policy implications resulting from this study is that culture is not something that can be overlooked in countering an insurgency. Any attempt to
formulate a concrete set of rules will ultimately prove futile. The only characteristic that will remain constant is the necessity remaining flexible.


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