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**WHY SO CONVENTIONAL? AMERICA'S PROPENSITY
TO WAGE TRADITIONAL LARGE-SCALE WARFARE**

by

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TRADITIONAL LARGE-SCALE WARFARE**

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ABSTRACT

The United States has repeatedly engaged in irregular warfare—including counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense, and unconventional warfare—throughout its history. However, despite its familiarity with irregular warfare, there is reluctance on the part of U.S. presidents, military leaders, and even the general public to engage in this form of war.

This thesis asks why the U.S. security mindset is focused on traditional large-scale warfare, even when the threats the United States has faced, and will continue to face, are mostly irregular. To answer this question, this thesis uses Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction model—which looks at why same-approach and opposite-approach strategies (direct and indirect) favor strong and weak actors differently—to analyze the U.S. Revolutionary War, when the United States was the weak actor, and the Vietnam conflict, when the United States was the strong actor, and to assess whether the United States implemented the correct form of strategic interaction in each conflict.

This thesis finds that the United States’ propensity for traditional large-scale warfare is based upon its desire to achieve victory in the shortest amount of time. Furthermore, a preponderance of resources and instruments of war has also impelled the United States to employ overwhelming mass, maneuver, and firepower, instead of irregular warfare with a protracted timeline strategy.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|---|
| ARVN | Army of the Republic of Vietnam |
| COIN | counterinsurgency |
| CT | counterterrorism |
| FID | foreign internal defense |
| IW | irregular warfare |
| IWJOC | Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept |
| JCS | Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| MACV | Military Assistance Command Vietnam |
| MAAG | Military Advisory and Assistance Group |
| NLF | National Liberation Front |
| NVA | North Vietnamese Army |
| RD | revolutionary development |
| SO | stability operations |
| UW | unconventional warfare |

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the American Revolutionary War, British General Frederick Haldiman stated, “The Americans would be less dangerous if they had a regular army.”¹ A wounded British soldier after the Battle of Concord wrote that the American colonial rebels, “... did not fight us like a regular army, only like savages behind trees, stone walls, and out of the woods and fields,” while another Redcoat remarked, “They would never engage us properly.”² These irregular warfare tactics used by the American colonials ultimately helped win the Revolutionary War even though George Washington continually strived for a professional, well-trained army that could defeat the British in conventional, force-on-force battle.

The history of the United States is steeped in successful irregular warfare campaigns and conflicts from Francis Marion in the American Revolutionary War to the United States’ indirect approach countering insurgencies in Latin America in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, despite many unconventional, counterinsurgency, or foreign internal defense successes, the contributions of irregular warfare have repeatedly been forgotten. The current U.S. Army *Field Manual, Counterinsurgency* (FM 3–24) states, “Throughout its history, the U.S. military has had to relearn the principles of counterinsurgency (COIN) while conducting operations against adaptive insurgent enemies.”³

Although insurgency has become the dominant form of conflict since the Second World War,⁴ the United States has continued to prefer conventional war, what this thesis will call traditional large-scale warfare. Time and time again, despite the success of irregular warfare in the twentieth century, the U.S. focus remained fixed on traditional

¹ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), 18.

² Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 66.

³ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency (COIN)* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006): ix.

⁴ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, xx.

large-scale warfare. A few examples of U.S. irregular warfare leanings include: the 1950–1954 U.S. approach to the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines, President Eisenhower’s farewell speech in 1961 warning of the possible grave implications of the immense military establishment and acquisition of unwarranted influence by the newly emerging military industrial complex,⁵ President John F. Kennedy’s counterinsurgency program in the early 1960s to combat Nikita Krushchev’s support for “wars of liberation,”⁶ and America’s successful indirect approach to countering Marxist and communist insurgencies in Latin America in the latter half of the twentieth century. Regardless of how often the United States takes part in or implements irregular warfare, the predominant means of warfare remain conventional or traditional large-scale warfare. This pattern of behavior is noted in The U.S. Army’s and Marine Corps *COIN* manual: “Counterinsurgency operations generally have been neglected in broader American military doctrine and national security policies since the end of the Vietnam War over 30 years ago.”⁷ What has continually inhibited the United States military and security mindset from embracing irregular warfare?

This thesis attempts to explain why, throughout America’s history, a contentious “one or the other” debate has occurred between irregular and traditional warfare, and why irregular warfare continually gets sidelined despite repeated engagements in counterinsurgencies and unconventional warfare. Specifically, this thesis delves into why irregular warfare is routinely looked upon as a lesser form of war that has been repeatedly relegated to the dustbins of U.S. military history. Why is the U.S. military and U.S. security mindset traditional warfare focused, even when threats we have faced are frequently not traditional? This thesis proposes that, only when this phenomenon is understood, can an honest debate about the utility of a traditional warfare strategy versus irregular warfare strategy proceed.

⁵ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Address,” January 17, 1961, accessed March 22, 2013, http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/farewell_address/1961_01_17_Press_Release.pdf.

⁶ Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerilla Warfare, Counter-Insurgency, Counter-Terrorism, 1940–1990*, (2002), accessed March 22, 2013, <http://www.statecraft.org/chapter6.html>.

⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), vii.

A. THE CURRENT DEBATE—COINISTA’S VERSUS COINATA’S

Despite America’s success in irregular warfare during the Revolution, the “American Way of War” is characterized as achieving victory resulting from overwhelming force and the absolute quantity of available assets.⁸ Even in 1983, almost 30 years ago, Edward N. Luttwak, in “Notes on Low-Intensity Conflict,” acknowledged that low intensity conflicts are merely deemed by the U.S. Defense Establishment as a lesser-included case of “real” war.⁹ Recently, after 12 years of irregular warfare and COIN conflict in Afghanistan, Fred Kaplan, author of *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*, claims that Afghanistan is COIN’s Waterloo.¹⁰ The fact that historians, journalists, and members of the U.S. military are equating the COIN strategy in Afghanistan with Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo, which ended his reign as emperor, is telling. Are we once again dismissing irregular warfare as a lesser-included case of “real” war? Is engaging in irregular warfare the path to U.S. loss of global power and possible demise? This traditional warfare—irregular warfare debate has manifested itself into an anti-COIN, pro-COIN argument, separated into the “Coinista versus Coinata”¹¹ camps, the former represented by retired Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, and the latter by Colonel Gian Gentile.

Retired Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, in *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, explores and compares the British success in Malaya from 1948–1960 to the United States’ failure in Vietnam from 1960–1973. Nagl argues that the main reason for the success of the British Army in Malaya compared to the failures of the United States in

⁸ Hy S. Rothstein, “Less is More: the Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an era of Collapsing States,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2007): 278.

⁹ Edward N. Luttwak, “Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare,” *Parameters* (December 1983): 333.

¹⁰ Octavian Manea, “The American Way of War After COIN’s Waterloo: An Interview with Fred Kaplan.” *Small Wars Journal* (March 5, 2013): 1, accessed March 22, 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-american-way-of-war-after-coins-waterloo-an-interview-with-fred-kaplan>.

¹¹ Student Conference on US Affairs (SCUSA) 64, “Leading in Lean Times: Assuring Accountability and Assessing American Priorities in an Age of Austerity. Long Live COIN? Dealing with Insurgencies and Internationalized Conflicts on a Budget.” United States Military Academy (November 7–11, 2012), accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.usma.edu/sosh/scusa/SiteAssets/SitePages/Round%20Tables/3%20Long%20Live%20COIN.pdf>.

Vietnam was the result of different cultural organizations between the two armies, simply, the British Army was a learning institution and the U.S. Army was not.¹² Because the British cultural organization promoted learning, they were better able to adapt to counterinsurgency tactics and strategies during the Malayan Emergency. Consequently, Nagl argues that the United States must be able to adapt to a global insurgency in the future and be able to create an operational capability to influence the actions of nations and subnational groups.¹³ Nagl suggests modifying the U.S. Army's force structure to incorporate an "advisor command" to accomplish this goal.¹⁴

Nagl's recommendations are met with contentious disagreement by perhaps the loudest voice for the anti-COIN argument, U.S. Army Colonel Gian P. Gentile. Writing articles with titles such as "COIN is Dead: U.S. Army Must Put Strategy Over Tactics," "Beneficial War: The Conceit of American Counterinsurgency," and his book, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of COIN*, Gentile argues that the U.S. military's current obsession with COIN is equivalent to the erroneous belief in airpower in World War II being able to shorten wars while at the same time "saving blood and treasure on both sides."¹⁵ In Gentile's article, "COIN is Dead," he argues that "future battlefields demand a ground force built around the pillars of firepower, protection and mobility."¹⁶ He further contends that the current Army force structure will need to change but will be unable to if they maintain their obsession and distraction with counterinsurgency tactics.¹⁷

Identifying whether or not Nagl's adaptive organizational culture and advisory command structure or Gentile's firepower centric force is necessary to fight America's

¹² John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), xxii.

¹³ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, xvi.

¹⁴ John A. Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review* (September-October 2008), 24–26.

¹⁵ Gian P. Gentile, "Beneficial War," *Harvard International Review*, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://hir.harvard.edu/india-in-transition/beneficial-war-0>.

¹⁶ Gian P. Gentile, "COIN is Dead," *World Politics Review*, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/10731/coin-is-dead-u-s-army-must-put-strategy-over-tactics>.

¹⁷ Gentile, "COIN is Dead."

future wars requires one to look at the type of conflicts that the United States will most likely find itself in in the future. This debate falls into two main categories. One argues that the United States faces a “new” type of war, often explained as “post-heroic” warfare. Essentially, war as we knew it in the Twentieth Century, industrialized war fought by state powers, has ceased to exist. Prominent authors on the subject of a new type of war, such as Mary Kaldor, Martin Van Creveld, and Rupert Smith, believe this new type of conflict consists of war amongst the people.¹⁸ These wars will not be waged by armies but by groups of terrorists, guerrillas, bandits, and robbers.¹⁹

The other side of the debate suggests that war, in its truest form, has really not changed at all. Colin Gray argues that whatever might be changing about warfare, it is not, and cannot be the nature or warfare itself; the nature of war is eternal.²⁰ However, even stating that warfare itself cannot change, Gray explains that the United States’ high-tech transformation will only be of limited value due to the fact that America’s foes will “pursue ways of war that do not test U.S. strengths.”²¹ Consequently, the United States, despite its technological, numerical, and professional military advantages, will still face irregular warfare threats in the foreseeable future.

Both schools of thought have a common thread: The fact that whether the nature of warfare remains the same or warfare will be predominantly fought by non-state actors, the United States’ technological, firepower, and overwhelming force advantages will only be of moderate benefits.²² Additionally, the fact that there is such an extreme imbalance of military power in favor of the United States, it will be uncommon for America’s adversaries to engage it in force on force traditional warfare. This observation supports Rupert Smith’s analysis “[t]hat a paradigm shift in war has undoubtedly occurred: from armies with comparable forces doing battle on a field to strategic confrontation between a

¹⁸ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 5.

¹⁹ Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 197.

²⁰ Colin S. Gray, “How Has War Changed Since the End of the Cold War?” *Parameters* (Spring 2005), 17.

²¹ Gray, “How Has War Changed?” 21.

²² Gray, “How Has War Changed?” 21.

range of combatants, not all of which are armies, and using different types of weapons, often improvised. The old paradigm was that of interstate industrial war. The new one is the paradigm of war amongst the people.”²³

Because of the commonalities among the new war and old war proponents, it stands to reason that the United States will most likely find itself engaged in some form of irregular warfare for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, the current COIN anti-COIN, or irregular warfare—traditional warfare, debate focuses solely on which strategy is best for America’s future global security. Furthermore, the analysis that does exist on the pro-traditional warfare mindset of the U.S. military primarily focuses on the outputs, not the inputs. Such analysis most commonly faults the traditional warfare-centric joint, professional, military-education (JPME) system, U.S military doctrine, and/or force materiel, weapons, and technology production utilized to wage traditional warfare. The arguments do not explain or determine the root cause or causes of the U.S. military and the national security mindset being predisposed to traditional warfare as the nation’s primary warfighting strategy.

B. HYPOTHESES ON THE CAUSES OF THE TRADITIONAL WARFARE MINDSET

There are several periods in America’s history where it appeared the U.S. security mindset and the armed forces were leaning towards an irregular warfare focus. From the French and Indian War to the Civil War, the United States incorporated, or even relied upon, irregular warfare. However, just when it appeared the United States should have maintained an irregular warfare approach to national security due to its success, the American “conventional” wisdom shifted to a conventional warfare approach. Max Boot calls this the “nomad (or guerrilla) paradox,” how a smaller force, utilizing superior mobility, effective leadership, and the ability to mobilize large portions of society while waging a war completely different than that of its conventional enemies is able to defeat them. This is only the first half of the paradox however, he also identifies that even successful guerrilla forces ultimately switch to the same conventional tactics that were

²³ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 5.

used by the superior force they defeated.²⁴ Boot argues that successful guerrilla tactics of history's fast moving nomadic tribes were of little use in defending the territory of its newly conquered states.²⁵ Additionally Boot contributes that once the nomadic "irregulars" started to live a more sedentary lifestyle, they lost their superior individual talents and unit cohesion that made them successful at irregular warfare in the first place. Although the trend predicts guerrillas and insurgents move away from guerilla tactics once they become successful, time and time again when guerrilla warfare seemed to be eclipsed by the latest and greatest capability, industrial warfare in the 1910s, aerial warfare in the 1930s, or nuclear warfare in the 1950s, the dominance of irregular warfare came to the forefront.²⁶

General Rupert Smith, in *The Utility of Force*, believes that the introduction of nuclear weapons made the "old" form of warfare, industrial war, incapable of serving as a deciding event. He explains that unfortunately strategic planners are developing force structure and plans with the industrial war concept in mind but fighting non-industrial wars against non-state participants.²⁷ Smith list four distinct attributes that set nation states' regular armies apart from non-state actors' irregular forces: an organized military body, a hierarchical structure answerable to the highest in the entity or state, a legal status to bear arms and to have a separate disciplinary code, and centralized funding for the purchase of warlike materiel. However, if the development of nuclear weapons was responsible for deterring traditional warfare post World War II, why was irregular warfare utilized predominantly by weaker nation states prior to the advent of nuclear war and why did stronger powers, such as the United States, not adopt an irregular warfare focus?

Based upon the shift from an initial focus on irregular warfare during America's founding to traditional warfare later in its existence, and the reluctance to revert back to irregular warfare as a primary course of action when it seemed appropriate, there must be

²⁴ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 42.

²⁵ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 43.

²⁶ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, xx.

²⁷ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 4.

one or several inhibiting factors preventing the U.S. security mindset and the U.S. military from accepting irregular warfare as an equal form of warfare, on par with traditional warfare.

This thesis aims to test the following hypotheses on the conditions that have fueled the persisting traditional large-scale war mindset in America.

- Hypothesis 1: The development and strength of the United States' military industrial complex inhibits an irregular warfare approach to our nation's military and security mindset by perpetuating and sustaining traditional warfare force structure and materiel via political interests, economic impact, and commercial lobbying of politicians.
- Hypothesis 2: Geopolitical posturing by nation-states seeking legitimacy and prestige on the international stage ensures a traditional warfare mindset and security posture. Essentially a "might is right" philosophy dominates international geopolitics and the universally understood display of power—force projection.
- Hypothesis 3: The organizational construct ingrained over time that focuses on a hierarchical authoritative command structure striving to maximize command and control efficiencies hinders irregular warfare concepts that espouse decentralized operations.

C. METHODOLOGY

This thesis attempts to explain why the United States' military and security mindset is traditional war focused by highlighting two specific periods in the United States' history where it could have maintained an irregular warfare focused military but chose a traditional large-scale warfare mindset instead, and conversely, where it most likely could have changed courses and adopted an irregular warfare mindset but chose to remain traditional war focused instead. Simply stated, why did the U.S. mindset change during its founding from one of irregular warfare to traditional large-scale warfare when, by all accounts, the irregular mindset was effective, and conversely, why did the traditional large-scale warfare mindset not revert back to irregular warfare when it appears as though it should have?

Evidence used for this thesis is broken down into three main categories: information suggesting the threat irregular warfare has posed to international security in the past and will continue to pose to the United States' in the future; academic and policy

literature citing the current contentious debate between the opposing camps supporting irregular warfare and traditional warfare, and data analyzing specific time periods in our nation's history analyzing irregular warfare and traditional warfare mindsets.

Sources used involve accounts from military and civilian leadership that capture behaviors of the respective time periods where the traditional warfare and irregular warfare concepts converged. This thesis also takes into account material analyzing the utilization of tactics, techniques, procedures, and overall strategy to vet the three hypotheses during each case study. U.S. Department of Defense capstone manuals and doctrinal publications are utilized to assist in framing the irregular warfare—traditional warfare debate and secondly, provide insight into the current and future strategic way-ahead for the United States military.

Through the use of primary and secondary sources, this thesis assesses what factors contribute most to the U.S. military's predilection of looking at irregular warfare as an alternate, or lesser, form of warfare. This thesis analyzes the American Revolutionary War, where America was the weaker actor, and the Vietnam War, where the United States was the stronger actor, to consider the conditions under which direct and indirect forms of warfare were chosen. In both wars, the United States chose strategies that were counterintuitive to their circumstances. In the Revolutionary war, the smaller, weaker Colonial forces longed for a conventional, large scale confrontation with Britain, despite being better situated to choose an indirect approach. In the Vietnam war, the United States—the stronger power—began with an indirect approach, through training and advising, when large scale confrontation was the more likely choice. By looking at the counterintuitive choices made by the United States in these two specific periods in U.S. history this thesis strives to understand the factors that have led the United States to choose the type of warfare in which they engage. Identifying these conditions is critical in understanding and proceeding with the current national debate on the degree to which irregular warfare and traditional large-scale warfare will play a part in our nation's future global security and defense. This thesis proceeds as follows:

Chapter II looks at historical and current military doctrine to identify the main characteristics, key similarities, and differences between traditional and irregular warfare in order to determine when and why each is best employed. The chapter then outlines Ivan Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction model, including its strengths and limits, to analyze each case study. The thesis also seeks to test whether his model adequately addresses the counterintuitive nature of irregular warfare strategy and current U.S. military doctrine.

Chapter III provides a case study on the American Revolutionary War from 1775–1783, why it was fought, and its key battles to determine how the United States, the weaker actor, defeated the more powerful British military. This chapter concludes with key reasons the nascent United States predominantly employed an irregular warfare strategy, but continually strived to achieve a traditional warfare capability.

Chapter IV offers a case study on the Vietnam War from 1961–1975, when the United States was the more powerful actor, why it was fought, and its key phases to determine the predominant warfare strategy, and more importantly, how the North Vietnamese, a weak actor, defeated the most powerful military in the world. The chapter concludes with identifying key reasons the United States repeatedly chose a traditional warfare strategy.

Chapter V concludes with summary findings and offers thoughts on why the United States prefers traditional warfare over irregular warfare and how the United States can effectively implement the correct strategy in future conflicts.

II. TRADITIONAL AND IRREGULAR WARFARE

A. INTRODUCTION

Carl Von Clausewitz stated war is simply a duel but on a larger scale,²⁸ summarizing “[e]ssentially war is fighting.”²⁹ Regardless of what devices man creates to give him an advantage in fighting, Clausewitz concludes, “...no matter how it is constituted, the concept of fighting remains unchanged. That is what is meant by war.”³⁰ Although Clausewitz states the nature of war remains the same, he also explains that the most supreme, far-reaching judgment a leader can make is to establish “...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”³¹

Current U.S. military doctrine echoes Clausewitzian theory, explaining that the basic nature of war is immutable, although warfare evolves constantly.³² Warfare, similar to Clausewitz’ analysis of fighting, is “the mechanism, method, or modality of armed conflict against an enemy. It is the “how” of waging war. Warfare continues to change and be transformed by society...”³³ Just as Clausewitz’ explained the most important decision leaders can make is identifying first and foremost which “kind of war” they are going to engage in, current U.S. military doctrine explains that understanding the nature of warfare, how it changes, frames the “context” of how wars are fought. Understanding this context helps leaders make informed decisions on how campaigns and operations

²⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75.

²⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 127.

³⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 127.

³¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 8889.

³² Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2013), I-3.

³³ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-4.

should be conducted.³⁴ Current U.S. military doctrine identifies two basic forms of warfare, traditional and irregular, to frame the context of how war is fought.³⁵

This chapter will attempt to explain traditional and irregular warfare, highlighting each form's main characteristics and key differences. These criteria will then be used in following chapters to analyze key points in U.S. history to determine whether or not the "first of all strategic questions" according to Clausewitz or "understanding the proper context of war" according to U.S. doctrine, was properly analyzed and implemented. This chapter will also highlight Ivan Arreguín-Toft's Strategic Interaction on Conflict Outcomes Model that helps identify which form of warfare to choose and why. This analysis, comparison, and conflict outcome determination will hopefully shed light on key reasons the United States could have utilized a strategy of irregular warfare but chose to emphasize traditional warfare instead.

B. TRADITIONAL WARFARE

A plethora of terms have been used in literature and military publications to describe state-on-state warfare from regular, to industrial, and the most common, and probably the most preferred, conventional. The latest edition of the *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Publication 1*, however, uses the term "traditional warfare," defining it as "a violent struggle for the domination between nation-states or coalitions and alliances of states."³⁶ The term "traditional" is misleading. One can endlessly argue, as many do, which form of warfare is actually traditional. As Max Boot argues "[i]n fact, conventional warfare is the relatively recent invention,"³⁷ or as the United States Marine Corps *Tentative Manual for Combating Irregular Threats* states, "[t]he traditional form of war is actually more irregular."³⁸ Joint doctrine writers

³⁴ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-4.

³⁵ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-4.

³⁶ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-5.

³⁷ Max Boot, "The Evolution of Irregular Warfare: Insurgents and Guerrillas from Akkadia to Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 2 (March–April 2013), 100.

³⁸ Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Tentative Manual for Countering Irregular Threats: An Updated Approach to Counterinsurgency Operations* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2006), 6.

must have recognized this juxtaposition and explained the term traditional warfare was chosen because it is the form most often employed in the West since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 “that reserved for the nation-state alone a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.”³⁹ In order to stay consistent with the most current U.S. military terminology, traditional warfare will be used throughout this thesis when referring to what is better known as conventional, or “traditional large-scale” warfare.

Traditional warfare is armed conflict between nation-states conducting force-on-force battles to defeat each other’s militaries, destroy each other’s war making capability, and retain territory in order to force a change in the adversary’s government or policies.⁴⁰ The focus of traditional warfare is the adversary’s armed forces with the objective of influencing the adversary’s government.⁴¹ Victory is achieved when the adversary’s armed forces have been defeated, its war-making capacity has been destroyed, or key terrain or territory has been seized.⁴² This is typically accomplished in traditional warfare through the use of overwhelming firepower and maneuver, via a series of offensive, defensive, and stability operations conducted against the opposing nation-state’s centers of gravity.⁴³

Focusing on maneuver, firepower, and the enemy’s center of gravity is entrenched in the writings penned almost 200 years ago by military theorists Carl Von Clausewitz and Antoine Henri Jomini, both products of the Napoleonic revolution in warfare that emphasized mass, firepower, and maneuver. Although Jomini focuses on the science of war and its fundamental principles, while Clausewitz focuses more on the theory and philosophical aspects of war,⁴⁴ both stress mass, maneuver, and attacking the enemy’s center of gravity at a decisive place and time. Jomini determines there is one great secret of war that consists of “the very simple maneuver of carrying the bulk of [one’s] forces

³⁹ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-5.

⁴⁰ Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept [IWJOC]* (Version 1.0) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2007), 7-8.

⁴¹ Department of Defense, *IWJOC* Version 1.0, 8.

⁴² Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-5.

⁴³ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-5.

⁴⁴ George C. Aucoin, Jr., “Clausewitz or Jomini?” *Marine Corps Gazette* 72, no. 8 (1988): 102.

upon a single wing of the hostile army.”⁴⁵ He believes this one great secret leads to one fundamental principle of war, strategically maneuvering the mass of one’s army against the decisive points in a theater of war.⁴⁶

Clausewitz also emphasizes massing and maneuvering one’s forces at the decisive point; “[t]he best strategy is always to be very strong: first in general, and then at the decisive point...there is no higher and simpler law of strategy than keeping one’s forces concentrated.”⁴⁷ He identifies the enemy’s center of gravity as “...the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point which all our energies should be directed.”⁴⁸ He believes the enemy’s center of gravity is its armed forces. Therefore, the quickest way to defeat one’s adversary is by defeating its military.⁴⁹

The quick, decisive defeat of an adversary’s armed forces is another aspect of traditional warfare that historical literature and current military doctrine cites as a main objective and therefore one of its defining characteristics. This is demonstrated in Clausewitz’ writings when he explains that “[t]he maximum use of force should be used from the outset to achieve decisive results in the shortest possible time.”⁵⁰ Expecting a quick, decisive victory is also reinforced in current military doctrine where the U.S. *Army Doctrine Publication 1, The Army*, states “[i]f U.S. forces fight, the Nation expects us to inflict a defeat of sufficient magnitude that the enemy abandons his objectives and agrees to peace on our terms. In other words, Americans expect us to dominate and win decisively.”⁵¹ The U.S. Army’s *Unified Land Operations* manual also explains that

⁴⁵ Aucoin, “Clausewitz or Jomini?” 102.

⁴⁶ Aucoin, “Clausewitz or Jomini?” 103.

⁴⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 204.

⁴⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 595–596.

⁴⁹ Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 22.

⁵⁰ Handel, *Masters of War*, 22.

⁵¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication 1, The Army* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012), 1–7.

lethality, defined as the capacity for physical destruction and one of the tenets of unified land operations, "...is fundamental to all other military capabilities and the most basic building block for military operations."⁵²

Lethality, accomplished by overwhelming combat power, in the form of mass, maneuver, and firepower is the essence of traditional warfare. It caters to powerful nation-states with an advanced industrial base and technological capabilities that can overpower peer competitors. Raw power en mass thus becomes a defining factor in traditional warfare. The Great Wars of the early twentieth century, World War I and World War II, are classic examples of Westphalian state-on-state "traditional" warfare, emphasizing mass, maneuver, and firepower, to defeat the enemy's similarly-equipped and uniformed armed forces in order to achieve a decisive victory. However, if an adversary realizes it has to engage a strong nation-state in combat but knows it cannot compete against his superior capabilities in force-on-force battles, it will most assuredly look for another method in which to defeat its goliathan adversary.

C. IRREGULAR WARFARE

Irregular warfare is utilized by disadvantaged nation-states or non-state actors to counter the capabilities and advantages of more powerful militaries.⁵³ Interestingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Publication 1*, explains that IW has recently emerged as a major and more pervasive form of warfare; however, it is not historical,⁵⁴ and yet the Department of Defense *IW Joint Operating Concept*, version 1.0 (*IWJOC*), explains that the U.S. Army, from its infancy up until the early twentieth century, focused primarily on irregular warfare against the native tribes of North America, "only in the past 100 years has European-style warfighting become the U.S. military tradition."⁵⁵ Therefore, even within the U.S. Department of Defense, there is disagreement on the definition and employment of IW as a term.

⁵² Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Publication 3.0, Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2011), 7.

⁵³ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-6.

⁵⁴ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I-6.

⁵⁵ Department of Defense, *IWJOC* Version 1.0, 7.

The most current military doctrine defines irregular warfare as “[a] violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”⁵⁶ The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* (IWJOC) stresses irregular warfare is about people, not platforms; advanced technology, equipment, and weapons systems alone cannot achieve victory.⁵⁷ Therefore, understanding the relevant population in order to gain their support is critical.⁵⁸ The population is the critical focus in irregular warfare; gaining or maintaining control, influence over, and support of that relevant population is the strategic purpose.⁵⁹ IW is ultimately a contest for the legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. The population is therefore both the battleground and the object of the conflict.⁶⁰

IWJOC version 2.0 identifies five principal operations and activities of IW that are undertaken “in sequence, in parallel, or blended”⁶¹ to counter irregular threats: counterterrorism (CT), unconventional warfare (UW), foreign internal defense (FID), counterinsurgency (COIN), and stability operations (SO).⁶² Each activity focuses on different but overlapping aspects of the IW operating environment: the host nation’s government, its security forces, the populace, economy, and, of course, the enemy. The activities are frequently confused or used interchangeably due to their “non-traditional” approach to waging war and combating adversaries. Most recently, COIN has received significant attention due to its emphasis in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Principles

⁵⁶ Department of the Defense, *Joint Publication 1*, I–6.

⁵⁷ Department of Defense, *IWJOC*, Version 1.0, 1.

⁵⁸ Department of Defense, *IWJOC*, Version 1.0, 1.

⁵⁹ Department of Defense, *IWJOC*, Version 1.0, 7.

⁶⁰ Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats, Joint Operating Concept* (Version 2.0) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2010), 13.

⁶¹ Department of Defense, *IWJOC*, Version 2.0, 16.

⁶² Department of Defense, *IWJOC*, Version 2.0, 16. The *IWJOC* Version 2.0 deals less with the IW theory, what it is, and how it differs from CW and delves more into IW’s importance. It includes discussions on the IW problem, irregular warfare threats, and expounds on the ends, ways, and means of combatting irregular threats.

and characteristics of COIN, and its four sister components of IW, will be utilized in this thesis to address and highlight key characteristics of irregular warfare.

The Department of the Army's *Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counterinsurgency* and the Joint Chiefs of Staff *Joint Publication (JP) 3-24 COIN Operations* establishes COIN doctrine for the U.S. military. COIN is defined as "comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances."⁶³ COIN operations are undertaken to defeat a growing insurgency, defined as "the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority."⁶⁴ Each side in a COIN conflict attempts to influence the populace to accept its authority as legitimate to achieve, or maintain, political power.⁶⁵ Success in COIN requires a long-term strategy that eliminates the cause of the insurgency, not just killing the insurgents. To do this effectively, COIN must incorporate all aspects of national power: political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure; military operations alone cannot achieve success in COIN.⁶⁶ "Victory is achieved when the populace consents to the government's legitimacy and stops actively and passively supporting the insurgency, not when the insurgency is defeated militarily."⁶⁷

Obtaining the population's consent requires providing security while at the same time maintaining essential services. To accomplish this, counterinsurgent forces must understand the local population's culture and the problems they face, and also incorporate their military efforts in conjunction with all instruments of national power. Political, social, and economic programs are often more effective than conventional military operations in addressing the root cause of the conflict and eventually undermining the

⁶³ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-24, Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2009), I-2. This definition updates the U.S. Army's COIN definition published in its December 2006 *Field Manual 3-24 COIN* manual, "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency."

⁶⁴ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-24*, I-2.

⁶⁵ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24*, 1-1.

⁶⁶ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24*, 1-1.

⁶⁷ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24*, 1-3.

insurgency, gaining the support of the populace and, ultimately, their support of the legitimacy of the host nation government. As Bernard Fall explains in “The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” in 1965, when the United States was just beginning its long military involvement in North and South Vietnam, the military problem in an insurgency is secondary, the primary issues are political, ideological, and administrative.⁶⁸

These points are further developed by David Galula, in his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, in which he categorizes counterinsurgency and insurgency as forms of revolutionary war, or internal conflicts with the aim of seizing power and the government’s attempt to retain control of the state. Galula explains that there is a significant asymmetry in revolutionary war between the two opposing forces that stems from the disproportion of strength between the state and the insurgent. Initially the state has the overwhelming superiority of tangible assets in the conflict: an established government, diplomatic recognition, legitimate power in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, control of the administration and police, financial resources, industrial and agricultural resources, transportation and communication facilities, use and control of information and propaganda media, and command of the armed forces and the possibility of increasing their size.⁶⁹

However, the situation is reversed when it comes to the intangibles in a revolutionary war. The insurgent has a formidable intangible asset—the power of a cause. The counterinsurgent, on the other hand, has a heavy liability, fighting the insurgent’s cause; he is responsible for maintaining or regaining order throughout the country. The insurgent strives to convert his intangible assets to concrete ones while the counterinsurgent strives to prevent his intangible liability from diminishing his superior concrete assets. The insurgency must grow from small to large and weak to strong in order to defeat the COIN forces while the counterinsurgency’s strength increases or

⁶⁸ Bernard B. Fall, “The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” *The Naval War College Review* (Winter, 1998): 47.

⁶⁹ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice—Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1964), 3.

decreases depending upon whether or not the insurgent can convert his intangible assets to tangible.⁷⁰ This initial asymmetry makes insurgency markedly different from conventional warfare.

Due to the extreme disadvantage the insurgency has in physical strength and force compared to the counterinsurgent force, “[I]logic forces him instead to carry the fight to a different ground where he has a better chance to balance the physical odds against him.”⁷¹ This new ground becomes the populace. If the insurgency can effectively dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, it will win. Galula states, “[I]n the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness.”⁷² The battle for the population is therefore a major characteristic of irregular warfare. This battle for the population and initial asymmetries between insurgents and the state result in two additional unique characteristics of irregular warfare: a long-term commitment, and small unit tactics conducted in an asymmetric-noncontiguous operating environment.

Since military solutions alone cannot prevail in irregular warfare, and incorporating all aspects of national power is required to “win the battle for the population,” irregular warfare strategies require a long-term approach. Successfully implementing and executing a strategy that will ultimately gain the population’s support takes time; victory, unfortunately, is not quick and decisive. This is supported by Max Boot’s analysis that the average insurgency since 1775 has lasted seven years and since 1945 the time has grown to 10 years.⁷³

In addition to implementing an overall long-term strategy to garner the population’s support, the weaker adversary takes a long-term approach to defeating his enemy militarily due to the lopsided military powers of the belligerents in irregular warfare. Countering a superior force is accomplished by avoiding the enemy’s military

⁷⁰ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

⁷¹ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

⁷² Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.

⁷³ Boot, “The Evolution of Irregular Warfare,” 112.

strengths. Instead of engaging in massive force-on-force battles, the weaker adversary attempts to attrite his stronger adversary over the long-term. Mao Zedong summarizes, “[o]ppose protracted campaigns and a strategy of quick decision, and uphold the strategy of protracted war and campaigns of quick decision.”⁷⁴ This protracted war strategy utilizes small, mobile military units that conduct hit and run engagements, nibbling at the enemy’s heels. Mao further asserts, “[t]he enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.”⁷⁵ T. E. Lawrence, another irregular warfare expert, refers to this concept as a “war of detachment,”⁷⁶ in which the strategic aim is to “seek its [the enemy’s] weakest link, and bear only on that till time made the mass of it fall.”⁷⁷ This strategy requires tactics emanating from “... a highly mobile, highly equipped typed force, of the smallest size...”⁷⁸ These smaller units operate without fixed battle lines, do not wear military uniforms, and consequently, blend into the very populace that both belligerents are trying to influence. Consequently, irregular warfare is extremely fluid in nature, waged in an environment absent of fixed battle lines, and over a protracted period of time.

These tactics and strategies define the unique characteristics of irregular warfare. They are demonstrated in numerous conflicts throughout the United States’ history, from the American Revolutionary War, where the Continental Army and state militias conducted what is now referred to as guerrilla warfare tactics against the British, to Vietnam where the North Vietnamese and Vietcong used similar tactics against U.S. Forces, to present day conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although few wars, if any, have strictly utilized only one form of warfare, one type tends to become dominant over the other during different phases of a conflict. Consequently, it is imperative to understand

⁷⁴ Mao Zedong, “Strategy in China’s Revolution,” *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1962), 95.

⁷⁵ Zedong, “Strategy in China’s Revolution,” 97.

⁷⁶ Thomas Edward Lawrence, “Guerrilla Warfare,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 4th ed., vol. 10 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1929), 880.

⁷⁷ Lawrence, “Guerrilla Warfare,” 886.

⁷⁸ Lawrence, “Guerrilla Warfare,” 886.

the main differences between each form of warfare to effectively identify which form has become the dominating way of fighting during various phases of a conflict.

D. COMPARING THE TWO FORMS

The key difference between the two forms of warfare thus becomes their focus. Traditional warfare focuses on defeating the adversary's military through force-on-force engagements, and seizing or retaining territory, in order to influence the opposing government, and doing it as rapidly as possible, while irregular warfare focuses on controlling, influencing, or gaining the support of the relevant population over a longer time frame. This different focus is what makes IW "irregular."⁷⁹ Each form of warfare's focus, consequently, lies on the two opposite ends of the warfare spectrum; the decision to use traditional warfare (emphasizing mass, maneuver, and firepower, to defeat the other opponent's military), or a protracted irregular warfare approach, which calls on all aspects of national power to eliminate core grievances of the relevant populace, while avoiding main force-on-force battle. These two different foci result in two radically opposing strategies. Matching the correct strategy to the environment and nature of the conflict determines victory or failure.

E. IVAN ARREGUÍN-TOFT'S STRATEGIC INTERACTION THEORY: "HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS"

Ivan Arreguín-Toft published "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," in the summer of 2001, just prior to the September 11 attacks.⁸⁰ His theory played out in the following 12 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. Arreguín-Toft analyzes how a weak actor's strategy in war can make a strong actor's seemingly overwhelming power advantage irrelevant. He begins with a simple statement, "if power implies victory in war, then weak actors should almost never win against stronger opponents...Yet history suggests otherwise."⁸¹ Arreguín-Toft's initial data analysis of a

⁷⁹ Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-24*, I-7.

⁸⁰ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001), 93-128.

⁸¹ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 94.

200-year period identifies that weak actors defeated their stronger adversary in nearly 30 percent of all asymmetric conflicts, and the trend is only increasing.⁸² He attempts to determine how this happens for two main reasons: first, to reduce the chances of unwinnable wars and increase the likelihood of the United States' success in future asymmetric conflicts; and second, because asymmetric conflicts are the most likely security threats the United States will face in the future.⁸³ Arreguín-Toft proposes his "strategic interaction" thesis to explain and predict the conditions under which weak actors win asymmetric conflicts against stronger adversaries.

Strategic interaction theory proposes that the dynamic and iterative interaction of actors' strategies during a conflict predicts the outcome.⁸⁴ Arreguín-Toft identifies two ideal-type attack strategies utilized by strong actors, direct attack and barbarism; and two ideal-type defense strategies utilized by weak actors, direct defense and guerrilla warfare strategy as "a useful starting point for analysis."⁸⁵

Direct attack is defined as "the use of the military to capture or eliminate an adversary's armed forces, thereby gaining control of the opponent's values."⁸⁶ The most common form of direct attack is the use of a belligerent's armed forces advancing against an opponent's strategic assets; the goal of a direct attack strategy is to destroy the enemy's military capability.⁸⁷ Barbarism targets non-combatants to destroy an adversary's will to fight, not its military capability. Arreguín-Toft defines barbarism as "the systematic violation of the laws of war in pursuit of a military and political

⁸² Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 94.

⁸³ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 94.

⁸⁴ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 95.

⁸⁵ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 100.

⁸⁶ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 100.

⁸⁷ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 100.

objective.”⁸⁸ The most common forms of barbarism historically have been the murder of non-combatants, the use of concentration camps, and strategic bombing against non-military targets.⁸⁹

The first form of Arreguín-Toft’s weak actor defense strategies is the direct defense defined as the “use of armed forces to thwart an adversary’s attempt to capture or destroy values such as territory, population, and strategic resources.”⁹⁰ This strategy, like the direct attack, focuses on destroying the adversary’s military capability by crippling its advancing armed forces; however, the ways and means are defensive.⁹¹ The second form of weak actor defense strategies, and the last form of Arreguín-Toft’s four ideal-strategies, is guerrilla warfare, defined as “the organization of a portion of society for the purpose of imposing costs on an adversary using armed forces trained to avoid direct confrontation.”⁹² The goal in guerrilla warfare is not to destroy the adversary’s military capabilities but its will. Arreguín-Toft stresses the most important cost a weak actor can impose on an adversary is time,⁹³ consequently, guerrilla warfare strategy is not used for a quick and decisive win against an invading army.⁹⁴

Based upon these four ideal-strategies used by weak and strong actors, Arreguín-Toft explains strategies and counter-strategies fall into two main categories, a direct approach, and an indirect approach. Direct approach strategies, consisting of the direct attack and the direct defense, target an enemy’s armed forces with the focus on destroying their capability to fight. Indirect approaches do not target the enemy’s armed forces or their capabilities but focus instead on destroying the adversaries will to fight. To this end, barbarism and guerrilla warfare fall into the indirect approach strategy.

⁸⁸ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 101.

⁸⁹ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 102. Even though they were “at the mildest end of the violations spectrum,” Arreguín-Toft explains that the United States’ Strategic Hamlet and Phoenix programs in Vietnam, although potentially successful, were both barbarism strategies.

⁹⁰ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 103.

⁹¹ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 103.

⁹² Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 103.

⁹³ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 103.

⁹⁴ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 104.

Expanding on Mao Zedong's maxim that "defeat is the invariable outcome where native forces fight with inferior weapons against modernized forces on the latter's terms,"⁹⁵ Arreguín-Toft theorizes that when the weak fight the strong, the specific interactions of some strategies will favor the weak, while others will favor the strong.⁹⁶ Consequently he develops, what he calls, "same-approach" interactions (direct strategy versus direct strategy or indirect strategy versus indirect strategy), and "opposite-approach" interactions (direct versus indirect, or indirect versus direct). He argues that conflicts in which the same-approach interaction occur favor the strong actor and result in the likely defeat of the weak actor because there is nothing to deflect or mitigate the strong actor's overwhelming military power.⁹⁷ Conversely, conflicts in which opposite-approach interactions are predominantly utilized result in weak actors achieving victory because the strong actors' power advantage can be deflected or dodged.⁹⁸

Defeat of a strong actor in an opposite-approach strategy occurs mainly for two reasons. First, strong actors, due to their overwhelming power advantage, expect to achieve a rapid victory. When the weak adversary employs an indirect approach, it draws out the conflict; the longer the conflict lasts, the stronger actor risks appearing more and more incompetent. This leads to domestic pressure at home and political vulnerability that result in the strong actor abandoning the conflict regardless of the military situation on the ground.⁹⁹ Secondly, strong actors lose in opposite-approach conflicts when they succumb to barbarism strategies due to increasing frustration from not attaining a quick and decisive victory. This also leads to not only political, and domestic, but also international condemnation and may potentially result in the strong actor abandoning the war effort.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 104.

⁹⁶ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 104.

⁹⁷ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 105.

⁹⁸ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 105.

⁹⁹ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 105.

¹⁰⁰ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 105.

Given Arreguín-Toft's two strategic approach strategies and resulting strategy-counter-strategy scenarios, he proposes five hypotheses: 1) When strong actors attack using a direct strategy and weak actors defend using a direct strategy, all other things being equal, strong actors should win quickly and decisively. 2) When strong actors attack with a direct strategy and weak actors defend using an indirect strategy, all other things being equal, weak actors should win. 3) When strong actors attack using an indirect strategy and weak actors defend using a direct strategy, all other things being equal, strong actors should lose. 4) When strong actors employ barbarism to attack weak actors defending with a guerilla warfare strategy, all other things being equal, strong actors should win because the weak actors are unable to deflect the strong actors' power advantage. 5) Strong actors are more likely to win same-approach interactions and lose opposite-approach interactions.¹⁰¹

Analyzing the four possible strategy-counterstrategy scenarios between weak and strong actors and determining the strategic interaction scenario and the conflict outcome, Arreguín-Toft analyzes three key relationships: 1) strategic interaction and conflict outcome, 2) strategic interaction and conflict duration, and 3) strategic interaction and the trend toward increasing strong-actor failure over time.¹⁰² After running regressions on 197 asymmetric conflicts between 1809 and 1996, in which the strategic interaction variable was coded 0 if it was a same approach conflict, and 1 if it was an opposite approach conflict; and the conflict outcome variable was coded 0 if the strong actor lost, and 1 if the strong actor won; the analysis determined strategic interaction and asymmetric conflict outcomes were associated and that the relationship between the two was statistically significant.¹⁰³ The results determined strong actors won 76 percent of all same-approach conflicts and weak actors won 63 percent of all opposite-approach conflicts. Additionally, same-approach interactions favoring strong actors were shorter in duration than opposite-approach interaction, 2.69 years on average for the former, and

¹⁰¹ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 107–110.

¹⁰² Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 110.

¹⁰³ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 111.

4.86 years on average for the latter (2.98 years overall mean).¹⁰⁴ Regarding weak actor defeating strong actor trends, Arreguín-Toft's data analysis demonstrated that opposite-approach conflicts and strong-actor failures have increased over time. From 1800 to 1899, only 5.9 percent of asymmetric conflicts analyzed were opposite-approach interactions; 10.1 percent from 1850 to 1899, 16.1 percent from 1900 to 1949, and finally, 22.2 percent from 1950 to 1998.

The conflict outcome, conflict duration, and strategy-interaction analysis support three key findings: 1) strong actors are more likely to lose opposite-approach conflicts; 2) opposite-approach conflicts last longer than same-approach conflicts, and; 3) the frequency of opposite-approach interactions has increased proportionally to strong actor failure over time.¹⁰⁵

In summary, Arrguine-Toft's analysis suggests that strong actors lose conflicts against weaker adversaries when the weak employ an opposite-approach strategy. Opposite approach strategies work against strong actors because the weaker adversary is able to sacrifice values for time; this drawn-out conflict timeline results in the eventual capitulation of the stronger adversary.¹⁰⁶ Same-approach strategies, however, favor strong actors because both sides share the same costs, values, and victory conditions. The weak actor cannot compete against the stronger actor's advantage in relative power.

Although Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction model provides a useful basis of analysis to compare weak and strong actors' strategic interactions in asymmetric conflict, it is not without its limits. First, Arreguín-Toft's interaction model oversimplifies conflict interactions by neglecting to take into account variables other than military strategies that may impact conflict outcomes. Simply put, victory is not solely dependent upon on an actor's military strategy, especially in asymmetric conflicts. Second, each actor's strategy is not randomly chosen; however, Arreguín-Toft does not explain why actors choose specific strategies or fail to change strategies when one is not working. As Michael A.

¹⁰⁴ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 113.

¹⁰⁵ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 112.

¹⁰⁶ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 121–122.

Jensen explains in *International Studies Review*, “Arreguín-Toft offers little explanation for why actors adopt particular strategies, or why they often switch to suboptimal strategies during the course of the war.”¹⁰⁷ The strategic approach of an actor in relation to his adversary is the deciding factor on who achieves victory; therefore why a strategy is chosen or not chosen should be addressed. This thesis aims to provide some insight into this point in particular. Lastly, the use of the terms barbarism and guerrilla warfare for both actors’ indirect approach strategies is misleading. Both terms imply utilizing military force as the only method of achieving victory in asymmetric conflicts. However, this thesis will assert that a true indirect approach positively engages and works through the population to defeat the adversary. Finally, as Timothy Richards explains in *Small Wars Journal*, the strategies are not unique to each respective actor. Barbaric tactics, such as terrorism, are often utilized by weak actors while guerrilla warfare can also be waged by strong actors.¹⁰⁸

Although Arreguín-Toft’s theory attempts to define why power does not simply equate to victory, all four ideal-strategies are based upon the use of force. Due to these issues, this thesis also aims to test Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction model to determine if it adequately explains the strategy-counterstrategy dynamic within the specific cases studied, where the United States was a weak actor in one, and the strong actor in the other.

F. CONCLUSION

The next chapters will explore two case studies of U.S. wars—the American Revolutionary War and the Vietnam conflict. In both wars, the United States initially adopted counterintuitive approaches: in the Revolutionary War, the U.S. colonies were the weak actor but initially attempted to fight a traditional large-scale war. In the Vietnam conflict, the United States was the stronger actor, but initially used an indirect strategy.

¹⁰⁷ Michael A. Jensen, “A Strategy for Success: How the Weak Defeat the Strong” *International Studies Review* 8, no. 4 (2006): 655.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Richardson, “Book Review: How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict” *Small Wars Journal* (March 5, 2011), accessed December 9, 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/692-richardson.pdf>

Each of these case studies will dissect which strategy, direct or indirect, the United States implemented throughout the war, and consequently, whether it was the correct strategic interaction at that time. Each case will analyze the conditions under which traditional war was chosen to investigate which of the three hypotheses proposed in Chapter I, the United States' military industrial complex, a "might is right" attitude, or a hierarchical authoritative command structure, explains the decision to use traditional tactics and strategies over irregular warfare.

III. THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

A. INTRODUCTION

From April 19, 1775 when the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, until the final salvos were fired at Yorktown on October 17, 1781, the American Revolution was a war for public opinion. Both countries' leadership realized this. Prior to the battle of Trenton in December of 1776, Washington wrote that one of the reasons for attacking the British was to, "...at least give our Affairs such a turn as to make 'em assume a more promising aspect."¹⁰⁹ Lord Germain, the British Secretary of State, wrote after the same battle that it was not the loss of men that mattered, but the effect on French and American opinion.¹¹⁰

Throughout the war, both armies' strategies would change and evolve but ultimately it became a strategy of attrition by the weaker Continental army against a strategy of annihilation by the British army. Although multiple strategies were employed throughout the Revolutionary War by both actors, the American colonies primarily implemented a war of attrition commanded by General Washington. The military theorist Hans Delbrück refers to this type of approach as a "bipolar strategy" by where "...the general decides from moment to moment whether he is to achieve his goal by battle or by maneuver, so that his decisions vary constantly, so to speak, between the two poles or maneuver and battle..."¹¹¹ Drawing from Arreguín-Toft, Washington's attrition strategy, even though he ultimately sought to defeat the British in decisive battle, translated into an indirect approach strategy employed by a weaker actor against a direct approach strategy employed by an overwhelmingly stronger actor that led to the American colonies' victory. Despite the colonies' success in using the indirect approach against their stronger adversary, Washington still longed for a direct and decisive military

¹⁰⁹ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 190.

¹¹⁰ Piers Mackesy, *The War for America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 116.

¹¹¹ Hans Delbrück, *The Dawn of Modern Warfare: History of the Art of War Volume IV*, trans. by Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press), 108.

engagement with the British. This is most likely due his desire to see a quick end to the conflict instead of testing the resolve and will of the populace via a protracted irregular form of warfare.

B. BACKGROUND TO THE WAR

The origins of the Revolutionary War have its roots in Britain's victory in the French and Indian war fought in the American Colonies from 1754 through 1763.¹¹² British patriotism and the importance it placed on the colonies were at an all-time high after the war. At the same time, however, the victory increased the colonists' confidence and status vis-à-vis the British Empire. This newfound confidence resulted in increasing British oversight and policies enacted to exact revenue and tighten its grip on the colonies. These growing tensions came to a head on April 19, 1775 when over 2,000 British Regulars and over 1,000 American colonists clashed at Lexington and Concord.¹¹³ At the end of the day 65 British soldiers and 49 American colonists lay dead.¹¹⁴ As a result of the "shot heard around the world" at Lexington, what was initially an argument about the relationship between the American colonies and England became a full-fledged civil war.

From the battle of Bunker Hill, where the British took control of Boston, the occupation of Rhode Island by General Clinton, the battle for New Jersey and resulting Forage Wars lasting through 1777, the campaign to control the Hudson Valley and the battle for Philadelphia in 1778, and finally the campaign for the southern colonies from 1778 to 1781 that led to the checkmate at Yorktown, it is nearly impossible to highlight one specific turning point in the war. However, if it were not for George Washington's decision to wage an indirect war against the strongest military power in the world, the conflict would have only lasted as long as the British initially thought it would, a few short months, before the American "rebels" gave up their cause for liberty and capitulated. Instead, George Washington's war of detachment and innate ability to retreat

¹¹² Jack P. Greene, *Understanding the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 54).

¹¹³ Bruce Lancaster, *The American Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 89.

¹¹⁴ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 67.

and attack in order to build and sustain public support for the war, forced the British public to turn against it, referring to America as “the graveyard of Englishmen.”¹¹⁵ In order to better understand the conditions under which Washington executed a war of detachment, it is necessary to highlight both sides’ strategies in the war.

1. American Strategies

Following the British defeat at Lexington and Concord in 1775, one of the colonies’ main priorities was to appoint a commander-in-chief to lead their newly formed army. The Second Continental Congress wanted a commander-in-chief that would unite the colonies, and garner necessary public support for the cause and keep the war effort going.

George Washington was chosen because he professed a lack of interest in the job while, at the same time, was a familiar name to everyone in the Colonies, not as a Virginian, but as a frontiersman who often spoke of the need to unite all the colonies.¹¹⁶ John Adams described him as, “a Gentleman from Virginia who was among Us and very well known to all of Us, a Gentleman whose Skill and Experience as an Officer, whose independent fortune, great Talents and excellent universal Character, would command the Approbation of all America, and unite the cordial Exertions of all the Colonies better than any other person in the Union.”¹¹⁷

Washington and his generals contemplated several strategies for winning the war. One strategy was to wage a maritime and economic war on Britain through the use of privateers, privately owned merchant ships authorized to attack foreign vessels. Although this course of action resulted in millions of pounds captured from British merchants, it had little impact on the leaders in England or on British public opinion.¹¹⁸ A second course of action, proposed by General Horatio Gates, consisted of avoiding decisive battles, and instead retreating to the interior of the colonies, and wearing down the British

¹¹⁵ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 77.

¹¹⁶ Edward C. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), Kindle edition, Loc2187.

¹¹⁷ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc2205

¹¹⁸ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 79.

Regulars through attrition.¹¹⁹ This strategy, at the time, did not gain any traction with the politicians and the public who, like Washington, hoped for a short conflict that would avoid testing the resolve of the colonists and soldiers over the long term.¹²⁰ General Charles Lee proposed a third strategy. He also wanted to avoid major battles but instead of retreating he suggested persistently attacking the stronger British adversary with smaller, highly mobile forces under independent commands.¹²¹ A fourth strategy, favored by Washington, was a defensive strategy in which the British army would be forced to attack strong defensive positions; however, this strategy, called a “war of posts” required a cooperative adversary.¹²² A fifth strategy was one of a perimeter defense that entailed defending all of the towns in the colonies. Militarily this was impossible given the limited numbers of troops.¹²³ Ultimately, Washington’s strategy focused on preventing Britain from capturing or defeating the Continental Army. “If the army could be kept alive, the Revolutionary cause would also remain alive.”¹²⁴

Although Washington sought to maintain support for the cause and his army by waging a protracted war, he always yearned for a professional, well-trained army that could fight a force-on-force decisive battle.¹²⁵ According to David Fischer in *Washington’s Crossing*, Washington learned a creed from an early age that valued self-government, discipline, virtue, reason, and restraint. It consisted of a philosophy that combined honor as a virtue, power with responsibility, and liberty with discipline. Fischer explains that the only fear Washington ever acknowledged in his life was that his actions would “reflect eternal dishonour upon me.”¹²⁶ Even as a young 23-year old colonel fighting in the French and Indian War, Washington had an intense concern for order and discipline among his soldiers. Washington wrote to his captains in 1757 that

¹¹⁹ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 79.

¹²⁰ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc2465

¹²¹ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 79.

¹²² Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 79.

¹²³ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 80.

¹²⁴ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 12.

¹²⁵ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc7278.

¹²⁶ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 12–13.

“[d]iscipline is the soul of an army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to all.”¹²⁷ He wrote to the Virginia governor complaining of insolent soldiers and indolent officers, demanded more rigorous military laws and tried to organize a First Virginia Regiment after British Regulars.¹²⁸

This was the same unstructured, undisciplined environment Washington encountered when he arrived in Cambridge on July 2, 1775. He was appalled by the New England soldiers and wrote, “[t]he officers generally speaking are the most indifferent kind of people I ever saw. They are an exceeding dirty and nasty people.”¹²⁹ Washington was not sure how he would be able to lead this amateur army against the professional and well-trained British Regulars. “[L]icentiousness and every kind of disorder triumphantly reign,” he wrote. “The little discipline I have been laboring to establish in the army, is in a manner done away by having such a mixture of troops.”¹³⁰

Washington’s strategy was consequently founded upon a strategic paradox. He had to completely vanquish the British military to win independence from England, but at the same time, his inferior army could not possibly wage an effective direct offensive campaign against them. However, if he could conduct a protracted war in which Great Britain would lose interest in the war over time, Washington could compel their withdrawal. Washington also realized he risked losing the American colonies’ support if the war lasted too long.¹³¹ He had to balance these two demands. In the contest for public opinion, if Washington could keep his Continental Army intact, and give the colonists, and the world, the perception that it was able to stand up against the powerful British army, he could wage an indirect, prolonged war, and turn British public opinion against it.

Another factor that led Washington to want direct, conventional confrontation on the battlefield over an indirect protracted war was his own concerns about the Continental

¹²⁷ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 15.

¹²⁸ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 15.

¹²⁹ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 19.

¹³⁰ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 12.

¹³¹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 5.

Army and the colonies' vacillating support. Washington recognized the Revolutionary War was a struggle for the legitimacy and influence over the population. Understanding this, he utilized both direct and indirect means to erode his adversary's power, influence, and will.

2. British Strategies

At the start of the American Revolutionary War, two-thirds of the British Army and one half of its Royal Navy were dispatched to the colonies¹³² to "end the rebellion and restore the American Colonies to their allegiance."¹³³ In addition, England paid over 20,000 Hessian troops to reinforce the British army and squash the rebellion.¹³⁴ General William Howe along with his brother Admiral Richard Howe, commander of the Royal British Navy in the American Revolution, were charged with restoring the British Empire in America by peace if possible, and war if necessary.¹³⁵

When the Howes arrived in New York in the spring of 1775, they had many strategies in which to consider and employ in order to accomplish their mission. The first strategy proposed was a naval blockade of the colonies. Since a large part of the colonies' per capita income came from foreign trade, and the colonies needed foreign trade to wage war, many British leaders thought a naval blockade would be the most effective strategy to subdue the continent. Admiral Howe noted, however, that a complete blockade of the colonial coastline was impossible with the amount of resources the British had dedicated elsewhere protecting the English Empire.¹³⁶

A second strategy proposed, called *Shrecklichkeit* (German for terror), emphasized a deliberate and extreme use of violence to break the colonists' will to resist. General Howe, however, thought such conduct was ultimately unwise and ineffective. Despite this, many British and Hessian soldiers employed this strategy throughout the

¹³² Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 33.

¹³³ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 73.

¹³⁴ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 51.

¹³⁵ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 71.

¹³⁶ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 75.

war, which did more to rally the colonists around the cause of liberty and to support George Washington's Continental Army and partisan efforts than it did to break their will.¹³⁷

A third strategy, championed by General Henry Clinton, was to relentlessly seek out, pursue, and destroy the Continental Army. However, Howe felt that the Continental Forces were too elusive of an adversary, appearing and melting away into the population at will. Howe wrote to England in the spring of 1776 expressing his concern, "...knowing the advantages, in having the whole country, as it were, at their disposal, they will not readily be brought into a situation where the King's troops can meet them upon equal terms. Their armies retiring a few miles back from the navigable rivers, ours cannot follow them from the difficulties I expect to meet with in procuring land carriage."¹³⁸

Another proposed strategy, today referred to as the inkblot or oil stain strategy, consisted of controlling small strategic areas in the colonies and expanding them until all the colonies became secure. However, over 95 percent of the American colonies' population lived outside major cities; essentially America was "a culture without a capital."¹³⁹ Secondly, the inkblot strategy would take time and require a significant increase in the amount of soldiers, both of which England was unwilling to commit. Instead, the Howes supported a variation of this strategy, which included seizing and holding major corridors and river lines, particularly the Hudson River in New York. If the British could capture and secure the Hudson River, they would be able to separate and isolate New England from the rest of the colonies and therefore strangle the revolt.¹⁴⁰ The last plan proposed by the British offered support for the colonists that were still loyal to England. The Howes supported this strategy, siding with General James Robertson, who wrote, "I never had an idea of subduing the Americans. I meant to assist the good Americans to subdue the bad."¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 75.

¹³⁸ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 76.

¹³⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 77.

¹⁴⁰ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 77.

¹⁴¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 77.

From these strategies the Howe brothers proposed an increase in forces and, together with the Royal Navy, would seize New York, making it a major base of operations. They would also send a smaller force to Canada that would move south and together, the two forces, would take control of the Hudson Valley.¹⁴² After controlling the Hudson Valley and New York, General Howe believed he would be able to leave a small contingent in New York City to keep it secure while he moved in two directions to seize Rhode Island and New Jersey. He would then occupy three colonies and would offer the Loyalists in each of the colonies protection and the colonists who were moderates concessions. In this way he would sway public opinion in his favor, and one by one, bring all of the colonies back under England's control. General Howe believed the key to this strategy, and consequently winning the war, was speed and maneuver. He wrote, "The army at the opening of the campaign, being in force, would probably by rapid movements bring the rebels to an action upon equal terms, before they could cover themselves by works of any significance."¹⁴³

Despite containing both direct and indirect methods, the British strategy for subduing the American Colonies relied primarily on traditional warfare, as defined by today's current doctrine, focusing on defeating the adversary's military through force on force engagements, and seizing or retaining territory to ultimately influence the opposing government's beliefs. England employed a direct approach strategy, via the direct attack and even the direct defense at times, to capture or eliminate its opponent's armed forces in order to regain control of its values via the use of overwhelming military force.

C. KEY BATTLES

Each Revolutionary War campaign, and battles within those campaigns, demonstrates an interesting combination of the evolution of, or persistence in, the strategies employed by both the British and the American forces. However, the Siege of Boston, and the campaigns for the control of New York, New Jersey, the Hudson Valley, and the Southern Colonies, directly led to the final battle of the Revolutionary War, the

¹⁴² Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 77.

¹⁴³ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 78.

Battle of Yorktown. For this reason, these campaigns are useful for exploring the strategic dynamic between the British and Colonial forces and ultimately how a weaker actor, General Washington and his Continental Army, was able to defeat a much stronger actor, the powerful English Army and Royal Navy. , was able to defeat a much stronger actor, the powerful English Army and Royal Navy. Even though the Continental Army engaged in and lost several conventional battles throughout the war, these campaigns show that the Colonial forces succeeded because they were able to stave off catastrophic defeat, which enabled them to wear down their stronger adversary overtime until public opinion in England turned against the war. The Battle of Yorktown, a direct confrontation between the Continental Army and the British, was possible only after years of draining-indirect confrontations wore down British will, and French reinforcements strengthened the colonials.

George Washington and General William Howe faced off at the siege of Boston in June of 1775. However, as Washington and his newly formed army persisted in the siege, Howe decided to abandon the city, deciding to resume the war against the Continental Army on conditions that were more favorable than the narrow Boston peninsula.¹⁴⁴ Howe was the commander of the British forces at Bunker Hill two months earlier. Although the British won the battle, the colonists entrenched in defensive fighting positions around Bunker Hill, successfully repulsed the first two British frontal assaults, resulting in the loss of 1,150 soldiers, 40 percent of Howe's force, compared to 441 American casualties.¹⁴⁵

The outcome of Bunker Hill had a profound impact on both armies. It initially confirmed to the Americans that they could effectively fight a strategic defensive war to defeat the British,¹⁴⁶ a belief that would be proven incorrect at the battle for New York.

¹⁴⁴ Weigley, *The War for America*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc 2513.

¹⁴⁶ Weigley, *The War for America*, 9.

The painful victory at Bunker Hill made General Howe reluctant to conduct a frontal assault against Continental Army fortified defensive positions for the remainder of the war.¹⁴⁷

1. The Battle for New York

Once the British withdrew from Boston, General Washington knew their next objective would be New York.¹⁴⁸ Washington hoped his army would be able to conduct a similar defensive operation around New York City like it did at Bunker Hill. However, Howe effectively and repeatedly flanked the Continental Army's defensive positions first on Long Island and again on Manhattan. The Americans retreated to their final defensive position of New York at Fort Mifflin. On November 16, 1776, General Howe launched an all-out attack on the fort and by the end of the day more than 2,800 American troops had perished or were captured. This crushing defeat changed the way Nathanael Greene chose to fight the British army, he wrote, "I feel mad, vexed, sick and sorry...This is the most terrible event: its consequences are justly to be dreaded."¹⁴⁹ General Greene would later command the armies and militias in the southern colonies using irregular warfare tactics, completely opposite to what he implemented on Long Island and Manhattan.

Like Greene, Washington was profoundly affected by the lopsided defeat in New York; he realized he had to match his strategy with the capability of his soldiers.¹⁵⁰ Washington explained in his written correspondence to Congress that it would be in error "to lead our young troops into the open ground against their superiors, both in number and discipline...I have not found the readiness to defend even strong posts at all hazards. The honor of making a brave defense does not seem to be a sufficient stimulus when the success is very doubtful, and the falling into the enemy's hands probable."¹⁵¹ Through this experience, General Washington developed his indirect strategy, writing "we should

¹⁴⁷ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc 2513.

¹⁴⁸ Weigley, *The War for America*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 113.

¹⁵⁰ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 101.

¹⁵¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 101.

on all occasions avoid a general action or put anything to the risque unless compelled by necessity.”¹⁵² Consequently, Washington came to terms with a strategy of a “retreating army” defending what it could, yielding what it must, and looking for an opportunity “when a brilliant stroke could be made with any probability of success.”¹⁵³ This indirect approach became the cornerstone of subsequent battles.

The first confrontation between General Washington as commanded-in-chief of the continental army at the Siege of Boston and the Battle of New York was a strategy between Washington’s weaker forces and General Howe’s stronger army and navy. Learning the devastating lessons of Bunker Hill, the British military refused conduct a frontal assault against fixed American defensive positions. General Washington’s untrained and undisciplined army was unable to disrupt the disciplined British military’s ability to use overwhelming mass and maneuver. As a result, Washington’s direct defense approach against General Howe’s direct attack approach failed miserably. If he had not executed a remarkable escape, General Washington may very well have lost the war in November of 1776.

2. The Battle for New Jersey: Roles Reversed

Having taken New York, General Howe aimed to seize New Jersey, while his brother took control of Rhode Island.¹⁵⁴ General Howe planned to establish posts throughout New Jersey while at the same use the farms and forests to resupply his army before the winter set in. Simultaneously his brother would move by sea with General Clinton commanding the land forces and seize Rhode Island. In this way England would have control of three colonies by the end of the year, New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey; they believed the rebellion would not last through the winter.¹⁵⁵

One of the major lessons General Washington learned from his loss in New York was the importance of having good intelligence. General Howe was able to utilize the

¹⁵² Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 102.

¹⁵³ Weigley, *The War for America*, 102.

¹⁵⁴ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 116.

¹⁵⁵ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 117.

overwhelming numbers, skill, and professionalism of the Royal Navy to conceal and deceive the American forces as to where his invasion forces would land. However, as the British won more ground and occupied more territory, Washington began to develop networks of informants throughout the local populace that continually updated him on the whereabouts and movements of the British and Hessian forces.¹⁵⁶ Using the intelligence he obtained from the local populace, instead of using a typical eighteenth century strong point defense, Washington focused his strategy on quick raids and attacks against British detachments and outposts.¹⁵⁷ Attacking at the periphery of the British army was the only strategy that his untrained and undisciplined army could execute at this stage of the war.¹⁵⁸

Howe's 1776 war of outposts in New Jersey played perfectly into Washington's strategy of quick raids, attacks, and withdrawals. Washington and his army successfully retreated across New Jersey, and fearing an overwhelming attack by Cornwallis and his army at Trenton, retreated to the western bank of the Delaware River into Pennsylvania in early December 1776. Cornwallis' men reached Trenton on December 8, 1776, and ended the New Jersey campaign, and put his men in winter quarters.¹⁵⁹ With General Clinton's army successfully occupying Rhode Island on December 7, Washington's army in retreat on the other side of the Delaware, and New York in his control, Howe believed that the rebellion, and the war, would soon be over.¹⁶⁰

On December 1, 1776, Washington only had 3,000 soldiers in his army after the battles in New York and the retreat across New Jersey.¹⁶¹ Actions by the Hessians and British soldiers, however, soon enraged the local populace, helped to recruit more colonists, and presented him with an opportunity to go on the offensive. General Howe

¹⁵⁶ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 117.

¹⁵⁷ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 135.

¹⁶⁰ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 137.

¹⁶¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 129.

initially thought that two thirds of the colonists actually supported England.¹⁶² As a result he believed he could safely spread his soldiers throughout New Jersey as part of his war of outposts strategy.¹⁶³ This was reaffirmed when many Loyalists welcomed them as liberators as they entered towns throughout New Jersey.¹⁶⁴

Howe's dispersion of the British and Hessian outposts contributed to significant logistical problems. Many of the provisions used to support the New York and New Jersey campaigns were brought by sea 3,000 miles away. By the end of November supplies were running low and the quick expected victory that was not achieved resulted in additional support requirements.¹⁶⁵ Howe ordered his garrisons in New Jersey to supply themselves by foraging through the countryside but ordered restraint in doing so.¹⁶⁶ The local populace soon became enraged at the amount of plundering conducted by the Hessian and British soldiers. Foraging turned into pillaging, pillaging turned into plundering, and plundering turned into rape and murder on many occasions.¹⁶⁷ As the violence increased, the New Jersey populace took up arms, and within a few weeks it was unsafe for the British and Hessian soldiers to forage or travel throughout the countryside, so unsafe that Howe ordered his troops to only travel in large convoys and forbade travelling at night. Pennsylvania and New Jersey partisans conducted small unit raids on enemy outposts and disappeared into the countryside or sniped at Hessian and British soldiers foraging through the woods.¹⁶⁸ General Howe realized that he had overestimated colonial support for Britain. He told his private secretary, "almost all the People or Parts & Spirit were in the Rebellion."¹⁶⁹

Although Washington did not command or direct the local militia and partisans, he was fully aware of their effect on the enemy and the opportunity they presented

¹⁶² Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 160.

¹⁶³ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 161.

¹⁶⁴ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* 126.

¹⁶⁵ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 172.

¹⁶⁶ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 173.

¹⁶⁷ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 178.

¹⁶⁸ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 179.

¹⁶⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 172.

him.¹⁷⁰ Under these conditions, Washington and his army crossed the Delaware River on Christmas Eve 1776, and conducted a surprise attack against the Hessian garrison at Trenton, New Jersey, using his Continental Army soldiers from the west and north and using Pennsylvania and New Jersey militiamen from the south. Over 900 Hessians were captured, 22 killed, and 83 seriously wounded.¹⁷¹

Washington used similar hit-and-run tactics against Cornwallis as he marched his men from Princeton to Trenton in January 1777. Washington's men and partisan forces attrited this powerful army along the march by harassing raids and ambushes, continuously attacking and retreating.¹⁷² Cornwallis' forces were weakened when they finally attacked the American's defense along the Main Post Road, forcing General Cornwallis to retreat. It was such a lopsided victory that an American artillery sergeant wrote, "[t]he bridge looked red as blood, with their killed and wounded and red coats."¹⁷³ The second battle of Trenton resulted in an estimated 500 British or Hessian soldiers killed, captured, or wounded compared to only 50 American casualties.¹⁷⁴

Washington then used this momentum to conduct a surprise attack on Princeton while General Howe was marching his forces toward Trenton for a counter attack. Washington used back roads to surprise the remaining British forces at Princeton. Following the raid, Washington retreated to Morristown where he waited out the remainder of the year, reorganizing and recruiting more soldiers for his Continental Army. In the face of local resistance, Cornwallis was forced to consolidate his outpost and withdraw into fewer, more fortified positions. The Hessian officer, Captain Ewald wrote, "Thus had the times changed! The Americans had constantly run before us. Four weeks ago we expected to end the war with the capture of Philadelphia, and now we had to render Washington the honor of thinking about our defense."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 201.

¹⁷¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 254.

¹⁷² Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 295.

¹⁷³ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 307.

¹⁷⁴ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 307.

¹⁷⁵ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 289.

Through these series of raids in New Jersey, George Washington was winning the war of public opinion, drawing more soldiers to enlist in his Continental Army, and capitalizing on the strength and effectiveness of the local militias and partisans. After the victories at Trenton and Princeton Thomas Jefferson wrote, “We have last turned the Tables upon these scoundrels by surprise, Could we but get a good Regular Army we should soon clear the Continent of these damned invaders.”¹⁷⁶ Washington continued to use the militias to annoy and harass the enemy at every opportunity and to avoid a general engagement in order to keep the enemy on the defensive.

3. The Hudson Valley Campaign and Loss of Philadelphia

On June 20, 1770, General Burgoyne, commanding an army of over 8,300 soldiers, 3,700 British, 3,000 Hessians, 650 Tories and Canadians, and 400 Iroquois Indians, with a train of 138 Howitzers and 600 artillerymen, set sail from the northern banks of Lake Champlain to secure the Hudson River. His plan was to sweep down Lake Champlain, capture Fort Ticonderoga, and push southward to Albany. From Albany he would combine forces with Colonel St. Leger’s forces attacking eastward from Lake Ontario via the Mohawk River. These two forces would then act as an anvil for General Howe’s force to attack northward up the Hudson River from New York and crush the American rebels. Under this plan, General Washington would be forced to abandon New Jersey to counter the combined British forces, which would lead to his defeat. If General Washington chose to stay in New Jersey and not reinforce the Northern Army, the British and Hessian forces surmised they would have complete control of the Hudson River and effectively strangle the rebellion.¹⁷⁷

On July 6, General Arthur St. Clair, commander of the American forces at Fort Ticonderoga, was forced to abandon the fort in the face of overwhelming British artillery. However, General Burgoyne’s heavy equipped army could not keep up with its lighter, more maneuverable American adversaries and became bogged down in the surrounding

¹⁷⁶ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 345.

¹⁷⁷ Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, 199.

forests, which were full of obstacles and colonial partisans. On August 16, an attack by John Stark's 1,500 men of the New Hampshire militia cost Burgoyne over 900 of his men.¹⁷⁸

In addition to having forces that were ill prepared for the terrain and partisan threats, word spread throughout the area of the atrocities committed against the populace by the Indians fighting for Burgoyne. Local resistance increased and swarms of militia and partisans continuously harassed Burgoyne's main forces as they made their way through the dense Hudson Valley.¹⁷⁹

By mid-September, Burgoyne's forces were half depleted, he lacked supplies, and were under constant attack from the local militias and partisans. Nevertheless, General Burgoyne attacked General Gates' defensive positions north of Albany at Bemis Heights on September 18 and, despite holding the line, sustained devastating losses, suffering 556 British regulars dead or wounded.¹⁸⁰ A second attack at Bemis Heights on October 8 forced Burgoyne to retreat to Saratoga¹⁸¹ where on October 17, he surrendered to General Gates. Over 5,800 British and Hessian soldiers and officers, and 27 field pieces were put out of commission.¹⁸²

In 1777, Howe made an attempt to seize the Colonies' capital, Philadelphia. Washington again made use of indirect tactics and ordered his troops and the local militia to "hang on" to Howe's troops with harassing attacks.¹⁸³ Washington's and Howe's forces met at Brandywine Creek. Howe used a force-on-force confrontation combined with a flanking manoeuvre that resulted in 89 British killed, and 488 wounded compared

¹⁷⁸ Mackesy, *The War for America*, 134.

¹⁷⁹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 23.

¹⁸⁰ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 389.

¹⁸¹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 390.

¹⁸² Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 391.

¹⁸³ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 392.

to Washington's army suffering 200 killed, 500 wounded, and 400 captured.¹⁸⁴ Howe entered the capital on September 26 unopposed, with Congress fleeing the city.¹⁸⁵

The loss of the capital in any other war during that time would have proved disastrous to the defending army and nation. However, Philadelphia was not a geographical center of gravity. Consequently, the political and economic damage inflicted on the colonies and the cause was minimal.¹⁸⁶ With the surrender of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga and Washington's ability to keep the Continental army alive, foreign powers were now willing to enter the war on the side of the Americans, and by the summer of the following year, July 1778, French soldiers came ashore en masse to help the Continental Army. These forces made Washington's desire for a decisive battle finally possible.

4. The Southern Campaign and Checkmate at Yorktown

With the war in the northern colonies a stalemate, the British turned their attention to the southern colonies where they believed strong Loyalist factions resided. In late 1778 and early 1779 the British army, under the command of Cornwallis, took control of Georgia. Clinton came down from New York on May 12, 1780 and captured Charleston along with the whole American army in the south commanded by Major General Benjamin Lincoln.¹⁸⁷ Within the span of 20 months the British completely wiped out three American armies, conquered Savannah and Charleston, occupied a substantial portion of South Carolina, and killed, wounded, or captured over 7,000 American soldiers.¹⁸⁸ However, British and Hessian soldiers' cruel treatment of the local populace enraged the local populace and the southern colonists began to revolt.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc5014.

¹⁸⁵ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc5152.

¹⁸⁶ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 22.

¹⁸⁷ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ John Ferling, "Myths of the American Revolution," *Smithsonian*, January 2010, accessed August 14, 2013, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Myths-of-the-American-Revolution.html#ixzz2fULfp8NF>.

¹⁸⁹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 26.

As in upper New York and New Jersey, partisan forces began to attack the British through hit-and-run tactics. In the Battle of King's Mountain, over-mountain men with Revolutionary partisans from North and South Carolina defeated British and Loyalists forces on October 7, 1780, killing Major Patrick Ferguson and 157 of his Loyalists fighters, and capturing approximately 800 others.¹⁹⁰ This devastating loss to the Loyalists effectively put an end to Loyalist support in the south.¹⁹¹

General Nathanael Greene, now in the South, capitalized on the indirect approach. With little more than 1,000 soldiers and militiamen, Greene split his men into three groups, one under General Daniel Morgan operating in the western portion of the Carolinas, the second under Lieutenant Colonel Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee who would work with Francis Marion along the coast, and the third under his own command in the center.¹⁹² Greene reasoned, "It makes the most of my inferior force, for it compels my adversary to divide his, and holds him in doubt as to his own line of conduct."¹⁹³

Cornwallis, not wanting to attack just one of Greene's units and let the other two go unopposed, decided to divide his forces as well and focused on General Greene while half of his army led by Colonel Tarleton, pursued Daniel Morgan in the west. Morgan, who was a superb tactician, allowed Tarleton to draw him into battle at Cowpens, South Carolina. With a little over 1,000 men he inflicted a crushing defeat against Tarleton and his forces, who lost nine-tenths of his men killed or wounded.¹⁹⁴

Cornwallis decided to pursue General Greene with the aim of drawing him into open battle and completely destroying his forces. Like the rest of the British campaigns in the Revolutionary War, Cornwallis's forces had an extensive and burdensome logistical train making them slower and less maneuverable than their American adversaries. Realizing this, Cornwallis burned his supporting equipment, except what his men could carry, in order to pursue General Greene's more mobile forces. Leveraging the lightness

¹⁹⁰ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 29.

¹⁹¹ Ferling, "Myths of the American Revolution."

¹⁹² Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 29.

¹⁹³ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6532.

¹⁹⁴ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 30.

of his forces and their knowledge of the local terrain, General Greene made Cornwallis chase him for as long as possible, remaining ahead of Cornwallis' army through the Carolinas to Virginia, depleting his supplies and exhausting his troops.¹⁹⁵ Before meeting in battle, Cornwallis had lost 500 men out of his initial 2,500 as a result of the frantic chase. Greene attacked General Cornwallis' depleted army at Guilford Courthouse on March 15 but still could not overcome Cornwallis' professional forces in open battle and had to abandon the fight. Although Cornwallis won the battle he sustained 532 casualties and 150 killed.

Cornwallis retreated to Wilmington and attempted a "war of posts" strategy.¹⁹⁶ However, the British did not have the manpower to establish the amount of posts required to secure the countryside, while at the same time the posts they did have were undermanned, leaving them vulnerable to attack. Greene's army and the partisans planned to defeat these outposts one by one. Although Greene would incur tactical defeat in the following attacks on Camden, Eutaw Springs, and other outposts, the casualties that the British suffered forced them to withdraw to a few limited locations in the south. This reduced their control in the south to only the immediate vicinities of Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah.¹⁹⁷ Greene best explained the reasons for his success in the Southern campaign when he stated, "I have been obliged to practice that by finesse which I dared not attempt by force. There are few generals that has run oftener, or more lustily than I have done...But I have taken care not to run too far, and commonly have run as fast backward, to convince our Enemy that we were like a Crab that could run either way...We fight, get beat, rise and fight again."¹⁹⁸

On August 14, 1781 Washington learned that French Admiral DeGrasse was en route to Virginia with 29 warships and 3,200 troops but he would not be able to remain on the American coast any longer than mid-October.¹⁹⁹ Washington wrote in his diary:

¹⁹⁵ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 32.

¹⁹⁷ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 35.

¹⁹⁸ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 36.

¹⁹⁹ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6696.

Matters having now come to a crisis and a decisive plan to be determined on, I was obliged ...to give up all idea of attacking New York; & instead thereof to remove the French Troops & a detachment from the American Army to Head of Elk to be transported to Virginia for the purpose of cooperating with the force from the West Indies against the Troops in that State.²⁰⁰

Washington's movement to Yorktown began on August 19. On September 28, 1781 Washington marched his entire army, the French and Americans, into positions forming a six-mile arc around the British entrenchments at Yorktown. It was the most powerful army he had ever assembled in the war with 7,800 French soldiers, 3,100 militiamen, and 8,000 Continentals.²⁰¹ This overwhelming force compelled General Cornwallis to offer a cease-fire. Ultimately, the British still had the forces to fight the war, but it was the public's support they did not have. On February 22, 1782, British Parliament voted 234–215 to end the war.²⁰²

D. STRATEGIC INTERACTION ANALYSIS

Both adversaries in the American Revolution employed Arreguín-Toft's four basic strategies. The basic ideal strategies for a stronger actor—the direct attack and barbarism strategies—were utilized by the stronger British forces. Two ideal strategies for a weaker actor, the direct defense and guerrilla warfare, were implemented by the American forces. Both adversaries attempted other strategies as well, not conducive to their strength such as a direct defense at times for the British and direct attack for the Americans. Overall, the American's employed the combination of strategies with greater success and in line with their own resources compared to their adversaries.

During the battle for New York, General Washington and General Howe both implemented a direct approach strategy, with the Continental Army commanded by General Washington utilizing a direct defense strategy (which was ideal), and the British and Hessian forces, commanded by General Howe, conducting a direct attack strategy (also ideal). Both generals were seeking to inflict a devastating defeat on his opponent in

²⁰⁰ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6696.

²⁰¹ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6733.

²⁰² Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 77.

order to bring a quick end to the war in the summer of 1776. In accordance with Arreguín-Toft's analysis for same approach interactions, when both are utilized, the stronger actor achieves victory because his overpowering advantages cannot be deflected. Such was the case with the Battle for New York and the American colonists suffered a devastating loss. Because of this same approach strategy-counter strategy, the stronger actor won, and the weaker actor, Washington and his Continental Army, realized they had to change their strategy.

From the Fall of 1776 through the Spring of 1777, the battle for New Jersey and the Forage Wars saw General Washington drastically revise his strategy from one of a failed direct approach, the direct defense, at the battle of New York, to an indirect approach strategy that he would utilize for the remainder of the war, until Yorktown, where he was able to command a military that was more numerous and more powerful than his British adversaries. Washington realized he had to match his strategy with the capability of his soldiers. General Howe on the other hand, continued to implement his direct approach strategy in New Jersey utilizing primarily a direct defense strategy via a war of outposts. Although he employed a pacification program and offered concessions and clemency to Loyalists and moderates, his main focus was on destroying the capability of the Continental Army and controlling terrain, both direct approach strategies.

One may argue that the British army conducted an indirect approach strategy by resorting to barbarism, attempting to destroy the colonists' will to resist; however, the acts of barbarism were not a unified strategic approach, and most certainly, were not used with restraint. General Howe understood that the *Shrecklichkeit* policy would only end up doing more harm than good, and in effect, when random soldiers and officers pillaged, plundered, raped and murdered the local populace, it only fueled the flames of opposition. This outrage allowed General Washington to grow a stronger, more effective guerrilla force and implement a guerrilla warfare-indirect approach strategy executed by his Continental Army, the militias and partisans. This opposite approach strategic interaction in the New Jersey campaign, with General Howe's forces utilizing a direct approach strategy, and General Washington's forces implementing an indirect approach

strategy, enabled the weaker American forces to effectively deflect their stronger adversaries' advantages, and consequently, win the battle for New Jersey.

The Hudson Valley campaign, between General Burgoyne's forces against General Horatio Gates' Northern Army from June until October of 1777, was a microcosm of the strategic interaction between the British and American forces throughout the American Revolution. Initially Burgoyne's army and resources greatly outnumbered and overpowered Gate's amateur forces. When Burgoyne began his campaign in Canada he had over 8,300 soldiers. Due to his extensive and burdensome supply trains and the atrocities his men committed against the local populace, the further Burgoyne moved away from his lines of communication pursuing his American adversaries, the more his men and supplies were attrited by the irregular warfare tactics of Gate's army, militia, and partisans. By the time Burgoyne's army engaged in a force on force battle at Bemis Heights his forces numbered only 3,500 men while Gate's soared to over 11,000. What began as a direct approach strategy by the British in the form of a direct attack against an indirect approach guerrilla warfare strategy by Gate's vastly outnumbered forces, culminated in a same approach engagement three months later at Bemis Heights. Gates and his continental soldiers, now the stronger actor, were able to defeat his weaker adversary in a force on force battle. Gates, initially the weaker actor, effectively conducted a campaign of detachment as T. E. Lawrence explained, seeking the enemy's weakest link and bearing down on it until its defeat makes the mass of the enemy's forces fall. In the end, Gate's indirect approach strategy via guerrilla warfare against Burgoyne's stronger military forces implementing a direct attack, gave way to a same approach strategy at Bemis Heights, resulting in the more powerful army winning. Initially however, it was an opposite-approach, strategic interaction, the stronger actor's direct attack, versus the weaker actor's indirect approach-guerrilla warfare strategy, which resulted in General Gates deflecting his stronger adversary's supposed enormous advantages, which ultimately resulted in the weaker actor winning.

Unlike the Hudson Valley Campaign, the Southern Campaign did not have a culminating-decisive force on force battle. Instead, Nathanael Greene predominantly implemented a guerrilla warfare counter-strategy against his stronger adversary's direct

attack strategy. Greene and his partisan forces attempted to avoid direct force on force engagements due to the overwhelming imbalance of power the British possessed. The few times Greene engaged in large-scale battle against the stronger British forces, at Guilford Courthouse, Post Ninety-Six, and Eutaw Springs, he suffered tactical defeats.²⁰³ It was Greene's proclivity to divide his forces, violating the principle of concentration that was unheard of at the time,²⁰⁴ and his ability to compliment the unorthodox tactics of Southern partisan leaders, such as Thomas Sumter and Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," that led to his success. Greene's strategy personified the future maxim of guerrilla leader Mao Zedong by advancing when the enemy retreated, harassing the enemy while he camped, attacking the enemy when he tired, and pursuing the enemy when retreated. Ultimately this opposite approach strategic interaction, Greene's indirect approach against Cornwallis' direct approach, resulted in the weaker actor being able to deflect the stronger actor's overwhelming advantages until he capitulated, with Cornwallis finally retreating to Wilmington and abandoning the campaign for the Southern Colonies.

The strategy, counter-strategy interactions in New York, New Jersey, the Hudson Valley, and the Southern Colonies eventually led to a direct force on force engagement at Yorktown on September 28, 1781, the culminating battle of the Revolutionary War. After six years of avoiding decisive battles with his stronger adversary, General Washington, with an army of over 18,000 men and naval superiority in the Chesapeake Bay under French Admiral DeGrasse,²⁰⁵ finally outnumbered and overwhelmed a besieged British army of only 9,000 soldiers.²⁰⁶ The weaker actor's strategy of avoiding direct engagements in order to keep his army and the cause alive was now the stronger actor. Washington, in Mao Zedong's terms, had successfully upheld the strategy of a protracted war and campaigns of quick decisions and opposed protracted campaigns and a strategy of quick decisions, until everything aligned in his favor. The Battle of Yorktown thus became a same approach strategic interaction; Washington's direct attack strategy against

²⁰³ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 34–35.

²⁰⁴ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6532.

²⁰⁵ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6718.

²⁰⁶ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6736.

Cornwallis' direct defense strategy, with the stronger actor, General Washington and his combined force of American, French, and militia soldiers winning outright.

Finally, it is important to consider why Washington was so focused on direct engagements and longed for a force-on-force confrontation with the British, especially when the indirect approach was successful.

E. WHY TRADITIONAL LARGE-SCALE WARFARE?

If Washington's war of detachment, or indirect-guerrilla warfare strategy, was so effective throughout the American Revolution, why did he continually strive to develop a professional army and employ it utilizing a direct attack, force on force, strategy? Did he simply resort to the eighteenth century European way of war? There is evidence to suggest that Washington's code of honor and aristocratic upbringing compelled him to want to fight war through the established norms of direct confrontation. However, Washington at his core was a pragmatist. He fought the type of war with the resources he had available in order to win. In doing so he fought indirectly when he realized his army was not capable of applying force, and applied overwhelming force when his army had the capability to do so.

Perhaps most importantly, however, his desire to fight a "traditional" form of war using overwhelming force was based upon his passion to end the war quickly. Both the American and the English leadership at the beginning of the war hoped for a quick end to the conflict. They saw the use of overwhelming force as the best way to accomplish this.

Both adversaries initially believed overwhelming force, the British via a direct attack, and the Americans by fighting a direct defense, would achieve a quick, decisive victory and therefore be able to impose their will on the opposing government. After the Battle of New York, however, when both sides failed to accomplish their objective of destroying or capturing the enemy's military, both commanding generals adjusted their strategies accordingly. General Howe employed a cautious and methodical pursuit of the Continental Army across New Jersey in order to promote an air of invincibility and

destroy the Americans' faith in their Continental Army.²⁰⁷ Washington, on the other hand, lacked the resources, the manpower, and the training to wage a traditional war. He resorted to an indirect strategy of attrition, what today would be called guerrilla warfare, to weaken his enemy over time and force England to eventually withdraw its support for the war. The conflict became a war of finesse versus a war of force.

Washington's undisciplined, ill-equipped, and outnumbered army led him to a finesse approach, but he was not completely opposed to it. His frustration with his undisciplined force was not the result of unruly subordinates. In eighteenth century warfare, well-trained disciplined soldiers were paramount on the battlefield in order to effectively maneuver and bring the ultimate amount force at a specific place and time to overpower the adversary's weak points.²⁰⁸ Washington's army did not have the training to perform these disciplined maneuvers, nor did he have the manpower.

Washington continually struggled to maintain a sufficient number of personnel to adequately sustain a standing army.²⁰⁹ On New Year's Day in 1776, for example, the remainder of Washington's recruits from New England, who had not done so already, left the Army when their enlistment ended. Washington struggled with retention of citizen-soldiers throughout the war and feared it would lead "the Country to desolation, and the Cause perhaps to irretrievable Ruin."²¹⁰ To compensate for his manpower deficiencies, Washington repeatedly instructed his soldiers to partner with the local partisan and militia forces. He complained about their lack of discipline but realized their value,²¹¹ directing his subordinates to work with the militia and partisans to annoy and harass the enemy but avoid a general engagement.²¹² He did not confine himself to a code of honor fighting a "gentlemen's way of war" either.

²⁰⁷ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 344.

²⁰⁸ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc2422.

²⁰⁹ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc2282.

²¹⁰ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc2697

²¹¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 348.

²¹² Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 349.

Washington employed irregular tactics that some would call acts of terrorism, and they definitely qualified as acts of sabotage. To compensate for America's woeful naval disadvantage against the British Royal navy, Washington personally planned unconventional means to destroy enemy vessels. He encouraged one French officer in the winter of 1778–1779 to “creep upon the ice,” and “set on fire one or two of the enemy's ships, by means of sulphured shirts.”²¹³ He even developed and carried out a plan to destroy British ships by employing explosive laden barrels, but the plan ended in disaster when a loose barrel floated away and exploded prematurely killing two boys who attempted to retrieve it.²¹⁴

When Washington had the better resources and capabilities, however, he used them. When Congress ordered Washington to defeat the significantly weaker Mohawk Indians in the spring of 1779, he employed overwhelming force to affect “the total destruction and devastation of their [the Indians] settlements and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible,” emphasizing that the Indian lands must, “not be merely overrun, but destroyed...You will not by any means listen to any overture of peace before the total ruin of their settlements is affected.”²¹⁵ Washington used force to win quickly when he had the capability to do so.

Washington's use of overwhelming force against the Mohawk Indians, his decision to partner with the local militia and partisans to wage an indirect war, and his acts of sabotage against the British Royal Navy, all demonstrate his ability to use whatever means were at his disposal to defeat his enemy, not eschewing one form of warfare or the other. His concern with a war of attrition was the fact it would take time, which was something that he believed he could not afford. Washington yearned for a powerful, professionally trained army that could defeat the British in a decisive battle in order to bring a quick end to the war and not unduly test the resolve of the American populace. The entrance of French military, and the professional training conducted by Baron Von Steuben provided Washington with both, finally resulting in a decisive

²¹³ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6224.

²¹⁴ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6224.

²¹⁵ Lengel, *A Military Life*, Loc6258.

victory that compelled the British populace to realize the cost of the war was more than they were willing to pay, six years longer than what Washington would have preferred.

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IV. THE VIETNAM WAR

A. INTRODUCTION

Almost 200 years after the powerful British Royal Navy sailed into New York harbor in 1775 fully expecting the weaker Continental Army to surrender at the mere site of the awesome array of British power, U.S. Marines waded ashore at Da Nang in South Vietnam on March 8, 1965, fully expecting that the most powerful and affluent nation in the world would quickly defeat the weaker Vietcong insurgents. Phil Caputo, a Marine lieutenant at the time, remarked “When we marched into the rice paddies on that damp March afternoon, we carried, along with our packs and rifles, the implicit convictions that the Vietcong would be quickly beaten.”²¹⁶ Similarly a journalist visiting the U.S. aircraft carrier *Ranger* off the coast of Vietnam in 1965 remarked, “They just ought to show this ship to the Vietcong; that would make them give up.”²¹⁷ The United States’ leadership and populace believed the war would be over quickly. Whatever “first” is used to mark the United States’ entry into the Vietnam conflict—the first U.S. military advisors in 1950 during the French-Indochina war,²¹⁸ the first rounds fired at North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 02, 1964, or the first combat troops deployed to Da Nang in March of 1965—over three million soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines would deploy to Vietnam over the course of five U.S. presidents, from Eisenhower to Ford, only to see the main objective of each of those presidents, ensuring the South Vietnam “domino” did not fall to communism, ultimately fail.

Both the United States and the North Vietnamese sought to break the will of their adversary via a war of attrition. The way each side implemented their strategy, however, could not have been more different. The United States sought to use its advanced technology, powerful military, and rich economy to destroy North Vietnam’s military capabilities, pummeling its weaker adversary into submission. As General William

²¹⁶ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 453.

²¹⁷ George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 159.

²¹⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 23.

Depuy explained at the time, “[t]he solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm...till the other side cracks and gives up.”²¹⁹ At the same time, Ho Chi Minh explained to a French visitor prior to the French-Indochina war, “[y]ou can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”²²⁰ Thus, the North Vietnamese sought a different kind of attrition strategy. They were fully aware they could not compete with the United States’ superior technology and firepower, so instead of pounding their enemy into submission, the North Vietnamese took a finessed approach and whittled the American goliath away, wreaking havoc on U.S. public support for the war, which ultimately resulted in the United States’ complete withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973. Two years later, in the absence of U.S. support, the North Vietnamese Army toppled the South Vietnamese Government.

Although the United States and North Vietnam attempted to wage a war of attrition according to their own strengths, each side implemented both direct and indirect strategies at various times throughout the conflict. General Giap, commander of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), emphasized an indirect guerrilla warfare strategy when he felt he could not directly confront U.S. military power. However, on several occasions he executed a traditional large-scale warfare strategy attempting to hasten victory. Likewise, the United States implemented both direct and indirect strategies concurrently from the start of the war until the very end with differing degrees of emphasis placed on each strategy depending on U.S. leadership. Ultimately, it was the ability of the North Vietnamese to wage a protracted war against the strongest military power in the world that led to victory. Waning U.S. public support for the war led to the complete withdrawal of U.S. military forces and funding, enabling the North Vietnamese Army to defeat South Vietnam in a traditional force on force decisive battle, 10 years after the first U.S. combat troops waded ashore at Da Nang.

This chapter offers an overview of the war and highlights three key phases: President Kennedy’s flexible response strategy via military advisors from 1961 through 1963; Lyndon B. Johnson’s gradual escalation and Americanization strategies from 1964

²¹⁹ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 168.

²²⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 198.

through 1968; and President Nixon's redeployment of U.S. troops via his Vietnamization strategy from 1969 until the war's end in 1975. Within these key phases, this chapter will attempt to determine why key U.S. civilian and military leaders chose to escalate the war and wage a traditional large-scale warfare strategy despite advice from several senior government officials for an alternative approach. As Lyndon B. Johnson despairingly exclaimed to his Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1967, "[b]omb, bomb, bomb, that's all you know...When we add divisions, can't the enemy add divisions? If so where does it all end?"²²¹

B. BACKGROUND TO THE WAR

On September 2, 1945 after allied forces defeated Japan in World War II and gave up its occupation of Vietnam, Vietnamese people of all ages, beliefs, and sects gathered in Hanoi to listen to Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, (the Vietnam Independence League, also known as the Vietminh), declare Vietnam's independence, using words from the United States Declaration of Independence, "[w]e hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them like, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."²²²

France, however, had other plans. It did not want to give up its wealthy colonial possessions in Indochina. This presented the United States with an interesting problem: back a nation seeking independence, or support an ally who played an integral role in the power structure opposing the spread of communism in Europe but also wanted to perpetuate colonialism. Advisors to President Truman believed Vietnam would become a communist country if it won its independence from France, specifically because of Ho Chi Minh's ties to Moscow,²²³ despite the fact that Ho Chi Minh appealed to the United States for support on numerous occasions throughout the first half of the twentieth century.²²⁴ In 1946, President Truman chose to support its European ally. The French

²²¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 23.

²²² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 147.

²²³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 12.

²²⁴ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 11.

Indochina war ensued, lasting almost 10 years, and ensnaring the United States into providing the French with military equipment, funding, and advisors totaling over \$2.6 billion in military aid,²²⁵ and creating a Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG) in Saigon that helped train the Vietnamese Army.²²⁶

Inevitably, as then Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy exclaimed, no amount of military support could defeat “an enemy of the people which had the support and covert appeal of the people.”²²⁷ The French suffered a devastating defeat at the battle of Dienbienphu in April of 1954. During this battle, they implored the United States to provide relief to its embattled soldiers but were rebuffed due to the Eisenhower’s refusal to commit U.S. troops without international support for the war. With the allied countries’, specifically England, refusal to support colonialism, and the absence of U.S. military air power, the French were unable to withstand the Vietminh’s unrelenting artillery barrages and continuous assaults; France surrendered on May 7, 1954.

The defeat at Dienbienphu gave rise to the Geneva Accords of 1954, which outlined a temporary division of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel to permit the regrouping of military forces on both sides but that was not supposed to constitute a political or territorial boundary; scheduled elections for the summer of 1964 to reunify the country; withdrawal of troops from the partition zones within 300 days; prohibit of the introduction of new forces, equipment, or foreign military bases to prevent Vietnam from descending back into conflict; and neither side of the conflict was permitted to join a military alliance, except in the case where their security was clearly threatened.²²⁸

With the threat of communism spreading, the Soviet’s formal recognition of the Vietminh in 1950, the fall of Chang Kai Shek’s Chinese government to Mao Ze Dong’s communist forces also in 1950, communist North Korea invading South Korea and the Korean war, and then France’s defeat in 1964, Eisenhower’s warning that if Indochina

²²⁵ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 44.

²²⁶ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 23.

²²⁷ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 38.

²²⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 43.

fell the rest of Southeast Asia would “go over quickly” like a “row of dominos”²²⁹ appeared to be more than just theory. Unhappy with the French defeat, President Eisenhower’s administration believed it did, however, provide the United States with some advantages. The Geneva Accords gave the United States an opportunity to build a non-communist state in South Vietnam, and the two year delay to holding national elections provided a sufficient amount of time to find an alternative to the Vietminh. With the French’s colonial ties to Vietnam out of the way, the United States felt confident it could prevent communism in Northern Vietnam from spreading throughout Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific.²³⁰ After the defeat of the French, the United States took up the mantle of defending Laos, Cambodia, and the southern portion of Vietnam below the seventeenth parallel, as Eisenhower’s Secretary of State Jonathan Dulles explained, “to keep alive freedom.”²³¹

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy continued Eisenhower’s containment strategy in Southeast Asia. Recalling the appeasement of Hitler that led to the Second World War, Kennedy believed that the United States must prevent “the onrushing tide of Communism from engulfing all of Asia,” and declared Vietnam “a proving ground for democracy in Asia...a test of American responsibility and determination.”²³² After his first summit with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in June, 1961, Kennedy explained, “[n]ow we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place.”²³³ This commitment to upholding democracy, preventing communism from spreading throughout the free world, and maintaining America’s credibility and prestige in the world would repeatedly be used to justify increasing the United States’ almost zealous-like commitment to South Vietnam over the next decade.

In 1961, the United States began the addition of military advisors in Vietnam and the subsequent commitment of military equipment and combat troops that would

²²⁹ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 36.

²³⁰ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 45.

²³¹ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 41.

²³² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 264.

²³³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 265.

dramatically escalate over the next two presidential administrations. In an attempt to prevent the dominos from falling in Southeast Asia—and potentially Africa and Latin America—the United States would have over 550,000 troops in South Vietnam at the height of the war, and would drop more bombs on North Vietnam than were used by Allied Forces throughout all of World War II. The more the United States committed soldiers, equipment, and aid to South Vietnam to protect its prestige and credibility in defending democracy, the more its credibility and prestige became inextricably linked to succeeding in Vietnam.²³⁴

The course of the war went through several different phases, unsurprisingly dependent upon the presidential administration in office, from President Kennedy's flexible response strategy via military advisors from 1961 through 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson's gradual escalation and Americanization strategies from 1964 through 1968, to President Nixon's redeployment of U.S. troops via his Vietnamization strategy from 1969 until the war's end in 1975. It is important to look at each of these phases to determine which strategy and counter-strategy occurred, whether the correct strategic interaction was employed by the United States, and finally, whether right or wrong, why the United States chose a specific counter-strategy.

C. KEY PHASES

1. The Military Advisor Phase: 1961–1963

When President Kennedy came to office in 1961 the threat of communism was not only on the rise but looked very much as if it was taking root in many parts of the world. Kennedy, painted as being soft on communism by his presidential opponent Richard Nixon, immediately faced the Bay of Pigs crisis, and the construction of the Berlin Wall the same year, followed by the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, and Nikita Khrushchev's speech in 1963 declaring the Soviet Union's support for wars of national liberation. Kennedy realized the threat was no longer just nuclear warfare but irregular warfare as well; the front against communism was no longer central Europe, but

²³⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 241.

Southeast Asia, and specifically South Vietnam.²³⁵ If Vietnam fell to communism, the theory went, so too would all of Southeast Asia, and potentially Africa and Latin America.²³⁶ In order to combat Khrushchev's wars of national liberation, Kennedy moved away from Eisenhower's "muscle-bound" mass retaliation strategy and developed what came to be known as the flexible response strategy, utilizing controlled and graduated responses that integrated military, political, and diplomatic power.²³⁷

Kennedy's initial strategy aimed at defending South Vietnam focused on increasing economic and military aid to Saigon in conjunction with the deployment of U.S. military advisors.²³⁸ Part of Kennedy's strategy relied on counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, which he implemented in response to General Maxwell Taylor's support of the flexible response strategy to deal with "brush-fire" wars in the third world.²³⁹ In April 1961, President Kennedy created a task force to provide effective economic, social, political, and military programs to South Vietnam. Kennedy approved strengthening South Vietnam's army from 150,000 soldiers to 170,000, and increasing the number of U.S. military advisors by a hundred.²⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the growing insurgency in the South would soon make the situation so dire that Kennedy began to escalate the number of U.S. military advisors, aid, and equipment, in an attempt to "avoid a further deterioration of the situation."²⁴¹

The insurgency in the South was a result of South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem's brutal anti-communism policies. In an attempt to eliminate communist sympathizers and supporters, Diem and his regime implemented and enforced a policy of mass arrests and killings. Although initially effective, Diem's heavy-handed and isolationist policies turned even those who were not communist against him. Many fled to

²³⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 208

²³⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 415.

²³⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 239.

²³⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 246.

²³⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 267.

²⁴⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 267.

²⁴¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 268.

the countryside and joined guerrilla insurgents that would later become the National Liberation Front (NLF), also called the Vietcong, backed and supported by Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnamese government.²⁴²

With the insurgency increasing and massive numbers of the South Vietnamese populace protesting against Diem's corrupt policies, Kennedy's Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to show North Vietnam and the insurgents that "we mean business," recommending the deployment of six U.S. military divisions, 200,000 combat soldiers, to South Vietnam. Kennedy sought a less aggressive approach by increasing aid to Diem but did not commit to deploying combat troops. He would, however, gradually increase the number of U.S. military advisors from 700 during his first year in office to ultimately over 16,000 by the time of his assassination.²⁴³

In addition to increasing U.S. military advisors and equipment to defend South Vietnam from communism, the United States also attempted to implement political and social reform. One such approach was the Strategic hamlet program implemented in 1962. This program attempted to remove the insurgents from the populace by moving South Vietnamese peasants into fortified hamlets throughout the countryside.²⁴⁴ Diem previously implemented similar programs such as the *agrovilles* and village defense forces, but just as those programs had failed, so too did the strategic hamlets. Ultimately the program was a façade, as Andrew Krepinevich explains in his book *The Army in Vietnam*. It was "...fortified on paper only. In just under two years in Vietnam over 8,000 strategic hamlets were "created," yet no attention was paid to their purpose..."²⁴⁵ The strategic hamlet program succeeded only in alienating the population from the South Vietnamese government.

At the same time the Strategic hamlet program was failing, the Vietcong was defeating efforts to train the South Vietnamese Army (the Army of the Republic of

²⁴² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 245.

²⁴³ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3.

²⁴⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 272.

²⁴⁵ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 68.

Vietnam—ARVN). As Diem's brutal anti-communist tactics increased, the North Vietnamese government decided to provide military advisors and equipment to the southern insurgents to stem Diem's onslaught. Consequently, in 1963, Ho Chi Minh and General Giap opted to increase attacks against the ARVN to topple Diem's regime before the United States became fully involved. The Vietcong, adopting a guerrilla warfare strategy, inflicted devastating losses against the ARVN by utilizing hit and run tactics, hiding amongst the populace, and choosing when and where to engage their better equipped and supported adversaries. Despite the South Vietnamese Army's devastating losses, the increasing commitment of U.S. military aid and equipment to South Vietnam reinforced Diem's belief that he needed to wage a traditional war against his adversaries, instead of instituting political and social reforms.²⁴⁶

With political and domestic opposition in the South escalating and Diem's own military leaders becoming more disenfranchised by his refusal to implement political and social reform, South Vietnamese Army officers staged a U.S. supported coup, murdering both Diem and his brother on November 2, 1963. The U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, cabled Kennedy "[t]he prospects now are for a shorter war."²⁴⁷ The political stability and effectiveness that President Kennedy deemed paramount for the success would never come to fruition, and his strategy to protect South Vietnam from communism through counterinsurgency operations, political, and social reform would end with his assassination, three weeks after Diem's, on November 22, 1963.

Kennedy's military advisor phase, although initially implemented as an indirect approach strategy, transitioned into a direct approach—traditional large-scale warfare strategy waged by the U.S. trained ARVN against the indirect—guerrilla warfare strategy of the North Vietnamese supported Vietcong. This opposite approach interaction resulted in delaying the expected quick-decisive win of the stronger actor, the United States. As a result, the United States increased the number of military advisors and equipment to prevent the South Vietnamese government from falling. North Vietnam, witnessing the

²⁴⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 276.

²⁴⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 327.

incremental escalation of U.S. military aid, infiltrated large conventional army units to South Vietnam, attempting to implement a traditional warfare strategy in an attempt to increase their prospects of winning before the U.S. became decisively engaged.²⁴⁸

2. Americanization 1964–1968

Lyndon B. Johnson, like presidents Kennedy and Eisenhower before him, initially opposed a large military commitment in Vietnam. However, as the Vietcong stepped up their attacks in 1963, and the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reported if something was not done to reverse the situation, South Vietnam would fall in three months, Johnson decided America had to act.²⁴⁹ He decided he could not let South Vietnam go the way of China and released National Security Council Action Memorandum (NSAM) 273 stating it was “the central objective of the United States” to assist the South Vietnamese government “to win their contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy.”²⁵⁰ Johnson may not have imagined, however, that his senior military leadership would repeatedly ask for the approval to deploy more troops and bomb more targets in North Vietnam to such an extent that he would eventually ask if Vietnam was “worth all this effort.”²⁵¹

Roger Hilsman, President Johnson’s assistant secretary of state, initially recommended implementing a counterinsurgency strategy; training the South Vietnamese Army in guerrilla warfare, securing one village at a time, and defeating the Viet Cong at their own game. Johnson instead chose a more forceful approach favored by his Joint Chiefs of Staff who proposed “Americanizing” the war. Johnson stated “[p]ower on the land, power in the air, power wherever it’s necessary. We’ve got to commit to it.”²⁵² He believed North Vietnam would fold under the military and economic power of the United States. Johnson proceeded with a gradual escalation strategy, using enough military force

²⁴⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 122.

²⁴⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 341.

²⁵⁰ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 122.

²⁵¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 413.

²⁵² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 412.

that would “be enough, but not too much”²⁵³ to avoid creating opposition to the war in the United States while at the same time being careful not to provoke the Soviet Union and China into entering the war. General Westmoreland, commander of Military Assistance Command—Vietnam (MACV), sought to accomplish President Johnson’s “just enough” approach via a strategy of attrition by wearing away the North Vietnamese until they could no longer replace the devastating losses the U.S. military inflicted on them, which he referred to as the “crossover point.”²⁵⁴ This attrition strategy focused on defeating the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese Army, and North Vietnam’s military capabilities via an air war, a ground war, and “the other” war—a pacification program aimed at building local support for the South Vietnamese government.

The air war escalated dramatically after two U.S. destroyers, the *USS Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, reported coming under attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats on the night of August 3, 1964, what later became known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident. To force the North Vietnamese into surrendering, Johnson authorized a series of major air campaigns, Operation Flaming Dart, Rolling Thunder I, and Rolling Thunder II, beginning in August of 1964 and lasting until November 1968. The air campaign was supposed to last only a few weeks until North Vietnam agreed to discontinue supporting the communist insurgency in South Vietnam. However, the more munitions the United States dropped on North Vietnam, the more North Vietnam resolved to support the insurgency, topple the South Vietnamese government, and outlast the more powerful U.S. military.

The United States’ ground war was a traditional large-scale warfare strategy that initially focused on a strategic defense but quickly transitioned to focusing on the destruction of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese military forces. Westmoreland doubled the number of U.S. military advisors in 1964, but as the air campaign escalated and U.S. airbases came under increasing attack from Vietcong guerrillas, President Johnson approved Westmoreland’s request to deploy combat troops to South Vietnam to protect the airbases. The defensive posture soon turned into offensive patrols with the

²⁵³ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 156.

²⁵⁴ Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, Robert Brigham, Thomas Biersteker, Herbert Schandler, *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Strategy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), 251.

ARVN, which turned into unilateral U.S. search and destroy operations. U.S. combat troops escalated from one Marine battalion in March of 1965, to 184,000 U.S. troops by the end of the year, to 486,000 by the end of 1967,²⁵⁵ and nearly 550,000 in 1968.²⁵⁶

The ground war from 1965–1968 was characterized by large scale search and destroy operations. Operations such as Attleboro, Cedar Falls, and Junction City consisted of over thousands of U.S. and ARVN troops supported by U.S. firepower sweeping through the South Vietnamese countryside attempting to force the enemy into battle.²⁵⁷ Civilians within President Johnson’s administration, to include Secretary of Defense McNamara, who was the initial architect of the gradual escalation strategy, began to realize destroying the North Vietnamese military capability via strategic bombing, and attriting the North Vietnamese Army by using search and destroy operations were not working.²⁵⁸ The U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, so opposed Westmoreland’s attrition strategy he threatened to resign as a show of protest.²⁵⁹ Westmoreland’s war of attrition was unattainable due to North Vietnam’s resolve to reunify the country, its ability to supply 200,000 military aged males per year to the war in the South,²⁶⁰ its agrarian society that limited U.S. strategic bombing effectiveness, and its ability to check the military aide and equipment the South received from the Soviet Union and China.²⁶¹ The elusive VC and NVA were able to pick and choose when and where they wanted to fight. One U.S. general during JUNCTION CITY stated “it was a sheer physical impossibility to keep the enemy from slipping away whenever he wished if he were in terrain with which he was familiar—generally the case.”²⁶²

²⁵⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 248

²⁵⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 580.

²⁵⁷ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 190.

²⁵⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 194.

²⁵⁹ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1999), 6.

²⁶⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 263

²⁶¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 471.

²⁶² Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 191.

A less-emphasized aspect of the United States' Americanization strategy was the pacification program, also referred to as "the other war."²⁶³ Johnson believed a key element in defeating the Vietcong was gaining the support of the South Vietnamese populace, and prodded the South Vietnamese government to implement a Revolutionary Development (RD) Program. The RD program consisted of 59 man teams that operated in hamlets, lived with the people, and tried to develop support for the government.²⁶⁴ The U.S. Marine Corps had some success with a similar approach known as Combined Action Platoons (CAPS). Each CAP consisted of 15 marines and 34 local Vietnamese paramilitary Popular Forces (PF). The CAPS focused on COIN operations, local security and government infrastructure.²⁶⁵ Another aspect of the pacification program was improving the capability of the Vietnamese local Regional Forces—Popular Forces (RF—PF units, also known as "Ruff-Puffs).²⁶⁶ Although each program has some success, the U.S. military during the Americanization phase of the war placed a low priority on the pacification program. As a U.S. Army general explained, "I had two rules. One is that you would try to get a very close meshing of pacification...and military operations. The other rule is the military operations would be given first priority in every case."²⁶⁷

The Vietcong and NVA launched a spectacular, but unsuccessful, surprise attack throughout South Vietnam on January 30, 1968. Known as the Tet Offensive, it was a traditional-scale offensive that consisted of over 70,000 VC and NVA soldiers attacking over a hundred towns and villages throughout South Vietnam, including Saigon and the U.S. Embassy. Just months earlier General Westmoreland stated enemy ranks were thinning and the end was beginning to come into view.²⁶⁸ Westmoreland asked President Johnson for an additional 200,000 U.S. troops to capitalize on the losses the U.S. military inflicted on the Vietcong (over 40,000 NVA and Vietcong were killed during the Tet

²⁶³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 176.

²⁶⁴ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 175.

²⁶⁵ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 173.

²⁶⁶ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 218.

²⁶⁷ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 222.

²⁶⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 527.

Offensive, the majority of them Vietcong).²⁶⁹ Johnson realized, however, there was no military solution to winning the war,²⁷⁰ and denied Westmoreland's request, agreeing to only a token number of forces. President Johnson explained he would make the expansion and improvement of South Vietnamese forces his top priority. He also ceased bombing North Vietnam above the twentieth parallel, and shocked the nation by declaring he would not accept his party's nomination for another term as president.²⁷¹ The end of the Americanization strategy had begun.

General Westmoreland's attrition strategy and the Americanization of the war effectively transitioned the U.S. military from an advisory role directing the ARVN to wage a direct attack strategy to one that saw it taking the lead and shouldering the majority of the burden. Westmoreland's attrition strategy focused primarily on a traditional large-scale warfare approach; relying upon overwhelming mass, maneuver, and firepower to destroy North Vietnam's military forces and military capability. After the VC and NVA's devastating military defeat during the Tet Offensive, General Giap realized his forces could not compete with the United States' overwhelming firepower and reverted back to a protracted war.

3. Vietnamization 1969–1975

Nixon was elected on the platform of an honorable peace in Vietnam and bringing the U.S. soldiers home and implemented a Vietnamization strategy, focused on gradually transitioning the war effort back to the South Vietnamese Army. Within his first year in office 60,000 service members came home. At the end of 1970 U.S. troop strength was down to 280,000, and the following year U.S. forces were decreased by an additional 140,000.²⁷² General Creighton Abrams replaced Westmoreland as the MACV commander and implemented a clear and hold "one war" strategy. This approach placed an equal emphasis on improving the South Vietnam's army, the pacification program,

²⁶⁹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 208.

²⁷⁰ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 366.

²⁷¹ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 367.

²⁷² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 699.

and military operations. Abrams explained all aspects of his strategy were “interrelated so that the better we do in one, the more our chance of progress in the others.”²⁷³ He focused not on the number of enemy killed but on providing security for the South Vietnamese populace.²⁷⁴

As the United States drastically reduced forces after Nixon’s first year in office, the ARVN pacification program was showing signs of effectiveness. In his book *Bombing to Win*, Robert Pape explains that, despite U.S. forces leaving, the Vietcong controlled 23 percent of South Vietnam in 1968 but only three percent in 1972; this was a sign that the pacification was working.²⁷⁵ According to Lewis Sorley, in late 1970 “the fighting wasn’t over, but the war was won...the South Vietnamese countryside had been widely pacified, so much so that the term ‘pacification’ was no longer even used.”²⁷⁶ William Colby, in charge of the pacification program under General Abrams, observed that by 1972 “the pacification program had essentially eliminated the guerrilla problem in most of the country.”²⁷⁷

One part of the Accelerated Pacification Program that was particularly effective was the Phoenix program, in which South Vietnamese personnel trained by U.S. advisors penetrated the command and control structure of the Vietcong. In 1969 the program was said to have “neutralized” 19,534 key personnel within the Vietcong, with only 6,187 being killed. One Vietcong leader explained that they “never feared a division of troops, but a couple of guys into our ranks created tremendous difficulties for us.”²⁷⁸

As U.S. force strength decreased and the pacification program received greater emphasis, Nixon believed he could effectively threaten the North Vietnamese with annihilation, forcing them to the negotiating table.²⁷⁹ According to John Lewis Gaddis,

²⁷³ Sorley, *A Better War*, 18.

²⁷⁴ Sorley, *A Better War*, 22.

²⁷⁵ Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 196.

²⁷⁶ Sorley, *A Better War*, 217.

²⁷⁷ Sorley, *A Better War*, 305.

²⁷⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 617.

²⁷⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 597.

ironically, the withdrawal of U.S. forces provided Nixon with greater flexibility.²⁸⁰ In the spring of 1970, Nixon approved U.S. ground and air operations in Cambodia, targeting Vietcong and NVA sanctuaries, explaining he had to show North Vietnam via force that the United States was still committed to the South Vietnamese government.²⁸¹ Once the American public became aware of the U.S. operations in Cambodia, seeing it as a complete reversal of Nixon's pledge to wind down the war, it inflamed the anti-war protests across the United States.

North Vietnamese leadership realized time was on their side as U.S. public discontent to the war drastically increased. When Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, proposed North Vietnam could leave its forces in the South while the U.S. withdrew, contrary to the "mutual" withdrawal policy U.S. leadership had always required for a cease fire, the North Vietnamese denied the offer, believing victory was within reach.²⁸² Nixon retaliated by instituting the most intensive bombing campaigns of the war, Linebacker I and Linebacker II.²⁸³ Linebacker II lasted for 11 days in December of 1972, until the North Vietnamese agreed to return to the negotiating table and on January 27, 1973, a peace agreement was signed between the two countries. The United States agreed to withdraw its remaining troops. North Vietnam was allowed to leave its forces in South Vietnam but gave up its insistence that South Vietnam's president step down.²⁸⁴

Many attribute Nixon's withering Linebacker II bombing campaign to be the proverbial straw that broke North Vietnam's back; however, the North Vietnamese knew they would soon be able to achieve what they initially set out to accomplish in 1963, the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam. After 10 years of deflecting U.S. power by implementing an irregular warfare strategy, although at times attempting to wage a traditional war to hasten victory, the time had come when North Vietnam could

²⁸⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 299.

²⁸¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 622.

²⁸² Herring, *America's Longest War*, 273.

²⁸³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 273.

²⁸⁴ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 276.

agree to a peace settlement. U.S. public support for the war, after Nixon's invasion of Cambodia and world condemnation of the no holds barred Linebacker II bombing campaign, was at an all-time low. U.S. war costs were projected to exceed \$22 billion per year.²⁸⁵ According to Stanley Karnow, in his book *Vietnam—A History*, the U.S. Marine Corps could not achieve its recruiting goals and the only combat-ready division defending the United States, the 82nd Airborne, was at 33 percent strength as a result of providing a majority of its forces to South Vietnam.²⁸⁶ North Vietnam had successfully resisted its stronger adversary's overwhelming military capabilities long enough for the United States to determine that the benefits of defending South Vietnam from communism were simply not worth the cost. Nixon's resignation from office meant he was unable to fulfill his promise to provide U.S. air support to the South Vietnamese Army. North Vietnam overthrew South Vietnam on April 30, 1975, by waging a traditional warfare strategy against South Vietnam, less than two years after the last U.S. troops left the country.

D. STRATEGIC INTERACTION ANALYSIS

The United States used military advisors to train the Vietnamese Army as early as 1950 and placed a major emphasis on the advisor role after the French defeat in 1964; despite this fact, the U.S. approach did not result in an indirect approach or irregular warfare strategy. Only a small fraction of U.S. aid for South Vietnam went toward political and economic reform from 1955 through 1959; the bulk of it, 78 percent, was for military assistance.²⁸⁷ The U.S. MAAG commander during this period, LTG Williams, focused ARVN training on what he believed was the real threat to the South Vietnamese government, an invasion from North Vietnam;²⁸⁸ he did not believe the Vietcong was a threat and instead convinced President Diem to focus on increasing the strength of his conventional army instead of political and economic reform.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 272.

²⁸⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 564.

²⁸⁷ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 67.

²⁸⁸ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 66.

²⁸⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 252.

John F. Kennedy adopted a COIN strategy in 1961 based on the advice of COL Lansdale, an experienced COIN specialist with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, and the communist-led Hukbalhap Rebellion in the Philippines afterward, focusing more on political and administrative reforms instead of a traditional warfare strategy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff disagreed with Kennedy's COIN strategy, believing that wars of national liberation were a distraction from the main threat from communism in Europe, and that COIN was simply an additional infantry task. As the Chief of Staff of the Army explained to President Kennedy, "any good soldier can handle guerrillas."²⁹⁰ Consequently, the U.S. military advisors under MAC-V trained and advised the ARVN to destroy the Vietcong and North Vietnam's military. When indirect strategies were implemented, such as the strategic hamlet program or village defense forces, they did not effectively address gaining the support of the populace. The strategic hamlet program collapsed in 1963 with a British COIN expert, Sir Robert Thompson, frustratingly explaining that "[n]o attention was paid to the purpose, the creation became the purpose itself."²⁹¹ Ultimately the indirect programs decreased support for the South Vietnamese government, took land away from the villagers, and focused more on security than social, economic, and educational reforms.

Employing Arreguín-Toft's criteria, the military advisor phase of the Vietnam War was a direct attack strategy employed by a stronger actor, the United States supporting the ARVN, against an indirect strategy by a weaker actor, the Vietcong and NVA, utilizing guerrilla warfare. The Vietcong successfully waged a war of detachment, using hit and run tactics, and hiding amongst and gaining the support of the populace. This strategy effectively deflected U.S. firepower, air mobility, and military advisory support to the ARVN. As a result of its frustration with the growing communist insurgency, the United States increased U.S. forces and combat operations in an attempt to achieve a quick victory by overpowering its weaker adversary.

Once Lyndon B. Johnson took office, in November of 1963, he vowed he would not be the first American president to lose a war, stating the United States should stop

²⁹⁰ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 323.

²⁹¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 273.

“playing cops and robbers” in Vietnam and win; he told senior military leadership he would give them everything they needed to succeed.²⁹² General Westmoreland’s strategy of attrition aimed to “...just go on bleeding them until Hanoi wakes up to the fact that they have bled their country to the point of national disaster for generations”²⁹³ was taking a gruesome toll on the United States. Although he proclaimed the United States was “in it for the long haul,”²⁹⁴ his long-term strategy merely consisted of repeatedly asking for more troops and bombing more targets to achieve victory in two to three years.

The NVA and Vietcong were able to minimize the effects of the United States’ superior technology and firepower by hiding amongst the populace, “clinging to the belts” of the Americans to minimize the use of U.S. air support, and choosing when to attack and when to retreat. Ninety-six percent of all ground combat in 1967 was company-size operations, 120 men or smaller, and 88 percent of all engagements were initiated by the Vietcong or NVA.²⁹⁵ North Vietnam was also able to sustain the devastating effects of the United States’ strategic bombing campaigns for a variety of reasons but, according to the Jason study conducted in 1966, primarily because North Vietnam was “an unrewarding target for air raids; the volume of supplies sent south was too small to be stopped by airstrikes and...the country had ample manpower to keep its primitive logistical network alive.”²⁹⁶

The Americanization phase of the Vietnam War ended after the Tet offensive in the spring of 1968, when President Johnson realized a military solution to the war was an illusion. Using Arguine-Toft’s strategic dynamic model, North Vietnam was effectively able to deflect the United States’ direct attack strategy by implementing predominantly an indirect-guerrilla warfare counterstrategy until General Giap chose a direct attack strategy, the Tet Offensive in the spring of 1968, to generate a popular uprising among the South Vietnamese populace. This primarily opposite approach strategic interaction

²⁹² Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 262.

²⁹³ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 263.

²⁹⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 438.

²⁹⁵ Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 191.

²⁹⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 513.

prevented a quick victory expected by the stronger actor, the United States. After the Tet Offensive only 40 percent of the U.S. populace approved of President Johnson's handling of the war.²⁹⁷ Frustration and disapproval of what was now a protracted war created a situation of political vulnerability for the Johnson administration, highlighted by his decision not to seek his party's nomination for reelection. The United States sought to seek an alternative approach to winning the war in Vietnam, electing Richard Nixon on a "peace with honor" platform. Nixon would focus on withdrawing U.S. forces and relying on the South Vietnamese to fight the war.

Ten-thousand U.S. service members lost their lives in South Vietnam in 1969, Nixon's first year in office.²⁹⁸ He knew he needed a new strategy to "achieve peace with honor." Nixon's strategy consisted of several components: 1) Vietnamization, which focused on the withdrawal of U.S. forces while putting the onus on the ARVN to fight the war^{299;300} 2) the invasion and bombing of Cambodia and Laos to destroy NVA sanctuaries and the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN); the command and control center for North Vietnam's military operations in South Vietnam;³⁰¹ 3) strategic bombing of military targets in North Vietnam; 4) a renewed emphasis on the pacification program; and 5) the Phoenix program.

By 1972 the war was primarily a South Vietnamese effort. Only 6,000 of the 70,000 Americans that remained in South Vietnam were combat troops.³⁰² The U.S. stepped up its efforts to make the ARVN a formidable fighting force capable of standing up to the Vietcong and NVA in the prospects of the inevitable withdrawal of the U.S. military, increasing the ARVN to over one million soldiers, and outfitting it with newest military weapons and equipment. South Vietnam also placed a renewed emphasis on its pacification program, dedicating 500,000 NVA soldiers specifically to securing villages

²⁹⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 559.

²⁹⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 616.

²⁹⁹ Interestingly the ARVN despised the term Vietnamization; remarking that they had been fighting the war before the United States' arrival.

³⁰⁰ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 253.

³⁰¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 260.

³⁰² Karnow, *Vietnam—A History*, 657.

throughout the countryside and implementing land, economic, and political reforms.³⁰³ When the ARVN attacked North Vietnamese forces seeking refuge in Laos in February of 1971, without the help of U.S. ground forces they suffered a devastating defeat, incurring over 50 percent casualties.³⁰⁴ The same scenario replayed itself when the NVA attacked throughout South Vietnam in the spring of 1972, known as the Easter Offensive. If it were not for U.S. air support, the NVA and Vietcong may have toppled the South Vietnamese government.³⁰⁵

Although General Abrams' Accelerated Pacification program was proving successful, congress voted to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, redeploy all U.S. forces from South Vietnam, and discontinue funding for military support. Coupled with public opinion cresting against the war, Kissinger felt he had to proceed with North Vietnam's proposal for a cease fire in exchange for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces and the release of U.S. Prisoners Of War. Kissinger knew it meant the end for the South Vietnamese government but justified his decision by stating, "What do you want us to do, stay there forever?"³⁰⁶

Consequently, the North Vietnamese were able to effectively wage a protracted war that deflected the United States' military might by implementing an indirect, guerrilla warfare strategy, and denying the stronger adversary a quick victory. The United States implemented an indirect strategy during the Vietnamization phase of the war by attempting to bomb the North Vietnamese into submission, emphasizing the pacification program, and by decimating the Vietcong's key leadership via the Phoenix Program. This same approach strategic interaction, according to Arreguín-Toft, should have resulted in the stronger actor winning. By this time, however, the growing discontent for the war among the American public and political leaders forced the United States to capitulate. As a Vietnam colonel explained after the war when U.S. Army Colonel Harry Summers'

³⁰³ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 254.

³⁰⁴ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 266.

³⁰⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 658.

³⁰⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 663.

(an anti-COIN advocate) boasted that the NVA and Vietcong never defeated the U.S. military on the battlefield, “[t]hat may be so, but it is also irrelevant.”³⁰⁷

E. WHY TRADITIONAL LARGE-SCALE WARFARE?

United States senior military leadership, and a majority of civilian officials, believed that overwhelming force, whether through the use of massive air bombardments or large conventional army search and destroy missions, would eventually force North Vietnam to surrender. However, most came to the realization that the gradual escalation policy and overwhelming force could not achieve victory. Both Secretaries of Defense during the war, Robert McNamara and Clark Clifford, came into office believing the sheer weight of the U.S. military could overpower the Vietcong and NVA. Both would leave office trying to convince their presidents that overwhelming force was not a feasible solution.

Archives documenting the Vietnam War are replete with instances referring to the United States’ decision to commit forces, whether limited initially under Kennedy, or en masse under Johnson, to protect its prestige and credibility in the world. President Kennedy commented “[w]e cannot and will not accept any visible humiliation over Laos,”³⁰⁸ when the Southeast Asian country appeared to be falling to communism, and applied the same philosophy to Vietnam. Kennedy’s vice president, Lyndon Johnson, reiterated this emphasis on perception when he said if the United States was to “throw in the towel...and pull our defenses back...[W]e would say to the world...that we don’t live up to our treaties and don’t stand by our friends.”³⁰⁹ Consequently, protecting the United States’ credibility and prestige, defending its “keystone in the archway of freedom” moniker, became a U.S. national security interest unto itself. As Under-Secretary of Defense John McNaughton wrote in 1966 “[a]t each point, to avoid the damage to our

³⁰⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 19.

³⁰⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 212.

³⁰⁹ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 213.

effectiveness of defaulting on our commitment, we have upped the ante. We have not defaulted, and the ante (and commitment) is now very high.”³¹⁰

Although Kennedy was cautious of the potential slippery slope of committing U.S. military advisors to South Vietnam, Stanley Karnow writes, at the same time the policy emanating from the White House resolved to stop communism from spreading, “so that he could not backtrack without jeopardizing the American’s government’s prestige—and in time that consideration would become the main motive for the U.S. intervention in Vietnam.”³¹¹ This is similar to Gaddis’ observation in which he details the United States’ careening commitment of forces in Vietnam “...that having committed itself to maintaining the existing distribution of power in the world, the United States could not allow challenges to that distribution even to appear to succeed against its will, because perceptions of power could be as important as the real thing.”³¹²

This commitment to protect America’s prestige and credibility resulted in the need to demonstrate force, whether via an initial commitment of military advisors by Kennedy’s Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who explained that a small number of troops would act as an advance party if more were needed,³¹³ or by President’s Nixon invasion and bombing of Cambodia almost 10 years later. Nixon summarized, “[i]f, when the chips are down, the world’s most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world.”³¹⁴

The use of overwhelming force was not necessarily about its effectiveness, but rather the conviction and commitment the use of force portrayed. Walt Rostow tried to convince President Johnson in early 1965 to deploy U.S. troops and air power immediately to South Vietnam by explaining that China and North Vietnam “...will not

³¹⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 241.

³¹¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 270.

³¹² Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 213.

³¹³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 269.

³¹⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 625.

actually accept a setback until they are sure that we mean it,” they had to “...confront an LBJ who had made up his mind.”³¹⁵

The United States used overwhelming force to demonstrate commitment because it simply had the abundance of resources to do so. Russell Weigley argues “[a]t the beginning, when American military resources were slight, America made a promising beginning in the nurture of strategists of attrition; but the wealth of the country and its adoption of unlimited aims in war cut that development short, until the strategy of annihilation became characteristically the American way in war.”³¹⁶ The “wealth of the country” that Weigley refers to provided ample military force for the United States to wage a traditional warfare strategy in Vietnam. From the onset of his presidency, Kennedy explained “in terms of total military strength, the United States would not trade places with any nation on earth,”³¹⁷ while Johnson stated, “[w]e are the richest nation in the history of the world... We can afford to spend whatever is needed to keep this country safe and to keep our freedom secure. And we shall do just that.”³¹⁸

The resources America brought to bear on North Vietnam were an immense array of instruments of power. In a dialogue almost 30 years after the war in which senior U.S. officials and military leaders met with their Vietnam counterparts to determine lessons learned in Vietnam War, retired U.S. Army General Dale Vesser was asked by a senior Vietnamese official how he would have responded if he was on the receiving end of the massive bombing campaigns and had hundreds of thousands of foreign soldiers in his country. General Vesser responded:

I suggest that you may not have understood the dire consequences of making those attacks [in South Vietnam]. They entailed reactions on our part that made use of the forces and means that were available to the United States in carrying the fight to North Vietnam. And as you learned, these forces included bombers.³¹⁹

³¹⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 421.

³¹⁶ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, xxii.

³¹⁷ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 207.

³¹⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 205.

³¹⁹ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 210.

As General Vesser contends, the U.S. responded with overwhelming force because, put simply, it had the resources to do so. Robert Komer, a member of Johnson's National Security Council, concluded, "[f]ew of our programs—civil or military—are very efficient, but we are grinding the enemy down by sheer weight and mass,"³²⁰ Even when the use of force was inefficient the United States continued using it because it had disposable resources, believing that eventually the enemy's resolve or military capabilities, whichever came first, would diminish long before the United States' abundance of resources did.

Although senior U.S. military officers and their civilian leaders stated publicly that the United States was dedicated to committing whatever amount of resources, men, and materiel were required to win the war regardless of how long it took, they believed they would win the war quickly. Robert McNamara, President Kennedy's Defense Secretary, and other senior officials envisioned U.S. military advisors withdrawing from South Vietnam in 1964, only two years after they were initially deployed. In 1965, General Westmoreland's original three-phased strategy optimistically depicted U.S. troops reversing the ARVN losses by the end of the year, then mounting major offensive operations to destroy enemy forces by the summer of 1966, and, if the enemy still persisted, an additional 12 to 18 months would be required to achieve victory.³²¹ After that timeline expired, Westmoreland asked Johnson for 565,000 U.S. forces in South Vietnam in 1967 to win the war in three more years. After the Tet Offensive in 1968, when there were already 550,000 U.S. forces in South Vietnam, Westmoreland asked Johnson for an additional 206,000 troops, so he could shorten the war.³²² The United States believed simply increasing forces and bombing campaigns would hasten victory; their long-term commitment seemed to have come only in two-to-three year installments.

If power and force implies victory, the United States had every reason to believe it would win quickly. Karnow writes that American officials looked at the war as a business plan, the larger the investment of men, equipment, and money, the greater the

³²⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 262.

³²¹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 465.

³²² Herring, *America's Longest War*, 212.

results.³²³ What could not be measured was the will of the North Vietnamese to endure the United States military and economic power. Henry Kissinger explained in 1969, after five years of an escalating air campaign against North Vietnam, “I can’t believe that a fourth-rate power like North Vietnam doesn’t have a breaking point.”³²⁴ General DePuy, the same general that said more bombs and napalm were the solution to winning the war, stated, “I guess my biggest surprise, and this was a surprise in which I have lots of company, was that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong would continue the war despite the punishment they were taking.”³²⁵ A senior Vietnamese official explained to McNamara 30 years after the war that the United States failed to look at the war from the Vietnamese perspective of a nation that suffered and fought for their independence for 4,000 years. They wanted peace as much as the United States wanted peace, “but not peace at any price.”³²⁶

Perhaps U.S. leadership never gave up believing that the war could be won by U.S. military power. At the conference between U.S. and Vietnamese counterparts, McNamara himself asked why, after losing approximately one million Vietnamese lives every year from 1965 through 1968 as the North Vietnamese figures stated, did they not negotiate for peace? A senior Vietnamese official responded,

We understand better now that the U.S. still understands very little about Vietnam. Even now—in this conference—the U.S. understands very little about Vietnam...Never before did the people of Vietnam, from top to bottom, unite as they did during the years that the U.S. was bombing us...if at that time we had begun negotiations with the U.S., we would have had to explain to the people why we could negotiate with the U.S., to meet with the U.S., and host the U.S., while bombs fell on us...it must be said that at those moments, when the bombs were falling, there was complete unity between the leaders and the people. There could be no negotiations under the pressure of the bombing.³²⁷

³²³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 284.

³²⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 611.

³²⁵ Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 217.

³²⁶ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 254.

³²⁷ McNamara, *Argument without End*, 255.

U.S. leadership grossly underestimated the will of North Vietnam to endure U.S. power. As the North Vietnam's resolve hardened, the United States' initial response was more soldiers and more bombs. As Westmoreland's two-to-three year strategy, predicated upon force, became more elusive, public support for the war waned, and the United States' credibility and resources slowly began to dissipate. U.S. leadership realized it had to find a strategy to "end the war in a manner that gave some meaning to the sacrifices that had been made."³²⁸ President Johnson told the United States years earlier, on July 28, 1965, as he was beginning to commit U.S. troops that, "[w]e cannot be defeated by force or arms. We will stand in Vietnam."³²⁹ He was absolutely correct. It was not by force of arms that the United States was defeated, but rather, by an indirect, protracted war that lost the support of the public at home, the votes of Congress, and the ability to maintain an effective defense capability domestically and abroad.

³²⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 301.

³²⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 441.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to determine why, throughout America's history, irregular warfare has routinely been sidelined despite the United States' continued experiences with counterinsurgencies and unconventional warfare, and why irregular warfare has routinely been looked upon as a lesser form of war, relegated to the history books only to reemerge time and time again as a necessary form of warfare. Only when this reoccurring trend is understood can an honest debate about the utility of a traditional warfare versus irregular warfare proceed, and answer Clausewitz's most important question, what type of war is one about to engage in and, consequently, what type of warfare strategy should be employed.

This thesis, therefore, asked the seemingly simple question, why is the U.S. military and U.S. security mindset traditional large-scale warfare focused, even when the majority of threats we have faced, and undoubtedly will continue to face, are irregular? To answer this question, this thesis drew on Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction theory, which argues that same approach interactions (a direct strategy versus direct strategy, or an indirect strategy versus an indirect strategy) favor strong actors while opposite approach interactions (a direct strategy versus an indirect strategy, or an indirect strategy versus a direct strategy) favor weak actors. The strategic interaction theory was used to determine which strategies were employed by the United States and its adversaries, and consequently whether or not the United States employed the correct strategy-counterstrategy interaction.

This thesis also proposed the following hypotheses to better understand the reasons why the United States has favored traditional war throughout its history, even when circumstances suggested an indirect approach. First, the development and strength of the United States' military industrial complex inhibits an irregular warfare approach to our nation's military and security mindset by perpetuating and sustaining traditional warfare force structure and materiel via political interests, economic impact, and commercial lobbying of politicians. Second, geopolitical posturing by nation-states seeking legitimacy and prestige on the international stage ensures a traditional warfare

mindset and security posture. Essentially a “might is right” appearance dominates international geopolitics and the universally understood display of power-force projection. Third, the organizational construct ingrained over time that focuses on a hierarchical authoritative command structure striving to maximize command and control efficiencies hinder irregular warfare concepts that espouse decentralized operations. Finally, the American Revolutionary War and the Vietnam War were analyzed to determine which form of warfare was predominantly employed, why it was chosen, and whether or not it was the correct strategy-counter strategy interaction.

A. FINDINGS

1. Strategic Interaction Theory: Direct Versus Indirect

Arreguín-Toft argues that actors who are able to predict their adversary’s strategy could dramatically improve their chances of victory by implementing the correct counterstrategy.³³⁰ Same approach strategic interactions favor strong actors because weaker actors are unable to deflect the overwhelming power imbalance. Opposite approach interactions, on the other hand, favor weak actors because they are able to deflect or dodge strong actors’ power advantages. With time, the stronger actor capitulates because the war has exceeded its projected costs, either politically, economically, or both.

While Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction theory is useful in explaining the importance of how a weak actor’s ability to deflect a strong actor’s superior capabilities can win asymmetric conflicts, his analysis of a strong actor’s barbarism strategy misrepresents the focus of indirect strategies. Arreguín-Toft’s two ideal attack strategies for a strong actor, the direct attack and barbarism, focus on utilizing force to defeat the adversary’s military, destroy the enemy’s military capability, or attack noncombatants to break the enemy’s will. He argues that a strong actor’s indirect-barbarism strategy intentionally targets non-combatants to force the enemy to give-up, either by breaking its will or denying access to the population (i.e., targeting civilian populations via strategic bombing campaigns or isolating populations using concentration camps). Even in a COIN

³³⁰ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 104.

campaign Arreguín-Toft explains a strong actor “attempts to deter would-be insurgents through, for instance, a policy of reprisals against noncombatants.”³³¹ Consequently, although Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction theory demonstrates that power does not automatically imply victory, each of his strategic interaction strategies, even his indirect approaches, rely upon the application of military power.

The use of force against non-combatants may be practiced by a stronger actor as an indirect strategy; however, these actions do not conform to theories and doctrine of irregular warfare, which is working with the local populace to gain their support and approval of the government. The strategic interaction theory would more accurately describe indirect and direct strategies if Arreguín-Toft included barbarism, the use of force against a society, as a direct attack strategy and included irregular warfare as a strong actor’s indirect strategy. Direct approach strategies therefore rely upon the use of force to achieve a quick victory; while indirect strategies utilize a war of detachment to wear-down the enemy’s will or negate its support. This re-categorization would likely still produce the same strategic interaction outcomes but more accurately represent indirect and direct strategies and tactics, which is critical in applying the strategic interaction analysis to future wars.

As was demonstrated in the Vietnam conflict, and even in the American Revolution, warfare rarely divides into either indirect and direct strategies. Commanders fluctuate between various strategies during various stages. George Washington and General Giap both waged a “bipolar strategy” moving from a war of maneuver, avoiding the enemy’s forces, to a war of battle, attacking the enemy. Both men alternated between traditional large-scale warfare and irregular warfare approaches throughout their wars. Likewise, both leaders implemented direct and indirect strategies at the same time. Finally, throughout the Vietnam War, each U.S. commander and president implemented multiple strategies simultaneously. This approach was perhaps best demonstrated by General Abrams, fighting a one war strategy that focused on both an indirect approach, via his accelerated pacification program, and a direct approach that focused on bombing

³³¹ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 101.

campaigns to interdict enemy troops and material in Laos and Cambodia, as well as small and large unit ground operations. Thus, although game theory elegantly depicts strategic interaction, assigning an ideal direct or indirect strategy to each actor, it cannot accurately capture the complexities and variables of war.

Lastly, Arreguín-Toft also explains that the guerrilla warfare and direct attack strategies are results of patterns of socialization, with the direct attack emanating from the West's blitzkrieg strategy after WWII and the indirect guerrilla warfare approach from the East's Mao Ze Dong's strategy to wage a protracted war against a technological superior foe.³³² These patterns of socialization, he suggests, mean that actors are not entirely free to choose their own strategy because militaries' forces, equipment, and training are not fungible. Secondly, actors prioritize threats; therefore, actors develop forces, equipment, training, and doctrine dependent upon the most likely threat.³³³

However, George Washington's use of an indirect guerrilla warfare strategy to negate the superior British power advantage, and General Giap's attempts to fight a traditional warfare strategy in 1963, in 1968 during the Tet Offensive, and the Easter Offensive in 1972, demonstrate that indirect or direct strategies are not restricted or unique to specific societies. In 1981, Vietnam's Prime Minister expressed his frustration with Mao Zedong's support for a protracted war against the United States when he lamented, "[Mao Zedong] was always ready to fight to the last Vietnamese."³³⁴

2. Hypotheses

a. *Hypothesis 1: The Military Industrial Complex*

Although President Eisenhower's famous farewell address in 1961 warned, "[i]n the council of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex,"³³⁵ research does not support the presence of the military industrialized

³³² Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 106.

³³³ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 107.

³³⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 345.

³³⁵ Eisenhower, "Farewell Address."

complex driving the United States' traditional warfare security mindset. George Washington did not have the military industrial complex behind him when he continuously strove for a decisive force on force battle against the stronger British military. Nor did he have the military industrial complex urging him to wage a traditional warfare strategy against the Mohawk Indians in 1779, he simply had more power compared to the Mohawks. Likewise, General Giap did not have an industrial complex urging him to fight a decisive battle against the French at the Red River Valley in 1951 in which he suffered disastrously,³³⁶ or in 1963 when he attempted a traditional warfare strategy against the ARVN to achieve a quick victory before the United States became decisively engaged in the war, or again in 1972 during the Easter Offensive. The traditional warfare strategy, attempting to use overwhelming force concentrated at a precise place and time, was implemented in an attempt of the United States to hasten victory.

During the Vietnam War, U.S. presidents were concerned about not using enough force and appearing soft on communism, as President Kennedy confided to his assistant, Mike O'Donnell, he was going to pull all of the troops out of Vietnam once he was reelected in 1963, even if he meant he was going to be labeled a "commie" sympathizer.³³⁷ However, they also refrained, at times, from using overwhelming force, concerned they would incense public anger, just as President Johnson told his joint chiefs of staff to wait until after he was reelected in 1964 to escalate the war.³³⁸ Consequently, the military industrial complex did not dictate or coerce policy, but provided a formidable array of options for U.S. leadership to accomplish its goals. In other words, the military industrial complex simply provided the means in which the United States' leaders, both military and civilian, believed they could achieve victory in the shortest amount of time.

³³⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 201.

³³⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 285.

³³⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 342.

b. Hypothesis 2: “Might is Right”

A preponderance of evidence, unsurprisingly, supports the notion that ingrained into our human psyche, as Arreguín-Toft writes, “the root principle of international relations theory has been that power implies victory...”³³⁹ An overwhelming projection of force, assumed to deter potential aggressors and destroy engaged enemies drives the United States’ traditional warfare security mindset. It compelled the British to expect the Continental Army would capitulate at the mere sight of the powerful British Royal Navy sailing into the New York Harbor in 1775, and the expectation that the North Vietnamese would cease support of the insurgency in South Vietnam once they realized the full weight of the United States was preparing to bear down on them.

In 1965 Bernard Fall wrote “...everybody likes to fight the war that he knows best,”³⁴⁰ cautioning the United States about waging the wrong type of war against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese. However, the United States had experienced success with an indirect-irregular warfare approach dating back to the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, up through World War II. But the use of force is implemented as much for the effects as it is for the perceived intentions. This perception led George Washington to seek a decisive battle, or an attempt at a decisive battle, to demonstrate to the world that his continental army was capable of standing up to the more powerful British Army and, as a result, garner domestic and international support. Similarly, General Giap, even though the weaker actor, conducted the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the Easter Offensive in 1972, not to deter U.S. public opinion or even achieve victory, but to demonstrate to the South Vietnam populace, the Soviet Union and China that North Vietnam still presented a formidable threat against their more powerful adversary, thereby ensuring continued internal and external support. Consequently a display of force is attempted not only by the strong actor, but the weak actor as well, to demonstrate capability, resolve, and curry support.

³³⁹ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 96.

³⁴⁰ Fall, “The Theory and Practice of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,” 51.

Force implemented by a traditional warfare strategy is also, and most often, used for the “knockout blow.” This was demonstrated time and time again throughout the American Revolution and Vietnam War, although not always successfully, to put the final exclamation point on what was, up until that time, a war of detachment. This exclamation point and perception of force explains the second half of Max Boot’s guerrilla paradox, where the same guerrilla forces that defeat a stronger adversary inevitably become the very type of military—a conventional army—they defeated.³⁴¹ This is due to the fact that once an opponent is considerably weakened and either no longer has support of the public or public support is waning, a traditional warfare-direct approach strategy serves as the knockout punch, the proverbial nail in the coffin, not only conveying one’s convictions to the stronger or weaker actor, but to the world writ large.

c. Hypothesis 3: Hierarchical Command and Control Structure

A weaker adversary’s lack of command and control structure contributes to an irregular warfare strategy. General Washington realized he did not have control over the partisan elements in the colonies or even the militias for that matter, but he used their lack of command and control to make up for his army’s extreme power disadvantages, continually encouraging the partisans and militias to harass the more powerful British army. Similarly, North Vietnam had little command and control over the Vietcong and even its own forces to a degree. The two incidents that contributed to the United States military involvement in Vietnam the most—the initial Gulf of Tonkin engagement on August 2, 1964, and the Vietcong attack on the U.S. airbase at Pleiku in February of 1965—the North Vietnamese leadership was unaware of the attacks.

If lack of command and control favors small unit decentralized tactics and operations, the hallmarks of an irregular warfare—guerrilla warfare strategy, does a professional army with advanced technology and training more likely result in a traditional warfare strategy? A hierarchical command and control structure, while it does

³⁴¹ Boot, *Invisible Armies*, 42.

not necessarily prevent an irregular warfare strategy, does appear to have an increased tendency to favor a strategy, predicated upon centralized operations, the concentration of mass, overwhelming firepower, and force.

In summation, while the United States' military industrial complex does not pull the puppet masters' strings of war, the widely held belief that power implies victory is fueled in part by the military industrial complex providing blunt force power to wield in warfare. The amassing of weapons of war ultimately results in the utilization of overwhelming force, mass, and firepower concentrated at a specific time and place to, most importantly, obtain a quick and decisive victory, just as Clausewitz and Jomini wrote over 200 years ago. But Washington and the mighty British army did not have the writings of either war theorist to compel them to use overwhelming mass, firepower, and maneuver, and yet repeatedly this traditional warfare mentality was used by both belligerents, and also by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army to elicit victory. The implementation of force is widely seen to produce what most belligerents in war desire, achieving a quick victory when the time is right, and remarkably, even when it is not.

B. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Determining why the United States' security mindset is predicated upon a traditional warfare strategy has resulted in four key implications for future strategy-counterstrategy interactions. First, illuminating the enemy by placing an unparalleled emphasis on intelligence collection is critical to avert the use of overwhelming force, which more often than not results in creating more opposition than eliminating it. The overwhelming use of force that is assumed to achieve a decisive victory ultimately works against the strong actor if he cannot identify the enemy from the populace. There is obviously a reason that the British and Hessians remarked during the Revolution that if only the American colonists would stand and fight they would be able to defeat them, or why General Westmoreland publicly defied the Vietcong to attack, and said he was looking for a fight,³⁴² waiting for the North Vietnamese to wage his type of war.³⁴³

³⁴² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 527.

³⁴³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 551.

Consequently, effective intelligence is critical in identifying the insurgent from the populace in order to prevent the tendency to revert to overwhelming force that only succeeds in negatively impacting the majority of the populace that may have been at one time been, if not supportive of the counterinsurgent, indifferent. Westmoreland implemented forced “urbanization,” deliberately creating massive amounts of refugees, to secure the countryside to separate the insurgents from populace.³⁴⁴ In reality, all it did was create more insurgents or those willing to support the insurgency. Therefore, effective intelligence capabilities that focus on identifying and discriminately targeting the enemy are paramount in irregular warfare. Military intelligence and operations alone, however, cannot effectively defeat an insurgency.

Political, economic, and social reforms are critical in isolating the insurgents from the populace in addition to effective intelligence operations. Many within the British government, including the military, such as General and Admiral Howe, advocated implementing political reforms that would avert war and reach an agreement regarding the imposing taxes on the colonies without representation. The Tory party in power, however, opted for force. There were also those in the U.S. administration after the Vietminh defeated the French who wanted to focus on political reform of the South Vietnamese government. The MAAG, however, believed focusing on political reform would detract from countering the growing insurgency, which it believed could only be achieved by obtaining a military victory.³⁴⁵ Neither the British leading up to or during the Revolutionary War, or the United States during the Vietnam War, placed the appropriate emphasis on political reform to deflate the insurgents’ cause. Implementing political reform is critical in developing support from the populace and isolating the insurgency or negating its cause all together.

Second, small-maneuverable, decentralized operations are extremely effective against larger, more powerful forces. When military force is used in irregular warfare, whether by the weak or strong actors, small unit operations utilizing decentralized command and control are more effective than large conventional force operations.

³⁴⁴ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 253.

³⁴⁵ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 77.

Throughout the Revolutionary War the Continental Army, militias, and partisans, repeatedly used small-unit, highly mobile operations effectively against British superior firepower and support trains. The same tactics were utilized by the Vietcong and NVA against the more powerful and better-resourced U.S. military. Although U.S. forces had overwhelming fire superiority and awesome mobility capabilities, the weaker adversaries were effectively able to negate the disproportionate power advantage by overwhelming, decentralized, small unit hit and run tactics. Conversely, when the United States did wage surgical strike operations, it had devastating effects on the enemy.

And lastly, a pragmatic approach to warfare, not being fixated on any one strategy or time constraints, provides the greatest chances of achieving victory. Ultimately, practical military decisions not tied to any one specific strategy or timetables have the advantage. George Washington and General Giap showed strikingly similar pragmatic characteristics by waging wars of detachment when they needed to deflect or dodge their enemy's technological superior and force advantages. They also pressed the attack when they needed to raise public support or awareness for their cause.

Conversely, the mighty British Army in the American Revolutionary War and the powerful U.S. military in the Vietnam War both, to their detriment, almost zealously adhered to the utilization of force, seeing retreat as a sign of weakness. From General Burgoyne refusing to retreat and recuperate while pursuing the Continental Army throughout the Hudson Valley, to General Cornwallis' decision to burn all his support trains and recklessly pursue Nathanael Greene throughout the Southern Colonies, to American military leadership in the Vietnam War continually responding with more troops and more bombs, each powerful military's refusal to accept anything other than the use of force was only reinforcing failure. Additionally, a strong actor's race against time to defeat his weaker adversary automatically puts him at a disadvantage. The U.S. government, when it decides to commit forces in irregular warfare, must effectively communicate to the American people that an irregular warfare strategy is a protracted warfare strategy, not simply a two-to-three year plan like Westmoreland's repetitive attrition strategies in Vietnam.

Understanding overwhelming force does not automatically equate to an overwhelming victory in a relative short amount of time is key in asymmetric conflicts where one actor is considerably stronger than the other. Placing a paramount emphasis on intelligence collection to illuminate the adversary, while complimenting the utilization of small-unit maneuverable, autonomous forces with a focus on political, social, and economic reform takes time. Arreguín-Toft's same approach strategic interaction, with a strong actor implementing an indirect irregular warfare strategy, focuses on gaining the support of the populace in order to alter or negate support for the weak actor's indirect-guerrilla warfare strategy. This approach ultimately results in the weaker adversary unable to deflect not only the stronger adversary's military capabilities, but more importantly, its political, and economic capabilities.

Many of these implications have already been codified in the U.S. Army's *Field Manual for Counterinsurgency Operations, FM 3-24*; however, current military doctrine would be justly served if the traditional nine principles of war are identified as the "Principles of Traditional Warfare" and the principles of COIN are codified as the "Principles of Irregular Warfare." Junior officers and NCOs are continuously taught throughout their careers that "words mean something," and doctrine, although often derided, institutionalizes the proper emphasis and prioritization on the tactics, operations, and strategy based upon the words chosen to define each.

If U.S. military doctrine does not incorporate or distinguish the principles of irregular warfare from traditional warfare, the animosity, frustration, and potential shift away from irregular warfare will continue to grow. The U.S. military will unfortunately repeat the institutional knowledge dismissal of irregular warfare that occurred in the ensuing years after the Vietnam War and had to be painfully relearned during the past decade in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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