

realignments that an emphasis on family group can promote when action is shaped by the relative closeness or distance of kinship.³⁴ And these patterns are in turn expected to promote tactics that emphasize small-unit raids, ambushes, and quick hit-and-run strikes rather than sustained defense of positions. As Richard Shultz and Andrea Dew put it:

Traditional societies do not have standing professional armies in the Western sense. Rather, all men of age in a tribe, clan or communal group learn through societal norms and legacies to fight in specific ways, and to fight well, if required. . . . these traditional concepts invariably take protracted, irregular, and unconventional forms of combat.³⁵

In other parts of the political science and strategic studies literature, “culture” can have a wide variety of other meanings, referring, for example, to patterns of behavior within organizations, or to broad national systems of value or perception.³⁶ I do not seek in this book to advance a general claim about the causal role of culture in this broader sense. But given the role of arguments about tribalism per se in the nonstate military debate I do thus address this aspect of culture in the case studies and findings below.

Approach, Method, and Cases

The theory below is motivated by a detailed deductive causal argument. This argument focuses on the relative military advantages and disadvantages of more-Fabian and more-Napoleonic methods and holds that for almost all actors, midspectrum blends of the two are militarily superior but extremely complex. I then develop the internal political requirements of fielding forces able to cope with this complexity.

The deductive argument below draws heavily on the experience of both state and nonstate militaries in modern war. Indeed, one of my central claims is that the putative category distinction between the two is largely an illusion; to sustain this claim requires a sustained exploration of both. The tendency to separate interstate and nonstate warfare into distinct, stove-piped literatures is part of the reason for the widespread misunderstanding of these underlying commonalities: if one studies nonstate warfare by looking only at nonstate actors then its similarities with interstate combat will never be seen. I argue that modern technology creates common military incentives that affect all actors alike—my theoretical discussion of these incentives thus makes extensive use of the modern military history of interstate as well as nonstate warfare,

as a means of shedding unique light on the features of nonstate warfare *per se*. Strictly speaking my findings pertain to nonstate actors *per se*, but the deductive discussion draws heavily on observations of both.

The result is a rationalist theory. None of this means that warlord commanders are cool, emotionless, Enlightenment calculators who evaluate all options in the way Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill might have done, and choose the one best suited to their mathematical objective functions. The causal mechanism here does assume, however, that the reality of warfare disciplines behavior by imposing disproportionate cost on those who make poor choices. War is an unforgiving enterprise. Those who misunderstand its dynamics will be exploited by those with stronger perception, and the result will be destruction or defeat of the obtuse at the hands of the astute: selection effects will remove, through death or conquest, those who consistently choose badly. In the crucible of war, trial and error will thus cause surviving combatants to vector in on something resembling the result of an objective calculation even if it never occurs to them as such. At any given time, some warriors will be in the process of elimination, hence not all will behave as a rationalist optimal behavior model would expect. But if the theory below is sound, then in steady state, most combatants at most times will display behavioral choices that mirror those the logic below suggests are optimal—and those who do not should suffer for their failure. The explicit calculations in the theory below thus short-circuit the process of experiential learning by real combatants in war, but they should predict about the same outcomes if the military logic below is correct.³⁷

The result is a deductive theory of military behavioral choice. This deductive theory is then tested via a series of detailed historical case studies of campaigns chosen to create maximum leverage for assessing the theory's validity.

These case studies use a variety of sources but make particular use of field research involving a total of 137 structured interviews with state and nonstate participants in critically selected military campaigns. This field research was conducted in Iraq, Croatia, and Israel, and in the United States with participants who had returned from Iraq and Somalia. It included interviewees who either fought as nonstate combatants (in Croatia) or were in a position to observe directly the behavior of nonstate combatant foes (in Lebanon, Iraq, and Somalia), at military ranks from private to major general, and ambassadorial rank in the Department of State, and it enabled detailed, in-depth, granular description of combat methods, battlefield events, and political details important to the theories assessed here but absent from typical secondary historical accounts. Throughout, military participants were asked to address only factual

events they observed themselves (or performed themselves); wherever possible, multiple participants' accounts of the same events were solicited to insulate the findings against observer bias to the greatest degree possible.³⁸

Case method permits the depth of analysis needed to characterize variables that have not heretofore been included in large-*n* data sets, especially military behavior. It also allows process tracing to help distinguish real causation from mere coincidence. This is especially valuable where a deductive theory with a detailed causal mechanism enables multiple observable hypotheses to be deduced for a single case—the more substantively detailed the deductive theory, the more points of tangency there will be between its claims and the historical events of any given case, and thus the more powerful the case can be as a test of the theory.

This depth of detail, however, makes it impossible to consider more than a handful of cases. No such sample can exhaust the range of possible empirical variation, especially for a theory whose dependent variable (and some independent variables) are continuous and real-valued. For a theory specified in continuous variables, there is literally an infinite number of points that make up the relevant theoretical space—this cannot be exhaustively surveyed to see whether prediction and observation match at each possible point. Nor could even the largest plausible large-*n* data set accomplish this. To test the theory here thus requires some act of selection to create a sample of observations chosen to create the greatest possible leverage for evaluating the theory given the scale of research needed to characterize fully all the relevant variables for any given case.

Given this, the cases considered here have been chosen to meet several important, theory-driven selection criteria designed to produce the most challenging test possible from an inherently limited sample.³⁹ First, they must enable direct observation of all independent and dependent variables; cases where the documentary record is insufficient or where participants are unavailable for interviewing are thus not suitable. Second, they must collectively show variance on all three classes of explanatory variable—materiel, tribal culture, and internal politics. Third, they should collectively explore as many distinct regions of the relevant theoretical space as possible (that is, they should approximate a stratified sample from that space). Fourth, they should present conditions for which the respective theories predict different outcomes, enabling the case to distinguish between them in their ability to explain the evidence. Finally, they should provide maximum benefit of the doubt to the preexisting prototheories, and stack the deck against the new theory to

the degree possible. Small-*n* case testing cannot prove or disprove theories. But if case testing shows the new theory outperforming its competition under conditions deliberately chosen to benefit the competition, this unusual result would merit a greater shift in confidence than would otherwise be warranted from such a small sample of cases.

The cases examined here are Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon campaign; the Shiite Jaish al Mahdi (JAM) militia in Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2003 to 2008; Mohammed Farah Aideed's Habr Gedir militia in Somalia from 1992 to 1994; the Croatian nationalist ZNG and Croatian Serb SVK in the Croatian Wars of Independence of 1991–95; and the Vietcong in the American phase of the Second Indochina War from 1965 to 1968.

Hezbollah in 2006 offers an opportunity for a controlled comparison with the Jaish al Mahdi in Iraq. Both were drawn from Shiite Arab communities that were much more tribal than those of their state opponents; both faced materially superior Westernized state militaries; and both had external support from the same Iranian patron. The 2006 campaign also approximates an Ecksteinian critical case for the hybrid materialist subschool: it is the single most prominent example of hybrid or fourth-generation warfare in the literature; for the theory to have much merit, it must account for Hezbollah in 2006. The two actors' internal politics, by contrast, were very different: Hezbollah had a stable, elaborately developed formal institutional structure and saw its conflict with Israel as existential, whereas the JAM's leadership was personalized and divided, with multiple factions turning increasingly to economic predation as the Iraq War continued. Orthodox materialist theories would thus predict similar, highly Fabian methods for both actors; tribal culture theories would do much the same, albeit with some expectation for more Napoleonic war fighting for the JAM (tribal norms were stronger in rural southern Lebanon than in urban Baghdad where the JAM was strongest). The new theory, by contrast, predicts substantially state-like midspectrum behavior for Hezbollah but more Fabian methods for the JAM—and this is in fact what the case evidence shows. The case also shows important variance between the details of Hezbollah's methods and the particular expectations of hybrid materialists: whereas the latter see hybrid warfare as a combination of high-tech weapons and irregular tactics, Hezbollah's tactics were no more irregular than those of most states.

Mohammed Farah Aideed's Somali National Alliance (SNA) militia approximates an Ecksteinian critical case for tribal culture theorists: if the theory is ever going to work anywhere, it should work here. Tribe and clan were the

central organizing principles both for Somali society in general and for the competing warlord militias in the aftermath of the Siad Barre government's fall. And in fact the Somalia case plays a prominent role in the tribalist literature on nonstate warfare, which treats this as almost the defining case of tribally determined irregular war fighting. The material imbalance here, by contrast, was more modest than in many cases of nonstate warfare. For over a year and a half, the war pitted rival militias against one another, with no state military engaged; neither the SNA nor its enemies enjoyed a decisive material edge. Only when American forces arrived after December 1992 did the SNA face a material disadvantage, and even here the material balance was less favorable to the Western forces than in cases such as Iraq: the SNA had access to a substantial arsenal of sophisticated weapons inherited from the Siad Barre state military, and the SNA fielded an unusually large combatant force for the size of its operating area. Materialist theories would thus expect Aideed's methods to change over time, with little need for the SNA to adopt highly Fabian irregular methods prior to 1993, but with increasingly Fabian "asymmetric" war fighting after that; neither period, however, should display a historical extremum of the kind that tribal culture arguments would expect. The new theory, by contrast, predicts change in SNA behavior over time, but in the opposite direction. The SNA's political organization was personalized and highly informal throughout. Its stakes, however, changed dramatically by mid-1993. Before that, SNA war aims were limited and economic, but when American admiral Jonathan Howe declared in August 1993 that his goal would be Aideed's capture and imprisonment and began targeting Aideed and his chief lieutenants, the war suddenly took on existential stakes for the SNA's leadership. For the new theory, the SNA's weak institutionalization would preclude highly complex midspectrum warfare throughout, but the radical change in stakes should motivate movement in that direction even for a nonstate militia—hence the new theory would predict *less* Fabian war fighting after the American intervention, not more (as materialists would expect), and not stasis (as culturalists would predict). In fact the case shows change, and change in the direction of an increasing effort by the SNA to hold key territory after August 1993. At no point did this amount to truly state-like midspectrum warfare, but neither was it the extremum of irregular methods predicted by tribal culture arguments, and the direction of change was toward the Napoleonic end of the spectrum after the United States intervened and the material balance worsened for the SNA—not the opposite, as materialist logic would imply.

The Croatian Wars of Independence present two different nonstate separatist groups, the Croatian nationalist ZNG and Croatian Serb SVK, together with a variety of associated militias. None were strongly tribal. The nationalist ZNG initially faced a materially preponderant state opponent in the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) in 1991; Serb militias aligned with the JNA enjoyed important material advantages over their ZNG rivals. This balance then reversed when the nationalists achieved international recognition and state status, Croatian Serbs did not, and the JNA withdrew—by 1995, Croatian Serbs were the materially inferior side. Throughout, Croatian Serb politics were highly personalized and subject to bitter factional disputes; their stakes were nominally existential, but until the very end their leadership assumed that the JNA would return to defend them—the expected outcomes for Croatian Serb elites varied mostly with respect to patronage and seniority in a regime they believed others would defend. Croatian nationalists, by contrast, saw unlimited stakes in a self-help war that they expected would yield brutal oppression in the event of failure. Nationalist institutions were much more formal and extensive than the Serbs' but remained highly personalized at the most senior levels as President Franjo Tudjman relied on cronyism to secure his own position. By 1995, however, this personalized institutional system was augmented via a different kind of nonstate actor: the private military firm MPRI, whose advisory services circumvented some of the normal politico-military problems of cronyism. In this setting, tribal culture theories would predict state-like “conventional” behavior for all parties. Materialist theories would expect highly Fabian irregular warfare for the nationalist ZNG in 1991 and for the outnumbered nonstate SVK when large-scale fighting reignited in 1995, but more Napoleonic methods for the materially superior Serb nonstate militias in 1991. The new theory identifies simpler, more Fabian methods as the best choice for poorly institutionalized actors like the Serbs with limited perceived stakes, and it implies that better-institutionalized parties like the nationalists should be able to field midspectrum militaries quickly when motivated by existential stakes; cronyism at the top should limit high-level coordination, especially in large-scale offensive action, but not tactical cooperation within small units. Observed behavior in the case fits the new theory but contradicts the others for the nationalist ZNG. The Serbian SVK fits none of the theories perfectly but follows the causal logic of the new theory even where the outcome is not exactly as predicted: the Serbs' weak institutional foundation and limited stakes left them incapable of the complex cooperation needed for midspectrum warfare; the theory assumes they would thus choose simpler, more

Fabian methods better suited to their limited skills. When they instead tried to implement complex midspectrum methods beyond their proficiency, the result was military disaster in August 1995 when the Croatian state army crushed the Serbs in a brief, four-day campaign.

The Vietcong from 1965 to 1968 were perhaps the paradigmatic nonstate irregular force in the eyes of most Americans, and their methods had a profound influence on subsequent policy and scholarship; any theory of nonstate warfare must account for the Vietcong. The case also offers a theoretically important opportunity to observe nonstate warfare prior to the advent of precision firepower—in fact, the 1965–68 era in Vietnam offers one of the last examples of warfare before the dawn of modern precision weaponry, which was introduced by the United States in the war’s latter campaigns. The chief finding from the case is to corroborate the new theory’s account of technology’s role in nonstate war fighting. The Vietcong faced existential stakes and had remarkably formal, mature institutions. There is good reason to believe they could have mastered the complexity of modern midspectrum warfare. Yet they chose mostly very Fabian methods instead—and suffered gravely when they departed from this pattern as in the 1968 Tet Offensive. I argue that their inability to use midspectrum methods successfully was due to their low-lethality weapon technology, which combined with the difficult jungle terrain of their primary operating areas to leave them unable to control territory on the necessary scale even though they deployed a large combatant force. With only light, low-firepower weapons at their disposal, the VC could not prevent their American, and to some extent South Vietnamese, state opponents from massing overwhelming combat power at chosen points. The problem here was not numerical imbalance per se, or even technological asymmetry—Hezbollah and the Croatian ZNG both proved able to control ground with midspectrum methods under comparable numerical and technical inferiority. But whereas Hezbollah and the ZNG had modern weapons lethal enough to force better-equipped state enemies to disperse, yielding manageable local imbalances at the critical points, the VC did not. The Vietcong’s 1960s-era light weapons and small arms could cause gradual attrition over time, but they could not stop a massed state offensive from crushing their defenses at any given point. Nor could the Vietcong take ground against state armies’ positional defenses with such arms. Their only option was thus to resort to highly Fabian warfare, notwithstanding the VC’s existential motivation and mature institutions. Later nonstate actors with more advanced weapons were able to make different choices even when faced with materially superior state opponents.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 presents the theory's dependent variable—a continuous, Fabian-Napoleonic spectrum of military behavior—and distinguishes this from the treatment of “conventional” and “guerilla” warfare in the existing literature.

The theory to explain this dependent variable is presented in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 treats the role of materiel, arguing that material military incentives have been driving both once-Napoleonic state militaries and once-Fabian nonstate forces toward the midspectrum middle for more than a generation. Chapter 4 treats the role of internal politics, arguing that political constraints shape any given nonstate actor's ability to act on this material incentive and implement the complex methods required. An appendix formalizes the theory's coding scheme for these variables and its functional form for interrelating them, and it presents comparative statics to identify the theory's predictions with greater precision.

Chapters 5 through 9 present the case studies of historical campaigns and their relationship to the theories under test. These cases show a pattern of closer correspondence with the new theory than either its materialist or its tribal culture competitors even under conditions chosen to place those competitors on their strongest analytical ground. Of course, this neither proves the new theory nor disproves the others—proof or disproof is beyond the capacity of case method. But it does establish a degree of empirical plausibility for the new claims. And it does so under conditions that should have offered easy, unambiguous predictive successes for preexisting theories if the latter were correct. Empirical findings are necessarily provisional pending large-*n* research that is possible only with the development of new data, but the unusual conditions in the cases chosen warrant a greater shift in confidence toward the new theory than would otherwise be warranted from a small sample of cases.

Chapter 10 concludes the book. It provides a more detailed summary of my main arguments and findings; most of the chapter, however, develops their implications for scholarship and policy, and it contrasts these with the views now typically held on the basis of current understandings. I argue that these contrasts are quite sharp, and that neither scholarship nor policy can be conducted on a sound basis without a more systematic consideration of the real determinants of nonstate military behavior.

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