When Power Fails:

The Causes of Authoritarian Strong State Defeat in Asymmetric War

A Senior Thesis by

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Introduction

One of the key assumptions of realist political theory is that conflict outcomes are largely determined by the participants' power. The state or coalition that has the most power at its disposal is expected to win the conflict. Nowhere should this be truer than in asymmetric wars, military conflicts involving at least one state in which one actor - generally a state actor - or a coalition of actors has vastly more material power at its disposal than its adversary does. As noted realist scholar John Mearsheimer posits, “it is clear that if one side has an overwhelming advantage in forces, the glaring asymmetry is very likely to portend a decisive victory.”¹

However, conflicts and their outcomes do not always follow this pattern; in fact, they often break it. In the past 200 years, the strong power² in an asymmetric conflict³ has lost or tied in the conflict approximately thirty percent of the time, and that percentage has been rising over time.⁴ Since World War II, an outright majority of asymmetric wars have been won by the materially weaker power.⁵

This pattern is highly counterintuitive, particularly but by no means exclusively for realist scholars. Although all varieties of regimes have faced such difficulties in asymmetric conflicts, the substantial quantity of political science literature that seeks to address this phenomenon of strong power defeat in asymmetric conflict has almost exclusively directed its attention towards the particulars of democracies’ struggles to win such wars or ignored the issue of regime type

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² Note that this terminology, which will be employed throughout, does not require that the ‘strong power’ be strong on an absolute scale; it indicates only relative superiority. For example, Japan could be considered the strong power in a (hypothetical) war with the Solomon Islands while simultaneously being considered the weak power in a (hypothetical) war with China.
³ A military conflict involving at least one state in which one power, generally a state actor, or coalition of actors has vastly more material power at its disposal than does its adversary – in this work, a conflict is considered asymmetric if one of the powers has at least a 10:1 advantage in terms of the product of the number of individuals in prewar population and the number of individuals in prewar armed forces.
⁵ Ibid., 5.
altogether. Despite the depth in the literature on the topic of asymmetric war, very little literature seeks to explain why strong, specifically authoritarian states often lose these conflicts as well.

This thesis seeks to begin to fill this gap in the literature by posing the question: why do authoritarian strong powers sometimes lose asymmetric conflicts? To answer this important question, this thesis will consider and address its two related components: first, why authoritarian strong states sometimes fail to achieve a military victory over their weaker adversaries; and second, given a failure to achieve military victory, when authoritarian strong states choose to make major political concessions in order to negotiate an end to the conflict or even abandon the conflict outright. It will find that varying combinations of generally-applicable\(^6\) theories of resource limitation, arms diffusion and over-mechanization, external intervention, and strategic interaction, coupled with authoritarian-specific, domestic-politics-driven weakness in military leadership and efficacy explain the failure to achieve military victory. It further finds that the decision to end a conflict far short of victory is made mostly-but-not-entirely rationally and is based on the personal and political interests of the authoritarian leadership, and that it can therefore be impacted by domestic constraints deriving from an authoritarian leader’s lack of institutionalized controls over the security forces and/or his lack of control over access to positions of power within the government structure. In short, they lose because some combination of failures of military leadership, insufficient commitment of resources, problematic military technology, outside interference, and poor strategic approach choices protract the war to the approximate point at which it becomes in the leader’s personal and political best interests to bring an end to the war.

This paucity in literature on authoritarian strong power defeat in asymmetric war is entirely inadequate. Democratic and authoritarian states might differ systemically in the kinds of

\(^6\) By which I mean applicable to authoritarian states, democratic states, and anything in between.
war that they choose to fight, the quality of their military forces, the level of resources they commit to the conflict, and the strategies and tactics that they adopt - not to mention the relative insulation of authoritarian elites from the costs of war, their greater ability to influence public opinion, and the reduced impact of public opinion on authoritarian decision-making processes. Any of these potential differences in war-choosing, war-fighting, and the domestic consequences of war between regime types could create significant differences in why authoritarian and democratic states fail to win and then eventually choose to end some wars in failure. Therefore, non-regime-specific and democratically-focused literature is simply incapable of fully explaining authoritarian strong power defeat, and it is completely inadequate at explaining certain aspects of such defeat, such as why authoritarian leaders’ sometimes decide to abandon the conflict.

It is not surprising that the literature on asymmetric war has focused largely on democratic states. The study of democratic strong state failure in asymmetric war has clear relevance for the United States and the Western world, particularly in the past decade and the context of the ‘war on terrorism,’ in the course of which the United States has become involved in multiple conflicts against vastly weaker states and organizations. It should not be forgotten, though, that many of the United States’ most important Middle Eastern allies in this ‘war’ are or were recently quite authoritarian, such as Egypt and Pakistan; thus, the study of authoritarian governments in asymmetric wars is certainly relevant for the war on terrorism. The need to understand the causes of authoritarian defeat in asymmetric war is further highlighted by the increasing importance of authoritarian China. Should China enter into a conflict with one of its weaker neighbors, an understanding of authoritarian defeat in asymmetric conflict would be beneficial in providing a greater degree of predictability in whether or not China would struggle

to obtain military victory and whether or when it would choose to sue for peace. The potential for Russia to lapse back into possibly-expansionist authoritarianism underscores the importance of understanding this phenomenon, which has not often been specifically addressed in the existing literature on asymmetric war.

Chapter I will describe in more detail the theoretical and operational definitions of the regime-related and conflict-related terminology that will be employed throughout this thesis. Chapter II will discuss existing generally applicable theories of strong state failure to achieve military victory in asymmetric conflict, specifically theories of resource limitation, arms diffusion and over-mechanization, external intervention, and strategic interaction, and discuss how each hypothesizes a factor in strong state defeat that is important in some but far from all cases. Chapter III will formulate hypotheses on how characteristics of the domestic politics of authoritarian states affect their ability to achieve military victory in asymmetric wars relative to democracies, specifically through selection effects or inferior war-fighting performance, and will end with a discussion of the reduced authoritarian sensitivity to the costs of war. Chapter IV will then develop hypotheses on which actor’s or group’s interests motivate withdrawal from protracted asymmetric wars, how the domestic politics of authoritarian states constrain that decision, and whether the decision is made entirely rationally.

Chapter V will conduct statistical tests and analyses of three hypotheses from Chapter III relating to how authoritarian political characteristics affect performance in asymmetric war. Chapter VI will present a case study of the Soviet Union’s 1980s war in Afghanistan that

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8 Although there is some risk of complications resulting from the selection of a conflict waged by one of the two polar powers in a bipolar world, this war was chosen for two reasons: first, there is a great deal of information available on this war, although it is still not fully complete; and second, the war took place under multiple Soviet leaders, some of whose decisions were negative (stay in the war) and one of whose decisions were first negative and later positive (end the war) with respect to war termination, which produces analyzable changes in war termination behavior both across and within leaders’ tenures.
illustrates the hypothesized factors from Chapter II's generally-applicable theories of strong state failure and a hypothesis from Chapter III, and it will then also test the hypotheses from Chapter IV against the Soviet Union's decisions over the course of the war. Finally, Chapter VII will present the unified results of these qualitative and quantitative tests and conclude with directions for future work and the significance of this analysis.

I. Terms and Definitions

This chapter will define, both theoretically and operationally, the conflict- and regime-related terminology that will be used here, specifically asymmetric conflict, democracy and democratic regime, authoritarianism and authoritarian regime, mixed regime, and loss or defeat.

Asymmetric Conflict

This thesis defines asymmetric wars or conflicts as military conflicts involving at least one state in which one actor, generally a state actor, or coalition of actors has vastly more material power at its disposal than does its adversary. For the purposes of data analysis, though, such a definition is still too vague. In this thesis, a military conflict involving at least one state is considered to be asymmetric if the products of the number of individuals in the prewar population and prewar armed forces of the two respective actors/coalitions differs by an order of magnitude - a ratio of 10:1 or more - with the added conditions that the state actors suffer, for inter-state asymmetric wars, at least 1000 total battle-related fatalities or, for wars with non-state actors, at least 1000 battle-related fatalities per year except in intra-state wars, in which the participants must jointly suffer at least 1000 battle-related fatalities. This set of conditions is added to ensure compatibility with the Correlates of War project’s Inter-, Extra-, and Intra-State War datasets (v. 3.0), online at http://www.correlatesofwar.org/ (accessed April 20, 2010). The Correlates of
power ratio has accurately been described as “arbitrary and [risking] unwanted selection bias”\(^{10}\); however, establishing some cutoff point for power is necessary in order to avoid the problem of subjectively judging whether a given conflict is asymmetric, which would introduce even greater selection bias. The specifically 10:1 ratio is as good as any other measure, and using it is necessary if this paper is to base its list of asymmetric conflicts on the list in the appendix of *How the Weak Win Wars* by Arreguin-Toft, which is considered the “most extensive [study of asymmetric conflict] to date”\(^{11}\) and is therefore the most suitable basis for my analysis.

**Regime Types**

In this thesis, a *democracy* or *democratic regime* will be described as a system of government in which citizens’ freely-formed preferences are expressed in government decisions either directly or indirectly through regularly, nonviolently elected representatives, in which there exist significant institutional constraints on the executive, and in which repression is minimal and most civil liberties, such as freedom of association, information, and communication, are guaranteed to the citizenry.\(^{12}\) For the purposes of empirical analysis, a state shall be considered a democracy in a given year if it has a net score of +6 or more in the Polity IV Project’s Annual Time Series 1800-2008 dataset.\(^{13}\) This boundary is selected for two reasons:

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\(^{10}\) The Polity Project, over four research phases (Polity IV being the most recent), has examined and coded various characteristics of central state governments, both modern and historical (since 1800). This dataset measures the autocratic and democratic characteristics of a regime, giving governments autocracy and democracy scores ranging
first, it is the Polity Project’s recommended cutoff for democracy categorization\textsuperscript{14} while being very close to the +7 score that the Polity Project user’s handbook considers to be representative of an operational definition of a “mature and ‘internally coherent democracy’”\textsuperscript{15}; and second, an inclusive cutoff of +6 (17 on the Polity III dataset’s 21 point scale) has been found in specification checks to be one of “the crucial threshold[s]” for the likelihood of leader punishment following being ousted from power, a distinguishing factor between democratic and non-democratic regimes.\textsuperscript{16} In this case, likelihood of post-overthrow punishment can be taken as an indicator of the degree to which the opposition and the populace are angry about acts of repression and forced exclusion from the political process; thus, that likelihood can be taken as a proxy variable for the level of repression and civil rights, a distinguishing factor of democracies that often coincides with indicators that contribute to Polity scores but is not directly measured.

The other crucial operational threshold in the Polity dataset is -5, distinguishing authoritarianisms or authoritarian regimes from non-authoritarian regimes on the basis of the likelihood of leadership overthrow following moderate defeat in war, which can be and is taken as a proxy for the repressive capacity of the state.\textsuperscript{17} This standard differs slightly from the Polity Project’s recommended cutoff for autocracy, which is a score of -6, but because the Polity Project does not explain its rationale, the inclusive cutoff of -5, indicating a threshold in

\[\text{from zero to ten based on such factors as the means in which leaders are chosen and the effectiveness of institutional constraints on the executive, creating one of the most common datasets used in quantitative work that involves regime type. The dataset also provides an overall score for regime type, obtained by subtracting the score for autocracy from the score for democracy, creating a 21-point scale ranging from a minimum (most autocratic) score of -10 to a maximum (most democratic) score of +10. The previous iteration of the dataset, the Polity III project’s dataset, also had a 21-point scale, although its minimum (most autocratic) was scored as a 1 and its maximum (most democratic) was scored at 21. Although Michael Desch describes the Polity scores, particularly for democracies, as subjective and unreliable (Michael C. Desch, “Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters” \textit{International Security} 27, no. 2 (2002): 40), they are the best source available to me.}\]

\textsuperscript{14} See http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm

\textsuperscript{15} Coyne, \textit{After War}, 13.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 63.
repressive capability, is the superior option. Authoritarian systems are, for theoretical purposes, characterized by governments in which decisions are made by a usually-selected elite without the institutionalized direct or indirect input of the citizenry at large, in which the elite might not be chosen regularly or nonviolently, in which there are not many significant institutional constraints on the executive, who is chosen from within the elite, and in which repression is common and many civil liberties are not guaranteed to the citizenry.\textsuperscript{18}

There is, of course, a middle ground between these systems of government: mixed regimes. \textit{Mixed regimes} may take any of a wide variety of forms; for example, either an elected legislature checked by a hereditary monarch and an elected executive checked in part by a hereditary council of nobles would be consistent with a mixed regime – executive checks and institutionalized public participation are too high and repressive capability is too low for the regime to be considered an authoritarian one, yet the degree to which the government reflects the will of the people is too low to be considered a true democracy. For data purposes, mixed regimes are those with Polity scores between -4 and +5, inclusive.

\textit{Loss/Defeat}

As the final paragraph in the introduction indicates, in this thesis a strong power will be considered to have \textit{lost} or \textit{been defeated} in an asymmetric war when its performance satisfies both of two conditions: first, that it failed to quell militarized opposition; and second, that it either unilaterally withdrew its armed forces from the conflict zone or made major political concessions, severely compromising its war aims, in order to negotiate an end to the conflict (that is, ‘draws’ are coded as strong power defeats).\textsuperscript{19} This coding is adopted to maintain

\textsuperscript{18} Definition adapted from Coyne, \textit{After War}, 13; and Linz, \textit{Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes}, 58, 165.

\textsuperscript{19} Arreguin-Tuft, \textit{How the Weak Win Wars}, 44.
consistency with the sources of the dataset, but also serves practical purposes – it allows us to address the questions of why and under what conditions strong authoritarians choose to end asymmetric wars well short of victory without becoming drawn into the tangential question of how that determination translates into terms of negotiation.

With these definitions established, I turn now to the question of why strong authoritarian states sometimes fail to achieve a military victory in asymmetric war. The next chapter will discuss the various non-regime-specific theories – theories whose mechanisms do not depend on the nature of the domestic politics of the strong power – that have been proposed as explanations for the broader question of strong state failure to win asymmetric war and will formulate hypotheses for each. Each section will also discuss the arguments and data that have been presented by existing literature in support or dissent to each theory and its hypotheses. Note that, as explained in the introduction, authoritarianism might have effects on war performance that are not described within these theories, effects that will be described in Chapter III.

II. Strong States and the Failure to Win

The existing literature on strong state failure to win asymmetric war, while limited in its application to specifically authoritarian states, is well developed in generalized, non-regime-specific ways. Four sets of theories in particular are important: theories of resource limitation, external intervention, technology, and strategic interaction. While these theories do not apply solely to authoritarian regimes, they are nonetheless crucial for understanding why authoritarians sometimes fail to win asymmetric wars.
Resource Limitation

Even though there exists by definition a severe imbalance in material power between the opposing sides of an asymmetric war, that imbalance may not be expressed to its fullest extent in the balance of power between the military forces committed by each side. This reduction in the effective imbalance of power usually results from limits on the resources that the stronger actor is willing or able to devote to the conflict, an effect that is likely to be greatest when there exists an imbalance of interests in favor of the weak, that is, when the weaker power in an asymmetric war has a greater stake in the conflict than does the stronger power.²⁰ That such an imbalance might exist is fairly intuitive. Stronger powers, particularly colonial powers and regional or global hegemonic states, often have a wide variety of interests and responsibilities, both foreign and domestic, that compete for the time and resources of the state. When, as is generally (but not always) the case, the weaker power in the asymmetric war lacks the capability to mount any kind of invasion of the stronger power, the survival of the stronger power is not in significant jeopardy, and the strong power therefore perceives the conflict as limited.²¹

In a limited conflict, the strong power can only afford to commit a fraction of its time and resources, reducing its effective power. The weak power, though, might not face such a restriction. In many cases, an asymmetric conflict threatens the survival of the groups or polities that make up the weaker power, in which case they will commit nearly the full extent of their resources to the asymmetric conflict. A prime example of such a conflict is the Vietnam War: the U.S., which had competing military interests in Western Europe and Korea, was only able to

devote a fraction of its total military strength to the war, while, for the North Vietnamese, the war was the chief and near-exclusive policy concern.\textsuperscript{22}

Even when the resource limitation resulting from an imbalance of interests is not sufficient to handicap the stronger power to the point where its favorable imbalance of effective power vanishes, it can still interfere with the war-winning process. Guerrillas, who operate on the basis of hit-and-run attacks meant to impose steady costs on their adversary, win insurgesciss only by outlasting their stronger foes; even in the unlikely event that the insurgents could destroy the stronger power's military forces in the war zone, more could be sent to continue the fight.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus, guerrillas must destroy their opponents' will to continue the struggle, most commonly through attrition. Such attrition, however, imposes greater costs on the insurgents than on their adversaries; in asymmetric wars against major powers since World War II, 81% of battle-related deaths have been suffered by the weaker side.\textsuperscript{24} Guerrillas' more pressing interests in the conflict and their resulting relatively less limited resources, might allow them to bear such costs and continue to impose costs on their enemies, aiming ultimately to break the enemy's will to fight.

A further consideration in resource limitation is the factor of distance and logistics. Asymmetric wars are most often fought in or near the weaker power, but not necessarily near the stronger power, especially when the stronger power is a colonial or hegemonic power. When conflicts are fought far from home, the competitive power of a state theoretically declines as its military forces suffer from extended supply lines, organizational problems, and poor morale.\textsuperscript{25}

These problems would seem to be especially relevant in the pre-WWI era, when asymmetric

\textsuperscript{23} Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 179.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 331
wars were often colonial and waged halfway around the globe from the stronger power and communication between the government/military leadership and the forces on the ground took weeks or months, maximizing the logistical difficulties inherent in the conflict. In the extreme case, these difficulties together with the competing interests of the stronger state could even tip the effective balance of power in favor of the nominally weaker power.26 These effects of limited resources and of distance would suggest two patterns in asymmetric conflict outcomes, namely that strong powers, especially colonial powers before WWII and hegemonic powers after, fail to win asymmetric wars in part because they are unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient military and/or economic resources, and that strong powers are less likely to win asymmetric wars waged across a great distance. Together, they can be formulated as a hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Strong powers, especially colonial powers before WWII and hegemonic powers after, fail to win asymmetric wars in part because they are unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient military and/or economic resources.*

There is little doubt in the literature that resource limitation has a significant effect on the outcomes of some asymmetric wars; the British defeat in the American Revolution, for example, was in part due to competing demands on British resources.27 In many defeats of great powers, in fact, the state can clearly be seen to have devoted much less than its full military potential to the conflict. However, in most cases, resource limitation resulting from imbalance of interests was not the decisive factor, as asymmetric interests do not correlate significantly with outcomes across all conflicts (although there has not been a test done for asymmetric conflicts specifically).28 In fact, in Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s six case studies of asymmetric conflicts, relative

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27 Ibid., 8.
power does not even explain relative interests at stake in the war.\textsuperscript{29} The factor of distance is actually somewhat stronger; in the pre-1918 era, greater distance does correlate significantly with strong power defeat in insurgencies (not all of which might fall into our dataset, though, as some might involve less than 10:1 power ratios), though it is not does not correlate significantly in the post-1918 era.\textsuperscript{30}

There are two further problems with the resource limitation theory. First, it fails to account for the fact that despite the effects of resource limitation, a great many strong power defeats occurred in which the strong power did maintain a favorable imbalance of effective power in the combat area, such as the Algerian war of independence.\textsuperscript{31} While resource limitation may have contributed to those defeats by reducing the imbalance of power, it cannot explain them. The second problem is that its logic suggests that the trend of strong power defeats should have moved in the opposite direction over time. Asymmetric wars in the colonial period should have featured a greater imbalance of interests, as most asymmetric wars were fought by great powers and empires with extensive colonial interests, as well as a greater effect of distance, since transportation and communications were orders of magnitude slower than they are in the modern era.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, resource limitation should have been at its peak importance, and strong powers should have lost more often in the pre-WWII era. In fact, as explained before, the post-world wars era has seen a much higher rate of strong power defeat in asymmetric war, suggesting that although Hypothesis 1 sometimes holds and resource limitation can be a very important component of strong powers’ failure to win asymmetric wars, it is not the sole or necessarily even the predominant cause.

\textsuperscript{29} Arreguin-Toft, \textit{How the Weak Win Wars}, 217.
\textsuperscript{30} Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines,” 88.
\textsuperscript{31} Merom, \textit{How Democracies Lose Small Wars}, 14.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 14.
External Intervention

Weak powers that defend themselves through insurgency and guerrilla war need more than just willpower and a less-than-fully-dedicated adversary in order to win an asymmetric war – they have to be able to survive, which requires social support in the form of resources such as food and water, arms, recruits, and sanctuary from retaliatory attacks. Third-party intervention may be a highly useful means of obtaining such support. External intervention occurs as third parties, often states that were originally uninvolved in the conflict, respond to the increased threat posed by a strong power that stands to gain from the asymmetric conflict by balancing against that threat and providing support to its opponents. These parties may well be weak relative to the threat against which they balance, but their support can greatly assist in the ability of guerrilla groups to weather a conflict. Their support is particularly important when they share a border with the state in which the conflict takes place, as their sovereignty may offer some additional sanctuary against strong powers that are wary of expanding the conflict into another territory, allowing insurgents a safe haven from which to conduct cross-border attacks. Even when wars are not guerrilla or insurgent in character, the additional arms, resources, and even military advisors with which external intervention can furnish the weaker power can have a significant impact on the effective balance of power, suggesting a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Strong powers are more likely to fail to achieve victory in asymmetric wars when their adversary receives tangible support (military resources and advice, logistical support, but not counting troops) from third party actors, particularly in the case of insurgencies.

33 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 41.
The historical record strongly supports this posited significance of external intervention on insurgency outcomes, suggesting that the pattern holds true for asymmetric conflicts as a whole as well. In fact, in a study of insurgencies conducted by Jason Lyall, the presence of external support for insurgents had the most significant effect (significant at 1%) on the likelihood of insurgent victory of all the variables tested, including variables like relative power and distance from the state power, over both the 1800-2005 period and the post-WWII period. However, while it is very important when it does occur, many conflicts do not feature external intervention, limiting its usefulness as an explanation of the failure of strong powers to achieve victory in asymmetric war. In Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s study of asymmetric conflict, only 19 of 173 conflicts involved external intervention, although 15 of those resulted in strong power defeats. Such statistics indicate that while external intervention is powerful, it is also very rare.

Technology

Asymmetric conflicts and particularly insurgencies, according to one set of theories, have been significantly impacted by the spread of increasingly modern weaponry and the mechanization of strong power militaries, especially in the post-WWII period. During WWII, a large quantity of more-or-less modern weaponry, including small arms, semi-automatic rifles, machine guns, and mortars, were diffused across the developing world. The availability of such weaponry has made it more possible for militaries and insurgent groups in the developing world

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37 This may be an underestimate; Arreguin-Toft does not indicate exactly how the involvement of external intervention was measured other than to say that it means “arms logistical support, and perhaps military advisors,” suggesting that it is state-based. However, the provision of cross-border sanctuary and diplomatic intervention could be as or more significant in their effects on the likelihood of small power/insurgent victory, and these less tangible forms of support could be much more common.
39 Ibid., 10-11.
to survive and impose unexpectedly high costs on strong powers' militaries. A few scholars, such as Hans Morgenthau, have even argued that the military difference between the developed and developing worlds effectively disappeared, although this argument does not hold up to the historical record. However, the milder version of the theory suggests a hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Especially after WWII, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts because their adversaries also have access to modern weaponry that enables more effective insurgency.

The theory that diffusion of arms either shortly before or during a conflict, conducted either through third-party intervention or the theft of arms from the stronger power, has a significant effect on conflict outcomes has not gone unchallenged. It is constrained in two important ways: first, the usefulness of diffused military technology is highly dependent on the circumstances of the conflict; and second, that technological innovation by the stronger power could mitigate the effects of arms diffusion. For example, consider the Russian victory in the Murid War; the attempts by the insurgent Murids to use captured Russian artillery proved to be disastrous, as they tied the once highly mobile Murid forces to the difficult-to-move artillery and had little effect on the Russian forces. Arms diffusion in that case did far more harm to the insurgents than good. Furthermore, the Russians were very successful in adapting their military technology over time, giving them even more of an advantage. The Murid War illustrates both constraints on the arms diffusion theory. Thus although arms diffusion certainly can be an important part of strong powers' failure to achieve victory, it is far from a complete explanation.

40 Merom, How Democracies Lose Small Wars, 6-7.
41 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 12.
42 Ibid., 13.
43 While the Murid War is not a post-WWII conflict, and thus is not incorporated into the original WWII-centric arms diffusion hypothesis, it is highly illustrative of the constraints on the mechanisms of the broader theory, and it is used as an example here for that reason.
44 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 68-70.
Another, more recent theory proposed by Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III postulates a second potential effect of technological change on strong powers’ failure to win insurgencies (and hence their failure to win in a substantial subset of asymmetric wars), namely, that the increased mechanization of strong power militaries in the post-WWI and WWII era has made it more difficult for them to prevail over insurgencies. According to this theory, “successful COIN [counterinsurgency] efforts hinge not on the physical destruction of insurgent organizations but rather on the incumbent’s ability to win over local populations,” and mechanization has impeded that effort. Born out of a desire to lower the human costs of war, mechanization has led to diminished interaction between soldiers and local populations; soldiers have become less dependent on locals for supplies (due to the ease of transporting them from outside the conflict zone) and tend to isolate themselves on isolated bases. This diminished interaction makes it difficult to establish trust and cooperation, especially since soldiers are sharing less and less of the risks faced by collaborative individuals, which deprives mechanized armies of the information they need to round up insurgents without alienating the local populations. Their hypothesis can be formulated as

Hypothesis 4: in post-WWI conflicts, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts that take the form of insurgencies because their own militaries are highly mechanized.

Thus far, the only quantitative analysis of this claim, conducted by the theory’s creators, supports the hypothesis that mechanization of strong power militaries is a significant factor in their post-WWII failures, but as the theory is very new (published less than a year ago as of this writing), any serious attempts at refutation have not yet emerged.

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45 Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines,” 72-73.
46 Ibid., 76.
47 Ibid., 73, 77.
48 Ibid., 73.
A final theory on strong state failure in asymmetric war, proposed by Ivan Arreguin-Toft, posits that the relationship between the type of strategy chosen by the strong and weak powers in an asymmetric war is a better explanation of strong state failure in asymmetric war than the balance of effective power.\(^49\) This theory divides the myriad strategies available to the powers into two types: the direct, which primarily targets the enemy’s physical capacity to fight, and the indirect, which primarily targets the enemy’s will to fight.\(^50\) Direct approaches are those of conventional war, in which the two sides fight a series of battles for control of territory and resources until one side admits defeat.\(^51\) An indirect defense is guerrilla war, terrorism, and/or nonviolent resistance; it attempts to impose costs while avoiding “direct confrontations” — necessitating allowing the enemy to capture territory and resources — in hopes of protracting the conflict until the attacker tires of the war and abandons the conflict.\(^52\) An indirect attack can range from conciliatory, hearts-and-minds approaches to barbarism, the “deliberate or systematic harm of noncombatants” meant either to destroy the resistance’s will to continue or to deny them the sanctuary, supplies, recruits, and information it needs to fight effectively.\(^53\)

The theory holds that when the actors attempt parallel approaches, the interaction will favor the strong power, while their attempting opposite approaches favors the weak. When both sides attempt to employ the same type of approach, the power advantage of the stronger power is overwhelming; there is “nothing to mediate or deflect a strong actor’s power advantage.”\(^54\) Either by destroying their conventionally-fighting forces or by denying indirect defenders their requisite

\(^50\) Ibid., 34.
\(^51\) Ibid., 32-33.
\(^52\) Ibid., 32-33.
\(^53\) Ibid., 31-33.
\(^54\) Ibid., 34.
popular support and resource base (by swaying their supporters to the strong actor's side or by eliminating their base of support through mass detainment or mass murder), the strong power's strategy denies the weak power's strategy the opportunity to succeed. When the approaches attempted are opposite, though, then the conflict boils down to either a conventional army trying to flush out and destroy a guerrilla/terrorist defense, with the predictably poor result, or the application of a strategy of attack that is meant to gradually wear down the enemy's will to fight, leading to inconclusive short-term results – at least a short term failure to win. Thus, the theory creates a hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5: Strong actors are more likely to fail to win asymmetric wars when they choose to attempt strategies opposite from their opponents' concurrent strategies.*

Empirically, Arreguin-Toft finds that strong actors won 76.8% of same-approach conflicts, but only 36.4% of opposite-approach conflicts.

While some of Arreguin-Toft's claims, namely the claims that when the imbalance of effective power favors the stronger actor a conventional attack will be likely to succeed against a conventional defense but usually fail to overcome guerrilla armies or other insurgent groups, are relatively uncontroversial, there is a much more intense controversy over the effectiveness of certain types of what Arreguin-Toft calls "indirect" forms of attack. "Hearts and minds" strategies "may simply be impossible if the population is too strongly predisposed to hostility," in which case targeting non-combatants is the only indirect strategy available. Even Arreguin-Toft himself acknowledges, though, that "barbarism inevitably backfires" in terms of long-term

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55 Ibid., 40.
56 Ibid., 45.
political control, and that it can induce increased resistance or international condemnation.\textsuperscript{58} He even finds in another work that strong actors using a strategy of barbarism are more than twice as likely to lose as those that are not.\textsuperscript{59} Other authors, such as Gil Merom, describe barbarism as a risky means of cost-management, but also say that the readiness to engage in such behavior is a necessary but not sufficient condition for winning against insurgencies.\textsuperscript{60} In other words, particularly when it comes to systematic indiscriminate violence, the particular nature of the indirect strategy may be as or more important than its indirect nature.

The most ‘optimistic’ data\textsuperscript{61} on the effectiveness of indiscriminate violence comes from Jason Lyall, who, in a quasi-experimental statistical analysis of indiscriminate artillery fire in Chechnya, concluded that artillery strikes reduced the incidence of insurgent attacks in the immediate area of the strike by 28% in the first 90 days after the strike, compared with an average of an 8.1% reduction elsewhere.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, “each individual killed... reduces the hazard of an insurgent attack at the village level by about 13%.”\textsuperscript{63} However, Lyall’s experiment has three significant limitations: first, the fact that it examines only a small area of Chechnya over a relatively short time introduces the possibility that the results are idiosyncratic; second, the ‘random’ artillery fire that he describes is not really random; and third, it is possible that the

\textsuperscript{58} Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 222, 225.
\textsuperscript{60} Merom, How Democracies Lose Small Wars, 48.
\textsuperscript{61} By ‘optimistic,’ I mean the most supportive of the argument that indiscriminate targeting of non-combatants is an effective counter-insurgency tool. Non-supportive arguments will be called ‘pessimistic’
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 24.
reduction in short-run attacks that he observes is the result of increasing insurgent mobilization rather than reducing insurgent capabilities.\textsuperscript{64}

Indeed, most of scholarly literature on the subject as well as the conventional wisdom is pessimistic and argues that barbarism is a counterproductive strategy. For one, it generally fails to break the opponent’s will, and “will not help to end a war unless the damage inflicted directly supports military campaigns that are designed to defeat the enemy’s forces.”\textsuperscript{65} It may even increase their resolve.\textsuperscript{66} Furthermore, the conventional wisdom holds that by creating grievances against the stronger actor it may radicalize individuals who were ‘on the fence,’ strengthening insurgent recruitment.\textsuperscript{67} Guerrillas and terrorists often seem to concur with this viewpoint, attempting to provoke the more-or-less indiscriminate retaliation of their adversaries in order to mobilize potential recruits.\textsuperscript{68}

Some authors convincingly argue for a more mixed picture of barbarism’s effectiveness. Stathis Kalyvas argues that \textit{indiscriminate} barbarism is essentially always counterproductive; it makes compliance with the strong actor impossible, and attempts to do so are far from guarantees of safety, making joining the insurgents the superior option.\textsuperscript{69} A German report from the WWII eastern front describing the calculus of the average citizen facing indiscriminate German barbarism is highly illustrative of this perverse incentive: “‘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

\textsuperscript{64} Kocher, Pepinsky, & Kalyvas, “Into the Arms of the Rebels?” 12.
\textsuperscript{67} Lyall, “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks?” 5.
\textsuperscript{69} Stathis N. Kalyvas, \textit{The Logic of Violence in Civil War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143-144.
partisans, I shall probably save myself.” Selective but systematic violence against noncombatants who help to provide support to insurgents, though, incentivizes collaboration with the strong while disincentivizing cooperation with insurgents, making it substantially more effective, although it is much more costly to conduct due to the need to gather much more specific information about cooperation with insurgents. Even Kalyvas allows, though, that “massive” indiscriminate violence can induce insurgents to suspend or at least reduce their activity. Alexander Downes modifies this claim to say that indiscriminate violence can be effective, but primarily when the population is relatively small and confined to a small area (in other words, when the strong actor can assert effective control over most if not all of the region) and when the insurgent group does not have external support on which to fall back.

While the literature is not in agreement on whether or under what conditions targeting non-combatants, selectively or otherwise, is an effective approach to counterinsurgency, it is in general agreement on one point: barbarism has been less effective since WWII than it was in the 1800s, for a variety of reasons. For one, only recently has the notion of ‘sisterly vigilance’ become important; the human rights agenda has in the post-world war era instituted international norms that vastly increase the diplomatic and potentially even economic or military costs of employing barbarism. This problem with employing barbarism has been compounded by the increasing power of communications technology, which makes hiding one’s behavior from the

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71 Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 144-145, 165.
72 Ibid., 158.
74 Merom, How Democracies Lose Small Wars, 250.
rest of the world far more difficult. This difficulty also introduces a far greater possibility of suffering unfavorable domestic public attitudes towards the state’s behavior in the conflict. Post-WWII norms of self-determination may have only worsened the problem by providing a ‘higher aim’ of insurgency that causes indiscriminate violence to intensify, not deter, most insurgent activity. This decreasing utility of targeting non-combatants could help explain part of the trend towards strong actor defeat in asymmetric wars.

The theories previously discussed did not depend on the domestic politics of the strong power’s regime in their mechanisms. The next chapter will discuss how the characteristics of the domestic politics of authoritarian regimes impacts their selection of wars, their war-fighting ability, and their strategic decisions, both with respect to the above theories and in ways overlooked in those non-regime-specific theories, as well as how the costs of war impact authoritarian regimes and societies.

III. Authoritarianism and Waging Asymmetric War

The five hypotheses from the previous chapter each present a partial explanation of strong state failure to win asymmetric wars irrespective of regime type. However, it is far from unreasonable to argue that characteristics of authoritarian regimes deriving from their domestic politics might also impact their war-fighting ability. In three ways in particular they might have effects: the types of wars in which authoritarian states choose to participate; the resources and skill with which they wage war; and the manner and degree to which the costs of war are felt by the politically most relevant section of the population. These effects are discussed in this chapter.

76 Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines,” 81.
War Selection

There are many reasons to believe that there might be a relationship between the domestic politics of a regime and its propensity to engage in certain types of war, particularly risky or even foolhardy wars. The simplest argument that has been made in this arena is propounded by some democratic peace scholars dating as far back as Kant; it argues that democracies are inherently pacifistic due to the public’s desire to avoid the costs of war, costs that it must itself bear, which translates into government war-aversion. It therefore suggests that wars that democracies choose to wage will be only those in which there is a strong national interest. Authoritarian states, meanwhile, lacking significant political relevance of public opinion, are more war-prone and adventurous, fighting wars with less regard to national interest.

However, this argument is not well supported. For one, scholarly attempts to demonstrate that authoritarian states have been more war-prone in the past two centuries than democratic ones have are inconclusive at best. An even more problematic point is that publics are not as war-averse as this argument suggests; democratic publics have historically shown themselves to be easily “moved to passionate support for wars in faraway lands, even when there is little apparent threat to the national interest.” Some scholars have even gone so far as to say that democracies engage in ‘diversionary war,’ beginning wars shortly before an election in order to instill the support of a belligerent public, even when those wars are likely to result ultimately in failure; authoritarian states, naturally, would have no need to engage in such diversionary behavior.

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80 Gaubatz, Elections and War, 154.
81 Ibid., 27.
82 Ibid., 7.
fact, a nearly opposite effect occurs: in democracies, even with a belligerent public, entering into war on the eve of an election is too risky, and they are actually unlikely to engage in wars to distract voting publics from domestic concerns.\textsuperscript{84} Authoritarians, though, while being no more war-prone or likely to instigate diversionary war, are somewhat more likely because of their unaccountability to their risk-averse publics to be opportunistic and join existing wars in order to overcome domestic economic troubles.\textsuperscript{85}

The unaccountability/accountability variable has other impacts as well. In \textit{Democracies at War}, Dan Reiter and Allen Stam assert that due to their accountability to their publics, democratic governments will be more likely to avoid risky wars, who can and likely will punish them for taking a gamble and losing, and will instead fight wars that carry the expectation of being both short and victorious.\textsuperscript{86} Authoritarian actors, though, will be more risk-prone; as the power of the regime over the public is fairly secure due to the lack of electoral constraints and the state's repressive capacity, there is little to fear from the public's response to a defeat, leading them "to start wars they know they may have little chance to win but where the prize at hand is particularly enticing."\textsuperscript{87} According to Reiter and Stam's analysis, the historical record supports this conclusion. A contributing factor to authoritarian states' risk-propensity in war could be the characteristics of the leaders themselves; the process of leader selection in many authoritarian regimes seems to favor the most risk-prone individuals — successfully ascending the political ladder is unlikely (there can only be a few people at the top, after all) — and failure can be fatal.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{84} Gaubatz, \textit{Elections and War}, 78.
\textsuperscript{85} Miller, "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," 398.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 6.
There is, however, little empirical study of selection effects on risk-propensity for authoritarian leaders.

Not only has the case been made that authoritarians are more likely to *purposefully* enter a risky war, but a case has also been made that they are more likely to *unknowingly* enter a risky war. Democracies' freedoms of speech and the press result in a diversity of opinions on foreign policy; no decision to wage war is likely to be made without a politically legitimate voice rising in opposition at both the public and elite levels, and this opposition can help to correct public or elite perceptions of the likely costs of war and contribute to the formulation of superior policies based on more accurate information. Authoritarian systems, generally lacking such freedoms of information and antiwar public voices, do not experience as much opposition. In fact, in many cases their leaders are surrounded by "yes-men," who will deliberately hide from the leadership the true likelihood of policy failure in order to curry favor with them; as ascension within authoritarian power structures is most often based on political connections and favor, rather than public opinion, such behavior is incentivized. Moreover, the lack of executive constraints in authoritarian systems can lead to the extreme case of a leader who decides to wage war without even attempting to learn the risks of that policy or consulting with his advisors.

The implications of these patterns of authoritarian states' leaders' high risk propensity and institutional tendencies to cause over-optimism for asymmetric war are limited, but potentially significant nonetheless. They are limited because, simply put, asymmetric wars are almost by definition not very risky. A state deciding to wage an asymmetric war in which it will be the greater power has a good chance of success if only due to its superior power. However,

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91 Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 23.
some forms of asymmetric conflict, particularly insurgency and guerrilla war, bear a greater risk for the strong power than others do (as discussed in Chapter II’s section on strategic interaction. Wars waged against small but more-modernized militaries are also risky, as technology may create a force-multiplier effect that renders an apparently asymmetric conflict much more balanced. According to the theories described here, authoritarian states should be both less likely to consider the risks of these kinds of wars and more likely to accept them if they are considered when compared with democratic states. Thus, as domestic political characteristics lead democracies to avoid fighting such wars while allowing authoritarians to blunder or charge into them, two hypotheses can be formulated:

_Hypothesis 6: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to take the form of insurgencies/guerrilla wars than those asymmetric wars waged by democracies._

_Hypothesis 7: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to be fought against more-modernized militaries than those waged by democratic states._

The potential importance of the nature of the domestic politics of the stronger actor for victory and defeat in asymmetric war, naturally, goes well beyond the question of in which wars they choose to take part, or more precisely, which wars they do not avoid. It should include the question of in what manner and how well they wage war as well. There are several theories regarding the impact of regime type on waging war, discussing its potential impact on states’ economic strength (both in total and in how much can be devoted to war-fighting), their levels of technology, their military effectiveness, and their choice of strategies, which will be discussed in the following section.
War-Waging

In an authoritarian system, the citizenry has very few low-cost means of political participation. Often, regime change (or barring that, a change in leadership within the regime) is the only way in which public voices can be heard, yet such action bears extremely high costs due to the repressive capability of the state. For that reason, according to David Lake, authoritarian states have a relatively very high capacity to earn rents (including money, goods, and services) from the population.93 These rents, “excess profits gained through nonmarket mechanisms,” are distributed amongst the authoritarian elite.94 However, rent-seeking behavior does not come without costs. Taxes are economically inefficient; by interfering with the economy, the rent-seeking state shrinks its economy.95 Thus, authoritarian regimes’ lack of public political relevance allows them to claim a bigger piece of the pie, but the pie itself is smaller than in democratic states. There may also be a political ideology component to authoritarians’ allegedly weaker economies; classical liberalism argues that “commerce is likely to flourish in free societies that exhibit respect for property rights” and when the individual is placed on par with or above the state.96 In an authoritarian state, therefore, commerce is unlikely to do well and economies will be smaller.

A stronger economy means that the state has a higher capacity to produce war materials, and the reverse is also true. It is also suggested that democracies “divert more resources to wage war”97 and are better able to mobilize their economies for a war effort, compounding the disadvantages of authoritarian politics.98 This decreased mobilization capacity of authoritarian

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95 Lake, “Powerful Pacifists, 28.
96 Reiter and Stam, * Democracies at War, 115.*
97 Efraim Inbar, introduction to * Democracies and Small Wars*, ed. Efraim Inbar (Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), viii.
98 Reiter and Stam, * Democracies at War, 117-118.*
states arises from the greater degree to which government resources are funneled into private goods distributed to the elite, which cannot be easily redistributed towards producing the public goods needed for war-fighting.\textsuperscript{99} These authoritarian disadvantages suggest that authoritarian states will be more likely to suffer the effects of resource limitation in asymmetric war, at least relative to democratic states.

However, this theory has depended more on mathematics than on empirical testing, and does not in fact hold up well in the historical record.\textsuperscript{100} According to "the best available study on the subject," there is little cross-regime type correlation between regime type and the ability to extract resources for the purposes of fighting wars.\textsuperscript{101} A far better metric, it holds, is institutional capability, an argument confirmed in other studies as well.\textsuperscript{102} Nor is there a relationship between regime type and the production of war materiel that works against authoritarian states. If anything, authoritarians produce and use more materiel, especially artillery.\textsuperscript{103} Although those studies do not disaggregate their results into symmetric and asymmetric conflicts, it is not unreasonable to expect the results to be the same. Thus, we can fairly safely reject the notion that authoritarianism has economic effects that make resource limitation a more potent reason for strong power defeat. Similarly, arguments that authoritarian states cannot deploy the same level of technology as democratic ones, due perhaps to innovation-inhibiting effects of limited personal freedoms, have not borne up well under study,\textsuperscript{104} and there is no effect of regime type on the level of mechanization of a country’s armed forces\textsuperscript{105}; in other words, authoritarian

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 117-118.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 118.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Desch, "Democracy and Victory," 27.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Reiter and Stam, \emph{Democracies at War}, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 120.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 135.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Lyall and Wilson, "Rage Against the Machines," 78.
\end{itemize}
character does not have any observable effect on the relevance of the technology-related reasons for strong power defeat in asymmetric war.

Regime type may have less material effects on war-fighting capability as well. One set of theories holds that authoritarian militaries differ from democratic ones in terms of their broad organizational capabilities. Authoritarian militaries might be in conflict with other parts of their government, less egalitarian and therefore less willing to hear new and different ideas that come from the lower ranks, or even simply corrupt. Such flaws create impediments to organizational efficacy, leading Reiter and Stam to hypothesize that authoritarian armies will have inferior logistics and battlefield military intelligence. However, their statistical testing of these hypotheses suggested that there is not in fact any statistically significant relationship between these organizational capabilities of militaries and the type of regime they defend, with the exception of a small logistical disadvantage for authoritarian states at the onset of wars, a disadvantage that quickly fades as the war proceeds. Overall, authoritarian states should therefore not noticeably suffer the resource-limiting effects of distance any more than democracies do.

The domestic politics of authoritarian regimes may even affect the performance of the military at the level of the individual combat unit. In three areas in particular, authoritarianism has been suggested to have adverse affects on that performance, namely soldier morale, initiative, and leadership. It has long been theorized (dating all the way back to ancient Chinese and Greek scholars) that governments that are viewed as legitimate and are seen as reflecting their populations’ interests – such as popularly elected governments – will be able to field armies

108 Ibid., 273.
with stronger morale and motivation than less legitimate, less accountable ones.\textsuperscript{109} Thus, the absence of public accountability in authoritarian regimes would produce less motivated soldiers who would not fight particularly hard or well due to their poor morale. However, the evidence is not supportive of this theory; Dan Reiter and Allen Stam found in a statistical analysis that regime type has not been significantly correlated with levels of morale in the major battles of the last 200 years.\textsuperscript{110} There is no empirical data on levels of morale in specifically asymmetric wars (Reiter and Stam’s data comes from both symmetric and asymmetric conflicts, though primarily from symmetric ones), but Reiter and Stam’s analysis of their data indicates that war is generally considered to be “a terrible, dirty business that few people share much enthusiasm for, regardless of the nature of the political institutions in the country,” and that morale is dominantly influenced by “how soldiers believe their unit and general army to be faring in the war,” both arguments suggesting little or no impact of regime type on morale.\textsuperscript{111}

There is also some debate over whether the lower levels of individualism in authoritarian society impacts soldier initiative. Many scholars of democracy, such as Alexis de Toqueville, have argued that the relatively unfettered individual initiative that is at the heart of liberal democratic culture spills over onto the battlefield, creating soldiers that act on individual reason rather than instinct, yet doing without compromising military discipline.\textsuperscript{112} Others, like Carl Schmitt, argue that individualism makes maintaining that discipline substantially harder, compromising collective and military action.\textsuperscript{113} So long as it does not weaken discipline, such flexibility and initiative allows for superior war-fighting capability, as soldiers can take advantage of temporarily available opportunities and better respond to the unexpected. Such

\textsuperscript{109} Reiter and Stam, \textit{Democracies at War}, 61
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 73-74.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 60.
skills are especially important in insurgencies, in which ambush and small-unit action are critical elements of war. Thus, if the argument of de Toqueville and others holds true, authoritarians should see relatively more problems of soldier initiative and be substantially less flexible in and capable of fighting wars, especially in asymmetric wars when combating insurgencies is commonplace.

However, such a proposition is very difficult to test empirically. Reiter and Stam attempted to test it using the HERO database\(^\text{114}\) and found that there is indeed a correlation between regime type and soldiers’ propensity to take initiative.\(^\text{115}\) This correlation, supporting a democratic initiative advantage and significant even at the .001 level, would seem to provide strong evidence, but in fact provides nothing of the sort. Alexander Downes, in a stinging critique of Reiter and Stam’s analyses, points out that, as other scholars have noted, the variable for initiative in the HERO dataset that Reiter and Stam used to reach their conclusion does not describe initiative in the traditional senses of soldier flexibility and responsiveness.\(^\text{116}\) It in fact only codes which side took the first action in major battles, which does not indicate anything about traditional initiative, especially in those contexts relevant for counterinsurgency. Thus, there is little empirical evidence for or against the argument, and there does not seem to be a reliable dataset that could be used in conducting an empirical analysis. In other words, while it is certainly possible that the low levels of individualism in the political and social cultures of authoritarian states reduces their soldiers’ initiative and combat effectiveness, it does not give rise to a quantitatively-testable proposition. Moreover, as it is a question of the relative levels of

\(^{114}\) The Historical Evaluation and Research Organization dataset examines and codes dozens of aspects of all major battles from 1600 to 1982, and is the only large-sample dataset on battles available. One variable they code is initiative, which they describe as “an advantage gained by acting first, and thus forcing the opponent to respond to one’s own plans and actions,” and it is this variable that Reiter and Stam employed in their analysis.

\(^{115}\) Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 84.

\(^{116}\) Downes, “How Smart and Tough are Democracies,” 17.
initiative of authoritarian and democratic armies deriving from their intangible levels of individualism, it cannot well be tested by one or a few case studies or other qualitative analysis. Thus, no hypothesis can be formulated with respect to initiative that this paper can address in any fair manner.

There is one area of military performance, however, in which authoritarianism does seem to create a disadvantage: leadership quality. There are several reasons why authoritarian character would tend to diminish the quality of military leadership (at both the high- and low-ranking officer level). On the broad social level, the social leveling of democratic society promotes egalitarianism and meritocracy within both the government and the military, suggesting that relative to democracies, less egalitarian authoritarian societies will produce less meritocratic militaries and therefore have militaries led by relatively inferior leaders.\textsuperscript{117}

An alternative (and probably superior) mechanism is that authoritarian political structures incentivize the creation of an inferior military leadership. One of the greatest domestic political threats to an authoritarian regime comes from the military itself. Hence, there is an incentive for authoritarian rulers, particularly those who do not depend on the legitimacy of military rank or political party backing,\textsuperscript{118} to fill their military leaderships with men who are the most dependable and the most loyal to the regime rather than the best leaders; not only are such men less likely to seek to overthrow the regime, but they are less likely to successfully gather followers for any such effort.\textsuperscript{119}

Furthermore, in their desire to prevent military coups, authoritarians, particularly dictatorial ones, frequently institute ‘coup-proofing’ military procedures, procedures designed to

\textsuperscript{117} Reiter and Stam, \textit{Democracies at War}, 70.
\textsuperscript{119} Reiter and Stam, \textit{Democracies at War}, 70.
reduce the ability of military officers to organize and gather support for overthrow attempts. The most common such measures involve compromising the effectiveness of military leaders. Creating elite parallel military forces devoted to the security of the regime, like Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard, draws many of the best leaders and officers away from the military that engages in foreign conflicts, including asymmetric ones, for example. Another common coup-proofing mechanism, preventing the formation of close ties as well as personal trust and loyalty between soldiers and their officers through the rotation of those officers and the disruption of military hierarchy, deliberately reduces the effectiveness of those officers with strong leadership capabilities. The suppression and/or purging of officers critical of the regime’s military decisions - even constructively critical - can also shrink the pool of effective leaders and de-incentivize military strategic innovation.

Through all of these mechanisms, authoritarian military leadership is compromised by poor civil-military relations and institutionalized fear of military overthrow. Democratic governments, whose legitimacy and power is far less dependent on the repressive capabilities of the state, do not share these fears or engage in these destructive behaviors, and authoritarian states should therefore be expected to experience relatively-inferior military leadership. Indeed, Reiter and Stam’s statistical analysis of the HERO dataset mentioned previously indicates that authoritarian states do suffer a statistically significantly inferior level of military leadership. Despite the known problems with the HERO dataset, this analysis provides the best evidence available relating to the effect of regime type on leadership quality. Since, to the best of my knowledge, no alternative datasets including a variable for leadership are available, Reiter and

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121 Weeks, “Rulers, Risk, and Restraint,” 8; and Reiter and Stam, Democracies at War, 70.
Stam’s conclusion will be taken here as some support for the following hypothesis, which will be primarily illustratively examined in the case study chapter:

Hypothesis 8: Authoritarian states fail to win asymmetric wars because they suffer from poor military leadership.

The effects of regime type on war-waging may go beyond military performance, though, into the choice of military strategy. As discussed near the end of Chapter II, a significant body of literature suggests that indiscriminate violence against non-combatants is an ineffective means of waging war. Selective violence against civilians who provide active, tangible support to the enemy is vastly more effective, but much more costly as well. There are reasons to believe that authoritarian armies may be likely to engage in indiscriminate violence: one, as their political systems’ — both their own and their puppet governments’ — legitimacy is based on repression instead of public support, it will be more difficult for them to sway civilians to their side and/or convince them to offer up information on individuals supporting the enemy; and two, authoritarians’ disrespect for individual rights will make enemy soldiers less likely to surrender instead of fighting to the death (as POWs are likely to be treated poorly) and less likely to offer up usable information once captured.\(^{123}\) These difficulties make the practice of selective violence against non-combatants near-impossible; thus, authoritarians confronting these more-hostile publics supporting a more determined enemy will be unable to afford the costs of practicing selective violence (which would require keeping a direct and close eye on much or most of the population) and will turn to indiscriminate violence for lack of any superior options.

Such a hypothesis, however, only holds true after WWII. Before the World Wars, democracies and authoritarians applied strategies of indiscriminate violence equally often.\(^{124}\)

\(^{123}\) Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 67-68.
\(^{124}\) Mann, “Democracy and Ethnic War,” 73.
Elections alone do not necessarily generate “liberal outcomes,”¹²⁵ and thus it is not too surprising that in the 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ centuries, the concept of total war against non-co-ethnic colonial rebels, those of different religious persuasions, and those peoples classified in the public consciousness as ‘savages’ was as powerfully present as ever in state policy.¹²⁶ Only after about 1940 does democracy become inversely related to atrocities in such wars.¹²⁷ The development of education and wealth in democratic states created a liberal “bourgeois culture” that, through the medium of modern communication technologies, became increasingly aware and angry at barbaric government behavior.¹²⁸ The French use of torture in the 1954-1962 Algerian war of independence, for example, led to outrage amongst its citizenry despite the fact that the Algerian rebels made use of it as well.¹²⁹ Since then, although not without exceptions, democracies have engaged in less harsh counterinsurgency tactics,¹³⁰ since they cannot reduce the political importance of their publics’ opinions.¹³¹

The authoritarian non-reliance on the support of the public allows authoritarian states to engage in indiscriminate violence much more easily, and authoritarian states failed to develop a comparable liberal ‘bourgeois culture’ and although the judgment of the international community is more important, it applies as much or more to democracies as to authoritarians and therefore presents no particularly strong impediment to authoritarian atrocity. We can therefore formulate a hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 9: Authoritarian states fail to win asymmetric wars occurring after WWII because they are more likely to systematically and indiscriminately harm non-combatants.**

¹²⁵ Coyne, *After War*, 115.
¹²⁶ Howard, “Constraints on Warfare,” 5.
¹²⁸ Howard, “Constraints on Warfare,” 5.
To recap, in addition to the non-regime-type-specific reasons for strong power defeat, namely resource limitations due to an imbalance of interests and the effects of distance, external intervention, the diffusion of military technology and the over-mechanization of strong power militaries, and the frequent choice of the wrong variety of military strategy, authoritarian states, as a result of their distinct domestic politics, are hypothesized to 1) more often select into wars that lead to insurgencies, 2) fight against more-modernized militaries more often, 3) suffer from poor military leadership, and 4) frequently attack non-combatants indiscriminately, leading in the post-WWII era to an intensification of insurgencies.

**Domestic Impact of Costs**

Authoritarian regimes' domestic political structures may cause problems for them when it comes to choosing or fighting wars, but it does create a distinct advantage in one regard: it renders them far less vulnerable to direct (personal) and indirect (political) costs of waging war. Their advantages with respect to indirect costs center around their control of the public's political relevance and their control of information. Democratic states are unable to control the political relevance of the public; come election time, the public will have its way.\(^1\) Authoritarians, however, lack institutions through which the public gains a regular, systematic voice in government and maintain a repressive capacity that can quell most if not all attempts at irregular, extra-systematic political relevance. As a result, authoritarian regimes can simply ignore the public in all but the extreme cases; while they need "a modicum of popular support" in order to survive\(^2\) - in Portugal, for example, public dissatisfaction was strong enough for veterans of its

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\(^1\) Ibid., 21.
colonial wars to overthrow its authoritarian government in the Carnation Revolution of the mid-
1970s\(^\text{134}\) - popular support is not critically important for waging war.\(^\text{135}\)

Furthermore, authoritarian states can manipulate public opinion to a greater or lesser degree through propaganda and the control of information. That control, both domestic and in-theater, not only allows them to make the war seem necessary and hide their more barbaric actions from both their domestic and international audiences,\(^\text{136}\) but also allows them to disguise the actual level of costs being borne by the public.\(^\text{137}\) In the absence of free media, few mechanisms exist by which members of the non-privileged public can inform themselves of the true costs of war. Many authoritarian states have even proven more resistant to the effects of globalized media that have increased the audience costs of war in democratic states; China, for example, maintains 14 government ministries for the purpose of administering censorship, and all Internet traffic in the country passes through one of three computer centers where the ‘Great Firewall’ blocks dissenting websites and censors information.\(^\text{138}\) Such censorship, only possible in authoritarian regimes, provides a great deal of information control despite globalized media.

The authoritarian insensitivity to costs extends to the personal costs of war as well. Casualties, for example, typically do not affect authoritarian elites; their political power allows them to protect their friends and relatives from the risks of war.\(^\text{139}\) Even when the politically-connected enter military service in order to further their political careers, they are likely to be officers and receive the least risky posts in the combat theater. Thus, the primary manner in which the costs of war directly impact the authoritarian elite is through finances; a very costly

\(^{134}\) Engelhart, “Democracies, Dictatorships, and Counterinsurgency,” 56.

\(^{135}\) Reiter and Stam, Democracies at War, 164.

\(^{136}\) Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 28.

\(^{137}\) Engelhart, “Democracies, Dictatorships, and Counterinsurgency,” 52.


\(^{139}\) Reiter and Stam, Democracies at War, 167.
asymmetric war could plausibly limit the amount of rents that can be disbursed to the elite by the
government and drawn from society. However, most asymmetric wars are not so costly; it is rare
for them to impose a major resource drain on the strong actor.  

Given these authoritarian advantages with respect to costs, the question must be asked:
why do authoritarian actors lose asymmetric wars in which they have the power advantage? The
previous two chapters have explained many reasons why they fail to win these wars easily, and
certainly many asymmetric wars do end in the military defeat of the nominally stronger power –
particularly when military resources are very limited and difficult to replace, as in 19th century
colonial wars – but they do not always lose militarily. In such cases, why do they often choose to
leave, ceding the issues at stake through troop withdrawal or a costly negotiated settlement,
instead of remaining in the conflict indefinitely and perhaps winning by attrition alone? The next
chapter will discuss the reasons behind such a decision.

**IV. When Authoritarians Choose to Lose**

The decision to end a war, particularly when that decision involves sacrificing many if
not all of the issues at stake in the war, is not a minor one. In examining the reasons behind such
a major, complicated, and often contested decision, one must consider three things: the sets of
interests at stake and the priorities given to each one (this might be considered a question of the
appropriate level of analysis to employ), the operative constraints, and the decider's level of risk
propensity or aversion. This chapter will consider each of these in turn.

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141 The next section will take as given that, for any or all of the reasons discussed in sections I and II, the strong
authoritarian actor engaged in an asymmetric war has failed and is continuing to fail to militarily defeat its adversary
or to force a favorable negotiated solution.
142 Even in an authoritarian state, leadership may not be concentrated in a single individual, and important decisions
in particular may be made by groups instead of individuals - see for example John H. Kautsky, *The Politics of
Aristocratic Empires* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 237. The interests and risk propensity
Interests and Priorities

One of the crucial attributes of classical realism and its more recent derivatives is that it is state-centric, that is, that it is based on the notion that state behaviors are motivated by state interests. The primary state interest, it holds, is power. Power can mean many things, including material military capabilities (the most commonly considered form, possibly due to the assumption that it is the only form of power that can threaten the survival of a state), economic wealth, or even institutional or normative influence. Power, particularly power relative to other state actors, is important because all states share one common goal: survival. If states do not act in the interests of their own survival, they will not long remain extant in the international system, just as animals that do not act in the interest of their own survival will die at younger ages.

Some early realists, like Hans Morgenthau, argued that looking at this state interest in power is sufficient for analyzing foreign policy decisions; the distribution of capabilities alone explains state action. Although most other realists would not carry the argument of the primacy of states’ material power interests to this extreme, they all share the argument that the state’s interests in its relative power and survival are the foremost concerns in crafting policy in the international arena, that the nation itself can be taken as the actor in deciding foreign policy. They could thereby be seen to be operating at or near the state level of analysis.

of individuals as distinct from groups may differ, but as the systematic ways in which individual interests factor into group decisions and in particular the risk propensity of groups are not well studied, this thesis will treat the set of individuals involved in choosing to end a war as if it were a single individual (“the leader” will be the term used to refer to this set of individuals in an authoritarian state), with the understanding that group decision-making processes may have an impact on the choice to end asymmetric wars that is unanalyzed in this paper. Such an analysis, though important, will only be possible once the necessary research into the psychology of political groups has been conducted, and can only be addressed in future work. See Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-9 for several definitions of realism that include this centrality of power.


 Ibid., 328

The implications for this on the decision to leave an asymmetric war are rather simple and clear: states will behave in their own best interest, seeking to maximize their power. Thus, when they judge that remaining in the conflict will, adjusted by whatever level of risk aversion or propensity applies, result in a superior outcome from the perspective of increasing the state’s relative power and chances of survival, they will remain in the conflict. If, however, leaving the conflict is a superior policy from the state’s perspective, that option will be the course of action chosen. Such an argument suggests that there can be only two reasons for the strong state’s withdrawal from an asymmetric conflict: either the authoritarian strong state’s leader judges that the state’s interests in the conflict have changed – for example, the collapse of the Soviet Union would greatly reduce the U.S.’s interests in combating Communist takeovers in small Third World states – or the estimated chances and/or costs of victory relative to withdrawal have changed as the result of new estimations of the enemy’s strength and resolve and/or due to changes in the international system, such as another state threatening military or economic sanctions if the war is not ended.\textsuperscript{147} Revisions to estimations of the enemy’s strength and resolve are most likely to come from failures on the battlefield or new military intelligence.\textsuperscript{148}

There is a contrasting argument to be made, though, that the state’s best interests are not sufficient to explain the decision to remain in or abandon a conflict. Leaders have always been concerned about maintaining their hold on political power\textsuperscript{149} and it stands to reason that this concern would impact their choices of policy, particularly on issues as important as war, suggesting that a level of analysis more in line with the individual level is superior. Maintaining political power is particularly important for authoritarian rulers; the more authoritarian a state is,

\textsuperscript{147} For this argument that interests, costs, and chances of victory constitute the utility of continued fighting relative to settlement, see Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment}, 20-21.


\textsuperscript{149} Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., \textit{The Logic of Political Survival} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 15.
the more likely it is that the ouster of a leader after defeat in war will result in the exile, imprisonment, or death of that leader within a short time span, to the point where the kind of rulers who are considered authoritarian in this paper are almost universally punished after ouster.\(^{150}\)

Given that their personal survival may hang in the balance, it is not unreasonable to assume that authoritarian leaders in particular will take action that maximizes their chances of holding onto power when there is a significant risk of losing it. In other words, many authoritarian states' political systems will include domestic audiences with the ability to sanction their leaders, constraining their actions towards or away from the course of action most in the interests of the state as a whole. While the factors in the state’s calculus in the state-centric argument, such as costs, interests in the conflict, and international constraints are still relevant — they may impact the leader’s own ordering of policy preferences when he is not constrained — they must be considered secondary to domestic constraints. After all, while there may be a few modern-day Cincinnati,\(^{151}\) most authoritarian rulers will not give up power willingly, especially when doing so is likely to be personally perilous. This argument lets us hypothesize:

_Hypothesis 10: The domestic political interests of the leader are the critical factor in deciding to continue or leave an asymmetric war._

If this hypothesis holds true, then identifying what the domestic constraints on authoritarians are is critical for explaining the decision to leave a conflict, and it is to the topic of those domestic constraints that I turn now.

\(^{150}\) Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 58. Motivations for such punishment derive from the domestic politics of authoritarianism and include the desire of previously-excluded persons and groups to take revenge for prior repression and political exclusion and the desire to prevent the old leader from serving as the nucleus of a future re-takeover; see Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 38-40.

\(^{151}\) The plural form of 'Cincinnatus,' a Roman dictator who was given absolute power in order to fend off a barbarian invasion and then chose to give up that power once the invasion was thwarted - not the city.
Domestic Constraints

Unfortunately, most of the literature on the subject of domestic politics' interaction with conflict behavior has focused on the effects between, not within, different types of regimes.\(^{152}\) I was only able to identify two theories on (or relating to and easily adapted to addressing) what the domestic constraints on authoritarian regimes are and how they impact conflict decisions: one based on Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s selectorate theory, and one that I will call 'costs theory' based on a draft paper written by Jessica Weeks.

Selectorate theory is predicated on two concepts within domestic politics. The first, the selectorate, is defined as "the set of people whose endowments include the qualities or characteristics institutionally required to choose the government’s leadership and necessary for gaining access to private benefits doled out by the government’s leadership," qualities and characteristics usually based on national origin, age, gender, skills, beliefs, education, and/or wealth.\(^{153}\) In other words, it is the set of people who could potentially become politically relevant. That does not indicate, however, that all of them will become so — a system in which five random adults are selected and allowed to pick a leader would have a selectorate consisting of the entire adult population.

The second important concept is that of the winning coalition, the "subset of the selectorate of sufficient size such that the subset’s support endows the leadership with political power"; in other words, it is the set of party members and political and military lieutenants who maintain the leader in power.\(^{154}\) Every state has one; it is impossible in a modern state to maintain an entire state apparatus without delegating power and thereby providing challengers

\(^{152}\) Weeks, "Rulers, Risk, and Restraint," 2.
\(^{153}\) Bueno de Mesquita et al., The Logic of Political Survival, 42.
\(^{154}\) For the importance of such lieutenants, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 35-36.
with an opening to overthrow the ruler should the delegates’ support flag. Leaders maintain the support of this winning coalition through private goods and benefits extracted from the society as a whole as well as public goods created through policy; by dispensing such goods to their supporters, they can outbid potential challengers and thereby retain their political support.

The domestic constraints on authoritarian regimes, by this theory, derive from the relative sizes of the winning coalition and the selectorate. When the winning coalition is very small relative to the selectorate, a structure common in single-party authoritarianisms, the domestic constraints are minimal. Because private benefits are being dispensed to a relatively small number of people, their support can be purchased easily in the form of private goods and rents taken from the population. Public goods are only marginally important; hence, the authoritarian leader in such a system can enact policy largely at will — unless his actions significantly threaten the survival of that system.

Furthermore, because the selectorate is so large relative to the winning coalition, potential challengers are faced with a commitment problem. The problem is straightforward but difficult to avoid: since the winning coalition is so small relative to the selectorate, the winning coalition’s benefits take the form of private goods. However, there is nothing to prevent a challenger from excluding members of the old winning coalition — even the ones that supported him — from continuing to receive private goods under a new regime, while benefits under the existing regime can be expected to continue conditional on loyalty, incentivizing remaining loyal. The risk of being excluded from future benefits can therefore be a critical factor in the

155 Bueno de Mesquita et al., The Logic of Political Survival, 51.
156 Ibid., 59.
157 Ibid., 60.
winning coalition members’ choice of who to support, and can be approximated as $1 - \frac{\text{size of winning coalition}}{\text{size of selectorate}}$.\textsuperscript{158}

When the winning coalition is large relative to the selectorate, though, there is less risk of getting excluded from the winning coalition, and less of an incentive to remain loyal to the incumbent. Moreover, as the size of the winning coalition grows, it becomes prohibitively expensive to buy them all off with private goods and benefits, leading to an increasing importance of public goods.\textsuperscript{159} Public goods, by definition, are not easily excludable, and thus even those who lose their status in the winning coalition as the result of ruler change maintain some benefits. The diminished importance of the individual leader for maintaining benefits therefore increases the expected benefits of supporting a challenger by resolving the commitment problem.

So what constraints does this theory suggest are felt by the executive? In a small-winning-coalition system, incumbency is powerful and ouster is unlikely. Thus, the only real constraint is the need to devote a certain amount of resources to private goods, which is unlikely to be seriously threatened by an asymmetric war – as mentioned previously, asymmetric wars rarely result in serious resource drains for the strong actor. When the winning coalition is relatively large, though, the leader needs to demonstrate his public policy successes in order to maintain support;\textsuperscript{160} that is, he is strongly pressured to devote more time and resources to trying to win the war. Not only is it exceptionally important for the leader to appear competent by achieving victory, as competency is the best indicator of future public goods provision,\textsuperscript{161} but in most cases winning the war can be taken as increasing the state’s security relative to losing it.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 67, 65.  
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 279.  
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 238-239.  
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 279.
Since "security is the essential public good of foreign policy," winning the war is therefore tantamount to providing public goods above and beyond the publicly-dispensed resources it might bring. In other words, a leader with a large winning coalition is constrained not to withdraw from asymmetric conflict because he is vulnerable to challengers in post-defeat environments, and will he instead devote more time and resources to the war effort. This leads to a hypothesis:

_Hypothesis 11: Leaders with relatively larger winning coalitions will be less willing to end an asymmetric war in defeat._

The costs theory functions rather differently. Whereas selectorate theory presents domestic constraints as primarily influenced by the benefits members of the winning coalition can expect to receive under the incumbent as opposed to under a challenger, benefits determined in large part by the ratio of the winning coalition to the selectorate, costs theory presents the level of domestic constraints on leader action in war as resulting from the expected costs of an overthrow attempt.

There are two types of costs related to replacing the incumbent, according to this theory. The first is the 'costs of ouster,' or "the difficulty of planning and implementing a leader's removal." These costs include the cost of coordinating an ouster, a cost that takes form in the risk of discovery and the severity of punishment expected upon discovery, and the costs of physically removing the leader. The former cost depends on the leader's ability to monitor the behavior of regime insiders, which in turn depends on the leader's control of the security forces; controlling the security forces, secret police, and other military or paramilitary organizations

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162 Ibid., 407.
163 Ibid., 252.
enables the leader to spy on potential enemies and increases the risk of discovery.\textsuperscript{165} Personal control of the security forces and/or ‘coup-proofing’ the military structure also increases the likelihood that a coup plan will fail, increasing the costs of physically removing the leader.\textsuperscript{166} In other words, the first type of costs related to replacing the incumbent, cost of ouster, is strongly influenced by the degree to which the leader personally controls the security forces or has tampered with their structures to prevent coups.

The second type of cost is the cost of turnover. As in selectorate theory, this kind of cost/benefit relates to the likelihood that a regime insider complicit in a coup will maintain his position after the challenger is installed.\textsuperscript{167} However, instead of positing the size of the winning coalition as the critical factor, Jessica Weeks proposes that the critical factor is whether or not the leader has personal control over high government office and other political benefits\textsuperscript{168} (something that is simply assumed in the selectorate model).\textsuperscript{169} When the leader has tight control over access to power, the challenger commitment problem of selectorate theory returns full-fledged. However, in some authoritarian states, independent bodies like party apparatuses or military promotion boards control such access, taking that control out of the new leader’s hands and resolving the commitment problem.\textsuperscript{170}

A further advantage of controlling access to power in overcoming domestic constraints, one that Weeks does not address but that is still highly relevant for this theory, is that by controlling access to power the leader can ensure that most of the individuals in positions of power relevant for attempts at overthrow are in agreement with his policy and do not see it as

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 8-9.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 10.
incompetence or hold the leader responsible for the war’s failure. In other words, he can circumvent the risks of overthrow by disempowering some potential challengers in favor of more agreeable individuals who are less likely to hold him accountable for the defeat and who can also obstruct any attempts by remaining challengers to overthrow the leader.

When the incumbent does not have control over either the security forces or access to power, though, he is exceedingly vulnerable to ouster. Defeat in war creates several motivations for attempts at ouster, which as mentioned previously frequently result in severe punishment for the ousted leader. Possible motivations for ouster following defeat in war include the desire to deter adventuresome leader behavior in the future, the desire to replace the leader with a more competent one (because defeat is often taken as indicating incompetent leadership — although less so when the leader who loses the war did not start the war as well), or to send a signal of benign intentions,\textsuperscript{171} or to establish the incumbent as a scapegoat for the war failures in order for regime insiders to escape personal blame.\textsuperscript{172} Therefore, when the costs of overthrow are low, authoritarian states will be constrained by domestic politics and forced to attempt a ‘gamble at resurrection,’ engaging in very risky behavior (attempting to win a war that has not gone well thus far) because the alternative is unacceptable, just as how a man who has lost everything he owns at a poker table might borrow to continue playing — he’ll most likely lose the borrowed money, but he has nothing left to lose. Similarly, if leaving the war is expected to lead to ouster and punishment, a high-variance war-fighting strategy can even be outright rational for the leader.\textsuperscript{173}

This establishes another hypothesis:

\textit{Hypothesis 12: Authoritarian leaders who do not have control of security forces or of access to positions of power will generally be unwilling to withdraw from asymmetric conflicts.}

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 22-26.
\textsuperscript{172} Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment}, 38-40.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 14.
When they are not constrained by domestic factors, the interests of authoritarian leaders can be considered to line up broadly with the state’s interests. Note that neither the selectorate nor the cost theory presents domestic constraints pressing towards troop withdrawal, as is often the case with constraints on democratic actors’ behavior; because the domestic audiences for authoritarians are the cost-insensitive elite instead of the cost-sensitive public, the constraints work in different directions. There still remains one more topic that needs to be addressed: what level of risk propensity or risk aversion the leader demonstrates.

Risk

The standard economic model of rationality holds that individuals have certain utility (happiness) associated with any outcome of a choice. Plotting all of these outcomes along a line produces a graph of a utility function, the second derivative of which indicates a level of risk aversion or risk preference; the utility of a gamble, a choice in which the outcome is uncertain, is calculated through expected utility – simply weighting each outcome’s utility by the probability of it occurring. This expected utility differs from the utility of the expected outcome; when the second derivative is negative, the expected utility is lower and the individual is risk averse, and when the second derivative is positive, the individual is risk preferring. The key assumption here is that an individual’s utility for an outcome is unrelated to the situation; that is, if one is playing cards and has $1000, one will be equally risk averse/preferring whether one started the game with $500 or with $5000. Such a rationalist model is often employed in political science as well, and forms one of the central tenets of realism.

175 Donnelly, Realism and International Relations, 15.
However, in a 1979 article, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky demonstrated in an experiment that people display behaviors that are completely incomprehensible from the standpoint of expected utility theory. They proposed that instead of treating utility as being dependent solely on the specific outcome, it should be considered as being determined by two variables, the 'reference point,' or the outcome that results in no utility change, and the magnitude of the change away from the reference point, an approach they called 'prospect theory.' Prospect theory finds that people display a loss aversion (an added negative utility associated with outcomes worse than the reference point) that makes them increasingly risk preferring when working deeper into the domain of loss (for example, many people will choose to flip a coin and pay $100 if it's heads in order to avoid a certain $40 loss, while being risk averse in the realm of gain – taking a sure $40 over a 50% at $100. People also tend to overestimate small chances, treating unlikely outcomes with much more weight than their probability warrants.

There are problems with attempting to apply prospect theory directly to real-world, uncontrolled events, not least among which is that it is extremely difficult to know with certainty where an individual's reference point is and whether he is operating in a domain of gains or of losses at a given juncture. However, when addressing the issue of whether to leave an asymmetric war that is stalemated or worse, it is not unreasonable to assume that the leader is operating in a domain of loss; even if the leader never hoped for gains from the conflict (e.g. because he opposed the decision of his predecessor to engage in the conflict), all of the likely outcomes, whether of staying or withdrawing, involve a net loss for the state, and likely for the

178 Ibid., 37, 41.
leader as well. If that is the case, then we should see authoritarian leaders in failing asymmetric wars display loss aversion and increasingly risk-preferring behavior as the condition of the war worsens; neither of which is easily explicable through rationalist theory. We can therefore formulate a general hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 13:** Authoritarian leaders sometimes act in ways that do not maximize their expected utility subject to constant levels of risk-acceptance, becoming more risk-preferring as the expected outcome of the war worsens.

This chapter has presented theories on each of the three aspects of why strong authoritarian actors choose to leave asymmetric wars: in the realm of interests considered, we have the theory of the primacy of state interests and the theory of the primacy of leader interests; in the realm of domestic constraints (assuming the primacy of leader interests) we have selectorate and costs theory arising out of the domestic politics of authoritarian regimes to explain what constraints on behavior, distinct from the kinds of constraints seen in democratic societies, are felt by what kinds of authoritarian leaders; and in the realm of risk we have traditional rationalism and prospect theory. In the next chapters, I do what testing I can on these hypotheses, including both simple quantitative analysis and case study of the USSR’s 1980s war in Afghanistan. But before turning to that, I present a reminder of the hypotheses under consideration:
Table 1: Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 1: Strong powers, especially colonial powers before WWII and hegemonic powers after, fail to win asymmetric wars in part because they are unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient military and/or economic resources.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2: Strong powers are more likely to fail to achieve victory in asymmetric wars when their adversary receives tangible support (military resources and advice, logistical support, but not counting troops) from third party actors, particularly in the case of insurgencies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3: Especially after WWII, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts because their adversaries also have access to modern weaponry that enables more effective insurgency.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 4: in post-WWI conflicts, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts that take the form of insurgencies because their own militaries are highly mechanized.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 5: Strong actors are more likely to fail to win asymmetric wars when they choose to attempt strategies opposite from their opponents' concurrent strategies.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 6: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to take the form of insurgencies/guerrilla wars than those asymmetric wars waged by democracies.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 7: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to be fought against more-modernized militaries than those waged by democratic states.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 8: Authoritarian states fail to win asymmetric wars because they suffer from poor military leadership.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 9: Authoritarian states fail to win post-WWII asymmetric wars because they are more likely to systematically and indiscriminately harm non-combatants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 10: The personal and domestic political interests of the leader are the critical factor in deciding to continue or leave an asymmetric war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 11: Leaders with relatively larger winning coalitions will be less willing to end an asymmetric war in defeat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 12: Authoritarian leaders who do not have personal control of security forces or of access to positions of power will generally be unwilling to withdraw from asymmetric conflicts.</td>
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<td>Hypothesis 13: Authoritarian leaders sometimes act in ways that do not maximize their expected utility under constant levels of risk-acceptance, becoming more risk-preferring as the expected outcome of the war worsens.</td>
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</table>
With such a variety of hypotheses, neither qualitative nor quantitative testing methods alone can suffice. Only through the application of multiple methodologies, including both quantitative and qualitative varieties, can they be analyzed. Thus, this thesis adopts such a multi-method approach, testing Hypotheses 6, 7, and 9 through quantitative statistical analysis, testing Hypotheses 10, 11, 12, and 13 through qualitative case study, which will also be used to illustrate the effects of Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8, which have been more thoroughly examined and verified at least limitedly in existing literature.

V. Data & Quantitative Testing

This chapter tests three of the four authoritarian-specific hypotheses on strong state failure to achieve military victory in asymmetric conflicts, namely Hypotheses 6, 7, and 8 from the list above, the eighth being practicably unquantifiable within the scope of this work and having been tested and confirmed more generally in existing literature. In order to quantitatively analyze the effects of these domestic-politics-driven potential factors in strong authoritarian states’ failure to win asymmetric wars, it will statistically compare their prevalence and/or apparent effects on authoritarian states with their effects on democratic states.

As indicated in the introduction, the list of asymmetric conflicts that will be employed in this data analysis is taken from Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s book *How the Weak Win Wars*, although it has been restricted to those conflicts that are not fought over control of the entirety of the strong power and that are also listed in the Correlates of War (CoW) Intra-state, Extra-state, or Inter-state War datasets (v. 3.0). See the Appendix on page 93 for the dataset as well as a list of variables and other coding. Data on the start and end years of these wars, as well as the identity of the conflict’s victor, were taken from either the CoW dataset or the Arreguin-Toft dataset;
when the two were in agreement, no changes were made, and in the approximately 7% of conflicts in which the two disagreed, I performed a small amount of independent research in order to identify which dataset had the stronger case, which was the CoW dataset in about 70% of those disagreements. The list of conflicts spans from the year 1800 until the year 2000.

Data on regime type was taken, as indicated in the introduction, from the Polity IV Annual Time Series 1800-2008. When the Polity scores were available for both the starting and ending years of the war, the average of those scores was taken as the overall score; when only one was available, that score was taken as the ‘average’ score. When a small number of states together formed the ‘strong actor’ in a conflict, their specific democracy/authoritarian scores were dropped and the average of each country’s overall score was taken. As discussed before, countries with scores from -10 to -5 are taken as authoritarian and those with scores from 6 to 10 are taken as democracies.

Data on the presence of insurgencies in non-interstate wars were taken from Jason Lyall’s list of cases in the appendix to “Do Democracies Make Inferior Counterinsurgents?” available online at http://pantheon.yale.edu/~jml27/YaleWebsite/Research.html (accessed April 19, 2010). Coding of insurgency in interstate wars was based on numerous academic and online sources, as was coding for the presence or non-presence of systematic indiscriminate harm to non-combatants and whether the weaker actor enjoyed a distinct advantage in military modernization.

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179 Some states are given average scores despite not having any specific scores for democracy or authoritarianism in either boundary year; these averages come from the Polity dataset’s approximations of a state’s score in times when their coding does not allow them to give more exact scores (e.g. when a country is engaged in civil war).
Before turning to the testing of specific hypotheses, we should satisfy ourselves that there is indeed a difference between authoritarian and democratic regimes when it comes to waging asymmetric war. Using the information above in Figure 1, namely that in the 127 conflicts in the sample, there were 39 democratic victories, 14 democratic defeats, 44 authoritarian victories, and 30 authoritarian defeats, I tested the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the democratic and the authoritarian chances of victory through a Pearson chi-squared test. The test finds a chi-squared value of 2.718; with one degree of freedom (since there are two rows and two columns), this is significant at p=.1 but not at p=.05. We can therefore reject the null hypothesis at the .10 significance level but not the .05. In other words, if it were true that there is no difference across regime types, if random samples of 127 conflicts were taken and divided randomly into a group of 53 and a group of 74 conflicts, we would expect the two groups to be at least this dissimilar somewhere between 5% and 10% of the time. This can be taken to mean that there is very roughly a 5-10% chance that the null hypothesis is in fact true. Such a percentage,
by statistical custom, allows the conclusion that there is a significant but not highly significant
difference between democratic and authoritarian states’ war performance.

Figure 2: Insurgency, Victory, and Regime Type

The data on insurgency and regime type is perhaps somewhat surprising. In all,
democracies fought 44 wars in which insurgency and guerrilla warfare were present and only 9
that in which they were not. Authoritarians, however, fought 40 wars with insurgency/guerrilla
warfare and 34 without, as illustrated in Figure 2 above. Running a Pearson chi-squared test on
these figures gives a chi-squared value of 11.56, which is significant even at p=.005. Thus, there
is only a very small chance that the null hypothesis is true, and we can conclusively reject the
null hypothesis that regime type and probability of insurgency are unrelated. However, the
finding is not that authoritarians will be more likely to select into insurrections, as originally
hypothesized. In fact, the finding is the precise opposite: democracies are in fact more likely to
fight against insurrections. The original hypothesis (Hypothesis 6) is not only rejected, but its
opposite is confirmed by the data.
There are several reasons why this might be. For one, authoritarians' opponents might believe, rightly or wrongly, that an insurgent or guerrilla resistance to authoritarians' forces will be more likely to trigger a policy of national annihilation or other devastating behavior than guerrilla resistance to democracies would, which disincentivizes attempting guerrilla defense against authoritarians. There may also be other forms of selection effects that drown out the hypothesized effect. For example, democracies may be less likely to engage enemies that have a chance of successfully resisting through conventional means, increasing the proportion of democratic conflicts that include insurgency/guerrilla war. However, the examination of such explanations is best left to future work. It is noteworthy, though, that the presence of insurgency alone does not seem to significantly impact likelihood of victory - democracies won 73% of wars with insurgencies and a similar 78% of those without, while authoritarians had a 60% victory rate in wars with insurgencies and 59% in those without – perhaps because the measure of insurgency employed does not mandate that the insurgency be the primary focus or front of the conflict, suggesting that even if the hypothesis had held, its explanatory power with respect to the question of why authoritarians sometimes lose asymmetric wars would be minimal.

Hypothesis 7, that democracies are less likely to engage smaller enemies who nevertheless have distinct advantages in military modernization, also receives very little support. None of the democratic strong powers' 53 asymmetric wars were fought against such opponents, but only four of the authoritarians' 74 wars were. A Pearson chi-squared test results in a chi-squared value of approximately 1.46, which is not even close to significant even at the $p=.1$ level. In other words, there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis that democracies and authoritarians are equally likely to combat smaller but technologically superior foes. On

\footnote{This test applies Yates' correction factor due to the extremely small number of expected observations, as is customary.}
examination, the data reveal that in all four cases, the strong actor was pre-Communist China and in three of the four, the small actor was Japan, suggesting that rather than indicating anything about authoritarian regimes, these cases merely indicate that China was historically large but militarily obsolete relative to other states and relative to Japan in particular. Thus, we can reject Hypothesis 7’s claim that authoritarians fail to win asymmetric wars because they are more likely to fight against smaller but more modernized militaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systematic &amp; indiscriminate harm of non-combatants</th>
<th>Democracy</th>
<th>Authoritarianism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>6 cases (2 victories, 4 defeats)</td>
<td>12 cases (6 victories, 6 defeats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>9 cases (7 victories, 2 defeats)</td>
<td>11 cases (7 victories, 4 defeats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting reports</td>
<td>3 cases (3 defeats)</td>
<td>1 case (1 defeat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Systematic and indiscriminate harm of non-combatants in post-WWII conflicts\(^{181}\) by regime type

Even the claim that authoritarians have been more likely to systematically and indiscriminately harm non-combatants in post-WWII asymmetric conflicts and therefore suffer a backlash that prevents their victory does not receive support. Running a Pearson chi-squared test on the data in Figure 3 in such a manner as to produce the greatest likelihood of a statistically significant result\(^{182}\) produces a chi-squared value of 1.798, which is not significant even at \(p=.1\).

\(^{181}\) Technically a misnomer – this paper includes the years 1937-1945 in ‘post-WWII’ conflicts, so ‘non-pre-WWII’ would be a more accurate title.

\(^{182}\) Namely, by treating all conflicting reports for democracies as negative cases and for authoritarians as a positive case and by not applying Yates’ correction factor (there is no consensus on whether to apply the correction factor, which seeks to prevent the over-significance of chi-square tests performed on small numbers of observations, when the number of expected observations in the cells of such a table are between five and ten and so the more generous option is chosen).
Thus, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that authoritarians and democracies are equally likely to employ the strategies in question in their post-WWII asymmetric wars. Even if we could, authoritarians are barely if at all more likely to lose wars in which they do employ such tactics, suggesting that any effect on the chance of winning a war is marginal at best. Thus, we can reject Hypothesis 9 as well as Hypotheses 6 and 7.

However, there is definitely a difference between pre- and post-WWII conflicts. In the pre-WWII era, there is a statistically significant difference between democracies’ (30-5) and authoritarians’ (30-16) rates of victory and defeat. With a Pearson chi-squared value of 4.405, this finding is significant at the p=.05 but not the p=.01 level, which is sufficient to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference. Non-pre-WWII conflicts, though, do not express any difference at all – democracies and authoritarians both won 50% of the time (9-9 and 14-14 respectively). It is possible - and consistent with the argument put forth by Gil Merom that liberal (i.e. post-WWII) democracies are often confronted in small wars with an impossible choice of whether to engage in brutality and thereby alienate their own publics or whether to refrain from escalation, which produces higher casualties among its own soldiery and thereby turns public support against the war — that while democracies are as likely to use systematic indiscriminate violence as are authoritarians, they suffer greater domestic costs from doing so. Such an explanation is suggested (although far from statistically significantly) by democracies’ greater variance in chances of victory between when they do use such methods and when they do not, as illustrated in Figure 3.

The quantitative testing done above indicates that there is essentially no support for the ideas that either selection effects, at least through the mechanisms hypothesized in this thesis, or strategic choice account for the difference between authoritarian and democratic victory rates in

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asymmetric wars, at least in the pre-WWII era. The most likely source for the disparity, therefore, comes from the area addressed in Hypothesis 8: military effectiveness. Hypothesis 8—authoritarian states fail to win asymmetric wars because they suffer from poor leadership—while not tested here, has received empirical support elsewhere in the literature, as discussed previously. There has been no reliable testing done on other aspects of performance, such as the exceedingly-hard-to-quantify factor of soldier initiative as well as morale in specifically asymmetric wars (where nationalist sentiments often employed by authoritarian states are less likely to be effective at encouraging high morale due to reduced state interests in the conflict).

The empirical support for Hypothesis 8 elsewhere in the literature and the rejection here of hypotheses favoring selection effects or strategic choice as reasons for authoritarian defeats combine to suggest that poor military performance in leadership, if not initiative and morale as well, is the strongest explanation for the relative failure of authoritarians in pre-WWII asymmetric war. It could also explain the post-WWII similarity in victory rates between authoritarians and democrats despite greater democratic squeamishness at employing barbarism—authoritarians have more difficulty in sufficiently militarily effective, while democrats fight better but are more likely to lose public support and thereby be compelled to abandon a conflict. Specifically looking at authoritarians, though, the general pattern of authoritarian failure to achieve military victory in asymmetric war can, according to this analysis, best be explained through combinations of the traditional non-regime-specific hypotheses - the significance and limitations of which have been explored in existing literature - of resource limitation, arms diffusion and over-mechanization, external support, and strategic interaction with authoritarian states' domestic-politics-driven failures of military effectiveness, especially in the realm of leadership.
The next chapter will test the last four hypotheses of this thesis and consists of a case study of the Soviet war against the mujahidin in Afghanistan. As mentioned in the introduction, this case study was selected for the depth of information available relative to that of other cases as well as for the ability to divide an analysis of the continuous decision throughout the war to continue or terminate the war into three distinct temporal ranges, namely the regimes of Brezhnev (1979-1982), Andropov and later Chernenko (1982-1985), and Gorbachev (1985-1989). The chapter will begin with the events of the war itself in Afghanistan, leaving aside issues of the Russian leadership, and examine them for the purpose of illustrating the effects of resource limitation, arms diffusion, over-mechanization, external intervention, and strategic interaction (Hypotheses 1-5), as well as illustrating the hypothesized authoritarian weakness of leadership (Hypothesis 8). It will then turn to the Russian leadership's attitudes towards the war and decisions to remain in or abandon the conflict, assessing the consistency of the Russian decision-making process with the four hypotheses from Chapter IV (Hypotheses 9-13), thereby providing some small confirmatory or disconfirmatory evidence for the accuracy of these hypotheses.

VI. The Soviet War in Afghanistan

The Path to War and an Overview of Combatants

The chain of events that led to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan began with the overthrow of King Zahir Shah by a Soviet-supported relation named Mohammed Daoud in 1973.\textsuperscript{184} Daoud fell out of favor with the Soviets after repressing the Afghan Communist parties

and quarreling with Brezhnev in a face-to-face meeting in 1977. After arresting Communist leaders in April 1978, he was overthrown by Communist sympathizers, who installed Mohammed Taraki as leader of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. However, Taraki was ousted and executed by Hafizullah Amin in late 1979. Thus the stage was set for the December 1979 Soviet invasion that overthrew Amin and installed Babruk Karmal as head of the DRA.

One of the commonest conventional wisdoms about the Soviet invasion was that "their real target [was] the Persian Gulf oil fields." This opinion was shared not only by the U.S. intelligence community but by foreign leaders as well, including General Zia, Pakistan’s head of state. However, this belief is largely incorrect. The Soviets were motivated more by the fear that a pro-American government might be installed in Afghanistan, or that Amin himself might "'do a Sadat,'... aligning himself with the United States." Such fears were reinforced by blowback from KGB rumors meant to portray Amin as an agent of the CIA and led to more alarmist arguments that "the CIA were intent on creating a new ‘Ottoman Empire,’ which would include the Soviet Union’s southern Republics, [and] that the United States might station Pershing missiles in Afghanistan."

This fear was a major motivating force in convincing Soviet policymakers that an invasion was necessary, and one of the largest obstacles to invasion – the fear that it would result in deterioration of relations with the West – lost relevance when NATO announced plans to

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185 Ibid., 20.
186 Ibid., 24.
187 Ibid., 28.
188 Ibid., 41.
189 Ibid., 13.
193 Ibid., 118, 119.
deploy Tomahawk and Pershing missiles in Europe, indicating that "relations were already spoiled." Another major factor in the decision to invade may have been the Brezhnev Doctrine, a policy of working to forestall allied governments' "fall to anarchy or outright hostile forces," although such a defeat of the Amin government was unlikely. Once the invasion had taken place, prestige was added as an important Soviet interest in the conflict. Many hard-liners, including a foreign policy aide to Gorbachev, even believed that the USSR lacked "the resilience to survive the loss of prestige" that would accompany a retreat from Afghanistan.

However, the Soviets were unable to field troops in proportion to the significance of those interests or to the needs of the battlefield (which the CIA estimated as requiring a force three or four times larger than the force the Soviets actually committed) because of the international outcry that a larger force would provoke and the simple logistical and financial costs of operating such a force. The number of Soviet occupation forces did vary over the course of the war, and estimates of their number differ. In 1984, the Soviets had somewhere between 85,000 and 115,000 troops and support personnel in Afghanistan, with another 30,000 stationed just across the Soviet border. Even at the height of the war, this force constituted only about 2% of total Soviet military capability.

Had the Soviets not been as limited in the resources they could deploy, and had they been

194 Cordovez and Harrison, Out of Afghanistan, 47.
196 Ewans, Conflict in Afghanistan, 120.
197 Ibid., 142.
199 Coll, Ghost Wars, 8,9
201 Ibid., 46.
203 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 44.
able to manage the logistics of a greater deployment, it is not implausible that they could have
decupled the number of soldiers deployed; the U.S., after all, devoted 21% of its military
strength to the war in Vietnam.205 Such action would have won the war, as the CIA and ISI had
estimated that the USSR needed to triple or quadruple its military force in order to overrun the
entire country and quell the insurgency – decupling would be more than sufficient.206 Thus, the
significance of Hypothesis 1 (that strong powers fail to win asymmetric wars in part because
they are unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient military and/or economic resources) is
demonstrated. The Soviet forces that were deployed were, however, supplemented by the Afghan
Army, which in 1978 had 100,000 personnel, by 1980 reduced by desertion to “some 30-40,000,
of whom probably less than half could be safely committed to battle.”207 By 1983, though, “the
Afghan Army was functioning again as a viable force.... [of] 35-40,000 men.”208

The numbers of the mujahidin are estimated at around 150,000 full- or part-time fighters
as of 1984, about a third of whom were full-time fighters.209 The interests of the mujahidin were
more decentralized. Some fought for their religion, temporarily setting aside tribal disputes to
drive out the infidel armies.210 Others fought for their tribe or for Pashtun nationalism, especially
around Kandahar.211 Personal gain was another motivating factor; the mujahidin were prone to
fighting for “immediate tangible gains, localized in area, and with no higher strategic
objective.”212 Some tribes would supply the Soviets and while supporting the mujahidin or even

205 Ibid., 27.
206 Coll, Ghost Wars, 89; and Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 48.
207 Ewans, Conflict in Afghanistan, 129.
208 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 58.
209 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 155.
210 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 33.
211 Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia (New Haven: Yale University
212 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 43.
participating in the jihad, in order to reap the greatest profit,\textsuperscript{213} and particularly in the south, loyalty depended on the provision of money and arms.\textsuperscript{214} These disparate interests were joined together by a common desire to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

\textit{Conduct of the War}

For the first two and a half years of the war, through 1982, the Soviet army used “conventional textbook tactics that had been devised to defeat NATO in western Europe and Chinese troops on the plains of Manchuria,”\textsuperscript{215} and which were utterly inadequate for fighting a guerrilla war in mountainous terrain, relying on slow-moving road-bound motorized convoys that gave the mujahidin resistance near-complete freedom in choosing the time and place of engagement.\textsuperscript{216} The Soviets seemed “content to hold a series of major military bases or strategic towns, and the routes between them,” not to exert influence over the countryside.\textsuperscript{217} When they did venture out of those towns and bases they were reluctant to leave the relative security of their armored vehicles unless and until “the area had been thoroughly strafed and pounded by shells, bombs, and rockets.”\textsuperscript{218} This reluctance reduced their tactical mobility against the mujahidin due to the mountainous terrain, making hit-and-run attacks far easier, and illustrating how the over-mechanization proposed in Hypothesis 4 affects strong powers’ ability to win asymmetric wars. They also suffered from leadership issues due to the centralization of Soviet command structures (which reduced flexibility in response to ambush) and a penchant for extensive preplanning (which could not account for ambush), as well as the “increasingly hereditary” makeup of the officer corps, whose un-meritocratic selection was responsible for some of the poor Russian

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{214} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 19.
\textsuperscript{215} Cordovez and Harrison, \textit{Out of Afghanistan}, 59.
\textsuperscript{216} Yousaf and Adkin, \textit{Afghanistan – The Bear Trap}, 53.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 56
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 56.
\end{footnotesize}
responses to guerrilla attack,\textsuperscript{219} illustrating the relevance of Hypothesis 8, namely that poor military leadership impedes authoritarian states’ attempts to win asymmetric wars. The army itself, including its NCOs, was predominantly made up of conscripts who were rote-drilled and expected to do no more than follow orders,\textsuperscript{220} and who cared far more about personal survival than the success of the mission.\textsuperscript{221}

As a result of this casualty-conscious behavior and the related use of firepower, “from its earliest days the Afghan war had been brutal, characterized by indiscriminate aerial bombing and the widespread slaughter of civilians.”\textsuperscript{222} These Soviet tactics can be seen in the first five Panjshir campaigns designed to root out and destroy the forces of Ahmed Shah Massoud, an insurgent leader who operated out of the Panjshir valley in northern Afghanistan and who targeted the Salang Highway, the long, exposed road that formed the only “reliable overland supply route between the USSR and Kabul.”\textsuperscript{223} “In each of the first six Soviet assaults on the Panjshir… Massoud hardly seemed to stand a chance”: he was always “grossly outgunned.”\textsuperscript{224} However, Massoud would “never stand and fight head-on,” instead conducting hit and run battles, capturing Soviet equipment and turning Afghan soldiers against Soviet forces.\textsuperscript{225} As a result, he was able to not only survive the first five assaults, but even increase the potency of his resistance during and between them.

The sixth assault was different, however. Conducted in the fall of 1982, in this campaign Massoud’s 2,000 fighters were confronted by about 14,000 mostly-Soviet troops and a great deal of air power and armor. “It had no decisive effect, and the Soviets suffered some 3,000

\textsuperscript{219} Galeotti, \textit{Afghanistan}, 200.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 200.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{222} Coll, \textit{Ghost Wars}, 131.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 115, 116.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 117.
casualties," but their scorched earth tactics "claimed thousands of civilian lives... [and] more than 80 percent of the Panjshir's buildings had been damaged or destroyed." The crops and livestock of the valley's populace were destroyed, and the Soviets built a wall to "starve the valley out." While the wall was not effective enough at preventing smuggling to accomplish its goal, "it was unclear how much more hardship the valley's population could bear," so "Massoud decided to cut a deal," exchanging the operation of an Afghan army base at the end of the valley for a year of peace in the Panjshir, which enabled him "to stockpile weapons and food for his critically malnourished and poorly armed troops" and rebuild his forces.

Massoud was not the only mujahid to face this new brutal Soviet strategy. "Beginning in 1983 [the USSR] made deliberate attempts to depopulate the countryside, principally by means of extensive air bombardment and shelling of villages, the sowing of mines and a 'scorched earth' policy on the part of ground forces." Punitive bombing was also practiced as retaliation for insurgent activity. Not all indiscriminate violence was planned — some resulted from breakdowns of discipline — but much of it was officially sanctioned. This strategy was not entirely ineffective; it prevented the mujahidin from finding local sources of food and shelter, which in theory could eliminate its ability to function as a guerrilla army. However, the tactic also created a large number of refugees, and the refugee camps that they required both inside and outside Afghanistan became useful sources of shelter and recruits for the mujahidin.

By the 1984 Soviet Panjshir VII campaign against Massoud, they had made a significant

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226 Ewans, Conflict in Afghanistan, 133.
227 Coll, Ghost Wars, 118.
228 Ibid., 118, 121.
229 Ibid., 118, 121.
230 Ewans, Conflict in Afghanistan, 133-134.
231 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan — The Bear Trap, 59.
233 Ibid., 141.
234 Ibid., 138.
addition to their tactical and strategic repertoire, and had begun to make a major push for military victory in Afghanistan. They began using attack helicopters and elite spetznaz commandos, deploying by helicopter,235 to cordon off areas and pursue resistance fighters in their search-and-destroy operations.236 The spetznaz “shifted war-fighting tactics in the Soviets’ favor” by making it much more difficult for the mujahidin to elude attacking forces and to conduct the hit-and-run operations that are vital to the success of a guerrilla resistance.237 Soviet aircraft and Special Forces were also used to interrupt mujahidin supply lines.238 In 1985, the mujahidin supply base at Zhawar, which attempted to be a conventionally-defending “impregnable ‘defense locality,’” was temporarily captured by the Soviets using such tactics,239 who destroyed some equipment (whether it was “most of the equipment and ammunition stored there”240 or just “a few truckloads”241 depends on which source one believes). By 1986, the rate of attrition had resulted in “manpower shortages [that] were growing,” fatigue among the active mujahidin, and recruitment problems; “mujahideen morale would not hold out indefinitely”242 under Soviet strategies of depopulation and the use of spetznaz and attack helicopters.

It was external intervention and the diffusion of arms and weapons alongside simple dedication to the jihad that enabled the mujahidin to resist these tactics. The CIA, with the government of Saudi Arabia matching their expenditures, spent several billion dollars funding the mujahidin between 1979 and 1989, providing not only hundreds of thousands of tons of arms and ammunition to the mujahidin but also clothing and food to both the mujahidin and Afghan

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235 Ibid., 56.
236 Coll, Ghost Wars, 122.
237 Ibid., 122.
238 Bearden and Risen, The Main Enemy, 207.
239 Cordovez and Harrison, Out of Afghanistan, 200.
240 Ibid., 200.
241 Yousaf and Adkin, Afghanistan – The Bear Trap, 172.
242 Ibid., 182.
refugees. The government of Saudi Arabia also used Islamic charities to funnel money to
groups of mujahidin that were not supported by the CIA and ISI, and wealthy individuals
contributed still more. By some estimates, “as little as 25% of the money for the Afghan jihad
was actually supplied directly by states.” The mujahidin also plundered Soviet supply convoys
for food, clothing, and arms; Massoud used this tactic to great effect in his efforts to maintain a
guerrilla resistance in the early 1980s, before he began to receive significant external support
in late '84.

Material supplies were not the only form of external support for the mujahidin. Pakistan
also offered “the border areas of the NWFP and Baluchistan as a sanctuary for both the refugees
and guerrillas, as without a secure, cross-border base no such [guerrilla resistance] campaign
could succeed.” The Soviets were therefore prevented from striking the mujahidin’s primary
bases by the potential international repercussions of the violation of Pakistan’s territorial
sovereignty that such strikes would constitute. These bases – especially in Pakistani urban
areas – could also serve as centers for recruitment to the jihad. Moreover, the CIA and ISI
provided the mujahidin with intelligence and operations planning, including intelligence derived
from satellite imaging from 1985 onward, that prevented “many battles [from being] lost.”
ISI operatives even accompanied the mujahidin on many missions. Between its provision of
sanctuary, recruitment, funding, supplies, and intelligence, the combination of arms diffusion and
CIA/ISI/Saudi/Arab intervention allowed many mujahidin groups to reduce their dependence on

243 Ibid., 4, 29.
244 Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 86.
247 Ibid., 123.
249 Ewans, *Conflict in Afghanistan*, 133.
252 Ibid., 3.
the general population for those supplies and logistical/intelligence support necessary for an
effective guerrilla warfare strategy, weakening the effectiveness of the Soviet depopulation
strategy in reducing the mujahidin’s capacity to continue the struggle, and illustrating the
importance of the factors suggested in the Hypotheses 2 and 3 (emphasizing external
intervention and arms diffusion respectively).

Arms diffusion through external intervention also provided the mujahidin with the ability
to overcome the tactical domination of Soviet air power and the mobility helicopters gave the
spetznaz. The introduction of American-made Stinger missiles to the Afghan jihad in mid-1986
gave them for the first time an effective SAM means of combating Soviet air power, “chang[ing] the dynamic” of the war. The tactical successes that the Stingers provided also provided the
mujahidin with a significant boost to morale, one necessary for the jihad to continue. It also
impeded the ability of the Soviets’ use of air power on the battlefield, forcing helicopters to fly
by night and stay over friendly forces, reducing both Soviet forces’ mobility and the degree to
which air power impeded the ability of the mujahidin to pursue a guerrilla warfare strategy.
The Stingers, however, did not cause the Soviet withdrawal that finished two and a half years
after their introduction, as by the time they were introduced, the decision to withdraw had
already been made. The Geneva accord reduced resistance to withdrawal by offering the face-
saving gesture of conferring international recognition on the DRA, and on 15 February 1989,
the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was completed.
The effects of resource limitation, arms diffusion/mechanization, external intervention, and authoritarian leadership failures — that is, the effects hypothesized in Hypotheses 1-4 and 8 — are all apparent from this analysis. Strategic interaction in this conflict has been addressed by the theory’s own author, Ivan Arreguin-Toft. He claims that the war consisted of two interactions, a conventional v. guerrilla warfare interaction that took place between 1980 and 1982, and a barbarism v. guerrilla warfare interaction that started with the sixth invasion of the Panjshir valley and lasted for the rest of the war. The mujahidin won both interactions. The first is explicable through and supports the strategic interaction theory, but the theory predicts Soviet victory in the second interaction, providing partial but limited illustrative support for Hypothesis 5, that strong state failure to win results from attempting the opposite kind of strategic approach as the weaker power. He explains this discrepancy as resulting from the sanctuary and other support afforded to the mujahidin by Pakistan and the CIA, which prevented barbarism from destroying their ability to resist.

The Soviet war in Afghanistan led to the battle deaths of about 26,000 Soviet soldiers, although military officials only admit to the deaths of 15,000, and the deaths of many more from disease, as well as between 140,000 and 200,000 mujahidin casualties, and the death or displacement of “fully half the civilian population of Afghanistan.” In all, though, “this was a relatively minor, if ill-conceived and uncomfortable military adventure, eminently supportable, a negligible drain on the resources of the USSR.” Moreover, few if any of the costs were borne by the elite, as institutionalized corruption “[confined] the suffering to an underclass of those

262 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 215.
263 Ibid., 180.
264 Ibid., 215.
265 The Russian General Staff, The Soviet-Afghan War, xix, 303.
266 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, 188.
267 Galeotti, Afghanistan, 2.
lacking the necessary cash, class or connections and, as a result, those also with the least input into national politics,” while strict guidelines of what could be reported — for example, until the rule of Chernenko, no operations could be reported as involving more than one platoon and no one above the rank of junior officer would comment on those operations — limited the publicly perceived impact of the war.\textsuperscript{268} So why did Gorbachev decide to abandon the conflict, and why did his reasons not sway his predecessors? I turn now to the Russian domestic political scene in order to examine this policy change and its relevance for my last four hypotheses.

\textit{Brezhnev}

In the decade leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan, many of the structures of Soviet governance had ceased to hold much meaning. Even such bodies as the Politburo, the nominally second-highest and functionally highest governing body of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), had “become little more than rubber-stamps for the ad hoc gatherings of various grandees.”\textsuperscript{269} Lower level officials might hope to convince those oligarchs to enact certain policies, but they had no means of putting genuine political pressure on them.

When it came to the decision to invade Afghanistan, three people were essential: Yuri Andropov, the chairman of the KGB; Dmitri Ustinov, the defense minister; and Andrei Gromyko, the foreign minister.\textsuperscript{270} Other individuals, such as Brezhnev’s foreign policy advisor Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, were sometimes influential – Aleksandrov-Agentov had convinced Brezhnev to disallow intervention in Afghanistan in early 1979, although his views later changed and he helped to quell dissenting opinion later that year – but the primary actors

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 30, 88.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 6.
were those three individuals.\textsuperscript{271} The Politburo as a whole and the rest of the military apparatus (many of whom had opposed intervention and learned about the decision from the newspaper\textsuperscript{272}) had very little to do with the decision, as did Brezhnev himself. Even though Brezhnev’s sign-off was needed to conduct such military actions, he had become only marginally functional and was incapable of making political decisions; in poor health and with a serious drinking problem, he was “easily swayed by those around him,” according to his friends.\textsuperscript{273}

The first reevaluation of the USSR’s Afghanistan policy came just two months after the initial invasion, following a trip by Andropov to Kabul to examine and report on the progress of the intervention.\textsuperscript{274} Although little information is available on the Politburo meeting in which this reevaluation took place, it is known that someone suggested withdrawing troops, but that this idea received little support. The Soviet leadership “saw their goal in Afghanistan as providing the security necessary for the Karmal regime to take root and be able to withstand both military and political challenges,” and observed that it was thus far unable to survive without Soviet troops.\textsuperscript{275} They saw the intervention as having increased Soviet security, and were unwilling to abandon their investment in Afghanistan on the basis of the relatively-minor costs that it was imposing.

Within a year, it had become clear that the war would not be over quickly. In February of 1981, Ustinov became the first of the original crafters of the Afghanistan invasion to reverse his position; he circulated a letter stating that “no military solution to the war was possible and that it was necessary to find a political and diplomatic way out,” but was unable to garner support from

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 49-50.
\textsuperscript{272} Mendelson, \textit{Changing Course}, 57.
\textsuperscript{273} Mendelson, \textit{Changing Course}, 55; and Cordovez and Harrison, \textit{Out of Afghanistan}, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{274} Kalinovsky, “Decision-Making and the Soviet War in Afghanistan,” 52.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 53.
other Soviet leaders.\textsuperscript{276} Most of the Soviet leadership felt that any withdrawal short of victory—that is, any withdrawal without a stable Afghanistan that is not under internal or external threat—would entail a substantial loss of prestige and be seen as conceding the issue to the United States, so they decided to continue the occupation.\textsuperscript{277} Shortly thereafter, though, partly due to concerns trickling up from mid-level officers, party members, and intellectuals and partly due to the awareness that the intervention had become a war, Moscow, with the support of both Andropov and Ustinov, began to float trial balloons that it was willing to consider a negotiated withdrawal.\textsuperscript{278} Of course, they would not have accepted any offer that did not guarantee the security of their regime in Kabul.

So what can these reevaluations tell us about whether or not the leader’s political interests play a prominent role in deciding whether to remain in or leave an asymmetric war? Unfortunately, very little. It is entirely plausible given the record that the Soviet leadership was motivated during this period by nothing more than the desire to do what was best for the USSR. This plausibility, though, does not suggest that leaders’ political interests do \textit{not} play a significant role. It could simply be that their decision was in line with whatever constraints were present; in fact, given that their decisions all involved continuing the war or ending it with a favorable negotiated solution, and given that both forms of hypothesized domestic constraints constrain in the direction of \textit{continuing} war, that notion seems quite likely. Indeed, it is entirely possible that Andropov, Gromyko, and Ustinov did consider their political statuses when making decisions on Afghanistan; they may have feared being scapegoated if the war was a failure, which may be at least as good an explanation as desiring to follow state interests for why they

\textsuperscript{276} Quoted in Cordovez and Harrison, \textit{Out of Afghanistan}, 65.  
\textsuperscript{277} Ewans, \textit{Conflict in Afghanistan}, 142.  
returned to previously-rejected channels of negotiation and diplomacy once the military option began to seem unviable.

This period also leads to inconclusive results in whether or not the decision is conducted rationally or along the lines of prospect theory; the leadership’s actions are consistent with either model. Take, for example, the fact that leadership wanted to avoid the impression of conceding anything to the United States. If an outcome is made worse simply by involving a concession, that could indicate the kind of loss aversion predicted by prospect theory; however, the inclusion of a concession could significantly change the impact of materially identical outcomes through the effect of prestige, which was certainly one of the Soviets’ primary concerns. Despite these inconclusive results with respect to the hypotheses being tested, it is necessary to examine the Soviet war decisions under Brezhnev in order to place future Soviet decisions in the proper historical context. Only by observing the Soviet perceptions of their interests that lay behind the initial invasion and early rejections of the possibility of withdrawal can we see how those interests changed over time and might have helped lead to the eventual decision to withdraw.

*Andropov & Chernenko*

This trajectory of gradually warming towards withdrawal continued in the tenure of Yuri Andropov, who succeeded Brezhnev in November of 1982. In early 1983, Andropov met with Diego Cordovez, the UN representative in the Geneva negotiations that were seeking to establish a negotiated settlement between Afghanistan and Pakistan and made it clear that he wanted the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan to end; the war, he said, was expensive, harmful to Russian society, and was creating problems in the Soviets’ international relations.\(^{279}\) However, Andropov was also a firm believer in the incompatibility of Communist and capitalist interests, and

believed that the two would eventually clash, and as a result, the only kind of negotiated settlement he would be willing to accept would have been one that guaranteed the survival of a Communist regime in Kabul, though not necessarily headed by Karmal.\textsuperscript{280} This can be seen in a Politburo meeting in March 1983, in which Andropov held that ‘American imperialism’ was what stood between the USSR and withdrawal.\textsuperscript{281}

Despite the willingness of Andropov, the USSR made only tentative moves towards negotiating a withdrawal during his tenure.\textsuperscript{282} There could be three explanations for this discrepancy between Andropov’s preferences and his state’s policy. The first is that he was domestically constrained to maintain forces in Afghanistan by one of the mechanisms described previously. This argument, however, is very weak. Andropov stressed to Karmal in mid-1983 that the USSR would not be staying in Afghanistan much longer,\textsuperscript{283} suggesting that he was not cripplingy afraid of being removed from office even if he was constrained. Moreover, as Andropov had once headed the KGB and maintained strong ties there, attempting a coup would be extremely costly, making him relatively unconstrained from the perspective of costs theory, and as the political system still maintained many of the oligarchic aspects of the Brezhnev era, Andropov’s winning coalition was not so large as to be constraining.

The other two explanations are more plausible. The first is that Andropov simply didn’t have the time and energy to accomplish much with respect to Afghanistan. Most of his fifteen-month tenure was spent on an anti-corruption campaign, which consumed most of his focus, and in mid-1983 he was hospitalized with kidney problems that led to his death in early 1984. With such pressing distractions, Andropov’s failure to follow through on his preferences could simply

\textsuperscript{281} Ewans, \textit{Conflict in Afghanistan}, 143.
\textsuperscript{282} Galeotti, \textit{Afghanistan}, 16.
\textsuperscript{283} Cordovez and Harrison, \textit{Out of Afghanistan}, 100.
be a fluke. The other explanation, and one that is not mutually exclusive with Andropov lacking the time and energy, is that Andropov was blocked by intra-leader-group dynamics. Andropov was the leader of the Soviet Union, but varying degrees of ‘his’ powers were in the hands of others, especially after his hospitalization. Most importantly, the hard-line Marshal Ogarkov dominated defense policy, and Andropov was unable to remove him. In other words, the presence of an uncooperative element when power is divided into a group can affect the way in which leaders’ preferences get adopted into policy. This kind of impediment is unaccounted for in the hypotheses presented previously, and suggests that further research into more-or-less-shared leadership by groups is necessary for a fuller understanding of authoritarians’ behavior.

In early 1984, Andropov died and was replaced by Konstantin Chernenko, a member of the Soviet old guard. Unfortunately, there is little concrete information on Chernenko’s attitudes towards the war in Afghanistan; “in thirty-five speeches, he never explicitly referred to Afghanistan.” However, it was the impression of newspapers like the New York Times and other international observers that Chernenko was trying to win the war on the ground; the Soviet forces certainly behaved more aggressively during his thirteen-month tenure that ended in March 1985. Mark Galeotti infers that Chernenko wanted a Soviet victory “both owing to his personal inclinations and his desire to win for himself at least one triumph before succumbing to his emphysema.”

As in the case of Brezhnev’s tenure, there is little in the actions and preferences of Andropov that would indicate a superiority of one model of decision-making over the other, nor is there an indication as to whether winning coalition size and low overthrow costs actually

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284 Ibid., 94.
285 Mendelson, Changing Course, 76.
286 Cordovez and Harrison, Out of Afghanistan, 175.
287 Galeotti, Afghanistan, 17.
288 Ibid., 17.
constrain authoritarian leaders. Given that Chernenko’s was a “moribund regime” with unclear attitudes and beliefs regarding the war, it is also impossible to draw directly from it any indication of whether any of the four hypotheses under consideration are in fact correct. These ambiguities illustrate two important limitations on these hypotheses’ testability: first, to confirm or reject them directly requires a great deal of information on the authoritarian leader’s attitudes, which may not be readily available; and second, their impact – and hence their visibility – is greatest at the margin, when the leader’s expected outcome of withdrawal is superior to his expected outcome of continuing the war, and is minimized when that is not the case, as in the tenures of these two Soviet leaders.

However, it is possible to draw from the reasons for which Chernenko was chosen for his position certain inferences with bearing on the hypotheses under consideration. Andropov had groomed Mikhail Gorbachev to be his successor, intending to pass the job of renewing the Soviet economy and politics to him. Nevertheless, the Politburo, dominated by members of the old guard, elected Chernenko instead, fearing the loss of their political status should Gorbachev, a reformist who was not of the old guard, become the leader of the USSR. From this choice, we can see that domestic politics can factor into war termination policy, even if only through the medium of leader selection. Even if the leader does not purposefully insert his own preferences into the decision to stay in or exit a conflict, simply by being in the position that he is, he may act as a medium for the domestic political interests of members of his political system. Directly or indirectly, the conditions of domestic politics do impact war termination decisions – the motivations for Chernenko’s selection therefore provide some support for Hypothesis 10,

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289 Cordovez and Harrison, Out of Afghanistan, 175.
291 Bennett, Condemned to Repetition, 242.
namely, that domestic politics do impact asymmetric war termination behavior, albeit in this case only indirectly.

Gorbachev

It is Gorbachev’s tenure that is most useful in addressing these hypotheses. At the start of his term, Gorbachev both publicly and privately expressed views of the interests of capitalists and Communists as being zero-sum, but within a short time, he had begun to adopt a greater degree of flexibility. By early 1986, he had begun to describe the war as a “bleeding wound” and he had even secured the approval of the Politburo in October 1985 - after reading aloud “a number of ‘heartbreaking’ letters from parents and relatives of soldiers” for a decision to withdraw in principle, albeit one without any actual withdrawal scheme attached. In fact, Gorbachev had problems with accepting practical withdrawal schemes; one issue was sunk costs: “a million of our soldiers went through Afghanistan. And we will not be able to explain to our people why we did not complete it.... We suffered such heavy losses! And what for? We undermined the prestige of our country, brought bitterness.”

After spending the next two years trying to stabilize Afghanistan and secure a plan for a minimum-political-loss withdrawal and continuing the Geneva negotiations that had been proceeding since Andropov’s tenure, Gorbachev finally accepted that the Soviets would not achieve an overall-favorable negotiated outcome and concluded the Geneva accords in March of 1988 with an agreement that the Soviets withdrawal from Afghanistan would begin by May of

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292 Ibid., 249.
293 Coll, Ghost Wars, 145.
1988 and be finished within 10 months, and this was indeed what occurred.\textsuperscript{296} The deal did not grant many concessions to the USSR – the Najibullah regime was left without the protection of Soviet forces and and the cessation of foreign aid to the mujahidin was conditioned on parallel cessation of aid to Najibullah’s regime. Although not a total defeat, the withdrawal agreement cannot possibly be considered to be a Soviet victory.

These policy shifts did not take place in a vacuum. Between 1985 and 1987, Gorbachev devoted a great deal of time and effort to establishing and expressing personal political control over who held positions of power in the Soviet government; in the 1986 ‘elections,’ Gorbachev effectively took control of the Central Committee, replacing 38\% of its members, primarily with centrists and reformists, two groups with attitudes favorable to his policies.\textsuperscript{297} At the same time, he took control of the Politburo, adding eight supporters between 1985 and 1986 to the original nine full members, four of whom were dismissed or placed in other positions.

The result of these changes was to transform the Soviet leadership from one in which the general secretary had limited power as oligarchic groups struggled for resources to one in which the general secretary was the most powerful actor, using his control of regional party apparatuses to influence the election of government officials at all levels (influence on regional apparatuses translated to influence over regional secretaries which translated to influence over the selection of delegates to Party Congresses who elect the Central Committee who elect the Politburo).\textsuperscript{298} In other words, Gorbachev’s control over who was in power extended to all levels of government, although some deeply-embedded officials could not be removed. At the same time, Gorbachev worked to decentralize the policy-making process and cultivate support outside of traditional institutions. The expert community in particular benefited from this cultivation, and its leaders

\textsuperscript{296} Cordovez and Harrison, \textit{Out of Afghanistan}, 263.
\textsuperscript{297} Mendelson, \textit{Changing Course}, 104.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid., 101.
received access to national-level positions of power both within and outside the traditional party apparatus.\textsuperscript{299} The process of \textit{glasnost} also allowed for the creation of new apparatuses, like a critical press,\textsuperscript{300} while old, status-quo favoring constituencies were actively disempowered.

There is a broad consensus that without these reforms and Gorbachev's related consolidation of political support and resources, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan would not have been possible. That Gorbachev waited as long as he did to take concrete actions towards withdrawal even after securing support for it as a general principle – which can be taken as a decision to stay that was ongoing until his decision to begin an actual withdrawal – speaks to the importance of the leader's interests and domestic politics in the decision of when and how to withdraw. Gorbachev viewed withdrawing Soviet troops as necessary, yet he did not withdraw Soviet troops until his political power was secure. Thus, the tenure of Gorbachev provides confirmatory evidence for Hypothesis 10 (The domestic political interests of the leader are the critical factor in deciding to continue or leave an asymmetric war).

Gorbachev's tenure also reveals what kind of factors contributed to the domestic constraints on his actions. By manipulating regional party apparatuses and the (s)election process to expand his base of support within the upper echelons of the party apparatus, Gorbachev demonstrated that control over access to positions of power was firmly in his hands, the hands of the general secretary, moving the system away from the more oligarchic system of the Brezhnev era. According to costs theory, this action should make him relatively less constrained, and that seems to have been the case. Thus, Gorbachev's use of extension of control over access to power as a means of overcoming domestic political obstacles and seems to be confirmatory of Hypothesis 12 (authoritarian leaders who do not have personal control of security forces or of

\textsuperscript{299} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., 4.
access to positions of power will generally be unwilling to withdraw from asymmetric conflicts). However, according to selectorate theory, Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and opening the political system to the community of experts, as a major expansion of the size of his winning coalition, should have made him relatively more constrained, not less. Thus, the effects of Gorbachev’s opening of the political system can be taken as disconfirmatory of Hypothesis 11 (leaders with relatively larger winning coalitions will be less willing to end an asymmetric war in defeat).

Most of Gorbachev’s actions in the lead-up to the withdrawal cannot arguably indicate whether expected utility-type rationality or the prospect theory variation on that rationality better describes his decision-making process. The focus on sunk costs that made agreeing on a plan of withdrawal before stabilizing Afghanistan problematic is perhaps better explained by prospect theory – by moving Gorbachev and the Soviet elite into the mindset of the domain of loss, sunk costs made them risk-accepting, which explains why they were so slow to accept that stabilization of Afghanistan through military force was impossible. However, it is not impossible to explain through expected utility rationality – relatively higher sunk costs might increase the negative domestic consequences of otherwise comparable outcomes, creating a mechanism by which the expected utility of withdrawal might be worsened by sunk costs. The magnitude of the effect suggests that prospect theory is the better explanation, since the effects of sunk costs on expected utility are likely to be fairly marginal, but it is not entirely inconsistent with the standard model of rationality. In other words, it suggests but does not entirely confirm that Hypothesis 13 is correct.

However, prospect theory is not entirely sufficient as a replacement for rationality theory in describing Gorbachev’s actions. The decision to stay in Afghanistan at least temporarily
makes sense when deciding to stay is framed as a gamble (maybe or maybe not managing to stabilize the Najibullah regime) while the outcome of leaving is viewed as a fixed loss. It is just as easy to argue, though, that *staying* imposes a fixed loss – the costs in men, materiel, and money of continuing the war – while *leaving* should be viewed as a gamble (A pro-Soviet regime maybe or maybe not managing to stay in power). Under such a perspective, setbacks during the time when Gorbachev was making a constant decision to stay should have deepened the fixed loss of refusing the gamble, which should have pushed him towards *leaving*, not, as it actually did, staying. The framing of the decision thus can be manipulated to reject prospect theory as well as confirming it. Since it is not apparent which frame is more accurate, or to put it another way, which gamble – staying or leaving – was more risky, Gorbachev’s tenure, while suggesting that rationality is insufficient in explaining leader decisions, cannot either confirm or reject prospect theory as an alternative. It could be tested if prospect theorists were to devise a way to predict which frame is likely to be adopted in such situations, but in its present state it cannot.

The case study of the USSR’s war in Afghanistan illustrates the effects of resource limitation, arms diffusion and over-mechanization, external intervention, strategic interaction, and the authoritarian weakness of military leadership and, in this case, the overuse of indiscriminate violence. The Soviet debates over withdrawal provide some confirmation of the hypotheses that the leader’s domestic political interests significantly impact the decision to continue or end an asymmetric war (Hypothesis 10), and that a lack of leader control over security forces and/or access to positions of power constrains him towards continuing the war (Hypothesis 12), and they suggest that while classical economic rationality does not suffice as a description of the decision-making process (Hypothesis 13), there can be no confirmation or rejection of the argument that prospect theory best describes the decision-making process. The
debates do provide some disconfirmatory evidence, though, of the constraining effects of relatively-larger winning coalitions (Hypothesis 11).

VII. Conclusion

In attempting to answer the question of why relatively strong authoritarian states sometimes lose asymmetric wars in which the balance of power is in their favor, this thesis has examined general theories on strong state failure to achieve military victory in asymmetric wars and the support or refutation thereof in existing literature, examined how authoritarian domestic politics might affect their war selection, war-fighting behavior, and ability to absorb costs, and examined which interests are most at play in asymmetric war termination decisions, how domestic politics constrain leaders’ war termination decisions, and what level of risk acceptance is applied in those decisions. In each of these areas, it formulated hypotheses, some of which were tested quantitatively through statistical analysis of a dataset of asymmetric conflicts, some of which were tested qualitatively through a case study of the Soviet Union’s war in Afghanistan, and some of which had been analyzed in existing literature and were merely illustrated by that same case study. The table on the following page restates these hypotheses and whether and how each was confirmed or disconfirmed:
### Table 2: Hypotheses Redux

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Supported/Consistent</th>
<th>Not Supported</th>
<th>Contradicted</th>
<th>Partially Confirmed</th>
<th>Confirmed</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1: Strong powers, especially colonial powers before WWII and hegemonic powers after, fail to win asymmetric wars in part because they are unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient military and/or economic resources. <strong>Confirmed as a significant partial explanation by existing literature, illustrated by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 2: Strong powers are more likely to fail to achieve victory in asymmetric wars when their adversary receives tangible support (military resources and advice, logistical support, but not counting troops) from third party actors, particularly in the case of insurgencies. <strong>Confirmed as a partially applicable but powerful explanation by existing literature, illustrated by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 3: Especially after WWII, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts because their adversaries also have access to modern weaponry that enables more effective insurgency. <strong>Confirmed as a partial explanation by existing literature, illustrated by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 4: in post-WWI conflicts, strong states fail to win asymmetric conflicts that take the form of insurgencies because their own militaries are highly mechanized. <strong>Confirmed by the theory’s author, but new and yet unchallenged by other authors, illustrated by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 5: Strong actors are more likely to fail to win asymmetric wars when they choose to attempt strategies opposite from their opponents’ concurrent strategies. <strong>Partially confirmed by existing literature, illustrated (but not entirely supported) by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 6: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to take the form of insurgencies/guerrilla wars than those asymmetric wars waged by democracies. <strong>Contradicted by quantitative statistical testing.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 7: Asymmetric conflicts waged by authoritarian states will be more likely to be fought against more-modernized militaries than those waged by democratic states. <strong>Not supported by quantitative testing.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 8: Authoritarian states fail to win asymmetric wars because they suffer from poor military leadership. <strong>Confirmed applicable to wars in general by existing literature, illustrated by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 9: Authoritarian states fail to win post-WWII asymmetric wars because they are more likely to systematically and indiscriminately harm non-combatants. <strong>Not supported by quantitative testing.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 10: The personal and domestic political interests of the leader are the critical factor in deciding to continue or leave an asymmetric war. <strong>Supported/consistent with case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 11: Leaders with relatively larger winning coalitions will be less willing to end an asymmetric war in defeat. <strong>Unsupported if not disconfirmed by case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 12: Authoritarian leaders who do not have personal control of security forces or of access to positions of power will generally be unwilling to withdraw from asymmetric conflicts. <strong>Supported/consistent with case study.</strong></td>
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<td>Hypothesis 13: Authoritarian leaders sometimes act in ways that do not maximize their expected utility subject to constant levels of risk-acceptance, becoming more risk-preferring as the expected outcome of the war worsens. <strong>Supported/consistent with case study.</strong></td>
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So why do relatively strong authoritarian states sometimes lose asymmetric wars in which the balance of power is in their favor? Because some combination of resource limitation, the diffusion of modern weaponry, over-mechanization in the face of insurgency, external intervention, poor choice of strategic approach, or failures driven by domestic politics of military leadership and possibly efficacy render them unable to win the war militarily or to force a favorable negotiated solution, until it becomes in the leader's best interest, constrained by potential lack of control over security forces or control over access to positions of power, to support a withdrawal, modified by a degree of risk-acceptance that increases when the expected outcome of the war worsens. It is not a short or simple answer, but the question is an extremely complicated one and merits a complicated answer.

This study and its results reveal several questions and areas of theory that merit further examination, explanation, and enhancement. For example, why have democracies been more likely than authoritarian states to combat insurgencies as part of asymmetric conflict, and how can prospect theory be refined in order to have effective real-world utility? Why do mixed regimes lose asymmetric wars? Perhaps the greatest area left unanswered, though, and perhaps the greatest limitation on this thesis as well, is how the relaxation of the assumption that authoritarian 'leaders' are individuals affects war termination decisions, an assumption that, as the Soviet Union demonstrated, frequently does not hold in the real world. Does the presence of dissenting voices of power within the leadership itself affect the decision-making process with respect to war and conflict? Do authoritarian leaderships become gridlocked, and if so, when and why? Do groups have inherent differences from individuals in perception, information processing, risk tolerance, or loss aversion, and if so, how do they affect the analysis of the decision to withdraw presented here? Given the likely significance at least some of the answers
to these questions, analysis of group decision-making in authoritarian states and its application to conflict decisions in general and asymmetric war termination decisions in particular presents itself as a crucial direction for future research.

However, the value of works like this one does not derive from what other questions they suggest, but rather from their significance. Although the answer that this thesis proposes is complex, it still has a great deal of practical significance. Its findings with respect to authoritarian states' failures to win authoritarian wars militarily present a set of conflict variables that can be examined shortly after the onset of an asymmetric war involving an authoritarian state in order to better predict the military outcome of the conflict. Meanwhile, its findings with respect to the decision to leave the conflict short of victory suggest that when assessing whether domestic politics are constraining the behavior of an authoritarian state embroiled in a protracted asymmetric war, policymakers should consider the leader's control over security and access to power rather than the regime's relationship with its public, the size of the group that maintains it in power, or other such factors. Its support for the hypothesis that leaders do not behave according to economic rationality and in fact, like a gambler losing badly at poker, become more risk-accepting the worse their situation becomes suggests that rather than applying sanctions to compel an authoritarian state to abandon an asymmetric conflict, which may have counterproductive effects, efforts should be made to make withdrawal as painless as possible. Its finding that authoritarian states' suffer in asymmetric wars from their predisposition to impede effective military leadership through 'coup-proofing' and a lack of meritocracy suggest that the U.S. should attempt to prevent such patterns from occurring in authoritarian states with whom it is allied in the war on terrorism. These and other applications imbue even an answer as complicated as this one with a great deal of practical significance.
Bibliography


Appendix

Variable Names and Coding

War Name: The name given to the war.

Strong Power(s): The stronger actor or coalition of actors in the asymmetric conflict.

Weak Power(s): The weaker actor or coalition of actors in the asymmetric conflict.

Dem. Start: The strong power’s Polity IV democracy score in the year that the conflict began.
- exes indicate that data was not available for that year or the government was interrupted or in interregnum.
- shaded fill indicates that the score is a rounded average of the scores of the individual coalition members.

Dem. End: The strong power’s Polity IV democracy score in the year that the conflict ended.
- exes indicate that data was not available for that year or the government was interrupted or in interregnum.
- shaded fill indicates that the score is a rounded average of the scores of the individual coalition members.

Auth. Start: The strong power’s Polity IV autocracy score in the year that the conflict began.
- exes indicate that data was not available for that year or the government was interrupted or in interregnum.
- shaded fill indicates that the score is a rounded average of the scores of the individual coalition members.

Auth. End: The strong power’s Polity IV autocracy score in the year that the conflict began.
- exes indicate that data was not available for that year or the government was interrupted or in interregnum.
- shaded fill indicates that the score is a rounded average of the scores of the individual coalition members.

Avg.: The rounded average of the net results of subtracting Auth. Start from Dem. Start and subtracting Auth. End from Dem. End (or, when data is unavailable for one but not both of those years, the net result from the year for which data is available, or, when data is unavailable for both years, the average net score over the years of the war as indicated in the Polity IV dataset.
- exes indicate that absolutely no data was available because the actor is not listed in the Polity IV dataset.

Reg.: Regime type; 1) Democracy, 2) Authoritarianism, 3) Mixed Regime.

Victory: 1) Strong power victory, 0) Strong power defeat/tie.
- Light shading indicates that the CoW and Arreguin-Toft data disagreed, and the CoW datum was chosen based on independent research.
- Dark shading indicates that the CoW and Arreguin-Toft data disagreed, and the Arreguin-Toft datum was chosen based on independent research.
- An underscore indicates that the CoW and Arreguin-Toft data agreed, but independent research indicated that both were incorrect.

Ins.: Insurgency; 1) Armed groups fought for or alongside the weak power(s) using guerrilla warfare, 0) No guerrilla warfare.
- Shading indicates that the insurgency was not coded in Jason Lyall's list of insurgencies, generally indicating that the war was inter-state.

I.V.: 0) No systematic indiscriminate violence against/imprisonment of noncombatants known to have taken place, 1) systematic indiscriminate violence against/imprisonment of noncombatants known to have taken place, 2) conflicting reports, blank indicates that the war was not after WWII and a coding was not needed.

Mod.: 0) The weak power(s) did not have a distinct edge in modernization of weaponry, 1) The weak power(s) did have a distinct edge in modernization of weaponry.

Start: The year the war started according to the CoW/Arreguin-Toft datasets. Shading indicates that the datasets disagreed and CoW was chosen.

End: The year the war ended according to the CoW/Arreguin-Toft datasets.

Data

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