

**DRAINING THE SEA BY FILLING THE GRAVES:
INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE AS A
COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY**

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Abstract

It is commonly believed in the literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency that to be effective in undermining civilian support for guerrillas, violence against noncombatants must be selective or risk alienating the population. Yet cases exist where governments have defeated insurgencies by wielding indiscriminate violence against noncombatants. This paper explores the conditions under which such violence can be effective through a case study of British counterinsurgency strategy in the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). I find that the smaller the size of the underlying population supporting the insurgents, and the smaller and more constricted the geographic area, the more effective indiscriminate civilian victimization is likely to be. Moreover, when civilian loyalties are not very flexible, selective violence is unlikely to deter people from supporting the rebels and indiscriminate force is sometimes required to make it impossible for people to provide support.

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Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Relations Workshop at Dartmouth University in November 2006. The author wishes to thank workshop participants, particularly Stephen Brooks and Benjamin Valentino, for their helpful comments and suggestions. Much of the case material on the Boer War in this paper is derived from chapter 5 of the author's forthcoming book, *Targeting Civilians in War* (Cornell UP, 2008).

INTRODUCTION

Is killing civilians an effective strategy for achieving political or military goals? Under what circumstances might it be more or less effective? Sustained, systematic violence against noncombatants is a regular feature of warfare. One study found that states use ‘barbarism’—‘the systematic violation of the laws of war in pursuit of a military or political objective’—in about 20 percent of asymmetric conflicts, wars in which one side is significantly more powerful than its opponent. A second study found that belligerents in interstate wars employ ‘civilian victimization’—‘a wartime strategy that targets and kills (or attempts to kill) noncombatants’—one-third of the time, while a third discovered that states killed more than 50,000 noncombatants in 21 percent of all wars after 1945.¹ Although several works have appeared that help illuminate the causes of this violence, few studies have systematically investigated and evaluated the effectiveness of civilian victimization as a military strategy.²

The literature on the effectiveness of punishing civilians in conventional wars largely condemns strategies that target noncombatants as not having much utility for winning wars or eliciting concessions from adversaries. Robert Pape, for example, argues that punishment—a coercive strategy that inflicts pain on an adversary’s civilian population in order to persuade the enemy to take (or refrain from taking) a certain action—hardly ever elicits concessions in strategic bombing campaigns.³ Pape also examined economic sanctions, a weaker form of punishment, and found that these were similarly ineffective, accounting for success in only a handful of 120 cases after 1945.⁴ Other authors condemn civilian victimization more broadly, arguing that targeting noncombatants almost never works, and more often leads to the perpetrator’s own ruin than to his opponent’s defeat.⁵

Students of civilian victimization in other contexts have come to rather more nuanced conclusions regarding the military efficacy of killing civilians. Ivan Arreguín-Toft, for example, argues that while targeting noncombatants can be militarily effective in the short-run, it typically backfires politically in the long-run and eventually undercuts the perpetrator's political goals. Gil Merom contends that brutality or indiscriminate force is an effective means of cost-management for states combating insurgencies, but that democracies cannot sustain such practices for long owing to their domestic norms, which proscribe the killing of innocents. Attempting to conserve on the human losses to their own side by targeting enemy civilians, democratic leaders alienate their domestic audiences, causing support for the war to erode and eventually forcing democracies to conclude the war on unfavorable terms. Pape, by contrast, although he argues so strongly against punishment in his work on strategic bombing, avers that punishment in the form of suicide terrorism has been fairly successful in obtaining concessions from democracies in the past 20 years.⁶

In the study of guerrilla insurgency, the common view regarding the efficacy or inefficacy of violence against noncombatants is that such violence is 'effective when selective,' that is, when it is limited to people who actually provide material support—food, shelter, other supplies, information on the enemy's movements, or sanctuary from discovery—to the adversary.⁷ Eliminating such individuals—often in gruesome circumstances—clearly signals observers regarding the fate of opponents or traitors, and thus helps deter defection and maintain the state's (or rebel organization's) support among the civilian population. Targeting the enemy's civilian supporters thus undercuts the adversary's fighting capacity indirectly—by deterring people who might be thinking about switching sides—and directly—by depriving the adversary of needed recruits, supplies, sanctuary, and intelligence.

Indiscriminate violence, on the other hand—targeting everyone in a particular village or district with no effort to determine guilt or innocence—tends to be counterproductive because there is no connection between a person’s actions and the infliction of punishment. The application of violence in this fashion by one or the other side in a conflict gives individuals no incentive to collaborate since they may be killed no matter what they do: why support the government or the rebels unless doing so increases one’s security? One reason the Vietcong was able to control much of the countryside in South Vietnam, for example, was that the Vietcong was able to personalize its threats and use targeted force to assassinate local representatives of the government, whereas US and South Vietnamese troops largely wielded force indiscriminately, killing supporters and opponents alike with high volumes of artillery and aerial bombing. Later in the war, however, US forces and their allies began to roll up the Vietcong’s civilian/political infrastructure in the villages by adopting the tactics of their opponents: targeted detentions and killings of known Vietcong operatives and supporters.

Yet there appear to be a number of exceptions to this general rule that violence against civilians is only effective when selective. One exception occurs in conflicts in which one party wages war to conquer territory, but is not interested in controlling the population—or a particular segment of the population—resident in that territory. The result in such cases is ethnic cleansing, which can be remarkably successful under certain circumstances. But even in guerrilla wars, a number of instances exist where incumbents (often colonial powers) have been able to quash powerful insurgencies by employing indiscriminate violence against the underlying civilian population. The British Army, for example, suffocated Boer resistance in South Africa by placing almost the entire Boer civilian population (along with native African civilians) in concentration camps, a strategy which caused the deaths of more than 45,000 noncombatants but

won the war. The US Army followed a similar strategy in the Philippines at about the same time, and the Italians followed suit in Libya thirty years later, each prevailing in the conflict but with substantial loss of civilian life.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the circumstances under which indiscriminate violence against civilians in guerrilla wars can be effective—in the sense of furthering a belligerent’s political or military goals in the conflict. Below I first flesh out the logic of targeting civilians in guerrilla wars and explain the conventional view that indiscriminate violence is counterproductive. The bulk of the paper consists of a case study of the causes and effectiveness of civilian victimization in the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). I show how the Boers’ shift from conventional to guerrilla resistance prompted the British to begin instituting reprisals against civilian property, mainly in the form of farm-burning. At this point in the war, indiscriminate reprisals backfired because they simply forced Boer men who had surrendered to return to the fight. When the British realized that their farm-burning policy was failing to stem the insurgency, they began to sweep the veldt clear of the entire Boer and African population. In combination with the devastation wrought by farm-burning, this population displacement strategy eventually wore down the Boers and delivered victory to the British. Unfortunately, it also cost the lives of many noncombatants.

Drawing on this evidence, the paper sketch several hypotheses for when indiscriminate violence can be effective in counterinsurgency. It is suggested that the key factors that make the difference between effective and futile barbarism are the size of the underlying civilian population and the size of the geographic area the incumbent is trying to control. When indiscriminate violence is employed against a large population in a big area, there is little chance that the incumbent will be able to exert effective control, and the logical choice is to defect to the

other side. With a small population in a relatively confined space, however, the incumbent has the potential to kill or imprison the entire population, effectively interdicting the insurgents' source of supply, recruits, and information. Incumbents employing this strategy in the right conditions have been able to defeat insurgencies in a relatively short time.

TARGETING CIVILIANS IN GUERRILLA WARS: CAN IT WORK?

Guerrilla wars are conflicts in which a rebel force, rather than fighting pitched battles in the open, avoids its more powerful opponent's main forces and engages in hit-and-run operations, attacking when an advantage presents itself and melting away into the wilderness or the surrounding civilian population when reinforcements or superior firepower are brought to bear. The goal of insurgents is not to defeat the government's army outright, but instead to avoid being defeated. Guerrillas typically seek to impose steady (if not unbearable) costs and prolong the war indefinitely, which will eventually cause the adversary to deem that the costs of continuing to fight are no longer worth it since victory remains elusive. In some cases, in which the insurgents gain control over territory, the guerrilla army may grow large enough to switch over to conventional operations and challenge the incumbent in open battle, as the Viet Minh did in Indochina in the early 1950s against France. More often, however, insurgencies prevail simply by not losing, wearing out the more powerful side rather than defeating them on the battlefield.

One important characteristic of guerrilla insurgencies is that they are highly dependent on local civilian populations for food, shelter, supplies, recruits, and information. This dependence is much more intimate than the way in which states rely on civilians in conventional interstate wars. In modern states, extraction is highly institutionalized and bureaucratized: soldiers do not go door-to-door asking for hand-outs, for example. Rather, civilian wages are taxed to support

the military effort, and civilians work in industries that produce war materiel. Guerrillas, by contrast, often collect their taxes from villagers at the point of a gun. Strong, well-organized insurgencies may establish a political infrastructure to systematize contributions and organize the population, as the Viet Cong did in some regions of South Vietnam, but still this infrastructure is primitive compared to the extractive apparatus of the modern state.

The other difference in the relationship between combatants and noncombatants in guerrilla versus conventional wars is that it is contested by the opponent. In a typical conventional war between two states, each side exercises monopoly control over its civilian population. A clear front-line separates the belligerent parties, and behind that front line, each side rules without challenge. The hallmark of guerrilla conflicts, however, is divided sovereignty, or multiple/overlapping sovereignties: while the government and the insurgents each may dominate certain regions, in others they compete for control. The army may rule by day, for example, but the insurgents come out at night when the army retreats to its barracks. A situation like this prevailed in Cyrenaica during the Sanusi revolt against Italian rule in the 1920s. The Italian commander, General Rodolfo Graziani, reported that ‘the Arabs spoke during the long campaign, right up to its conclusion, of the two Governments of Cyrenaica, Italian and Sanusi, as “the Government of the Day and the Government of the Night.”’ Kalyvas describes a similar situation in the Mitidja region of Algeria in the mid-1990s: ‘the Mitidja became in 1997 an area where locally segmented monopolies of violence were replaced, after the army gradually moved in, by fragmented rule, where both political actors had the ability to exercise violence within the same space: as a villager put it, there was a “government by day and an [Islamist] government by night.”’⁸

THE LOGIC OF CIVILIAN VICTIMIZATION IN GUERRILLA WARS

The competition between the would-be governments of the incumbent and insurgents for the loyalties of the population drives much of the violence in guerrilla wars. Each side wants to gain the support (or at least acquiescence) of the people, and perhaps more importantly to deny that support to its opponent. Massacres—whether aimed only at known enemy supporters and their families on the one hand, or at entire villages where guerrillas are known to be active on the other—deter the population from providing aid and comfort to the enemy.

According to Tom Marks, although some people support one side or the other because they are true believers in the cause, ‘Most people ... sit on the sidelines until compelled to do otherwise. They give their support when it becomes in their *interest* to do so. Terror is but one tool for creating such an interest ... Providing it is not abused, then, terror, while it may alienate some, also fortifies others. At the margins, it can push an undecided group into support it would otherwise not give.’⁹

Similarly, Stathis Kalyvas remarks that ‘violence is primarily a resource rather than the final product; it is intended to shape the behavior of a targeted audience by altering the expected value of particular actions.’¹⁰ According to these formulations, civilian victimization in guerrilla wars—like punishment strategies in conventional wars—follows the logic of terrorism: violence is used to influence the behavior of some target group, in this case civilians who are potential supporters of insurgents or status quo incumbents.

Kalyvas argues that violence in guerrilla warfare is a function of territorial control. Where one belligerent or the other exercises monopoly control, there is no need to employ violence since civilians comply with the locally dominant actor. Where neither side has control, violence is also absent since neither side has sufficient information to know who to target;

lashing out blindly will drive people into the enemy camp. Civilians are most likely to be targeted where one side begins making inroads into an area the other side has dominated. Both sides are able to gain quality information on defectors, and the side whose influence is slipping has an incentive to target turncoats to deter further defections.¹¹

WHY INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE IS THOUGHT TO BE INEFFECTIVE

The credible threat of torture, mutilation, or murder to oneself or one's family is obviously a highly effective deterrent. As Dave Grossman has put it, 'One of the most obvious and blatant benefits of atrocity is that it quite simply scares the hell out of people.'¹² The literature, however, is nearly unanimous in its contention that violence is more effective when selective, that is, when the targets of violence have actually done something (like informing for the enemy) that warrants retaliation. According to Kalyvas, 'selective violence personalizes threats and endows them with credibility, for if people are targeted on the basis of their actions, then refraining from such actions guarantees safety.'¹³

Indiscriminate violence, by contrast—violence in which people are targeted based not on what they have done, but rather because of their appearance, race, religion, where they live, or their proximity to a rebel attack—is thought to be ineffective and often counterproductive because 'compliance guarantees no security ... joining the opponent can actually increase the probability of individual survival.'¹⁴ When one of the actors in a conflict employs violence indiscriminately, whether people cooperate with that actor or not makes no difference: they may be killed no matter what they do, targeted solely on the basis of guilt by association. In such situations, defecting to the opposition might actually increase the chance of survival, if only

because one has a weapon and can fight to defend oneself against the attackers. This logic is what leads Kalyvas to declare that ‘*indiscriminate violence is counterproductive in civil war.*’¹⁵

The treatment of the civilian population in the western areas of the Soviet Union in 1941-42 by the conquering Germans is a famous example of how indiscriminate killing of noncombatants can feed resistance to an occupier. In Ukraine and Belorussia, according to Matthew Cooper, ‘whether from reasons of nationalism or dissatisfaction, the overwhelming majority of the population ... were, at the very least, indifferent to the invaders, and, for the most part, welcomed by them as a catalyst that would bring about change for the better.’¹⁶ Rather than capitalize on the good will generated by liberating these people from the Soviet yoke to pacify the occupied regions, however, German policy—owing to Hitler’s ideological predilections—was uniformly harsh. Soviet prisoners of war were murdered or left to die: of the 3.3 million Soviet soldiers captured by February 1942, 2 million were dead.¹⁷ The *Einsatzgruppen*—special mobile killing units operating directly behind the army groups—murdered 500,000 Jews in the first six months of the war, and an additional 900,000 in a second sweep in 1942.¹⁸ The Kommissar and Barbarossa Orders called for the Wehrmacht and SS to eliminate Soviet political officers and ensured that troops would not be prosecuted for offenses against civilians. These orders were followed up by further anti-partisan instructions once the attack began, advocating ‘the death penalty for fifty to one hundred Communists ... as suitable atonement for one German soldier’s life.’¹⁹

Individual units also formulated their own orders endorsing indiscriminate reprisal massacres as a means for combating the partisans. The staff of General von Manstein’s 11th Army, for example, decreed in a memorandum dated 15 December 1941 that partisans and civilians captured in operations should be executed, reasoning that ‘the population must be more

frightened of our reprisals than of the partisans.’ Field Marshal von Reichenau, commander of the 6th Army, directed in a 10 October order that ‘if isolated partisans are found using firearms in the rear of the army, drastic measures are to be taken. These measures will be extended to that part of the male population who were in a position to hinder or report the attacks ... The fear of German counter-measures must be stronger than the threats of wandering Bolshevik remnants.’²⁰

Although the Germans were betting that massive and indiscriminate reprisals would create sufficient fear in the population that it would deter people from tolerating or supporting partisans, the wanton display of brutality by the Germans in fact had the opposite effect. Many Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians soon realized that they stood little chance of survival under German occupation and thus their only hope of staying alive was to join the resistance. Some German officers realized that the policy of indiscriminate reprisal massacres was driving the civilian population into the arms of the partisans. One report described the decision calculus of the average civilian as follows: ‘If I stay with the Germans, I shall be shot when the Bolsheviks come; if the Bolsheviks don’t come, I shall be shot sooner or later by the Germans. Thus, if I stay with the Germans, it means certain death; if I join the partisans, I shall probably save myself.’ The partisan movement, therefore, which despite German fears hardly existed in the war’s first months, grew, flourished, and eventually forced the Germans to divert ever-increasing amounts of manpower from the front lines to protect their logistics network and pursue guerrilla bands in the rear areas. As Cooper concludes, German brutality, ‘practiced in the name of security from the moment German troops set foot on Soviet soil, could do nothing but alienate the people; they, as much as, if not more than, the other aspects of German rule, were the cause of the partisan movement avoiding the near-certainty of defeat and, instead, emerging, despite all its defects, as a potent force in large areas of the occupied territories.’²¹

WHY DOES INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE NEVERTHELESS OCCUR?

There is thus a reasonable consensus in the literature that indiscriminate victimization of civilians in the context of guerrilla warfare is less effective than violence that is targeted specifically at individuals who have committed an offense, such as switching allegiances to the other side. Still, indiscriminate violence occurs, sometimes with the knowledge that it is counterproductive. Why?

Kalyvas argues that using violence discriminately is costly because it requires specific information on individuals' actions and allegiances that is expensive to acquire. Most incumbents lack the necessary information, and are unable to obtain it owing to a lack of resources, such as troops. Moreover, poor manpower policies—such as short combat rotations—can impede organizational learning and lead to the repetition of ineffective policies. Military cultures or competition with other service branches might also perpetuate policies of indiscriminate violence.²²

Kalyvas also inquires into the conditions under which indiscriminate violence is likely to be effective, arguing that 'incumbents can afford to be indifferent about the type of violence they resort to when insurgents are unable to offer any protection to civilians. Put otherwise, costly discrimination can be dispensed with when insurgents are exceedingly weak.'²³ This contention seems strange, however, since guerrillas rarely seek to protect noncombatants from government persecution, and are frequently unable to do so. In fact, insurgents often try to provoke governments into committing indiscriminate reprisals in the hope that wanton displays of cruelty will galvanize support for the rebel cause. A better hypothesis might be that indiscriminate killing is more likely to be effective when the rebels are unable to offer a credible alternative to the government that disaffected civilians can join. The reason is not that the rebels cannot protect

the population because they are weak, but rather that their weakness precludes them from deterring government violence because the incumbents need not worry about civilians defecting to an alternative authority.

This revised hypothesis, however, still leaves a few questions unanswered because there are instances of governments resorting to indiscriminate civilian victimization even when insurgencies have been relatively strong, and where such violence has succeeded in destroying the rebellion. Italy's war to suppress the Sanusi-led insurgency in Libya's Cyrenaica region (1923-32) provides one such example. Enjoying superior mobility and high levels of popular support, and exploiting favorable terrain, Sanusi bands were able to remain in the field despite being worsted in most of the actual battles. After seven years of fruitless pursuit, the new Italian commander—General Rodolfo Graziani—adopted a policy of 'draining the sea' in 1930 by rounding up and interning the entire population of Cyrenaica. He also severed the Sanusi's supply line from Egypt and instituted a system of flying columns to pursue the guerrillas incessantly. Hunger, disease, and privation exacted a fearsome toll from the population languishing in the camps: of the 85,000-100,000 people who entered the camps, only 35,000 people emerged after the war. 'The colonialist goal was to separate the resistance from its social base,' and in this the Italians succeeded: the policy of concentration was probably the key to their victory in Cyrenaica.²⁴

A second case, explored further in the case study below, is the British combination of scorched earth and concentration camps in the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Although the immediate effect of farm burning was counterproductive—thousands of Boer commandos who had given up and gone home after the conventional defeats of early 1900 returned to the field as their property was destroyed by indiscriminate British retaliation—most studies argue

that in the long run it played a significant role in defeating the insurgency. Scorched earth accomplished this not by lessening the Boers' will to resist—indeed, burning their homes only inflamed this motivation—but by reducing the ability of the commandos to continue fighting. Farm burning turned vast stretches of territory into blackened, deserted wastelands incapable of supporting life.

The effect of this policy was amplified by the confinement of the Boer civilian population to squalid concentration camps, which prevented them from giving aid and comfort to their menfolk in the insurgency. Approximately 46,000 Boer and African civilians died in the camps from preventable diseases caused by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and malnutrition, but this brutal interdiction policy was highly effective, and brought about the surrender of the remaining Boer guerrillas in May 1902.²⁵

THE SECOND ANGLO-BOER WAR

The cases sketched above seem to have several factors in common. First, the underlying civilian population from which the guerrillas drew their support was small, roughly a quarter of a million in the Boer case and 100,000 in the Sanusi case. Second, the geographic area being contested was also relatively small. Third, in neither case did the rebels have an external sanctuary to which they could retreat to recuperate and avoid incumbent attacks. Although the Sanusi had an external source of supplies, this source was susceptible to interdiction; once it was cut off, it was impossible to replace. Similarly, the Boers were surrounded by British-held territory or hostile African tribes eager to profit from the Boers' plight.

This section of the paper unpacks British counterinsurgency policy in South Africa from 1900 to 1902 in greater depth with an eye toward deriving hypotheses regarding the conditions

under which indiscriminate violence in guerrilla wars might be effective in defeating an insurgency. It first describes the extent of the suffering and death inflicted upon the Boer and African civilian population by British operations. The section then shows that British forces increasingly targeted noncombatants as the Boers turned to a guerrilla strategy and refused to concede defeat. Also outlined are the various strategies the British employed, and how—after being initially counterproductive—they eventually brought about the defeat of the Boers.

CIVILIAN VICTIMIZATION IN THE BOER WAR

Great Britain and the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State went to war on 11 October 1899 with the latter opening hostilities. British officials expected a typically easy victory over another backward opponent, but the war turned out to be anything but quick and decisive. Facing imminent defeat at British hands in mid-1900, the Boers decided to continue the war in guerrilla fashion rather than submit to British demands and lose their independence. In retaliation, the British Army—first under Lord Roberts, and then under Lord Kitchener, the hero of Khartoum two years earlier—adopted a scorched-earth policy, burning down the farms of all those who supported the Boer cause, and forcing Boer women and children into concentration camps. By the time the war was over, almost 28,000 Boer civilians had died in the camps, 79 percent of whom were children under the age of sixteen. Overall, including native African fatalities, as many as 46,000 noncombatants died in the British concentration camps, nearly double the number of military fatalities caused by the war.

The bulk of the civilian fatalities in the Boer War stemmed from the British policy of confining Boer and African noncombatants to concentration camps. Conditions in the South African camps were appalling, especially in 1900-1. Tents were overcrowded; inhabitants did not

receive soap as part of their rations; water was insufficient in quantity and of dubious quality; fuel for cooking was scanty; and food rations were at the starvation level.²⁶ The number of medical personnel was inadequate; in fact, of the 94 doctors in the camp system in February 1901, half had quit or been sacked a year later, as had 85 out of 217 nurses.²⁷ Moreover, ‘undesirables’ whose menfolk remained at large with the Boer commandos received a smaller ration than those who had surrendered to the British. At first these unfortunates were allotted no meat at all; but ‘even after rations were improved [in March 1901], they still remained extremely low. There were no vegetables, nor jam; no fresh milk for babies and children; just a pound of meal and about half a pound of meat a day, with some scrapings of sugar and coffee; much worse than the diet of the barrack room, or the official diet of the troops on campaign; a diet quite poor enough to allow the rapid spread of disease.’²⁸

Camps were often poorly sited, being vulnerable to the elements, and camp commandants gave little thought to sanitary facilities. In Bethulie, for example, a camp in the Orange Free State, ‘the smell from the latrines was appalling, and as a result sicknesses broke out because of fouling on the ground and insufficiency of lavatory facilities.’ The water supply for the detainees was also contaminated with human waste.²⁹

As a result of these conditions, the death rate in the camps shot up as the number of people confined in them increased.³⁰ Fatalities in the camp system, which numbered 550 in May 1900, tripled to 1,675 by July, and then doubled again by October, reaching 3,205 in that month (a fatality rate of 344 per 1,000 internees per year, equal to the death rate for plague).³¹

Lord Kitchener, who succeeded Roberts as commander of British forces in mid-1900, was uninterested in the alarming increase in mortality: ‘Kitchener no more desired the death of women and children in the camps than of the wounded Dervishes after Omdurman, or of his own

soldiers in the typhoid-stricken hospitals of Bloemfontein. He was simply not interested. What possessed him was a passion to win the war quickly, and to that he was prepared to sacrifice most things, and most people, other than his own small 'band of boys,' to whom he was invariably loyal, whatever their blunders.'³² What concerned the British Commander-in-Chief was crushing Boer resistance in the quickest, most efficient way possible. If ending the war quickly and preserving the lives of his troops required that Boer families suffer, then so be it.

Proof that the fatalities in the camps were not due to conditions beyond British control came when the Army finally transferred control of the system to the civilian administration under High Commissioner Sir Alfred Milner in November 1901. Although he was one of those most responsible for the war's outbreak, throughout the conflict Milner advocated a more humane approach to fighting it, arguing that British troops should clear districts of rebels and then occupy them, rather than sending flying columns up and down the veldt chasing the commandos and burning everything in sight.³³ Once he assumed responsibility for running the camps, the carnage in them dropped precipitously; only 196 people died in the concentration camps during the last month of the war.

The confinement of black Africans to concentration camps—and their deaths in large numbers—followed a similar logic and trajectory as that of the white Boers, if delayed a few months owing to the fact that the population of the white camps grew earlier than those for blacks. Although British apologists have claimed that the Africans were interned for humanitarian reasons and for their own safety, this contention obscures the truth:

The reason that the British Army established the black concentration camps was for the same basic reason that the white concentration camps were established. And that reason was a military strategy based on an antiguerrilla warfare master plan that consisted of three chess-game-like interlocking pieces: (1) blockhouses and interconnecting barbed-wire squares; (2) black and white concentration camps, and (3) massive sweeps by the British flying columns ... the prevention

of logistical and intelligence support to the Boer commandos was the primary reason for their [whites and blacks] being swept off the Boer farms into the concentration camps.³⁴

Native camps suffered from even worse neglect than those that housed whites: they often lacked latrines, blacks had to work for (and in some cases also pay for) their rations, and the British provided medical care only if illness threatened the labor supply or the health of the Army or the white settler community.³⁵ The leading study of the black concentration camps in the Boer War has documented 18,000 fatalities, and conservatively estimates that a minimum of 20,000 deaths actually occurred.³⁶ The study concludes:

Based on the experience with the black and white concentration camps from September 1900 until June 1901, and the high death rates in those camps which were much better equipped, the British Army must have known that there was a high risk of the thousands of deaths that followed. As long as these camps were no threat to the military or the white camps or communities, adequate medical intervention was not undertaken.³⁷

THE CONVENTIONAL WAR

The course of the war up to June 1900 can be quickly summarized. The Boers exploited their three-to-one numerical advantage to invade Natal in the east and Cape Colony in the west, hoping that early defeats would discourage the British and make them amenable to a negotiated settlement. The Boers in fact won a series of quick victories, but could not defeat the British decisively.³⁸ The first British counteroffensive in December was a failure and led to the replacement of Redvers Buller as Commander-in-Chief by Field Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts, assisted by General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum as chief of staff. With new leadership and a flood of new troops, the tide began to turn in Britain's favor.³⁹ The Boers suffered a key defeat at Paardeberg in late February: 4,000 men—roughly ten percent of the total Boer army—surrendered. One after another the key Boer towns fell: Roberts took Bloemfontein, the capital of

the Orange Free State, on 13 March and Johannesburg and Pretoria (the Transvaal capital) fell on 31 May and 5 June, respectively. The war appeared to be over, as 8,000 Transvaal burghers surrendered by the end of June, joining 6,000 of their Free State colleagues who likewise quit the war.⁴⁰ On 1 September Roberts annexed the South African Republic to Britain, then turned the situation over to his deputy Kitchener and returned to Britain on 28 November.

THE GUERRILLA WAR

The Boer defeats in February swept aside older generals like Cronjé and Joubert and brought to prominence a younger, more dynamic generation of leaders, including Louis Botha, Koos de la Rey, and Christiaan de Wet. At a war council on 20 March 1900, Boer commanders decided to continue the war, but de Wet in particular ‘urged the general abandonment of burdening wagon laagers which stunted speed, stifled flexibility, and offered too obvious a target for enemy guns.’⁴¹ Henceforth the Boer commandos would travel light and capitalize on their mobility and elusiveness to strike at isolated British outposts and lines of communication. De Wet previewed this campaign in mid-February by ambushing part of Roberts’ supply column of 200 wagons and 3,000 oxen at Waterval Drift. The British steam-roller depended on a lengthy logistical chain for supplies of food and ammunition.

As British forces used their superior numbers to overwhelm the defensive advantage of entrenchments and well-aimed rifle fire, the Boers increasingly abandoned set-piece confrontations with the British, breaking up into smaller units and mounting hit-and-run operations on the supply lines of Roberts’ army. De Wet scored a series of major successes in late March and early April against British installations and columns, but it was his attack on Roodewal station on 7 June that prompted Roberts—realizing the threat to his lines of

communication—to announce that houses in the vicinity of Boer attacks on rail and telegraph lines would be burned in retaliation. Furthermore, the British began to confiscate the property of Boer men on commando and force their families out ‘destitute and homeless.’⁴²

The last pitched battle of the war was fought at Bergendal (Belfast) on 27 August 1900. Possessing a four-to-one numerical advantage, British forces under Buller repeatedly smashed the Boer line until it finally cracked and the burghers took flight. This defeat confirmed to the Boer generals that only guerrilla tactics could persuade the British to come to terms: ‘These generals still clung to the hope that by prolonging hostilities they might sap Britain sufficiently to bring about an end to the war by negotiation, not by their having to succumb to a clear-cut imperial victory.’⁴³

THE FIRST BRITISH REACTION: SCORCHED EARTH

The first British response to the budding guerrilla campaign was to institute a policy of destroying the property of Boer men found to be on commando. Upon assuming command, Roberts initially pursued a conciliatory policy toward Boer combatants, promising in a proclamation dated 17 February 1900 that those who surrendered ‘will not be made to suffer in their persons or property on account of their having taken up arms in obedience to the order of their Government.’⁴⁴ Roberts repeated this offer on March 15, two days after occupying Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and still maintained as late as the end of May that commandos who capitulated would be allowed to return home.⁴⁵ The British press, however, roundly criticized Roberts’s amnesty policy as overly lenient; even members of the government began pushing for a harsher policy toward Boer noncombatants. Lord Lansdowne, in early 1900 still the Secretary of State for War (he would shortly become Prime Minister) and an early

exponent of a moderate policy, urged his military commander to adopt a sterner attitude in May: 'I think you were right to begin by showing great leniency. The impression created was good on this side and probably on yours except among the most violent partisans. But experience has shown that your confidence has been grossly abused and you will be supported if you insist on thorough going measures for disarming the suspect part of the population and if you inflict stern retribution where unfair advantage has been taken of your clemency.'⁴⁶

As the carrot of amnesty had little effect, and the Boers refused to capitulate even as the British captured their major towns, Roberts turned to the stick, issuing two further proclamations in quick succession. The first, published on 1 June, threatened 'all inhabitants ... who after 14 days from the date of this Proclamation ... may be found in arms against Her Majesty within the said colony, that they will be liable to be dealt with as rebels and to suffer in person and property accordingly.'⁴⁷ Two weeks later, Roberts threatened to take residents prisoner and burn their houses in areas where acts of sabotage were committed against British lines of communication.⁴⁸ 'It was a sign, officially,' notes Owen Coetzer, 'for an orgy of farm burning.'⁴⁹ As General Methuen commented in 1901, 'It became the custom first of all to burn farms from which a treacherous attack was made upon our troops, then to burn all the farms within a radius of ten miles from any point on the railway at which an attack was made by the enemy, then to confiscate or burn anything which was the property of any Boer fighting for his country.'⁵⁰

Two logics underpinned the new policy of devastation. The first logic was one of deterrence and coercion. According to Pakenham, 'The aim of farm burning was strictly military: to make an example of certain families, and so deter the others from aiding De Wet and the guerrillas.'⁵¹ The British hoped that by destroying the homes and farms of families known or suspected of providing assistance to the insurgents, the remainder would withhold their support

for fear of the consequences of being caught in the act. As Roberts described his policy in September 1900, 'I am not in favor of lessening the punishment laid down for any damage done to our railway and telegraph lines. Unless the people generally are made to suffer for misdeeds of those in arms against us the war will never end.'⁵²

As the year progressed and the farm-burning policy failed to curb Boer guerrilla activities, Roberts began to conceive of his strategy as that of a classic coercion-by-punishment campaign: a means to coerce the commandos into surrendering by inflicting suffering on their families. According to S.B. Spies, 'The policy of clearing the country also came to have a further object: to put pressure on the Boers in the field to surrender, by subjecting their dependents to certain hardships.'⁵³ 'The more difficulty the people experience about food,' Roberts argued in September, 'the sooner will the war be ended.'⁵⁴ British officers putting this policy into practice in the veldt apparently got the message: as one wrote to another, 'I gather that Lord Roberts decides to treat the remnant of the burgher forces as brigands and to devastate the country of supplies and to use the consequent starvation as a lever to bring the recalcitrant fanatics to their senses.'⁵⁵

Government officials in London explicitly approved of this rationale. Prime Minister Salisbury, in one of his few direct comments on the war, called for a harsher policy in a letter to the War Minister in December 1900: 'I do not like this protection of isolated hills. I should prefer to see a complete protection of lines and bridges; and then you ought to be able to destroy food with flying columns of considerable strength. You will not conquer these people until you have starved them out.'⁵⁶

Increasingly, however, the British tended to view all Boer civilians as active or potential guerrilla supporters: 'To the British every farm was an outpost; every Boer a spy.'⁵⁷ The second

logic of devastation, therefore, began to come to the fore: to make it impossible for the rebels to live off the land. If Boer civilians could not be deterred from aiding their menfolk, and the commandos could not be coerced by the suffering of their families, then the noncombatant population would have to be prevented physically from aiding the rebels.

The British first tried to turn the Boer republics into a barren landscape incapable of supporting human life. As described by Pakenham, 'Farm burning was designed to make guerrilla war impossible, and in certain areas it had already begun to achieve this. The Magalies valley was becoming a blackened desert, useless as a base for De la Rey's guerrillas, so efficient were Clements's columns at burning grain, seizing stock and trampling crops.'⁵⁸ Kitchener instructed his commanders in the field on 25 August to see to it that 'the country is so denuded of forage and supplies that no means of subsistence is left for any commando attempting to make incursions.'⁵⁹ 'According to this order,' writes Spies, 'clearing the country was not intended as a punishment for transgressions committed by the inhabitants. Its clearly enunciated aim was to prevent commandos from existing in the districts so cleared.'⁶⁰

The testimony of numerous war correspondents and British soldiers confirms the extent of the devastation. 'Along the line of march,' wrote the *Cape Times* correspondent, 'General Campbell has practically denuded the country of livestock and grain stores, whilst the sight of burning farmhouses and farm property is of daily occurrence.'⁶¹ One British officer recorded in September 1900 that:

the various columns that are now marching about the country are carrying on the work of destruction pretty indiscriminately, and we have burnt and destroyed by now many scores of farms. Ruin, with great hardships and want, which may ultimately border on starvation, must be the result to many families ... Our troops are everywhere at work burning and laying waste, and enormous reserves of famine and misery are being laid up for these countries in the future.'⁶²

British columns even began torching entire villages and towns for alleged complicity with Boer commandos.⁶³ Overall, British forces burnt in excess of 30,000 Boer farms and 40 towns over the course of the conflict, and killed or confiscated millions of head of livestock.⁶⁴

In the short term, these severe policies undercut British objectives as much as they aided them. Nearly 20,000 Boer commandos surrendered in mid-1900, but farm-burning undoubtedly caused an unknown number to remain in—or return to—the field. In the opinion of many British officers, the scorched earth strategy was counterproductive and prolonged the war: as one officer wrote, ‘The Burgher out on Commando is bound always to his farm ... by burning it and sending his family packing, we are only making him a roving desperado, consumed with hatred.’⁶⁵ Other officers noted that ‘‘excessive’ destructiveness would only end up benefiting the enemy cause by keeping combatants in the field ... because they no longer had homesteads and a fixed family to which to go.’⁶⁶ In fact, many men fighting for the Boer cause expressed exactly these sentiments: one German volunteer noted in his diary that ‘the burnings were benefiting the Boer cause, since those who no longer had homes could no longer go home.’⁶⁷ S.B. Spies concludes that ‘many men were remaining on commando because they were homeless as a result of their farms having been burnt.’⁶⁸

Nor did the farm-burning policy reduce the number of attacks on British lines of communication, which increased from June to November 1900. ‘It cannot therefore be said,’ writes Spies, ‘that the burning of farms was an effective deterrent against attacks on communications.’⁶⁹ The British Army’s reign of fire, therefore, breathed renewed life into the flagging Boer cause: 8,000 or 9,000 commandos were back in the field by October 1900.⁷⁰

Over the longer term, however, the wholesale destruction visited upon the veldt paid handsome dividends. The farm-burning policy without question deeply embittered the Boers

against the British, but it clearly diminished their capability to continue fighting. As historian Byron Farwell remarks, 'it [farm-burning] did not lessen their will to resist, only their means for doing so.' Farwell elaborates: 'Kitchener's policy of deliberate wholesale destruction was intended to deprive the guerrillas of supplies, and in this he was successful. Even De Wet, ever scornful of British tactics, admitted that "had not the English burnt the corn by the thousand sacks, the war could have been continued."'71

At the peace negotiations in Vereeniging in 1902, Boer leaders summed up the six main reasons the war must be ended. The scorched-earth policy figured prominently: 'Firstly ... the military policy pursued by the British military authorities has led to the general devastation of the territory of both Republics by the burning down of farms and towns, by the destruction of all means of existence, and by the exhausting of all resources required for the maintenance of our families, the existence of our armies, and the continuation of the war.'72

The Boers' plight was particularly severe in the Heilbron district of the Orange Free State and in eleven districts in eastern and southeastern Transvaal. When Boer military leaders met to discuss surrender at Vereeniging, it became clear that these districts would have to be abandoned in order to continue the war. The upshot of such a move for Boer military prospects was clear: 'During the peace talks Louis Botha repeated the argument of P.R. Viljoen, namely that if the Boers were compelled to give up eleven districts because of food shortages, as was bound to happen soon, they would have to concentrate their forces and thus enable the enemy to do the same, with disastrous consequences for the Boer forces.'73 The British scorched-earth policy was thus gradually constricting the area within which Boer commandos could operate, thereby eliminating the main Boer advantages of mobility and elusiveness. Defeat looked inevitable.

Farm-burning—while provoking increased Boer resistance in the short term—played a significant role in defeating the commandos in the long run. The most authoritative study of the impact of the war on noncombatants supports this conclusion, finding that ‘considerations which flowed out of the British policy of clearing the country of supplies played an important part in swaying the Boer scales in favor of peace.’⁷⁴

THE SECOND BRITISH RESPONSE: CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The British strategy of farm-burning gave rise to the policy of confining Boer civilians to camps in order to prevent them from providing aid and comfort to the commandos. The concentration camp system apparently began as a means to cope with the increasing numbers of Boer women and children being rendered homeless as the British Army burned down their houses. While there was some talk of forcing the Boer commandos to care for these unfortunates, and Roberts did send 2,500 civilians to the Boer lines in eastern Transvaal in July 1900, British commanders realized something had to be done with these people lest they starve right there on the veldt.⁷⁵

Here lies the terrible irony of the concentration camps: these compounds, which ended up killing so many innocents, were founded at least partially for a humanitarian purpose. According to Emily Hobhouse, who became an outspoken critic of the camps, ‘Humanity forbade, at this stage a continuance of the practice of their [Boer women and children] being left outside their ruined houses, and so it came to pass that they were brought in by convoys and placed in small camps which had been established for refugees.’⁷⁶ Of course, as Coetzer points out, the British themselves caused the calamity they sought to remedy: ‘It was Britain’s “humanitarian desire” to safeguard the women and children which brought about the establishment of the camps. That

they (Britain) had in the first place been responsible for the destruction of the farms escaped them entirely.’⁷⁷

The humanitarian impulse that spawned the camps was accompanied and soon superseded by a military rationale. ‘The concentration camps were, in fact, established for military reasons’ to deny supplies to the Boers, according to Spies. ‘A further military consideration governing the policy of clearing the population into concentration camps was the belief that if the women were taken away from their homes, men on commando would surrender so that they could join them in the camps.’⁷⁸ The first camps to accommodate the displaced Boer women and children—many of whom did not consent to their confinement (which renders the term ‘refugee’ camp used by the British a misnomer)—were established at Bloemfontein and Pretoria in September 1900. The population of these and other camps began to balloon in early 1901 when Kitchener launched a series of drives ‘to flush the guerrillas out ... and to sweep the country bare of everything that could give sustenance to the guerrillas: not only horses, but cattle, sheep, women, and children.’⁷⁹

The ‘first priority’ of this round-up of ‘undesirables’—as the dependents of Boer combatants were known—was to ‘prevent the guerrillas being helped by civilians’: ‘Kitchener felt that once the Boer women and children were gathered in camps the burghers on commando would no longer be able to get food from the women on the farms. He also believed that the burghers would lay down their arms in order to be reunited with their families.’⁸⁰ This sweep was largely completed by autumn 1901, by which time 34 camps held about 110,000 Boer civilians.⁸¹ It should be noted that Kitchener informed the government of his intentions in December 1900: ‘The Cabinet fully agreed with the proposed policy and [British High

Commissioner in South Africa] Milner did not at the time or shortly after the inception of the scheme raise any objection.’⁸²

In choosing to intern Boer women and children, Roberts and Kitchener seized upon the example provided by Spanish General Valeriano Weyler in putting down the Cuban insurrection of 1895-98.⁸³ Weyler was widely condemned during that conflict for herding Cuba’s rural inhabitants into camps (known as *reconcentrados*) and then systematically devastating the countryside to deprive the rebels of recruits and supplies.⁸⁴ The inadequate provisioning and deficient sanitation of the *reconcentrados*, however, made them breeding grounds for disease, which eventually killed between 100,000 and 300,000 Cuban civilians.⁸⁵ According to Stanley Payne, ‘Most of the suffering in the reconcentraciones was caused by the Army’s inability to care for the needs of the relocated population rather than by a Spanish policy of violence or cruelty.’⁸⁶ The fact that the British were well aware of these tactics and their deadly outcome is shown by calls in the London press for the ‘Weyler method’ to be applied to the South African conflict.⁸⁷

The effect of the confinement of their women and children to concentration camps—and the high mortality suffered there—is evident in the statements of Boer leaders. Schalk Burger, for example, acting President of Transvaal, argued that it was ‘not the arms of the enemy which directly compelled us to surrender, but another sword which they had stretched out over us—namely, the sword of hunger and nakedness, and what weighed most heavily of all, the awful mortality amongst our women and children in the Concentration Camps.’⁸⁸ Another Boer commando noted that ‘more than 2,000 women and children die per month in the camps, and if we prosecute the struggle without hope, we become accessories to their death.’⁸⁹

Some scholars disagree with this assessment, arguing that the suffering inflicted on their loved ones in the camps contributed to many Boers' resolve to resist the British to the bitter end.⁹⁰ This may be true, but there is no question that the removal of civilians from the veldt combined with the wholesale destruction of livestock and other foodstuffs rendered the prospects of continued defiance nearly hopeless. One must also take into consideration the real fears of national extinction raised by the 'high civilian mortality' in the concentration camps, which had a 'devastating impact ... on the morale of republican leadership ... it seemed to be threatening the very reproductive future of the Boer people.'⁹¹ The Boers, according to Pakenham, were faced with a terrible choice: 'Negotiate now ... and ... keep the volk together as a nation. Fight on, and the volk will die (or suffer a fate worse than death). The threat was not only to the lives of individuals, but to the continued existence of the nation.'⁹²

In combination, the three aspects of British counterinsurgency strategy—obliterating Boer sources of supply through farm-burning, crop destruction, and killing of livestock; preventing the sympathetic Boer civilians from helping the rebels by removing the population to concentration camps; and driving the Boer commandos against blockhouse and barbed-wire barriers with flying columns—proved effective. British columns swept the country clean of anything that could support human life, and 'by constricting available territory and penning in the enemy Kitchener gradually countered the Boers' evasive warfare.'⁹³

These factors—supplemented by a growing threat from their African neighbors, no hope of a rising by the Cape Boers, and a growing number (over 5,000) of Boer converts to the British cause (raising the prospect of civil war)—convinced the 20,000 so-called 'bitter-enders' that the war must end.

HYPOTHESES ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE AS A COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

As discussed earlier, the literature on civilian victimization in guerrilla insurgency maintains that discriminate violence targeted at specific individuals based on their actions or loyalties is more effective than indiscriminate violence. Targeted violence against enemy collaborators or traitors who switch sides is doubly effective because it delivers a very personal message to observers that cooperating with the enemy will be punished. It also communicates that refraining from collaboration with the adversary will gain people immunity from violence. If these threats and promises are sufficiently credible, the logical thing to do is collaborate with the side that can deliver them.

In addition to a deterrence function, discriminate massacres also eliminate actual enemy infrastructure. As Arreguín-Toft notes, ‘Barbarism works as a COIN [counterinsurgency] strategy because by attacking either or both of the essential elements of a GWS [guerrilla warfare strategy]—sanctuary and social assistance—it destroys an adversary’s capacity to fight.’⁹⁴

Where the existing literature errs, however, is arguing that *only* discriminate violence can be effective. As Kalyvas observes, indiscriminate killing in an environment of divided sovereignty may increase rather than decrease the likelihood of defection, since defecting increases the individual’s chance of survival and fulfills their desire for revenge. When one side makes it impossible for the civilian population to help the opposition by killing or imprisoning the people, however, defection is no longer an option. People might still prefer to help the rebels, but are unable to because they are either dead or in jail. To the extent that such a policy is possible, therefore, it is likely to be more effective than a strategy that kills large numbers of people randomly in order to deter the survivors from supporting the insurgents.

There exist several conditions under which indiscriminate victimization of civilians fulfills this interdiction/denial function. First, indiscriminate violence is more effective the smaller the underlying civilian population. Why, for example, was the indiscriminate violence employed by the British Army in South Africa so effective at defeating the Boer insurgency, whereas German victimization of noncombatants in the Soviet Union backfired and increased the size and strength of the partisans? One answer is that indiscriminate violence is more effective when the civilian population that the insurgents draw their support from is small. It was actually possible for the British to round up almost the entire Boer (and African) population in the Transvaal and Orange Free State and intern it, thereby simply preventing the people from providing any aid to the guerrillas, whereas this was never a feasible strategy for the Germans in Russia. The smaller the population, therefore, the more plausible it is to kill or completely isolate it, and thus the more effective large-scale civilian victimization can be.

It is important to note the differential effectiveness of British farm-burning early in the war as opposed to farm-burning and concentration later in the war. As long as the British made no attempt to control the Boer population, indiscriminate devastation had the usual counterproductive effect: it intensified the Boers' will to resist and prompted many Boer men who had surrendered to return to battle. Devastation in combination with a policy of interning the population, however, not only destroyed the food supply, it also removed the option of defection: Boer civilians could not help the rebels even if they wanted to. This deadly combination is only possible when the population is small enough to seize in its entirety.

Second, indiscriminate violence in guerrilla wars is likely to be more effective the smaller the size of the geographic area comprising the theater of battle. The logic is simple: If people have nowhere to run, then it is easier to hunt them down and kill or intern them. In the Boer

example, the territory of the two Boer republics was already small, and the British Army's scorched earth policy progressively shrank the area in which Boer commandos could operate and still support themselves. Italy's repression of the Sanusi rebellion in Cyrenaica in the 1920s was partly accomplished by concentrating the tribes of the region in camps, a task facilitated by the small size of the region in which the rebels operated. It also helped that the population in question only consisted of about 100,000 people. Similarly, in the Philippines (1899-1902), American troops relied on concentration camps to dry up the water in which the Filipino insurgents were swimming, a task aided in no small measure by the fact that the fighting occurred on small, isolated islands.

Third, indiscriminate violence is more likely to be effective—or less likely to backfire—when the insurgency is denied sanctuary and is cut off from external sources of supply. Population concentration and/or large-scale killing, I have argued, is best conceived of as a brutal method of 'draining the sea,' preventing the insurgents from obtaining needed supplies from civilians. If the rebels have sanctuary across a border in another state, or an open supply line from a third party, draining the domestic sea can only partially sever the insurgents' ability to obtain supplies and continue to fight. Vietcong sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, for example, as well as the Americans' inability to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail from North Vietnam, contributed to difficulties US forces experienced defeating the South Vietnamese insurgency. In South Africa, by contrast, the Boers were trapped between British-controlled territory on three sides and territory inhabited by hostile African tribes with a history of conflict with the Boers. Similarly, the Italians cut the only Sanusi supply line from Egypt, which enhanced the effectiveness of their attempt to drain the sea in Cyrenaica.

Other states have achieved notable success in this regard: in the French-Algerian War (1954-62), French forces constructed the Morice Line along the Tunisian border, which succeeded in almost completely isolating *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) fighters inside Algeria from their comrades outside the country. Unbeknownst to many, the French also emptied the countryside, relocating over two million people—one-third of the entire rural population—to concentration camps.⁹⁵ These policies aided the French in gaining the upper hand over the FLN by the war's later years.

Finally, indiscriminate violence is likely to be more effective than selective violence when the population is solidly committed to the insurgents' cause. Kalyvas argues that all civilians—no matter what their prior ideological commitments, if any—give their support to the actor whose coercive threats are most credible, that is, the actor who controls the area militarily. Yet we know this to be untrue empirically, at least in some cases. In South Africa, Boer civilians failed to rally to the British side, forcing the British to detain them. Similarly, in Cyrenaica, even people nominally working for the Italians would often aid the rebels, and the Italian command eventually perceived the population as being wholly sympathetic to the insurgents. Certainly the pattern of violence in Darfur since 2003 does not suggest that the Sudanese government and its Janjaweed militia allies are differentiating among African civilians and only singling out certain tribes for violent expulsion. On the contrary, this is a case of draining the sea through indiscriminate ethnic cleansing of the population rather than concentration, similar to what occurred in Kosovo in 1999.⁹⁶

When a group of civilians is strongly committed by virtue of ethnicity or ideology to an insurgency, targeted violence may be insufficient to deter it from supporting the guerrillas. Indeed, selective violence may only infuriate group members and make them more determined to

resist. In such situations, rare though they may be, massive applications of violence in support of a strategy of rendering the group incapable of supporting the insurgents might prove more effective.

CONCLUSION

Indiscriminate violence against civilians can be effective in defeating guerrilla insurgencies under certain—relatively restrictive—conditions. When the population from which the guerrillas draw support is relatively small, the land area in which the insurgents operate is similarly constricted, and external sanctuary and supply is not available, governments have been able to strangle rebel movements with indiscriminate violence. In these circumstances, it is possible to sever completely the insurgents' ability to receive supplies and information from the population, rendering the guerrillas incapable of continuing the war.

Killing (or imprisoning) the population is not the only way—and certainly not the most desirable way from a normative point of view—to defeat a guerrilla insurgency. Targeted violence, as noted above, is more efficacious in circumstances where the incumbent is not able to control the whole population physically. Less violent methods can also be successful when an insurgency is very weak.

One question I have not addressed here, for example, is the following: indiscriminate violence 'worked' in the Boer case in the sense that the British won the war, but would a less violent strategy have worked better or defeated the Boers in a shorter amount of time? This question is all the more interesting because some of the conditions under which I hypothesize indiscriminate violence will be effective seem similar to the conditions that would enable a 'civic action' or 'oil spot' strategy to work.⁹⁷ Given the Boers' strong nationalism and the nearly

unanimous support the commandos enjoyed among the population, it is hard to envision a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign having much success. Still, the possibility of there being multiple paths to counterinsurgent success is an intriguing one that begs further research.

Analysts often point to the pacification of Malaya by British forces in the 1950s as a model for how to win guerrilla wars humanely. The insurgency in Malaya was based in the small (less than one million) ethnic Chinese population, and even among the Chinese support for the rebels was far from unanimous: the rebels may have had as few as 50,000 supporters.⁹⁸ For this reason, the rebel movement never counted more than a few thousand fighters. British and allied forces were able to segregate the population and deny the rebels access to their popular base without the widespread use of violence. Still, suppressing the rebellion took hundreds of thousands of security personnel ten years to accomplish. Even in the most promising of circumstances, therefore, low-violence counterinsurgent strategies are very expensive and time consuming.

The situation the US-led coalition faces in Iraq today does not bode well for any type of counterinsurgency strategy. Leaving aside questions of morality, the Sunni population is probably too numerous for indiscriminate violence to do anything but backfire and produce further anger. Discriminate violence is not possible without high quality information, which in most cases the US does not have. Finally, US troop levels are too low to implement a true oil-spot strategy. Worse, such a strategy would probably cause violence against civilians to increase rather than decrease because it would entail recruiting village militia from local populations, which would prompt the insurgents to target actual and potential defectors.

NOTES

¹ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,' *International Security* 26/1 (2001) pp.93-128; Alexander B. Downes, 'Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: The Causes of Civilian Victimization in War,' *International Security* 30/4 (2006) pp.152-95; and Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, "'Draining the Sea": Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,' *International Organization* 58/2 (2004) pp.375-407.

² On the causes of violence against civilians in war, in addition to the works in note 1, see Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,' *Rationality and Society*, 11/3 (1999) pp.243-85; Kalyvas, 'The Logic of Terrorism in Civil War,' *Journal of Ethics* 8/1 (2004) pp.98-137; Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge UP, 2005); and Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge UP, 2006).

³ Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996). See also Michael Horowitz and Dan Reiter, 'When Does Aerial Bombing Work? Quantitative Empirical Tests, 1917-1999,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45/2 (2001) pp.147-73.

⁴ Robert A. Pape, 'Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work,' *International Security* 22/2 (1997) pp.90-136.

⁵ Caleb Carr, *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare against Civilians* (New York: Random House, 2002). See also Ivan Arreguín-Toft, 'The [F]utility of Barbarism: Assessing the Impact of the Systematic Harm of Non-Combatants in War,' paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, August 2003.

⁶ Arreguín-Toft (note 1); Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge UP, 2003); Robert A. Pape, 'The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,' *American Political Science Review* 97/3 (2003) pp.343-61; and Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005). For a contrary view on the effectiveness of terrorism, see Max Abrahms, 'Why Terrorism Does Not Work,' *International Security* 31/2 (2006) pp.42-78.

⁷ Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Kalyvas, 'Wanton and Senseless?' (note 2), and 'Logic of Terrorism in Civil War' (note 2).

⁸ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949) p.173; Kalyvas 'Wanton and Senseless?' (note 2) p.264.

⁹ Tom Marks, 'Making Revolution: *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 3/1 (1992) p.43 (italics in original).

¹⁰ Kalyvas, 'Logic of Terror' (note 2) p.100.

¹¹ For a detailed examination of these dynamics, see Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

¹² Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 207.

¹³ Kalyvas, 'Logic of Terror' (note 2) p.105; see also Kalyvas, 'Wanton and Senseless?' (note 2) p.251.

¹⁴ Kalyvas, 'Wanton and Senseless?' (note 2) p.251.

¹⁵ Kalyvas, 'Logic of Terror' (note 2) p.105 (italics in original).

¹⁶ Matthew Cooper, *The Nazi War Against Soviet Partisans, 1941-1944* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979) p.20.

¹⁷ Christian Streit, 'Soviet Prisoners in the Hands of the Wehrmacht,' in Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (ed.) *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II, 1941-1944* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000). A total of 3.2 million Soviet POWs died in German captivity during World War II.

¹⁸ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003) pp.304-05, p.408.

¹⁹ Quoted in Cooper, *Nazi War* p.49.

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.* p.51 and p.52, respectively.

²¹ Quoted in *ibid.* p.27; *ibid.* p.49. German indiscriminate reprisal massacres had similar effects elsewhere; for the Greek experience, see Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993).

²² Kalyvas, 'Logic of Terror' (note 2) pp.130-33.

²³ *Ibid.* pp.133-34.

²⁴ Quote is from Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) p.107; judgment of efficacy is from Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi of Cyrenaica* p.188.

²⁵ On camp mortality for whites and blacks, see, respectively, Fransjohan Pretorius, 'The Anglo-Boer War: An Overview,' in Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.) *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2001) p.21, and Stowell V. Kessler, 'The Black and Coloured Concentration Camps,' in *ibid.* p.148.

²⁶ For a first-hand description of the camps in the first few months of 1900, see Emily Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* (London: Methuen & Co., 1902) pp.114-25.

²⁷ Fransjohan Pretorius, 'The Fate of the Boer Women and Children,' in *Scorched Earth* (note 25) p.46.

²⁸ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Post Road Press, 1979) p.523. See also S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1977) p.199.

²⁹ Owen Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky: The Destruction of the Orange Free State 1899-1902* (Weltevreden Park: Covos-Day Books, 2000) p.116.

³⁰ One problem was that the number of camps did not increase with the number of people confined there: 27 camps held 35,000 people in March 1901, whereas 34 camps held 110,000 six months later. Pretorius, 'Fate of the Boer Women and Children' (note 27) p.49.

³¹ *Ibid.* p.44; and Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.548.

³² Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.524. At one point Kitchener even considered deporting the entire Boer population to some remote location, such as the Dutch East Indies, Fiji, or Madagascar. *Ibid.* p.530.

³³ *Ibid.* pp.515-16. His restrained views on how the war should be conducted did not extend to the terms Milner thought Britain should exact from the Boers, as he insisted on unconditional surrender. Kitchener blamed the High Commissioner for repeatedly torpedoing his efforts to negotiate a moderate peace. Paradoxically, therefore, the architect of the concentration camp system in South Africa sought a reasonable peace of conciliation, whereas the champion of humane conduct while fighting pursued a punitive peace.

³⁴ Stowell V. Kessler, 'The Black and Coloured Concentration Camps,' in *Scorched Earth* (note 25) p.135, p.137.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp.149-52.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.148.

³⁷ Ibid. pp.151-52.

³⁸ The British had about 20,000 of these were in South Africa, whereas the combined armies of the Orange Free State and Transvaal numbered approximately 55-60,000 men. For these figures, see Bill Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902* (London: Arnold, 1999) p.61, p.68.

³⁹ British troops in South Africa totaled 180,000 by early 1900. Ibid. p.149.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.183. The British captured a further 4,500 commandos under Marthinus Prinsloo in mid-July. These men became known to commandos who continued to fight as *Hensoppers*, or ‘hands-uppers.’

⁴¹ Ibid. p.167. Importantly, this shows that the Boer decision to pursue guerrilla warfare preceded the British scorched earth policy, which did not begin until June 1900. Thus, while farm burning probably drove many Boers back into the field, as discussed below, it did not cause the decision to continue the war.

⁴² A British public notice issued in Krugersdorp on 9 July 1900, reproduced in Fransjohan Pretorius, ‘The Anglo-Boer War: An Overview’ (note 25) p.22.

⁴³ Nasson, *South African War* (note 38) p.193.

⁴⁴ Roberts’s first proclamation, quoted in Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* (note 26) p.2.

⁴⁵ The March proclamation was more carefully worded, and specified more conditions that would have to be met before a former commando received amnesty. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.34. The May announcement further omitted the guarantee that Boers who surrendered would be able to keep their property.

⁴⁶ Lansdowne, quoted in *ibid.* p.50.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.88.

⁴⁸ For the text of this proclamation, see Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.102. Roberts further decreed in September that following an attack on rail or telegraph communications, all foodstuffs within a 16km (10 mile) radius would be destroyed, and further in October that all farm houses in the same area should be burned. Pretorius, ‘The Fate of the Boer Women and Children’ (note 27) p.39; and Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.110.

⁴⁹ Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.88.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *ibid.* p.91.

⁵¹ Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.467. At the beginning, therefore, farm-burning belongs in Kalyvas’s category of discriminate violence, constituting a mild form of Valentino’s counterterror strategy. On the latter, see Valentino, *Final Solutions* (note 2) pp.211-13.

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- ⁵² Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.112.
- ⁵³ Ibid. p.121.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in ibid. p.122.
- ⁵⁵ General Hunter to General Bruce Hamilton, 29 September 1900, quoted in ibid. p.122.
- ⁵⁶ Quoted in ibid. p.175.
- ⁵⁷ Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.87.
- ⁵⁸ Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.500-01.
- ⁵⁹ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.120.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. p.120.
- ⁶¹ Quoted in Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.94.
- ⁶² Captain March Phillipps, quoted in Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* (note 26) p.20.
- ⁶³ British troops under General Hunter, for example, burned 45 houses in Bothaville, a town in northwestern Orange River Colony (formerly the Orange Free State) on 23 October 1900. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.119.
- ⁶⁴ Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.105; Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.608; and André Wessels, 'Afrikaners at War,' in John Gooch (ed.) *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image* (London: Frank Cass, 2000) p.101. Following the war, Boers filed 63,000 claims for damage compensation with their new government. Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.608.
- ⁶⁵ Quoted in Nasson, *South African War* (note 38) p.192.
- ⁶⁶ Quoted in ibid. p.192.
- ⁶⁷ Quoted in Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando During the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1999) p.332.
- ⁶⁸ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.285.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. p.114.
- ⁷⁰ Nasson, *South African War* (note 38) p.192.
- ⁷¹ Byron Farwell, *The Great Boer War* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999) p.372, p.371.
- ⁷² Rayne Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War* (London: Cassell, 1959) pp.503-04.
- ⁷³ Pretorius, *Life on Commando* (note 67) p.339.
- ⁷⁴ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.287.

⁷⁵ On Roberts's expulsion of Boer civilians, see Pretorius, 'Fate of the Boer Women and Children' (note 27) p.39. After burning the town of Ventersdorp, British General Bruce Hamilton declared: 'The Boer women and children who are left behind should apply to the Boer commandants for food, who will supply them unless they wish to see them starve. No supplies will be sent from the railway to the town.' Quoted in Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.93.

⁷⁶ Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell* (note 26) p.37.

⁷⁷ Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.107.

⁷⁸ Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.188.

⁷⁹ Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.522.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.523; see also Pretorius, 'Fate of the Boer Women and Children' (note 27) p.41.

⁸¹ Pretorius, 'Fate of the Boer Women and Children' (note 27) p.44.

⁸² Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.190.

⁸³ Kitchener also copied Weyler's system of covering the country with closely-connected blockhouses to deny the rebels free movement.

⁸⁴ Indeed, the extent of the outcry over 'Butcher' Weyler's methods contributed to American intervention and the resulting Spanish-American War.

⁸⁵ Pretorius, 'Fate of the Boer Women and Children' (note 27) p.43. Disease also exacted a heavy toll from the Spanish expeditionary forces.

⁸⁶ Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford UP, 1967) p.74.

⁸⁷ Coetzer, *Fire in the Sky* (note 29) p.115.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism* (note 28) p.284.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 289. Boers on commando did not know that mortality in the camps had declined by early 1902.

⁹⁰ Pretorius, *Life on Commando* (note 67) p.332.

⁹¹ Nasson, *South African War* (note 38) p.223.

⁹² Pakenham, *Boer War* (note 28) p.602. This threat also applied to the 12,000 to 14,000 women and children who remained on the veldt (the British began refusing entry to the camps in December 1901) and faced ever deteriorating conditions.

⁹³ Nasson, *South African War* (note 38) p.212. Contributing to this constriction of space was the denial to the Boers of a territorial sanctuary outside of their republics that historically has been so essential for the waging of successful guerrilla campaigns.

⁹⁴ Arreguin-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars' (note 1) p.109.

⁹⁵ Keith Sutton, 'Population Resettlement—Traumatic Upheavals and the Algerian Experience,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 15/2 (1977) p.286.

⁹⁶ On the Kosovo case, see Kelly M. Greenhill, 'The Use of Refugees as Political and Military Weapons in the Kosovo Conflict,' in Raju G.C. Thomas (ed.) *Yugoslavia Unraveled: Sovereignty, Self-Determination, Intervention* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003) pp.203-42.

⁹⁷ On these strategies, see Valentino, *Final Solutions* (note 2) pp.205-06, and Andrew F. Krepinevich, 'How to Win in Iraq,' *Foreign Affairs* 84/5 (2005) pp.87-104.

⁹⁸ Valentino, *Final Solutions* (note 2) p.229, p.304 (n.187).