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THE EVOLUTION OF THE INSURGENT CHALLENGE FROM 1850 TO THE PRESENT

I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: for, as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner. I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body…the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me; but in the posture I lay, could see nothing except the sky.

(Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*)

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the time men first sought to exert some form of centralized political control, there have been men resisting the extension of authority. Insurgency has become the predominant form of conflict since World War II, but guerrilla warfare is not a modern phenomenon. Nor is the potency of the insurgent threat. Circa 2190 BC, guerrillas from the mountains brought about the final dissolution of the first empire, the Akkadian empire in Mesopotamia, whose impressive – and ruthless – military machine exerted control over much of modern-day Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey (Boot 2013: 13-5). Its ruler believed himself the "'king of the world,'" and yet, "'lawless'" insurgents, on foot, without guns, brought down the dominion he built (Boot 2013: 13-4). David, it seems, has been bringing Goliath to his knees for millennia.

Today, however, national governments have acquired the capacity to exert a form of territorial sovereignty over those living within their borders more profound than taxation and conscription. Concomitant with a revolution in "conceptions of national sovereignty" (Scott 2009: 11) and the replacement of empires by nation-states (Wimmer and Min 2006: 870), the past two centuries in particular have witnessed extraordinary technological developments. Today, living beyond the reach of state authority in, as James Scott describes them, "nonstate spaces" is "an option that is fast vanishing" (Scott 2009: 4, 9). Expanding networks of railways, then roads, have collapsed distances between state centers and frontiers, between areas of urban control and rural autonomy; airpower and motorized surface transport have granted the state lethal access to previously unassailable havens of resistance (Scott 2009: 4-13). Increasingly, the center has been able to exert coercive force in days rather than months. The expansion of communications networks in tandem with the transportation revolution has permitted the state unprecedented means to monitor – and control – its residents, not only through the newly

feasible and increasingly accurate collection of information supporting expanded state functions (e.g., censuses, land surveys, and tax registers), but also through increasingly advanced intelligence apparati designed to track and muzzle public opposition (Scott 2009, Thomas 2007). Equipped with transportation technology capable of overcoming distance and terrain, weapons technology capable of meeting resistance with overwhelming force, and communications technology capable of tracking, coordinating, wooing, and coercing even those far from its center, the modern state would seem to have progressively attained the capability to impose substantive "legibility" on its citizens, practice devastatingly effective counterinsurgency (COIN), and thus, ultimately, bring all areas within the state under its control (Scott 2009).

Remarkably, however, the historical record manifests precisely the opposite: during the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, armed resistance to state-imposed control became increasingly prevalent and increasingly intractable. Despite steep, sustained technological progress, which facilitated the consolidation of modern nation-states, Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III (2009), for instance, contend that the state's capacity to extinguish insurgencies[1] declined steadily and substantially after the period 1851-1875, such that in the latter part of the twentieth century, states won only about a quarter of their contests with insurgencies, down from a peak of around 90% (69). The weakness of new, wobbly postcolonial states fails to explain this phenomenon, as Great and Non-Great Powers alike saw their counterinsurgency success rates fall by at least half after World War I (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 69-70).

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[1] It should be noted that the authors, in assessing insurgency data since 1812, define insurgency 1,000 battle death inclusion rule, with at least 100 casualties suffered on each side" and employed guerrilla warfare, which they define as a "strategy of armed resistance that (1) uses small, mobile groups to inflict punishment on the incumbent through hit-and-run strikes while avoiding direct battle when possible and (2) seeks to win the allegiance of at least some portion of the noncombatant population" (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 70).

I propose that two major trends associated with the emergence of the modern nation-state may help to clarify the phenomenon in question: (a) the increased feasibility of robust insurgent networks, and (b) the emergence of modern norms of sovereignty requiring more direct imposition of control from the center. Over the last two centuries, new transportation and communications technologies permitted the development of connections among communities previously geographically isolated and socially insular, making formerly implausible avenues of communication and organization possible. By enabling more rapid movement, information sharing, coordination, monitoring, and advocacy over longer distances (even internationally), the evolution and spread of these technologies facilitated increasingly resilient ties among those opposed to the incumbent power. These technologies, in combination with more advanced weapons technologies, may have allowed some states to consolidate and/or expand central control, but the insurgencies they faced in still unsecured areas were often more difficult to overcome than in previous periods.

The suppression of insurgency was further impeded by the transition from imperial to state sovereignty as some previously effective tactics (i.e., buying off well organized rebels as clients or asserting nominal sovereignty while effectively permitting the autonomy of particular territories) ceased to be viable political options for the incumbent. As evolving norms of sovereignty emerged, modern nation-states restricted local autonomy, refused to tolerate intermittent peripheral violence, and undermined networks of intelligence and control; pressure to impose more direct and intrusive rule rendered counterinsurgent victory a much more daunting task. Thus, for about a century and a half, incumbents faced insurgents they found increasingly formidable and standards of counterinsurgent victory they found increasing difficult to attain.

This paper aims, first, to examine the puzzling and largely overlooked phenomenon of the rise in insurgent efficacy from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth, and then, to propose a theoretical structure that will help to illuminate the nature of insurgency more generally. Part II explores the difficulties that the dramatic decline in the state's ability to extinguish insurgencies, despite an apparently substantial and impressive accretion of central power,[2] poses for the literature on how state capacity and GDP affect insurgency, and also demonstrates the inadequacy of present theories to adequately explain the conundrum. Part III presents the proposed theoretical structure in more detail. Part IV tentatively considers the future of counterinsurgency in light of indications over the last few decades that insurgent strength may be declining, and finally, proposes an empirical approach to the evaluation of the theoretical insights presented in this paper.

II. CURRENT THEORIES

The literature on conflict has largely ignored the apparent deterioration of incumbent capacity against insurgencies over the past two centuries, but this phenomenon poses a number of major questions for the extensive body of work on the effects of state capacity and GDP levels on insurgency. As the last two centuries have witnessed technological and social changes enabling not only a remarkable increase in general state capacity (i.e., capacity to monitor, tax, engage, provide, and punish) but also a considerable increase in global wealth, then what are we to make of theories that posit that these factors should work to subdue insurgent activity? Part IV will propose a theoretical structure to address the challenge the modern decline in incumbent counterinsurgent capacity poses for the wider literature, in part because the few theories that do

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[2] In terms of technology and resources.

confront this issue are inadequate. Broadly, these theories attempt to explain the downward trend in incumbent win rates by relying on modern constraints on counterinsurgency, such as the rise of public opinion and increasing mechanization of incumbent armies. Although these theories may have a certain amount of explanatory power, they are insufficient to account for the sharp decline in counterinsurgent success since 1875.

The rise of public opinion is often cited as a major vulnerability of the Great Power incumbents, who move to confront an insurgency with overweening force but, impeded by the myriad constraints that constitute domestic opinion, are unable pursue the long-term, high-cost, and/or 'barbaric' tactics necessary to defeat the insurgency; they are compelled to abandon the effort or grant disproportionate[3] concessions to the rebels (Boot 2013; Mack 1975; Record 2007). Indeed, the historical record appears to affirm that social and technological changes, in conjunction with and contributing to evolving conceptions of political legitimacy, have strengthened the ties between incumbents and their popular constituencies, such that domestic public opinion has come to wield unprecedented power over incumbent counterinsurgent action. That public influence, this theory maintains, has functioned overwhelmingly as a constraint on counterinsurgent activity: as Boot contends, insurgents have enjoyed greater success in the twentieth century (especially in the latter half) "in large part because of their ability to play on public opinion, a relatively new factor in warfare" (2013: xxvi). Although it seems unlikely that the human rights discourse has taken on such power that humanitarian sentiments have alone, or even substantially, stymied counterinsurgencies, it seems plausible that public capacity to express unwillingness to shoulder substantial and sustained expenditures of national resources and lives has indeed impeded and sometimes doomed counterinsurgent efforts.

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[3] Vis-à-vis the degree of military imbalance in the incumbent's favor.

Prior to the nineteenth century, central powers were relatively immune to popular concern about the domestic costs of counterinsurgency and the suffering inflicted on its targets and bystanders, in part because the concept of 'popular opinion' presupposes communication and mobility enabling shared sentiment. For most of the last two centuries, the vast majority of the population lived geographically insular lives, unconcerned about and – more likely – unaware of the activities of the central government unless it affected their lives directly (Boot 2013; Weber 1976; Gellner 1983; Kroneberg and Wimmer 2012: Appendix B, 1). Indeed, as Gerhard Ritter notes, in the imperial state (the predominant political form prior to the advent of the nation-state and the World Wars), "only rarely and from a distance could the subjects' wishes, longings, and fears make themselves heard in the realm of policy" (qtd in Jackson 2007: 64). The central authority had relatively free reign to pursue foreign and domestic counterinsurgency without the population monitoring, much less controlling, its behavior.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, it has become increasingly feasible for the populace to *know* what the center is doing and to collectively express support or opposition. Moreover, conceptions of the relationship between government and the people have also evolved: in the age of autocracy, "few populations could do much…to sway the decisions of their emperor, king, or chief," but today, and increasingly over the past century or so, populations (or subsets of the population) find themselves vested with the power to force government policy one way or the other (Boot 2013: 52). Boot, for example, contends, "In the modern age, the printing press would become as important a weapon in the insurgents' arsenal as the rifle and the bomb" (2013: 55). Perhaps the first clear instance of domestic opinion paralyzing a state's counterinsurgency efforts is the British withdrawal from the American colonies in 1781-3. After the disastrous battle of Yorktown, the British still possessed more than enough military resources to continue

fighting, but overwhelmingly negative popular opinion (due to both the costs of the campaign and popular sympathy for the American insurgents[4]) precluded raising a fresh army and severely punishing insurgent leaders like George Washington (Boot 2013: 75).[5] This was, in Boot's words, "a new and hugely important development in the long history of guerrilla warfare: a parliamentary government could not prosecute a war that did not enjoy popular backing" (2013: 75).

In the American case, and in many others post-1875, domestic fatigue provoked by the price in lives[6] and resources counterinsurgency exacts seems to have effectively redistributed the balance of power from incumbent to insurgent by eroding the incumbent's will to keep fighting, "offset[ting] some of the advantages enjoyed by an incumbent regime" and granting insurgents "a greater chance of success" (Boot 2013: 75). Similarly, domestic fatigue surrounding a costly war effort in Indochina turned a less-than-crippling military defeat at Dien Bien Phu into the impetus for "French political concessions…end[ing] French rule in Indochina" (Record 2007: 44). When the domestic constituency has considered the price of action too great, even the greatest military powers have faced crippling popular pressure to terminate military engagements, particularly engagements abroad where the benefits of victory are less clear to those at home. In 1993, American popular outcry over the loss of fewer than twenty soldiers in the Black Hawk Down incident in Mogadishu prompted the Clinton administration to withdrawal US troops from Somalia and subdued American willingness to engage in subsequent counterinsurgency efforts in the region (e.g., Rwanda) (Boot 2013: 64-5).

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[4] Sympathy upon which the American insurgents "skillfully and shamelessly played" (Boot 2013: 76).
[5] Boot asserts that the Roman Empire would have crucified Washington and his fellow leaders and then launched fresh forces on the colonists (2013: 75).
[6] Soldiers' lives here; general humanitarian sentiment will be considered later in this section.

Perhaps the strongest testament to the capacity of domestic opinion to doom even the most promising counterinsurgency is the French renunciation of all claims to Algeria in 1962. Domestic opposition to the French campaign allowed the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), an insurgency the French had decisively vanquished, to win independence from French rule and assume control of Algeria. French forces, through devastatingly effective, "ruthless…counterinsurgency methods" and by successfully "isolating the insurgency from external material assistance," had broken the insurgency within Algeria (Record 2007: 58-9). Nevertheless, dissent among French troops and consternation over mounting "economic and military strains," in combination with domestic (and international) horror at "French behavior in Algeria, especially the open and widespread use of torture," pushed France's fragile government to the point of collapse and subsequently compelled its next leader, Charles de Gaulle, to give up highly successful counterinsurgent efforts (Record 2007: 60-1).

> (T)he fact that the FLN insurgency had been effectively deprived of any chance of military success, and indeed was on the run from superior French forces and strategy, made no difference in the war's political outcome, which was determined by political events in France, not counterinsurgent military events in Algeria (Record 2007: 61-2).

Public opinion, in France as well as abroad, brought about an insurgent victory where incumbent victory was otherwise all but inevitable. Over the course of the last two centuries, public opinion seems to have acquired a growing power to gravely impede counterinsurgency efforts, at least against foreign insurgencies.

In some cases, international assistance (motivated at least to some extent by foreign public opinion) has contributed to insurgent success. The Greek War of Independence, for example, demonstrates how insurgents have been able to manipulate the international narrative to their benefit – to engage successfully in "information warfare" (Boot 2013: 106-7). The

Greek insurgency had formidable militants among its ranks, but the Ottoman Empire had faced and overcome far worse; as Boot points out, "The Greeks' skill at guerrilla warfare was impressive but not enough to prevail" (2013: 102). Despite the fact that the Greeks perpetrated devastating campaigns to "ethnically cleans[e]…the Peloponnese of all 'Mohammedans,'" they were successful in concentrating European attention on the barbaric tactics of the Turks: "Greek misconduct barely registered, while Turkish atrocities, real or imagined, loomed large" (Boot 2013: 105). Europeans sent troops, but these had "negligible" military significance: far more influential, and ultimately decisive, was European nations' "political role in rallying Western support for the Greeks" at a time when Greek military prospects were gravely deteriorating (Boot 2013: 106). It was only through British, French, and Russian diplomatic pressure and the military pain they inflicted on the Ottomans outside Greece that the Greek insurgency won independence from the Ottomans. This dramatic reversal in the insurgency's fate evinces the powerful influence international opinion can wield over incumbent capacity to suppress insurgency.

The resolution of conflict in Guatemala in 1996 provides striking evidence of the constraints international opinion can impose on otherwise successful counterinsurgency efforts. In this case, international interference in a domestic counterinsurgency struggle compelled the incumbent to accept a draw where victory was otherwise effectively certain. As Stoll (2008) recounts, the Guatemalan insurgency, which, like the Greek insurgency more than a century and a half before, had unquestionably lost the war, romanced the international community (the West, primarily) with a narrative of revolutionary consciousness and defiance of class oppression in the face of brutal government repression. Westerners took up the cause of the freedom fighters, and "(a)s international pressure mounted on the belligerents, debates over human rights became a

more decisive arena than the battlefield…The more important war became the international one, of images" (Stoll 2008: 6-7). Accordingly, the majority of the pressure on Guatemalan incumbent forces to cease fighting and grant concessions to the rebels "came from abroad" (Stoll 2008: 8). The final peace agreement in 1996 was between a potent incumbent military force and "a rather vestigial guerrilla movement" (Stoll 2008: 8). And here, just as in the Greek War of Independence, the freedom fighters contributed substantially, if not primarily, to the suffering of the civilian population, a fact considerably downplayed by the insurgency's advocates.

Even if the constraints imposed by public opinion, domestic and international, have in some instances and to a certain extent contributed to the decline in incumbent victories, theories primarily relying on the rise of public opinion may nevertheless overestimate its power from a number of exceptional cases. The Syrian conflict, for example, exposes the limitations of humanitarian concern: when the vast majority of observers believe that acts of inhumanity in contravention of international norms are occurring, a majority may nevertheless oppose intervention on the basis of the substantial resources intervention would require. Although intervention is analytically and practically distinct from counterinsurgency, the Syrian case demonstrates that widespread aversion to military involvement in the West (the purported fountainhead of human rights protection), expressed in an unwillingness to expend domestic blood and treasure, can trump humanitarian concerns. This example, however, serves perhaps to affirm the importance of public opinion in restraining the actions of sovereign actors: Prime Minister David Cameron, like King George III more than two centuries before, could not override an unwilling parliament to pursue the military action he wanted in Syria (*Reuters*, 29 August 2013). Nevertheless, in regards to modern insurgency struggles, domestic aversion to boots-on-the-ground intervention abroad may well be due primarily to fear of stalemate or failure

rather than national expense and casualties *per se*. Although a vocal minority may have opposed American support for counterinsurgent activity in Iraq and Afghanistan on account of the money and lives expended so far from home, it seems the American public was largely unconcerned with resource expenditure in Iraq and Afghanistan provided there was hope of success. Generally, public opposition based solely on the costs of counterinsurgency may be concentrated in a relatively small collection of highly aware citizens, a minority unable to mount the sort of potent and widespread political pressure that could effectively curtail counterinsurgency efforts.

Indeed, theories treating public opinion as inimical to counterinsurgent capacity would lead one to expect that democracies, bound to the opinion of a domestic population informed by a free press, would be hamstrung by their very constitution (Record 2007; Merom 2003; Lyall 2010: 169-70). According to this argument, democracies must be inherently weak counterinsurgents, suffering markedly lower rates of counterinsurgent success than more autocratic forms of government. Studies supporting this theory have significant empirical flaws (Lyall 2010), however, and Weeks (2008) demonstrates that autocracies' audience costs are often comparable to those of democracies. Lyall argues instead that "it is the fact of being an external occupier, rather than democracy itself, that is pivotal in shaping COIN outcomes," i.e., in provoking incumbent losses (2010: 180). While public opposition may have, in some cases, constrained counterinsurgent activity abroad, it is not clear that increasing public opposition can adequately account for the declining success of domestic counterinsurgency efforts since 1875, nor is it clear why sovereign actors are at times incapable of demonstrating to their constituencies a plausible capacity to overcome insurgencies on the battlefield abroad.

Lyall and Wilson, on the other hand, attribute the attenuation of state counterinsurgency efficacy not to modern audience constraints but to the impairment of military local intelligence

gathering caused by increased state military mechanization in the decades following World War I (2009: 67). Up until the nineteenth century, militaries lived off the land, "'foraging'" for their supplies as they marched, and as a result, "extensively interacted with local populations" (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 68). According to Lyall and Wilson, these extensive soldier-civilian interactions, driven by the need for food and supplies, yielded "high volumes" of intelligence regarding "local-level power relations, cleavages, and languages" (2009: 73). This local intelligence in turn permitted the army's application of selective force (i.e., "rewards and punishments"), while soldier-civilian relationships and "networks within these populations" – made possible by the substantial number of troops on the ground – legitimated the army's use of such force (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 73). Given that, according to Lyall and Wilson, the counterinsurgent must "win over local populations" to overcome insurgency, "the efficient collection of reliable information on population characteristics, including its grievances, cleavages, power structures, views of the counterinsurgent, and the nature of the insurgents themselves" is essential to successful COIN; accordingly, it is because mechanized militaries cannot collect and vet the local intelligence necessary for this employment of discriminate force that they perform counterinsurgency so poorly (2009: 75-8). Without the immersion in the population and the networks of trust and local awareness occasioned by a foraging infantry, modern militaries' counterinsurgency efforts are often not just ineffective but counterproductive.

Setting aside for the moment questions regarding the precise mechanisms Lyall and Wilson believe underlie counterinsurgent efficacy (e.g., victory depends upon popular support), there are a number of reasons, both theoretical and empirical, to challenge the assertion that, beginning in the aftermath of WWI, COIN success rates have "decline[d] in lock-step with the increasing rate of mechanization" (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 75). First, inferring causality across

such a vast stretch of time and diversity of space (and actors) is inherently very difficult: given the myriad transformations (social, political, technological, etc.) occurring from the mid-eighteenth century[7] to the beginning of the twenty-first, it is plausible that the analysis in question might have overlooked lurking variables or mistaken correlation for causation. The sheer complexity of the task warrants further investigation. Moreover, even if the argument presented were highly persuasive, it is unlikely that the deterioration in COIN efficacy since 1875 can be explained by a single variable (i.e., mechanization). Any attempt to grasp this complex, large-scale, long-term phenomenon must recognize that it is probable that multiple interacting factors have contributed to its emergence.

Second, the timeline of mechanization versus COIN decline calls the mechanization narrative into question: although Lyall and Wilson focus on mechanization post-WWI, during the entirety of WWII only the United States "could even *begin* to create a fully motorized army"; the use of mechanized infantry did not begin in earnest for most nations until the 1930s (Van Creveld 2004: 178, emphasis added). Moreover, even if the Great Powers were initiating the process of mechanization in 1918, the authors' data suggest that states began to suffer sharp declines in COIN success nearly half a century before, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 69). Even if mechanization has played a significant role in undercutting COIN efficacy since its mid-twentieth century implementation (or later), it seems probable that mechanization has not been the sole major factor at work here, and certainly not the first: from the period 1851-1875 to 1876-1900, the decline in incumbent win rates is as pronounced as that between 1901-1925 and 1926-1950.[8] Indeed, even a cursory examination of

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[7] The Industrial Revolution began circa 1760.
[8] The win rate fell from 93% to 73% from the period 1851-1875 to 1876-1900, and from 63% to 44% between the periods 1901-1925 and 1926-1950.

the record between 1875 and 1925 indicates that mechanization cannot explain the onset of this dramatic decline.[9]

Third, the authors' central claim (i.e., military foraging practices facilitated crucial relationships and information sharing with local populations) glosses over the inherently hostile and exploitive nature of foraging, which, far from building civilian-counterinsurgent trust, victimized and antagonized the population. Jeremy Weinstein (2007), for example, often describes foraging – by rebels and state forces – as predation, as a very ugly business indeed. Lyall and Wilson themselves admit these foraging, pre-WWI armies obtained their supplies in a manner that was usually coercive, but they do not discuss the ruinous impact on local populations (2009: 72-4). The depredation involved extended far beyond a few stolen cattle and some petty local resentment: in Martin Van Creveld's words, prior to the World Wars, "(w)hat took place in enemy territory could defy description" (2004: 246). Markets took too long to set up and soldiers' pledges of remuneration usually went unfulfilled; more often than not, soldiers actively stole from locals and pillaged the area, such that "(m)ore or less well-organized plunder was the rule rather than the exception" (Van Creveld 2004: 7).

By the early seventeenth century, nearly two hundred years prior to the nineteenth-century foraging Lyall and Wilson credit with COIN success, armies had grown too large for foraging to adequately sustain them: they were, more than ever, "marauding bands of armed ruffians, devastating the countryside they crossed" (Van Creveld 2004: 7). Armies were compelled to keep moving to new towns and areas: "the presence of large bodies of troops and their hordes of undisciplined retainers would quickly exhaust an area," as the soldiers left it

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[9] In the 1919 Anglo-Afghan War, for example, airpower was significantly helpful to the British, and the Bolivian loss of Acre was due not to mechanization but to the robust external assistance of Brazil (Omissi 1990; Burg 2003: 372).

"impoverished if indeed [they] did not also destroy property and kill whoever refused to surrender it as fast as was demanded of him…even when the province in question was friendly or neutral" (Van Creveld 2004: 9, 245). The proposition that such patterns of ruin and pillaging engendered legitimating networks of trust and information-sharing based on "cultural awareness" (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 76) between "marauding bands of armed ruffians" and their victims (Van Creveld 2004: 7) is difficult to accept.

Moreover, it is unclear why the information sharing between soldiers and locals, if it existed, would yield information beyond where provisions could be found and who might be hoarding them. Simply because foraging armies were "forced to privilege information collection among local populations" does not mean they had "excellent awareness of local-level power relations, cleavages, and languages" beyond that directly relevant to foraging, if that (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 73). Furthermore, any local information collected may well have been misinformation, given by locals to soldiers to further vendettas and petty-grievance-fueled disputes with their neighbors (Kalyvas 2006: 330-63). It does not automatically follow from high troop presence and the obligation to extract resources that locals will trust and work to aid foraging armies rather than resent the troops and use the traveling army's capacity to inflict selective violence to their private ends.

Finally, even if, as the authors contend, the reduction in infantry levels occasioned by increased mechanization does in fact "inhibit information collection among local populations" and thereby fatally undermines counterinsurgency efforts, it is still not necessarily true that a change in the quality and quantity of local intelligence is responsible for the decline in counterinsurgent fortunes over the 150-year time period in question (Lyall and Wilson 2009: 67-8). Given the prevalence of modern advocates for intelligence-primacy in counterinsurgency (as

enshrined in the 2007 The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual), it seems common knowledge that intelligence is absolutely vital to successful COIN. It should be noted that information primacy, however essential it is today, may well be a novel phenomenon. Examination of one highly successful early counterinsurgency effort, for example, the British and American campaigns against the American Indians, reveals that these powers comprehensively stifled insurgent outbreaks with very poor intelligence (Friedman 2013a, 2013b). As Friedman details, the American and British armies generally "possessed little information on the specific tribes that they were fighting," much less a "fine-grained understanding" of tribal structures or cleavages (2013b: 34; 2013a: 17). Indeed, for the most part, and certainly before 1875, "the central challenge was simply *finding* the tribe in question, to say nothing of assessing the complex military, social, and political dynamics underlying its resiliency and combat effectiveness" (Friedman 2013b: 34). And yet, without exception, the counterinsurgents succeeded in crushing resistance: "by the end of the nineteenth century, even the most resilient tribes had been coerced into reservation life" (Friedman 2013b: 28).

This is hardly the modern ideal of a successful counterinsurgency heavily dependent on stellar intelligence regarding the insurgent population that permits the surgical use of coercive force. The lack of high-quality local intelligence (and softer forms of control) appears an inadequate basis for an explanation of long-term decline in state counterinsurgent capacity. Mechanization of incumbent forces cannot be the central development responsible for the sharp decline in counterinsurgent capacity. Indeed, insurgencies, not just counterinsurgencies, have gone through radical changes since 1875, and the following sections will show how transformations of both sets of actors may help to illuminate the phenomenon Lyall and Wilson highlight.

III. THE EMERGENCE OF THE NATION-STATE

To explore this conundrum while recognizing the enormous, complex, and simultaneous changes that have taken place over the past two centuries, I take a theoretical approach grounded in case study analysis rather than relying upon large-N regressions. The wealth of competing and overlapping influences, attenuating circumstances, and interaction effects frustrate even the most conscientious attempts to eliminate bias, account for fixed effects, and consider potential lurking variables (Green, Kim, and Yoon 2001). I follow Paul Staniland in my belief that building and assessing the general validity of a theory on insurgency require a data-intensive approach to detect anomalies and trace credible trends across cases, time, and space without ignoring the singularity endemic to human interaction (Staniland 2013: 14).

What, then, if not primarily the rise of public opposition or mechanization, has occasioned the startling 150-year decline in counterinsurgent capacity? I propose two principal factors that might help account for transformations in both counterinsurgency and insurgency over the time period in question: (a) the increase in insurgent network-building capacity, and (b) the shift from imperial to state sovereignty. Technological and social changes have facilitated the forging of stronger insurgent networks, multiplied the incidence of these more resilient networks, and granted insurgents unprecedented access to tools of resistance. In short, counterinsurgents no longer benefit from such a favorable imbalance of political centralization and military capacity. Indeed, the decline of counterinsurgent efficacy concomitant with the rise of the nation-state and the imposition of more profound territorial sovereignty from the center is less surprising if we recognize that it is the tools, technologies, and norms upon which the nation-state is built that have empowered insurgencies while handicapping counterinsurgency, as

these tools, technologies, and norms have engendered a proliferation of the capacity to organize and impose control among *non*-state actors.

Before moving into a discussion of each of these macro-trends in turn, it is important to note that the influence of these changes was neither immediate nor plainly evident in 1875; developments as far back as 1760[10] worked to create the environment in which we have witnessed such drastic change in COIN efficacy. The relative importance of one factor or another may vary from case to case, but the overall trend is nevertheless clear, well supported, and evident in a wide variety of cases drawn from divergent periods and geographies.

A. Insurgent Networks

Internal ties

As social and technological transformations have increasingly enabled insurgent groups to fashion stronger horizontal and vertical ties (including, significantly, international ties), insurgencies have become more potent and more resilient to counterinsurgent attack. Indeed, it is increasingly the case that insurgencies need not even be very potent as long as they are resilient: protracted counterinsurgency, frequently eschewed by the modern domestic populace and by the international community, is more and more frequently failed counterinsurgency (Mack 1975). Analysis of insurgent network strength can also help to explain relative successes or failures of insurgent groups against incumbent power pre-1875.

As Paul Staniland (2013) argues, insurgencies are most "militarily effective and resilient in the face of counterinsurgency…pressure" when they have both strong horizontal and strong vertical ties (8). Horizontal ties, i.e., "robust central control" and associated central monitoring,

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[10] Or much earlier, one might argue; when these changes truly began is a difficult question, but the onset of the Industrial Revolution in 1760 is likely one of the early catalysts of these shifts.

socializing, and distribution institutions are central to the insurgent leadership's capacity to establish, coordinate, and implement overall strategy while retaining the "loyalty and unity of its key leaders" (Staniland 2013: 7-8). Vertical ties, i.e., "robust local control," constitute "an institutionalized presence in local communities" enabling the insurgency to recruit, socialize, monitor, and discipline "foot soldiers and low-ranking commanders," such that there is "reliable, consistent obedience" even under sustained, potent COIN pressure (Staniland 2013: 7-9). Without such horizontal and vertical ties, insurgencies are "fragmented" and therefore "relatively easy to destroy," since they "exist as loose collections of small factions and individuals" largely unable to maintain unity and discipline (Staniland 2013: 10-1). Skilled counterinsurgents can more easily "systematically isolate and wipe out local units" as leaders "cannot readily move to and mobilize other locales because their links to these other areas are weak" (Staniland 2013: 78). Accordingly, as Staniland asserts, "the ability of rebels to build strong organizations has been crucial to their military effectiveness and political influence" (Staniland 2013: 1). Robust horizontal and vertical networks have been fundamental to insurgent success, even in cases before 1875, and the relative development and strength of intragroup ties help to explain differences in resilience and potency among even those groups that ultimately succumbed to state power. The American Indian insurgency provides such an example.

Fought over three centuries and involving over 200 tribes and 2,958 individual engagements (Friedman 2013a: 15; Friedman 2013b: 34), the American Indian Wars are, as Jeffrey Friedman recognizes, singularly well suited to analyzing the effects of political structure on the resilience and military potency of groups fighting incumbent control (Friedman 2013a: 2-7). Indian insurgent groups, some of whom resisted state control and some of whom did not, exhibited a diversity of political structures, which are well documented and, having formed prior

to the advent of incumbent forces, are "plausibly exogenous to the wars the tribes fought" (Friedman 2013a: abstract). Based on an extensive dataset describing conflicts and the levels of political centralization of the Native American groups involved, Friedman presents compelling evidence that Indian polities with more centralized institutions were substantially more likely than more fragmented polities not just to engage in violence but to fight larger-scale, longer-term, more destructive, and more successful conflicts (Friedman 2013a: 32). In short, relatively more centralized insurgent groups persisted longer against and inflicted more casualties on counterinsurgent forces. These are precisely the attributes that render insurgencies more difficult, and more costly, for incumbent powers to overcome (Friedman 2013a: 32).[11] Friedman finds a strong relationship between stronger intragroup networks and thornier insurgency in spite of the fact that American Indian political institutions appear to have been far less hierarchical and empowered with far less coercive force than modern insurgent institutions (Friedman 2013a: 32-3). As Friedman notes, "we should expect this relationship to be even stronger when political structures are more institutionalized" (2013a: 33). While political centralization may not *induce* violent resistance or capacity to wage more formidable insurgency, it may well make that engagement and devastating capacity feasible.

Further, failed insurgencies demonstrate the converse: no matter how severe the grievance and how intense the motivation, without robust horizontal ties (or external ties), the incumbent can extinguish localized pockets of resistance, even if these groups, individually, are highly formidable (Staniland 2013: 74). Repeated Polish uprisings in 1794, 1830, 1863, and 1905, for example, were doomed by disorganization; in their war against the Bolsheviks, Polish supporters were so diffuse that collective mobilization was impossible and the insurgency was

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[11] The power to inflict *cost* (casualties, resources, and time) on the incumbent as one of the major determinants of insurgent success will be examined in more detail in the next section.

quickly crushed (Boot 2013: 102). Later, in 1975 Afghanistan, an attempted insurgency by Islamists was "quickly and effectively shattered" as it failed to build robust central control to tie together disparate local cadres, neglecting to "'connect up with existing community structures'" and therefore remaining "'weak and geographically restricted'" (Staniland 2013: 180; Harpviken 1997: 275 and Dorronsoro 2005: 83 qtd in Staniland 2013: 179-80). Weak local control doomed the Muslim Janbaz Force in Kashmir, which collapsed due to the weakness of recruiting, monitoring, and socialization institutions (Staniland 2013: 135), and the Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen, which, despite "'virulent'" local rural networks, was a "loose coalition of [these] local networks" that in turn suffered from "enduring local factional autonomy" and lack of a "tight central leadership" (Joshi 1999: 63 qtd in Staniland 2013: 139; Staniland 2013: 139).

Even in cases where the insurgent group is relatively more integrated, as was the case in North Caucasus resistance to the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, counterinsurgents can prevail if they can effectively localize, circumscribe, and progressively smother the insurgency. Lacking adequate intelligence and pursuing a high-risk strategy (i.e., forcible disarmament), the Soviets were nevertheless able to suppress a rebellion fueled by intense grievance in less than five years because they were able to encircle distinct areas of population, isolate each completely from external communication and assistance, and concentrate overwhelming and indiscriminate violence on these villages individually (Zhukov 2013: 21-2). Subsequently removing the means of lethal resistance in door-to-door light arms seizures, the Bolsheviks rendered "rebel capacity to sustain a military challenge…sufficiently low, [and]…achieve[d] pacification despite a deeply unfavorable operating environment" (Zhukov 2013: 35). Effectively cutting off horizontal ties allowed the Soviets to extinguish an otherwise robust and relatively organized insurgency.

Localization precluded strong (or any) vertical and horizontal ties for almost all insurgent groups prior to 1875,[12] a fact reflected in the remarkably high incumbent success rate throughout the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. Before the transformation of transportation, communication, and economic systems enabled and encouraged greater mobility and exchange, society was largely organized into discrete, inward-facing social units isolated from one another. As Ernest Gellner (1983) outlines, the typical social structure of the "agro-literate polity" or agrarian empire (the predominant form of polity before the advent of the nation-state) consisted of a minority ruling class which enjoyed horizontal ties within its own "stratified, horizontally segregated layers" (i.e., exchanging letters, intermarrying, traveling to visit one another, and generally communicating and socializing among themselves) (9-13). These horizontally integrated ruling strata were, however, "rigidly separate" from the peasant majority, who generally "live[d] inward-turned lives, tied to the locality by economic need if not by political prescription" (Gellner 1983: 9-10). Peasant communities were no less rigidly separate from one another than from their aristocratic overlords, as communication and the formation of horizontal ties among people in different villages were simply impossible (Gellner 1983: 9-12).

Under such conditions, peasant uprisings could be rapidly suppressed: between 1808 to 1814, for example, Jacobin forces quelled numerous revolts in their European holdings with relative ease, as these uprisings were relatively "confined, geographically and demographically" and received no external aid (Boot 2013: 80-1). Incumbent forces, rather than moving from successful suppression of resistance in one area only to find that the insurgent hydra had spawned fresh resistance in another (or many more), could instead concentrate their military

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[12] Formation of such integrated groups remained a critical challenge for insurgent groups after 1875 but this year marks an approximate tipping point after which a critical confluence of changes facilitated increasingly formidable insurgencies.

might on a limited number of circumscribed areas of resistance and suppress insurgency wholly and decisively.[13]

Where peasants did manage to forge vertical ties, however, more consequential, formidable insurgency became possible. As Karen Barkey (1991) recounts, the "crucial determinant of large-scale, sustained peasant rebellions is the ability of peasants to find allies among other societal groups," i.e., those groups with the resources to support and render consequential popular resistance to the state (699). In France, "strong peasant-noble alliances" made sustained insurgency possible, as the "nobility offered several key ingredients for revolt: protection, organization and arms," while the "social isolation of the peasantry in the Ottoman empire" precluded "collective action" against the state (Barkey 1991: 699, 706). In this case, vertical ties between the people and leaders coordinating security and resources enabled a large-scale, sustained insurgency to crystallize where none could have emerged in their absence. These French seventeenth-century uprisings were, however, ultimately unsuccessful, despite their fledgling vertical ties, for the regions most given to insurgent activity were high in "intravillage solidarity" (i.e., strong community structure), but "sparsely settled" and "low in intervillage interaction" (Barkey 1991: 706). Such weak horizontal ties between local groups may well have allowed incumbent forces to smother even these relatively more formidable challenges to state power.

Although myriad post-1875 insurgencies with weak horizontal and vertical ties have emerged (and failed),[14] technological and related societal transformations beginning in earnest in

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[13] Similarly, perhaps the British and the French were able to overcome every American Indian insurgent group using roughly equal military weaponry, poor to nonexistent intelligence, and a strategy consisting of "fairly straightforward applications of almost pure coercion" because the various tribes remained discrete entities, which, without strong vertical and horizontal ties, could be bought off or individually eliminated (Friedman 2013a: 33).

the last quarter of the nineteenth century have enabled insurgent groups to develop horizontal and vertical ties of unprecedented profusion and strength (Kilcullen 2012). As Gellner observes, "in an inherently mobile and unstable society the maintenance of these social dams, separating unequal levels [i.e., village peasants and the aristocratic classes], is intolerably difficult" (1983: 12). And indeed, beginning in Europe, societies around the world have become progressively more mobile and interconnected over the past century and a half: "For Europe as a whole, the period between 1871-1914 was one of very rapid demographic and economic expansion …industry, trade, and transportation developed by leaps and bounds until, on the eve of World War I, they had totally transformed the face of the continent" (Van Creveld 2004: 109). Over the course of the twentieth century, these changes spread to the rest of the world's continents.

As changing economic conditions cut peasants' tethers to their rural farmland and both encouraged and compelled greater mobility, technological developments (e.g., railways, roads, telegraphs, radios, telephones, civilian mechanized transport, planes, and today, the Internet and cell phones) have made geographical mobility – and nearly universal communication – possible to an unprecedented extent. Coordination from the center and among local cadres has become increasingly feasible; insurgencies are no longer largely restricted to localized bursts of resistance (Kilcullen 2012). Accordingly, modern incumbents usually cannot simply envelop and smother isolated pockets of resistance. Modern international insurgencies like Al-Qaeda can project their message of jihad to a global audience on YouTube and through chat rooms, coordinate ideology and methodology of recruitment and socialization worldwide, communicate intelligence and enforce discipline over radios and cell phones, and flee from counterinsurgent pressure in cars, motorcycles, trains, and planes, often to foreign sanctuaries. Such capacities

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[14] The increasingly important role of foreign assistance in bolstering otherwise fragmented, doomed insurgencies will be discussed later in this section.

have been increasingly available to insurgents since these technological revolutions began in earnest in the mid to late nineteenth century, and though strong horizontal and vertical ties are not endemic to modern insurgency, the forging of these ties has indeed become more feasible and sustainable, rendering insurgencies increasingly difficult to extinguish. As Boot recognizes, "(s)cale matters in guerrilla warfare": what incumbents found possible to suppress "in a single isolated region" may be too pervasive, elusive, and costly to suppress in a larger area or "across an entire country" (Boot 2013: 81).

Indeed, while groups without strong internal ties are highly vulnerable to defection in the face of a determined counterinsurgent "divide-and-conquer policy," modern insurgencies' (frequently) stronger ties among local and regional elements work to preclude incentivized defection (Staniland 2013: 78). Incumbents vigorously exploited local and regional divisions with great success in the premodern age. As the next section details, incentivizing resistant tribes and kingdoms to abandon the fight was central to the Roman and Ottoman Empires' structure and responsible in large part for their remarkable longevity despite repeated challenges. Pacification through inducement and the creation of client kingdoms were characteristic of the center-periphery relations that constituted the empire itself (Heather 2006; Kocher 2004; Barkey 2008). Indeed, it is the disintegration of an insurgency's internal ties that prompts defection in the modern era. According to Staniland, while incumbent inducements allow internal insurgent divisions to translate into defection, it is the internal divisions that afford the state the opportunity to dismantle the insurgency. Without insurgent fragmentation, "(c)ounterinsurgent manipulation, bribery, and peace processes are unlikely to induce significant defection on their own" (2012: 37). In the case of Sri Lanka, for instance, "(t)he willingness of the Indian and Sri Lankan militaries to work with insurgents was important in providing opportunities for armed

groups to switch sides…[but] the driving trigger for defection was not the lure of state patronage, but instead the need for protection caused by intrainsurgent fratricide" (Staniland 2012: 35-6). Accordingly, insurgencies whose internal ties are strong enough to prevent or curtail destabilizing fratricide are more resilient in the face of counterinsurgent efforts, no matter how attractive incumbent inducements might be.

The next section examines the possibility that modern incumbents may offer inducements less frequently than their premodern counterparts did because working with or aiding actors that are particularly unsavory to the incumbents' constituency – i.e., the rebels and 'terrorists' most demonized in the state media – may be politically impossible, no matter how effective state defection inducement might otherwise be. Given the prevailing Western rhetoric proclaiming absolute refusal to engage with, much less negotiate, with terrorists and other violent resisters to state authority, it is difficult to imagine a Roman-style patron-client relationship between the United States and Al Qaeda, for example. It seems highly likely that the American populace, and the citizens of other modern Western nations, would reject such a relationship with 'the enemy.' During the 2007 surge in Iraq, the US was able to induce Sunni militias to defect from Al Qaeda by offering these groups protection from severe reprisals[15] (significantly, *after* Al-Qaeda had engendered deep resentment among these militias), but these militia were relatively low-risk and low-profile (Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro 2012); the real question vis-à-vis induced defection as a counterinsurgent policy is whether it is viable in the modern era when implemented with high-risk, high-profile, politically unsavory insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda itself. It is not clear that all or most modern counterinsurgents, at least the democratic ones, are

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[15] The US also offered inducements of "$300 per fighter per month," but it was the provision of security that permitted the Sunni militias to break with Al Qaeda; prohibitive levels of violence had previously precluded such defection (Biddle, Friedman, and Shapiro 2012: 18-22).

as willing as the Indian or Sri Lankan militaries to "provid[e] opportunities for armed groups to switch sides" and thereby divide and conquer armed challengers by actively co-opting them (Staniland 2012: 35-6).

Moreover, insurgencies need not exhibit extraordinarily strong intragroup ties to force incumbents to grant concessions or even admit defeat. It is often sufficient that an insurgency is sufficiently integrated (vertically and/or horizontally) that its relative perseverance and capacity to inflict costs push the incumbent (or its impatient, cost-averse constituency) to the point of COIN exhaustion.

EXTERNAL TIES

The strengthening of internal insurgent networks increases the resilience of insurgency both in itself and through its encouragement of external networks. Foreign actors are more likely to support groups capable of success or posing a potent challenge to – and draining substantial resources from – the incumbent in question, rather than a group that might disintegrate in short order, representing a waste of resources and potential embarrassment for the supporting state, or that might spawn factions in pursuit of ends unattractive to the potential state sponsor. The recent Syrian civil war demonstrates how wary foreign actors can be of involvement with groups that seem liable to fragmentation, fratricide, and collapse. Despite the strong opposition of many Western nations to the counterinsurgent tactics of Bashar al-Assad, uncertainty regarding the viability and coherence of the Syrian rebels discouraged concerted, overt, and substantial foreign support. Insurgencies that succeed in establishing (or at least presenting) effective horizontal ties are more likely to find crucial external support (e.g., arms, strategic counsel, diplomatic affirmation, troops, or safe haven).

Kalyvas and Balcells (2010), along with a wealth of recent research, find that the international system has a profound impact on internal conflict and may be one of the key determinants of the occurrence and the outcome of that conflict. Indeed, for Jeffrey Record (2007), "the presence or absence of external assistance may be the single most important determinant of insurgent war outcomes," and he, like Boot (2013), finds "few if any examples of colonial or postcolonial insurgencies that prevailed without foreign help" (Record 2007: 23; Boot 2013: xxvi). As the German general Erwin Rommel acknowledged, even the most determined insurgency cannot succeed without adequate resources:

> The bravest men can do nothing without guns, the guns nothing without plenty of ammunition; and neither guns nor ammunition are of much use in mobile warfare unless there are vehicles with sufficient petrol to haul them around (Van Creveld 2004: 200).

External assistance, whether financial, material (e.g., food or fuel), or military (e.g., strategic counsel, safe haven, or troop contributions), may enable insurgents to reverse an unfavorable balance of power between insurgent and incumbent (Record 2007: 24-5).[16] Examples abound of insurgent groups suffering from weak ties or lacking adequate resources propelled to success by external assistance. The North Vietnamese, for instance, would likely have failed without foreign assistance, as they were entirely dependent upon "China, the Soviet Union, and other Communist Bloc countries for all armaments," from small arms and ammunition to a sophisticated air defense system and the crucial Viet Cong rail network (Record 2007: 23). It is, in Record's words, "difficult to see how an unarmed North Vietnam could have translated its superior will and strategy into victory over the United States and its South Vietnamese allies" (2007: 23).

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[16] Political assistance will be described in the next section. External assistance has occasionally been influential in incumbent survival as well: "During the cold war the United States provided military assistance to a host of countries facing internal insurgent threats" (Record 2007: 24).

The Soviet-Afghan War provides another illustrative case study: the Afghan resistance was only weakly organized, suffering from lack of unifying vertical ties among its "constellation of 200 to 300 guerrilla groups" and would likely have crumbled before the sustained, punishing Soviet onslaught "but for the impossibility of isolating the Afghan resistance from external assistance" (Record 2007: 55). The arms the Afghan *mujahideen* received from Iran, Pakistan, and the United States "dramatically shifted the balance of power in Afghanistan" and "increased the costs of conquest and occupation" for the Soviets (Arreguin-Toft 2005 qtd in Record 2007: 55-6). Indeed, the "literature on the Soviet-Afghan War is virtually unanimous in affirming the decisiveness of foreign help in defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan" (Record 2007: 55).

Similarly, the devastating and ultimately decisive[17] 1953 French defeat at Dien Bien Phu was occasioned by "major Chinese military assistance in the form of professional advisers and training teams, large quantities of small arms and military gear, and most important, modern artillery" (Record 2007: 44). Conversely, before political concerns forced the French out of Algeria, the effects of their successful "isolation of the insurgents from external assistance…coupled with stepped up French counterinsurgency operations inside Algeria, were militarily decisive" and fatally weakened the insurgency (Record 2007: 60).[18] Accordingly, as Record points out, "One has difficulty finding a successful, externally unassisted insurgency, except in those cases of exceptionally weak or disintegrating governments," like Batista's 1959 regime in Cuba or the 1918 Czarist regime in Russia (Record 2007: 64).

Lastly, information technology permitting modern record keeping, communication, and access (as well as the literacy Gellner (1983: 11) finds absent among the peasants of the agrarian empires) has also allowed insurgent groups to gain access to the experience and expertise of

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[17] For reasons explored in the next section.

[18] Until French domestic opposition and disorder gave the insurgency a vital boost.

insurgent groups around the world – and throughout history. As Boot argues, where before "literacy levels were low, books rare, long-distance travel difficult [and] (m)ost people led isolated lives," it was nearly impossible for insurgents to pool collective wisdom and share lessons about the most "potent techniques to bring powerful empires to their knees" (Boot 2013: 54). Now insurgents may also "study their predecessors' experiences," an advantage counterinsurgents had long enjoyed (Boot 2013: 54). Indeed, according to Boot, one of the greatest advantages enjoyed by modern insurgencies is "the ability to learn from their predecessors" (Boot 2013: 53-4).

B. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE NATION-STATE

While the development of popular sovereignty has increased the importance of public opinion and empowered it to stymie otherwise effective COIN, transformations in the conception of sovereignty have made counterinsurgency 'success' more difficult in another sense: the form of modern state control (i.e., state sovereignty) mandates a very direct and comprehensive form of control within territorial boundaries. The imposition of this sort of sovereignty constitutes a far more daunting challenge than the less intrusive sovereignty empires imposed for centuries (Boot 2013: 24; Kocher 2004: 194-6; Barkey 2008; Barkey and Hagen 1997). In effect, changing notions of incumbent control have raised the bar for state victory versus those resisting its power.

Before the twentieth century and its proliferation of nation-states, empires were the predominant form of political entity (Wimmer and Min 2006: 870) and generally allowed numerous regions under its aegis substantial autonomy as long as these regions paid taxes and supplied conscripts. As a result, sovereign control permitted autonomous practices, customs, and

governance structures and meant little more than exacting a fee from the local population and the

equivalent of staking a particular flag. The Romans, for example, maintained a network of client

kingdoms in frontier regions (where it is generally most difficult to impose state control), paying

off resistance with gold and trade and, "like most successful imperialists…exploiting political

divisions" among these potential insurgents (Boot 2013: 23; Heather 2006: 82-3). As Boot

affirms, Roman "ferocity in putting down revolts…was only part of the story," as Rome

frequently accommodated its enemies – offering citizenship, security, and prosperity, the empire

often assimilated them (Boot 2013: 23). Roman elites maintained "a complex web of social and

financial connections that bound them closely with local elites both inside and outside the

empire," and it was this network of near universal elite dependence on the empire that permitted

the "ramshackle Roman state" to run a massive empire extraordinarily cheaply with a relatively

small army (Boot 2013: 23-4).

The Ottomans maintained a similarly successful and long-lasting form of unobtrusive

rule over relatively autonomous regions bound together by networks of center alliances with

periphery elites, upon whom the empire practiced divide-and-rule skillfully (Barkey 2008: 3-27;

Kocher 2004: 15, 221). As Kocher (2004) argues, "the Ottomans maintained their hegemony

in this region by limiting their demands and by cultivating local allies at multiple levels of

aggregation among whom a rough balance of power could be maintained by the center" (15).

The Ottomans, like the Romans, did not attempt to impose direct rule over the vast expanse of

their territory[19] and offered security and prosperity within its bounds (Barkey 2008: 3-27). These

policies did much to curtail insurgent uprisings (Boot 2013: 24-5). Indeed, if a "draw" (as Lyall

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[19] As Kocher demonstrates in Kurdistan: "the Ottomans chose to create defensive depth at relatively low cost, manning the great fortresses of the East directly but avoiding any attempt to comprehensively occupy the countryside" (2004: 212).

and Wilson define it) entails "the voluntary disarmament of insurgents in exchange for greater participation in the state's political affairs…or the granting of greater regional autonomy (but not independence)," then "draws" are precisely the means by which empires survived and laid sovereign claim to the lands and populations under their control (2009: 71). Empires were built upon negotiated draws and concessions, which neutralized those most capable of mounting resistance in defense of an alternative state vision, preempting and defusing well-resourced, well-supported, and therefore resilient insurgencies before they even began.

In contrast, to exercise 'true' sovereignty today, the state can no longer rely on negotiated draws or concessions to extend its (nominal) power. Instead, the state must subdue insurgencies by extending and establishing comprehensive control over regions previous empires would have left autonomous and/or bought off. It is a far more formidable task to impose what now constitutes 'sovereign rule,' one that demands much more direct rule over those within its boundaries. Indeed, as Kocher observes in the case of Kurdistan, as the Ottoman state "more thoroughly penetrated the rural society of Kurdistan, its ability to deter or overcome large-scale internal challenges to the authority of the state actually *declined*" (2004: 197). During the period of the Moroccan Protectorate, the French generally hugged the coasts and limited their control to the plains populations, who recognized incumbent authority and paid taxes (Potiron de Boisfleury 2010: 17). In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the French-controlled Sultan exercised "limited, sometimes only nominal" control in more rural and mountainous regions of his territory, as the tribesmen in these regions "accepted his religious headship, but were less prepared to pay taxes" such that here "the Sultan's authority was spiritual only" (Potiron de Boisfleury 2010: 17). When French (and Spanish) forces threatened to extend their control over an emir of the Rif Mountains, Abd el Krim, however, they soon faced a large-scale, highly

cohesive, and strongly supported insurgency, involving many tribes the French had considered pacified. The Rif Rebellion inflicted heavy French casualties and enormous economic costs. Only massive bombing campaigns and the use of devastating chemical weapons succeeded in subduing the rebellion (Balfour 2002).

Perhaps now that modern nation-states can no longer purchase the obedience of or effectively cede territorial control[20] to capable, relatively autonomous groups without relinquishing their claim to sovereign power, well-resourced insurgents are indeed mounting potent, resilient challenges to state power where before, encountering little incumbent interference, these groups would have found little reason to engage in large-scale insurgent resistance. Indeed, Kocher asserts, "That encroachments on the privileges of peripheral elites is a source of conflict, and sometimes violence, seems beyond question. Especially when these local authorities maintain independent means of violence, they can be expected to resist" (2004: 206). As state attempts to impose direct control have spread over the course of more or less the past century, incumbents have provoked formidable foes whose resistance previous forms of rule (i.e., imperial rule) had effectively preempted or diffused. The tremendous costs of successful counterinsurgency against such insurgents, coupled with the new constraints incumbents face in their pursuit of counterinsurgency, have resulted in increasingly frequent counterinsurgency failures.

IV. CONCLUSION

Counterinsurgency, it seems, has become an increasingly onerous task. Since the mid-nineteenth century, insurgent resilience and strength rose while counterinsurgent capacity deteriorated. The theory presented here posits two transformations which, while tracing their

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[20] Albeit with a fee in taxes and conscripts (and nominal control).

roots back to the mid-eighteenth century, began to manifest with particular intensity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and may help explain the marked modern decline in counterinsurgent success rates: (a) the heightened feasibility of forging insurgent networks, and (b) the shift in conceptions of sovereignty to a more direct imposition of control. It seems the very transformations that facilitated the modern nation-state's displacement of imperial polities have worked to render insurgencies increasingly effective and persistent. If robust insurgency is increasingly feasible – and increasingly successful – as state-building tools proliferate, internal and external networks flourish, and notions of sovereignty evolve, shouldn't increasing modernization lead to increasingly potent insurgent threats? Indeed, a realist perspective would predict that more and more non-state actors would choose to engage in insurgency in light of the rising feasibility of victory and its rewards. It would seem, then, that we are headed for the violent atomization of states the world over.

To the contrary, the world's most modernized countries, far from suffering insurgencies made impossibly robust by modernization, have faced virtually no domestic insurgencies for decades. Indeed, Kalyvas and Balcells (2010) find "a striking decline" in insurgent or "irregular" conflict in the aftermath of the Cold War (427). Evincing the centrality of external and internal networks to insurgent resilience and potency, "robust insurgency benefited from extensive and multifaceted superpower support…channeled through transnational…supraregional and even global contacts and networks" during the standoff between the United States and the USSR, but when the Cold War ended, so did the "abundant provision of material support to rebel forces across the world" (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010: 420-1). Accordingly, insurgent capacity and overall rates of victory against the state dropped dramatically after 1991. Although this post-Cold-War shift in the international system was a singular, one-time event, there is reason to

believe that the effects of the transformations outlined in this paper will ultimately engender a reduction of insurgent activity. The proliferation of the communication, transportation, and weapons technologies that, in combination with widespread social changes, enabled the modern state to establish a more profound sovereignty in the areas within its reach may have in turn enabled insurgents to mount more devastating challenges to incumbents *at first*, but the cumulative result of (i) urbanization (Kocher 2004; Kilcullen 2012: 21-2), (ii) extension of state transportation and communications infrastructure into hitherto inaccessible or disconnected areas (Warren 2012; Kilcullen 2012: 24-5), and (iii) gentrification (i.e., rising GDP per capita) is likely a dramatic decline in insurgent incidence. Indeed, insurgencies have most often proliferated and consolidated within countries – and in the particular areas within those countries – that have not yet experienced fully the effects of these trends.

According to Kocher, urbanization works to inhibit insurgency by depriving potential rebels of an environment conducive to the forging of rival states,[21] such that the progressive urbanization of the globe should work to progressively suppress insurgency. Kocher finds that the "pattern of settlement…is the key factor that determines whether or not [insurgents] can effectively state-build inside the territory of an existing state," as insurgent state-building is necessary to "(c)halleng[e] incumbent states violently," and since they lack a large number of well-organized and well-equipped troops, guerrillas can only state-build within areas of relatively low population density (2004: 2). In these areas, the state simply cannot "occupy every place where people live continuously," affording insurgents room to maneuver, employing tactics of violence to assert sovereignty over relatively unprotected, unorganized, and unarmed locals remote from state protection and control (Kocher 2004: 4). In more urbanized (i.e.,

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[21] States rivaling the present, or incumbent, state.

densely populated) areas, insurgents are vulnerable to "being overwhelmed by the superior resources, organization, and fighting strength of modern incumbent states" (Kocher 2004: 3):

> The highly concentrated populations and small spaces of cities and towns *require* something resembling conventional battle to control them….[as they] force conventional battle, render intensive population control and surveillance relatively easy…represent concentrated assets the state has high incentives to protect, and facilitate the denunciation of clandestine rebels to state forces (Kocher 2004: 4).

Accordingly, in urban settings, "it is comparatively easy for the state to literally occupy every place with significant concentrations of force" which insurgents cannot hope to confront militarily with any frequency of success, such that "highly urbanized places are the toughest environments for the counter-state" (Kocher 2004: 3-4). Although Kocher acknowledges that the level of settlement concentration cannot definitively and infallibly predict whether insurgencies will thrive or flounder, urbanization should work broadly to depress the level of insurgent activity, as insurgencies find it more difficult to expand their state-building projects over significant territory within states and ultimately, to find areas where such counter-states can take root (2004: 5).

Some, like David Kilcullen, however, suggest that given expected increases in "fighting over scarcer resources in crowded, under-serviced, and under-governed urban areas" as the world urbanizes, cities represent the next frontier of heightened insurgent activity (2012: 26). While an urban subset of insurgencies certainly exists, however, this subset is limited and we can expect it to remain so. As Staniland (2010) points out, this atypical "class of civil wars" is "important" but "small," and the urban insurgencies that do break out emerge because of "political constraints on the counterinsurgent state's response," not an urban structure or social, political, or economic climate that is especially conducive to modern, robust insurgency (1642-3). Indeed, Kilcullen seems to discount the fact that "(c)ities present easier targets to conventional military

forces than the pacification of vast swathes of rural terrain, regardless of their social characteristics" (Staniland 2010: 1630; Kilcullen 2012: 31; Kalyvas 2006; Kocher 2004). When the state cannot impose overwhelming sovereign control, either on account of political constraints (Staniland 2010), lack of policing resources, or bureaucratic failings, then insurgencies may well break out in these "most vulnerable cities," but the migration from rural areas (which are, for the incumbent, relatively uncontrollable) to urban areas (far more feasibly controllable) will decrease the incidence and the potency of future insurgencies (Kilcullen 2012: 26).

Further, we can expect increasing connectivity between the center and the periphery in the form of expanding and improved communication and transportation networks (Kilcullen 2012: 21, 24-5) not only to facilitate the armed extension of state power into formerly more autonomous regions, but also to generate greater acceptance of incumbent authority in these peripheral spaces (Warren 2012). As Camber Warren (2012) stresses, "effective state capacity requires not just physical access, but *communicative* access, to the relevant populations," which enables "the generation of widespread voluntary compliance with state dictates through the dissemination of normative appeals" that, "through the transmission of images, myths, and other symbols…characterize state rule as beneficial and just" (2012: 1-2, 6). Consequently, populations in areas "with stronger mass media systems will be less likely to engage in anti-state collective violence" and states with "more well developed mass media systems [can]…more effectively resist violent divisions" (Warren 2012: 2, 7). Accordingly, the expanding "reach of state communications" through "roads, electrification, and most importantly, technologies of mass communication" into terrain previously remote from the center (physically or effectively) will increase incumbent capacity to govern groups previously prohibitively expensive to control

(Warren 2012: 1-8; Kalyvas 2006; Boulding 1962; Gellner 1983). The expanding "deployment of mass communication infrastructure," then, is likely to reduce insurgent activity in areas formerly liable to "violent rebellion" (Warren 2012: 1).

Lastly, although the causal mechanisms involved are not well understood, peace within a country's borders appears to be correlated with economic performance as measured by such indicators as per capita GDP (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). More robust economic performance may subdue insurgent activity in a number of ways: higher levels of income may boost incumbent legitimacy, raise citizens' switching costs and heighten incentives to resist insurgent control, signal the level of resources the incumbent can channel into projecting state power into the periphery (in terms of coercive power or soft power like social service provision), and/or inspire popular support by providing a measure of the state's capacity to monitor, evaluate, and extract resources from the population. A state's economic strength may signal incumbent counterinsurgent capacity and/or enhance it, but regardless, numerous studies have found that "*per capita* income, and the growth rate…have statistically significant and substantial effects that reduce conflict risk" (Collier and Hoeffler 2004: 588).

Whatever the mechanism, it seems plausible that rising levels of income around the world would work to reduce insurgent activity globally. And the world is, in fact, getting wealthier. The world is not only "getting a lot richer" as a whole (Nairne 2011), but as Charles Kenny (2011) asserts, the world has also "got a lot less poor": across the developing world, these "trends are strong enough that the broad picture of falling global poverty and rising incomes is widely accepted" (Kenny 2011). Accordingly, even if the potency and robustness of insurgencies surged in the century and a half, there is good reason to believe that trends consequent to the broad modernization of the globe will work to further the consolidation of the

nation-state and both reduce the incidence of insurgency (due to reduction of pliable space and support) and permit the state to fight insurgencies more effectively (through enhanced avenues of peripheral control).

If the globe has been witnessing urbanization, increased connectivity, and relatively robust economic growth since the start of the Industrial Revolution, shouldn't the incidence and strength of insurgencies have been *dropping* since 1875? It must be noted, however, that the effects of modernization have been highly uneven (Warren 2012), such that only in recent decades have real shifts toward urban life, the infrastructure for connectivity, and more comprehensive increases in personal wealth appeared outside the developed world (Kenny 2011; Nairne 2011). It is likely that modern technological and societal transformations permitted non-state actors to forge rudimentary and limited, albeit resilient, networks while the incompleteness of such modernization prevented the imposition of broad and encompassing networks of control, i.e., a sovereign nation-state whose control consists of both coercion and welfare provision. Although partial or fragmentary modernization may lead to a heightened insurgent threat to incumbent authority, more consistent, comprehensive modernization should reverse and overcome this phenomenon.

A sort of inverted-U paradigm, then, might more aptly characterize the nonlinear nature of the effects of these global transformations, wherein modern technologies and societal shifts first worked to expedite insurgent construction of robust networks but did not yet allow the state to extend its presence and authority to all areas within its borders (while evolving conceptions of sovereignty prohibited the state from condoning or simply ignoring such semi-autonomous areas), leaving spaces outside state control to incubate devastating insurgencies even as the state ought to extend its control over the areas within its reach. As increasingly pervasive

modernization extends that reach, however, these bastions of insurgency should shrink and weaken, resulting in the attenuation of the insurgent threat. Indeed, this is the pattern we observe in the historical record. We might exploit this unevenness of modernization around the world to construct subnational empirical tests of the claims made in this paper. As Warren (2012) recognizes, the pace, progress, and effects of modernization are uneven not only among states but within them: "state strength," however defined (Kocher 2010), "is rarely uniform across territory" or across cleavages and groups (e.g., ethnic groups) (Warren 2012: 2). Subnational comparisons of peripheral regions experiencing disparate degrees of urbanization, connectivity, and economic progress, then, may demonstrate more concretely the parabolic effect of modernization on insurgent incidence and strength. We would expect regions that experience greater development (becoming relatively more urbanized, connected, and wealthy) to witness curtailment of insurgent activity compared to those places that have access to rudimentary modern weapons, communications, and transportation technologies in more sparsely populated areas bereft of substantial connectivity to the state center and the economic boost associated with extensive modernization.

Perhaps such study will review development thresholds similar to those found in the democracy literature (Przeworski and Limongi 1993), whereby beyond a certain level of development, a state is highly unlikely to experience substantial insurgent activity. Still, even if it is reasonable to expect modernization to subdue the insurgent threat over the coming decades, it is possible that the greatest danger to the stability and wellbeing of the nation-state may come from armed groups uninterested in seizing state power, such as terrorist networks (e.g., the multiplicity of Al-Qaeda-affiliated militant groups) and cartels, which fuse irregular warfare with the intent to destroy and disrupt or to profit. Violent minorities capable of inflicting great

damage with modern tools may well do so, even if they cannot – and do not intend to – seize

central state control.

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