

Counterinsurgency and the rise of the global state system

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Paper for the Stony Brook Initiative for Historical Social Sciences

October 16, 2008

“The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish... the kind of war on which they are embarking.”

Carl von Clausewitz.

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A historian who I greatly admire, Christopher Bayly, in his introduction to Eric Stokes' The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857, remarked that

“In the middle decades of the nineteenth century a wave of political earthquakes shook the Eurasian land mass. But the widely separated upheavals, ranging from the 1848 revolutions in Europe, to the Mutiny Rebellion in India, and the Taiping and Nien rebellions in China, had little in common except the experience of failure.”¹

I see this as a challenge worthy of taking up; I hypothesize that these events do indeed have a great deal more in common than simply the experience of defeat; they have a common origin in the dynamics of the developing global system of states. They are an instance of what I believe is the wave-like periodicity of irregular warfare in the periphery. This paper lays out the rudiments of an argument to that effect.

Indeed, I rather think that Bayly himself would today be inclined to situate these events within a similar global framework (as in his magnificent The Birth of the Modern World.²) His most recent work, a brilliant two-volume study (co-authored with Tim Harper) of the impact of the Second World War on the political systems of southern Asia demonstrates how the apparently disparate and diverse events of the mid-1940s in that region are best seen through the prism of the titanic struggle of the Second World War as it intersected with growing pressures for national independence and (for some) social revolution.³ Some sociologists and historians have studied wars, insurgencies, mass religious rebellions and the like in their national and regional settings; others have explicated the dynamics of the world-system as a whole. The pressing task, as I see it, is to synthesize these approaches so that the detailed specificity of case studies can be embedded within a global and historical interpretative framework.

What follows is a set of ruminations as I propose a speculative hypothesis about the global and historical causation of the insurgency-counterinsurgency couplet. I will deal with definitional and

¹ C. A. Bayly, “introduction” to Eric Stokes, The Peasant Armed, 1986, p.1

² 2004

³ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, Forgotten Armies: the Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945, 2005 and Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia, 2007

terminological issues (which are crucial) shortly. This paper should be read as a preamble to a research program. Let me repeat that my arguments are entirely speculative: I don't yet have the data to see whether or not they hold up to empirical scrutiny.

A sketch of the argument

My hypothesis is that global wars among core powers produce waves of irregular warfare in the periphery. These processes are to be understood both as a long-run development of individual states in the periphery and as the development of the global state system as a whole.

This is the kind of "big, huge, sweeping" historical sociology that drives most historians and area specialists crazy. Such vast generalizations are seen by those who have a detailed understanding of specific cases as gross distortions of local specificities, as a willful or ignorant blindness to detail and nuance. As someone who has spent much of his career on that side of the fence, all I can say is that I sympathize with the objections, but I am determined to go ahead anyway.

I need to establish three things. **First**, I need to get my concepts right: to define and identify what I mean by global wars and irregular warfare. These have to be operationalized, and all instances identified. **Second**, I need to establish a correlation between the two. And **third**, once I have established that the pattern I hypothesize actually corresponds to the historical record, I need a causal theory to explain the correlation. I need to identify and demonstrate the existence of a series of causal mechanisms linking the global system and local events. Readers of this paper can develop lines of attack on each of these three aspects.

Defining Global War

A global war is one in which two or more core powers engage in a major contest in which military operations take place to a significant extent in the periphery as well as in the core. (The question of war causation is not part of this definition, and can be ignored for the present.)

There have been six global wars.⁴ The first was the Seven Years' War (also known parochially in this part of the world as the French and Indian Wars.) The second was the War of the American Revolution. This was followed by the third global war: the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon. The fourth global war was what we now call the "First World War," and the fifth was the Second World War. (The different numbering systems can be a little confusing.) I am unsure whether or not to describe the Cold War as the sixth global war. Some would then go on to assert that the current "Global War on Terror" will turn out to be the seventh global war.

Should one perhaps see the long struggle between England and France as a single "long war" with episodes of fighting punctuated by periods of quasi peace? (This is how one would see the Cold War.) What we see in the period between 1758 and 1820 is a spiral of wars and revolutions, one leading to another, in a seemingly endless vicious circle. Only with the abandonment by Britain, France and Spain of (most of) their American colonies and the peace arrangements of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 did the global state system settle down. Basically a successful conservative institutionalization put an end to a long period of instability.

Similarly, some historians have argued that World War I and World War II should be seen as a single cataclysmic event. In this view, the failure of the peace arrangements of 1919 led inevitably to a renewed outbreak of fighting. Only the establishment of a solid global institutional order based on American hegemony in the West and Soviet dominance in the East produced the peace of the Cold War. This would give us two clusters of war and revolution to examine, rather than the six global wars I have identified, and would result in a quite different narrative.

Defining counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.

Armed conflicts for the control of the state, or of particular territory, or over the terms of incorporation of some groups in the state, or over state policy, are variously called "internal wars," "irregular wars," "insurgencies," or some other synonym. They include both revolution and civil

⁴ Global war and total war are different concepts. A "total" war is a war fought for unlimited aims (i.e. the destruction of the adversary polity) and with unlimited means. All of society is mobilized and all aspects of the adversary society are legitimate targets.

war, as well as a variety of “dirty wars.” What they all have in common is (more or less) organized armed conflict aimed at changing the nature of the state or limiting its sovereignty.

Counterinsurgency refers to the policies of a state facing internal war. It is the effort on the part of the state to defeat insurgency. Insurgency and counterinsurgency form the two faces of a couplet of contention.

None of the generally used terms are very satisfactory, and I would prefer to abandon these terms for a broader definition of my object of inquiry: irregular warfare, of which counterinsurgency is a sub-set. Irregular warfare can be defined in various ways. I opt for a definition in terms of style of military organization. Regular military forces are paid for by a state, organized hierarchically, disciplined (more or less), and operate (in principle) to further the aims of the state. Irregular forces are lacking on one or more of these dimensions. Conventional war occurs when two or more regular forces fight each other. A set of cultural expectations was gradually developed in the core states about how this combat (conventional war) should be conducted. Irregular war occurs when one or more regular forces engages in combat with one or more irregular forces.⁵ Irregular warfare thus includes a bunch of activities which we normally put into separate conceptual boxes: wars of colonial conquest, national liberation struggles, most insurgencies and counterinsurgencies, some civil wars, warlordism and military predation, and partisan operations.

By focusing on the family resemblances among these forms of armed conflict, I define the dependent variable, irregular warfare, in a specific and unusual manner. This naturally has consequences when it comes to an empirical evaluation of my hypothesis.

Our times

Many of us write and think as a response, conscious or otherwise, to the political issues of the day. I am no exception. My research project for the last decade and a half has been to follow the debates in the U.S. military as it adjusts, both organizationally and intellectually, to the world after the Cold War. This has been a convoluted journey, both for the military and for me.

⁵ By rights, we should call this “unconventional war,” but the term has been appropriated and has a different meaning. It would be clearer if I talked about type A war and type B war, but that would simply produce a muddle.

I began by thinking about the “peace dividend” and the end of major war. Why would any core power any longer need a large military establishment? The inter-democratic peace and the end of the Cold War offered a glimpse of a world without major war. Along with many other observers, I hypothesized a sort of “March of Dimes”⁶ effect: the military would seek to justify its continuing existence by embracing a variety of new missions. In the early 1990s these seemed to be the expanding peace-keeping and peace-enforcement missions, the humanitarian interventions, and a host of vaguely-defined “military operations other than war.”

As it turned out, this was not the primary response on the part of the military. Most military thinkers and policy-makers were very uncomfortable with this new turn of events. Instead, military strategists began, more or less immediately, a search for new enemies and new dangers. Initially, this involved much thrashing around and the compilation of increasingly lengthy lists of improbable perils, all to be taken with the utmost seriousness. Eventually, by the turn of the new century, partly under the impact of parallel but separate debates about the emerging “revolution in military affairs,” many U.S. military strategists had settled into more or less of a consensus about the need to focus on China as a budgetary enemy. This view was dominant, but continued to be challenged from a wide range of alternative perspectives. There continued to be considerable debate and a diversity of opinions both about the future threats to America and about the appropriate military response. There was much to study.

Most of this went out the window after the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003.) As these operations proved more difficult than initially anticipated, the U.S. military was led (and therefore I followed) to an effort to understand the nature and causes of counterinsurgency and, more generally, what is now generally referred to as irregular warfare. This paper is a side-product of that intellectual journey.

There are big policy issues at stake: understanding the dynamics of warfare in the twenty-first century is a task that surely needs no elaborate justification. There is an urgent need to

⁶ Selznick analyzed the March of Dimes organization which had been set up to find a cure for polio. Once the cure had been found, instead of going out of business, the March of Dimes expanded its concerns to other diseases. Organizations seek to survive, and one way to do so is to redefine the core mission.

understand counterinsurgency, and I believe this is best done by placing it in the context of the growth of the global state system. Many of us are hoping that, once the current administration is out of office, these wars will wither away. Perhaps that will happen. But we need more than wishes; we need a model that helps us understand trends in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare.

As a historical sociologist, my trained inclination is to attempt to understand these issues within some sort of historical frame. My hypothesis is that current counterinsurgency campaigns are episodes in a long-run global development of the global state system.

Like many commentators, I think there are likely to be more such operations in the near future. However, my reasons for so believing are rather different from theirs, and I hope to use this paper (in part) to explain some of my differences with other commentators.

Irregular warfare in general, and counterinsurgency in particular, is neither perennial nor novel. Irregular warfare does not occur randomly; it is patterned in time and space and is a complex function of the expansion of the global state system. It comes in waves. What today is called counterinsurgency is part of a constellation of wars that include wars of colonial conquest, national liberation movements, and civil wars sparked off by state-building and interstate competition in the core and their impacts on the periphery.

Building on the Existing Literature

Let me begin by making three observations about the existing literature.

First, in my desultory reading of work by sociologists on revolutions and insurgencies, I have been struck by two associated findings: revolutions are often triggered by war, and they come in waves. These are hardly novel observations: the first was put forward by Theda Skocpol and the second by Chuck Tilly three decades ago. Sociologists (or at least the ones I admire) now approach the analysis of popular political mobilization (strike waves, insurgencies, etc.) in a profoundly historical way, with a stress on the global and structural (especially military)

influences on the local dynamics of contentious politics. This paper tries to build on these pioneering efforts.

This previous work has its limitations, however. Sociologists and historians are generally uninterested in counterinsurgency and counterrevolution.⁷ They have been interested in successful revolutions, particularly “great” ones. They have tended to see these as unstoppable, as tidal waves that wash over the affairs of men and women. Because of sampling on the dependent variable, students of revolution have blinded themselves to the fact that agents of the state, together with its supporters and allies, have generally and actively sought to thwart insurgent movements, often with success. I think we need to take a fresh look at the dynamics of counterinsurgency and counterrevolution. They are not esoteric subjects; they are an inherent part of the dynamic of revolution and insurgency.

The other thing I mean when I say that sociologists and historians are generally uninterested in counterrevolution and counterinsurgency is that their theories predispose them to a particular view of revolution, one in which states “collapse.” All too often, theories of revolution have a sort of unilinear determinism. A sequence of events is set in motion and, providing the necessary and sufficient conditions are present, sooner or later the state collapses and a revolution occurs. The sense that there is a real contest, and that insurgents are often defeated, is lost, and with it a more accurate understanding of the dynamics of revolution. I believe that a fruitful approach is to place strategic interaction at the center of the model. This enables us to refocus our attention on what is surely a central element of revolutions: a violent contest for the state. To do this we need to turn our attention to efforts on the part of the state and its supporters and allies to defeat the insurgents. Counterinsurgency and counterrevolution constitute the other half of a theory of revolution.⁸

⁷ To be sure, there are some works on these topics; many of them are sitting on my bookshelf. But as a proportion of the amount of academic attention, they constitute a small fraction.

⁸ They also constitute the other half of a theory of war. What some (Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 2005) have called the modern war paradigm began with the rise of industrial/conventional war. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars marked a watershed in this development and produced the two great thinkers, Jomini and Clausewitz, who jointly set the foundation stones for the western theory of modern war. Military thinkers have been elaborating on this in the nearly two centuries since.

Indeed, theories of war and theories of revolution are linked to each other via the focus on the state. The paradigm of modern war and the phenomenon of irregular war are linked to each other like Siamese twins. The rise of the modern global state system created them simultaneously.

My second observation is that professional historians, economists and political scientists (but not sociologists) have recently produced extremely valuable and impressive studies of counterinsurgency and civil war. On the whole, however, they have not taken a contextual historical approach to their subject. Let me try to explain what I mean by this.

There are excellent monographs on particular conflicts, often with such a wealth of detail that we understand the local and regional variations, the internal disputes within the contending parties, and the infinite complexity, ambiguity and nuance of the many meanings these conflicts had for the various interested parties. Detailed historical analyses of these hitherto obscure conflicts are beginning to appear and to change our general understanding of the phenomenon of irregular warfare. Nevertheless, even the best works tend to treat their case with from each other and in isolation from their historical setting.

This is most obvious in the recent debates over causation and motivation in the many “civil wars” that currently plague parts of the periphery. Economists, such as Paul Collier and his colleagues at the World Bank, were joined by political scientists in what began as a debate over “greed” vs “grievance” in the origin and perpetuation of civil war, and then expanded into wider questions.⁹ Cases tended to be wrenched out of their larger context and compared with one another to produce a general model. There is nothing wrong (in principle) with this procedure but, in this case at least, the historical context turns out to be an important part of the explanation of these “civil wars.” That, at any rate, is my claim.

Third, the majority of the works dealing specifically with counterinsurgency are generally written either by professional military officers (or by civilians who are part of the counterinsurgency machine) or by Beltway pundits. These works are often excessively focused

Core militaries, despite their constant operations in the periphery, chose to define themselves almost exclusively by reference to the (core) paradigm of modern war. As a result, all our thinking about war has been skewed. It is time to rethink the basics. There is currently much debate in military circles and in their academic penumbræ about the changing nature of war; I see what I am doing as part of that debate.

⁹ Paul Collier et al., Breaking the Conflict Trap, 2003; Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis eds, Understanding Civil War, 2005; Mats Berdal and David Malone eds, Greed And Grievance, 2000

on the “purely military” aspects of the topic, draw upon social science hardly at all (preferring ad hoc sweeping common sense generalizations), and have a generally ahistorical approach to the subject.¹⁰ If one could simply ignore what these people have to say, life would be easier. But they are generally recognized as “the experts” in this field, and what they say seeps into the general Beltway chatter that is the medium in which policy is articulated. They generate a set of imprecisely defined alternative hypotheses with which social scientists must engage if they hope to work on issues with policy relevance. As some of my readers may be only partially familiar with this literature, let me run quickly over what the doctrine writers and Beltway pundits have been saying.

The Rival Hypotheses

The competing hypotheses fall into three categories: the perennial, the novel and the routine social science explanations based on local-level factors.

Perennialists argue that there have always been rebellions, insurrections, and insurgencies, and that throughout history states have had to contend with challenges. Perennialist theories run a gamut from Hobbesian notions of an inherent propensity of humans to engage in violence, to notions of civilizational and cultural clashes, to radical and populist invocations of the struggles of the oppressed masses. Spartacus and Arminius were merely the first in a long line of rebels.

Perennialists are, of course, right: so long as there have been states, there have been revolts of one kind or another, and states have responded with counterinsurgency policies. What is missing from the analysis is any ability to predict variation in the timing and frequency of revolt. Perennialists imply a stochastic process with near-random transition probabilities. When it comes to prediction, this model can only suggest that, since there have been insurgencies in the past, there will undoubtedly be insurgencies in the future.

¹⁰ There are, of course, exceptions, usually monographs on particular cases of irregular warfare written by professional military historians.

Not only is this not particularly helpful, it is downright misleading. Jeff Goodwin has demonstrated (to my satisfaction at least) that stable democracies generally do not experience insurgencies.¹¹ For these countries, the probability of occurrence of an insurgency has dropped dramatically. There is thus no reason to assume that insurgency must necessarily occur in the future; it depends on circumstances.¹²

Those who argue that contemporary counterinsurgencies represent a truly **novel phenomenon** incur the opposite error. Some argue that the new phenomenon of globalization has changed the parameters of state formation and warfare. These are the “new war” theorists.¹³ They argue that globalization has produced (1) state collapse in the periphery and (2) the resources for non-state actors to sustain irregular warfare.¹⁴ New war theorists have produced many valuable insights and I agree with many of their propositions. However, the forms of war they describe and the means of financing it, do not look all that novel to me. (And, of course, many of us think that globalization is not an entirely novel phenomenon, either.) The “new wars” only look different by contrast with a highly stylized and historically inaccurate image of modern war that dominates our thinking. I think they have produced bad history, and so the contrasts at the heart of their concepts are misleading.

They eagerly announce the arrival of “new wars,” wars that seem new to them because they seem different from the standard accounts we have of modern, conventional warfare. Having read next to nothing of recent work in military history, they rely on a highly stylized version of military history. This is a more or less teleological notion of the rise of the “Western Way of War.” In this view there has been a monotonic rise in the superiority of “western” military technology and organization associated with the rise of modernity. The professionalization of the

¹¹ Jeff Goodwin, No Other Way Out, 2001

¹² I think it is not unreasonable to generalize from the core experience to assert that the periphery will cease to experience irregular warfare once it too has made the transition to stable democracy. Whether all regions of the periphery can make this transition, and the forms that the transition will take, are matters for another paper.

If I am right, the process of violent state-building – and irregular warfare – will not come to an end until the entire world has made the transition to stable democracy. Fukuyama was half right. The end of history occurs when citizens can adjust their differences through the institutionalized, routine politics of democracy. His failure was to consider only the core states of the global system.

¹³ Mary Kaldor, Old and New Wars, 1999; Herfried Munkler, New Wars, 2005

¹⁴ The 9/11 Commission put forward a version of this theory about globalization and weak states.

military led to a style of warfare that pitted one professional military organization against another. The distinction between soldier and civilian, between combatant and non-combatant was central to this way of war. The mass civilian casualties of the Second World War, together with the “total” nature of societal involvement seemed to reverse that trend, but recent advances in technology (the revolution in military affairs) have returned the Western Way of War back to its true course.

What we have here is an ideology with a grain of truth at its core. I think it is certainly the case that a specific mode of warmaking was developed in modern Europe and that it was, in many ways, superior to other modes of warmaking, but this was primarily the result of two phenomena: advances in logistics so that expeditions back by maritime forces could be sustained for lengthy periods, and the quantum jump in discipline and command and control aspects so that the armies now permanently maintained by the state would efficiently execute state policy. The rest: the treatment of civilians, the rule-bound nature of combat, and the clear distinctions between soldier and civilian and between war and peace, seem to me to be both epiphenomenal and ephemeral.

Now that the military organizations of core states find themselves primarily engaged in operations of a peacekeeping or counterinsurgency kind in peripheral countries, some social scientists have discerned the emergence of “new wars.” By contrast with the idealized notion of the Western Way of War, these supposedly new wars seem messy, emotional, and “political.”

These wars only seem new by contrast to an image of the Western Way of War which is a simple-minded and teleological understanding of the military history of the last two or three centuries. Anyone who peers below the surface will see that military operations in the core in modern times have always been messy and destructive. War has not generally by-passed civilians. What has been distinctive about modern wars in the core is the employment of regular military forces, as opposed to the poorly disciplined armies of the pre-modern and early modern periods.

The elaboration of the concept of the Western Way of War has served several important ideological functions. One of these has been to foster the claim on the part of a self-conscious military profession to have esoteric technical mastery over its realm of action. This has led to a distinction between “war” and “politics” that has simultaneously been functional for the maintenance of civilian political supremacy, and has resulted in endless tension and confusion over the meaning of the statement that “war is the extension of politics by other means.”

A variant of the novelty position turns on the concept of Empire and resistance. Writers in this vein are impressed by the novel circumstance that there is now only one serious empire whereas the past was characterized by competing empires. An example of this is to be found in the work of Tom Barnett, one of the strategy popularizers.¹⁵ He has basically updated development theory, and relabeled the underdeveloped world “the Gap.” He sees conflict and turmoil in the Gap as a product of the lack of development. I largely agree with him. My differences are two: Barnett has an ahistorical understanding of the dynamics of underdevelopment and thus replicates modernization theory; and he (like many American analysts) prioritizes good governance over democracy. But that is another paper.

A further variant of the novelty position has been put forward by military theorists, and is possibly less familiar to readers of this paper. They argue that the techniques of warfighting have undergone an evolution so that we are now in the phase of “Fourth Generation Warfare.”¹⁶ This view (and associated terminology) is more common in the military than in academia. I do not want to spend much time on it in this paper. Suffice it to say that I think it is poor history and trivial analysis. It asserts that there have been three generations of warfare: the first was the age of Napoleon, the age of the line and column, the age of the smoothbore musket. The second generation was the age of indirect firepower, typified by the artillery battles of the First World War. Third Generation Warfare arrived in the Second World War and was marked by the predominance of maneuver and combined arms. It is then asserted that we are now in a fourth generation typified by the Palestinian intifada: an age when ideas are the means of warfare, and warfare is conducted by loose networks of warriors, rather than the rigid hierarchies of regular

¹⁵ Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map*, 2004

¹⁶ Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 2004

armies. This is all pure nonsense. Popular organization is not new, military history started before Napoleon, and the differences between the three “generations” are overdrawn. The schema is excessively driven by technological changes in weaponry. The only interesting question is why it appeals to anyone. But, as they say, that is another story.

The bottom line for novelty thinkers is that, either because of globalization, empire, military technology, or new forms of popular organization, contemporary insurgency and counterinsurgency are so different from similar phenomena in the past that no helpful comparisons can be drawn.

What all these theorists of novelty have in common is an analysis that implicitly accepts the premise of a “global war on terror” that will necessarily be a “long war,” a generational struggle. In this, they coincide with the views of most US political leaders and policy analysts. The argument is that, for whatever reason, there has been a structural shift in the global system such that we are now faced with the prospect of irregular warfare – terrorism and counterinsurgency – for the indefinite future. There is not much that can be done about this; the severity of attacks can be mitigated and consequences managed, but “root causes” cannot be easily changed.

The third rival approach is the dominant one amongst professional social scientists. It is to explain variation in the onset and frequency of irregular war by means of a multivariate model of the kind we are all familiar with, some variant of the general linear model. The difficulty with this model is that it treats the explanation entirely in terms of variations in local-level conditions. I think these are important, but they leave out the contextual factors I focus on in this paper. At most, context can be operationalized with a dummy variable.

When did the global system of states emerge?

When we talk of a system, we are asserting that the behavior of any one of the parts cannot be satisfactorily explained in isolation from the constellation of other parts that together make up the system. To the extent that a satisfactory explanation of the behavior of one part requires reference to the parts as a whole, then we are dealing with a system. This implies the existence of connectors

between the parts. In the case of the global state system, these include wars, diplomacy, and the pursuit of state interests, which may be quite various. The system is not defined, however, by any one of these connectors.

I date the global state system from the time of the long struggle for global hegemony between England and France, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. Some would date the emergence of the global state system earlier. Certainly there were conflicts among the Italians, the Dutch, the Spanish and the Portuguese, and their far-flung maritime empires.

A case can be made for an origin in the period of the global voyages of exploration and the overseas expansion of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, beginning in the late 15th century. Certainly both the 16th and 17th centuries saw intense warfare and commercial rivalry between European powers.

There is a case for a later dating. The current global state system began as an Atlantic-centered system, and then, with the incorporation of the Pacific, transformed itself into a truly global system in the mid-nineteenth century. This is the strongest case for moving the date of the origin of the current global state system forward by a century. The continental expansion of the United States, the eastward march of Russia, the emergence of the “great game” geopolitical tensions between Britain and Russia were all parts of this mid-nineteenth century transformation, as was the collapse of China (beginning with the Opium Wars and the Taiping revolt) and the emergence of Japan as a core power (with the Meiji Restoration.) If we want precision, then perhaps it makes sense to talk of the three phases of the state system: the European, Atlantic and Global phases.

The global state system transferred war between the core powers, at least in part, to the periphery where it had dramatic impact on the development of those societies. It is a story of “world wars” and the traumas they induced in the countries of the periphery, traumas that took a variety of forms: revolutions, insurgencies, civil wars, mass religious movements, intense political repression, and sometimes genocides.

It is intuitively obvious that the expansion of the global state system would create resistance (as well as accommodation.) The question is why this resistance would take the form of irregular warfare. One possible answer is that this was already the culturally preferred mode of warring in the periphery. A second is that the superiority of the core system of regular military forces (together with the great difficulties of copying the system in a short period of time) forced peripheral polities to turn to irregular warfare as the only viable option. (As I said earlier, the keys were (1) the ability to sustain expeditionary forces through regular supplies of food, and this was heavily dependent on reliable maritime supremacy; and (2) the discipline of the soldiers, backed up by an effective hierarchical command and control system.

So the story I think should be told is one of a succession of global wars, each of which produces a revolution. There are then a series of ripples or secondary effects on other regions. If irregular warfare is seen to be successful, it will be emulated. Similarly, if attempts at counterrevolution, counterinsurgency or conservative stabilization are seen to work, they too will be emulated elsewhere.

The Evidence

So much for the throat-clearing. Here now is my preliminary reading of the historical evidence. Tell me if you think it is inaccurate.

Let me begin with an intuitive overview. To take the better-known cases first, at the end of both the First and the Second World Wars there were major revolutions (in Russia and China,) a host of minor revolutions and insurgencies, and other kinds of irregular conflict. The First World War was directly causally implicated in the outbreak of the Russian revolution of 1917. It triggered a wave of minor or unsuccessful revolutions and revolts: in Germany in 1918, in Hungary in 1919, in Ireland in 1916-23, in the remains of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian revolution in turn produced its own echoes and sequelae: the Russian civil war, the various efforts to spread the revolution in Asia, and demonstration effects everywhere.

The Second World War was similarly directly causally implicated in the victory of the Chinese Communists in their civil war (in 1949.) The Second World War produced the collapse of European empires in the Far East. It generated insurgencies in the Philippines, in Vietnam, in Burma, in Indonesia, with varying results. It led to the division of Korea and indirectly to the war in that country (which in the South contained elements, so Bruce Cummings tells us, of popular insurgency.)¹⁷ The timing of Indian independence cannot be understood without reference to the Second World War, though there was no irregular war here. (The INA qualifies, surely, as only a minor footnote.)

Both of these wars also produced massive popular mobilization of a less violent kind across the globe: strike waves, expansion of democracy, women's rights, peasant movements, etc. (Of course, in nearly all these cases, within a few years these popular movements were contained and new institutional arrangements established.)

So much for the more obvious and better understood cases. Let me return to the first of my cases: the Seven Years War. The principal protagonists were Britain and France, though many other states were involved. It involved fighting in Europe, North America, and India. It was a maritime as well as a land war, and the goal of each of the main protagonists was global hegemony, translated as the possession of colonies and secure frontiers. In some theaters, most notably north America, irregular warfare dominated the fighting.

This global war was a principal cause of the revolt of the American colonies. The security threat from the French and their Native American allies was removed and with it the need (from the colonists' point of view) for restraint in expanding westward across the Appalachian mountains. This set up a conflict between the colonists and the British Crown, which was interested, if only for fiscal reasons, in restraint. The war also spurred the British Crown to a greater regularization of relations between metropolis and colonies, and to an insistence that the costs of imperial defense be borne by the colonists. The participation of the colonists in the French and Indian Wars also,

¹⁷ Bruce Cummings, Origins of the Korean War, vol 1, 1981

according to Anderson, increased their sense of political efficacy and thereby indirectly led to the colonial revolt.¹⁸ (That there were also other causal factors goes without saying.)

The form of the fighting during the War of the American Revolution was various. Initially it pitted largely civilian militias against regular troops. Subsequently, beginning with the siege of Boston, George Washington worked hard to transform his citizen army into a regular army. The Continental Army worked, however, in conjunction with a complex set of militias and irregular forces. According to David Hackett Fischer the combination of regular and irregular forces posed strategic dilemmas for the imperial troops.¹⁹ The intervention of the French tipped the scale, and Yorktown marked the end of British efforts to regain the colonies, though guerrilla warfare characterized the southern colonies in the final years of the war.

By the time of the French intervention (1778,) the revolutionary struggle in America had transformed itself both internally and internationally into what was now largely a conventional war between two great powers over the global distribution of power and access to colonies. It had morphed into the second global war. The British eventually gave up on their colonies on the Eastern seaboard in order to concentrate on saving their Caribbean colonies and to establish their position in India. And so the irregular war sequelae of the first global war (Seven Years' War) were transformed into the second global war: the War of the American Revolution considered as a global conflict between Britain and France.

This war strained the French treasury, and set in motion the train of events that eventually led to the French Revolution of 1789. Here I follow Skocpol's account of the causal link between war and revolution via fiscal crisis. The French revolution almost immediately led to a wave of conventional war in Europe. With the ascent of Napoleon, these revolutionary wars became a global war. (The third in my series.) Some of the conflicts engendered by French expansion had revolutionary overtones, though revisionist historians have cast doubt on many of these claims.²⁰

¹⁸ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 2000

¹⁹ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 2004

²⁰ See, for example, Charles Esdaile on Spain, *Fighting Napoleon*, 2004

The most direct consequences of the Napoleonic wars were the slave revolt in Haiti and the long struggle for the independence of Latin America. The fighting there generally took the form of irregular bands that caudillos strove to turn into more regular armies in a bid, not only for national independence, but also for control of the state. By 1815, the European conflict had been contained, and new global institutions (and the hegemony of Great Britain) paved the way for Latin American success.

We see no more global wars for another century. This is not to say that the world was at peace. There were wars in the core, but usually brief and localized. Some either had direct revolutionary implications (Italian unification) or indirectly generated revolutionary episodes (the Paris Commune, for example.) There were revolutions and revolts, both in the core and the periphery not obviously connected with war in any fashion. Decaying empires in the periphery were the scene of numerous wars of decomposition and recomposition, as well as being irresistible targets for the core empires. Continuing expansion of core empires provoked revolts in the core.

The two world wars then broke the long period of “peace” among core powers. I have already listed their sequelae in terms of irregular war, and so I can now turn to the most recent global wars. Contemporary American strategists are comfortable talking about the Cold War as another global or world war, and some of them have gone on to talk about the Global War on Terror, by extension, as another global war (the seventh.) Its current label is the “long war:” a vacuous term whose principal merit is to signal the notion that the current conflict is like the Cold War in being protracted and fought with a variety of non-military as well as military means.

We must ask whether it is reasonable to terms these periods “global wars” in the same sense that the other cases can be described as global wars. After all, there was very little direct military conflict between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union; most of the fighting was done by proxy. And many of the wars that erupted in the periphery were not directly caused by the superpower conflict. However, all conflicts during that period became objects of superpower contention: everything was seen through the lens of the Cold War. For example, it is hard to argue that the Cuban revolution was caused by a global war. But the meaning of Castro’s victory rapidly became defined within the ideological parameters of the Cold War, and provided inspiration for

further efforts at revolution and counterrevolution elsewhere. My inclination is to see the Cold War as the sixth in the series of global wars, but I can see why this might be problematic.

If there are problems conceptualizing the Cold War as a global war, then this is *a fortiori* true for the current Global War on Terror, despite the implications of its name. Although it is much too early to make a sensible judgment, my sense is that the Global War on Terror will shortly reveal itself (if it hasn't done so already) as a phase of core efforts to direct events in the periphery in a manner reminiscent of similar imperial activities in the late nineteenth century.

In sum, what I think the historical record demonstrates is that there was a series of global wars, and that each of these produced (1) a major revolution, (2) a series of minor revolutionary movements, and (3) yet more conventional war. It is important, however, to not confine our attention to one side of the story. Each of these revolutionary movements generated its Siamese twin: efforts at counterinsurgency, counterrevolution, or conservative stabilization. Sometimes these efforts produced various kinds of authoritarian states in the periphery.

Bringing the world economy back in

The second half of the nineteenth century does, however, pose a major problem for my hypothesis, since we see a lot of irregular warfare in the absence of global war. I here resort to some ad hoc modification of the theory.

There were waves of irregular warfare and revolution which were not directly spurred by interstate global war in core. There was the wave of uprisings, religious revolts and colonial wars in the mid-nineteenth century to which I referred in the opening passages of this paper: the Indian Mutiny, the Pugachev Revolt, the Opium wars and the Taiping Revolt, the Meiji restoration, and the 1848 Revolutions in Europe. There were a number of irregular wars towards the end of the nineteenth century as core states pushed into Africa and as the U.S. took over parts of the decaying Spanish empire. And finally, there was a wave of revolutions in the 1905-1910 period (Iran, Russia, China, Mexico) which cannot be attributed to global war. (The Russian revolution of 1905 was, of course, partly a result of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, but this was not a global

war.) John Hart has argued that the revolutions of 1905-10 were primarily the result of a crisis in the world economy, and it is time for me to reinstate the global economy as a key driver in producing irregular warfare in the periphery.²¹

I am not entirely sure of my ground here, but my guess is that there are two three key periods. The first runs from about 1846 to 1861 or 1865. The key feature of this period is a series of apparently unconnected irregular wars in the periphery or semi-periphery. These wars were costly, threatened (and in some cases overturned) local regimes, and were generally provoked by active intervention on the part of Western powers as they used military (including naval) might to enforce preferential commercial arrangements.

The second period sees the scramble for colonies in Africa and a self-conscious assumption of imperial identities by all the major powers, including the United States (which occupied Cuba and Spain as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898.) Beginning in the 1880s, this period reached a crest in 1900 with the Boer war. It included the beginnings of Japanese imperialism in Korea. I am unsure when the period comes to an end, perhaps as early as 1902, perhaps not until the outbreak of World War I.

There is, of course, a considerable element of arbitrariness in identifying a wave of irregular warfare at the end of the nineteenth century. Since this was connected with the New Imperialism, it would be entirely reasonable to object that irregular wars resulting from colonial expansion were hardly new and had been going on for many years. I think there is a clustering of irregular wars at this time, but until I have gone into the historical record more carefully, I am reluctant to be too assertive on this point. This is clearly tricky terrain for my theory.

Linking Global and Local: Shocks, Demonstations, Constraints:

There are two kinds of causal factors: global waves and local conditions. With regard to the global waves, the key feature of the global system to be explained is the wave-like occurrence of irregular warfare. These waves in the periphery are caused by two kinds of waves in the core: (1)

²¹ John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico, 1987

global wars between core powers that impact (in several ways) the periphery, and (2) spurts of economic globalization. These spurts of globalization involve increased trade and investment flows, and new institutional arrangements for global markets.

The second set of causal determinants are those local conditions that operate at levels below that of the global state system. Given a propitious global conjuncture, certain constellations of social-structural, cultural, political and economic conditions are more conducive to the outbreak of irregular warfare than others. This is standard social science. These local conditions are numerous, and which ones are causally important varies from place to place and time to time. The central ones are: (1) economic dislocation or instability in developing countries, (2) variations in the structure of elites in developing countries, (3) patterns of state formation, democratic stabilization and governance, (4) religious mobilization and reformation.

The causality that operates is complex, contingent and contextual: these kinds of social processes must be studied in their context. Depending on the context, very different sets of causal factors might account for the presence of the phenomenon to be explained. This leads to the development of models which are not invariant across time and place, but which incorporate historical periodicity into the model itself.

It is necessary to link changes at the global level to the occurrence of irregular warfare in particular countries and regions by demonstrating the existence of causal mechanisms and transmission belts. There are a number of these mechanisms that link change and variation at the global level to causal processes at the local level.

The first mechanism is that global systems create sets of institutions, norms, and expectations that effectively constrain the options open to all actors, global, core and peripheral. Global systems are institutionalized both formally and informally. These institutionalized patterns create and embody particular cognitive maps. With stable expectations, all sorts of options are closed off from consideration. Whether we are dealing with periods of relative stability, or periods of rapid change, these features of the external environment constrain the choices of local actors.

The second mechanism is that of exogenous shock. If global institutions routinely act to structure and constrain perceived options, then shocks of various kinds are capable of introducing sudden and dramatic changes in perceptions and expectations. The occurrence of a war or an economic crisis typically sends shock waves around the global system. The impact of these shocks is mediated by the key variables in the local society: national-level institutional patterns, the power and organization of local actors, etc. At the very least, expectations are changed.

A third mechanism is the physical introjection of “foreign” agents into the local society: the arrival of foreign armies and navies, foreign merchants and investors, missionaries, diplomats, political organizers, etc. At the extreme, this is what we understand by colonialism, but there are numerous forms of foreign penetration which fall well below this level but which are nevertheless important mechanisms linking global systems and local societies.

Fourth, there are international demonstration effects. The success of the French and Russian revolutions, for example, led to conscious imitation elsewhere, and the success of military dictatorship in Brazil increased the likelihood of similar interventions in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. International demonstration effects often operate through the diffusion of broad “lessons” that are embodied in cognitive maps and prescriptive heuristics accepted by relevant social actors.

To give an illustrative example, the Second World War produced all four mechanisms. First, the operation of the world economy was dramatically transformed. Both the supply and the demand for certain kinds of commodities changed, and the constellations of political power and the rules of international politics changed. This was true even in parts of the world, such as Latin America, which were untouched by the actual fighting.²² In Europe and elsewhere, war-ravaged economies had to be rebuilt in a political context in which socialist and Communist parties were politically more powerful than previously. The Bretton Woods agreements, the creation of the United Nations and the World Bank, and then the Marshall Plan and NATO, created institutions and rules that transformed political alignments, both globally and locally.

²² Leslie Bethel and Ian Roxborough (eds), Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1992

Many of these changes happened abruptly, sending shock waves (the second causal mechanism) through the global system, as well as altering the options available to local actors.

Third, in some parts of the world, foreign armies arrived, displacing or discrediting local elites, generating local resistance movements, and leading to a mobilization and arming of local populations. This was the case in China, Burma, Vietnam, the Philippines. In Europe the occupation produced resistance movements, often polarizing national politics so that in the war's immediate aftermath the specter of armed, Communist insurrection or of an electoral victory for the Communists, could not be discounted. This was the case in Greece, Italy, France and Yugoslavia. Elsewhere the war produced a general turn to the left and social-democrats brought the welfare state and Keynesian economics into the mainstream of politics.

Fourth, in Asia at least, the displacement of the European colonialists by the Japanese demonstrated that colonial rule could be overthrown by Asians. As the war came to an end, local resistance organizations morphed into national liberation movements and the success of one produced demonstration effects that encouraged others. Both the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 (one of the many sequels of the Second World War in that part of the world) and the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949 (again, unintelligible outside the framework of the Second World War) created massive demonstration effects and set the stage for the diffusion of Maoism as an ideology of political transformation. The echoes and ripples went on for decades.

There are probably more than four types of relevant causal mechanisms. An important part of the research agenda is to figure out how many there are, and when we find them operating.

What would convince me that I was wrong?

It would not take a lot to convince me that this hypothesis simply doesn't hold up. Despite the "big, huge, sweeping" nature of my hypothesis, I was originally trained as a detail person: an area specialist who was unhappy with even the most modest generalization. So how might we go about demolishing my hypothesis?

Pointing out that particular cases don't quite fit the model (even one's favorite cases) isn't quite enough. Because we are not dealing with a deterministic universe, because of the role of chance, and because the causality is complex, a few awkward cases are tolerable.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, I think there are three basic lines of attack: concepts, correlation, and causation. The first is interesting but ultimately irrelevant, since the proof of the conceptual pudding is in the empirical eating. The second is the one that worries me. The third is simply an invitation to rethink the causal model.

The first line of attack is on the concepts: global war, irregular warfare, and the global state system. It could be argued that one or more of these concepts is unclear, ambiguous, self-contradictory, or uninteresting. It could be argued that I am assuming unit homogeneity where it does not exist and that I am shoe-horning quite dissimilar events and processes into a Procrustean bed.

The second line of attack is to show that there really is no correlation, no pattern. If there is no pattern there is nothing to explain. This, however, must be an empirical attack: you need to convince me that the data simply don't show what I think they show. If, for example, it turned out that there was a more or less constant level of irregular warfare for large parts of this period (1750-1991) or that fluctuations in the level of irregular warfare were not associated with periods of global war, then I would readily admit defeat. If you could convince me, for example, that not only the Cuban revolution but also other similar events in the second half of the twentieth century were not triggered by global war, then I would have to step away from my hypothesis.

The third line of attack is to show that the supposed correlation and attendant causation is spurious. Even if there is a pattern, its causes are not those that I hypothesize. This is a reasonable line of attack, but I regard it as eminently constructive. It accepts the pattern of correlation, but replaces one explanation with another. This is probably (at least from my perspective) the most fruitful line of enquiry. I think there are a variety of causal mechanisms that link global and local, and I would like to know which ones operated in which particular instances.