

The Soup of Allusion: Mao Zedong and George Washington, Vietnam and Valley Forge—Analogy or Analysis?

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In 1944, Theodore H. White, an American journalist who studied Chinese history at Harvard and traveled in China writing about its society, politics, and wars, was invited to the “personal cave,” in Yen-an Province, of Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party. Their conversation proved useless for publication after editing by Mao’s aides, but the rest of the morning and a private lunch with Mao and his wife were more agreeable. Mao played the role of an instructor and White that of a student. The lessons ranged from Chinese history through the current struggle against the country’s Japanese occupiers to future relations between the Communist and Nationalist factions. Mao spoke, White remembered in 1978, like “an autodidact, who had read as whim and taste took him.” Seeking to persuade his visitor how the ongoing struggle against his enemies would end successfully, Mao offered a vivid comparison between his China as seen from Yen-an and the American Revolution as it might have looked to a reporter who learned about it from George Washington at Valley Forge. Washington did not have “machinery” or “electricity,” Mao observed. The British army “had all those things,” but Washington prevailed because of his “*ideas*,” and because “he had *the people* with him.”¹ White concluded that Mao had “not placed the era of industry [or of]...electrification in their proper centuries,” but he got the big picture right. He “knew his country.” He knew that “ideas made people bear guns,” and that “power was what came out of the muzzle of the gun.” He had, White concluded, “invented the modern doctrine of partisan warfare.”²

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¹ Theodore H. White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 194-197.

² *Ibid.*, 196-197.

Left out of White's book was an analysis of how, or even whether, Mao's amalgam of history, doctrine, and policy related to the *actual* American Revolution. White wrote in the shadow of the American debacle in the Vietnam War, where another Asian nationalist, borrowing from the *Declaration of Independence* and texts by Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, used popular mobilization and guerilla tactics to overcome not only machinery and electricity, but chemical warfare, strategic bombing, satellite imaging, and possibly even the dawn of the Internet.³ The tone of the passage placed a post-Watergate American public in White's seat: awkwardly at the feet of a dogmatic but pragmatic revolutionary leader who made better use of the *Lessons of 1776* than their own countrymen had been doing.⁴

Ironically, as White composed his account, some historians of the Revolution were retreating from what seemed to many of them to have been indulgent presentism in the scholarship of the 1970s. The forums for this reconsideration were proliferating Bicentennial conferences and numerous volumes of published proceedings that they produced. Some scholars clung to analogies between the Revolution and modern wars of national liberation, even as others scrambled away from them. Nascent debates had begun but were not sustained. This circumstance produced an enlightening set of conversations about the American Revolution and later anti-colonial wars, still not comprehensively synthesized, which never quite added up to a coherent historiographical moment.⁵

It was not just the Vietnam War that conditioned this discourse, but rather a long series of anti-colonial struggles between countries in the Global South and their Euro-American adversaries after World War II. As early as 1953, before the Vietnamese victory against France at Dien Bien Phu, Eric Robson saw parallels between the inability of the British to subdue a dispersed and amorphous farmers' revolt in America and the challenges French generals encountered in Indochina.⁶ In 1968, Thomas Barrow cast the American Revolution less as an internal event than as a struggle resembling "other colonial wars of liberation, particularly those of the twentieth century." Writing before the Tet Offensive, he

³ Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, trans. Claire Duiker (New York: Cambridge University Press 2007).

⁴ In *Thunder Out of China*, co-authored with Annalee Jacoby (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1946), White described a similar reflection, attributed only to officers in Mao's entourage rather than the Chairman himself.

⁵ Don Higginbotham, "The Early American Way of War: Reconnaissance and Reappraisal," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 44, no. 2 (1987): 230-273.

⁶ Eric Robson, *The American Revolution in its Political and Military Aspect, 1763-1783* (London: Batchworth Press, 1955), 96-97.

tried to make this analogy serve his effort to cast the Revolution as a conservative ideological episode rather than a class struggle over “who should rule at home.”⁷

In the darkening political climate of 1970, Richard Morris acknowledged the at least spiritual paternity of the American Revolution for decolonization movements from the 1810s in Latin America through contemporary struggles in Southeast Asia. He conceded Mao’s “polite, even friendly” mid-1940s invocations of the “parallel between America’s War for Independence...and China’s war for independence in the twentieth century,” but noted that his views had changed considerably by 1949.⁸ Of Vietnam, he could only lament that “tragically misconceived war” and plead that “the United States needs desperately to...recapture the anticolonial stance of a John Jay or a John Quincy Adams or a Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and once more to resume its honored place in the front ranks of the nations founded on revolutionary principles.” Readers familiar with post-Great Society American politics may detect here rhetoric whereby historical analysis blends with liberal nostalgia for beleaguered social ideals.¹⁰

It cannot be said that revisionist sensibility intervened to impose discipline on this mixture of analysis and analogy, but many scholars admitted the costs that a quest for *relevance* had imposed on historical perspective. In 1974 and 1975, John Shy, addressing Bicentennial-themed gatherings of officers from the U.S. Army and Air Force, showed how many American conflicts from the Civil War onward offered what recent scholars call *lenses* through which to view the Revolution. The Civil War foregrounded eighteenth century constitution making, World War II showed the need for international alliances. The Korean War made salient questions about officers’ subordination to civil authority and the dawning outlines of a military-industrial complex. The Vietnam War resonated with black-and-white televised images of farmers scrambling between the furrow and the firefight. All of this was useful, Shy implied, if the terms of intellectual engagement remained rigorous.¹¹ At a conference on the “Military Character of the American Revolution,” Don Higginbotham confessed that “in the 1960s I over-

⁷ Thomas C. Barrow, “The American Revolution as a Colonial War for Independence,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 25, no. 3 (1968): 452-464, quotation on 462. For Carl Becker’s famous musing on home rule vs. rule at home, see *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 22.

⁸ Richard B. Morris, *The Emerging Nations and the American Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 204-205.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰ White, *In Search of History*, 197.

¹¹ John Shy, “The American Revolution Today,” in *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Independence*, ed. John Shy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 1-19.

stated the case for the uniqueness of early American warfare,” an error influenced at least partly “by the Vietnam War.” He noted hopefully that “we have now put some distance between us and the first wars of national liberation in the Third World,” that “passionate divisions that ravaged this country in the sixties are behind us,” and that American historians were finally “taking over from the generals, politicians, and journalists” as analysts.¹²

In 1976 Shy gathered ten articles he had written as “an ‘evangelist’ for a new military history” into an influential volume. Discovering much of the “personal and responsive” in the circumstances of their production, he chose instead of purging that feature to annotate it with brief headnotes. These pieces, on subjects like the colonial militia, armed Loyalism, “hearts and minds,” and radical American strategic proposals that had been considered but never adopted—with references to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Douglas MacArthur’s desire to carry the Korean War into China, televised images of Detroit and Newark burning, and “an awful feeling that the hopeless war in Vietnam was wrecking my country”—suggested that it was less a matter of scholars taking over from generals than of recalibrating the balance between passion and perspective.¹³ By stripping away inapt or inept impressions of the compatibility of early and late-modern military phenomena, it might be possible to hone our appreciation for a *usable past* and its apparent incubator, the always interminable present.

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It is not my plan to produce retrospectively the historiographical synthesis of this literature that I have just claimed did not emerge *in situ*, but rather to sift these writings for insights that may make it useful to see Washington’s Valley Forge (or Morristown in 1777 and 1780, or the Hudson Highlands in 1782–1783) as plausible *American Yenans*. Washington surely had many *ideas* in the thousands of words that flowed from his pen or those of his staff secretaries, especially in times of winter inactivity. And he had *some* of the people “with him,” though as Edmund Morgan would soon describe, “The People” Mao invoked had only begun to be *invented* in America in the late eighteenth century.¹⁴

¹² Don Higginbotham, “Reflections on the War of Independence, Modern Guerrilla Warfare, and the War in Vietnam,” in *Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the American Revolution*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University of Virginia Press, 1984), 2-3.

¹³ Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, x (“evangelist”), xv (“personal”), 163 (“hearts”), 235 (“awful”).

¹⁴ Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

Washington's political skills were as well-developed as his military talents were uneven. He served a planter's apprenticeship in the House of Burgesses and other civil or ecclesiastical posts of public trust. He was delegated to the Continental Congress, where his stature, bearing, and sartorial instincts helped to get him chosen as the Commander-in-Chief in 1775. Once in office, he showed a politician's ability to both commit and survive gaffes, as when he called Yankees an "exceeding[ly] dirty and nasty people."¹⁵ As a field commander, he dealt with revolving casts of Continental Congressmen in correspondence and through their occasional visits as committeemen to his camps. He hesitated to execute the civil powers that they thrust on him except under circumstances of grave danger to the army. He imposed strenuous discipline on his troops except when he chose to conciliate them. He awed high-level subordinates into silence or retirement while receiving and answering importunate petitions of complaint from privates and non-commissioned officers. He could gratify only a fraction of their appeals, but they showed little hesitation about approaching him more as an ombudsman than as their Commander-in-Chief. He canvassed subordinates for operational advice to the point of sometimes being criticized as indecisive. He marched the army through towns to show civilians that it still existed while displaying obsessive concern about its dress, demeanor, and especially public behavior.¹⁶ He showed a broad inclination to engage politically with civil and military problems and a cultivated *other-directedness* for a man sometimes recalled as having had a wooden personality in life that was readily marbled in death. The question is whether we can identify structural or operational elements in the Revolutionary context that gave any of these phenomena the military utility that Mao implicitly projected onto Washington. Unless we can, the Yanan interview may reveal little more than the musings of an "autodidact" who is said to have first "heard of America" while reading "a short biography of George Washington."¹⁷

A good starting point for this exercise may be to admit that most contributions to this literature were only loosely engaged with each other on an analytical

¹⁵ "From George Washington to Lund Washington, 20 August 1775," Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0234>.

¹⁶ Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), esp. 48-54.

¹⁷ White, *In Search of History*, 194-197. See also He Di, "The Most Respected Enemy: Mao Zedong's Perception of the United States," *The China Quarterly*, 137 (1994): 144-158.

plane.¹⁸ One scholar's reference to *partisan operations* may or may not have subsumed or excluded another's invocation of *bushwacking tactics*. The range of phenomena assumed to illuminate the plight of troops from powerful countries battling the armed citizens of smaller or weaker ones could include: their global strategic contexts, resource-mobilizing abilities, political will, demographic circumstances, and conditions of local terrain, before veering into subjects like *concentration* or *dispersal* on the battlefield, *stand-up* fighting versus *hit-and-run* raiding, or guerilla *fishes* blending fluidly into friendly partisan *seas*. In the library or at the seminar table, the *fog of war* may be less disorienting than the *soup of allusion*—the muddled and competing receptions of the past that scholars attempt to render useful through their deployment as analogies. And, as in real wars, some of the most revealing academic exchanges doubtless occurred after hours, in the bars or bistros to which scholars, like soldiers, are reliably wont to repair. They are beyond our reckoning now.

One point of contention salient in the 1960s and 1970s was the rejection by some scholars of the ambient conviction of others that irregular forces were bound to prevail in contests with actual armies. In 1975, Piers Mackesy challenged the “assumption that the circumstances of Revolutionary warfare made the British task of winning the War of Independence a hopeless one.” He asserted two points. The first was that even after Britain's supposedly decisive defeat at Yorktown in 1781, its naval superiority over France could have helped it to force America's principal ally out of the war, allowing the Redcoats to concentrate on defeating the rebels through pacification tactics.¹⁹ This second point, that a strategy of pacification could have succeeded, is both commensurate and relevant.

Some scholars have emphasized issues of economic organization, and material, fiscal, or logistical mobilization that are clearly relevant for understanding

¹⁸ Pertinent historiography on this subject includes John Morgan Dederer, *Making Bricks without Straw: Nathanael Greene's Southern Campaign and Mao Tse-Tung's Mobile War* (Manhattan: Sunflower University Press, 1983); James W. Pohl, “The American Revolution and the Vietnamese War: Pertinent Military Analogies,” *The History Teacher* 7, no. 2 (February 1974): 255-65; Don Higginbotham, “The Vietnamization of the American Revolution,” *American Heritage* 32, no. 6 (October/November 1981): 79-80; Richard W. Ketchum, “England's Vietnam: The American Revolution,” *American Heritage* 22, no. 4 (June 1971): 6-11. See also Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) for a more theoretical grounding in civil war violence and control.

¹⁹ Piers Mackesy, *Could the British Have Won the War of Independence? Bland-Lee Lecture, September 1975* (Worcester: Clark University Press, 1976), 3. Shy's critique, in “The American Revolution Today,” refers to Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). See also Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived” in *The American Revolution: Changing Perspectives*, eds. William M. Fowler, Jr. and Wallace Coyle (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1979), 169-188.

predicaments that both sides faced in America during the Revolution, but that may be incommensurate with circumstances in the late twentieth century. Research in the 1980s and 1990s revealed the creation in Britain between 1690 and 1740 of a fiscal-military state, capable of mobilizing prodigious amounts of material resources for a century-long contest with France.²⁰ Less of this literature was available to scholars during the 1960s debating whether, why, or how George III (who inherited that apparatus in 1760) could have retained the British colonies. But even if it was available, anyone standing at the American end of a dry supply pipeline from England and Ireland before 1781 might legitimately have asked: what was blocking the flow? R. Arthur Bowler showed that while supply failures on the American side became a clear part of the moral narrative of the Revolution itself, the inability of British officials to maintain reserves of food and equipment at the bridgehead depots where Redcoats needed them had comparably constraining effects on their ability to execute plans for suppressing the rebellion.²¹

Bowler concluded that “in [the] balance...more advantage lay with the rebels than has traditionally been assumed.” Mackesy acknowledged these findings and some of their implications, but was more impressed with Richard Buel’s judgment that flaws in the Continental system of public finance and revenue management eroded the structural foundations of the rebellion just as Washington and his French allies gained the upper hand on the battlefield. “By the end of 1780 the [British] army’s provisioning problem was virtually over,” Mackesy wrote, something that no Continental commissary at Morristown could have said about his situation. Meanwhile, Buel suggested, not only did currency depreciation and price inflation erode civilian morale during the early 1780s, but in a widening circle around the British headquarters in New York City, they promoted ruinous civil commerce with that garrison for vital goods that Washington could not stop and that steadily sapped republican will.²²

²⁰ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1797–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 2; P.M.G. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

²¹ R. Arthur Bowler, “Logistics and Operations in the American Revolution,” in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 55-71; Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775–1783* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). Some more recent discussions of this subject include Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: ‘The People,’ The Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Barbara Clark Smith, *The Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America* (New York: New Press, 2010).

²² Bowler, “Logistics and Operations in the American Revolution,” 70; Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 176-179, 185; Richard Buel, Jr., “Time: Friend or Foe of the Revolution?,” in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War*, 124-143.

These and other material, fiscal, and econometric perspectives offered valuable insights to historians of the Revolution in the 1970s seeking to explain its volatile dynamics, and to connect the political decisions of legislative bodies with the strategic performance of military institutions. The contemporaneous discoveries made by the Valley Forge Historical Research Project of the mental worlds of middling commissary officers at Valley Forge, and the tactical wiles of previously invisible “market people” on the roads between there and Philadelphia, were among the intellectual high points of this historiographical moment.²³

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It is unclear, however, how much utility these contributions have for comparing the Revolution with modern instances of national liberation or counter-insurgency warfare. Insurgents in places like Vietnam had international recognition and alliance systems. They did not depend on achieving early victories like those won by the rebels at Trenton, Princeton, or Saratoga to gain legitimacy. Given the nuclear realities of the Cold War, it is doubtful whether the United States would have intentionally gone to war with their sponsors or suppliers over those conflicts.²⁴ The mechanics of external supply were as complex as any in the eighteenth century, but the interdiction of supply processes was difficult for the same reasons. U.S. forces had trouble enough attempting to disrupt the movement or delivery of war materiel and personnel *within* combat zones. Whether the Vietnamese economy was well enough integrated into global systems to be vulnerable to dysfunction, corruption, or external interference is hard, probably impossible, to ascertain. Mao may have asserted the relevance of these factors for the problems at hand, but if he did White did not take particular notice of the fact.

Most scholarly energy has focused on operational questions before 1971, to invoke the utility of twentieth century perspectives on irregular warfare for thinking about the Revolution, and after that year, to pare such analogical approaches back to sustainable dimensions. The allure of the militarily specific and the material or anecdotal has been palpable in this discourse. Do Washington’s raid on an exposed Hessian garrison at Trenton in 1776, or the plight of Burgoyne’s troops “drowned at Saratoga in a hostile sea” a year later, or clashes between patriot and Loyalist militias in the South, or the efforts by General John Sullivan’s expedition to destroy the sanctuaries of Britain’s Iroquoian allies in 1779, sustain

²³ Wayne K. Bodle and Jacqueline Thibaut, *Valley Forge Historical Research Project*, 3 vols. (Valley Forge and Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1980), esp. vol. 1 (by Bodle) and vol. 2 (by Thibaut).

²⁴ Nina Tannenwald, “Nuclear Weapons and the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 4 (August 2006): 675-722.

such comparisons? Scholars have shown a commendable inclination to step back to broader structural points of analysis in their efforts to gain a reliable interpretive grasp on such questions.²⁵

One issue that has intrigued participants in this discussion, and that points to *differences* rather than similarities between the Revolution and modern guerrilla wars, involves the *temporal* sequences between political and military events. Historians of the Revolution have repeatedly insisted that *war* was underway more than a year before a politically defining *Declaration* of its purposes was made, but this is to see things entirely from the Continental perspective. On a state-by-state basis, the collapse of the functional legitimacy of royal authority coincided with, and generally preceded, the eruption of armed conflict. It was the recognition in Boston and London of both the extent and the impending consequences of the transfer of local power to insurgent leaders that led, in April of 1775, to the nocturnal intrusion of Redcoats into the Massachusetts countryside to reverse that situation.

In 1975, Piers Mackesy acknowledged that “long before the shooting war began, the rebels had won the first *guerre révolutionnaire*. They had seized control of the organs of government...and put down the loyalists by systematic violence and intimidation.”²⁶ In 1976, K. G. Davies quoted the views of a South Carolina advisor to the British commander-in-chief, Henry Clinton, on the need to restore civil government in recaptured territories to assure Loyalists and neutralists that it was not the Crown’s intention to perpetuate military government indefinitely. That advisor defined the problem as “a very general opinion that the [old] government and constitution of the rebellious provinces have been so utterly subverted that they are absolutely extinct and cannot exist to any purpose.”²⁷ Building on that insight, Mackesy sketched its wider implications:

“Before the conflict had become an armed rebellion, the dissidents had seized control of the organs of government; and many who would have welcomed the restoration of the royal government were convinced that

²⁵ Shy, “The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War,” in *A People Numerous and Armed*, 207 (“drowned”); Clyde R. Ferguson, “Carolina and Georgia Patriot and Loyalist Militia in Action, 1778–1783” in *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, eds. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 174-199.

²⁶ Mackesy, “Could the British Have Won the War of Independence?” 5-6.

²⁷ James Simpson to William Knox, August 20, 1781, CO 5/176, fol. 189r-v, The National Archives, Kew, U.K. Transcription available in K.G. Davies, *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770–1783* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1979), 20: 218-219. Note that this quotation is misattributed to Simpson’s letter to Knox of July 28 in Davies, “The Restoration of Civil Government by the British in the War of Independence,” in *Red, White and True Blue: The Loyalists in the Revolution*, ed. Esmond Wright (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 127.

the royal institutions had been overturned so totally that they were extinct and past reviving. This belief engendered despair...that had to be overcome before victory was possible.”²⁸

In what was probably the most important contribution to the 1970s discussion of the nexus between the Revolution and modern independence conflicts, John Shy developed some of these points. He conceded that “we dare not argue that the American Revolutionary War was basically like modern revolutionary wars in Indochina and elsewhere.” But after rejecting some especially simplistic parallels concerning the “use of guerrilla tactics,” he argued that their broadest “structural similarities” were “far more important than the differences.” The “most important points of dissimilarity,” he said, were “the relative ease with which local instruments of government fell into the hands of American rebels, the relative dependence of the rebels on conventional forms of military action, and their relative innocence of any explicit doctrine of revolutionary warfare, like that developed in our own time by Mao Tse-tung and his admirers.”²⁹ Can the first of these phenomena have definitively shaped the subsequent ones?

Mackesy, in his 1975 lecture “Could the British Have Won the War of Independence?” developed the most sustained analysis of the implications of the preemptive takeover by American rebels of local instruments of government that Shy posited. Finding themselves possessed of power from one end of the colonies to the other, Mackesy noted, and seeking unity and external support, the rebels chose to defend themselves “by raising a regular army and fighting an orthodox war.” The “existence of the Continental Army,” he posited, “forced the British army to focus its efforts” and “precluded dispersed landings and small-scale occupations in conjunction with the loyalists” that would have, he believed, been more appropriate to initiate the pacification process. The Continental Army offered a target, it became a “distraction from the long-term question of resettlement,” and it thereby “encouraged [the British] to defer proper consideration of the problems of pacification” until it became too late to matter.³⁰

Mackesy’s point was that British strategists should have organized “parallel” military and pacification operations, not the “successive” ones to which they were drawn by American initiatives. Elsewhere, he described the need for both sides to find a “balanced reciprocity” between regular army and auxiliary forces. He said that the existence of the Continental Army illustrated “concentration”

²⁸ Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 182-183.

²⁹ Shy, “The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War,” 196 (“dare”), 198-200 (“guerrilla,” “most important...admirers”), 201 (“structural...differences”).

³⁰ Mackesy, “Could the British Have Won the War of Independence?,” 7.

as a “principle of war,” and that its potential as an agent of mischief or its value as a target kept British forces likewise concentrated until at least 1779. This concentration was part of the distraction that hindered the British search for the alternative approaches that he considered essential. Drawing on revisionist thinking about the structure, strengths, and weaknesses of American militia organizations by scholars like Higginbotham and Shy, Mackesy concluded that the rebels had either “by chance or calculation” achieved a division of military and political labor between their regular and militia forces. This allowed Washington to “keep the Continental Army together” and thus to keep the British nearby and massed while he learned how to use dispersed militia forces to “polic[e] the countryside,” and for the “defense of those ‘civil institutions’ of the rebellion.” The British “grasped, though they did not express,” the need for a “balanced response” to this adjustment, but they only achieved even the outlines of one with Lord Germain’s campaign plan for 1778. And then they were unsuccessful in implementing it.³¹

The connections between what Mackesy called “the institutional revolution which had preceded the war” (the assumption by colonists of local political control) and the character of military operations, remained hazy long after 1976, but Mackesy, Davies, Shy, and others assumed that this phenomenon worked to the advantage of the rebels and the detriment of British interests. Mackesy cited this factor in acknowledging the challenges British strategists faced, which were “not insuperable” if Parliament had not panicked, if the British navy had forced France out of the war, or if Horatio Gates’s army had not disrupted pacification efforts in the Carolinas during 1780 and 1781. Davies took American political ascendancy for granted as a precondition for the British need to restore civil government. Shy’s inclusion of the rebels’ assumption of “*incumbency*” in his account of similarities and differences between the Revolution and modern wars, particularly the Vietnam War, was not yet fully developed when he offered his three-part assessment of British definitions of the conflict. But he seemingly believed that the rebels’ early possession of government initiative was an asset in a contest of “triangularity” where “two armed forces contend less with each other than for the support and the control of the civilian population.”³² In these

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6 (“parallel”), 8 (“successive”); “The Redcoat Revived,” 182-183 (“balanced...response”); Shy, “A New Look at the Colonial Militia, in *A People Numerous and Armed*, 21-34; Don Higginbotham, “The American Militia: A Traditional Institution with Revolutionary Responsibilities” in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War*, 83-103.

³² Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 183 (“institutional”), 185 (“insuperable”); Davies, “Restoration of Civil Government”; Shy, “The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War,” 199 (“triangularity”). Some evidence supports this assumption. In Georgia after 1778, even with a restored royal assembly legislating under the purview of a Crown-appointed governor, partisan forces in the interior functioned like a civilian memory cloth, protecting Whig local

constant allusions from the past to present and back, it seemed unclear how one could distinguish reception from presentism, a useful past from a hyper-relevant present.

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To solve this puzzle, we may look at the place where Mao figuratively urged Theodore White to send an imaginary eighteenth-century journalist (Thomas Paine comes to mind), Pennsylvania, in the months surrounding the bitter winter of hardship at Valley Forge in 1777–1778. There, the existence and the proximity not just of the Continental Congress, but of Pennsylvania’s *state* government, bedeviled Mao’s revolutionary precursor, Washington. If General Howe had seen and better understood this issue of proximity between political entities and military bodies, and the complexities of competition between them, they would have offered him strategic or at least tactical opportunities that he appears neither to

authority while dissuading neutralists from embracing the King’s peace. (Shy, “The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War,” 210-212; Davies “The Restoration of Civil Government,” 120-123; Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 184). In South Carolina, the capture in 1780 of the rebel political seat at Charles Town, and the destruction of Gates’s southern Continental army, did not result in even the nominal restoration of royal government. Meanwhile, partisan resistance ravaged the interior. The withdrawal of British troops from Georgia to assist in Carolina destabilized the situation that they left behind without helping to suppress that resistance. Then a new rebel army under Nathanael Greene entered the state to disrupt British momentum. That Washington could organize and send Greene’s force south exasperated Mackesy, whose case for the British ability to prevail implicitly depended on Greene’s non-arrival in the Carolinas. And much of the problem lay in the ambivalence of Henry Clinton toward the prompt restoration of civil government in occupied places like South Carolina. (Davies, “The Restoration of Civil Government,” 130-131; Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 184). In his headquarters at New York, Clinton also balked at sharing authority with a restored British civil regime and at the expectation by his superiors at home that he would disruptively carry offensive operations toward Washington’s troops in the Lower Hudson Valley. Mackesy sputtered at the spectacle of Clinton “sitting inactive at New York with an immense force of regulars, [doing] nothing to prevent Washington from creating a new southern army” under Greene “to replace that of Gates,” which had been destroyed in South Carolina. And he observed with exasperated wonder that the U.S.-French siege at Yorktown “was won overwhelmingly by regular troops” from Rhode Island and the Hudson posts, “which Clinton had allowed to march unimpeded across his front.” (Mackesy, “Could the British Have Won?,” 22, 24-25). Clinton’s strategic caution at headquarters, and the fumbling efforts of his commanders in the Lower South, bore some relation to the existence by mid-1776 of Whig state and local governments. They could be shattered, as in Georgia, or displaced from their usual seats, as in New York, but they continued to operate in exile, or at least left quasi-autonomous militia remnants behind to keep their claims alive in civilians’ memories and imaginations. Combined with many civilians’ suspicions that imperial predecessor regimes had become “extinct” (in Simpson’s phrasing, see above), it seems clearer why many scholars have viewed the precocious transfer of functional legitimacy to the rebel side as a critical asset for the latter (Shy, “The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War,” 199).

have recognized nor taken. John Shy has summarized the dynamics of triangularity in terms worth repeating:

“Two armed forces contend less with each other than for the support and the control of the civilian population. Invariably, the government and its forces are reluctant to perceive this essential triangularity, while the rebels use whatever strength they can muster to break the links between governor and governed. Revolutionary violence is less an instrument of physical destruction than one kind of persuasion; the aim is to destroy responsiveness to the state, at first within the general population, ultimately among those who man the military and administrative arms of the state. Ideally, government ceases to function because no one any longer obeys...to organize revolution means going beneath the normal level of governmental operation, reaching the smallest social groups and even individuals, indoctrinating everyone so recruited, and of course, using those forms of violence, particularly threats, terrorism and irregular or guerrilla warfare, that are at once most difficult to stop and most likely to change docile, obedient subjects into unhappy, suggestible people.”³³

This model cannot be applied universally to any phase of the Revolution, but parts of it are applicable to the situation in Pennsylvania in 1777–1778. One immediate problem, which becomes clearer with a little imagination, is the question of who governed and who obeyed (or did not obey)? On the face of the question the answer is simple. To use the Pentagon’s terminology from the project on which Shy developed his analysis, the “incumbent” was the royal government that the Redcoats and Hessian mercenaries were in the field to restore. The “insurgent” side was the Continental Congress and its makeshift military branches.³⁴ Because of the collapse of royal government in America between 1774 and 1776—whether by the isolation of General Gage’s forces in Boston in 1774–75; the anguished decision of some royal governors to retreat to shipboard platforms in 1776; the reflexive allegiance of elected governments in New England’s corporate colonies to the patriot side; and the forcible overthrow of conservative regimes in more radical colonies like Pennsylvania, however—the situ-

³³ Shy, “The Military Conflict as a Revolutionary War,” 199.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 193 [headnote].

ation on the ground shows substantially opposite dynamics. Avowed revolutionaries became the government, the King's friends were the outlawed, and neutralists were caught between the two.³⁵

In places where the Revolution's war came and went quickly, this point may be irrelevant or at most an ironic anecdotal curiosity. For places where the void created by the collapse of royal authority was filled by prudent members of conservative Whig provincial elites, accustomed to governing under imperial constitutions, the reassertion of order was steady, if not always unopposed. After completing the business of Independence in 1776, many prominent revolutionaries retired to state offices, where they wrote constitutions and interacted stably with the second-tier operatives who took their places in the peripatetic and *less* prestigious *national* Congress. There was no shortage of crises. Revolutionary politics were studded with tensions between state and Continent-level interests, inter-regional rivalries, and cross-border partisan formations. However, as the war veered erratically from place to place, those problems could be ameliorated by processes of compromise or consensus formation. For those reasons (although the details still need to be worked out in local studies explicitly shaped by the question) the first *guerre révolutionnaire* offered more problems to the British side than to its rebel adversaries.³⁶

In places where state governments were installed by struggles over who should rule at home, the existence of those regimes might be militarily problematic when Redcoats came out, or liabilities to soldiers trying to drive them away.³⁷ Pennsylvania was such a place. Its social, ethnic, religious, and cultural pluralism are too well known to require summary. Its vibrant economic growth in the century after 1681 is familiar. Its more organic and less regulated fit into the mercantiled British Atlantic economy than colonies like Massachusetts or Virginia are staples of the colonial literature. The latter circumstance gave its merchant elites what Thomas Doerflinger called a "logic of moderation" during the crises that climaxed in 1776.³⁸ It was more than the default Quakerism defining the state

³⁵ Wayne Bodle, "This Tory Labyrinth: Community, Conflict, and Military Strategy during the Valley Forge Winter," in *Friends and Neighbors: Group Life in America's First Plural Society*, ed. Michael Zuckerman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 220-250; Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers in War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), *passim*.

³⁶ Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); H. James Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); Calvin Jillson and Rick K. Wilson, *Congressional Dynamics: Structure, Coordination, and Choice in the First American Congress, 1774-1789* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

³⁷ Barrow, "The American Revolution as a Colonial War for Independence."

³⁸ Thomas Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American

in the eyes of both the invading Redcoats and external revolutionary soldiers that made Pennsylvania slow to reach the political boiling point. A bye-election for assemblymen on May 1, 1776, appeared to show Pennsylvania's electors moving *away* from confrontation with King and Parliament rather than toward separation from imperial authority. Few historians of Pennsylvania's experience doubt that its path to Independence was shaped by an internal revolution in the fullest *progressive* sense of that term.³⁹

Pennsylvania's experience with the Revolution's *war* cannot be separated from these contexts. Its 1776 state constitution was radical and its government was self-consciously weak, structurally decentralized, and badly divided. When the war veered toward the state in late 1776, the Continental Congress retreated to Baltimore while Philadelphia's militarily inexperienced citizens fled the town. The state government did *not* flee, because it was not functioning well enough to be able to do so. Even after the year-end Revolution-saving victories at Trenton and Princeton, doubts about the future multiplied. Washington's retreat from New York to Pennsylvania and his subsequent trek into the hills of Morris County, New Jersey, were a decidedly *Short* March, but as he got there his army shrank virtually (or in truth, literally) to nothing. If he ever knew an *American Yenan* it was at Morristown in early 1777.

In terms of the *politics* of warmaking, the subsequent year in Pennsylvania was even stranger. Washington returned to the state with a substantially reconstituted but not yet a seriously *rebuilt* army only because William Howe did. And Howe went there because many American Loyalists, notably Pennsylvania's Joseph Galloway, portrayed it as being filled with the King's friends and a good place to crush the rebellion. Southeastern Pennsylvanians, especially Philadelphians, moved more slowly and deliberately out of the way of an army *actually* in their midst than they fled *rumors* of one in 1776. Washington tried to conduct as conventional a campaign as possible, but he lost two battles and control of the Revolutionary capital for his trouble. The damaged American supply systems collapsed in late October of 1777, immobilizing his army northwest of Philadelphia, just as many officers began to imagine that they might at last (after Germantown) actually be in a position to defeat their adversary. The last months of the campaign saw dispersed clashes between patrols and partisan forces that may

History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 180.

³⁹ David Freeman Hawke, *In the Midst of a Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961); Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the 'Lower Sort' during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), chaps. 2-4.

have looked to both contemporaries and historians more like *petite guerre* than they were if analyzed structurally. The inability of American troops and Pennsylvania's politically alienated militia to keep the Delaware River obstructed until it froze ended the campaign on a cruelly demoralizing note.⁴⁰

When Washington—pressed by Continental and State leaders in November of 1777 to conduct a Winter Campaign against the British army occupying Philadelphia—tried to decide what to do next, he got a different picture of the local social and political fabric from his officers than Howe obtained from Galloway. Councils of War with his generals, supplemented by written memoranda, disclosed a military leadership fractured along regional lines. Southern and New England generals dismissed both the opinions and the morale of local civilians and they counseled Washington to withdraw the army to interior Pennsylvania to regroup for the next summer's campaign. Middle Atlantic generals, especially Pennsylvanians, feared the political consequences of such a step. They portrayed a diverse community combed out by the war, with Loyalists having fled into the city for British protection, patriots swelling interior towns where many generals hoped to winter the army, and a middle ground populated by the indifferent, the fearful, the immobilized, and civilians whose loyalties might be drawn to either side. They urged Washington to keep the army near the city, in Wilmington, Delaware, or camped along the Schuylkill River. They divided over Pennsylvania's call for a winter campaign, but many feared that without one the army might forfeit the confidence or allegiance of all but bitterly committed Whigs.⁴¹

Washington was sympathetic to the view of most of his generals, but he yielded to the political logic of the locally-informed minority and brought the troops to Valley Forge. An inquiring journalist like Paine might have found him there in early 1778 in a quiet period and a mood at once resigned and resilient—not entirely what Mao conjured for Theodore White in 1944. February was a hellish month. A committee from Congress was in camp. Its members experienced at close range the most catastrophic supply failures of the winter, ones that saw Washington warn credibly that the army might soon be forced to dis-

⁴⁰ Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, chaps. 1-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 3; Wayne Bodle, "Generals and 'Gentlemen': Pennsylvania Politics and the Decision for Valley Forge," *Pennsylvania History* 62, no. 1 (1995): 59-89; Benjamin H. Newcomb, "Washington's Generals and the Decision to Quarter at Valley Forge," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 117, no. 4 (October 1993): 309-329.

solve or disperse. A solitary working breakfast with Washington, melding seamlessly into tea or lunch with George and Martha, would have been unlikely but not out of the question.⁴²

What could Paine have wheedled from the old man as dusk fell on the camp and news spread that Generals Greene and Wayne were still not back from desperate foraging expeditions in nearby Pennsylvania and New Jersey? Not complaints about General Howe's *technology* advantages or his enviable *energy* situation. Howe's troops chopped the Philadelphia peninsula bare of trees that winter just trying to stay warm. Washington's ideas would have been abundant, probably expressed in short sentences punctuated by long silences. Asked whether the people were with him, he might have described Pennsylvanians as being *too much with him*. His officers were perplexed by the inhabitants. New Englanders reduced the state's plural religious communities to so many comedic variants on the word Quaker, and described "this Sanctified Quaking State" or "Tory Labyrinth" as "a heathenish land."⁴³ The British were similarly baffled. One Redcoat officer paused on the Brandywine battlefield to tell an enraptured Quaker youth that "you have got a hell of a fine country here, which we have found to be the case ever since we landed at the head of Elk."⁴⁴ But two months later, having brushed past rebel resistance to occupy Philadelphia, a British general described the same campaign as having been "as hard an exertion as ever was made, by any army, through the strangest country in the world."⁴⁵

Pressed by the articulate and perceptive Paine, Washington might have shifted the talk from Pennsylvanians themselves to their fledgling and precarious state government, which he and the army were literally fronting in geographical terms. It did not resemble anything he had seen in Virginia. Its unicameral Assembly was populated by farmers and tradesmen who did not care to meet very often in a time of military crisis. The state had sent to Congress signers of the Declaration of Independence so obscure that one of them is not even profiled in the definitive *American National Biography*. Executive power was lodged not with

⁴² Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter*, chaps. 5-7. According to Eric Foner, Paine spent the winter of 1777-1778 in York, Pennsylvania, so he could have (but did not) accompanied the committee visiting the army. Foner, *Tom Paine*, 141. The committee reached the camp on January 24, and Martha Washington probably about two weeks later.

⁴³ John Paterson to Colonel Marshall, February 23, 1778 ("Sanctified"), James Varnum to (Mrs.) William Greene, March 7, 1778, James Varnum to Colonel Nathan Millers, March 7, 1778 ("Tory" and "heathenish"), all quoted in Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter*, 172, 203.

⁴⁴ [Joseph Townsend], *Some account of the British army, under the command of General Howe, and of the battle of Brandywine* (Philadelphia: T. Ward, 1846), 23.

⁴⁵ Major General Charles Gray, November 28, 1777, quoted in Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter*, 76. For soldierly views of Pennsylvania and its "people," see *ibid.*, 76, 80-81, 126-128, 202-203; Ricardo A. Herrera, *Feeding Washington's Army: Surviving the Valley Forge Winter of 1778* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), chaps. 2 and 3.

a governor but a committee of three men, the Supreme Executive Council. Its president was a colorless Philadelphia moderate, Thomas Wharton, with whom Washington worked cordially, but its vice president was a blunt radical, George Bryan, who would have pleased Paine more than the commander-in-chief. During frequent periods when this group did not meet, emergency power devolved on a Committee of Safety, and this ungainly contraption was supervised by a Council of Censors charged with recommending revisions to the state constitution. Personnel from these bodies were crowded into Lancaster after Philadelphia fell to the British in September of 1777, forcing on the Continental Congress the not entirely unwelcome prospect of crossing the Susquehanna River to meet in the remoter, quieter, and safer town of York—though some delegates hated that place, too.⁴⁶

This menage must have persuaded Galloway that he had made the right choices in becoming a Loyalist and accompanying Howe's troops back home to Pennsylvania. Some conservative Whigs—like John Dickinson, Joseph Cadwallader, and Joseph Reed—had joined the state's radical government, risking violating their Test Oaths not to oppose the 1776 constitution, which they had every intention of doing to render Pennsylvania's government more like those of other states. Reed and Cadwallader forfeited Continental commissions, but they rode with Washington in 1777, informally advising him on strategy while serving as liaisons between the army and state agents of their own political persuasions. Mao might have seen in these circumstances parallels to China in the early 1940s; Pennsylvanians of divergent political views setting their differences cautiously aside to repel an invader, while working steadily—and not always quietly—to secure their long-term interests against once-and-future rivals.

It was in reluctant accommodation to this intersection of political and strategic imperatives that Washington kept his army in the field in 1777–1778 while most of his officers favored other options. His *second* dividend for this flexibility was Congress's decision to send the investigating committee to Valley Forge that made February a fraught month. The *first* prize was an angry remonstrance from state officials in December of 1777, doubting that the army would remain to protect the state and their political flanks, after Washington had expressly agreed to do just that. His response was to denounce the state's hypocrisy while portraying his army as being on the brink of collapse, and hinting darkly that he might

⁴⁶ William Pencak, "The Promise of Revolution, 1750–1800," in *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth*, eds. Randall M. Miller and William Pencak (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 101-152; Joseph S. Foster, *In Pursuit of Equal Liberty: George Bryan and the Revolution in Pennsylvania* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

bring it to Lancaster County after all if more material support was not forthcoming.⁴⁷

An intrepid Paine, sojourning at headquarters to gather material for a sequel to *The American Crisis*, would have left camp with a mass of notes, but probably, like White, little that could be attributed to The Chief. His self-confidence and role in Pennsylvania politics may have left him no readier to challenge Washington than White's China *bonafides* led him to contradict Mao. On one question central to our task of comparing the Revolution with wars of national liberation—the impact of rebel control of government at the local level—Washington's views would have been clear. By staying in the field, in front of and as an agent for the state government as well as Congress; and by protecting Whigs and recruitable neutralists, the army assumed roles and liabilities that revolutionary theory assigns to the *incumbent*, not the *insurgent*. It would not conduct the Winter Campaign that armchair advocates in Lancaster all wanted, but risked being pulled into perilous contact with civilians. The army had embraced a new mission. More than a stolid symbol of resistance to the occupation of Pennsylvania, it had to enforce unpopular laws prohibiting civilians from associating with the enemy.

The main engine for this dynamic was the attraction of British currency in hard money, pitted against depreciating Continental paper. Pennsylvania farmers were likely to sell their produce for the best prices available whatever the consequence. As the agent of a precarious, radical state government, the army became a regional police force. Seeking to define that role narrowly, Washington extracted an agreement for the state to supply one thousand militia troops at all times, and he divided Philadelphia's hinterland into two sectors, east and west of the Schuylkill River. Continental troops were responsible for the west side while state forces patrolled the east. But Pennsylvania never fielded more than a tiny fraction of that number. One consequence of this role, for which the *New* army of 1777–1778 had neither been recruited nor trained, was to accelerate its alienation from the community. Violent clashes between patrolling troops and civilians spread across the region. The winter brought charges, and some evidence, of favoritism, bribery, corruption, and *brigandage* by both the militia and regular troops, for which each side blamed the other. *Third force* parties, including British and American deserters, joined the fray, imperiling isolated wayfarers, including small detachments of regular army troops.

By trial and error, and by the application of his cautious temperament, Washington learned to limit these damages at the risk of giving material advantage to the enemy or of clashes with state and Continental authorities. In

⁴⁷ Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, chap. 3.

February and March, when the centrifugal tug of this civil war peaked, he refused to allow the army to be pulled deeper into it. This gave the British opportunities to exploit the advantages that revolutionary theory assigns to the *insurgent*. Howe declined, for the same reasons that Henry Clinton did in the South, to certify the liberation of Pennsylvania by forming a provisional civilian government. He opened his treasury to make Philadelphia markets attractive to farmers. He sent detachments into townships adjoining the city to drive away rebel patrols while *market people* scrambled into town. But whether he understood the systemic pressures that these tactics put on ties between Pennsylvania inhabitants, their government, and the army, is unclear. He never sent Redcoats back home with the marketeers to protect them from political or legal reprisals for their avarice. Only with the effective collapse of Continental operations in late February and March did he actually try to dismantle the civil and political infrastructure of the rebellion. Washington batted down militarily and rode those liabilities out while Howe probed randomly and ineffectively for weaknesses across the region. If Howe was inarticulate about these events, forfeiting insurgent advantages that Shy sees in triangularity, Washington was similarly mute.⁴⁸ He learned as time passed. He declined to help New Jersey officials address the spillover of civil conflict east of the Delaware River that had accompanied Continental foraging there in February. He allowed a brief Tory uprising in Delmarva, on the border between Delaware and Maryland, to burn out rather than trying to stamp it out.⁴⁹ *Learning* may be the biggest lesson here. It was not clear if any serious advantages inhered to the Continental side in its relations with state governments or their webs of communities. Nor are there reasons to assume that the British faced insuperable disadvantages from these circumstances.⁵⁰ If that *became* the case as the war spilled into the Southern states during 1778, it reflects gradual adaptation by actors on both sides.

When the British withdrew to New York City to execute Germain's plan to integrate military operations with the pacification and protection of the civil population in the South, Washington's army moved to the Lower Hudson estuary, where it manned a looser replica of its crescent-shaped screen around Philadelphia. Dealing more comfortably with the civil governments of New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut than he had with Pennsylvania's, Washington kept Clinton's forces under surveillance, suppressing his recurrent impulses to attack the

⁴⁸ Shy, "The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War," 199.

⁴⁹ Bodle, "Valley Forge Winter," 186-188, 216-219; Wayne Bodle, "The Ghost of Clow: Loyalist Insurgency in the Delmarva Peninsula," in *The Other Loyalists: Ordinary People, Royalism, and the Revolution in the Middle Colonies, 1763-1787*, eds. Joseph S. Tiedemann et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 19-44.

⁵⁰ Mackesy, "The Redcoat Revived," 184-185.

city. He intervened more gingerly in civil conflicts in Bergen County, New Jersey, or Westchester County, New York, than he had around Philadelphia, and gave coastal Connecticut inhabitants no more protection than he had their counterparts in Delmarva.

Washington attended closely to military morale during a period of incipient mutiny and treason. On this platform he assembled the Continental reinforcement army that Nathanael Greene led south in 1780–1781 to unravel British achievements under Lord Germain's plan. He orchestrated its movement unimpeded on the way to Virginia. His willingness to serve as a managerial overseer rather than taking personal command in Carolina, and his rejection of General Charles Lee's "radical alternative" that Shy calls "a war waged along guerrilla lines," suggests that he had found a middle course that reconciled warmaking with political imperatives. From that point on, symbiotic relationships between Continental forces and local instruments of government began to matter more.⁵¹

Learning *about* military learning is a difficult task. The works discussed herein did not, in the 1960s and 1970s or thereafter, produce a *historiographical moment*. There were no Special Issues of scholarly journals, or topical Forums in regular issues, or thematic panels at academic gatherings. There were no review essays, and indeed, as these ideas gestated, it became harder to get anthologies or conference proceedings published at all, much less reviewed. Don Higginbotham was unduly sure in 1981 about what aspects of the 1960s and 1970s Americans had put behind them. But circumstances and academic fashions change, and the impulse to *study war no more* was never that far from the scholarly cortex. Reagan-era interventions in places like Grenada were dismissed as risible gestures, and his covert activities in Central American conflicts generated too little notice from the history academy. Few scholars showed much taste for analyzing possible *San-dinista Saratogas*.

Current or future American engagements with regime change, or state-building conflicts on the South Asian mainland, or anywhere in the southern hemisphere, may be no different. Scholars like Mackesy, Higginbotham, Shy, and Russell Weigley or John Keegan, brought keen insights to wars from early modern times to the twentieth century. But except for Shy's "skeptical" willingness early in the Vietnam era to accept the Pentagon's "modest stipend" to study "Isolating the Guerrilla" from his civil supporters, and his co-authorship with Peter Paret of a volume on guerrilla warfare, few studies treated here addressed technical elements of the events with which the Revolution was being compared.⁵² In 1979,

⁵¹ Shy, "American Strategy: Charles Lee and the Radical Alternative," in *A People Numerous and Armed*, 133-162, 155 ("war waged").

⁵² Shy, "The Military Conflict Considered as a Revolutionary War," 193 [headnote] ("skeptical... Guerilla"); Peter Paret and John W. Shy, *Guerillas in the 1960s: A Background Study of Modern*

Mackesy wondered whether a “surge of British strength” in 1782, from thirty thousand troops to, say, sixty thousand, might have preserved the First British Empire. The prescient relevance of this observation to subsequent U.S. military interventions suggests that the *historiographical moment that never happened* may not be as obsolete as we may think.⁵³

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Soon after Kabul fell to the Taliban in the summer of 2021, scholars met at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia to confer about the upcoming celebration of the 250th anniversary of American Independence in 2026. In a panel on “War and Revolution,” the moderator noted how different American wars have intersected to stimulate meaning or launch debates in the field of military history. He cited John Shy’s efforts during the 1960s and 1970s to forge new understandings of the Revolution “in the shadow[s] of Vietnam.” He wondered if backward reflections from 2026 might similarly be shaped by the “Long Wars” from 2001 through the first two decades of the twenty-first century: the collapse of the Afghan government, the triumph of the Taliban, and the disorderly withdrawal of American troops two months before the conference.⁵⁴

Panel members silently but politely declined to run with that prompt, a testament to the obsolescence of the historiographical moment that never happened. But is that imagined moment really irrelevant, and should it be confined to the dustbin of History? None of the technical things that make the current war in Ukraine an unconvincing match for the worlds of Paul Revere, Johnny Tremain, or George Roberts Twelves Hewes—shoulder-fired ship-killer missiles,

Guerilla Tactics (New York: Praeger, Published for the Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1962).

⁵³ Mackesy, “The Redcoat Revived,” 181. For Weigley’s and Keegan’s insights, see Russell Weigley, *The Partisan War: The South Carolina Campaign of 1780–1782* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970); John Keegan, *Fields of Battle: The Wars for North America* (New York: A. Knopf, 1996). For contemporary uses of “surge,” see Nick Schiffrin, “Campaign Analysis: The ‘Surge’ in Iraq, 2007–2008,” *Orbis* 62, no. 4 (2018): 617–631; Kevin Marsh, “Obama’s ‘Surge’: A Bureaucratic Politics Analysis of the Decision to Order a Troop Surge in the Afghanistan War,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (2014): 265–288; Rajiv Chandrasekran, “The Afghan Surge is Over: So Did it Work?,” *Foreign Policy*, September 25, 2012; Kelly McHugh, “A Tale of Two Surges: Comparing the Politics of the 2007 Iraq Surge and the 2009 Afghanistan Surge,” *SAGE Open* 5, no. 4 (October–December 2015): 1–16.

⁵⁴ The proceedings of this conference, “The Meanings of Independence,” can be seen on the American Philosophical Society’s YouTube channel at: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLoKwLGnyZL4CHDhOpurL35cqW_aVRlxpj. See especially, Brendan McConville, moderator, preliminary remarks to the “War and Revolution” session; and Robert Parkinson, moderator, preliminary remarks to the previous session on “Experiences of Revolution.”

weaponized drones jousting for battlefield airspace, journalists using geolocating tools for satellite photo analysis—lessens the chance that this episode will energize generational scholarship on the American Revolution and its combat modes. The questions raised above about partisan control of local instruments of government, may resonate with Kremlin efforts to establish civil regimes in cities that they have demolished, captured, and rebuilt. The ruble's fate in eastern Ukraine, as a tool of commerce and a cultural asset for warmaking, may inflect narratives about the contest between British specie and Continental paper in American Revolutionary neighborhoods. The differential incidence of modern journalists' education and exposure to required military service, or the appearance of women reporters' framed by siren-filled night skies, may have scholarly resonance.

This begs another question as well: Can secondary Atlantic trade patterns in the Revolution, apart from blockades and embargoes, be understood anew through the lens of modern practices of sanctions? Specialist literature on British and American efforts to enlist the military or diplomatic support of Catherine the Great is already substantial, but will Vladimir Putin's insistence that Ukraine was never a country, or his claim to the imperial mantle of Peter the Great, reinvigorate that obscure branch of comparative historical inquiry? Will military subjects resume their traditional place as a domain of hyperspecialized practitioners, or as the default interest of amateur populist audiences? It would be regrettable not to use the time we have to formulate ideas and questions that keep the practice of war as critical to understanding revolutions as Shy's contemporaries contrived to make them, and to retreat, debate, and remake them.