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'The People are Revolting': An Anatomy of Authoritarian Counterinsurgency

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ABSTRACT

Rather than win hearts and minds, authoritarian counterinsurgency is said to rely heavily on coercion. It has a reputation for effectiveness, if also for its amorality. Still, the research into authoritarian counterinsurgency is surprisingly lacking. By distilling common features from key cases, this article concludes that this approach goes beyond the indiscriminate violence that typically captures the imagination. Like their democratic counterparts but differently, authoritarian regimes also engage in mobilisation, create narratives, and turn military advantage into political gain. The analysis explains how these tasks are undertaken and, by contradistinction, sheds light on more liberal approaches as well.

KEYWORDS Authoritarianism; Counterinsurgency; Counterterrorism; Regime type; Violence

Count de Monet: I have come on the most urgent of business. It is said the people are revolting.

King Louis XVI: You said it! They stink on ice!

Mel Brooks' *History of the World: Part I*

Introduction

The counterinsurgency theory that guided US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan was strongly informed by various liberal precepts about winning hearts and minds and fostering good governance. Per the doctrine, counterinsurgency entailed co-opting the local population by creating security, restoring essential services, and enhancing the capacity of the central government to govern legitimately following the withdrawal of

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foreign forces.¹ In the aftermath of two frustrating campaigns, this type of thinking has lost much of its lustre. Scepticism is only reinforced by the perception of counterinsurgency 'successes' marked by their apparent indifference to legitimacy and root causes. Be it the Russians in Chechnya, the Chinese in Xinjiang, or – even – Hafez Assad's regime in Syria, democracies face the uncomfortable possibility that authoritarian counterinsurgency is simply more effective.

In some circles, such suspicions lead perversely to envy, based on the tantalising promise of a more effective, if inconveniently repressive, approach to political violence.² Still, the research into this approach – what it is and how it works – is under-developed. Although there is no shortage of relevant cases, they rarely feature in the mainstream counterinsurgency texts, plausibly because they are thought to impart no useful lessons to democratic states and militaries. A handful of comparative studies have sought to go further, yet, despite their contribution, they are often hampered by methodological and conceptual hurdles. Specifically, the use of 'regime type' as a unit of analysis encourages generalisations that misconstrue individual cases and their essential context. The rush to determine the relative 'effectiveness' of either an authoritarian or democratic approach also leads to false dichotomies and an excessive focus on outcomes, which – however coded – relate at best indirectly to the nature of the regime.

Given the variegation of practice and multiplicity of variables, the study of authoritarian counterinsurgency requires great caution. Looking at specific cases, it is possible to distil approaches that reappear in several such campaigns. Taken as a set, these approaches amount to a repertoire, similar to the classic counterinsurgency framework of 'clear-hold-build'. This repertoire *does not define* authoritarian counterinsurgency across time and space – indeed it is largely impossible to delineate neatly 'authoritarian counterinsurgency' from its 'democratic' counterpart. Still, the repertoire does appear in a sufficiently large number of cases to allow for fruitful comparison with the *theory* of counterinsurgency employed by many democratic actors.³ The study shows that authoritarian counterinsurgency comprises far more than overwhelming force, and compels closer attention to how these regimes mobilise their populations, create narratives, and translate military advantage into political gain. Indeed, authoritarian governments seek the same ends as democracies – sustaining domestic support, separating

¹As the 2006 US Army and Marine Corps manual stated, 'counterinsurgents aim [over time] to enable a country or regime to provide the security and rule of law that allow establishment of social services and growth of economic activity'. See US Army and Marine Corps, FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Department of the Army 2006) 1–1.

²Nothing captures the sentiment as vividly as Ralph Peters' rant on Fox News: 'You do not nation build, you don't try to hold ground. You go wherever in the world the terrorists are and you kill them, you do your best to exterminate them, and then you leave, and you leave behind smoking ruins and crying widows'. See 'Peters' Plan to Fight Terror', Fox News Insider. January 09, 2015 <<http://insider.foxnews.com/2015/01/09/lt-col-peters-plan-fight-terror-leave-behind-smoking-ruins-crying-widows>>.

³Needless to say, the counterinsurgency *practice* of these democratic actors is far less convergent.

insurgents from the population, and spreading state control – but they pursue them in different ways. Examining these differences sheds light not just on coercion, control, and state consolidation, but on more liberal approaches as well.

Regimes and counterinsurgency: avoiding false starts

To understand authoritarian counterinsurgency, it is necessary to understand the authoritarian state. Writing in 1964, sociologist Juan Linz provided a seminal typology:

authoritarian regimes are [1] political systems with limited, not responsible political pluralism; [2] without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive personalities); [3] without intensive nor extensive political mobilization (except at some points in their development); and [4] in which a leader (or occasionally a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones.⁴

This understanding mirrors that of the Economist Intelligence Unit, which sees authoritarianism in those states where ‘political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed’ – many are ‘outright dictatorships’; civil liberties are limited, disregarded or abused; there is no independent judiciary; the media is state-owned or controlled; and ‘there is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship’.⁵

Based on these characteristics, it is commonly assumed that authoritarian regimes hold key advantages in the prosecution of counterinsurgency: they are unconstrained by law, uncontested by rivals, and can argue with overwhelming force, as atrocities go unreported or are massaged in the state-owned press. Such presumptions have found both implicit and outright validation in the academic literature. Gil Merom’s work on democracies at war suggests they are limited precisely because of their ‘sensitivity to casualties, repugnance to brutal military behavior, and commitment to democratic life’.⁶ Luttwak frames ‘collective punishment’ as the ‘easy and reliable way of defeating all insurgencies everywhere’ but notes that such ‘well-proven’ methods are not available to the United States.⁷ As if to confirm the point, Jason Lyall’s quantitative study of indiscriminate shelling of Chechen villages finds that such violence

⁴Juan J. Linz, ‘An Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain’, in Yrjö Littunen and Eric Allardt (eds), *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems* (Helsinki: Academic Bookstore 1964) 297.

⁵Economic Intelligence Unit, ‘Democracy in Limbo’ Democracy Index 2013, 29.

⁶Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2003) 230–1.

⁷Edward Luttwak, ‘Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice’, *Harper’s Magazine*, February 2007, 40–1.

‘actually reduced the mean number of insurgent attacks relative to non-shelled villages’.⁸

Yet for every text suggesting an advantage for the ‘coercive’ or ‘authoritarian’ approach, another points in the opposite direction. Applying a mathematical model for epidemics to conflict trends in the North Caucasus, Toft and Zhukov find that ‘punishment’ – ‘offensive operations in contested areas to manipulate the costs of sustained fighting’ – is the least effective counterinsurgency approach; it is even ‘counterproductive’.⁹ Stathis Kalyvas presents any number of cases to prove this point – that collective punishment *provokes* insurgent violence.¹⁰ Based on sophisticated number-crunching, Michael Findley and Joseph Young submit that a ‘hearts and minds strategy *consistently outperforms* the attrition approach, but the level of its impact depends on the population’s commitment to the insurgency’.¹¹ While discerning no convincing correlation between regime type and success rate, Engelhardt nonetheless notes that ‘the experience of Great Britain’ – given its supposed ‘winning record’ – ‘suggests that the benevolent approach may indeed work best’.¹²

Scholars and policy-makers have every right to be confused. In one study, authoritarianism proffers the political latitude needed to quash dissent, yet in the other abuses of power lead to revolutions and coups. In some cases, state repression forces acquiescence; elsewhere it turns the insurgents into the more attractive ally. Part of the problem is that the terms of the discussion are not consistent. Some studies seek to comment universally on the collective fortunes of *regime types*, generating questionable generalisations and that lack the necessary nuance. Others look at the role of large-scale *coercion* as if its presence in a campaign makes it inherently distinct from ‘Western’ or ‘democratic’ experiences. In both approaches, the objective is to determine the relative *effectiveness* of different regimes or approaches, which encourages findings that deny the complexity of the sample space and range of variables involved.

As a unit of analysis ‘regime type’ can easily become a red herring, in at least three ways. First, the supposed dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian counterinsurgency is deeply problematic. Any such comparison must for example acknowledge that democracies typically face fewer

⁸Jason Lyall, ‘Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53/3 (2009.) 332.

⁹Monica Duffy Toft and Yuri M. Zhukov, ‘Denial and Punishment in the North Caucasus: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Coercive Counter-insurgency’, *Journal of Peace Research* 49/6 (2012) 786.

¹⁰Stathis N. Kalyvas, ‘The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War’, *The Journal of Ethics* 8/1 (2004) 97–138.

¹¹Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, ‘Fighting Fire with Fire? How (not) to Neutralize an Insurgency’, *Civil Wars* 9/4 (2007) 379 (my emphasis).

¹²Michael J. Engelhardt, ‘Democracies, Dictatorships and Counterinsurgency: Does Regime Type Really Matter?’, *Journal of Conflict Studies* 12/3 (Summer 1992) 56–7. For a criticism of this idea of a ‘winning record’ or a particularly British style, see Robert Egnell and David H. Ucko, ‘True to Form? Questioning the British Counterinsurgency Tradition’, in Beatrice Heuser *et al.* (eds), *National Styles in Insurgencies and Counterinsurgency?* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2015).

domestic insurgencies and are therefore included for what they *elect* to do, *abroad*, in imperial or state-building endeavours – an inconsistency that irredeemably muddies the water. Given the rising number of ‘anocracies’ and of ‘democratic authoritarian’ regimes, it is also difficult to delineate specific regime types precisely, precluding neat categorisation. As Dawn Brancati pointed out in 2014: ‘In the past decade, about 70% of authoritarian states held legislative elections and 80% held elections for the chief executive’.¹³ Finally, if regime type truly determines behaviour, analysis should presumably account for differences between authoritarian regimes, be they bureaucratic, monarchical, military, or one-party, yet such nuance is rarely found within the attendant literature.

Second, the focus on regime type denies agency to the government and ascribes its actions, and their effect, to this one, largely static variable. Reality is seldom so neat.¹⁴ Democracies have often acted in authoritarian ways, if by this we mean coercively and with scant regard for civil liberties. The British campaigns in the Boer War and Kenya are renowned for their abuses and repression, as were the US campaign in the Philippines and the French war in Algeria.¹⁵ Even in more contemporary campaigns, there is no shortage of practices commonly associated with authoritarianism: prisoner abuse, torture, indiscriminate shelling, and (while certainly not state policy) a number of massacres.

On the other side, there is also no uniformity within the aggregated counter-insurgency experience of authoritarian regimes. The Dhofar campaign illustrates the point: erratic and paranoid, Said bin Taimur resisted any reform that might tamp down the rebellion, but his son, Qaboos, who overthrew and succeeded his father, swiftly enacted liberalising measures that played a large part in ending the insurgency.¹⁶ As in other cases, the approach taken stemmed not from the nature of the regime but the individual in charge. Another father-and-son team, this time in Syria, shows that even when the approach remains fairly constant, the outcome still varies widely. As Joseph Holliday notes, Hafez al-Assad could in the 1980s put down the Muslim Brotherhood uprising through a particularly brutal counterinsurgency campaign, but Bashar’s attempt to replicate said strategy in 2011–12 only transformed the conflict into a protracted civil war.¹⁷ Clearly, regime type correlates poorly with both approach and outcome, which should compel closer consideration of plausibly more meaningful

¹³See Dawn Brancati, ‘Democratic Authoritarianism: Origins and Effects’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014) 314.

¹⁴Toft and Zhukov, ‘Denial and Punishment in the North Caucasus’, 785, 788.

¹⁵See Lyall, ‘Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks’, 332.

¹⁶Ian F.W. Beckett, ‘The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar 1965–1975’, in Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (eds), *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing 2008) 175–190. On Taimur’s rule, see James J. Worrall, *State Building and Counter Insurgency in Oman: Political, Military and Diplomatic Relations at the End of Empire* (London: IB Tauris 2013) 52–3.

¹⁷Joseph Holliday, ‘The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War’, *Institute for the Study of War* (2013).

variables such as the correlation of forces, the interaction of strategies, and the ability to mobilise.¹⁸

A final, methodological problem lies in the tendency toward large-*n* quantitative analysis to study the collective experience of respective regime types. Whereas such studies have much to offer, their inevitably cursory reading of individual cases encourages totalising claims based on errors of interpretation and questionable coding.¹⁹ In other cases, sophisticated datasets and computational models fail to compensate for a rather limited understanding of counterinsurgency as a concept,²⁰ and of policy-making as a dynamic and often irrational process.²¹ The best that can be said about this field is that so many of the relevant studies conclude, rather unsurprisingly – yet only after extensive number-crunching – that ‘regime type has little analytical utility for explaining COIN [counterinsurgency] war outcomes and duration’.²²

Beyond regime type, a related avenue of enquiry considers the relative merit of specific *approaches* to counterinsurgency rather than the nature of the government involved. Whereas this entry-point avoids some of the pitfalls above, it tends to emphasise almost exclusively the large-scale use of indiscriminate force, as if its presence in a campaign makes it antithetical

¹⁸See, respectively, John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Assessing the Conventional Balance: The 3:1 Rule and its Critics’, *International Security* 13/4 (1989) 54–89; Ivan Arreguin-Toft, ‘How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict’, *International Security* 26/1 (2001) 93–128, and Philip Keefer, ‘Insurgency and Credible Commitment in Autocracies and Democracies’, *The World Bank Economic Review* 22/1 (2008) 33–61. See also Michael C. Desch, ‘Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters’, *International Security* 27/2 (2002) 5–47.

¹⁹When Lyall equates ‘occupation’ with an external power invading another, he forgets that many indigenous populations experience operations even by their ‘own’ security forces as occupation (178). This is certainly the case in southern Thailand but also in Anbar province, Iraq. When he notes that only two regimes became more authoritarian in the year prior to conflict (177), he omits the many cases where an autocratic turn dashed expectations of progress and triggered insurgency (Malaya, El Salvador and the Jeju island rebellion in Korea are but three examples). He also somewhat dubiously codes army mechanisation as indicating an inappropriate force structure for counterinsurgency (179), when much depends on *how* such means are used, rather than their mere existence. See Lyall, ‘Do Democracies Make Inferior Counterinsurgents? Reassessing Democracy’s Impact on War Outcomes and Duration’, *International Organization* 64/1 (2010) 167–92.

²⁰Abrahms, for example, makes no distinction between counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency, including both in the same dataset. In his discussion of ‘concessions’ to ‘terrorists’ he also conflates willed diplomatic accommodation and coerced battleground losses, even though each occurs for different reasons and with different intent. See Max Abrahms, ‘Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists’, *Security Studies* 16/2 (2007) 223–53. Similarly, Getmansky argues that ‘popular support’, defined by the ‘provision of public goods’, is ‘one of the more important determinants of insurgency onset and outcomes’. In contrast, the literature is quite clear that support means nothing in the absence of presence, mobilisation, and strategy, and that the service provision means nothing without security. See Anna Getmansky, ‘You Can’t Win If You Don’t Fight: The Role of Regime Type in Counterinsurgency Outbreaks and Outcomes’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57/4 (2013) 713–14.

²¹Getmansky (‘You Can’t Win If You Don’t Fight’, 713–14) sees democratic regimes as capable of rational decision-making as to whether ‘to become involved in insurgency’, when such decision points are often unclear and gradual (one may query when Britain ‘decided’ to conduct counterinsurgency in Malaya, or when the United States ‘decided’ the same in Iraq).

²²Lyall, ‘Do Democracies Make Inferior Counterinsurgents?’, 188. Getmansky (‘You Can’t Win If You Don’t Fight’, 725) concludes, similarly, that for various reasons ‘we might not be able to directly observe the effect of regime type on insurgency outcomes’.

to 'Western' or 'democratic' counterinsurgency.²³ Not only does this approach rest on another problematic dichotomy, but the focus on violence also divorces it artificially from the parallel measures that, in many cases, give it meaning. As we will see below, even where mass violence has been used it has been but one facet of a broader strategy. Indeed, this is largely unavoidable as the use of force must at some point stop, and a new political order be put in place. The point relates intimately to counterinsurgency's essence, however conducted, as a *political* contest, in which violence merely creates space for a new accommodation. Therefore, to focus on violence as the hallmark of counterinsurgency is to misunderstand both the term and its execution.

Underlying these issues is the difficulty of determining 'effectiveness' without discussing the meaning of counterinsurgency 'success' or 'victory'. Is it the elimination of the insurgency, the resumption of state control, or the resolution of pre-existing grievances and an overall increase in 'human security'? How should one code success if it is possible to defeat the insurgents yet lose the war (the French experience in Algeria springs to mind)? Similarly, when Lyall shows that indiscriminate shelling of Chechen villages was effective because it did not result in increased insurgent violence in the targeted or neighbouring villages, there is a danger of missing the forest for the trees. To make a meaningful assessment of Russia's counterinsurgency campaign it would be necessary to go beyond the dataset and query the spread of terroristic violence outside Chechnya, into Ingushetia and Dagestan.²⁴ One could take this further and question the broader effect that this campaign has had on Russia's government, legitimacy, accountability, and stability – not to mention the longer-term effects on Chechnya itself. What, in this context, is meant by success?

Characteristics of Authoritarian Counterinsurgency

The above discussion indicates that great caution is warranted whenever political scientists purport to comment universally on the nature of authoritarian counterinsurgency or the advantages inherent to a more or less coercive approach. Still, the messiness of the field does not render the study of authoritarian counterinsurgency intellectually void.

²³See Russell W. Glenn, *Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Post-Colonial Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge 2015) ch. 2; Alexander B. Downes, 'Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves: Investigating the Effectiveness of Indiscriminate Violence as a Counterinsurgency Strategy', *Civil Wars* 9/4 (2007) 420–44; Eugene Miakinkov, 'The Agency of Force in Asymmetrical Warfare and Counterinsurgency: The Case of Chechnya', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34/5 (2011) 647–80.

²⁴For statistics on the violence in North Caucasuses today, see Elena Pokalova, *Chechnya's Terrorist Network: The Evolution of Terrorism in Russia's North Caucasus* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO 2015) 175–8.

The key lies in assuming more modest goals. Rather than comment broadly on the *effectiveness* or comparative *advantage* of different regimes or approaches, a workable aim is to understand how *some* regimes of a particular type have gone about addressing the threat of insurgency, even if others chose a different path. The ambiguous case selection and tentative findings will irk the more orthodox of political scientists. Stanislav Andreski's exculpatory note is therefore more than apposite: 'the true scientific spirit consists of trying to obtain the nearest approximation to truth which is possibly under the circumstance, and it is puerile to demand either perfect exactitude or nothing'.²⁵

With this caveat in mind, the following section examines five characteristics that typify *a number of campaigns* conducted by authoritarian regimes. These methods are, in isolation, neither inherent nor exclusive to authoritarian governments though, as a whole, they form a repertoire that these regimes are well placed to employ. Closer examination of this repertoire provides critical answers to questions largely unexamined in the mainstream counterinsurgency literature. How do authoritarian governments use violence to achieve control? How is such control sustained beyond the major combat phase? How do authoritarian governments engage in reform or reconciliation, or otherwise translate military gains into political objectives? It also provides particular insight on the relation between co-option, coercion, and control.

Prohibition on Dissent

The prohibition on dissent is central to many authoritarian counterinsurgency campaigns, yet its effect can easily be over-stated. Flowing from their control of media, authoritarian governments are well placed to repress criticism of on-going operations both among the insurgency-affected population (more on this later) and the country's population writ large. On the latter, democratic governments are sometimes seen as hamstrung by what the electorate will tolerate. Jonathan Caverley argues that the United States selected a suboptimal strategy in Vietnam precisely to 'reduce the costs of conflict for an important swath of voters', without whose support the incumbent administration would fall and the war become unsustainable.²⁶ The implication is that by circumventing this vulnerability authoritarian regimes can prosecute their campaigns as desired and for as long as needed. Indeed, Michael Engelhardt's quantitative study argues that authoritarian governments' ability to sustain higher costs and fatalities has in

²⁵Stanislav Andreski, *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (Penguin: Harmondsworth 1973) 130.

²⁶Jonathan D. Caverley, 'The Myth of Military Myopia: Democracy, Small Wars, and Vietnam', *International Security* 34/3 (2010) 119–57. For a critique, see David Ucko, 'Bad COIN Wins Votes (Apparently)', *Kings of War*, 1 March 2010 <<http://kingsofwar.org.uk/2010/03/bad-coin/>>.

important cases (China in Tibet = 40,000 Chinese casualties, the Soviet Union's Balkan campaigns = 20,000 casualties) led to hard-won victories.²⁷ Pre-revolutionary Portugal, an authoritarian regime, was by 1968 spending six per cent of its gross national product in its African wars, 'twice the percentage being spent by the United States in Vietnam at the same time' and, per capita, 'Portuguese losses were five times as great'.²⁸ Notably, it was only after the overthrow of the Estado Novo regime in April 1974 that the colonial wars were brought to a close.

Authoritarian governments clearly do have a stronger grip on information than do democracies. During the Second Chechen War, the 'Kremlin not only employed police action and judicial measures to strictly control the media's access ... but also engineered a revolution in media ownership and control in Russia' that effectively silenced criticism.²⁹ After the Beslan attack, Moscow shut down all media to control the narrative, much as China did following the Uyghur knife attacks in Xinjiang in July 2014. Still, the point can be taken too far. First, closer scrutiny reveals too many counter-examples to allow for simple conclusions. As Engelhardt concedes, the impressive sacrifices of Russia and China in their campaigns are dwarfed by three of the 16 'democratic' campaigns included in his sample – the French and American Vietnam wars and the French campaign in Algeria – which persisted despite significant losses.³⁰ This should give pause to hasty generalisations.

Second, authoritarian regimes are not immune to dissent, and its effect can be very real indeed. In the case of Portugal above, it was precisely opposition to the government's counterinsurgency policy – in Guinea, but also Mozambique – that led to the coup that ended the dictatorship.³¹ To this one case, one may add those of South Africa and El Salvador, which underwent dramatic processes of democratisation in the midst (and as a result) of on-going counterinsurgencies. In both cases, the conflict 'transformed the core interest of economic elites, eventually convincing substantial segments that their interests could be more successfully pursued by democratizing compromise than by continued authoritarian recalcitrance'.³²

This vulnerability to dissent is unsurprising given Juan Linz' characterisation of authoritarian regimes as 'politically pluralistic', albeit in a limited way. Through legacy arrangements, economic assets, or

²⁷Engelhardt, 'Democracies, Dictatorships and Counterinsurgency', 60.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 55.

²⁹James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2011) 123.

³⁰Engelhardt, 'Democracies, Dictatorships and Counterinsurgency', 55.

³¹Bruno C. Reis and Pedro A. Oliveira, 'Cutting Heads or Winning Hearts: Late Colonial Portuguese Counterinsurgency and the Wiriyamu Massacre of 1972', *Civil Wars* 14/1 (2012) 96.

³²Elizabeth Jean Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP 2000) 6, *passim*.

independent coercive capability,³³ various groups are empowered and jostle, within a confined political opportunity structure, for privilege and influence. Though the resultant plurality is entirely unaccountable to the people, it nonetheless forces autocratic leaders to maintain a certain equilibrium, which – more than legal barriers – constrains policy.³⁴ This potential for dissent explains why authoritarian regimes feel the need to ‘coup-proof’ their militaries, whereby they are kept weak, politicised, divided, or subject to sudden purges.³⁵ It also explains why Bashar al-Assad, in Syria’s on-going civil war, entrust only his most loyal units for the worst of atrocities and charges four overlapping intelligence agencies with monitoring the army ‘to limit defection and enforce compliance’.³⁶ It follows that whereas authoritarian regimes often protect themselves through censorship or by silencing its critics, dissent can take different forms and closer consideration of individual cases is required to understand its full effect.

Mass Mobilisation

If authoritarianism keeps the masses quiet, it can also mobilise them for total support even for exceptionally brutal campaigns. Such support flows from the government’s monopoly on information but relates also to what Linz saw as the ‘intensive popular participation’ typical of authoritarian regimes in crisis and, even more so, of totalitarianism.³⁷ As Hannah Arendt perceptively noted with regard to both Hitler and Stalin, their popularity cannot ‘be attributed to the victory of masterful and lying propaganda over ignorance and stupidity’; neither ‘could have maintained the leadership of large populations, survived many interior and exterior crises, and braved the numerous dangers of relentless intra-party struggles if they had not had the confidence of the masses’.³⁸

³³On this last grouping, see Eva Bellin, ‘The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective’, *Comparative Politics* 36/2 (2004) 149–50. For the specific example of Syria, see Roger Owen, *Rise and Fall of the Arab Presidents for Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2012) 38.

³⁴Linz, ‘An Authoritarian Regime’, 297–301, 316.

³⁵James Quinlivan, ‘Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East’, *International Security* 24 (Fall 1999). See also Daniel Byman, ‘Death Solves All Problems: The Authoritarian Model of Counterinsurgency’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*.

³⁶Holliday, ‘The Assad Regime’, 13, 14, 26.

³⁷Linz’ work separates authoritarianism not only from democracy (the standard dichotomy) but also from totalitarianism, yet argues that in times of crisis – such as insurgency – this difference is lessened. Whereas ‘stabilized authoritarian regimes’ do not regularly include the people in the politics of the nation, the ‘emergence of a crisis would involve considerable and often very intensive popular participation’ – otherwise a hallmark of totalitarianism. Similarly, instability within the authoritarian state is likely to bring increased use of state terror – also typical of totalitarianism. The media and press are more strictly controlled in totalitarian regimes, but an authoritarian regime in crisis is likely also to tighten its grip. In the end, both authoritarian and totalitarian regimes can therefore be part of our discussion. See Linz, ‘An Authoritarian Regime’, 304, 316–17.

³⁸Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Publishers 1994) 306.

Indeed, authoritarian rulers often react to threats to their power by mobilising a tremendous political will, through nationalism, ideology, or a cult of personality. Rather than win the hearts and minds of the insurgency-affected population, as per democratic counterinsurgency theory, the focus is on selling the threat to the broader populace, surging support for both party and state, and whipping up a chauvinistic hatred for the perfidious rebels that justifies whatever response is deemed necessary. 'Insurgents' are framed as 'bandits' or as 'terrorists' supported by foreign elements, and with no legitimate cause or grievance.

Putin's Russia illustrates the point. As Schaefer explains, most Russian generals felt that the 1994–96 war in Chechnya had failed primarily because of a lack of national will. Therefore, prior to the second (and ultimately more 'successful') war in 1999, 'the Russians viewed winning a "hearts and minds" campaign to be critical to their success, but it was the "hearts and minds" of the Russian population – not the Chechen one'.³⁹ Leading up to the war, the press loudly derided the character of the Chechen struggle, reshaping 'the image of the *boevik* guerrillas from freedom fighters to criminals, and Chechnya from an aspiring nation into a terrorist state'.⁴⁰ The government employed similar terminology, painting Chechnya as an 'outpost of international terrorism', a 'bandit enclave' for foreign-funded 'Islamic fundamentalists', which was threatening the local population, the Russian motherland, and international stability itself.⁴¹ The narrative was reinforced by the attack on tower blocks outside Moscow, causing 293 fatalities, which then was blamed on Chechen terrorists but now is increasingly seen as a false-flag operation conducted by the government.⁴² Either way, the outcome was an indiscriminate onslaught on Chechnya that met with little serious political opposition within Russia.⁴³

Similar framing techniques were used to mobilise support during Syria's vicious counterinsurgency campaign in the 1980s. In the early days of the insurgency, Rifaat al-Assad, younger brother of Hafez, painted the struggle as an 'all-out war against the terrorists' in which the nation would sacrifice whatever it took to prevail. To evince 'absolute loyalty' from citizens, who to Rifaat, 'showed no sense of responsibility', he insisted that 'those who were not with the regime must now be considered against it'.⁴⁴ The regime soon armed citizen militias in every city and, to whip up hatred of the enemy, Hafez himself appeared in urban centres to give demagogic sermons, preaching 'armed revolutionary violence', and bringing tens of thousands of cheering young followers to their feet. As Patrick Seale notes, previously

³⁹Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO 2010) 199.

⁴⁰Miakinkov, 'The Agency of Force', 666. *Boevik* translates loosely to fighter or combatant.

⁴¹Hughes, *Chechnya*, 112.

⁴²John Dunlop, *The Moscow Bombings of September 1999: Examinations of Russian Terrorist Attacks at the Onset of Vladimir Putin's Rule* (Stuttgart: Ibidem 2014).

⁴³Hughes, *Chechnya*, 122.

⁴⁴Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris 1988) 327.

reclusive, Hafez now turned orator, 'theatrical in his anger and defiance, able to set large audiences alight and to do so night after night'.⁴⁵ This outreach provided the societal mobilisation necessary for a counterinsurgency campaign marked by its exceptional brutality.

Mobilisation of this type was also central to Saudi Arabia's response to the threat of a demonstration – a rumoured Day of Rage – against the regime in March 2011. In contrast to Riyadh's response to similar pressures in Bahrain, where force dominated, 'inside Saudi Arabia, the regime's first line of defense ... was to mobilize anti-Shia sentiment and official Wahhabist religion'. Via religious leaders, the kingdom issued a *fatwa* against protests, warned of God's punishment of those planning to participate, and framed the whole matter as 'an Iranian-Shia conspiracy directed by Saudi exiles in London and Washington and the Shia in the Eastern Province to cause *fitna* (chaos) and divide the country'.⁴⁶ Given their historical vilification within the kingdom, the implication of Shias was particularly effective in turning many would-be critics. Meanwhile, messages of celebrating unity and denouncing 'sectarianism' were reinforced in the state-owned press. The mobilisation allowed for the regime's continued repression and, in the end, no Day of Rage occurred.

The Chinese government uses polarising language to achieve a similar effect for its campaigns in Tibet and Xinjiang. The recent memories of societal trauma – the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, and civil war – compel many Chinese to prize order highly, which gives the government significant leeway in eliminating 'destabilising' actors.⁴⁷ To sustain this latitude, challenges to the government's authority are framed as stemming from the 'three evils' – separatism, extremism, and terrorism – which plays to the people's 'unitary national identity' and ideological belief in defending the motherland.⁴⁸ 'The patriotic consensus, aptly manipulated by diverse Party organs, acts as a crucial element in the coherence of the otherwise increasingly fragmented Chinese world'.⁴⁹

As in Saudi Arabia, China's dominion of media, but also of education, plays a key role.⁵⁰ During the nine years of compulsory education, 'regime values are reinforced every year' generating 'greater acceptance of political

⁴⁵Ibid., 328.

⁴⁶Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'No Saudi Spring: Anatomy of a Failed Revolution', *Boston Review* 37/2 (2012) 36.

⁴⁷Martin Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism: Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Approaches*, doctoral dissertation, Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 13 July 2006, 194–5.

⁴⁸'Xinjiang to Crack Down on the "Three Evil Forces"', *China Daily*, 6 March 2012 <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-03/06/content_14766900.htm>; Liselotte Odgaard and Thomas Galasz Nielsen, 'China's Counterinsurgency Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23/87 (2014) 546.

⁴⁹Geremie R. Barmé, 'To Screw the Foreigners is Patriotic: China's Avant-Garde Nationalists', *The China Journal*, 34 (July 1995) 233.

⁵⁰Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 82.

messages from the state-controlled media'.⁵¹ These messages are also very persuasive, combining a narrative of victimisation with one of pride. The government presents the country both as a target of foreign intrigue and as a superpower, both at risk yet with endless potential, given the people's unswerving loyalty. This combination unites government and people against supposedly common foes, particularly where these are seen – as they so often are framed – as stemming from abroad. When China reacts to violence, therefore, 'the state and the Party can be seen as having protected not only China's society from a threat to its internal stability but also having protected those otherwise happily dancing and singing minorities from themselves'.⁵²

Mass Violence

Indiscriminate violence, against the insurgency and any population suspected of supporting it, is often viewed as the hallmark of authoritarian counterinsurgency. Indeed, Yuri Zhukov argues that the authoritarian approach is *defined* by the 'habitual use of coercive measures'.⁵³ This may be too narrow a criterion, but there is any number of examples that support the point. Zhukov uses the Soviet counterinsurgency in Ukraine, from 1944–59, whose early phase featured pogroms, show trials, public executions, the detention of suspected insurgents' families, and mass deportation of entire villages – all to root out the threat.⁵⁴ The Soviet Union's later campaign in Afghanistan witnessed 'indiscriminate firepower' to offset local inferiority in numbers: 'in Herat, a city overrun by urban guerillas (sic) ... three quarters of the urban centre was shelled into rubble'.⁵⁵ In the countryside, the Red Army launched an all-out war against the farmland on which the *mujahideen* were thought to depend. Similarly, in the second war in Chechnya, the military combined 'heavy bombardment designed to crumble the resistance while simultaneously choking any external support with a military and economic blockage'.⁵⁶ The consequences for the Chechen population were devastating.

Russia can claim no monopoly on these techniques. In Xinjiang, approximately 2–3000 Uighurs were reportedly killed as part of China's military

⁵¹ John James Kennedy, 'Maintaining Popular Support for the Chinese Communist Party: The Influence of Education and the State-Controlled Media', *Political Studies* 57/3 (2009) 521.

⁵² Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 88.

⁵³ Zhukov, 'Examining the Authoritarian Model of Counter-insurgency: The Soviet Campaign against the Ukrainian Insurgent Army', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18/3 (2007) 461, fn. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 448.

⁵⁵ Zhukov, 'Counterinsurgency in a Non-Democratic State: the Russian Example', in Paul Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (London and New York: Routledge 2012) 290.

⁵⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya*, 210.

response to the Baren riots in April 1990 (though the figures are contested).⁵⁷ The Korean government of Syngman Rhee launched a brutal counter-insurgency campaign on Jeju Island in 1948–49, featuring ‘mass arrest and detention, forced relocation, torture, indiscriminate killing and ... large-scale massacre’: of a population of 28,000, government forces killed almost 12,000.⁵⁸ Government-sanctioned death squads and massacres of several hundred civilians marked the early years of the Salvadoran counterinsurgency campaign, resulting in more than 8000 deaths in 1983–84 alone.⁵⁹ The Syrian regime killed between 10,000 and 40,000 people in response to increased Muslim Brotherhood militancy in Hama: having shelled the city, security forces ‘killed hundreds of people in a series of mass executions ... blew up many of the buildings that still stood, sometimes with tens of people inside ... and [allegedly] used cyanide gas to kill people inside structures’.⁶⁰ This last charge appears credible given Syria’s use of chemical weapons in the on-going civil war, killing hundreds of civilians in the Ghouta strike alone. Bashar al-Assad has also replicated his father’s indiscriminate shelling of urban areas held by the resistance.⁶¹ In a similar vein, the Iraqi response to the Kurdish rebellion during the Iran–Iraq war involved the infamous an-Anfal campaign, where chemical weapons, concentration camps, and mass executions were used to kill ca. 50–100,000 civilians and destroy thousands of villages in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁶² This campaign is frequently called genocide and is, in this regard, regrettably far from unique. Also included in this category is the Pakistani crackdown on the Bengali nationalist movement in 1971, in which hundreds of thousands were raped and/or killed over the course of just eight months. On a similar scale, Burundi’s Tutsi-dominated Army killed 100–200,000 people following the violent secession attempted by Hutu gendarmerie in 1971.⁶³

Given the prevalence, range, and variety of mass violence, it is difficult to comment universally on its strategic rationale or effect. Still, one objective is to achieve what the US Army calls ‘overmatch’: ‘the application of capabilities

⁵⁷ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, ‘Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux’, in Frederick S. Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2004) 317.

⁵⁸ Hunjoon Kim, ‘Seeking Truth after 50 Years: The National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju 4.3 Events’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3/3 (2009) 410–11.

⁵⁹ T. David Mason and Dale A. Krane, ‘The Political Economy of Death Squads: Toward a Theory of the Impact of State-Sanctioned Terror’, *International Studies Quarterly* 33/2 (1989) 190.

⁶⁰ Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New York: Human Rights Watch 1991).

⁶¹ Holliday, ‘The Assad Regime’, 15, *passim*.

⁶² Human Rights Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (New York: Middle East Watch Report 1993) preface.

⁶³ United States Institute for Peace, ‘International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi: Final Report’, par. 85.

or use of tactics in a way that renders an adversary unable to respond'.⁶⁴ Because insurgents are difficult to identify and isolate, and because the people among whom they hide are deemed complicit in their crime, many authoritarian regimes simply target entire communities so to as gain the upper hand. The indiscriminateness is not accidental but rather strategic, in that it creates conditions – mass dislocation, despondence, and fear – that prevent the rebel group from mobilising and allow the state to take over. Ironically, this incapacitation is a key goal also in democratic counterinsurgency doctrine, yet its clearing operations are to be conducted *with*, or at least *for* the local population, as a precursor to their co-option. In contrast, the authoritarian approach punishes the people for the insurgency and severs the bonds between the two not through politics but with force. Loyalty can be created in this manner but it will, in the short term at least, be negative rather than positive.

The on-going civil war in Syria illustrates the strategy well. Since 2012, the Assad regime has responded to the loss of towns and cities to the rebels by attacking these urban centres with massed firepower. Paradoxically, collective punishment has at times turned the population against the rebels, who are blamed for the devastation. A mother of two, forced to flee Aleppo, explains: 'The regime left us alone until they came. We had water, and food, and electricity, and there was a sense of normalcy. Then they came, even though we didn't ask, and the regime punished us for it by combing our houses, cutting off the electricity, and we could find no food or water'.⁶⁵ The regime appears to be aware of this dynamic, as evidenced by its targeting of bakeries in rebel-held territory to make life there more difficult: 'two Syrian opposition groups have counted over 100 airstrikes on bakeries'.⁶⁶

If the use of violence aims to preclude the insurgency from building ties to society and render impossible the counter-state that they seek to build, a similar effect has been achieved through what Kelly Greenhill terms 'coercive engineered migrations'.⁶⁷ This approach is a form of mass violence, in that the deportations are massive in scale and forced, resulting in humanitarian hardship. Joseph Stalin provides the obvious precedent. Attempting to prevent outbreaks of nationalism within the Soviet satellite states and provinces, Stalin in 1943–44 deported 600,000 people from the North Caucasus to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, 'supposedly for collaborating with

⁶⁴US Army, *The US Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World 2020–2040*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, 31 October 2014, 11. Notably, this document specifies that 'Army leaders seek overmatch in close combat while applying firepower with discipline and discrimination' (22).

⁶⁵Holliday, 'The Assad Regime', 23.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 24. For greater context, see Annia Ciezadlo, 'The War on Bread: How the Syrian Regime is Using Starvation as a Weapon', *New Republic*, 14 February 2014 <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116615/syrian-war-crimes-regime-bombs-bakeries-uses-starvation-weapon>>.

⁶⁷Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2011) 13, *passim*. See also Miakinkov, 'The Agency of Force', 674, and Lyall, 'Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks'.

German forces'.⁶⁸ Around the same time, in Ukraine, 175,063 persons, 75–84 per cent women and children, were displaced to Siberia and Kazakhstan.⁶⁹ It was also in Ukraine that Stalin, a decade earlier, had attempted to stifle independence movements by orchestrating a famine – the Holodomor – killing 2.5–7.5 million people. In such an environment, there can be no insurgency.

More recently, in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union's all-out offensive on rural farmland forced a third of it to be abandoned and made any remaining farmers dependent on the guerrillas rather than the other way around.⁷⁰ In Chechnya, 'from late 1999 [the] Russian military strategy was to depopulate Chechnya of the bulk of the civilian population'. More than 350,000 persons were forced to flee the republic – about a third of the population – and IDPs more than once exceeded 90 per cent of the total population.⁷¹ The resultant atomisation of Chechen society allowed Russian forces to wrest control over the population from any insurgent group, and to this end they set up 'safe military zones' to which IDPs were herded. An added benefit of this approach was that, initially at least, reliance on firepower reduced the threat of military casualties and, resultantly, that of a domestic outcry similar to that seen in the First Chechen War of 1994–96.⁷²

In so far as demographic manipulation constitutes an 'approach' to counterinsurgency, it has been emulated and adapted by other authoritarian regimes. Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi show how Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, and Mozambique used forced resettlement to undercut insurgent support or to clear rebel-affected territories.⁷³ In Syria, too, at least since 2012, one of the main objectives of Assad's destruction of opposition strongholds – with bulldozers, air power, artillery, and massacres – appears to be the large-scale uprooting of populations: if insurgents swim like fish in the sea of the people, then 'rather than going fishing, as the metaphor suggests, Assad drained the lake by displacing the population'.⁷⁴ In a twist to the script, China has not deported but rather, since the 1990s, actively migrated Han Chinese to areas affected by ethnic strife so that they now

⁶⁸Hughes, *Chechnya*, 10. See also Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge UP 2010) 164–94.

⁶⁹Zhukov, 'Counterinsurgency in a Non-Democratic State', fn. 45.

⁷⁰Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven and London: Yale UP 2002) 227, 231. It should be noted that as far as the guerrillas were concerned, a lack of local support was soon off-set by increased international assistance.

⁷¹Hughes, *Chechnya*, 121.

⁷²Robert H. Scales Jr., 'Russia's Clash in Chechnya: Implications for Future War', *National Security Studies Quarterly* VI/2 (Spring 2000) 49–58. See also Olga Oliker, *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation 2001) 46.

⁷³Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, 'Famine, Complex Emergencies and International Policy in Africa: an Overview', in J. Macrae and A. Zwi (eds), *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies* (London: Zed Books 1994) 18–19.

⁷⁴Holliday, 'The Assad Regime', 20.

supersede the previously dominant Uyghurs in Xinjiang and constitute two-thirds of the population of Lhasa, Tibet's capital.⁷⁵

Holding, Suppressing, Controlling

If the use of mass violence typifies the 'clearing' phase of authoritarian counterinsurgency, the 'holding' often involves the mass deployment of military means to shape whatever remains according to regime preferences. This consolidation begins to answer the question of how authoritarian governments can employ ruthless violence without inspiring resistance amounting to insurgency. Given the saturation of security forces, any organised attempt to counter the state is forced underground, preventing meaningful linkages with the population and any sense of mobilisation.

In Chechnya, this repression was enabled by a massive troop deployment: at its peak, 140,000 Russian troops were stationed in this republic of 1.2 million people, resulting in a force ratio of 1:9.⁷⁶ With the area further sealed from external influence, the idea was that 'given sufficient time, if the insurgency is not allowed to grow, then the situation in Chechnya will gradually improve and the insurgency will simply die out'.⁷⁷ In its fight against the Ukrainian separatists in the 1940s and 1950s, the Soviet Union consolidated its aggressive clearing of territory by establishing outposts and checkpoints on all roads and trails connecting the villages, 'thus isolating the insurgents from provisions and critical supplies'.⁷⁸ The Syrian response to the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s was also one of saturation: 'after clearing out these urban areas with combined ground forces and artillery, Assad's troops held these population centers with long-term troops garrisons'.⁷⁹ The 3rd Armoured Division held Aleppo for a whole year 'with a tank in almost every street ... backed up by armed party irregulars', whereas Damascus was 'turned into an armed camp'.⁸⁰ In Xinjiang, the government has deployed an impressive force of military and paramilitary units, particularly given the size of the population. The numbers are contested but, as Martin Wayne argues, the effect was a military *fait accompli*: 'China now holds the territory and forceful opposition results in death and harsh crackdown'.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Odgaard and Nielsen, 'China's Counterinsurgency Strategy', 547; James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia UP 2007) 306–10, 342.

⁷⁶ Jim Nichol, *Russia's Chechnya Conflict: Developments in 2002–2003*, Congressional Research Service RL31620, 15 April 2003, 1, 6. Oliker (44) claims 100,000 troops were in Grozny alone, producing a similar force ratio in the capital.

⁷⁷ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 202.

⁷⁸ Zhukov, 'Examining the Authoritarian Model', 448.

⁷⁹ Holliday, 'The Assad Regime', 12.

⁸⁰ Seale, *Assad*, 328–31.

⁸¹ Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 95.

Once sufficient control is achieved, it is typical that this 'holding' function is reassigned from military forces to various paramilitary units, and then to special police forces and intelligence outfits. This network of coercion provides the foundation for the all-seeing, all-hearing police state, where subversion is deterred. Within criminology, deterrence is characterised as resting on three pillars: certainty ('the certainty that an offense will be detected and actually punished'); the severity of punishment; and celerity ('the promptness with which punishment is administered following the offense').⁸² In this phase of authoritarian counterinsurgency, the state continuously demonstrates that dissent is always punished swiftly and severely, and thereby achieves a deterrent effect. Meanwhile, collective action is either repressed or remains in a state of deep 'clandestinity', meaning it is isolated and struggles to amass the momentum needed for political change.⁸³

Two aspects merit emphasis. First, this type of control, in effect collaboration, is precisely that identified by Stathis Kalyvas in his classic *Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*. In what can be seen as a challenge to more liberal conceptions of counterinsurgency, Kalyvas argues that in gaining the people's cooperation, physical control of territory and populace trumps any sense of legitimacy. As people weigh political preferences against survival, the latter wins out, and siding with the regime becomes the logical response. In other words, contrary to dominant counterinsurgency doctrine, the population is not won over; it is seized. Kalyvas' second proposition is that the control necessary for such domination is best achieved not through violence, whose effects can be unpredictable and counterproductive, but by a heavy infusion of means and manpower.⁸⁴ Accordingly, authoritarian states are wont to move whenever possible from an overwhelmingly coercive approach to a more tailored and discreet form of repression driven by local police, paramilitary, and intelligence outfits: an all-out penetration of society, enabling surgical strikes on subversives and colluders.

There is nothing new about this dynamic; in her commentary on Nazi control of Germany in the 1930s, Hannah Arendt notes that following the mass violence against perceived state enemies, those who remained 'had learned "who is master here", and realized that their lives and the lives of their families depended not upon their fellow-citizens but exclusively on the whims of the government which they faced in complete loneliness without any help whatsoever from the group to which they happened to belong'. The result, she notes, is the 'mass atomization' of society: the liquidation of

⁸²Edmund S. Howe and Cynthia J. Brandau, 'Additive Effects of Certainty, Severity, and Celerity of Punishment on Judgments of Crime Deterrence Scale Value', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18/9 (1988) 797. I am indebted to Thomas Rid for alerting me to this model.

⁸³On the limiting effects of clandestinity, see Donatella Della Porta, 'Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy', in Martha Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in Context* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP 1995) 105–59; Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2006) 113–32.

⁸⁴Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2006) 111–45.

any structure or group that may mobilise against the state.⁸⁵ More than that, as it becomes dangerous even to affirm the government's excesses, or to characterise them as such, 'this never-communicated information loses its quality of reality and assumes the nature of a mere nightmare'.⁸⁶

Second, an inevitable effect of mass atomisation is the structural divorce of insurgent vanguard and base, of leaders and followers. The social movement from which the insurgency emerged – and could yet re-emerge – is forced underground, transforming its violent vanguard into an isolated terrorist cell, wholly disconnected from its base. This separation between 'hard-liners' and 'moderates' is precisely that sought in Western counter-insurgency doctrine, yet it relies on co-option to meet this end. In authoritarian contexts, regardless of previous sympathies, it is the climate of fear, the crushing of collective action, and the saturation of security forces that compel cooperation, even if passive, with the state. In Stalin's Soviet Union, for example, the fear of 'guilt by association' had its own perverse logic. As Arendt notes: 'As soon as a man is accused, his former friends are transformed immediately into his bitterest enemies; in order to save their own skins, they volunteer information and rush in with denunciations to corroborate the nonexistent evidence against him'.⁸⁷

Yet one need not revisit Stalinist Russia to witness the effect: the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan – a singularly authoritarian yet stable regime – owes its survival to this very ability to repress opposition and disband organised resistance. The military is not involved; instead, various police units – including the *Milliy Xavfsizlik Xizmati*, or MXX – break up, in *purposefully visible ways*, any protest movement or attempt at collective contention. According to human-rights reports, the regime also routinely engages in 'torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment ... to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings'.⁸⁸ Thus, there was never any real chance for the reformist organisations that emerged following independence. 'Not only were these groups effectively banned, but leaders and members were arrested on trumped-up criminal charges', harassed, and/or forced into exile. Under such conditions, social movements cannot take hold – indeed, as Jennifer Murtazashvili notes: 'There has been no wide scale, publically organized political movement in the country since that time'.⁸⁹

The Chinese government has attempted a similar chokehold on popular mobilisation in Xinjiang. Following the large-scale deployment of the People's

⁸⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 320, 323.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 435. On this phenomenon, see also Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 170–1.

⁸⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 323.

⁸⁸ United Nations Committee Against Torture, 'Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee against Torture, Uzbekistan', CAT/C/UZB/CO/3, 39th Session Geneva, 5–23 November 2007 <<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/cat/observations/uzbekistan2007.html>>.

⁸⁹ Jennifer Murtazashvili, 'Coloured by Revolution: the Political Economy of Autocratic Stability in Uzbekistan', *Democratization* 19/1 (2012) 87.

Liberation Army in the 1990s, China gradually shifted the burden to the People's Armed Police (PAP) and other local forces. As a result, the police has become 'an active force within society: the local community knows who they are', and through coercion and fear, 'the society participates with its policing'.⁹⁰ As in any police state, fear is a force multiplier: even where the police is not present, informants and intelligence agents are so numerous as to be, perhaps, anywhere and everywhere.⁹¹ Fuelling this climate, the Chinese government offers cash rewards for tip-offs, encourages the local population to inform on one another, and holds the heads of local associations responsible for any subversion within their ranks. To stave off deviation at the root and ensure conformity, the range of punishable offenses has also widened and now includes bans on the public wearing of burqas or of headscarves and long beards on public transport.⁹²

Tibet tells a familiar story. Again, since initial troop deployments in 1989, PAP and local security outfits have taken charge to monitor and suppress the local population. During the riots and protests of March 2008, paramilitary forces, PAP, the Public Security Bureau, as well as Chinese plain-clothed surveillance officers combined to disperse forcibly the congregations of monks and laypersons.⁹³ Order was restored and, indicating the impossibility of collective action, the sole form of protest remaining for the monks was the most *individualised* expression of all, that of self-immolation. The saturation of forces virtually guaranteed that 'any Tibetan who raised a protest banner would be leapt on within seconds and taken away', though notably there have been few such actions since then.⁹⁴ To strengthen their grip further, the Chinese authorities in 2013 announced the expansion of a surveillance system throughout the region, known as 'the grid'. As explained by Alexander Neill, each square in the grid 'accounts for approximately 1500 individuals and is staffed by a number of security and emergency personnel who are networked into the system', able to monitor real and virtual communications, and respond quickly as and when needed. In effect, 'using hand-held mobile technology, static police posts, surveillance positions, and traditional neighbourhood watch patrols, the Chinese authorities have formulated a seamless, networked surveillance platform designed to leave no stone unturned in the management of local security'.⁹⁵

The Russian response in Chechnya also shifted to emphasise local security forces. Realising that Russian control made resistance futile, a number of Chechen insurgent leaders defected and became the human face of Putin's

⁹⁰Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 125.

⁹¹Ibid. See also pp. 139–41.

⁹²'China Bans Beards, Veils from Xinjiang City's Buses in Security Bid', Reuters, 6 August 2014; Steven Jiang, 'China Bans Wearing Burqa in Biggest Muslim City', *CNN.com*, 14 January 2014.

⁹³Interview with Alexander Neill, Shangri-La Dialogue Senior Fellow for Asia-Pacific Security, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1 February 2015.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid. See also 'Grid locked', *The Economist*, 22 June 2013. It is worth noting the lengthy record of such an all-encompassing approach; see Thomas A. Marks, *Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang* (London: Frank Cass 1998) esp. 11–76.

'Chechenization' policy. This shift allowed local security forces to take the place of the Russian military. Human rights abuses continued at a shocking rate, yet it was now possible to claim – at least on paper – that the province was self-governing under the rule first of Akhmed Kadyrov and, following his assassination, his son Ramzan and his 3000-strong Kadyrovtsy paramilitary. As James Hughes notes, the Kadyrovtsy is comparable to a death squad, although unlike other death squads it is concerned not with 'deniability' but in 'claimability' so as to exercise the proper political effect both on adversary and neutrals. Indeed, 'Kadyrov's approach of mixing brutality toward the fighters who persist with the resistance, and especially against their relatives, with lenience for those who surrender (often rewarding them and reemploying them in his own forces) has been an effective instrument for demoralizing and containing the insurgency'.⁹⁶ Contrary to Western counterinsurgency theory, 'Russia was not seeking to win "hearts and minds" in the sense of achieving doctrinal and ideological dominance over the Chechen population; the purpose of its strategy was to secure control and reduce the insurgency to what is classically known as an "acceptable level of violence"'.⁹⁷ As the situation 'normalised', about 300,000 federal troops remained in the North Caucasus to ensure compliance with Moscow rule.

Hearts and minds: or 'what have the romans ever done for us?'

In counterinsurgency theory, the clearing and holding of territory enables the 'build' phase, where the state re-establishes its legitimacy by reaching out to the local population.⁹⁸ As Thomas A. Marks notes, insurgency is 'armed politics', and the role of the security forces is therefore to establish the conditions necessary for an effective political counter.⁹⁹ The underlying logic is what gives rise to the oft-misunderstood phrase 'winning hearts and minds' and the frequent reminders, by civilian and military leaders alike, that 'you can't kill your way' out of the problem.

Common wisdom suggests that autocratic governments are fundamentally disinterested in the accommodation implied by this logic. Autocracy, after all, denotes the centralisation of power, not its sharing, and these governments are more likely to repress than co-opt agents for social and political change.¹⁰⁰ One reason for the intransigence may be the desire to retain an image of strength along with the bonds of fear that hold the authoritarian state together. In Sudan, for example, the decision to grant South Sudan the possibility of independence

⁹⁶Hughes, *Chechnya*, 124.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 122.

⁹⁸For a critique of the clear-hold-build model, see David H. Ucko, 'Beyond Clear-Hold-Build: Rethinking Local-Level Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan', *Contemporary Security Policy* 34/3 (2013) 526–51.

⁹⁹Thomas A. Marks, 'Counterinsurgency in the Age of Globalism', *Journal of Conflict Studies* 27/1 (2007).

¹⁰⁰Christian Davenport, 'Multi-Dimensional Threat Perception And State Repression: An Inquiry Into Why States Apply Negative Sanctions', *American Journal of Political Science* (1995) 707.

through referendum appears to have heightened armed resistance also in Darfur.¹⁰¹

For all this, closer scrutiny reveals significant efforts by authoritarian regimes to win over relevant populations, even though their impact has often been minimal or meaningless. The history of Russian counterinsurgency is particularly telling. During the Bolshevik war against the White Army, Vladimir Lenin's New Economic Policy was enacted specifically to alleviate the misery facing the Russian peasantry and gain their support, even at the cost of ideological purity.¹⁰² Similarly, following the occupation of the Baltic States and Poland, Soviet attempts to counter subversion included an agrarian programme designed to win hearts and minds. As Alexander Statiev explains: 'Moscow lectured local communists: "Banditry cannot be eradicated and bourgeois-nationalist insurgency cannot be successfully suppressed by police and military operations alone, without raising the broad masses against them"'.¹⁰³ Ensuing attempts at mass mobilisation reflected ideological principle more than local need and as such were typically counter-productive. Initially, the Soviet policy of taking land from the rich and giving it to the poor did have the effect, a deliberate one claims Statiev, of engendering pro-Soviet attitudes among the majority of the population, that is to say the poor. Yet, with time, the unrelenting foisting of collectivisation as the answer to agrarian problems in the western borderlands raised the worst fears of the local workforce, who were well aware of its disastrous effects in the Soviet Union. What is notable about this case is that neither the hearts and minds activities nor their overall failure had any real bearing on the final outcome. Instead, the Soviet Union's stranglehold, not least through collectivisation, and its ruthless application of violence against suspected state enemies instilled despondence and defeatism within the insurgent ranks. Resistance was deemed futile, and people either died or moved on.¹⁰⁴

Also in Afghanistan, Russia grew increasingly concerned with winning local hearts and minds, though without much effect on the campaign. As the 'agricultural sector ... became the centre of the mujahidin economy', the Soviet Union sought to gain the allegiance of Afghanistan's rural population, so as to starve the insurgency. Yet despite various efforts to this end, the approach was hamstrung by unrelenting dogmatism. In this case, efforts at land redistribution not only created mass confusion but

¹⁰¹Patrick Johnston, 'Negotiated Settlements and Government Strategy in Civil War: Evidence from Darfur', *Civil Wars* 9/4 (2007) 364–5.

¹⁰²Such pragmatism could also be seen in the Bolshevik's pacification of Basmachi resistance in the Ferghana Valley. See John P. Riordan, *Red DIME: Dissecting the Bolshevik Liquidation Campaign in the Ferghana Valley against the Basmachi Resistance* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies 2008) 8–9.

¹⁰³Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency*, 146.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.* The effects of war-fatigue should not be discounted.

'disturbed the social structure in agricultural areas and further fueled the opposition against the regime'.¹⁰⁵ More destructive yet, to the hearts and minds campaign and to agricultural policy in particular, was the simultaneous onslaught on those lands on which the insurgency was thought to depend. Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolyneec see such attacks not just as a crude counterinsurgency tactic but as reflecting once more an ideological impulse – in this case to punish petty-bourgeois land owners and, possibly, create a proletariat class through urban migration. Regardless of intent, in only three years the campaign cut the government's land taxes by 94 per cent and made it dependent on food imports.¹⁰⁶ Here and more broadly, despite its increased prioritisation, hearts and minds remained an afterthought or amounted, at best, to sporadic humanitarianism, badly integrated, and with no real political effect.¹⁰⁷

Russia's focus on hearts and minds has been more pronounced in Chechnya, particularly in recent years. To Hughes, writing in 2007, a serious obstacle to stabilisation was 'the lack of reconstruction and socioeconomic recovery'.¹⁰⁸ The semblance of normalisation was important to Moscow, but it did not give substance to the narrative. Whereas the Russian budget consistently included funds for reconstruction, spending was ineffective, corruption systemic, and the task itself immense given the scale of destruction.¹⁰⁹ The lacklustre progress was then glossed over with a highly questionable referendum in 2003 on the republic's future, in which a reported 88 per cent of the electorate turned up to vote overwhelmingly for Russian rule.¹¹⁰ According to the narrative, hearts and minds had been won and the matter was settled.

Still, from 2007 onward, the hearts and minds campaign shifted gear, as Kadyrov made good use of the funds provided to him by Putin to reconstruct and repair. Grozny still faces problems but has transformed quickly, given its starting point, with new apartment blocks appearing throughout the city. Socially, Kadyrov has engaged in a campaign of Islamisation – building mosques (the largest in Europe), enforcing headscarves for women, limiting alcohol sales, closing down brothels, and enacting Sharia-esque mores for public life. The intent is to out-Islamise the guerrillas, to appropriate their cause – and, in this regard, says Schaefer, Kadyrov has

¹⁰⁵ Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolyneec, *Economic Development in Afghanistan during the Soviet Period, 1979–1989: Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan* (Ottawa: DRDC Centre for Operational Research and Analysis 2007) 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fn. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Robinson, 'Soviet Hearts and Minds Operations in Afghanistan', *Historian* 72/1 (2010) 10–13.

¹⁰⁸ Hughes, *Chechnya*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 125–6.

¹¹⁰ That there was no open 'no-campaign', no international monitoring, and that it occurred during military occupation obviously undermines the credibility of the political establishment that it created – and of the elections that followed in its wake.

been remarkably successful.¹¹¹ Kadyrov also initiated a counter-corruption campaign in 2008, has rehabilitated former guerrillas and turned some of its leadership, and is resurrecting Chechen traditions (such as mandated teaching of Chechen language in schools). The achievements are such that other Russians now see Chechnya as 'a part of Russia in name only' and resent the expenditure of federal funds – quite substantial and certainly unsustainable – for this breakaway republic.¹¹²

For all this, Kadyrov's efforts occur against the backdrop of continued repression and state violence including killings, disappearances, and torture. The economy is still in tatters and continued reconstruction is not only limited to Grozny but precariously dependent on outside funds. The cornerstone of Kadyrov's approach – Islamisation – may have swayed rebel leaders but sits badly with Chechnya's traditionally secular populace.¹¹³ It is therefore questionable whether the appearance of normalisation has in any way mediated underlying grievances or diminished the likelihood of renewed hostilities. Still, the case does illustrate, once again, that there is more to authoritarian counterinsurgency than violence. As Schaefer notes: 'If the policy was "all sticks and no carrots" there would be no support for Kadyrov in Chechnya at the moment – and that is not the case'.¹¹⁴

A similarly ambivalent verdict applies to the Chinese government's effort to win hearts and minds in Xinjiang. Because China sees Xinjiang's underdevelopment and poor integration within the Chinese economy as root causes for the violence, it has launched major infrastructure projects to modernise the province and boost its economy. The government launched the 'Open up the North-West' programme in 1992 and the broader 'Great Development of the West' in 2000, the latter allocating 900 billion *yuan* to various Xinjiang-based projects, including a rail-link from Kashgar to Kyrgyzstan, a regional highway, and various energy-sector projects.¹¹⁵ In parallel, the Chinese government has reserved various privileges for ethnic minorities, such as a 'relaxed one-child policy, certain advantages for enrollment into the universities, and lower taxes'.¹¹⁶ It has also ensured that Uyghurs are more included in local leadership positions and within the bureaucracy.

Again, the political impact of these measures is questionable. The major economic programmes tend to favour the local Han population, which has grown precisely because of the new economic activity. As part of China's

¹¹¹Schafer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya*, 258–60.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 260.

¹¹³Interview with Elena Pokalova, Associate Professor at College of International Security Affairs, National Defense University, 10 February 2015.

¹¹⁴Schafer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya*, 253.

¹¹⁵Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 299.

¹¹⁶Elena V. Barabantseva, 'Development as Localization: Ethnic Minorities in China's Official Discourse on the Western Development Project', *Critical Asian Studies* 41/2 (2009), 247.

modernisation efforts, the government has encouraged westward migration, so that the Han can help elevate the locals to a higher standard. The implied ethnic hierarchy is felt also with regard to the special privileges reserved for ethnic minorities, with Barabantseva arguing that these are often viewed as denoting backwardness and declined as a marker of status.¹¹⁷ The new opportunities have created a relatively small Uyghur middle class, yet it sits uncomfortably between a Han elite and far larger Uyghur working class, both of whom look upon it with some disdain. More generally, excluded from emerging markets, the Uyghurs view China's development policies as the state 'permitting ethnic (Han) elites to aggregate economic power by exploiting their indigenous lands'.¹¹⁸

Clearly, authoritarian regimes do endeavour to win hearts and minds, even if their efforts are often misguided or counter-productive. It should be noted that this verdict typically applies also to democratic counterinsurgency campaigns. Yet most authoritarian regimes operate with an added challenge – that of winning support without *political* reform and amid the continued repression of a police state. Unsurprisingly, within such a context, outreach and hand-outs have only a limited effect on regime legitimacy.

A more successful approach, used by a number of authoritarian regimes, is to turn this disadvantage on its head and use the trappings of the police state to win hearts and minds by other means. In these cases, the state interposes itself in every local transaction and activity and thereby renders itself indispensable to public life. Such penetration of local-level affairs is possible because the government's ubiquitous security presence, which allows it to combine the sticks expected from this set-up with occasional carrots, leading – over time – to predictability, stability, and even to something resembling legitimacy, yet without the state ever conceding political space or accommodating grievances.

Jennifer Murtazashvili's analysis of regime survival in Uzbekistan provides a compelling illustration of the approach, not least given the Karimov regime's survival over the last quarter-century. Since independence, the government has co-opted and created various local social institutions that allow the state to provide 'public goods in order to win the hearts and minds of the population'.¹¹⁹ To make this system work, the state had also invested and inserted itself into matters of public health, literacy, and employment. This state-owned welfare system allows the government to respond to community interests but also to monitor those very same communities and repress subversion at its root. As Murtazashvili explains, the

¹¹⁷Ibid., 248–9.

¹¹⁸Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 179. On the unequal distribution of benefit, see Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 304–5. See also Odgaard and Nielsen, 'China's Counterinsurgency Strategy', 547.

¹¹⁹Murtazashvili, 'Coloured by Revolution', 88.

approach 'illustrates the complex web of rewards and sanctions the regime uses to garner both support and generate fear among citizens at the local level'.¹²⁰ Hence, repression is indispensable but insufficient for regime survival, which requires also various economic and social incentives.

This approach can also be seen in Xinjiang, alongside the economic line of effort discussed above. As part of what Martin Wayne calls 'society-centric warfare', the state has purged some institutions and co-opted others, and thereby gradually permeated public life in the province. From this position, the state uses various social tools and levers to force a gradual disassociation from the insurgency and assimilation with Chinese norms.¹²¹ In education, Mandarin has been positioned as the language of opportunity and upward mobility, teachers (who are state-employed) are carefully selected and closely monitored, and a centralised curriculum inculcates the many wonders of the Chinese nation-state.¹²² In culture, the public role of religion is constrained, state officials deemed 'too religious' are eliminated, under-18s are barred from studying Islam, and mosques and local imams are closely monitored and required to desist from political activity.¹²³ To placate yearnings for change, the state speaks of eventual liberalisation, even democracy, and thereby generates a palliative hope that despite current hardships matters will soon improve.¹²⁴ In combination with repression and control, the long-term effect of these measures will likely be the province's involuntary integration into the Chinese mainland, even if in the meantime we see the consequences of unmediated grievances and continued radicalisation. Indeed, the last two years have seen an escalation both of 'mass incidents' and actual terrorist attacks, most notably the 28 July 2014 knife attack in Yarkand County in which nearly 100 people were killed. It would appear that, for many authoritarian governments, this is the cost of doing business.

State permeation of civil society characterises the hearts and minds policy also in Saudi Arabia, where, again, it has shielded the regime from instability. In contrast to other states affected by the Arab Spring, there are in Saudi Arabia no trade unions, no active student movement, and no women's movement or similar vehicle for dissent. Instead, local political and religious structures belong to the state, which thereby oversees all modes of mobilisation. Further strengthening the monarchy's grip, 'tribal chiefs, religious scholars, and regional elites, who once were strong enough to exert

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 79.

¹²¹Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 162.

¹²²Dru C. Gladney, 'The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978–2001', in S. Fredrick Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe 2004) 113–14.

¹²³Wayne, *Understanding China's War on Terrorism*, 172–5.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 182–3. The socially calming effect of hope is the premise of James C. Davies's J-curve theory of social crisis. See James C. Davies, 'Toward a Theory of Revolution', *American Sociological Review* 27/1 (1962) 5–19.

pressure on the ruling family, have become regime functionaries'.¹²⁵ Thus, during the Arab Spring of 2011, the only space where dissent could find expression was online, where it struggled to take root. This control also avails certain levers with which the government can produce social effects. To stave off dissent, King Abdullah in 2011 announced a US \$93 billion gift package that benefited key societal structures: public sector employees (55 per cent of the population), military personnel, the security services, and the unemployed. Also benefiting were various local religious organisations that spread the Wahhabi message, including obedience to the king, and the religious police, to monitor public morality but also spy on the population.¹²⁶ Again, state permeation provides both for sticks and carrots.

Given the survival of the regime in the face of falling oil prices, regional instability, and the death of the king in February 2014, it may be argued that the Saudi approach to winning hearts and minds has been largely successful.¹²⁷ It bears noting, however, that much as in Xinjiang and Chechnya the underlying grievances remain unresolved, and indeed are actively suppressed. In such a context, al-Rasheed's conclusion seems correct, that 'If the delayed Arab Spring eventually reaches Saudi Arabia, it will likely be a bloody affair'.¹²⁸

Conclusion: to what end counterinsurgency?

There is no simple dichotomy between a democratic and an authoritarian approach to counterinsurgency. There is also no reified approach to counterinsurgency that regimes of a certain type instinctively adopt as their own. Even the categorisation of regimes can only be so accurate, given the great variety of governance systems and the fluctuation in regime type prior to and during conflict. Still, these constraints do not render sterile the discussion of authoritarian counterinsurgency, though the analysis must be tentative in its findings and respectful of their limited applicability.

With this caveat in mind, it is possible to discern five components that, together, have in many cases characterised authoritarian counterinsurgency: control on information, mobilised chauvinism among the populace, extreme and indiscriminate violence, imposition of a police state, and the permeation of civil society so as to sustain a more regime-friendly environment. The broad conclusion to emerge from this dissection is that authoritarian counterinsurgency denotes far more than violence – even where it has dominated, consolidation has been required to shape its

¹²⁵ Al-Rasheed, 'No Saudi Spring: Anatomy of a Failed Revolution', 39.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ On this point, see Ben Hubbard, 'Saudi King Unleashes a Torrent of Money as Bonuses Flow to the Masses', *The New York Times*, 19 February 2015.

¹²⁸ Al-Rasheed, 'No Saudi Spring: Anatomy of a Failed Revolution', 39.

inevitable aftermath. Much as in traditional counterinsurgency doctrine, it is this follow-up that gives strategic meaning to the use of force, though in authoritarian contexts it does so in a manner entirely inimical to what the field manuals propose.

The discussion forces us back to the question of effectiveness. It is true that many of the regimes surveyed here have clung on to power and, in highly illiberal ways, dismantled insurgent threats. These regimes have avoided any genuine political reform and yet fomented some form of loyalty – or at least control – among formerly restive populations. In many cases, the problem of insurgency has been reduced from an existential threat to the regime to one of occasional (and certainly surmountable) terrorism. Bloodshed may not have been entirely eliminated, yet a cynic will point out that the outcome still compares favourably to what we see today in Iraq, or may yet see in Afghanistan – the ostensible test-beds for democratic counterinsurgency. Can it therefore be said that authoritarian counterinsurgency is effective, or at least more effective, than the liberal approaches prescribed in Western doctrine?

Unfortunately, the question cannot be easily answered – and the racking up of ‘wins’, ‘losses’, and ‘draws’ according to regime type obscures more than it reveals. Beyond the methodological pitfalls, the measurement of effectiveness requires set criteria, which presupposes a common normative standard. For example, it is necessary to agree on the purpose of counterinsurgency: is it regime survival at any cost, or do we engage in these contests to serve higher purposes and ideals? Democratic statecraft is oriented toward an open political opportunity structure for its people, and the actions of the state are judged by this standard.¹²⁹ Thus, counterinsurgency as ‘armed reform’ foresees the preclusion of violent change in part by addressing ‘root causes’, however defined.¹³⁰ In contrast, authoritarian regimes are uncompromising in their retention of power and prerogative, which produces incongruent metrics for counterinsurgency ‘effectiveness’. The normative context is inseparable from the question: is it a state of the people (‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’) or is it a state of the sovereign (*l’État c’est moi*)? What is it we are fighting for? What truly matters?

These questions have acute policy-relevance to democratic states conducting counterinsurgency in defence of an authoritarian partner. These

¹²⁹Hence the rise of human security as a concept rivaling or threatening to subsume that of national security. See Neil S. MacFarlane and Yuen Foong Khong, *Human Security and the UN: A Critical History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: IN: Indiana UP 2006) 1.

¹³⁰Thomas Marks, ‘Mao Tse-Tung and the Search for 21st Century Counterinsurgency’, *CTC Sentinel* 2/10 (October 2009) 20. See the British definition of counterinsurgency as ‘those military, law enforcement, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency, while addressing the root causes’ (my emphasis). British Army 2009, Vol. 1 Part 10: *Counter Insurgency Operations*. Army Code 71749. London: Ministry of Defence, October 2009, 1–6.

third-party actors must decide whether their intent is to protect a regime or engage in political reform, whether their concern is regime security or human security. Because the two approaches are largely incompatible, clarity on this point will avoid unnecessary confusion, self-delusion, and wasted effort. An authoritarian approach can work: violence, repression, and the non-mediation of grievances do not necessarily escalate the insurgency, at least not in the short term. Yet the question is how closely, or at least how visibly, a democracy beholden to its populace would want to implicate itself in the forcible and systematic repression of human rights abroad, and what public good could justify such a policy. There is also a reason why democratic regimes most commonly find themselves fighting insurgents abroad: adherence to the democratic values and norms, evolved over several centuries, and reflected in the law of armed conflict and the UN Charter, appears to guard effectively against the most violent of ruptures. Regretting this achievement as a counterinsurgency weakness would be both perverse and, ultimately, self-defeating.

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