Before *Small Wars*: Early Thoughts on the Strategy of Colonial Warfare and Their Relevance

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the British precursors to C. E. Callwell's *Small Wars* and their prevailing views on the strategic dimensions of colonial warfare. It examines how the interplay between the theory of regular warfare and the practice of irregular operations contributed to shaping the emerging theory of small wars. Finally, it addresses the use of indiscriminate violence and its strategic rationale in managing the asymmetries inherent in wars of imperial conquest and pacification, highlighting the continuities between earlier small wars and modern counterinsurgency in the application of such violence.

KEYWORDS

Callwell; logistics; Wolsely; small wars; strategy

A Summary of Past Experience

Charles Edward Callwell's *Small Wars* has been credited with representing the starting point of the British approach to counterinsurgency and, more generally, with enshrining lessons of enduring validity for modern asymmetrical warfare.[1] It can be contended, though, that the treatise serves more as a recapitulation of the era of imperial wars of conquest than as the main intellectual foundation for further theorizing on COIN warfare. Of the three classes of conflicts encompassed by the term "small wars" as defined by Callwell, only that of "campaigns for the subjugation of insurrections, for the repression of lawlessness, or the pacification of territories conquered or annexed" stands as the likely antecedent of counterinsurgency operations as these are currently understood.[2]

Callwell indeed took care to point out that campaigns of conquest and annexation often passed through two distinct stages, the second represented by operations to stamp out a

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diffuse resistance made "of ambushes and surprises, of murdered stragglers and of stern reprisals."[3] While such an observation blurs the boundaries between the aforementioned classes of campaigns, this second stage, made of counter-guerrilla operations, still differs significantly, with regard to the prevailing political circumstances, from the subsequent British experience of counterinsurgency warfare during the second half of the 20th century. Callwell's operations of pacification brought about the stabilization of the imperial edifices, leading the colonial expansion, while the majority of the internal conflicts between "insurgent groups and counter-insurgent security forces," on the rise after the end of the Second World War, are understood to have originated "in decolonization, in the global process of empire disintegration.[4] Therefore, the fundamental outlines of counterinsurgency operations in these two distinct periods might be perceived as analogous because, as stressed by Carl von Clausewitz, war has a grammar of its own: tactics converge while, as for the logic of war, the political aims dictating the nature and course of these conflicts differ between the historical phase of imperial conquest and that of decolonization.[5]

In countering the notion of "an apparent absence of any formal doctrine" shining through the British colonial operations of the period, Simon Anglim stressed how Callwell, in his effort to provide a strategic and tactical summary of colonial warfare, actually "reflected prevailing opinion as much as influenced it".[6] The array of experiences shaping the composition of *Small Wars* is notoriously wide, although together with the practical knowledge gained by the British Army on the various colonial battlefields, two major focal points could be singled out: the seminal importance of the French experience, chiefly represented by Hoche in Vendée and Bugeaud in Algeria and Callwell's enduring interest in the Russian operations in Central Asia.[7] The British experience in small wars, however, was not purely empirical: even though in campaigning in Africa and India "the experience of one war often was reversed by the next,"[8] thereby hindering the formulation of a comprehensive theory, there was already a consensus on a series of principles conveyed by a body of literature Callwell drew upon extensively.

Small Wars as an Art by Itself

Even though he resorted to a term such as *small wars* which, by his admission, he was not entirely satisfied with—a loose label denoting "in default of a better, operations of regular armies against irregular, or comparatively speaking irregular, forces"[9]—Callwell is credited with being the first to have recognized small wars as a branch of the military art separate from conventional war, thus striving to "demonstrate that small wars should be accorded a professional status equal, if not superior to, continental soldiering."[10] According to his famous dictum, "the conduct of small wars is in fact in certain respects an art by itself, diverging widely from what is adapted to the conditions of regular warfare, but not so widely that there are not in all its branches points which permit comparisons to be established".[11]

Such a stance was hardly original: Garnet Wolseley had already spoken of "savage warfare" as "an art in itself", going as far as to declare that "almost all our colonial misfortunes during the reign of Queen Victoria, are to be accounted for by the fact that we have attempted to fight great warlike native races with the same formal tactics as those which succeeded at Waterloo».[12] Therefore, it can be concluded that the kind of regular warfare small wars had to depart from, while retaining some of its principles of enduring validity,

was the sort of post-Napoleonic warfare expounded by the Archduke Charles, William F. P. Napier and especially Antoine de Jomini; and summarized in Great Britain by textbooks such as MacDougall's *The Theory of War* and, chiefly, Hamley's hugely influential *The Operations of War*.[13] Albeit without being dogmatic, Patrick L. MacDougall and Edward B. Hamley were rather conservative interpreters of the Jominian thought. In *The Theory of War* the principles of war pinpointed by the author amounted to three fundamental rules, reflecting a strict focus on the operational level of strategy: "to places masses of your army in contact with fractions of your enemy"; "to operate as much as possible on the communications of your enemy without exposing your own"; "to operate always on interior lines".[14] Of these principles, Hamley would offer a more articulate and detailed discussion, for example, illustrating, by means of an analysis of the 1849 campaign of Novara, the advantage for an army to operate "on a front perpendicular to the line communicating with its base" instead of parallel to it.[15] The fact that this very same analysis—quoted *verbatim* by Luvaas because paradigmatic of Hamley's approach—has already been cited by Reginald da Costa Porter in his 1881 essay demonstrates its influence on British strategic thinking in the 1870s and 1880s.[16]

Da Costa Porter's "Warfare against Uncivilized Races" can lay claim to the distinction of being the first comprehensive British essay dedicated to the realities and specific exigencies of colonial warfare. Although it is overwhelmingly rooted in the experience of the Zulu War of 1879—the only campaign the author took part in before his untimely demise in 1882[17]—it stands apart from the histories of single campaigns, such as Brackenbury's semi-official history of the Ashanti War and Rothwell's official narrative of the Zulu War, insofar as it attempts to identify "certain main principles" common to all campaigns "which may serve as guides in future cases".[18] It is also safe to assume that Da Costa Porter's approach, albeit carefully eschewing any criticism of the strategic orthodoxy of the day, exemplifies the process of building a theory of small wars by deducing from regular warfare principles those that could still be applied to irregular warfare, linking them up with the lessons learned on the battlefield: this process would be crowned by the publication of Callwell's *Small Wars*. In such a fashion, the author first made mention of the disadvantage of operating on a front parallel to one's own line of communication, stressing that, to a certain extent, this was the case with the 3rd Column stationed at Helpmekaar and depending upon the Helpmekaar-Durban line, whose Greytown-Helpmekaar section ran parallel to the Zulu boundary.[19] Then, he took care in highlighting that in savage warfare the enemy had "usually […] no fixed whereabouts" and he was "almost entirely independent of lines of communication", which made "his movements freed from the restraint of civilized armies".[20] This trait had profound implications, not only for offensive, making a futile exercise out of any attempt of maneuvering in order to threaten the enemy communications:[21] "protect[ing] our line of communications from attack" carried out by an enemy endowed with such a latitude of movement was "frequently impossible" as well.[22] Therefore, the analysis proposed by these first theorists of colonial warfare tentatively moved back and forth between two poles: the reassurance that even in "the peculiar conditions of campaigns in savage countries, many of the ordinary rules of warfare do still apply in the majority of cases"; and, as Wolseley put it, the fact that "the theory of war as we learn it from books is an excellent servant, but to him who obeys its orders literally it is often the falsest and most fatal of masters."

The Capture of Whatever They Prize Most

Hamley had observed that "whenever the *causa belli* is something less definite and tangible than disputed territory […] the acquisition of some material guarantee can alone be expected to bring the adversary to terms. That guarantee is generally sought in an enemy's capital" because "the occupation of its chief city paralyses a civilized country". True to the Napoleonic lesson, though, Hamley stressed that the mere possession of the enemy capital was not enough, and that a collapse of the enemy resistance was to be expected only when "the seizure of the capital is coupled with such ascendancy over the defensive armies […] that further resistance is felt to be hopeless".[23] But what to do, wondered Da Costa Porter—glossing Hamley obliquely—when faced, in a colonial context, with "the absence of a capital of prime importance to the country and "the peculiar nature of the enemy's army, which generally makes it quite impossible to ensure driving it before us"?[24]

On an operational level, the absence of organized bodies of regular soldiers occupying key positions in the theatre of war meant that there were no flanks, strictly speaking, which could be overturned, and as for a supposed outflanking movement, the already stressed absence of any significant enemy line of communication made it devoid of much of its strategic significance even if successfully carried out. Thus, if "strategy fails to ensure a successful conclusion to any series of operations," as Da Costa Porter put it, the solution must be sought at the level of moral forces: namely, by relying on the "combating and aggressive spirit on the part of the natives" which "will lead them sooner or later to attack any force that advances into the country."[25] Therefore, striking deep into the country, "prepared to give or accept battle wherever we may find the enemy" had to be assumed as the primary aim of colonial warfare,[26] to which Da Costa Porter added two strictly related objectives: directing the march upon "the king's residence" or "the chief stronghold of the nation"; and doing "as much material mischief as possible to the enemy […] by destroying his huts and crops, and seizing his cattle."[27]

Exasperating the enemy by systematically destroying the means of living of warriors and civilians alike went hand in hand with advancing "well into the interior of the enemy's country," and it might turn out to be the best way for compelling him to accept a set-piece battle. One of the chief features common to this early generation of theorists of colonial warfare was the striving to bring wars back to the conventional battlefield, where the European superior firepower could be most efficaciously brought to bear. As aptly stressed by Whittingham, Callwell himself "was not a theorist of counterinsurgency as we would understand the term today." In order to attain decisive results, "he believed that irregular warfare should be kept as 'regular' as possible."[28] Such an assertion clearly diverged from the population-centric/network-centric approach typical of the French school of counterinsurgency.[29]

The preceding remark is true for Da Costa Porter as well. In other words, what made these practitioners of imperial wars stand apart from the COIN theorists of a later age was the unwillingness to embrace the asymmetrical nature intrinsic to this class of conflicts. Rather, they thought it would be better to try to overcome it by aiming at a swift collapse of the enemy morale, to be obtained by forcing a series of symmetric engagements on the opponent, or resorting to widespread destruction, deprivation, and collective punishments. Whenever these efforts failed to bring about a decisive result, the specter of protracted war

was looked at in horror; and the elusive enemy of Da Costa Porter, described as "one of those brainless, back-boneless animals, which may be destroyed, but can scarcely be killed" anticipates the "protracted, thankless, *invertebrate* war" which, according to Callwell, showed up in "the quelling of rebellion in distant colonies."[30]

Such concerns raised by the nature of colonial warfare and the corresponding remedies were shared by Wolseley, whose recipe for a swift victory was based on both the attack on the king's residence or some other vital points of the country, provided there was any—and the deprivation of the enemy of his resources. According to Wolseley's dictum, quoted at length by Callwell,[31] "in planning a war against an uncivilized nation who have perhaps no capital, your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion." "Thus"—Wolseley continued—"the capture of their cattle and the destruction of their crops and of the grain stored in their kraals or villages in depriving them of food is most efficacious."[32] In any case, aside from the usual advice to "strike hard and strike quickly," Wolseley refrained from offering a comprehensive analysis of colonial warfare and its predicaments. The preface to the fourth edition of his *Soldier's Pocket-Book* unambiguously declared to deal "with all subjects connected with the actual practice of warfare, especially under those phases in which it is most commonly presented to us in our wide-extending Empire," then directing the reader interested in the study of science of war to "Sir Edward Hamley's most admirable work."[33] Thus, the nature and genesis of Wolseley's ideas on colonial warfare could be outlined only by taking into consideration an assortment of letters, articles, and memoranda. For instance, his recommendation to capture whatever the enemy prized most can be traced back to the planning and execution of the 1873-74 campaign against the Ashanti Empire. Already in the first memorandum submitted to Lord Kimberley[34]—of which no original copies survive, but whose text is preserved by Brackenbury in his history of the campaign—Wolseley stressed that, after freeing the British Protectorate from the Ashanti invaders, his intention was "to advance into the Ashanti territory and, by the seizure and destruction of Coomassie, strike a decisive blow at the Ashanti power."[35] A swift victory, followed by a timely retreat, was all the more essential because, as pointed out in a letter to his brother, "the season for operations is December, January and February, when inland the climate is by no means bad."[36] Judging from this letter and another one addressed to Evelyn Wood, it is also apparent that the first scheme submitted to the War Office envisaged a strike deep into the Ashanti Empire going up the Pra River, thus recycling the general concept of the 1870 Red River Expedition.

As noted by Adrian Preston, the first modern editor of Wolseley's diaries and journals—and hardly a sympathetic one—the Red River Expedition was "Wolseley's first independent command and a cameo of logistical planning […] left an indelible mark upon the few inflexible strategic concepts that Wolseley […] possessed."[37] That the basic scheme of the Gordon Relief Expedition had been borrowed, once again, from that earlier model was a notion already clear to its contemporaries.[38] Hence, Wolseley's ostensible lack of strategic inventiveness and inflexibility was subjected to harsh criticism in the aftermath of the campaign's failure, all the more because the choice of the Nile as a line of advance had been vehemently contested.[39] In the course of the acrimonious strategic debate, Lord John Hay had a point in highlighting that "obviously the proposal is made in the belief that the features and circumstances of the Nile in those parts are very similar to those presented to the Red

River Expedition"; and, such a similarity being untrue, he felt "compelled to report unfavorably on [the] proposed operation."[40] However, if considered in the context of what Daniel R. Headrick pointed out about river steamboats as the chief means of the European penetration in Asia and Africa,[41] Wolseley's insistence on choosing rivers as the main lines of advance seems less obtuse than usually suspected; and, I dare say, lends credibility to him as a strategist attuned to the realities of the day and sensible to the new possibilities offered by contemporary technological progress.[42]

In this respect, Preston's interpretive suggestion of Wolseley as the proponent of an amphibious strategy[43]—and his Ashanti Ring as something more than the mere outcome of a personalized approach to command, thus pitted against the continental school represented by the Indian Army—is intriguing, albeit not entirely devoid of pitfalls. Specifically, it is convincing that the "continental Indianization of British strategic policy seemed not only logical but unanswerable"; all the more so in view of the continental commitment pursued during the First World War, when the "land-powers capacities for defensive concentration and maneuver" backed by a "spreading web of interior railroads," as first practiced by the British in India, were fully brought to bear in the war against Germany.[44] *En passant*, and without wishing to hint at any kind of crude technological determinism, I believe that Preston's intuition is also substantiated by some broader facts: with the partial exception of the Ganges River—which, in any case, became increasingly difficult to navigate due to "massive deforestation, erosion and silting"—the other rivers of India were "too shallow or fickle to become major highways of steamer traffic."[45] Therefore, aside from the immediate imperatives of the defense of a vast continental landmass from the alleged Russian menace, there were multiple reasons for the development in India of a railway network—in turn giving rise to a new continental school of strategic thinkers—while the rest of the British Empire continued to be an essentially maritime network: one whose existence depended on the defense of the sea lines of communication. Nonetheless, in Frederick Roberts' letter quoted by Preston, where Roberts expressed his deep puzzlement at Wolseley's choice for the Nile route, the same also suggested the long-discussed Suakin-Berber route as an alternative.[46] Such a choice, though, would have implied the close cooperation of the Royal Navy in maintaining Suakin as the main base of operations, landing all the supplies the Expeditionary Corps would have needed in its advance along the Suakin-Berber route: the very option Wolseley had rejected, thus starting the feud with the Royal Navy already mentioned above.[47] Therefore, we see how the dividing line between the two "schools" of strategic thinking was more blurred than Preston maintained, and that Roberts himself still relied on a combined operations scheme when it came to offer an answer to the Khartoum quandary. I do not intend to argue that such a distinction between strategic approaches did not actually exist; only that, still at this stage, the difference rose to significance on specific issues, such as the war planning against Russia.[48]

Campaigns against Nature

In *Small Wars,* a long and detailed recounting of the Nile route, its salient features, and the difficulties encountered by the Relief Expedition was attached to the end of Chapter V as an example of the extent to which the organization of supplies weighed on colonial warfare.[49] Such a choice is hardly surprising, not only for his paradigmatic value— the author stressing that by the time the Desert Column reached Gubat, both that and the River Column had

become "practically inoperative […] on account of supply"[50] —but also because Callwell had a profound knowledge of the subject. At the time, he was assigned to the Intelligence Department, "in entire charge of matters in connection with Egypt and the Sudan" and had also been tasked with revising and completing Colvile's Official History.[51] Indeed, if one of Callwell's well-known dicta is that "it is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristics of small wars […] that they are in the main campaign against nature," the Nile Campaign was all the more relevant inasmuch as "it was essentially a campaign against nature, a struggle against the difficulties arising from supplying the wants of troops traversing great stretches of desert country."[52] Such a forceful statement might engender a common misconception: namely, that provided that all the difficulties related to the barrenness of the theatre of war were overcome, the fight proper would have had a foregone conclusion due to the technological and organizational superiority of the Europeans. The idea was already widespread back then, with Da Costa Porter candidly admitting that, as for the battle of Amoaful fought during the Ashanti Expedition, "by the small loss inflicted to our men […] I have been accustomed to regard the fighting as mere child's play"; this until a veteran had startled him by saying "that at one moment he thought matters very critical."[53] It seems that, due to his own field experience and by querying veterans of other colonial campaigns, Da Costa Porter had then changed his mind and come to the conclusion that "savage wars are fought against immense odds" to the point that "a feather would […] turn the scale." In other words, while concentrating enough forces on the battlefield would of course secure the victory, the challenge posed by colonial campaigns was precisely that of being able to concentrate enough forces, well fed and with enough ammunition, at the right moment. At Isandlwana, Da Costa Porter conversely concluded, "the scale was turned, the disaster occurred."[54]

The hair's breadth between victory and defeat in colonial warfare—or the feather capable of turning the scale, according to Da Costa Porter—was aptly expressed by Callwell who noted that "so great indeed are the difficulties that arise in many small wars from supply, that it becomes necessary to cut down the forces engaged to the lowest possible strength consistent with safety." Borrowing the words of Henry IV, the author thus concluded: "invade with a large force and you are destroyed by starvation, invade with a small one and you are overwhelmed by a hostile population."[55] Again, using the Zulu War as an example, Da Costa Porter noted that "nothing could be obtained by the country. Everything had to be carried; the army had to be absolutely self-supporting. And so it must be in all our native wars."[56] In consequence, any force had to be accompanied by a far larger logistic train than regular armies were accustomed to, and this had to be fed in turn, further compounding the strain. Thus, it seems plausible that a division of force might have represented an attempt to address and relieve such a logistical quandary. Indeed, Callwell observed that "the division of force in the theatre of war"—something generally considered a display of bad strategy in a regular war—was often necessary in small wars, citing supply concerns as one of the motives making such a division desirable. However, this does not appear to have been the chief reason justifying a similar course of action.[57]

According to Callwell, far more poignant in motivating a division were the diverging objectives of a campaign – for instance, an invasion of Afghanistan requiring two different lines of advance, one to Kabul and the other to Kandahar – and the goal of overawing the enemy with a show of force or even confusing his plans, so that "in attempting to cover all

points he covers none."[58] Already in Da Costa Porter's essay, it is made clear that "the first question which will strike every organizer of an expedition must be, shall I advance in one column, or in two, or in three?" The author never made mention of compelling logistic constraints in order to justify a splitting-up of the available forces: provided that "sufficient men are available to render each column strong enough for independent action"– and taken for granted, we may gloss, that the logistic apparatus was enough to support separate masses of soldiers – there were different considerations that "may induce us to use more than one line of advance."[59] The plan for the invasion of Zululand, subjected to a critical reappraisal by the author, provides the reader with one of these considerations: while Da Costa Porter predictably found fault in a scheme according to which the different columns had been mistakenly presumed to be strong enough to resist any attack on their own, he deemed that it was reasonable to expect that the moral effect engendered by such a division "have some weight even with a nation like the Zulus." More importantly, though, "by increasing the area of country occupied and devastated by our men, it was also thought that the rigour of war would the sooner be brought home to the natives, and a speedier conclusion to the war be brought about."[60] Although published three years after the disaster of Isandlwana, such an analysis remained consistent with Frederic Thesiger's[61] first memorandum addressed to Henry Bulwer,[62] in which the general identified "five main lines of advance from Natal and Transvaal into Zululand […] equally adapted for attack or defence," proposing to occupy all of them with an equal number of columns "thoroughly complete in every particular."[63] This arrangement would not only have ensured the defense of Natal from potential Zulu forays whose likelihood, we know, Chelmsford considered rather high;[64] in case of a general invasion of the Zululand it would have also made the British forces spread out on the enemy territory burning down the kraals, seizing the mealies and resorting to any means to compel the Zulus to accept a general engagement. This relatively reckless approach was shaped in Chelmsford by his particular experience of the kind of desultory warfare typical of the Ninth Frontier War against the Xhosas,[65] and by a more general over-reliance on the technological edge enjoyed by the British troops on the battlefield.[66] En passant, the very same over-reliance turned out to be fateful on more than one occasion: by studying the correspondence of William Hicks Pasha during the 1883 Sennar and Kordofan campaigns, it is quite apparent that Hicks duly recognized the low morale of the troops, the questionable competence of the European officers attached to his command and, still, showed confidence in the outcome, provided that his men merely learnt how to fire low at the enemy.[67]

As for Zululand, the concern of the British general commanding officer was to prevent the enemy from evading a decisive battle, but aside from Chelmsford's specific miscalculations, this remained the chief concern of colonial warfare *en général*. As we already pointed out, Da Costa Porter stressed that against so mobile enemy such as that represented by the "savage" nations – one not constrained by the customary burden of maintaining lines of communication – any strategical combination was useless: after examining the opening stages of the Zulu War he further reiterated the concept by pointing out that "no stress should be laid upon the strategical importance of the movement." The "only comparative certainty of meeting the enemy" lay in advancing deep into the enemy country and "bringing the rigour of war home to him."[68]

A Lesson They Will Not Forget

As already highlighted, success in colonial warfare depended on the ability to strike some kind of delicate balance between the two extremes of deploying a large force, which ran the risk of being crippled by the logistical constraints of a barren and underpopulated theatre of war, and a small force, flexible and commensurate with such a logistic challenge, but liable to be overwhelmed by the enemy numerical superiority. It is worth asking whether these early theorists of colonial warfare ever managed to realize that success also depended on striking another kind of balance: namely, between desultory and dragged-on operations, and levels of sheer violence liable to turn the scale and become counter-productive. Whittingham aptly noted that, according to Callwell, the conduct of small wars "justified a degree of violence that would not have been permissible in regular warfare."[69] In *Small Wars,* this level of violence was justified by two strictly-intertwined reasons: the need to attain a "moral effect […] often far more important than material success," brought about by operations "sometimes limited to committing havoc which the laws of regular warfare do not sanction,"[70] and the racist belief that such a moral effect was particularly impactful on the "lower races" because they were "impressionable" and "greatly influenced by a resolute bearing and by a determined course of action."[71] It is also apparent that, for Callwell, it was not just a matter of waging war in a fashion attuned to the alleged low levels of civilization of the savage nations, as was true in the recommendation "of bringing such foes to reason […] by the rifle and sword, for they understand this mode of warfare and respect it."[72] If the stress on the moral effect was aimed at swiftly bending the enemy will, thus overcoming the otherwise insurmountable advantages enjoyed by the natives, it is reasonable to conclude that such a moral effect was confidently presumed to be decisive: the savages were considered to be impressionable just because of their primitive nature, therefore their primitive polities were liable to be disarticulated by a sufficiently brutal display of force.

In a way, this conclusion was anticipated already by the writers preceding Callwell: in Da Costa Porter "the capture and destruction of the king's residence has usually sufficed at least to alter the character of the war" because if the native king inspires "awe, physical or superstitious, in the hearts of his subjects […] should he, however, fail in war, his potency vanishes at once." [73] By the time he was writing his essay, stressed Da Costa Porter, the validity of this assertion was shown by the examples of Kumasi, Ulundi, Sekhukhune's stronghold, and Magdala, representing either the king's residence, some kind of final place of resistance for the natives, or both.[74] The recourse to such vigorous measures, as the destruction of the king's residence and the burning of the crops, was dictated by the belief that "the savage on war path can seldom be influenced by mild measures. To spare his home and crops seems to him a sign of weakness, and generally acts as an inducement to hold out longer against our efforts."[75] Crop destruction was not exclusively aimed at disarticulating relatively organized polities like the Zulu Kingdom; for instance, in recounting his experience during the Kafir War of the 1850-53, colonel John C. Gawler made clear that preventing the Xhosas from "cultivating anywhere" represented an integral part of a strategy intended to eject them from their lands.[76] Indeed, the writings of this age pay lip service to the need to moderate the violence exercised in small wars. According to Da Costa Porter, "wanton and unnecessary cruelty […] should never be resorted to under any circumstances,"[77] thus anticipating Callwell's word of caution that "there is a limit to the

amount of license in destruction which is expedient"; a limit dictated by the purpose to "ensure a lasting peace" which could be achieved only if "the overawing and not the exasperation of the enemy is the end to keep in view."[78] Still, it is apparent that widespread violence and destruction were fundamental aspects of colonial warfare and, far from being considered reprehensibly indiscriminate, were openly advocated by its early theorists and practitioners in the name of achieving a swift and decisive victory.

In 1990, Thomas R. Mockaitis declared the employment of the minimum force as one of the "three broad principles" that shaped British counterinsurgency, stemming from the appreciation of the limits of military means in solving political problems.[79] The author made a neat distinction between modern counterinsurgency – that is, internal campaigns of pacification warranting only a highly selective exercise of violence – and Imperial small wars, whose external nature justified the use of methods of a far more indiscriminate nature.[80] This line of reasoning seems to be consonant with Callwell's limits as denounced by Porch, i.e., the over-reliance on operational solutions to disentangle political quandaries.[81] Despite the fact that Callwell had already dealt with operations for "subjugation of insurrections […] repression of lawlessness or […] pacification of territories,"[82] in turn justifying harsh measures in order to swiftly tackle such an *invertebrate* kind of war and make it come to a quick end, Mockaitis singled out the British experience in the Boer War, the Irish Troubles and the Amritsar as a watershed: episodes which forced "a change in the attitude of educated Britons towards acceptable conduct in warfare," thus strengthening the upholding of the rule of law in the subsequent counterinsurgency campaigns.[83] This being the case, Callwell's *Small Wars* would amount to something of a false start in the history of British counterinsurgency, which would rather trace its origins in the 1934 *Notes on Imperial Policing.*[84] Thus, the stepping stones of the modern counterinsurgency doctrine should more appropriately be identified in works such as Gwynn's *Imperial Policing,* with its apparent stress on minimum force. The latter also introduced the distinction, then reworked by Mockaitis, between small wars in which "no limitations are placed on the amount of force which can legitimately be exercised" and situations in which the Army "becomes the main agent for the maintenance of or for the restoration of order where civil control does not exist, or has broken down." It is relevant, though, that Gwynn considered the Army to be trusted to "act with good sense and restraint" insofar as it was timely called to intervene before the situation got out of hand, thus hinting at the legitimate use of more brutal means if warranted by the need to deal with a deteriorated situation.[85]

Recent scholarship has been increasingly critical of Mockaitis' interpretive framework, with David Frenc—the foremost advocate of the "nasty not nice" approach to counterinsurgency—challenging both the upholding of the rule of law and the use of minimum force by the British. The former was significantly curtailed by the use of the 1939 Emergency Powers Order-in-Council, giving colonial governors the power to declare a state of emergency and issue emergency regulations amounting to "a wholesale repudiation of many of the human rights enshrined in the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and "tantamount to police state control."[86] As for the latter, French stresses that, rather than minimum force, "coercion through exemplary force was everywhere the mainstay of British counter-insurgency policy"[87] forced resettlements and harsh means such as the "aerial proscription" employed in Radfan—that is, the strafing of herds and bombing of irrigation systems in order to deny the enemy the basic means of livelihood[88]—echoed the

seizure of livestock and the destruction of crops already advocated by Wolseley and Da Costa Porter. Therefore, rather than a hiatus between the slash-and-burn tactics typical of the small wars and the minimum force advocated by modern counterinsurgency, there is the strong suggestion of a substantial continuity, as for the use of indiscriminate violence aimed at beating the insurgents into swift submission, between the new methods of counterinsurgency and the old realities of Imperial wars of conquest and pacification.

Endnotes

1 As for *Small Wars* as the starting point of British counterinsurgency, see Daniel Whittingham, "'Savage Warfare': C. E. Callwell, the Roots of Counter-insurgency, and the Nineteenth Century Context," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, nos. 4–5 (2012): 592, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709769. As for Callwell's enduring relevance, see the Introduction by Douglas Porch in Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice. Third Edition* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), v, vii-viii, xvii.

2 C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice. Third Edition* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906), 26.

3 Callwell, 26.

4 Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless, eds. T*he Oxford Handbook of Late Colonial Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 1.

5 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War. Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 605.

6 Simon Anglim, "Callwell versus Graziani: How the British Army Applied 'Small Wars' Techniques in Major Operations in Africa and the Middle East, 1940–41," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (2008): 592, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310802462455.

7 Daniel Whittingham, *Charles E. Callwell and the British Way in Warfare* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 49; Douglas Porch, C*ounterinsurgency. Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4-8, 18-23. In view of Porch's avowed polemical target, i.e. the American approach to COIN doctrine enshrined in the *FM 3-24* and its allegedly distorting effect on the ability of waging conventional operations, *Counterinsurgency* must be approached with caution; nevertheless, the author's remarks on Callwell's facile simplification of the operations in Vendée, as well as on Bugeaud's *razzia* as the immediate forerunner – only slightly reworked by Hubert Lyautey – of the population-centric approach typical of modern COIN doctrine, are sound. For a critical reappraisal of Callwell's views on Russian operations, see Alexander Morrison, "The Extraordinary Successes which the Russians have achieved – The Conquest of Central Asia in Callwell's Small Wars" in *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, nos. 4-5 (2019): 913-936, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1638548. As for Callwell readily gauging the importance of seizing fixed positions in the ultimate success of the Russian strategy, see Alex Marshall, *The Russian General Staff and Asia 1800-1917* (Routledge, 2006), 60-61.

8 Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Cassell, 1965), 200.

9 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 21.

10 Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 50.

11 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 23.

12 Garnet Wolseley, "The Negro as a Soldier," in *The Fortnightly Review*, No. CCLXIV. New Series. – December 1, 1888, 702-703.

13 Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, 102-103, 139-141.

14 P. L. McDougall, *The Theory of War. Illustrated by Numerous Examples from Military History. Third Edition* (Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), 51. As for the purely Jominian lineage of the emphasis on interior lines, see the "Maxims on Lines of Operations" in Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War by Baron the Jomini. Translated from the French by Capt. G. H. Mendell and Lieut. W. P. Craighill* (J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862), 114-123.

15 Edward Bruce Hamley, *Operations of War. Explained and Illustrated, Fourth Edition* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1878), 76.

[16] Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, 142; Reginald Da Costa Porter, R.E., "Prize Essay 1881. Warfare against Uncivilised Races: or, How to Fight Greatly Superior Forces of an Uncivilised and Badly-Armed Enemy," in *Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers, edited by Mayor R. H. Vetch, R.E., Royal Engineer Institute, Occasional Papers*, Vol. VI, 1881 (Published for the Royal Engineer Institute by Edward Stanford, 1882), 306.

[17] Luvaas, 306. Despite Da Costa Porter's assertion of having frequently mentioned "the wars in New Zealand, Abyssinia, Ashanti and Afghanistan," the examples taken from these campaigns are sparse and most of the concepts are illustrated through episodes taken from the Zulu War.

[18] Luvaas, 305-306. As for the mentioned histories of campaigns, see Henry Brackenbury, T*he Ashanti War. A Narrative Prepared from the Official Documents by Permission of Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1874); *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879. Prepared in the Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster-General's Department* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1881).

[19] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 306-307.

[20] Da Costa Porter, 311.

[21] Da Costa Porter, 316. Da Costa Porter remarks that "the absence, or comparative unimportance, of the enemy's line of communication destroy the chance of using strategical combinations (in the higher sense of the word)."

[22] Da Costa Porter, 312.

[23] Hamley, *Operations of War*, 50-51.

[24] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 309.

[25] Da Costa Porter, 310.

[26] This recommendation will be reworked in a more articulated fashion by Callwell: "in a small war the only possible attitude to assume is, speaking strategically, the offensive. The regular army must force its way into the enemy's country and seek him out. It must be ready to fight him wherever he may be found." See id., *Small Wars*, 75.

[27] Da Costa Porter, 312.

[28] Whittingham, *Callwell and the British Way*, 40.

[29] Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 20-24, 52-56.

[30] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 27; Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 310.

[31] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 27.

[32] Garnet J. Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service, Fourth Edition* (MacMillan & Co., 1882), 398. The section dedicated to colonial warfare, under the heading of "Wars in Bush or Hill Country with Savage Nations" appeared in this edition for the first time and was slightly reworked for the Fifth Edition of 1886.

[33] Wolseley, iii.

[34] John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley (1826-1902), Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1870-74 and again in 1880-82; see, John Powell, "Wodehouse, John, first earl of Kimberley," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36987.

[35] Brackenbury, *Ashanti War*, vol. I, 117.

[36] "Wolseley to Surgeon Major Richard Wolseley," in Ian F. W. Beckett, ed., *Wolseley and Ashanti. The Asante War Journal and Correspondence of Major General Sir Garnet Wolseley, 1873-1874* (The History Press for the Army Records Society, 2009), 57.

[37] Adrian Preston, ed., *In Relief of Gordon. Lord Wolseley's Campaign Journal of the Khartoum Relief Expedition 1884-1885* (Hutchinson & Co., 1967), xvii-xviii.

[38] On April 25, 1884, Lord Hartington, the then Secretary of State for War, wrote to Sir Frederick Stephenson, first GOC of the British Army of Occupation in Cairo, stating that "Lord Wolseley

has underrated the difficulties of the Nile route, relying very much as he does on the experience under different conditions of the Red River Expedition." The letter is reproduced in Bernard Holland, *The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), vol. I, 451.

39 As for the so-called "Battle of the Routes" preliminary to the planning of the campaign, see Halil Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley. Victorian Hero* (The Hambledon Press, 1999), 156-157.

40 Vice-Admiral Hay was the then Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Station. His letter, addressed to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty and based on the report made by Commander T. F. Hammill, is reproduced in H. E. Colvile, *History of the Soudan Campaign. Compiled in the Intelligence Division of the War Office* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889), Part I, 37-38.

41 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire. Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 18-19.

42 Rather the opposite of the figure sketched by Ian Hamilton, that of a "leading soldier of the greatest industrial nation of the nineteenth century" re-embarking "upon the methods of the ninth century." Hamilton might have a point as for the untimely and chaotic organisation of the Camel Corps entrusted with the dash through the Bayuda Desert, but as a former Indian officer and protégé of Lord Roberts, his opinion was anything but unbiased; see Ian Hamilton, *Listening for the Drums* (Faber and Faber, 1944), 176-177.

43 On this point also see, Adrian Preston, "Frustrated Great Gamesmanship: Sir Garnet Wolseley's Plans for War against Russia", 1873-1880, in *The International History Review* 2, no. 2 (1980): 239-240, https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.1980.9640213.

44 Adrian Preston, "Wolseley, the Khartoum relief expedition and the defence of India, 1885-1900", in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 6, no. 3 (1978): 257-258, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086537808582510. As for the shift of the British strategy from the "limited/maritime construct" shaped by Julian Corbett to a full continental commitment along the lines of a "German strategy", see Andrew Lambert, T*he British Way of War. Julian Corbett and the Battle for a National Strategy* (Yale University Press, 2021), 307-335.

45 Headrick, *Tools of Empire*, 23.

46 "Reinforcements could only reach them *via* Suakim [sic], and under the most favourable circumstances, several weeks must elapse before a properly equipped force could march to Berber. I could never understand why Wolseley insisted upon the Nile route." See "Roberts to Grant Duff", in Brian Robson, ed., *Roberts in India. The Military Papers of Field Marshal Lord Roberts 1876-1893* (Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1993), 316.

47 See above, notes 39 and 40.

48 Based on what Preston stated in his "Frustrated Great Gamesmanship", Beckett recently suggested that Wolseley's amphibious vocation amounted to championing the idea "that any war fought against Russia should be primarily amphibious and aimed at peripheries such as the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, or the Turkestan/Caspian area. Any posture adopted by the Indian army should be primarily offensive": see, Ian F. W. Beckett, *A British Profession of Arms. The Politics of Command in the Late Victorian Army* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 74-75. I may add, though, that Wolseley's stance was liable to play into the hands of those in India who upheld a strategy of "masterly inactivity", as opposed to the supporters of a "forward policy" like Roberts.

49 Callwell, *Small Wars*, 68-70.

50 Callwell, 70.

[51] C. E. Callwell, *Stray Recollections* (Edward Arnold & Co., 1923), vol. I, 318-322. According to the author, in addition to completing the History after Colvile fell ill and proved unable to bring the work to a conclusion, Callwell was also tasked with expunging the opening chapters Sir Evelyn Baring had taken exception to on the grounds that "they went into political matters relating to the events which had led up to the expedition […] and […] they conveyed an entirely false impression as to some aspects of those political matters."
[52] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 44, 68.
[53] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 338-339.
[54] Da Costa Porter, 338.
[55] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 60.
[56] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 321.
[57] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 109: "supply is a great difficulty, and only a certain amount of supplies can be moved along a particular route within a given time."
[58] Callwell, 108-110.
[59] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 317.
[60] Da Costa Porter, 317.
[61] Frederic Augustus Thesiger, 2nd Baron Chelmsford, after the death of his father on October 5, 1878. Henceforth addressed as such.
[62] Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Natal (September 1875 to April 1880); see John Laband, *Historical Dictionary of the Zulu Wars* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 22.
[63] John P. C. Laband, ed., *Lord Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign 1878-1879* (Alan Sutton Publishing for the Army Records Society, 1994), 6.
[64] "Lieutenant-General Thesiger the Hon. F. A. Thesiger to Colonel F. A. Stanley", in Laband, 13.
[65] John Laband, *The Shadow of Isandlwana. The Life and Times of General Lord Chelmsford and his Disaster in Zululand* (Greenhill Books, 2023), 204-205.
[66] "I am induced to think that the first experience of the power of the Martini Henrys will be such a surprise to the Zulus that they will not be formidable after the first effort": KZNA, *Wood Mss, II/2/2, Chelmsford to Wood*, 23 Nov. 1878, quoted in Beckett, *Profession of Arms*, p. 201.
[67] "I never in my life saw such a rabble – like a flock of frightened sheep. […] If my Egyptians only stand firm I am prepared for 40.000. I learnt 'stand firm' – 'fire low' in Arabic and […] I went up and down the ranks while they were firing, quietly repeating these two short sentences"; see M. W. Daly, ed., *The Road to Shaykan: Letters of General William Hicks Pasha written during the Sennar and Kordofan Campaigns, 1883* (University of Durham, Occasional Papers Series No. 20, 1983), 35, 87.
[68] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 315, 317.
[69] Whittingham, "Savage Warfare," 594.
[70] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 42.
[71] Callwell, 72. See also 78: "The records of small wars show unmistakably how great is the impression made upon semi-civilized races and upon savages by a bold and resolute procedure."
[72] Callwell, 41.
[73] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 312.
[74] Da Costa Porter, 311.
[75] Da Costa Porter, 315.
[76] Colonel Gawler, late 73rd Regiment, "British Troops and Savage Warfare, with Special Reference to the Kafir Wars", *RUSI. Journal* 17, no. 75 (1873): 925, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847309433598.
[77] Da Costa Porter, "Warfare," 315.

[78] Callwell, *Small Wars*, 41-42.
[79] Thomas R. Mockaitis, "The Origins of British Counter-insurgency", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 1:3 (1990): 211, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592319008422956.
[80] Mockaitis, 211-212.
[81] Porch in Callwell, *Small Wars*, xv.
[82] See above, note 3.
[83] Mockaitis, "Origins of British Counter-insurgency", 212.
[84] *The National Archives*, WO 279/296.
[85] Charles W. Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (MacMillan and Co., 1939), 2-3, 14-15.
[86] David French, "Nasty not Nice: British Counter-insurgency Doctrine and Practice, 1945-1967", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23:4-5 (2012): 748, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2012.709763.
[87] French, 751.
[88] French, 752.