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Why Do the Strong Quit?
Causes of Counterinsurgent Withdrawal during Overseas Insurgencies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in International Relations from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for HONORS
(Honors)



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, weak actors used guerrilla warfare in attempts to expel much stronger foreign forces from their territory with mixed success. This often occurred in European colonial empires as subject peoples sought independence. In such insurgencies or small wars, seldom can weaker actors ever hope to militarily vanquish the strong's forces. The weaker power must instead convince the strong power to quit the fight, for until the strong power decides to withdraw its forces, the weak has not won. My question is what causes a strong power, faced with an insurgency in a distant territory, to throw in the towel, withdrawing its forces and making terms with the insurgents?

In this paper I will argue that the decision by a strong power to abandon a war against irregular forces in an external territory depends on whether the leadership of the strong power feels the answer to the following three questions is “no”:

(1) **Can we win the peace?** If the strong power's leadership becomes convinced that its military action is not aiding the establishment of an advantageous and locally legitimate political order, they will be inclined to withdraw.

(2) **Will our present enemies still threaten us if we leave?** If strong powers' decision-makers feel that a political order following withdrawal would not be hostile, they will be inclined to withdraw.

(3) **Is there something in the territory we must have?** If the territory in question plays a crucial role in supplying natural resources such as oil to the metropole, the leadership will be inclined to continue the war. If the territory is desired for another

reason, such as defensive military purposes, then policy-makers will be able to substitute control of the territory with other measures, such as off-shore naval forces, to secure their strategic aims, making them inclined to withdraw.

Many scholars have argued that the economic and financial cost of the conflict, public opposition to it, and the degree of international sanction resulting from the war, are key factors in strong power withdrawal. I will argue that these factors prove to be far less decisive than the three mentioned above.

The Study of Insurgency: Battle of Wills and Public Support

Carl von Clausewitz famously tells us that “war is a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means,”¹ and that a successful state combatant must align the powers of the “trinity” of government, army, and people.² War’s political object of “compel[ing] our enemy to do our will”³ can come from the “disarming of the enemy”⁴—militarily defeating the enemy’s armies—or by inflicting damage that seeks to convince the enemy that the “expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object”⁵—in other words, targeting the will of the enemy’s people and government and the resources of its country. While some see irregular warfare as a launching pad for conventional victory,⁶ it typically serves as the latter sort of strategy, seeking to convince

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret), (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976), 87.

² *Ibid.*, 89.

³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ William R. Polk, *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism & Guerrilla Warfare from the American Revolution to Iraq*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), xxiii; Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, (Washington: Brassey’s, 2002), 20; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1961) 18, 23.

the strong to make peace on the weak's terms by creating conditions in which the strong faces "the improbability of victory" and an "unacceptable cost."⁷

In one of the first academic works on guerrilla warfare, Joseph Kraemer says that nationalist guerrillas raise the economic and military costs of maintaining political control and also subject the strong power to both international opprobrium and domestic political pressure to withdraw and end the conflict.⁸ He notes that much decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s was the result of war-damaged European economies being unable to sustain military counterinsurgency operations.⁹ Kraemer agrees with Robert Taber's contention that the "oppressive power relinquishes its grasp" when the rebellious land "becomes (1) too great a political embarrassment to be sustained domestically or on the world stage, (2) unprofitable, too expensive, or no longer prestigious."¹⁰

In an early major paper discussing why the weak defeat the strong, Andrew Mack says that the will, or the "*political capability*" (italics in original) to wage war is a crucial determinant of victory: a big power fighting far from its metropole will by definition not have as much at stake as those fighting for their independence. The weak's use of guerrilla warfare wearies the strong, and thus destroys the strong's domestic political ability to continue the conflict, even though they possess a preponderance of military power. Because the metropole is not subject to invasion by the weak, the conflict is not an existential one for the strong, though it is for the guerrillas struggling against it in the conflict zone.¹¹ The strong will be unwilling to engage in the necessary levels of

⁷ Clausewitz, 91.

⁸ Joseph S. Kraemer, "Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare and the Decolonization Movement," *Polity* 4, no. 2 (Winter, 1971): 137-158.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Taber, 98.

¹¹ Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January, 1975): 181.

violence to bring the rebels to heel while nationalism will help the weak endure the reprisals of the strong. Territories with substantial settler populations, for whom the conflict is existential, will prove much harder for weak combatants to defeat.¹² Mack's analysis is groundbreaking, in that he notes that strong power defeat comes from its own decision to give up on the conflict and he addresses generally *why* the strong quit. But he does not say how this decision is reached or what specific factors lead the strong to continue fighting and what leads it to withdraw and why it might do one or the other.

Some recent scholarship examines how public opinion and domestic politics influences strong power defeats in insurgencies. Gil Merom, noting that democracies are unusually successful in conventional war, argues "that democracies fail in small wars because they find it extremely difficult to escalate the level of violence and brutality to that which can secure victory"¹³ because of "disagreement between state and society over expedient and moral issues that concern human life and dignity."¹⁴ Essentially, "the politically most relevant citizens" in the upper middle class are unwilling to allow their government to brutalize foreign populations in order to quell rebellion. Merom cannot account for times when democracies have successfully defeated insurgencies, such as Britain in Kenya and Malaysia and the United States in the Philippines. Why would British "squeamishness" or "lack of stomach" cause Britain to withdraw from Cyprus while pursuing a brutal victory in Kenya?

Dominic Tierney contends that in America (and presumably, to some degree in other nations too), a "quagmire mentality" sets in over time, that leads to disillusionment

¹² Ibid., 190-191.

¹³ Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), 15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

and withdrawal.¹⁵ This is a product of American history (especially the Vietnam War), values and the way in which the American media covers military operations abroad.¹⁶ With the benefits dubious and the costs mounting, the public's hope dissipates and there are calls for withdrawal. Responding to public pressure, American leaders call it quits. For Tierney, America's political capability is destroyed by opposition to the war caused by the public's perceived hopelessness of the situation. But this "quagmire mentality" does not always set in right away or before the US achieves success (such as during the Filipino Insurrection). He seems to preclude the thought that policymakers would be willing to take action against public opinion or with any concern other than domestic politics. Tierney's thesis fails to explain why public opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which have dragged on for years, has not led to withdrawal. Instead, American Presidents chose to escalate both conflicts when the war was least popular.

The Study of Insurgency: Clash of Arms

Many recent studies focus on the military dimension of asymmetric conflicts. Ivan Arreguin-Toft argues an asymmetric war's outcome is determined largely by the interaction of strategies employed by both the strong and weak actors.¹⁷ For the weak, a direct strategy is an attempt to engage the front line combat units of the strong and hold territory against them. An indirect strategy is guerrilla warfare that targets the strong forces' logistics and morale. For the strong, a direct strategy is one that targets the

¹⁵ Dominic Tierney, "America's Quagmire Mentality," *Survival* 49, no. 4 (Winter, 2007): 60-62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷ Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer, 2001): 93-128.

opponent's fighters and supplies, while an indirect strategy is barbarism that targets the opponent's civilian population through massacres and other reprisals. In a dyad in which both combatants choose the same type of strategy—direct-direct or indirect-indirect—the strong will invariably win. But if a strong and a weak actor employ different types of strategies, then the weak should prevail. Guerrillas will eventually outlast a strong actor that seeks to find and kill guerrilla combatants while attempts to force the weak into submission by inflicting pain while leaving the weak side's combat power more or less intact should fail because they tend to increase the resistance of the weak.

Arreguin-Toft's theory has many flaws. In few conflicts do the combatants pursue pure "direct" or "indirect" strategies. During the Irish War of Independence, the British military and security services often engaged in reprisal killings and destruction of property, but also engaged in "direct action" and intelligence operations in targeting Irish Republican Army guerrillas. During the Iraqi Revolution of 1920, Iraqis at times fought British outposts conventionally and overran them, but also harried the British with guerrilla tactics. Further, Arreguin-Toft does not explain why a strong power would decide to withdraw—an essential aspect of strong power defeat is the strong side's own decision to discontinue the distant conflict. He mentions that a preponderance of strength leads to expectations of easy victory, and when this does not occur, the strong becomes frustrated. The strong are forced to increase the amount of resources devoted to the war and to resort to barbarism, both of which lead to domestic backlash against the war.¹⁸

Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson also try to explain asymmetric war outcomes by focusing on the military conflicts themselves. They argue that what is necessary to defeat insurgents is interaction with the local population, and that the more mechanized armies

¹⁸ Ibid., 105-106.

are, the less they interact with the population.¹⁹ They suggest that as state militaries have become more mechanized, they are less infantry intensive and have less interaction with locals as they drive or fly by and bring along their own supplies instead of foraging. But like Arreguin-Toft's thesis, their work ignores what drives the strong power's decision to withdraw when their mechanized military fails to quell irregular rebels.

Jeffrey Record argues that many different factors determine whether the strong or weak will prevail in an asymmetric conflict, but that the single greatest factor is whether the weak actor has external support. He notes "highly motivated and skilled insurgents can be defeated if denied access to external assistance and confronted by a stronger side pursuing a strategy of barbarism against the insurgency's civilian population base."²⁰ In addition to increasing the strong's battlefield costs of blood and treasure, Record notes that external support for insurgents causes a change in the balance of power in the military theater and a reevaluation of the situation by the strong power.²¹

The Study of Insurgency: National and Military Culture

Record also contends, like Tierney, that the United States has peculiar cultural factors, especially the military's and the public's ideas on war and victory, that make the US particularly vulnerable to defeat by insurgents.²² Other writers, such as military historian John Pimlott, argue that Britain and the British army are especially well suited to counter-insurgency war, based on Britain's long experience in imperial wars against

¹⁹ Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, "Rage Against the Machines: Explaining outcomes in Asymmetric Conflict," *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (Winter, 2009): 68, 72-73.

²⁰ Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win*, (Washington: Potomac Books, 2007), 24, 132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

²² *Ibid.*, 24-27.

irregular local opponents.²³ While national culture may make victory more or less likely (Britain has lost counterinsurgencies, such as Cyprus Emergency, and the US has won them, such as the Filipino Insurrection), culture cannot be the decisive factor or alone trigger withdrawal.

The Study of Insurgency: Unanswered Questions

Current scholarship leaves some important questions unanswered. *How* does the attrition of the strong by the weak combatant take effect? Arreguin-Toft, Record and Lyall and Wilson all discuss important factors in how the war on the ground plays out. It is logical to infer that failure to prevail on the battlefield leads somehow to withdrawal. Is the increasing financial cost of a drawn out war the decisive factor, as Kraemer and Taber contend? Or does domestic dissatisfaction weigh heavier in policy makers' minds, as Merom and Tierney argue?

Studies of asymmetric warfare pay insufficient attention to the impact the value of the territory being fought over has on the decision to continue in suppressing a rebellion or giving up on it. It seems plausible that a strong power could find some territories more worth fighting for than others. A territory can possess value in two ways: by virtue of its location and its resources. What role does the value of a territory, both the value of its strategic location and its resources, play in the decision to fight for or abandon a territory?

Methodology

²³ John Pimlott, "The British Army: The Dhofar Campaign, 1970-1975," in *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-Insurgency*, eds. Ian F.W. Beckett and John Pimlott, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 16-17.

I have selected four cases of rebellion from within the British Empire. Two of the rebellions occurred following the First World War, the second two began during the 1960s. In each pairing, Britain withdrew from one territory and handed over power to its adversaries, while in the other pursued the fight and defeated the insurgency. Selecting all British cases has a number of advantages. Most important, it controls for factors of national culture and regime type, which Record, Pimlott, Merom, and Tierney view as important in determining when strong powers will abandon their military efforts against weak adversaries. While holding constant the factors of regime type and national culture, I am able to explore the role public opinion, geography, and leaders' perceptions played in the determining whether or not to abandon the conflict. The vast nature of Britain's imperial holdings means Britain frequently found itself facing weak combatants, thus allowing for simultaneous comparisons.

The heart of my research involves archival research, studying British Cabinet meeting minutes to determine what influenced the Cabinet's decisions in each conflict. I supplemented the archival research by various secondary sources on each of the cases. Being that many works on insurgencies have been theoretical, such as Mack's and Kraemer's, or involve large-N quantitative studies, like Arreguin-Toft's and Lyall and Wilson's, my close examination of specific cases complements the existing literature and explores avenues neglected by scholars. By parsing the discussions leading to key decisions, I can trace out how events on the battlefield, Britain's economic situation, and the pressures of public opinion shaped the actions of British ministers. I can thus establish a link between these various pressures and the decision to withdraw.

Case Selection

The first paired comparison is the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and the Iraqi Revolution (1920). After World War I, Britain found itself facing revolts in its oldest and newest imperial holdings: Ireland and Mesopotamia. In both countries, the British military demonstrated a willingness to use great and indiscriminate violence to contain the unrest. But by 1922, Britain had granted its oldest external possession dominion status (virtual independence; the same status enjoyed by Canada) and turned over power to a Sinn Fein/Irish Republican Army government. In Mesopotamia (soon re-named Iraq by the British), Britain asserted its League of Nation Mandate, remaining a dominant influence in the country until the 1958 Iraqi Revolution.

The second paired comparison is the Aden Emergency (1963-1967) and the Dhofar Rebellion (1964-1975). In the early 1960s leftist guerrilla groups challenged Britain's pre-eminent position in southern Arabia in both the Aden Protectorate and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman. In both Aden and Muscat and Oman, Britain exercised power in collaboration with local rulers. The British Army had recently crushed insurgencies in Kenya (the Mau Mau Rebellion) and Malaysia (the Malay Emergency). Yet in 1967 Britain withdrew from Aden, abandoning it to the leftist forces. In neighboring Oman, Britain redoubled its assistance and brought in other regional allies to assist the Sultanate in defeating the rebels. The campaign took over a decade and British officials dominated the administration of the Omani government and military well into the 1980s.

My case selection allows me to examine a number of factors in relative isolation, determining what causes withdrawal. The comparison of Iraq and Ireland allows for

comparison in norms, examining whether using violence against Arabs in a distant land was perhaps more acceptable to the British public than using it against fellow Europeans in a neighboring isle. It also allows me to compare the relative value of territory, looking at oil rich Iraq versus resource poor Ireland, and the importance of a territory's location, comparing a North Atlantic island to Middle Eastern land neighboring Turkey and Persia and close to Russia.

The comparison of Aden and Oman holds relatively constant the value of a territory's location and resources. Both are located in southern Arabia and have middling oil wealth. Both conflicts pitted the British and their local allies against leftist rebels in Arab countries, so there is no reason why use of violence against Arab leftists should be viewed with more moral opprobrium in one territory than another. This comparison permits an examination of the role domestic party politics and ideology play in a withdrawal decision. During the war in Oman, the Conservative Party, generally more hawkish, took power from Labour for a time, only to lose it again before the Anglo-Omani military effort succeeded. The change in government permits an examination of the impact of political ideology on the decision-making process.

By looking at events at two different points in time, I am able to examine British policy making during different economic and international political situations. Looking at two pairs also helps mitigate the impact of factors unique to each pair in the four decisions.

It is important to note that all these conflict zones bore a different constitutional relationship with Britain. Ireland was part of Great Britain, legally the same as England, Scotland, and Wales. Mesopotamia (Iraq) was a League of Nations Mandate, given to

Britain to administer but not technically under British sovereignty. The city of Aden itself was a Crown Colony, surrounded by tribal protectorates. Muscat and Oman was technically independent but was a de facto British protectorate, controlled by British soldiers and administrators. All these conflicts occurred in an era of rising nationalist challenges to British dominance, challenges which would eventually contribute to the collapse of the Empire. It should be made clear then that in each case, Britain was not fighting to retain complete administrative control over the territory. In fact, in all of the cases, Britain had decided it would be lessening its administrative control over the territory. What Britain desired was to preserve “the patterns which had constituted the traditional imperial system” that substituted “informal control” for direct rule.²⁴ In Ireland and Aden, Britain failed to do so. While Ireland retained some links to the British Crown, power was handed over to an IRA/Sinn Fein government with the power to make laws, collect taxes, set trade policy, raise troops, and conduct external relations. In Aden, power was transferred to the National Liberation Front, which established a Soviet-bloc state. In Iraq and Oman, nominally independent monarchies were managed by British soldiers and administrators well beyond the conflict’s end.

²⁴ L.J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 193.

CHAPTER 2

IRELAND AND IRAQ

At the end of World War I, British and allied armies were victorious throughout the world, but the Empire was badly overstretched financially and militarily. Britain's wartime leader, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, faced a tricky diplomatic endgame finalizing peace treaties with Germany and Ottoman Turkey, dealing with the creation of the Soviet Union as the first communist state and the rise of the United States as a major power, and contending with a recession in Britain.

As the Empire's armies were demobilized, Britain faced a number of new military threats. In its oldest possession, Ireland, the Irish members of Parliament refused to take their seats and declared an independent republic. They soon backed up this claim with a campaign of guerrilla warfare. In Mesopotamia, which British forces had occupied since the middle of the war, a nationalist revolt brought Sunni and Shia Arabs together in a bloody war against the British occupation forces. At great expense in blood and treasure, Britain crushed the revolt in Mesopotamia but negotiated a peace treaty that granted independence to most of Ireland. In this chapter I will argue that Britain abandoned its war in Ireland because (1) Cabinet members believed establishing an enduring, pro-British government was impossible, meaning Britain had "lost the peace," (2) the terms Irish rebel leaders were willing to accept convinced British leaders that an independent Ireland would not be a threat, and (3) British leaders believed retaining naval bases on the Irish coast would allow the Royal Navy to adequately defend Great Britain's maritime approaches. I will also argue that Britain persevered in suppressing the Iraqi revolt because (1) Cabinet leaders always believed Britain could establish a locally legitimate

pro-British government, (2) British leaders felt withdrawal from any part of Iraq would leave a vacuum of power that would be filled by a rival power, threatening Britain's position in Persia and southern Iraq, and (3) leaving Mesopotamia would forfeit British access to local oil reserves.

Irish War of Independence

Ireland was formally incorporated in the United Kingdom in 1801, with the same constitutional status as England, Scotland, and Wales. Periodic revolts continued and by the late nineteenth century there was a strong movement for Irish autonomy. In 1914, after decades of Irish pressure, the British parliament passed a controversial Home Rule Act that would have granted Ireland some domestic autonomy, but because Irish Protestants objected, implementation of the act was postponed. In 1916 a small group of radical Irish nationalists staged a German-backed revolt in downtown Dublin. The execution of the revolt's leaders and a proposal to introduce conscription into Ireland towards the end of WWI increased pro-independence and anti-British sentiment in Ireland. In the British general elections at the close of 1918, the Irish separatist party Sinn Fein won virtually all seats in Ireland except in a few predominantly Protestant areas in the northern part of the island. The Sinn Fein delegates declared a republic on January 21, 1919 and the Irish Republican Army, Sinn Fein's military wing, commenced guerrilla warfare against the Royal Irish Constabulary and the British Army.

The British government was focused on the Versailles peace conference where Lloyd George was heading the British delegation. The war started slowly and was seen first as a policing problem with the Sinn Fein parliament a bigger concern for British

leaders than IRA violence.²⁵ British leaders feared an independent Irish republic would pose an unacceptable threat to the security of Britain itself.²⁶ Ireland was crucial to guarding the western maritime approaches to Britain. In addition to concern that Sinn Fein was a pro-Bolshevik organization, there were worries that an independent Ireland allied with the United States would challenge British naval superiority. America was in the midst of naval build up Britain could not afford to match.²⁷ The president of the declared Irish Republic, Eamon de Valera, was an American citizen by virtue of his New York birth. He spent much of 1919 and 1920 touring the United States, attracting crowds in the tens of thousands.²⁸ Irish-American groups were lobbying hard for US support of Irish independence and other idealistic Americans took up the Irish cause, and the British Ambassador in Washington worried the United States might come out in support of Sinn Fein.²⁹ Thus, Britain felt it imperative to retain control over Ireland's security and external affairs. The most generous proposal for Ireland the Cabinet discussed by the end of 1919 envisioned an autonomous Ireland with no military or war making capability, no independent foreign policy, and a currency and trade policy set by the United Kingdom.³⁰

As 1919 progressed the IRA began to make its presence felt throughout much of Ireland by attacks on police barracks and other symbols of government. By the summer

²⁵ Lord French, Memorandum on the Release of Sinn Fein Prisoners, February 7, 1919, CAB 24/76; Eunan O'Halpin, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland, 1892-1920*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1987), 180; Thomas E. Healy, *Britain and Irish Separatism: From the Fenians to the Free State, 1867-1922*, (Washington: Catholic UP, 1984).

²⁶ Cabinet, "First Report to the Cabinet on Ireland," November 4, 1919 CAB 24/92; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, November 11, 1919 CAB 23/18.

²⁷ Foreign Office Political Intelligence Division, "Public Opinion in the United States," February 25, 1919, CAB 24/75.

²⁸ Home Office, "Revolutionary Movements Abroad," February 16, 1920, CAB 24/98.

²⁹ Edward Grey to the David Lloyd George, October 6, 1919 CAB 24/90; Edward Grey to the David Lloyd George, October 17, 1919 CAB 24/92; Cabinet, "Western and General Report No. 125," June 25, 1919, CAB 24/150.

³⁰ "First Report to the Cabinet on Ireland," November 4, 1919 CAB 24/92.

the Cabinet and press realized the situation in Ireland needed to be addressed.³¹ Through 1919, the British security services were unsure of the enemy they were facing. Many British leaders perceived Sinn Fein and the IRA as closet Bolsheviks and the nature of the IRA, who ran it, and the degree of its centralization were all in doubt.³² Many in the Cabinet, including the Chief Secretary for Ireland, felt that punitive actions would soon have effect and return Ireland to British control.³³

As 1920 began British security services found themselves subject to ever fiercer attacks. The Royal Irish Constabulary, the all Irish and mostly Catholic paramilitary police force, was unable to function adequately or obtain recruits.³⁴ By May, police and military leaders in Ireland had requested reinforcements and the Cabinet decided to establish special paramilitary police units composed of demobilized WWI veterans to help restore order.³⁵ By now, the Irish police had abandoned large parts of the countryside in the face of IRA attacks. Military commanders in Ireland requested planes to conduct an air campaign against the IRA and their request was turned down only because no spare planes were on hand in Britain.³⁶ Because a formal treaty with the Ottoman Empire had not yet been signed, war-time emergency powers were maintained and the Cabinet readied legislation to extend emergency powers and try guerrillas in special military tribunals.³⁷ With the arrival of British reinforcements, especially members of the paramilitary auxiliaries, the war intensified dramatically and with a much

³¹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 14, 1919, CAB 23/15; Healy, 230-231.

³² Admiralty, "Political Summary of Ireland," November 11, 1919 CAB 23/92; O'Halpin, 191.

³³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 14, 1919, CAB 23/15.

³⁴ Home Office, "Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom," February 26, 1920, CAB 24/99; James Gleeson, *Bloody Sunday: How Michael Collin's Agents Assassinated Britain's Secret Service in Dublin on November 21, 1920*, (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2004), 7-9.

³⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1920, CAB 23/21.

³⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1920, CAB 23/22.

³⁷ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 26, 1920, CAB 23/22; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, August 4, 1920, CAB 23/22.

higher civilian cost. The paramilitary police, known as “Black and Tans” for their combination of brown Army and black police uniforms, were infamous for their atrocities and reprisal killings, which were reported in the British and American press.³⁸

In addition to the escalation of the War, the Cabinet developed a political solution in the form of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. Since the passage of the 1914 Home Rule Act, many in Ireland and Britain assumed Ireland would have some degree of self rule in the future and the Cabinet sought some form of political solution to the “Irish question” from early in the conflict.³⁹ The Government of Ireland Act granted limited autonomy to what would become Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, designated Southern Ireland, separately. The new Act to appeased Protestant Unionists and their Conservative supporters in Parliament and the Cabinet who had balked at the idea of by the all-Ireland parliament in the 1914 Home Rule Act. Lord Privy Seal Andrew Bonar Law, the ranking Conservative in Lloyd George’s Tory-Liberal coalition government, was okay with an Irish Republic—he in fact recommended “turning disloyal Ireland out of the Empire”—but felt that no right-thinking person would “ever think of forcing the loyal and Protestant North into the same political mould as the disloyal and Roman Catholic South.”⁴⁰ The Act was also designed to appease public opinion in the UK and abroad, prevent the 1914 Act from coming into force, and make Sinn Fein appear as uncompromising radicals.⁴¹

As winter approached the War continued and violence surged. Lloyd George scoffed at criticism of Black and Tan brutality, saying the Black and Tans had “struck the

³⁸ Frank Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, from first-hand sources, of the negotiation and signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 48-58.

³⁹ Denis Gwynn, *The History of Partition, 1912-1925*, (Dublin, Browne and Nolan, Ltd., 1950), 182-184.

⁴⁰ Andrew Bonar Law, “Memorandum to the Cabinet on Ireland,” November 25, 1919 CAB 24/93.

⁴¹ O’Halpin, 193.

terrorists and now the terrorists are complaining of terror,” indicating his intention to crush the rebels.⁴² In December, large parts of Ireland were placed under martial law,⁴³ so that reprisals could be brought “under official control” for greater effect.⁴⁴ The imposition of martial law and the fierce counter-guerrilla operations had significantly damaged the IRA’s organization and convinced British police and military leaders the IRA was on the ropes. At a December 29 Cabinet meeting, the British police and Army commanders in Ireland reported that the IRA could be crushed in another four months or so.⁴⁵ But British political leaders was starting to lose hope of bringing the conflict to a close by military means alone by the end of 1920. When Lloyd George asked the assembled generals and commandants if an election could be held in early 1921 and what the result would likely be, he was told it would probably be boycotted on orders from Michael Collins, the IRA Director of Intelligence and de facto leader. To this the Prime Minister remarked, “if Michael Collins could stop three million people from using their vote, it did not say much for the success of the policy His Majesty’s Government was now pursuing.”⁴⁶

As the war escalated through 1920, British leaders began to get a clearer understanding of their foe. They began to see Sinn Fein and the IRA as relatively hierarchal and under the control of Irish President de Valera and Michael Collins.⁴⁷ Sinn Fein had begun sending peace feelers to the British government, primarily through

⁴² Pakenham, 57.

⁴³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 9, 1920, CAB 23/23.

⁴⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, October 1, 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁴⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 29, 1920 CAB 23/23.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 24, 1920 CAB 23/23.

members of the Catholic clergy.⁴⁸ Some members of Cabinet, especially Lloyd George, began to feel that they could arrange a truce with the IRA and then negotiate a final settlement along the lines of the Government of Ireland Act.⁴⁹

In rough agreement that further military action was of limited use, the Cabinet decided to respond to the Sinn Fein negotiation offers.⁵⁰ Secret meetings and indeterminate violence continued for many months as Sinn Fein and British negotiators edged towards a cease fire.⁵¹ Sir Anthony Cope, a former detective was named Assistant Under-Secretary for Ireland and somehow put himself in touch with senior Sinn Fein and IRA leaders. These first steps toward a negotiated settlement were halting and had made little head way by early spring.⁵² Sinn Fein was unwilling to surrender its arms or agree to preconditions.

Lloyd George still hoped that military means might advance his ends and let him negotiate from a position of strength.⁵³ He felt moderate Irish leaders and Sinn Fein members would come forward, but not until the IRA had been sufficiently broken up.⁵⁴ Once this happened, Sinn Fein and the Government would negotiate “for the discussion of such amendments to the Government of Ireland Act as will make it acceptable to the people of Southern Ireland,” in the words of Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu. So the War continued, with mixed results for the British. By April General Nevil Macready reported that the IRA “flying columns” that had operated openly in 1920 were

⁴⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1920 CAB 23/23; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, November 17, 1920 CAB 23/23.

⁴⁹ Fraser, 45.

⁵⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1920 CAB 23/23; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 9, 1920 CAB 23/23.

⁵¹ Gwynn, 194.

⁵² Pakenham, 67-68.

⁵³ Fraser, 45.

⁵⁴ “World’s Disorders are ‘Coming Right’ says Lloyd George,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1920.

driven underground.⁵⁵ In June, the security services found and seized IRA headquarters in Dublin and captured many IRA veterans when the IRA attacked the Dublin Customs House.⁵⁶ Yet Sinn Fein and the IRA demonstrated a strong hold over the population. In the May elections for the Southern Ireland legislature, Sinn Fein won all seats except those reserved for Trinity College, Dublin.⁵⁷ A Colonel sent by the War Office to assess the military situation in Ireland reported back that, “the British Army in Ireland is besieged,” either hunkered behind defenses or traveling only in armed units while, “on the other hand, the population moves when, where, and by whatever route it wishes. This is a curious situation for a force whose *raison d’être* in the country is to maintain order.”⁵⁸

In June 1921, with the Protestant Unionists secure in their own autonomous region in Northern Ireland, Britain threw in the towel and offered Sinn Fein a truce without preconditions and an offer of Dominion status. Sinn Fein leaders went to London for final negotiations.⁵⁹ The resulting Anglo-Irish treaty established an Irish state, known as the “Irish Free State” and possessing the same constitutional links to the British crown as Canada. The treaty reserved British sovereignty over three naval bases on the Irish coast, had Ireland assume a portion of Britain’s war debt, and proscribed the Irish army from enlisting a higher percentage of the Irish population than Britain did of its own. It also specified that the final borders between Northern Ireland and the Free State would be decided by a boundary committee.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Nevil Macready, “Report by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief on the Situation in Ireland, the Week Ending April 23, 1921,” April 26, 1921, CAB 24/122.

⁵⁶ Home Office, “Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom,” June 2, 1920, CAB 24/125.

⁵⁷ Pakenham, 65.

⁵⁸ Col. Hugh Elles, “The Military Situation in Ireland,” June 24, 1920, CAB 24/125.

⁵⁹ Hackey, 283; Fraser 45-48.

⁶⁰ Anglo-Irish Treaty, December 6, 1921, DE 2/304/1.

Why did Britain Quit?

Three factors led to the British government's decision to negotiate peace with Sinn Fein and withdraw from most of Ireland: the sense that Britain had "lost the peace," the perception an independent Ireland would not threaten British security, and the acknowledgement there was nothing in Ireland Britain needed. As Lloyd George began to realize in his December 1920 meeting with the police and army commanders, no form of British rule would be accepted as legitimate by the Irish. The Sinn Fein sweep of the Southern Ireland elections confirmed this, as did the inability to recruit Irishmen to the security services. For over a century before 1919, the predominantly Catholic RIC kept order in Ireland. By the last week of June 1921, only 12 of the RIC's 224 new recruits were Irish.⁶¹ In June the Army also noted that they did not feel Irish units could be used in Ireland.⁶² The Irish people and Sinn Fein would not accept mere "amendments to the Government of Ireland Act" and continued war would not make British rule any more legitimate. Britain had "lost the peace."

The fact that Ireland agreed to acknowledge the British sovereign as Head of State convinced the Cabinet that Ireland would be unlikely to break decisively with Britain in the realm of foreign affairs. Because Sinn Fein was willing to accept Dominion status, rather than their desired republic, the Cabinet felt Ireland would not be completely hostile after the withdrawal of British troops. Members of the press, the Cabinet, and other Dominion leaders had long advocated this move would satisfy many Irish aspirations and

⁶¹ Hamar Greenwood, "Weekly Survey of the State of Ireland," June 29, 1921, CAB 24/125.

⁶² War Office, "British Military Liabilities," June 15, 1920, CAB 24/107.

allay British concerns.⁶³ The fact that Northern Irish Protestants were secure in their British run enclave meant no religious war would erupt after Britain's departure.

Further, Ireland's value as a defensive bulwark in the Atlantic was to be retained. The treaty granted the Royal Navy three bases, known as "treaty ports," allowing it to secure the seaward approaches to Britain and thus allayed Britain's main security concern regarding Ireland. As long as the seas could be secured, Britain derived no real additional value from administering Ireland.

Other Factors Examined

Public opposition to the conflict does not appear to have been a decisive factor in Britain's decision to end the War. The War was never popular and the harsh measures of the British security services angered much of the British public. The proximity of Ireland meant events were well covered in the British press. However, the War was unpopular from its onset; had British leaders been merely following public opinion, the War would have ended much sooner. Instead it dragged on for two and a half years. The decision to form the Black and Tans and other military auxiliaries was taken with the full knowledge that the action would be described as the "reconquest of Ireland" by the British press.⁶⁴ Up until the eve of the truce, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Birkenhead, vigorously defended the government's harsh policies.⁶⁵ If the Cabinet's overriding goal had been to appease public opposition to the war, the public escalation, bombastic rhetoric, and declarations of martial law were an odd way to do it.

⁶³ Fraser, 41, 47, 53; Gwynn 184.

⁶⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1920, CAB 23/21.

⁶⁵ Pakenham, 64.

The role of international pressure also appears to be rather minimal. Public sympathy abroad for the Irish cause seldom translated into political pressure. Sinn Fein pinned great hopes on Irish Americans, who strongly supported the cause of Irish independence. However, fervent lobbying efforts and outpourings of support for Sinn Fein failed to move the Wilson administration, which remained pro-British throughout its tenure.⁶⁶ Ireland failed to win international recognition from any country save the Soviet Union, which was itself internationally isolated. The Dominions lobbied in favor of Ireland, with Irish-Canadians and Irish-Australians at the forefront of pro-Irish efforts. But like the British public, the Irish Diaspora in particular and the English-speaking world in general opposed the war from the start. While outrage at British policy concerned the Cabinet, it was largely just lamented, especially when it did not translate into official pressure. As early as February of 1919 the Cabinet was aware that the “unsolved Irish question” was the main source of Anglo-American friction,⁶⁷ but proceeded to engage in years of warfare. Dire warnings from the British embassy in Washington began in the Spring of 1919 and prompted little action from the Cabinet.⁶⁸ The biggest concern was expressed at the refusal of Irish-American dockworkers to load and unload British ships in New York and Boston, which could have caused a significant danger to British trade.⁶⁹

What certainly did not cause British withdrawal was a lack of resources. It is true that at the end of WWI, British troops were very overextended and the country was

⁶⁶ Alan J. Ward, *Ireland and Anglo-American Relations*, (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1969), 166-268.

⁶⁷ Foreign Office Political Intelligence Division, “Public Opinion in the United States,” February 25, 1919, CAB 24/75.

⁶⁸ Edward Grey to the David Lloyd George, October 6, 1919 CAB 24/90; Edward Grey to the David Lloyd George, October 17, 1919 CAB 24/92.

⁶⁹ Home Office, “Intelligence Report on Revolutionary Movements Abroad,” August 22, 1920, CAB 24/112.

heavily in debt. Though while the British army and air forces were heavily committed in the Middle East, Britain was easily able to recruit auxiliary forces from recently demobilized soldiers. Had Britain desired to continue the conflict, forces could have been removed from the Middle East, especially after the peace with Turkey and the end of the worst of the Egyptian and Iraqi revolts. As the War Office noted, “compared with Mesopotamia, Ireland was a small affair... Broadly speaking, we had only lost in Ireland one-tenth of the men, and Ireland had only cost one-tenth of the money expended in Mesopotamia.”⁷⁰

The Iraqi Revolution of 1920

British forces from the Indian Army landed in the Ottoman province of Basra in 1914 to open another front against the Ottoman Turks during WWI. The initial expedition was a failure and had to surrender in 1916. A second invasion in 1917 fared better and the end of the war left the British Army in possession of much of the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Basra, what is now southern and central Iraq, which the British then referred to as Mesopotamia. The region had been allotted to Britain by the secret wartime Sykes-Picot Agreement and shortly after the armistice between the Ottomans and the allies on October 30, 1918, British administrators from the Indian government arrived to administer the province. Local Arabs resented this imposition of Indian law. Throughout 1919 Mesopotamians chafed under the occupation and there were scattered outbreaks of violence. After the Conference at San Remo in April 1920, it was announced that the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra would form a

⁷⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 31, 1920, CAB 23/23.

League of Nations Mandate of Iraq administered by Britain. This announcement sparked outrage and the revolt began at the end of May.⁷¹

Initially, the extent of the revolt and the competence of the local Arab forces caught the British by surprise. In the early summer of 1920 many small British outposts were overrun or had to be abandoned. Hundreds of British soldiers were taken prisoner. Many units were cut-off in remote outposts.⁷² The General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia, James Aylmer Lothorpe Haldrane, Mesopotamia requested reinforcements which were dispatched from Persia and India. The Cabinet decided to sack the British civilian leader, Civil Commissioner Sir Arnold Wilson, and replace him with a veteran Middle East hand, Sir Percy Cox.⁷³ The government in London committed to a long campaign to pacify Mesopotamia, approving a plan developed in Baghdad to “contract to railheads in Mesopotamia, and develop [the] Air Force there, and gradually re-occupy as our strength grows and circumstances allow in the next few years.” The additional units, including armor and airplanes, would allow the army to “handle roughly” the Mesopotamian rebels.⁷⁴

Throughout the summer, the Cabinet’s discussions do not indicate that they gave much thought to abandoning the new Iraq Mandate. Discussion often involved how Britain’s new Middle East territories would be administered (whether by the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, Indian government, or a new Middle East office) and the nature

⁷¹ Edwin Black, *Banking on Baghdad: Inside Iraq’s 7,000 Year History of War, Profit, and Conflict*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2004), 250-252.

⁷² War Office, “Memorandum on the Causes of the Rebellion in Mesopotamia,” September 30, 1920. CAB 24/112.

⁷³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 17, 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁷⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1920, CAB 23/22.

that the Iraqi oil concession would take.⁷⁵ Early in June, Secretary of War Winston Churchill circulated a plan to withdraw from northern Iraq and northwest Persia, concentrating forces in central and southern Mesopotamia.⁷⁶ Churchill's plan only involved abandoning the northern countryside and concentrating forces in Baghdad. Talk of withdrawal seems to have been quashed three days later when India Secretary Edwin Montagu circulated a recent telegram from Cox saying, "we must hold what we then had with the troops then in the country, or clear out," and "there was no middle course."⁷⁷

At the end of July, the news from Mesopotamia worsened. Haldrane informed the War Office that Baghdad may have to be abandoned.⁷⁸ Many of the requested reinforcements had not arrived from India and would not be in the field until August. But the British military and civilian leadership in Baghdad were not all on the same page. The same day that Haldrane wrote about abandoning Baghdad, Cox cabled his own analysis back to London suggesting that the grievances of the Arab rebels were largely local and that in three years time a pro-British regime could be established.⁷⁹ It was Lloyd George and Montagu's handpicked man, Cox, who had the ear of the Cabinet. Whereas the GOC's communiqués were transmitted through the War Office, Cox often communicated directly with the Cabinet at large.

As British and Indian reinforcements poured in from Persia and India, the British went on the offensive. By August the news from Baghdad was that the British were

⁷⁵ India Office, "Memorandum on Mesopotamia," June 1, 1920, CAB 24/107; Viscount Milner, "Memorandum on the Middle East," June 17, 1920, CAB 24/108; Edwin Montagu, "Memorandum on Mesopotamian Oil Fields," July 12, 1920, CAB 24/109.

⁷⁶ Winston Churchill, "The Situation in Mesopotamia Should it be Decided to Evacuate Northwest Persia and Withdraw on All Fronts in the Area Covered by Existing Railroads," June 12, 1920, CAB 24/107.

⁷⁷ "Mesopotamia: Political and Military Situation," Telegrams between Indian Secretary and Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, June 15, 1920, CAB 24/107.

⁷⁸ War Office, Telegram from JAL Haldrane to the War Office, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110.

⁷⁹ Percy Cox to Cabinet, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110.

beginning to get a handle on things. The “situation had eased considerably” and London was told that not quite as many reinforcements were needed as thought in July.⁸⁰ By September the War Office reported to Parliament that “the back of the rebellion has been broken.”⁸¹ Despite the fact that violence continued, Cox was instructed to establish an Arab-run Iraqi government.⁸² From the late summer on, Cabinet members were told by Cox and others on the ground in Mesopotamia that a local government could be established that would take over much of the administrative and military duties from Britain.⁸³ In the person of Feisal bin Al-Hussein, the military leader of the British-backed Arab Revolt against the Ottomans in WWI, Cox and other Middle East experts felt they had good candidate to build a pro-British administration around.⁸⁴

It was in the Fall and early Winter, when British military might was prevailing, that members of Cabinet started to consider abandoning large parts of Mesopotamia. At no time did the Cabinet ever discuss abandoning the whole country, but there was a lot of debate as to whether all of what is modern day Iraq should be retained or only the southern, Shia dominated portions which constituted the Ottoman province of Basra. An expensive army of occupation would have to remain in Iraq for some time while a new Arab one was established.⁸⁵ Churchill, worried about the strain Mesopotamia placed on the War Office budget even before the war started, was a constant advocate for

⁸⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, August 12, 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁸¹ Winston Churchill, “Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War Relating to the Army Supplementary Requests for 1920-21,” September 2, 1920, CAB 24/116.

⁸² Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁸³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 31, 1920, CAB 23/23; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, August 12, 1920, CAB 23/22; Percy Cox to Cabinet, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110.

⁸⁴ NNE Bray, “Preliminary Report on the Causes of Unrest,” September 24, 1920, CAB 24/112; Percy Cox to Edwin Montagu, December 26, 1920, CAB 24/188; India Office, “Note on the Causes of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia,” August 1920, CAB 24/110.

⁸⁵ Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War Relating to Army Supplementary Requests for 1920-1921, September 2, 1920, CAB 24/116.

withdrawal to Basra to cut costs.⁸⁶ By October, Montagu also doubted Iraq was worth the cost.⁸⁷ Churchill and the General Staff felt the greater Basra area could be held with less troops than all of Mesopotamia.⁸⁸ Britain could thus retain the northern part of the Persian Gulf, protecting the passage to India and secure the most well known oil fields. Additionally there was strong public opposition to the war, especially related to the great cost of the army.⁸⁹

Why Did Britain Stay?

Britain persevered in Iraq because British leaders believed that military efforts were leading toward a desirable political solution—a British-dominated Iraqi state, because withdrawal would have left a power vacuum that would have destabilized British interests throughout the Middle East, and because some form of British control was necessary to gain access to Iraqi oil.

Cabinet members felt that a massive British presence and expenditure was not indefinite after Cox began establishing a local government. Instead, Iraq could become a boon to the Empire. Cox reported to London that a pro-British indigenous establishment could be quickly established and that it would largely maintain order with its own Arab troops⁹⁰—not unlike the way India and British African colonies were primarily

⁸⁶ Winston Churchill, “Mesopotamia Expenditure,” May 1, 1920, CAB 24/106.

⁸⁷ Edwin Montagu, “Mesopotamia Mandate,” October 9, 1920, CAB 24/112.

⁸⁸ Cabinet Meeting Minutes, December 13, 1920, CAB 23/23; Barry Lando, *Web of Deceit: The History of Western Complicity in Iraq, From Churchill to Kennedy to George W. Bush*, (New York: Other Press, 2007), 12-13, 16.

⁸⁹ Edwin Montagu, “Mesopotamia Mandate,” October 9, 1920, CAB 24/112; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 1, 1920, CAB 23/38.

⁹⁰ Telegrams between Percy Cox and Edwin Montagu, December 31, 1920-January 2, 1921, CAB 24/118; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 31, 1920, CAB 23/23.

garrisoned with native troops.⁹¹ As Arab troops were raised, the British military role could be largely restricted to that of air support. As long as local Arabs were substantially involved in the administration of the territory, Cox felt they would accept the British Mandate.⁹² Thus a few years of expense could transform Mesopotamia into a new India: Iraqi oil would fuel the British fleet and make profits for British corporations, a British controlled Arab administration would keep order in Iraq, and British advisors would develop the local economy. Iraqi troops would serve as needed throughout the Empire, just as Indian troops did.⁹³ Cox, Haldrane, and other experts on the scene reported that other than some of the urban intelligentsia, most rebels were not nationalists, but tribesmen fighting due to local grievances, a violent nature, financial inducement from Turkish intelligence, or because tribal leaders felt Britain was weak and they sensed opportunity.⁹⁴ Most of the new “Iraqis” would thus be content with a British Mandate as long as the administration “had a truly Arab Facab [system]” and was “predominantly Arab.”⁹⁵ Thus no matter the military difficulties faced by the British Army, should British arms prevail the Cabinet could trust that their man in Baghdad, Cox, would “win the peace” by establishing a British-dominated and locally legitimate government.

⁹¹ Winston Churchill, “Mesopotamia Expenditures,” May 1, 1920, CAB 24/106; Winston Churchill, “The Situation in Mesopotamia Should it be Decided to Evacuate Northwest Persia and Withdraw on All Fronts in the Area Covered by Existing Railroads,” June 12, 1920, CAB 24/107; Winston Churchill, “Situation in Mesopotamia,” December 10, 1920, CAB 24/116.

⁹² Percy Cox to the Cabinet, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110; Percy Cox to Edwin Montagu, December 26, 1920, CAB 24/118.

⁹³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, October 12, 1920, CAB 23/22.

⁹⁴ Percy Cox to Cabinet, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110; NNE Bray, “Preliminary Report on the Causes of Unrest,” September 24, 1920, CAB 24/112; Percy Cox to Edwin Montagu, December 26, 1920, CAB 24/188; India Office, “Note on the Causes of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia,” August 1920, CAB 24/110.

⁹⁵ Percy Cox to Cabinet, July 30, 1920, CAB 24/110.

Withdrawal was rejected by Lloyd George and much of the Cabinet (Churchill being the major dissenter), because they feared the resulting vacuum of power would be filled by Bolshevik, Turkish, and French influence. The General Staff labeled the “Turkish and Bolshevik menace” as the main danger to British forces in Mesopotamia and Persia.⁹⁶ Haldane warned of Turkey’s “aggressive intentions against Mosul Villayet [sic]” in northern Iraq.⁹⁷ An India Office report was more dire, declaring, “we must recognise that we are fighting in Mesopotamia not a constitutional question as to the future government of Mesopotamia, but for the very existence of civilisation in the Middle East. If we are driven out, only anarchy can supervene.”⁹⁸ Military and civilian leaders alike such a withdrawal would ruin Britain’s image in the Arab world, because “everyone knew what retirement meant when carried out in front of a native enemy.”⁹⁹

Churchill’s partial withdrawal to southern Iraq was rejected as well. The Cabinet was informed that there was no natural defensive line in the south of Mesopotamia and “very large consensus of military and Governmental opinion on the spot [Baghdad] held that the retirement to the line proposed by the General Staff would at any rate in the event of attack, require as large a force as is required to hold the present area of occupation.” Foreign policy experts informed the Cabinet in December “that if this [Churchill’s] policy were adopted the British Mandate would be destroyed, the local Arab Government would disappear and its local levies would never be raised; and the Turks, possibly in collusion with the Bolsheviks, would enter into the vacuum thus created.”¹⁰⁰ There was

⁹⁶ Winston Churchill, “The Situation in Mesopotamia Should it be Decided to Evacuate Northwest Persia and Withdraw on All Fronts in the Area Covered by Existing Railroads,” June 12, 1920, CAB 24/107.

⁹⁷ JAL Haldane, “Reduction of British Garrison in Mesopotamia,” December 1, 1920, CAB 23/38.

⁹⁸ India Office, “Note on the Causes of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia,” August 1920, CAB 24/110.

⁹⁹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1920, CAB 23/22.

¹⁰⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 13, 1920, CAB 23/23.

also the possible France would take advantage of British weakness. The War Office noted that French forces had concentrated in eastern Syria near Mosul at the start of the summer¹⁰¹ and Haldane noted that the French “may seek to protect their own interests without regard to ours.”¹⁰² It was clear to the Cabinet that withdrawal, even a partial one, meant a hostile entity would arise in the center of the Middle East in position to threaten Britain’s hold over the Persian Gulf and the oil fields of Persia and Basra.

Finally, Britain needed a presence in Mesopotamia to access the oil there. By WWI, the Empire and especially the Royal Navy were dependent on Persian Gulf oil and the decision to invade Mesopotamia was in part to secure the oil there.¹⁰³ When reports of unrest reached London, the first thing Churchill asked Haldane about was the security of oil fields in Mesopotamia and Persia.¹⁰⁴ Lloyd George was ardently against a withdrawal from northern Iraq, as that would let the oil contracts for Mosul’s oil fields would go to American or French companies.¹⁰⁵ Even if the route to India could have been secured by the occupation of Basra (which everyone but Churchill doubted), Britain needed a military presence in the rest of Iraq to access the oil in the north.

Other Factors Examined

Despite the War’s high cost in men and material at a time of government belt-tightening and military demobilization, resource constraints failed to force British withdrawal. War in Mesopotamia was a crushing strain on resources on an already

¹⁰¹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 11, 1920, CAB 23/37.

¹⁰² JAL Haldane, “Reduction of British Garrison in Mesopotamia,” December 1, 1920, CAB 23/38.

¹⁰³ Black, 206.

¹⁰⁴ War Office, “The Situation in Mesopotamia,” Telegrams between War Office to JAL Haldane, June 10, 1920, CAB 24/107.

¹⁰⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 13, 1920, CAB 23/23; Percy Cox to Edwin Montagu, December 29, 1920, CAB 24/188; Lando, 16.

overextended British army.¹⁰⁶ The expense of the War was large and the most frequently discussed aspect of the conflict in Cabinet. In a Cabinet discussion on the 1921 defense budget, members agreed that Parliament would only pass additional funding for Mesopotamia with great difficulty and assurances that the 1921 budget “represented the end of the heavy military expenditure, particularly in the Near East.”¹⁰⁷ The British government was reduced to begging the Dominions for troops¹⁰⁸ (a request that was denied¹⁰⁹) and denuded Persia of forces to fight in Mesopotamia.¹¹⁰ The Iraqi rebels did a good job of raising British financial, material, and personnel costs, but their efforts were more than matched by Britain’s ability to reallocate resources. Britain was willing to divert resources from other objectives (such as backing the Shah of Persia and using aircraft that were being requested in Ireland) in order to prevail in Mesopotamia.

Like the war in Ireland, the Mesopotamian War was also unpopular with the war-weary British public and press. The public was especially concerned about the War’s ballooning cost.¹¹¹ Most damaging was Colonel T.E. Lawrence’s (Lawrence of Arabia) condemnation of the War. Lawrence slammed British involvement in Mesopotamia as “a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour,” and wrote, “our government is worse than the old Turkish system.”¹¹² While such criticisms posed difficulties, Cabinet members felt they could wait out and work around them. Montagu, the Cabinet member most concerned with public opinion, fumed to the other Ministers

¹⁰⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1920, CAB 23/22; War Office General Staff, “Reinforcements for Mesopotamia,” September 9, 1920, CAB 24/111.

¹⁰⁷ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 1, 1920, CAB 23/38; Cabinet Meeting Minutes, December 31, 1920, CAB 23/23.

¹⁰⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1920, CAB 23/22.

¹⁰⁹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, September 30, 1920, CAB 23/22.

¹¹⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, September 14, 1920, CAB 23/22.

¹¹¹ Lando, 12.

¹¹² T.E. Lawrence, “A Report on Mesopotamia,” *The Sunday Times*, August 2, 1920.

about what he termed Lawrence's "hostile—and in my view unmerited—criticisms."¹¹³ He suggested that the government not tell the public and parliament "we have accepted internal and external responsibilities for Mesopotamia," but instead, "let us leave the public, for the present at any rate, to believe... that the Mandate will be to form an Arab Government, and to relieve ourselves of all responsibility as quickly as possible."¹¹⁴ Churchill was instructed to request the minimum amount of funds necessary for 1921 to lessen anti-war sentiment.¹¹⁵

The British government relied heavily on Indian troops during the Mesopotamian War, which would seem to insulate the British public from the costs of the War. Yet the British public, suffering under a massive tax burden while the government sought to pay down war debts,¹¹⁶ were well aware of the War's financial cost.¹¹⁷ The use of Indian troops meant Indian public opinion had to be taken into account, especially after the 1919 Amritsar Massacre by British troops. Concerns about Indian public opinion, which was against the War,¹¹⁸ and the reliability of Indian troops was an issue throughout the War.¹¹⁹ Some Indian soldiers felt they were being "exploited" and many had been deployed to the Middle East since early in WWI, while white troops from Britain and the Dominions had been demobilized.¹²⁰ Montagu warned of "grave political consequences if we try to enforce the Turkish peace by Indian mercenaries."¹²¹ Yet, like with resource

¹¹³ Edwin Montagu, "Mesopotamia Administration," July 23, 1920, CAB 24/109.

¹¹⁴ Edwin Montagu, "Mesopotamia Mandate," October 9, 1920, CAB 24/112.

¹¹⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 31, 1920, CAB 23/23.

¹¹⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 8, 1920, CAB 23/23.

¹¹⁷ Lando, 12.

¹¹⁸ Cabinet, "British Empire Report," September 15, 1920, CAB 24/156.

¹¹⁹ See for example JAL Haldane, "Reinforcements for Mesopotamia," September 9, 1920, CAB 24/111; Cabinet, "British Empire Report," September 15, 1920, CAB 24/156; Winston Churchill, "Situation in Mesopotamia," December 10, 1920, CAB 24/116.

¹²⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, August 12, 1920, CAB 23/22.

¹²¹ Edwin Montagu, "Mesopotamia Mandate," October 9, 1920, CAB 24/112.

constraints, hostile public opinion in both Britain and India was not a decisive factor in decision-making.

The Iraqi Revolution is infamous for being the first instance of widespread coercive bombing of civilians. Given the widespread criticism of British reprisals in Ireland, it seems logical that Britain's seemingly freer hand to use brutality against non-white Muslims, especially via air, could have aided Britain in suppressing the revolt. A closer examination reveals a greater ability to brutalize civilians was far from decisive. First, British conduct was less wanton than commonly believed. It is true that Royal Air Force did "handle roughly" the rebels. Cox told the Cabinet that airborne reprisals at times killed innocents and was one of the "reasons underlying the loss by the civil administration of that degree of popularity which it first enjoyed."¹²² Clearly there was concern in some quarters about the repercussions of aerial reprisals and the RAF itself noted it was necessary to have a "very efficient intelligence service" to appropriately target reprisals.¹²³ Nor was the financial cost the only source of public opposition to the War. For example, Lawrence protested against "illegal executions" for "political offenses," sounding a lot like the criticism voiced against British conduct in Ireland.¹²⁴

¹²² Air Staff, "Memorandum on the Air Force as an Alleged Cause of the Loss of Popularity of the Mesopotamia Civil Administration," August 27, 1920, CAB 24/111.

¹²³ Air Staff, "On the Power of the Air Force and the Application of this Power to Hold and Police Mesopotamia," March 12, 1920, CAB 24/106.

¹²⁴ T.E. Lawrence, "A Report on Mesopotamia," *The Sunday Times*, August 2, 1920.

CHAPTER 3

ADEN AND OMAN

As Britain left many of its imperial possessions after the Second World War, it still envisioned a global role that included involvement in Asia and Africa. Despite no longer controlling India, Britain was still responsible for the defense of the Indian Ocean in the Anglo-American Cold War division of labor.¹²⁵ Britain was especially keen on maintaining its presence on the Arabian Peninsula. British officials felt that the presence of British forces ensured local stability, secured British investments in the region, and guaranteed that oil flowed uninterrupted to Europe.

In the mid 1960s, two rebellions against British-backed regimes began along the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. In Aden, Britain abandoned its counterinsurgency effort, turning over power to the Communist National Liberation Front while in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman's neighboring Dhofar province, British and allied forces persevered and eventually defeated the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf in an eleven year war. In this chapter I will demonstrate that Britain abandoned its war in Aden because (1) Cabinet members believed establishing an enduring, pro-British government was impossible, meaning Britain had "lost the peace," (2) the Cabinet did not know of the NLF's East Bloc ties and did not believe an NLF-run Aden would be a Soviet client-state, and (3) British leaders believed an increased military presence off-shore and in the Persian Gulf would mitigate the loss of Aden. I will also show that in Oman Britain persevered in counterinsurgency efforts because (1) British

¹²⁵ Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Pucker, and Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006). 21-22; Jacob Abadi, *Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East 1947-1971: The Economic and Strategic Imperatives*, (Princeton: Kingston Press, 1982), 74, 209; W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 145.

officials always felt that the long-ruling Al Bu Said dynasty could establish a legitimate pro-British government and thus British leaders never felt they had lost the peace, (2) British leaders knew that PFLOAG was a Communist entity hostile to the West, and (3) should Oman fall into unfriendly hands, not only would Oman's oilfields be lost to the West, but all of the Gulf's oil would be threatened by Communist control over the Straits of Hormuz.

The Aden Emergency

Aden's strategic location at the southwest tip of the Arabian Peninsula made it a convenient way station and staging ground for deployments throughout the Middle East, East Africa, South Asia, and the Far East. By the early 1960s, Britain desired to end its old protectorate treaty relationships with the tribal leaders of the Aden protectorates and merge their territories with the Aden colony, creating the Federation of South Arabia.¹²⁶ Beginning at the end of 1963, two independence groups began a violent struggle against Britain and the nascent South Arabian Federation government. These groups were the Egyptian-backed Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) and the National Liberation Front (NLF), backed by China and the Soviet Union. In 1966, Britain decided it would no longer maintain its military commitments in the Far East and that it would be cheaper to guarantee British oil supplies by expanding existing bases in the Persian Gulf.¹²⁷ Yet even after the decision to close Aden base, it was assumed that Britain

¹²⁶ Abadi, 205; Hinchcliffe et al., 21-22.

¹²⁷ Defence Ministry, "Defence Review Part I," February 11, 1966, CAB 129/124.

would succeed in establishing a stable, pro-British government, subsidized by Britain, and inclusive of Britain's old tribal allies.¹²⁸

In the spring of 1964, British forces were struggling to suppress a tribal-nationalist revolt in the Aden Protectorates that was backed by the Egypt and Yemen Arab Republic, a Nasserite state on Aden's northern border (it was later known as North Yemen after Aden became South Yemen following the British withdrawal). Despite the challenges, Conservative Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home believed "we must be resolute in maintaining our position in southern Arabia" and the Cabinet agreed to militarily crush the rebels, even though the campaign was likely to be a protracted one requiring reinforcements from Britain.¹²⁹ By the end of May, British forces seemed to be successful in suppressing the insurrection. The rebels were being beaten back from all but the most reclusive mountain areas and military officials were confident punitive air strikes would deter further rebellion. The High Commissioner in Aden was hopeful about reaching a constitutional compromise with the various faction leaders in Aden and the Protectorates.¹³⁰ It was even felt that Aden would be a future base of nuclear weapons.¹³¹

In October the Labour Party took power and Harold Wilson became Prime Minister. In December, new Colonial Secretary Anthony Greenwood visited Aden to work on the difficult task of establishing a permanent government of the tribal sheikhs, through whom Britain had long administered the hinterland, and the local members of

¹²⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, February 14, 1966, CAB 128/41; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹²⁹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, April 16, 1964, CAB 128/38.

¹³⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 14, 1964, CAB 128/38; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1964, CAB 128/38.

¹³¹ Letter from Maltese Prime Minister, July 9, 1964, CAB 129/118.

Britain's administrative council in the city of Aden. The sheikhs jealously guarded their internal power while Aden's cosmopolitan elite did not want to be subsumed into what they feared would be a backward and feudal British puppet state. Though Britain had combined the tribal and Adeni leaders into the Federation of South Arabia, all parties could not agree on a constitutional framework for a post-independence government.¹³²

However, the visit filled Greenwood with optimism and he reported to the Cabinet that he hoped to establish a friendly and democratic government that would fully respect human rights.¹³³ In 1965, Aden's troubles largely stayed off the radar of the Cabinet, despite a steady increase in British casualties.¹³⁴ British efforts continued to no avail to establish a constitutional accord on Aden's future. Still, the Cabinet was in no hurry; Greenwood lamented the "unfortunate" delays but cautioned against any "early initiative" on Britain's part.¹³⁵ Nasser's Egypt was Britain's main concern in the Middle East and British officials believed Egypt would continue to use its military presence in Yemen to support the rebels in Aden. Despite this provocation by Egypt, the Foreign Secretary reported that Nasser's regime was "increasingly precarious"¹³⁶ and in a weak position vis-à-vis Britain and other regional powers, which would enable Britain to outlast Egypt in the struggle for Aden's future.¹³⁷

The biggest development regarding Aden's future in 1965 was the growing idea that a permanent military base in Aden was no longer necessary.¹³⁸ Wilson's government, driven in part by a desire to increase domestic social welfare spending, felt it

¹³² Hinchcliffe et al., 35-36.

¹³³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 11, 1964, CAB 128/39.

¹³⁴ Hinchcliffe et al., 36.

¹³⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, February 25, 1965, CAB 128/39.

¹³⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1965, CAB 128/39

¹³⁷ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, March 18, 1965, CAB 128/39; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, March 24, 1965, CAB 128/39.

¹³⁸ Hinchcliffe et al., 206-208.

had to curtail its military commitments in Asia, “East of Suez.” In the beginning of 1966, the government decided Britain should no longer maintain its military commitments in the Far East and that it would be cheaper to guarantee British oil supplies by closing Aden and expanding existing bases at Sharjah and Bahrain in the Persian Gulf.¹³⁹ Even after the decision to close the Aden base, the goals of Britain’s military campaign to quell Adeni unrest remained unchanged. Wilson, along with the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs and Defence, still wanted to establish a stable, pro-British government, subsidized by Britain, and inclusive of Britain’s old tribal allies.¹⁴⁰ The main difference was that this government would not host a permanent British military base.

In May of 1966, concerns arose about the viability of Britain’s vision for Aden. Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart and Defence Secretary Denis Healey argued for staying the course in Aden. Stewart argued Britain was “under an obligation to assist the Federal Government in building up local forces so that they could take over the defence of the country when we left. This was agreed.” Failure to do so “would gravely damage United Kingdom interests” as “the humiliation of a disorderly withdrawal would weaken confidence in us in the Persian Gulf: and our failure to bring South Arabia to independence in an orderly manner would damage our prestige throughout the world.”¹⁴¹ Chancellor of the Exchequer James Callaghan was a sharp critic of the Foreign and Colonial Office’s plans for a protracted campaign in Aden. While the Defence and Foreign Ministers spoke of building of local forces, the Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out that with the UK supplying three-quarters of the Adeni budget, an

¹³⁹ Defence Ministry, “Defence Review Part I,” February 11, 1966, CAB 129/124.

¹⁴⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, February 14, 1966, CAB 128/41; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹⁴¹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1966, CAB 128/41.

independent Aden would not be solvent by the 1970s. He suggested only a small increase in funding be given “in order to secure our own withdrawal.” In the end, Wilson came down on the side of Stewart and Healey, though the records show “there was however a difference of view in Cabinet and some members felt that it should be possible to meet our minimum requirements [a safe withdrawal of British troops and equipment] at a lower level of expenditure.”¹⁴²

Despite the grumblings, most of the Cabinet still felt it essential that the British drawdown be done orderly and that local troops be readied to handle internal security themselves and external security with limited British assistance. Cabinet members accepted the Foreign Office view that South Arabia must not fall to pro-Egyptian forces and that Britain’s failure to leave behind a friendly regime would undermine its position in the Gulf, perhaps fatally.¹⁴³ Even as a severe budget crunch was forcing a reevaluation of Britain’s global position, the Cabinet approved additional aid for Aden.¹⁴⁴ The forces in Aden were spared any of the Defense spending cuts for the general Middle East.¹⁴⁵ Early in 1967 George Brown, Stewart’s replacement as Foreign Secretary, told the newly appointed High Commissioner to Aden, Sir Richard Turnbull, there would be no Palestine-like “scuttle” from Aden.¹⁴⁶

Yet in 1967, a scuttle began to appear like the only way out. Hopes that Britain could win the peace by shoring up the South Arabian Federal government vanished, leading to Britain’s decision to abandon the country at the end of the year. Despite the assurances given to Turnbull, the continued failure to reach a political settlement and

¹⁴² Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹⁴³ Ibid.; Treasury, “Memorandum on Economies in Overseas Expenditure,” July 18, 1966, CAB 129/126.

¹⁴⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, January 20, 1966, CAB 128/42.

¹⁴⁵ Treasury, “Memorandum on Economies in Overseas Expenditure,” July 18, 1966, CAB 129/126.

¹⁴⁶ Hinchcliffe et al., 55-56.

dissensions amongst the Arab troops convinced British leaders that continued military efforts were futile. Efforts to reach out to elements of FLOSY ended in failure.¹⁴⁷ In a Cabinet meeting on Aden on March 16, Brown announced that the situation in Aden was “bad and deteriorating.”¹⁴⁸ Not only were the guerrillas fighting British forces, but also each other, making it near impossible to reach an agreement with them.¹⁴⁹ Brown proposed that every effort be made to reach out to dissident groups, “to broaden the basis of the Federal Government.” Brown was far less concerned than his predecessor, Stewart, with the ramifications of failure in South Arabia. His main concern was withdrawing British troops by the end of the year “with the least risk either of extending the period during which we maintained forces in South Arabia or of becoming involved with Federal forces in dealing with internal security” after South Arabian independence, which he wanted set at November 1, 1967. Brown suggested the Royal Navy “station a strike carrier and a commando carrier (with an embarked commando [Marines]) in the area,” for “it was not thought likely that Egyptian forces from the Yemen would attempt to invade South Arabia, at least as long as it was supported against external aggression.” The rest of the Cabinet agreed to his proposals.¹⁵⁰

In the spring and summer of 1967, Cabinet members and British officials felt rather powerless in the Middle East. In April the Cabinet debated dumping the Aden problem on the UN and having them figure out a solution; the Ministers doubted Britain’s ability to find one.¹⁵¹ In May a Foreign Office memorandum discussing a possible

¹⁴⁷ Hinchcliffe et al., 44.

¹⁴⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1967 CAB 128/42.

¹⁴⁹ Hinchcliffe, et al, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1967 CAB 128/42.

¹⁵¹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, April 10, 1967 CAB 128/42; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, April 18, 1967 CAB 128/42.

British confrontation with Nasser noted, “the days are past where we could take effective action on our own.”¹⁵² Though hopes were meager, the Cabinet decided that to continue Brown’s plan to aid to the Federal government and its forces, hoping both would increase in capability and legitimacy while the UK closed down its facilities and held the line militarily.¹⁵³

These hopes were dashed as the insurgents demonstrated their control over the population. In a memorandum to the Cabinet Brown noted that “the terrorist organisations demonstrated their ability to dictate a complete strike.” The British feeling of helplessness deepened with the mutiny of the Arab troops and police in June.¹⁵⁴ Defence Secretary Healey noted back in May 1966 that Britain was “dependent... on the Federal Regular Army” in its efforts to secure a stable, pro-British regime in Aden.¹⁵⁵ Now even the troops recruited and paid by Britain could not be counted on. Even though British forces were able to retake the Crater area of downtown Aden, intelligence predicted future mutinies were likely.¹⁵⁶ By the fall, the British-backed Federal government had collapsed.¹⁵⁷ The government they had hoped to shore up disintegrated in the face of insurgent violence and the army that was supposed to prop up the new regime was mutinous and rife with tribal and ideological divides. Though British arms could establish a degree of order as demonstrated by the Battle of the Crater,¹⁵⁸ they could not achieve the Cabinet’s long term political goal: military withdrawal coupled

¹⁵² Foreign Office, “Memorandum on the Middle East,” May 29, 1967, CAB 129/30.

¹⁵³ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, March 16, 1967 CAB 128/42; Foreign Office, “Memorandum on South Arabia,” May 9, 1967, CAB 129/129; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1967 CAB 128/42; Defence Ministry “Draft of the Defence White Paper,” July 4, 1967 CAB 129/132.

¹⁵⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, June 22, 1967, CAB 128/42.

¹⁵⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹⁵⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 27, 1967, CAB 128/42.

¹⁵⁷ Foreign Office, “Memorandum on the Middle East,” October 26, 1967, CAB 129/133; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, October 30, 1967, CAB 128/42.

¹⁵⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 6, 1967, CAB 128/42.

with the establishment of a stable and friendly successor government. The situation was not unlike that in Ireland in late 1920 and 1921: the successes of British arms against the insurgents did not endear the population to a pro-British political order, which was underscored by the inability to maintain loyal local security forces. Britain had lost the peace.

New intelligence analysis and Egypt's retrenchment after losing the Six Day War in June cemented the Cabinet's decision to abandon Aden at the end of 1967. After the Six Day War, a weakened and chastened Egypt withdrew from Yemen and reached out to Britain. Given his humiliating defeat by Israel, Nasser felt he could no longer afford British enmity as well. In November, the same month the last British forces left Aden, Egypt and Britain reestablished diplomatic relations and Egypt communicated its intention to begin refining oil at Aden's refinery, allow British passage through Egyptian airspace, and promised to try to bring Aden's warring guerrilla armies to an agreement.¹⁵⁹ Thus even if Britain left chaos in its wake in Aden, hostile Egyptian forces would not overrun the country. During the summer and fall, the Cabinet received reports stating the National Liberation Front, which was emerging as the strongest guerrilla faction, was an indigenous movement drawing inspiration from the Ba'athist parties of the Levant and would not jump into Nasser's camp. The Foreign Office suggested that the NLF and Britain had a common aim in reducing Egyptian influence in Aden.¹⁶⁰ It was in fact to the NLF that Britain handed sovereignty to at the end of the year. The NLF's future alignment with the Soviet Union and China was not foreseen by the Cabinet or the Foreign Office.

¹⁵⁹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, November 2, 1967, CAB 128/42.

¹⁶⁰ Foreign Office, "Memorandum on the Middle East," October 26, 1967, CAB 129/133; Hinchcliffe et al., 44.

Why did Britain Quit?

The same three factors that prompted Britain to abandon Ireland—the failure to “win the peace,” the notion that an insurgent-run state would not be hostile, and the realization there was nothing in the territory Britain needed—led Britain to abandon Aden. As the war progressed, British leaders felt increasingly less able to shape South Arabia’s political future by military means. The optimism of the early military victories in 1964 gave way to the despair and helplessness of 1967. As the tribal leaders, FLOSY, and NLF failed to come to accord despite repeated attempts at mediation, British officials were losing faith that they could engineer any sort of solution legitimate in the eyes of Adenis. The mutinies of the local security forces were a stark indicator that Britain had “lost the peace” in Aden.

The Anglo-Egyptian détente of late 1967 and flawed analysis of the NLF made withdrawal even more acceptable to the Cabinet. Despite the fact that the NLF desired to establish a state called “The People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen”, Foreign Office analysts felt the group was a nationalist one influenced by Levantine Arab nationalism. It was assumed that the NLF had a common interest with Britain in containing Egyptian influence in Arabia. The Cabinet did not realize that an East Bloc client state would emerge after British withdrawal.

With the decision to close the base in Aden, there was nothing else in Aden that Britain needed. Defense officials felt that air power in Oman, additional battalions in the Gulf, and an offshore flotilla could contain Egypt much more cheaply and mitigate a lost

ground presence in Aden.¹⁶¹ Aden's value was as an anchor of Britain's Arabian littoral defenses, not as a major source of petroleum. This meant that Aden could be abandoned without fear of losing access to Middle East oil.

Other Factors Examined

One explanation long given for Britain's withdrawal from Aden and the Persian Gulf is that the Labour government abandoned British commitments in Asia to increase domestic spending social welfare spending.¹⁶² In fact, Wilson's government sheltered Aden's war budget from the overall defense cuts and offered additional financial aid and weapons to Adeni factions as late as the summer of 1967 in hopes of attaining a better political outcome.¹⁶³ While finances did lead to Britain's reevaluation of its role East of Suez and the decision to curtail that role, it is not true that the conflict in Aden simply became too expensive. While spending cuts were being made in 1966 and 1967, funding for the war in Aden and other aid to South Arabia was not touched.¹⁶⁴ Wilson's government was willing to fund the involvement in Aden even though it meant greater cuts in military spending in the Far East and Persian Gulf. And in the short run, costs were fixed because of the time it would take withdraw men and material, many of which were engaged in combat.¹⁶⁵

Concern over public opinion was also not a leading cause of withdrawal.

Throughout the conflict, Cabinet members voiced concern over how the British public

¹⁶¹ Foreign Office, "South Arabia," May 9, 1967, CAB 129/129; Defence Ministry, "Defence White Paper Draft," July 4, 1967, CAB 129/131.

¹⁶² Abadi, 203.

¹⁶³ Defence Ministry, "Defence White Paper Draft," July 4, 1967, CAB 129/131.

¹⁶⁴ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, January 20, 1966, CAB 128/42.

¹⁶⁵ Treasury, "Memorandum on Economies in Overseas Expenditure," July 18, 1966, CAB 129/126.

perceived the War, but this was not decisive in the decision to withdraw. Public opinion was seen as a public relations issue to be dealt. When the first British reinforcements were dispatched in 1964, the government wanted to carefully explain the issue to friendly reporters as part of its public relations strategy and also chastised colonial and military officials for not being careful enough in dealing with the press.¹⁶⁶ Incidents such as the mutilation of British casualties and the revelation harsh interrogation and detention measures were seen as storms to be weathered. Healey suggested that in order to not “prejudice our prospect of successfully disengaging ourselves from South Arabia and of leaving behind an organised State” the government not ban harsh detention practices.¹⁶⁷ Regarding the decision to withdraw, Brown said, “there would be criticism in some quarters in this country when our plans were announced. Our policies were, however, likely to command general agreement in Parliament and in the country and could easily be defended.” Thus, when public opinion was discussed in relation to withdrawal, it was that public opinion would be supportive of withdrawal, not that it was forcing it.¹⁶⁸

The same can be said of international opinion. Foreign Secretaries often noted that the situation in Aden, along with that of Rhodesia and other lingering imperial commitments, caused much international criticism of Britain, especially in the UN. While the Cabinet often lamented this, they did not view Third World complaints as reason to alter policy. The typical response was that of November 24, 1966, when the Cabinet noted “with approval, the tribute paid by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to the United Kingdom Representative at the United Nations and that of the staff of the

¹⁶⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, May 12, 1964 CAB 128/38; Cabinet Meeting Minutes, May 14, 1964, CAB 128/38.

¹⁶⁷ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, November 24, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹⁶⁸ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, October 30, 1967, CAB 128/42.

United Kingdom Delegation” for hanging tough during a blistering few days of anti-British harangues.¹⁶⁹

The Dhofar War

Throughout the nineteenth century British influence in Oman had increased to the point that by the early twentieth century the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman was a de facto British protectorate, treated functionally the same way as its other Persian Gulf protectorates, such as Bahrain, Qatar, and Trucial Oman (the modern day United Arab Emirates).¹⁷⁰ By the mid-twentieth century, Britain ran Oman’s foreign affairs, controlled its government, and ran the Omani military, which was commanded by British officers. Mail service was even provided by the Royal Mail.¹⁷¹ British troops were also stationed at the RAF bases at Salalah and Masirah Island. The de jure ruler was Sultan Said bin Timur who lived in isolation from his country in a remote palace surrounded by his British officials and African slaves. He banned virtually all modern technology, forbade Omanis from working abroad, and allowed no advanced schools to be established, fearing these would breed Marxists and Arab nationalists. Many British officials concurred and did little to discourage the Sultan’s anti-modernization stance.

Some Omanis, especially those from the Western Dhofar province, felt differently. The Dhofaris are a non-Arab minority, culturally and geographically distinct from the rest of Oman. They resented the Sultan’s rule and many went abroad, especially to the Persian Gulf, to work. The War in Oman’s Dhofar province began about a year

¹⁶⁹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, November 24, 1966, CAB 128/41.

¹⁷⁰ James Onley, “Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection,” Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, 2009.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

after violence began in Aden, when a guerrilla group formed by former expatriate workers attacked an oil exploration vehicle in December 1964. British-led Omani forces, most of them ethnic Baluchis from Pakistan, mounted an ineffectual campaign over the next few years against the rebels, but the highest levels of British government were unconcerned. The Cabinet started taking much greater interest in Oman in 1967, when Omani oil production began.¹⁷² It was also in the mid-1960s that the situation in Dhofar worsened as the Dhofari nationalist Dhofar Liberation Front was renamed the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) and took a decidedly Communist tone. PFLOAG began receiving substantial financial and material support from China and the Soviet Bloc.¹⁷³ Anglo-Omani military efforts were failing to contain the revolt, and British officials began to blame the Sultan's inflexibility for the inability to defeat the guerrillas.¹⁷⁴ With the British withdrawal from Aden at the end of 1967, the guerrillas achieved a safe haven from which to conduct operations and ship in weapons. By 1969, much of the Dhofar province was effectively in rebel hands, and the additional British troops were sent to RAF Salalah to keep it open and prevent the base from being overrun.¹⁷⁵ The rebel successes began to attract the attention of British policy-makers. In the summer of 1970, PFLOAG attacked oil facilities far from Dhofar in central Oman. This further alarmed British officials and led the British managers of Petroleum

¹⁷² See for instance "Memorandum on Arab Attitudes and United Kingdom Economic Interests in the Middle East," July 7, 1967, CAB 129/132; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 10, 1967, CAB 129/132; Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 11, 1967, CAB 128/42 and Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1967, CAB 129/133.

¹⁷³ J.B. Kelly, *Arabia and the Gulf* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 136-137.

¹⁷⁴ Pimlott, 30-31.

¹⁷⁵ Kelly, 137-138.

Development (Oman) Ltd (a British-run subsidiary of Shell with a concession for oil production in Oman) to urge action by the British government.¹⁷⁶

Fortunately for Britain, a perfect candidate for Sultan Said's successor existed: his son, Qaboos bin Said. Qaboos had been educated at the British military academy at Sandhurst, served in the British army in Germany, and was now kept under house arrest in Oman by his father, who viewed him as too Western and untrustworthy. Qaboos had no Omani friends and little contact with Omanis, but was allowed contact with British officers and officials in Oman. Britain could easily depose Said, given their control of the Omani military. Qaboos would be dependent on Britain, even more so than his father, given his isolation from and ignorance of the Omani political scene. Edward Heath's newly elected Conservative government approved the coup plan which was orchestrated by the Foreign Office and British intelligence, and carried out by seconded British officers and possibly British special forces on July 23, 1970.¹⁷⁷

The plan succeeded marvelously. Said was deposed without bloodshed and bundled off to exile in London. Qaboos invited Britain to send substantially more troops to Oman, implement political and governance reforms devised by British officials and consultants, allowed MI6 to establish a new intelligence service run entirely by British military and intelligence officers, and spent much of his oil wealth on British weapons systems.¹⁷⁸ Over the next five years, British and Omani forces then gradually secured key areas of Dhofar and beat back PFLOAG in a campaign military scholars consider a

¹⁷⁶ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 731.

¹⁷⁷ Dorril, 732; "Britain's Role During the 1970 Coup in Oil-Rich Oman," BBC, November 23, 2009. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/b00ny7nb>

¹⁷⁸ Dorril, 733; Kelly, 150-152.

model counterinsurgency operation.¹⁷⁹ By 1975 PFLOAG had ceased to exist. The Anglophile Sultan remains in power and maintains close relations with Britain to this day. The Omani military and intelligence services were British run well into the 1980s. Qaboos certainly knew that his throne rested on the continued goodwill of his British officers and London.¹⁸⁰

Why Did Britain Stay?

The question becomes why, with the British decision to abandon Aden in 1967 and close all bases and withdraw all troops from the Persian Gulf by 1971, did Britain continue fighting an East of Suez war well into the 1970s? The answer is that Britain felt it could win the peace, saw PFLOAG victory as irreconcilable to British national security, and had to keep Omani oil fields and the vital Musandam Peninsula in friendly hands to access Persian Gulf oil.

Unlike Aden, where British leaders despaired of finding a suitable political outcome, they always felt they could “win the peace” in Oman. Often during the war, the military situation in Dhofar seemed dire, but it was never felt that the efforts of British arms were futile. Key to this optimism was Qaboos bin Said. As Foreign Secretary (and former Prime Minister) Alec Douglas-Home told the Cabinet, Qaboos “was likely to adopt more enlightened policies than his father; and the change would be welcomed” in Oman.¹⁸¹ Said had named Qaboos his heir and Qaboos would have legitimacy as a member of the long-ruling Al Bu Said dynasty. The coup was welcomed in Oman and

¹⁷⁹ Pimlott.

¹⁸⁰ S.H. Amin, *Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf*, (Glasgow: Royston Ltd, 1984). 36-37; Dorril 733-734.

¹⁸¹ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 30, 1970, CAB 128/47.

there was no reason to assume Qaboos' rule would not be accepted as legitimate by Omanis. His time in Britain and the British army had left a deep Anglophilic streak in the young prince and his isolation from Omanis meant he would be pliant to the desires of his British officials and "advisors." With Qaboos on the throne, British officers could implement the military, political, and economic reforms they felt necessary to defeat PFLOAG. Once the rebels had been beaten, Oman could easily transition into a modern, informal relationship with Britain in which Britain would withdraw its troops and bases but seconded British officials could guide Oman's military and economic development.¹⁸²

Unlike Sinn Fein in Ireland and the National Liberation Front in Aden, PFLOAG was seen as being hostile to Britain's interests should they take power in Oman. PFLOAG were strident Communists, with commissars and Chinese advisors.¹⁸³ In the words of a senior British general in Oman, PFLOAG "offered management of the country under close Russian control."¹⁸⁴ There would be no acknowledged connection to Britain (as in Ireland) or perception of common interests (as was thought the case in Aden). Instead, a country in the Western camp would have shifted to the Communist one.

Finally, a friendly Oman was crucial to Britain's oil supply. By late 1967, Omani oil production satisfied ten percent of British oil needs. Given that Britain effectively controlled Oman, British leaders could count on Oman to continue supplying oil to Britain in the event of a general Arab oil embargo, like that which occurred during the

¹⁸² Kelly, 160.

¹⁸³ Simon Scott-Plummer, "Ten-year battle for gateway to the Gulf," *The Times (London)*, April 14, 1973, 14; Kelly, 136-137.

¹⁸⁴ John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975*, (Salisbury, England: Michael Russel Ltd, 1982), 16.

1967 Six Day War.¹⁸⁵ More importantly, Oman's ruler controlled the Musandam Peninsula, which juts out from Arabia towards Iran to form the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow chokepoint all oil tankers leaving the Persian Gulf must pass through. The power that controlled Musandam had the power to disrupt the entire world's oil supply. This was a key concern for Britain, which was dependent on Persian Gulf oil.¹⁸⁶ The Foreign Office felt that "the contribution which our forces make directly or indirectly to physical security along the southern shore of the Gulf (Trucial Oman Scouts and help to the Sultan of Muscat's Armed Forces), is of particular importance in the new oil-fields which are now, or will shortly be, coming into production."¹⁸⁷ The senior British officers directing the war were well aware that the reason for British involvement in Oman was "Britain's own national interest in maintaining both stability in the Gulf and the free flow of oil."¹⁸⁸ Unlike Aden, where the loss of territory to anti-British groups could be contained by offshore forces and nearby airpower, the Omani oilfields and Musandam Peninsula needed to be in pro-British hands to guarantee Britain's oil supply.

Other Factors Examined

Britain's ruling party changed hands twice during the course of the Dhofar War, but this appears to have little impact on the course of British policy in Oman. The War began during Harold Wilson's first Labour government, continued through Edward Heath's Conservative government and then ended during Wilson's second term as Prime Minister. In January 1968, shortly after the withdrawal from Aden, Wilson announced

¹⁸⁵ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, July 10, 1967, CAB 129/132.

¹⁸⁶ Fain, 147-148.

¹⁸⁷ Foreign Office, "Memorandum on the Middle East," March 24, 1965. CAB 129/120 .

¹⁸⁸ Akehurst, 16.

Britain would withdraw from the Gulf by 1971. Even after the withdrawal date was announced, Wilson's government reinforced British troops in Oman¹⁸⁹ and the plotting of the Omani coup was conducted during the final days of the Wilson government.¹⁹⁰

While Tory opposition leader Edward Heath was highly critical of the government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf, a 1969 visit to the region convinced him the genie could not be put back in the bottle and he implemented the Labour withdrawal timetable after becoming Prime Minister in 1970.¹⁹¹ He soon ordered the Omani coup¹⁹² and further escalated the Dhofar War. After Wilson returned to power in 1974, his government again sought to find savings by cutting overseas military commitments. After initially proposing to cut the UK involvement in Oman, the Cabinet decided to maintain the operation.¹⁹³

All in all, the impact of party and ideology on decision-making seems small. Both Wilson and Heath seemed reluctant to abandon policies put in place by their predecessors. As Wilson's 1968 announcement on Gulf withdrawal and internal debates in 1974 show, he and the Labour Party were more willing to consider abandoning foreign military commitments in favor of domestic spending, as his ideology would suggest. But the British departure from the Arabian littoral was part of the long post-war transition from formal physical control of distant lands to informal relationships with local rulers. Wilson did not envision a complete abandonment of the Gulf—British officers would continue to be seconded to local forces and commercial ties were expected to continue.

¹⁸⁹ Kelly, 137.

¹⁹⁰ Dorril, 731.

¹⁹¹ Fain, 171, 176.

¹⁹² Dorril, 732.

¹⁹³ Defence Ministry, "Defence Review Parliamentary Statement Draft," November 18, 1974, CAB 129/180/8; Defence Ministry, "Draft Defence Review," November 21, 1974, CAB 129/180/12.

Both Wilson and Heath understood the importance of keeping the Straits of Hormuz in friendly hands and tended to follow the long-term policies set by their predecessors.

As in Aden, Ireland, and Mesopotamia, finances caused a reexamination of the war, but ultimately the factors I have identified and not cost drove the decision to remain in Oman. By the early 1970s Britain faced an expensive counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland and Wilson's government sought to cut other parts of the defense budget, especially the few lingering East of Suez commitments. In October 1974, Wilson endorsed a plan to end British involvement in Oman, as well as to reduce Hong Kong's garrison and pull all troops out of Brunei.¹⁹⁴ But with progress on the ground continuing, Wilson and the Cabinet decided that November to keep British involvement going and made cuts elsewhere in the defense budget. As Defence Secretary Roy Mason noted, "in present circumstances"—Anglo-Omani military successes—it would be a shame to abandon the war.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Harold Wilson, "Memorandum on the Defence Review," October 28, 1974, CAB 129/179/26.

¹⁹⁵ Defence Ministry, "Defence Review Parliamentary Statement," November 14, 1974, CAB 129/180/26.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The four cases discussed above suggest that a strong power quits a fight against a weak enemy when (1) it feels that its military force can no longer contribute to a desired political outcome, (2) that the political order post-military withdrawal will not threaten it, and (3) the territory being fought over does not provide access to a resource the strong power needs.

In Aden and Ireland, the insurgency's demonstrated control over the population, the collapse of support for pro-British local institutions and the resignation (in Ireland) or mutiny (in Aden) of native security forces convinced the Cabinet that they had "lost the peace" even if British military forces were making gains against insurgents. In Mesopotamia and Dhofar, British leaders always felt that their military actions were leading towards a desirable political outcome. Prevailing over the insurgents would pave the way for the establishment of locally-run governments friendly to Britain who would handle most of their own internal security. In the persons of Feisal in Iraq and Qaboos in Oman, Britain found rulers they could control while building an effective and locally legitimate administration around. In both countries, Britain was either recruiting or felt they could recruit local security forces. In neither conflict was Britain always winning the war, but it never seemed on the verge of "losing the peace" should they prevail militarily. This is in sharp contrast to Ireland, where IRA leader Michael Collins was the most influential local leader and the Irish police were resigning in large numbers, and Aden where Britain's chosen tribal sheikhs saw their authority vanish even in their own regions as local police mutinied and fought with the rebels against the British army.

The realization that British-backed rule had lost local legitimacy coincided with the assumption that rule by Britain's foes—Sinn Fein in Ireland and the National Liberation Front in Aden—would not produce states hostile to Britain. This was indicated by Sinn Fein's willingness to accept Dominion status, as opposed to a republic, and (ultimately false) intelligence analysis of the NLF's intentions. In Mesopotamia and Oman, British leaders always assumed a political order dominated by their foes would be an unacceptable risk to national security. Abandonment of Mesopotamia would have left the center of the Middle East open to Soviet Bolshevik and Turkish nationalist forces. Cabinet members, based on assessments from soldiers and administrators in Mesopotamia, felt that Turkey, the Soviet Union, or France would have seized the rich oil fields of Mosul and could have threatened the oil fields in Basra and Persia if Britain abandoned northern and central Mesopotamia. In Oman, the British leaders had no doubt that PFLOAG was a Soviet client and their victory meant a Communist state that could halt the flow of oil to Western Europe. A chaotic Mesopotamia vulnerable to foreign invasion and a Communist-run Oman were simply irreconcilable with British security interests.

Withdrawing from either Mesopotamia or Oman would have jeopardized British access to the oil reserves in those countries. When a strong power seeks political control, even partial control, (in all four cases Britain envisioned it would exercise incomplete political control over the disputed territory in the future) for the access to something in the territory, quitting the fight probably means losing that access. The main value of Ireland and Aden to Britain was for military defensive purposes: Ireland secured Britain's western maritime approaches while Aden was the western flank of Britain's

Arabian littoral. When a strong power seeks control over a distant territory because it is a useful defensive buffer, then other steps can be taken to mitigate the loss of the territory. The fight does not take the same all-or-nothing aspect and the strong will be willing to negotiate withdrawal with its weaker foe. The defensive concerns associated with the loss of Ireland and Aden were mitigated by retaining naval bases in Ireland and beefing up British forces in the Persian Gulf and off Aden's coast.

This analysis does not deal with the "battlefield" explanations that many studies of insurgency focus on.¹⁹⁶ Because irregular conflicts in which a much weaker combatant fights a much stronger one seldom are resolved by a Clausewitzian "disarming" of the strong's forces, these battle field interactions are of greatest importance in how they affect the strong's policymakers' perception of the conflict. Ultimately, the weak can only be victorious if they convince the strong to quit and go home. The degree of mechanization, the level of interaction with the local population, and the interaction of the military strategies all do shape events on the ground, which in turn shape policymakers' analysis and actions. This paper links the battlefield interactions studied by Arreguin-Toft, Lyall and Wilson, Record, and others to the decision-making that occurs at senior levels of government in the strong power.

My thesis most directly contradicts Gil Merom's findings which posit that democracies abandon counterinsurgencies when a significant portion of the liberal and educated class grows fed up with the war and especially the brutal coercive measures needed to defeat irregular fighters, thus forcing the government to abandon the conflict.¹⁹⁷ British outrage at reprisals in Ireland and negative publicity of harsh

¹⁹⁶ See the discussion in the introduction of Ivan Arreguin-Toft, Lyall and Wilson, and Record.

¹⁹⁷ Merom, 15.

interrogation and detention measures in Aden did not quickly lead to withdrawal. Punitive actions in Mesopotamia and media accusations of atrocities in Oman also did not cause those campaigns to fail.¹⁹⁸ In fact, Colonel “Mad Mitch” Campbell’s brutal victory in the “Battle of the Crater” at the end of the Aden War was welcomed in Britain and made him a household name. He later used his fame to get elected to Parliament.¹⁹⁹ The records of Cabinet deliberations instead show that while ministers were aware and at times concerned with public disapproval of the war, they were willing to weather criticisms to pursue British objectives by force. The key point of Merom’s argument is that “modern democracies lose protracted small wars because in situations of deep *instrumental dependence*, the *politically most relevant citizens* create a *normative difference* of insurmountable proportions” (italics in original).²⁰⁰ Perhaps Merom’s cases, which were all fought with conscript militaries—and thus involved more directly a much greater portion of society and a greater “instrumental dependence”—have a different dynamic than my four British cases, all of which were fought by professional soldiers. Merom even argues at the end of his book that America and France’s transitions to volunteer militaries has made it easier for the presidents of the two countries to intervene in small wars abroad.²⁰¹ Yet this does not square with his assertion that democracies lose small wars “because they find it extremely difficult to escalate the level of violence and brutality to that which can secure victory.”²⁰² Why would the “politically most relevant

¹⁹⁸ Kelly, 138-139.

¹⁹⁹ “Lieutenant-Colonel Colin Mitchell – Obituary,” *The Times (London)*, July 24, 1996; Brian Wilson, “‘Mad Mitch,’ The Empire’s Champ,” *The Guardian*, July 24, 1996.

²⁰⁰ Merom, 19.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 246-247.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 15.

citizens” accept brutality committed by professional soldiers but rail against brutality committed by conscripts?

What seems more likely is that unless there is “deep *instrumental dependence*,” politicians can afford to ignore public criticism of distant counterinsurgencies. By employing a volunteer army and making heavy use of local or other forces (such as the paramilitary Royal Irish Constabulary, the Indian Army in Mesopotamia, the Federal South Arabian Army and Police, and the Sultan of Oman’s Armed Forces), it seems that the British government was able to avoid a “deep *instrumental dependence*” on British society in waging these wars. However, as Aden and Ireland demonstrate, this lack of instrumental dependence does not mean a strong power will not withdraw. Britain was also able to prevail over insurgents in Malaysia and Kenya with conscripts in the 1950s, showing that conscription need not doom a counter-insurgency campaign.

Dominic Tierney’s concept of a “quagmire mentality” developing in the public mind²⁰³ is also misplaced, at least in regard to Britain. Strong power withdrawal results from the formation of a quagmire mentality not in the public’s mind, but in the minds of key decision-makers. When the Cabinet members believed Britain was embroiled in a military quagmire—that British military efforts were not contributing to a desired political outcome—it decided on military withdrawal. If this was not the case, the politicians were willing to ride out public criticism.

The cases also do not support the contention by Robert Taber²⁰⁴ and Joseph Kraemer²⁰⁵ that distant counterinsurgencies are simply abandoned because they get too expensive. As the War Office told the Cabinet, war in Ireland cost only a tenth as much

²⁰³ Tierney, 60-62.

²⁰⁴ Taber, 98.

²⁰⁵ Kraemer, 144.

as war in Mesopotamia. In the last months before withdrawal in Aden, Britain was willing to spend additional sums if it felt a better outcome could be got. While it seems that difficulties in paying the economic and military costs of fighting rebellions overseas *generally* led to a reevaluation of and then retreat from empire after the Second World War, neither Ireland nor Aden was abandoned simply because it alone was too expensive. For a strong power, even one as diminished as Britain was in the 1960s and 1970s, the ability of distant guerrillas to raise economic and military costs were more than matched by Britain's ability to shift and reallocate resources. Calm regions such as India and Persia could be weakened to bolster a restive Mesopotamia. Necessary defense cuts could be made in Hong Kong to keep the Dhofar campaign going. Skeptical Parliamentarians could be won over by arguing that costs were temporary and leading to a result in the national interest. The Cabinet noted that it would be necessary to show Parliament that the expensive troop presence in Mesopotamia was not open ended and would soon be reduced.²⁰⁶ Similarly, the Cabinet prevented cuts to the Dhofar war by arguing "in present circumstances"—Anglo-Omani military successes—it was best to keep funding the war.²⁰⁷

Avenues for Further Research

There are numerous avenues to further research on the outcomes of such asymmetric conflicts. A first would be to look at non-British cases. It could be that the nature of British society or government makes certain aspects of its policymaking process unique. Britain's Cabinet system means consensus among leaders of the party is required

²⁰⁶ Cabinet, Meeting Minutes, December 1, 1920, CAB 23/38.

²⁰⁷ Defence Ministry, "Defence Review Parliamentary Statement," November 14, 1974, CAB 129/180/26.

for major decisions, while the concentration of power in a single chief executive in the United States and French may give American and French presidents more leeway to chart their own policies. Britain's long imperial history may have conditioned British leaders and society to the idea of frequent wars abroad, lessening the nature and level of public opposition distant counterinsurgency campaigns generate.

Another area of research would be the impact of conscript versus professional troops is. It makes sense that it would be politically easier for leaders to continue wars in which professional troops, rather than conscripts were used. But Britain both won (Malay and Kenya) and lost (Cyprus) colonial insurgencies in the 1950s when it had a conscript army.

It may be especially illuminating, if it becomes possible, to examine the archives of autocratic powers that faced irregular wars in foreign lands, such as Egypt in North Yemen or Portugal in its African colonies, to see if their leaders' deliberations differ dramatically from those in democracies. There is no reason that the factors I have identified would not apply in autocracies as well as democracies, so research confirming that would buttress my argument.

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