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Attitudes Towards Civil War Among British Officials, 1900-1924

Jack Merlin Watling

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy – April 2018

Birkbeck College
University of London

I, Jack Merlin Watling, hereby declare that the content of this volume is my own work, and that all sources are correctly acknowledged and referenced.



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Abstract

Civil wars are defining moments in the history of nations, and consequently attract considerable scholarly attention as events. The concept of civil war has received minimal attention among historians however. The original contribution to our understanding of civil war presented in this thesis lies in its analysis of the conceptual evolution of civil war, which had practical legal and policy implications for British officials in the first quarter of the twentieth century. By charting British officials' responses to conflicts, primarily in Ireland and Russia, this thesis demonstrates how the concept of civil war changed.

At the beginning of the twentieth century 'civil war' meant the division of a state's institutions over questions of civic principle, and the continuation of politics by violent means. It was the internal affair of the state. Conflicts in Ireland and Russia did not fit these frameworks, and so the concept expanded to include the breakdown of order, and core assumptions about the dynamics of civil war were reshaped, from a focus on institutions, to an emphasis on communities. Civil war became a threat to international security. These changes fed into a growing acceptance of intervention, and the perception of civil war as a policy opportunity, which was a contributing factor to the emergence of civil war as the predominant form of warfare worldwide.

This thesis also contributes to a growing historiography that is integrating national, imperial, European, and world history. The treatment of synchronic crises in Ireland and Russia in this thesis demonstrates how decision making in domestic, imperial, and international contexts were intrinsically interrelated.

Civil war is necessarily a paradoxical term, for war is not civil, and therefore cannot be used without elaboration, which provides a valuable lens for gaining new insights into changing ideas about international governance, sovereignty, empire, government legitimacy, and civilization.

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Abbreviations

- AOH:** Ancient Order of Hibernians
BL: The British Library
BLOU: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
CAB: Cabinet Office
CCC: Churchill College, Cambridge
CIGS: Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CO: Colonial Office
CUP: Cambridge University Press
DI: Detective Inspector
DMI: Director of Military Intelligence
DMO: Director of Military Operations
FO: Foreign Office
GOC: General Officer Commanding
HC: House of Commons
HL: House of Lords
ILP: Independent Labour Party
INV: Irish National Volunteers
IPP: Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA: Irish Republican Army
IRB: Irish Republican Brotherhood
IWM: Imperial War Museum, London
MP: Member of Parliament
NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer
OUP: Oxford University Press
PAW: Parliamentary Archives, Westminster
PM: Prime Minister
PRONI: Public Records Office Northern Ireland
RC: Roman Catholic
SR: Socialist Revolutionaries
TNA: The National Archives, Kew
UK: United Kingdom
US/USA: United States
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UVF: Ulster Volunteer Force
WO: War Office

Introduction

Winston Churchill: 'I said that what occurred in Ireland was a revolution which was viewed retrospectively as civil war.'

Robert Cecil: 'That is to say, it was civil war, but it was not so treated. That is an astounding statement to make... as a matter of fact, it was not civil war, or, at any rate, it was not wholly civil war. I have never seen any advantage in mixing up facts and in trying to conceal, by using different words, the real truth of the matter.'¹

The debate unfolding in the House of Commons on 12 April 1922 was about a lot more than 'using different words.' As Churchill and Cecil both knew the term 'civil war' had serious ramifications. If it had been applied by the British Government during the Anglo-Irish War it could have ceded belligerent rights to the Irish Republican Army, and created a precedent for international interference. Even retroactive recognition set a new threshold for civil war that rendered ambiguous whether subsequent violence in the Irish Free State constituted an Irish Civil War, a British Civil War, or would create a *casus belli* for interstate war between Ireland and Britain.

Over the preceding two decades civil war had been a matter of intense debate within the British government. From South Africa, Ireland, and Russia, to China, Colombia, and Persia, the question of what constituted civil war and what was to be done about it, was a key political discussion and led to an evolution in thinking. This thesis seeks to explore that evolution and its effects upon concepts of sovereignty, empire, nation, and international law in relation to the policy challenges tackled by British officials in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The central argument is that prior to the Ulster Crisis of 1912-1914 there was a broadly understood definition of civil war among British officials. This definition was built upon prevailing histories of Rome's Civil Wars, the British Civil Wars, and the American Civil War. Civil war was defined as a conflict over civic principles between parties that split a state vertically, through its institutions. It was the point at which the mechanisms for political debate failed, where whatever a majority decided the other party could not concede, and politics would continue by violent means. Civil war, in this established reading, was a fight for the rules defining a state, not simply the use of violence by internal factions. It was an

¹ HC, *Hansard* (12 April 1922), vol. 153, cols. 516-517.

internal affair, and did not in itself justify foreign intervention.

The Ulster Crisis undermined the government's confidence in this framework. Because the declaration of martial law was interpreted in Britain as a declaration of civil war, the existing structure proved a political straitjacket from which ministers sought to extricate themselves. The crisis led to a more flexible approach to demarcating civil conflict. Policy innovation would be accelerated by intervention in Russia, because at the time of the Allied landings in March and August 1918 the British government did not view Russia as being in a state of civil war. When they came to the conclusion that Russia was fighting a civil war their policy contradicted established norms, and they were forced to develop new justifications for their actions.

What emerged was not a new consensus but conceptual ambiguity. Civil war became synonymous with disorder, political crime, revolutionary violence, and was entangled in the contradictions between state and nation that were increasingly apparent as the League of Nations sought to use the legal mechanisms of the former to uphold the principles of the latter. The result was a new set of justifications for intervention in civil war, and an expansion of when civil war was thought to occur. Although not universally accepted many argued that civil war – being synonymous with a breakdown in order – threatened international peace and was therefore an international concern, not the internal affair of a particular state. In this way the discourse on civil war fed into growing support for international responsibility, humanitarian intervention, and the limitation of states' rights. The conflation of civil war with civil disorder strengthened the idea that government legitimacy could be judged by the actions of a state towards its citizens, not just its conduct towards other states, though it also justified the entry of military and paramilitary groups into the civilian sphere.

Civil wars have been the subject of considerable scholarly attention, given their defining and traumatic role in the history of many nations. The historiographies of the American, Russian, and Spanish civil wars are voluminous, and yet isolated; they have been studied as key moments in the history of America, Russia, and Spain, while civil war as a concept has been neglected. The historical study of civil war has only recently moved away from 'methodological

nationalism,'² beginning with the work of Stanley Payne in his 2011 monograph *Civil War in Europe, 1905-1949*, charting the proliferation of civil war in Europe over the early twentieth century.³ Payne sought to address a problem long discussed by political scientists: the emergence of civil war as the most prevalent form of armed conflict. To do this, Payne surveyed a large number of conflicts that he believed met the criteria of civil war, adopting the definition of the political scientist Stathis Kalyvas, which encompasses 'most revolutions, sustained peasant insurrections, "revolutionary" or ethnic insurgencies, anti-colonial uprisings, and resistance wars against foreign occupiers.'⁴ Payne's only caveat was that 'political violence alone... is not enough to constitute genuine civil war, which must involve an extended contest of arms to win state power, even if waged by means of irregular warfare.'⁵

While such a definition allows for the comparison of many wars it lacks historicization. Payne analyses conflicts that were not understood as 'civil war' by contemporaries, and dismisses others that were. In an illustrative clarification, Payne dismisses the American Civil War because it 'was purely a secessionist struggle, and thus in principle not a full civil war, despite the terminology normally employed in the United States.'⁶ As this thesis seeks to explore, the concept of civil war as understood by historical actors went through a process of transformation over Payne's period of analysis. One factor contributing to the expanding number of civil wars could therefore be that more conflicts were understood to meet the expanding criteria. Moreover the reasons for states and opposition movements utilizing civil war as a tool of policy during the period of Payne's analysis must necessarily have been affected by the developing perceptions of the merits of that policy option in relation to what civil war was thought to entail. Payne's application of a universal definition of civil war suppresses these factors.

The historian David Armitage adopted a different approach in *Civil Wars: A*

² David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (New York: CUP, 2013), p. 17.

³ Stanley Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905-1949* (New York: CUP, 2011).

⁴ Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: CUP, 2006), p. 19. cited: Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, p. 1.

⁵ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, p. 1.

⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

*History In Ideas.*⁷ Armitage argued that 'any truly historical study of civil war - its genealogy, its morphology, its durability, or its terminability - must stretch ten times further than the horizon of [current] analyses,'⁸ which tend to keep to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His analysis focused on the concept of civil war, and spanned from the dying days of Republican Rome to the rending of Iraq in Ramadi and Fallujah. Armitage continually refers back, showing the concept of civil war developing both in reaction to particular conflicts, and in relation to an intellectual discourse over centuries. Regrettably such a grand narrative must be incomplete. Armitage jumps from the American Civil War to the foundation of the United Nations, avoiding the Russian Civil War completely, despite this period being, as Payne had identified, a turning point in the prevalence of civil war. For Armitage this omission could be justified because he was focusing on the concept. Revolutionary civil war had arguably been debated quite thoroughly with reference to the French Revolution. But the emergence of ideas does not always coincide with their gaining political traction. Few of the concepts explored in this thesis were new ideas between 1900-1924. But this thesis argues that in the context of a world war, attempted world revolution, and hopes for world governance, the idea of civil war took on a new significance.

Another important divergence from Armitage is that while it aims to closely interrogate conceptual development this thesis is principally concerned with how changing concepts shaped policy and *vice versa*. Armitage argued that civil war is always a contentious label. 'Revolutionaries redescribed what in other circumstances - or by other ideologues - had been called rebellion, insurrection or civil wars. Indeed, one sure sign of a revolution's success is precisely that retrospective redescription.'⁹ While Armitage thoroughly examines political considerations, he neglects the policy implications of civil war. This is apparent in Armitage's account of debates over whether Iraq faced civil war in 2006-2008. Armitage focuses on public arguments that Iraq was in civil war, as opposed to the

⁷ David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History In Ideas* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2017).

⁸ David Armitage, 'Civil Wars, from Beginning ... to End?', *American Historical Review*, vol. 120, no. 5 (2015), p. 1830.

⁹ David Armitage, 'Every Great Revolution is a Civil War', Keith Baker and Dan Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolutions; A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 67.

Bush Administration's denials of this state of affairs.¹⁰ His analysis of this public relations struggle does not address the fact that American military, diplomatic, and intelligence officials were using civil war as an analytical frame in policy planning for 'the surge.'¹¹ The policy response to civil war lies outside Armitage's methodological focus. This is no less apparent in Armitage's account of civil war's conceptual origin during the final decades of Republican Rome. Civil war did not simply emerge to describe a new kind of violence. As the historian Valentina Arena has noted civil war displaced an established conception of political violence as a dichotomy between *concordia* and *discordia*: the harmonious or disharmonious purpose of political action. *Bellum civile*, and its opposite, *pax* - to be imposed by the victory of one civil party - was not just descriptive, but prescriptive. The formation of the idea of civil war brought with it assumptions about the necessary remedy. Similarly this thesis argues that between 1900 and 1924 there was a significant shift in the assumptions surrounding civil war, which changed the objective in, and approach to such conflicts. Self-determination shifted the emphasis to political integration, and if this was impossible partition, as mechanisms for conflict resolution.

The question of how to cure the malady of civil conflict has been at the heart of debates among political scientists since the foundation of the discipline. Payne's history draws heavily on the work of the political scientist Stathis Kalyvas.¹² Bill Kissane foreshadowed the importance placed by Armitage on civil war's classical origin.¹³ Similarly this thesis, charting British intervention in two conflicts, is partially inspired by that applied by Richard Little.¹⁴ It is important however for historians to detach their work from this legacy, because political scientists are attempting to answer fundamentally different questions and their approach risks introducing anachronisms into historical inquiry. Among political scientists there

¹⁰ Armitage, *Civil Wars*, pp. 196-231.

¹¹ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla; Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: Hurst and Company, 2017), pp. 16-22.

¹² Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

¹³ Bill Kissane, *Nations Torn Asunder: The Challenge of Civil War* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

¹⁴ Richard Little, 'Intervention and Non-Intervention in International Society: Britain's Responses to the American and Spanish Civil Wars', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 39, issue. 5 (2013), pp. 1111-1129.

are two accepted truths about civil war: it is extremely prevalent, and in spite of a considerable scholarly effort, remains an enigma. Few academic works on the subject fail to begin by noting that civil wars have constituted the overwhelming majority of conflicts in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Yet there is very little agreement about why civil wars occur, or even what they are, as the political scientist Edward Newman observes:

Understanding the causes, nature and impact of civil wars - in single cases or as general patterns - has been fraught with methodological difficulties. The challenges of defining and codifying the phenomena under study, and then collecting and interpreting data, have resulted in controversy over even the most fundamental issues related to civil wars.¹⁶

Key controversies surround basic questions such as what ‘threshold of violence distinguishes civil war from other forms of internal armed conflict? How do we know when a civil war starts and ends? How can we distinguish between intrastate, interstate, and extra state wars?’¹⁷ Research has proved inconclusive. In 2009 Jeffrey Dixon reviewed 46 quantitative studies on the causes of civil war and found over 200 independent causal variables of which there was a mild consensus on 30 and a slightly stronger consensus on seven. Moreover he found little interplay between the studies, and a lack of discussion around those variables that were widely accepted.¹⁸

The field is split into three broad theories. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler argue that civil wars occur when groups within a state believe they stand to gain more materially through appropriation than through production.¹⁹ James Fearon and David Laitin offer an alternative hypothesis, accepting that opportunity is crucial, but emphasising the opportunities to gain political power presented

¹⁵ Edward Newman, *Understanding Civil War: Continuity and Change in Intrastate Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 1; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Dominic Rohner, ‘Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War’, *Oxford Economic Papers*, vol. 61, no. 1 (2009), p. 1; Andrew Mack, ‘Civil War: Academic Research and the Policy Community’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 39, no. 5 (2002), p. 515.

¹⁶ Newman, *Understanding Civil War*, p. 58.

¹⁷ Nicholas Sambanis, ‘What is Civil War? Conception and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 48, no. 6 (2004), p. 815.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Dixon, ‘What Causes Civil Wars? Integrating Quantitative Research Findings’, *International Studies Review*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2009), pp. 707-735.

¹⁹ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Dominic Rohner, ‘Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War’, pp. 1-27.

through the weakness of the state, rather than opportunities for economic gain.²⁰ Nicholas Sambanis on the other hand argues that while opportunity creates the potential for civil war, the cause depends on whether the demands leveled by an opposition group are excessive or whether the extremity of government repression renders compromise impossible.²¹ Implicit in all of these arguments is that civil war ‘occurs disproportionately in low-income countries’²² where there are weak structures of governance and political institutions are easily subverted for gain. This conclusion is inconsistent with the historical record, not because a majority of what today we call civil wars have occurred in rich countries, but because many people in the early twentieth century considered ‘civilization’ to be a prerequisite for civil war, and thus only relevant to states with clear structures of political governance. The definition of civil war is not constant, and the tendency to try and create a universal definition of civil war does not assist historical inquiry.

This thesis consequently proceeds by historicizing the concept of civil war, seeking to delve into what constituted civil war in the minds of British officials by exploring the interplay between the evolving conception of civil war, and an evolving policy response to it. The emphasis is not on theory, but on how theory shaped practice, and *vice versa*. In this way this thesis attempts to meet Quentin Skinner’s demand that ideas are studied in relation to their application in context.²³ Skinner warns against studying ideas or texts as a progression in a conversation stretching centuries, which tends to ‘mutate into a mythology of doctrines.’²⁴ Ideas must be studied in relation to their time and place. Skinner also crucially warns against the tendency to smooth out a particular individual’s views, minimizing or explaining away apparent contradiction.²⁵ Many of the historical actors in this thesis advocated contradictory positions. In such instances the assumption is that they were in fact being inconsistent. Conversely however,

²⁰ James Fearon and David Laitin, ‘Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War’, *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 1 (2003), pp. 75-90.

²¹ Nicholas Sambanis, ‘Using Case Studies to Expand Economic Models of Civil War’, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2 (June, 2004), pp. 259-279.

²² Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, ‘Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2002), p. 3.

²³ Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1969), pp. 3-53.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

reluctance to ‘read into’ texts, beyond what is explicitly stated, can exclude vital actors from consideration. It can narrow the texts considered to those that espouse a clear rationale or purpose. A key criticism of the Cambridge School has been its overemphasis on theorists as agents of historical change, so that it fails to adequately examine ‘in detail and depth the precise nature of the interrelationships of the political ideas with the realities of human activity.’²⁶ Avoiding this tendency is enabled, as Charles Taylor puts it, by reading ‘the text as action in context,’²⁷ in which the assumptions in official reports can be extrapolated by reference to the political purpose the writing serves.

Taylor notes that this risks placing no importance upon the truth of an historical actor’s arguments. Often contradiction is rendered inevitable by bureaucracy, and essential in collective decision-making. Civil servants, and colleagues in committee, are not always required to explain their reasoning, especially when the goal is to reach a consensus. Exploring conceptual development within institutions demands the identification of what the historian James Joll termed the ‘unspoken assumptions’²⁸ about civil war that underpinned their decision-making. As Raymond Geuss has observed, the boundaries between the police and a gang, between an army and a militia, ‘is embedded in a social context in which people have some beliefs about distinctions between formal and informal, controlled and uncontrolled, authorised and unauthorized kinds of violence.’²⁹ What constitutes civil war is entangled in precisely these questions, and so Taylor’s concern about the ultimate validity of an historical argument is broadly irrelevant. Contradictory or otherwise the boundaries of civil war were demarcated by beliefs, and this thesis is concerned with how those beliefs changed in relation to a changing context. Because this thesis is more concerned with

²⁶ Neal Wood, *Reflections on Political Theory: A Voice of Reason from the Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 103. See also Paul Blackledge, *Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 10-12.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, ‘The Hermeneutics of Conflict’, in James Tully, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 219.

²⁸ James Joll, *1914: The Unspoken Assumptions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968).

²⁹ Raymond Geuss, *History and Illusion in Politics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 47-48.

practitioners, rather than theorists, it must diverge from Skinner's prescriptions; often trying to unpick why certain terms go unchallenged, as much as those that received critical attention. Those theorists whose works are considered at length, such as Lassa Oppenheim and Halford Mackinder, feature because besides the impact of their work on official thinking they themselves were involved in implementing policy; Oppenheim in the creation of the League of Nations, and Mackinder in Southern Russia.

Two conflicts in particular are central to this thesis, the Struggle for Irish Independence, and the Russian Civil War. The comparative approach to historical inquiry has been much maligned as an insufficient escape from 'methodological nationalism', but nevertheless provides a basis for framing useful historical questions.³⁰ By comparing responses to conflicts described as civil war prior to 1912, with subsequent policy in Russia and Ireland, and by comparing approaches in domestic, imperial, and foreign contexts, this thesis seeks to understand how policymakers differentiated between different types of conflict, and problematised them. At the same time however the aim is to move beyond a directly comparative approach. As Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt observe, 'comparisons presume that the objects of comparison can be isolated.'³¹ Russia and Ireland were not two separate conflicts that can be treated discretely. For British officials they were synchronic components of a global conflict, and while they had significant local peculiarities, they were linked. One method that seeks to avoid the separation emphasised in comparative history is to work transnationally, focusing on the 'relationships, transfers and interactions'³² of people, goods, and ideas, and placing 'an emphasis on historical actors within international networks, rather than conceiving of individuals from the outset as national subjects.'³³ The precise methodological boundaries between global, migration, and transnational history

³⁰ Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', *History and Theory*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2003), pp. 29-44.

³¹ Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, 'Comparative History; Methods, Aims, Problems', Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 25.

³² Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p. 2.

³³ Jan Rüger, 'OXO: Or, the Challenges of Transnational History', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2010), pp. 659.

may be ambiguous,³⁴ but it is generally accepted that transnational history seeks to avoid a state-centric approach; Michael Espagne's research on cultural transfer for instance tries to break down the clear border demarcating France and Germany.³⁵ Given that this thesis is overwhelmingly focused on British officials, and the British government, it cannot claim to be transnational, but in its linking of disparate conflicts it draws considerable inspiration from recent transnational histories of conflict, not least Robert Gerwarth's *The Vanquished*.³⁶ This thesis embraces methodological elements of transnational history, but aims them at quite different ends.

Britain is an especially important case study in the conceptual development of civil war. Britain's global empire, and the number of conflicts in which it was directly involved over the first quarter of the twentieth century, provide a considerable quantity of evidence to work with. The continuity of officials and institutions of government over this period enables the study of an evolution in thinking. Moreover the British experience of civil war was both domestic - in Ireland - and foreign, and presented Britain with conflicts of choice, as well as existential crises. Britain was also the primary intermediary between America and Europe, and as a leading power in the League of Nations, had a disproportionate impact on how civil war was problematised by institutions of international governance.³⁷ Historiographically there is a significant tension in British studies between Britain's national, imperial, and international – especially European – contexts. Following the 'imperial turn'³⁸ in British history, many historians have

³⁴ Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Learning by Doing: Notes about the Making of the Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History', *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008), pp. 159–179; Ian Tyrrell, 'Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2009), pp. 453-474.

³⁵ Michel Espagne, *Les Transferts Culturels Franco-Allemands* (Paris: Presses Université de France, 1999).

³⁶ Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished; Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

³⁷ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 2015).

³⁸ Which saw a growing number of new perspectives on empire including but far from limited to David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001); Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture, and Colonialism, 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999);

struggled to achieve ‘a mediation on the notion of a mutually constituted history between Britain and its empire.’³⁹ In the academy British studies are often intentionally detached into three separate spheres of British, European, and imperial history, despite the fact that ‘Britain’s European and imperial roles were inherently linked.’⁴⁰ In spite of the extensive contribution to European history by British historians, it remains possible for Michael Bentley, in his 2005 monograph *Modernizing England’s Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970*,⁴¹ to, in the words of Richard Evans, write ‘as if English historians wrote exclusively about English history’.⁴² This separation encompasses the Russian Civil War, while Ireland has often been overlooked⁴³ owing to its ambiguous ‘semi-detached - and perhaps semi-colonial - status within the UK’.⁴⁴ As Jan Rüger has demonstrated, the study of institutions like the Royal Navy, which existed ‘at the intersection between local, national and imperial contexts’,⁴⁵ provides an

Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Richard Price, ‘One Big Thing; Britain, Its Empire and Their Imperial Culture’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2006), p. 603.

⁴⁰ Jan Rüger, ‘Writing Europe into the History of the British Empire’, John Arnold, Matthew Hilton, and Jan Rüger (eds.), *History after Hobsbawm: Writing the Past for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), p. 48.

⁴¹ Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England’s Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism 1870-1970* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005); the same could be said of Christopher Parker, *The English Historical Tradition since 1850* (Edinburgh: John Dolton, 1990); following the style of John Kenyon, *The History Men: The Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

⁴² Richard Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 2.

⁴³ Among historians of Ireland, its relationship to Europe and Empire has remained a challenge, see Brian Walker, ‘II. Ireland’s Historical Position: “Colonial” or “European”’, *The Irish Review*, no. 9 (1990), pp. 36-40. Moreover Irish historiography remains a poorly integrated sub-category of British studies, leaving Irish history susceptible to myopia, see Enda Delaney, ‘Our Island Story? Towards a Transnational History of Late Modern Ireland’, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 148 (2011), pp. 599-621.

⁴⁴ Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 24.

⁴⁵ Jan Rüger, ‘Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1887-1914’, *Past & Present*, no. 185 (2004), p. 160.

invaluable lens for integrating analysis of these fields. Similarly civil war, which connected domestic terrorism in London, and labour strikes, to challenges to imperial security in Ireland, Persia, and South Africa, and to threats from foreign powers in Germany, Anatolia, and Russia, provides a useful frame for considering British history in a manner that integrates its multiple layers.

The period examined in this thesis straddles a transformation in the conceptualization of civil war between 1912-1921. The analysis begins however in 1900 because the South African War and Thousand Days' War, ongoing at the time, both provide insight into how civil war was perceived by British officials prior to the Ulster Crisis, and created important legal precedents that would affect policy in Russia and Ireland. 1921 meanwhile would be an awkward place to conclude the analysis because fighting in Ireland was ongoing, and the Russian government was not yet recognised, while conflict convulsed Anatolia. The fall of Lloyd George's coalition, the recognition of the Bolshevik government, and the conclusion of the Irish Civil War all make 1924 a reasonable point at which to draw the analysis to a close.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first surveys how civil war was conceptualized within the British government between 1900 and 1912 in relation to the South African War, the Thousand Days' War in Colombia, rebellions in China, and the Persian Constitutional Crisis. The second chapter considers the challenges to that conception of civil war presented by the Ulster Crisis of 1912-1914 and the Easter Rising of 1916. The third chapter explores why the British intervened in Russia, and how their understanding of what was unfolding in Russia evolved between 1917 and 1919. The fourth chapter examines developments in international governance, self-determination, government legitimacy, and civil war, with regards to British policy in Russia, Ireland, and Eastern Europe between 1919 and 1923. The fifth chapter looks at the interplay between public debates, legal and political theory, and popular culture between 1919-1924, and the concept of civil war, which both constrained and accelerated certain elements of official discussion.

The nomenclature surrounding war, and especially civil war, is inherently controversial. The 'Second Boer War', 'Anglo-Boer War', or 'South African War', are all tinged with historical and historiographical judgments; the first is imperialistic,

assuming British participation, while the second suggests a war between white populations, overlooking extensive black participation.⁴⁶ Whether Ireland experienced revolution,⁴⁷ or ‘a struggle for independence’,⁴⁸ was both disputed at the time among Irish nationalists, and is now a divide in the historiography. Different parties adopted the nomenclature of a Russian Civil War years apart, and even after this term was generally adopted the boundaries between civil war in Russia, as opposed to Finland, Poland, or between different theatres within Russia, remained flexible and imprecise at the time. Much historiographical debate has similarly focused on defining the boundaries of the conflict.⁴⁹ While historicizing the nomenclature is the ideal, the divergence of terminology used by historical actors renders the lack of consistency confusing. Where it is relevant and possible this thesis seeks to explain differences in how conflicts and actors were categorized by contemporaries, but it is also necessary to adopt some labels that are used consistently throughout this work. The ‘South African War’ is the most neutral name for the conflict. This thesis generally refers to the Irish struggle for independence, not an Irish revolution. Whether the struggle was revolutionary is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is described as a struggle for independence because this is still true irrespective of whether it was a revolutionary struggle. The term ‘Russian Civil War’ is used as a general descriptor encompassing the numerous conflicts that convulsed the post Tsarist Empire; however problematic no alternative appeared to be less so.

What to call parties in conflicts is even more complex. In general this thesis has either adopted the names that historical actors gave themselves, or in particular cases the names applied by British officials. Rebels are referred to in relation to a number of conflicts. This is not a judgement on the validity of their

⁴⁶ Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902*, (London: CUP, 1983).

⁴⁷ Diarmaid Ferriter, *A Nation and Not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913-23* (London: Profile Books, 2015).

⁴⁸ Frances Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 397.

⁴⁹ Historians have both sought to divide the conflict into overlapping struggles within the same space, see Geoffrey Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 2013), and to distinguish the war inside Russia, with those in the states on the periphery of the former Tsarist Empire, see Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World* (Oxford: OUP, 2016).

cause, but because rebellion had a particular legal and political significance within the context of civil war for British officials. The term ‘Ulsterman’ is controversial, since many Ulster Unionists were not men, and many men in Ulster were not unionists. However the idea of the Ulsterman had a particular significance in official discussion, referring to active unionists in Ulster, involved in the Ulster Volunteer Force. Conversely British officials used the term ‘Sinn Feiners’ in the period before and after the Easter Rising to refer to any militant Irish nationalist, which did not correspond with membership of Sinn Fein. In spite of its being incorrect, the way that these inaccurate categories affected policy is an important part of this thesis, and therefore the term is occasionally used in this manner. ‘White Russian’ is a similarly problematic label. But within the British government it was often used to encompass a broad coalition of anti-Bolshevik forces, and sheds light not only on British misconceptions, but also on tensions in official discussion. Transliterations of Chinese, Persian, and Russian names are presented as they appear in official documents, leading to a plethora of ways of spelling Bolshevik, and numerous other terms. All dates are presented according to the Gregorian calendar.

Chapter One

Conceptualising Civil War, 1900-1912

Halford Mackinder, the renowned geographer, told the Commons in April 1910 that ‘the ultimate test of party government is civil war,’¹ and that the legislation before the House risked bringing about precisely such a crisis. The legislation in question was the Parliament Act, which proposed to allow the Commons to pass legislation without the concurrence of the House of Lords. The notion that civil war is especially associated with democracy, with party government, and with states with strong institutions, is contrary to almost every theoretical framework currently applied to the phenomenon. Mackinder’s argument demonstrates just how differently civil war was understood at the dawn of the twentieth century. Any analysis of attitudes, let alone policy, towards civil war in this period, must therefore begin by exploring the ‘unspoken assumptions’² underpinning the term’s use.

This chapter addresses three questions about official attitudes towards civil war between the annexation of the Boer Republics in 1900 and the onset of the Ulster Crisis in 1912: how did British officials define civil war, both practically and legally; how did the concept of civil war interact with concepts of sovereignty, civilisation, and empire; and what were the policy implications of a conflict being deemed a civil war? The chapter analyses responses to several episodes in British foreign policy: the South African War, the Thousand Days’ War in Colombia, rebellions in China, and the Persian Constitutional Crisis. The South African War, and in particular rebellion in Cape Colony, was understood by many to be analogous to civil war. Cape Colony highlights both the theoretical dynamics of civil war in this period, and how that conceptualisation was influenced by historical analogy, especially to the American Civil War. British policy in the aftermath of the Thousand Days’ War and the rebellions that swept China in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion provides insight into how civil war related to concepts of civilization and empire, and how civil war was distinguished from anarchy. The Persian Constitutional Movement, which resulted in a civil war between the Parliament and the Shah, sheds light on the perceived merits of intervention.

¹ Halford Mackinder, HC, *Hansard* (13 April 1910), vol. 16, col. 1286.

² Joll, 1914: *The Unspoken Assumptions*.

Civil War as a Contest of Civic Principles: South Africa, 1899-1902

As early as 17 June 1899, the Government of Natal was warning the British government that 'the outbreak of hostilities between Great Britain and the South African Republic might lead to civil war, and would in any case tend to the perpetuation of racial bitterness.'³ Winston Churchill, upon disembarking in November 1899, noted that 'a considerable part of the Colony trembles on the verge of rebellion.'⁴ For over a year warnings trickled into the papers from Cape residents making the same point, that 'men who talk about United South Africa must face bloodshed... and we will know what bitter feelings are left after war, especially civil war.'⁵ By December 1900 *Reuters* was reporting after a Cabinet Meeting in Cape Colony that 'anti-British agitation is being vigorously pursued. All loyalists trust that drastic measures will be taken with a view to preventing the terrors of a possible civil war in the colony.'⁶ Ten days later the issue was taken up in Parliament when the Liberal MP, Duncan Pirie, who had served in South Africa and been mentioned in dispatches, told the Commons:

I think it is almost a misnomer to speak of this Bill as a War Loan Bill—the actual facts are such as to justify it being called a Civil War Loan Bill. Honourable Members have no conception of the amount of intermarriage which has gone on in South Africa. The whole community there may be said to form one large family, and it is because I wish the country to have a more correct idea of the situation and to realise how close are the ties between our colonists in South Africa and those who are suffering the horrors of this war that I am making these remarks to-day.⁷

Fear of rebellion grew steadily throughout the conflict, and yet the significance of warnings of 'civil war' has not featured prominently in the prevailing historiography of the South African War. For decades the war was characterised as the ultimate case study in the interdependence of capitalism and imperialism. 'Whatever the ideology', wrote Eric Hobsbawm, 'the motive for the

³ 'Telegram, Natal Ministry to Hely-Hutchinson, 17 June 1899' cited. 'The Defence of Natal', *The Manchester Guardian* (1 February 1900), p. 8.

⁴ Winston Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), p. 37.

⁵ 'Afrikander Aims', *The Times* (1 June 1900), p. 7.

⁶ 'News from Capetown', *The Manchester Guardian* (5 December 1900), p. 5.

⁷ Duncan Pirie, HC, *Hansard* (15 December 1900), vol. 88, col. 880.

Boer War was gold.⁸ This goes back to the case made by John Hobson, correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* during the conflict, who claimed that 'the British people had been led into a crime,'⁹ in which the empire sought to annex two independent states to seize their assets. The case for imperialist conspiracy was advanced in Leonard Thompson's monograph *A History of South Africa*, in which he argued that the essential causes of the conflict were 'Diamonds, Gold, and British Imperialism.'¹⁰ Although less focused on conspiracy in the British government, Diana Cammack similarly concludes that the conflict was brought about by economic systems competing over gold.¹¹ This narrative has been challenged by historians including Andrew Porter, who noted a 'dearth of evidence for the existence of detailed exchanges before the war between representatives of mining or financial interests and imperial officials,'¹² and argued for political causes to the conflict such as the voting rights of non-Afrikaner residents of the Boer Republics, known as Uitlanders. The historian Iain Smith has argued that civic principles were not a 'Trojan Horse' used by the British government to justify the seizure of mines, but were key concerns of officials – especially Lord Milner - who, having backed them, precipitated a political crisis which neither side felt able to back down from.¹³ The existence – or lack – of a conspiracy within the British government is beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this discussion one point in this historiographical debate is significant; if a conspiracy did exist it was not the motivation for most of the participants in the war, who by definition could not have been aware of it. Understanding the war as an inter-state struggle over gold provides no insight into the thinking that enabled it to be widely termed a civil war.

For a significant proportion of those involved in the conflict, including senior

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 2004), p. 66.

⁹ John Hobson, *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects* (London: James Nisbet & Company, 1900), p. 316.

¹⁰ Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 110-153.

¹¹ Diana Cammack, *The Rand at War, 1899-1902: the Witwatersrand and the Anglo-Boer War* (London: University of California Press, 1990).

¹² Andrew Porter, 'The South African War (1899-1902): Context and Motive Reconsidered', *The Journal of African History*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 46.

¹³ Iain Smith, *The Origins of the South African War, 1899-1902* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 417-428.

policymakers, the war was largely fought over matters of principle, and fought within, as much as between communities. Duncan Pirie was not merely referring to infighting between colonists of British and Dutch origin when he warned of civil war. He was referring to the fracturing of communities, within Cape Colony and the Boer Republics. Many participants in the conflict believed themselves to be fighting over two core questions: ‘freedom for blacks and equal rights for Whites throughout the conceded territory.’¹⁴ These questions played a crucial role in determining the shape of the divisions created by the conflict. The Afrikaner historian Floris van Jaarsveld – one of the most sympathetic writers on the Boers – saw a key driver of the conflict in Afrikaner nationalism, and conceded that this drove apart Afrikaner society by creating a rift between Uitlanders and Afrikaners within the Boer Republics.¹⁵ Van Jaarsveld largely ignores the experience of black Africans in the conflict, portraying it as a war between white communities. However the mobilisation of black troops by the British played a significant role in dividing communities both in the Boer Republics, and in Cape Colony. The historian Shula Marks has detailed how the war broke apart race relations in the Boer Republics, with former black tenants seizing land,¹⁶ as well as the scale of collaboration with the British among Afrikaners.¹⁷ In Cape Colony, the historian Wayne Dooling has argued, race relations were a cause, rather than addition to intra-communal violence. As the Boer commander General Kritzinger wrote in 1904, with regards to support his commandoes received from Cape Colonists, the ‘enlisting of blacks by the British induced many Colonists to cast in their lot with the Boers. If natives were to be employed to crush a kindred race, the Colonists

¹⁴ ‘Great Britain and the Dutch Republics’, *The Times* (9 February 1900), p. 12.

¹⁵ Floris van Jaarsveld, *From van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974* (Johannesburg: Perskor Publishers, 1975). The ‘civil war’ aspect of the war has been a long running narrative in Afrikaner historiography, though it more often refers to inter-Boer conflict, and therefore approaches the civil war discourse in Britain from the opposite perspective to this thesis, see André Wessels, ‘Boer Guerrilla and British Counter-Guerrilla Operations in South Africa, 1899 to 1902’, *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2011), p. 17.

¹⁶ Shula Marks, *War and Union, 1899-1910: The Cambridge History of South Africa* (New York: CUP, 2009), p 161.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 162-165.

thought that they were justified in rendering assistance to their fellow-Dutch.¹⁸

This is not to imply that the British government was on a crusade for racial equality; but British officials believed that they were fighting for a very different basis for race relations than existed in the Boer Republics. These civic principles at the core of the conflict were what made it comparable to civil war in the eyes of contemporaries, and also explained its ferocity and longevity. It was not uncommon to draw parallels between the American Revolutionary struggle and the Boers, since they both 'looked upon the conflict as a civil war in which no man was justified in ranking himself against those whom in his conscience he believed to be in the right.'¹⁹ There was also a remarkable correlation between the descriptions of Confederate officers in the American Civil War, and the language used to describe the Boer leaders. William Russell, writing of his recollections of the American conflict in 1898 described how '[General Beauregard] believed religiously in the righteousness of secession and in the wickedness of the abolitionists.'²⁰ Substituting secession for independence the same was said regularly by British officers of Boer commanders. Direct comparison with the Confederacy was commonplace, as demonstrated by Arthur Conan Doyle who wrote that the

Imperial Government has always taken an honourable and philanthropic view of the rights of the native and the claim which he has to the protection of the law. The view... is apt to be irritating when urged by a Boston moralist or a London philanthropist upon men whose whole society has been built upon the assumption that the black is the inferior race. Such a people like to find the higher morality for themselves... [as to] what the relations shall be between a white employer and his half-savage, half-childish retainers. Both branches of the Anglo-Celtic race have grappled with the question, and in each it has led to trouble.²¹

The centrality of civic principles to civil war was less a typological imperative than an assumed dynamic among British officials at the time,

¹⁸ General Kritzinger, cited in: Wayne Dooling, 'Reconstructing the Household: The Northern Cape Colony before and after the South African War', *The Journal of African History*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2009), p. 401.

¹⁹ 'The American Revolution and the Boer War: A Parallel', *The Manchester Guardian* (9 August 1900), p. 10.

²⁰ William Russell, 'Recollections of the Civil War. II', *The North American Review*, vol. 166, no. 496 (1898), p. 363.

²¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War* (London: Smile, Elder and Company, 1900), p. 7.

emanating from their understanding of the British and American Civil Wars. British interest in the American Civil War has long been studied in relation to its significance to the military. There were a great many military theorists who drew lessons from the American Civil War, not least George Henderson in *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*²² - both a biography and prescription for military conduct in modern warfare - which set a style of commentary that would be taken up by many theorists including Basil Liddell Hart,²³ and John Fuller,²⁴ culminating in Jay Luvaas's *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance*, published in 1959.²⁵ It is only in the last few years however that attention has turned to the broader political and social lessons that the British drew from the conflict with Nimrod Tal's *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to the Present*²⁶ which detailed the extent to which memory of the American Civil War pervaded British thought and discussion. Tal argued that British theorists of the American Civil War 'were not interested in war merely as a passive entity shaped by historical circumstances. Instead, they devoted their lives to the study of war because they saw it as an agent of social and political transformation.'²⁷ And they applied the fruit of their studies to contemporary challenges, including South Africa and Ireland.

In spite of significant differences in interpretation as to the causes of the American Civil War, both in America and Britain, there were also crucial points of agreement. American Unionists were adamant that the war had been fought over slavery, typified by James Woodburn's summation of Thaddeus Stephens' view that since 'the slaveholders were trying to destroy the Union to save slavery; he

²² George Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* (London: Longmans, 1898).

²³ Basil Liddell Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

²⁴ John Fuller, *Grant & Lee: A Study in Personality and Generalship* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1933).

²⁵ Jay Luvaas, *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

²⁶ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

²⁷ Nimrod Tal, 'The American Civil War in British Military Thought from the 1880s to the 1930s', *Civil War History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2014), p. 410.

would, therefore, destroy slavery to save the Union.²⁸ Southerners like H. E. Belin argued in contrast that 'it is a mistake to suppose that the war between the states was fought in defence of slavery... The real question at issue between the sections was a political one, viz., the relative claims and advantages of a Republican or a Federal form of government.'²⁹ Both sides agreed however that the war had been fought over civic principles, even if they disagreed over what those principles were. The primacy given to civic principles meant that third parties to the conflict were invariably categorized in relation to their support or opposition to the principles at stake. When Annie Abel examined Indian participation in the American Civil War, she wrote of 'the Choctaw Nation, [who] in General Council assembled, took an even more pronounced action and committed itself unequivocally to the pro-slavery cause.'³⁰ Their diverse motives for aligning with the South were subsumed beneath the civic principles that framed the conflict. There was an assumption that the side taken by a particular person was defined foremost by their convictions, not by their interests. When the Confederate General Longstreet published a military account of the conflict, after becoming a Republican and so alienating many of his comrades, the Virginian lawyer Sergeant Patteson observed that he had 'departed from the theories he so earnestly advocated'³¹, namely that a white people 'never will be governed by a despised and inferior black and colored race.'³² To call a conflict a civil war meant to suggest a core ideological dispute.

David Armitage has argued that the ideological focus of civil war is to a large extent a matter of justification; for the defeated, civil war over an ideological issue implies moral legitimacy, while governments prefer to consider their opponents to have been rebels. In fact Armitage goes further, asserting that civil war as a label represents a concession to the defeated, and that if the rebel faction

²⁸ James Woodburn, 'The Attitude of Thaddeus Stevens Toward the Conduct of the Civil War', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1907), p. 567.

²⁹ H. E. Belin, 'The Civil War as Seen Through Southern Glasses', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1903), p. 259.

³⁰ Annie Abel, 'The Indians in the Civil War', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1910), p. 282.

³¹ Sergeant Patteson, 'Longstreet and the War Between the States', *The Sawane Review*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1896), p. 326.

³² Ibid. pp. 326-327.

had won, invariably the conflict would have been termed a revolution.³³ This was one aspect of the dispute over the principles concerned in America. ‘As a Southerner myself, and the son of a captain in the cavalry of the Southland,’ wrote Garland Greever in 1910, ‘I am naturally a trifle reluctant to admit that the term “Confederacy” is synonymous with “villainy” or “treason.”’³⁴ As the historian David Blight has argued, the memory of the civil war entirely distorted the issues as seen before and during the conflict, in order to facilitate reunion. This was driven by the Southerners’ need to reconcile themselves with the nation; a byproduct of which was a set of ideological propositions justifying the creation of a new racial oppression under the Jim Crow laws.³⁵ While it is important to acknowledge that the American Civil War as remembered by Americans, and understood by the British, bore a limited resemblance to the historical reality,³⁶ the manner in which the war was understood had tangible and immediate consequences.

The assumption that civil wars were fought over civic principles shaped how British officials understood the motives of combatants, and therefore the policy needed to confront them. As Armitage points out ‘so much of the imagery of civil war, from classical times to the present, has dwelt on its barbarism and bestiality’.³⁷ Civil war was deemed purely destructive; there was general agreement when George White told the Commons in 1908 that ‘if they were to have war at any time, he would rather have war with a foreign Power than he would have a civil war in his own community.’³⁸ For many, this very fact lent the factions in civil wars a degree of moral parity. No one was better off for having fought a civil war; they were not fighting for personal gain, but for principle. The

³³ David Armitage, ‘Every Great Revolution is a Civil War’, Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein (eds.), *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 57-70.

³⁴ Garland Greever, ‘Southern Leadership since the Civil War’, *The North American Review*, vol. 192, no. 657 (1910), p. 264.

³⁵ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁶ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

³⁷ David Armitage, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Civil War’, Joan-Pau Rubiés and Neil Safier (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: CUP, FORTHCOMING).

³⁸ George White, HC, *Hansard* (25 November 1908), vol. 197, col. 475.

conflict was, to repeat Mackinder, 'the ultimate test of party government',³⁹ and its continuation by violent means, because the sides would not submit to the majority. But to pursue this thinking to its logical conclusion, a fight for principle meant to put aside the question of the probable outcome - which even in victory would be bad - because the fight itself was the right thing to do. Ergo, the conflict could not be ended by the clear military superiority of one side, but had to be brought to a complete military conclusion, with the utter defeat of one party.

Those who viewed the South African War as a civil war not only applied this logic in prescribing policy, but also made direct comparisons with the American example to justify doing so. First was the recognition that civil war was devastating for all concerned, and that the war needed to end quickly. A correspondent for *The Times*, writing on the tension between the military and civil population in Cape Town in November 1901 reported that while the military sought to end the war as quickly as possible, for the civil population the 'war, it is argued, is now a civil war, and over and above the necessity of bringing it to an immediate termination stand the supreme interests of the country'.⁴⁰ As the conflict was ideological it would only come to an end with absolute victory, and in consequence the Boers needed to be unequivocally beaten. Thus the extraordinary measures used in South Africa were justified, as Arthur Lee – a former professor at the Royal Military College of Canada and British defence attaché to Washington - explained to the Commons in April 1901, 'the practice in the United States... was the same. In order to deal with the lawless bands who made raids on small parties along the lines of communications, General Sheridan gave orders for the destruction of villages, the burning of barns and mills, and the seizure of stock'.⁴¹ He added that 'the more vigorously war is pursued the better it is for humanity. Sharp wars are brief'.⁴² The miracle of the American Civil War was that such a bitter conflict resolved so completely, without subsequent outbreaks of rebellion. The lesson was lenience, as a correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* argued from Cape Colony, 'rebellion

³⁹ Halford Mackinder, HC, *Hansard* (13 April 1910), vol. 16, col. 1286.

⁴⁰ 'The Situation in Cape Colony', *The Times* (23 November 1901), p. 9.

⁴¹ Arthur Lee, HC, *Hansard* (2 April 1901), vol. 92, cols. 521-523. His comments were given a ringing endorsement in *The Times* the following day, On the motion of Mr. Balfour', *The Times* (3 April 1901), p. 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*

must be punished, but not... with undue severity, for it should never be lost sight of that this war is almost a civil war, and that those who went into rebellion... had moral excuses which were sufficient in their eyes to justify their actions.⁴³ Crucially, it was argued that in order for the Boers to submit, as in America, the peace terms must be lenient, for as Henry Labouchere told the Commons, a 'country that has gone through a species of civil war – for that is what [South Africa] comes to - if it is wise does not treat the conquered as conquered, but endeavours to make no distinction between the one side and the other.'⁴⁴ Lenient terms were not just necessary to bring about an end to the war, but also to ensure that it did not reignite. On 20 January 1902 the Liberal MP Charles Trevelyan, advised the Commons to consider

the Rebellion in England. For ten years the Commonwealth Government was carried on. It was possible to be carried on because a large part of the people consented to live under the government of Cromwell, but the government became and continued a military government from beginning to end just because a large part of the Royalists never consented to come under the new Government. And the unexampled effect of the consent of the Southern States in America, after the Civil War, in settling down under the new conditions, is a proof of what can be done if the consent of a white people is obtained.⁴⁵

The government accepted that the South African War shared many similarities with civil war, and that the analogy to the American Civil War - both politically and militarily - was relevant. In responding to Trevelyan, Joseph Chamberlain argued that 'if we are not to have a recurrence of the war... the defeated party should admit their defeat. I say there is no humiliation in that... less humiliation, in fact... than there was in the case of the South in the American Civil War.'⁴⁶ It was not the first time he had used the analogy to justify policy. Five months earlier Chamberlain had used the American Civil War to justify farm burning in South Africa, telling the Commons that with regards

to what the United States did in the civil war forty years ago. Everyone who knows anything about it and, as I have, talked to the principal actors in the war, knows that in what they believed to be the interests of humanity, and to bring the conflict to the earliest possible conclusion, they took steps against belligerents and persons not belligerents which exceeded in hardship

⁴³ 'Martial Law in Cape Colony', *The Manchester Guardian* (10 October 1901), p. 4.

⁴⁴ Henry Labouchere, HC, *Hansard* (28 March 1901), vol. 92, col. 151.

⁴⁵ Charles Trevelyan, HC, *Hansard* (20 January 1902), vol. 101, col. 359.

⁴⁶ Joseph Chamberlain, HC, *Hansard* (20 January 1902), vol. 101, col. 380.

anything we have done in this war. Talk of farm-burning! Farm-burning in South Africa was trivial to the devastation of an enormous tract of country by General Sherman in his march through Georgia.⁴⁷

In public, Chamberlain did not acknowledge the importance of leniency in the peace terms, as such pronouncements could push Boer leaders to demand unrealistic concessions, but leniency was nonetheless British policy. Concerned for example with preventing successive outbursts of violence, Chamberlain stressed to Milner the importance of ensuring that 'the people who have long been accustomed to manage their own affairs may be able to continue to deal with all strictly local business.'⁴⁸ The government bought the point about leniency, the argument that the defeated needed to be able to re-integrate, not into the empire as an aloof, overarching power, but with the Uitlanders, loyal Dutch colonists and the Boers who had decided to work with the British,⁴⁹ that would make up their post-bellum community. When negotiations began in 1902 the British government made clear that it 'cannot entertain any proposals which are based upon the continued independence of the former Republics,'⁵⁰ But it was repeatedly emphasised that the British 'sincerely share the earnest desire of the Boer representatives for peace,'⁵¹ and crucially a lasting peace. In pursuit of this the British offered 'as soon as circumstances permit, representative institutions, leading up to self-government.'⁵² The government demanded equal treatment of uitlanders, but conceded by slight of hand extending 'the franchise to natives [which] will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.'⁵³ In this way the British could claim to have supported the principle, but by making it a matter of local government, could avoid it being enforced, which would have been unacceptable to the Boers. Finally, after extensive debates over the reconstruction of the South after the American Civil War, as a crucial step in preventing continued instability, it was promised that the British would '[assist in] the restoration of the

⁴⁷ Joseph Chamberlain, HC, *Hansard* (15 August 1901), vol. 99, col. 999.

⁴⁸ TNA, CAB 37/53/60: Chamberlain to Milner, 28 July 1900.

⁴⁹ TNA, CAB 37/61/44: General Vilnel to Steyn, 11 January 1902.

⁵⁰ TNA WO 32/8108: Secretary of State for War to Kitchener, 13 April 1902.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² TNA, WO 32/8108: Draft peace terms proposed by Kitchener to Secretary of State for War, 21 May 1902.

⁵³ Ibid.

people to their houses, and supplying those who, owing to war losses, are unable to provide for themselves, with food, shelter, and the necessary amount of seed, stock, implements, indispensable to the resumption of their normal occupations.⁵⁴

Fears of further outbreaks of violence in the colony persisted over the following decade. The historian Tilman Dederling has demonstrated the persistent uncertainty about the loyalty of the Boer population,⁵⁵ while Peter Richardson has highlighted the extent of doubt after the war over the introduction of further races (especially Chinese) to the Cape,⁵⁶ lest it spark internal conflict. British officials also remained wary at the prospect of foreign agents stirring up interracial agitation.⁵⁷ All of which demonstrates that the discussion around civil war in Cape Colony was not the outlandish outlook of a minority, or merely a process of legitimisation among those who sympathised with the Boers, but shaped policy.

The British Government, while accepting the relevance of this perspective, did not deem the war, or the rebellion in Cape Colony, which they distinguished from the fighting in the Republics, to be a civil war. This was because although politically similar it was legally an inter-state conflict. In official discussion of the conflict both military officers and civil servants called it a rebellion. Officers stressed the need to keep Boer commandoes out of the Cape Colony 'at whatever cost... The danger of giving them any rest in a country full of their friends and full of supplies is too great.'⁵⁸ But the difference between the Boer commandoes, and rebels was differentiated in the agreed peace terms:

The terms of surrender offered... are confined to burghers of the Orange Free State and South African Republic... His Majesty's Government are unable to make any pledges... as to the treatment of rebels... [They are to give] up their arms, [and] sign a document... acknowledging themselves guilty of high treason, and that the punishment... shall be that they shall not be entitled for

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tilman Dederling, 'The Ferriera Raid of 1906: Boers, Britons and Germans in Southern Africa in the Aftermath of the South African War', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2000), pp. 43-60.

⁵⁶ Peter Richardson, 'The Recruiting of Chinese Indentured Labour for the South African Gold-Mines, 1903-1908', *The Journal of African History*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1977), pp. 85-108.

⁵⁷ Michael Seligmann, *Rivalry in Southern Africa, 1893-99* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998).

⁵⁸ TNA, CAB 37/57/62: Report on the situation in South Africa, 19 June 1901.

life to be registered as voters.⁵⁹

Although the British Government found the South African conflict to resemble civil war, and accepted the relevance of comparisons with civil war in America, they did not consider it to have been an actual civil war. For this reason the South African War provides a useful lens for assessing the assumed dynamics of civil war among British officials. First and foremost civil war was fought over civic principles within a political community. Because of its ideological nature, victory had to be absolute, and the peace terms lenient. But there is only so much that can be gleaned from the South African example. Peter Warwick, and others, have done away with the misconception that 'the war was simply an Anglo-Boer struggle,'⁶⁰ with over 100,000 black Africans directly involved in the British war effort, and up to 40,000 under arms. Black participants have nevertheless often been treated as followers, rather than an independent party. Just as Native American Indians during the American Civil War were assumed to join the 'pro-slavery cause',⁶¹ so too were black Africans talked about as loyal British subjects, rather than as historical actors with agency pursuing their own aims. Discussion of black participation in the South African War therefore does not sufficiently illustrate the relationship between concepts of civil war and civilization that were a prevalent aspect of civil war discourse at the time, or, as the war was fought within the colonies, does it show how Britain problematised civil war in relation to third parties, and the relationship between civil war and sovereignty. For these questions it is necessary to look further afield.

Civilization and Civil War: China and Columbia, 1902-1905

Six days after the outbreak of the South African War members of Colombia's opposition Liberal Party took up arms against the government. The Thousand Days' War, as it came to be known, was the bloodiest in a long series of conflicts since Colombia's independence from Spain in 1819. It did not present a significant foreign policy concern for the British government. After seeking American mediation in a boundary dispute with Venezuela, Britain had given tacit

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 32/8108: Chamberlain to Milner, 27 May 1902.

⁶⁰ Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Abel, 'The Indians in the Civil War', *The American Historical Review*, p. 282.

recognition to the Monroe Doctrine in 1896 and considered Colombia to be within America's sphere of influence.⁶² Moreover, with the deteriorating situation in South Africa, Britain did not want to upset the United States. Even the presence of precious metals was met with limited enthusiasm. Although British companies were active in Colombia, it was felt that 'in such countries as Venezuela and Colombia mining is too much interrupted by revolutions to make it a profitable venture.'⁶³ Yet the war would generate discussion within the Foreign Office over the political and legal significance of civil war. In the aftermath of the Thousand Days' War the British government spent the best part of a decade seeking to gain compensation for British companies for losses caused by the fighting.⁶⁴ There was also the question of Panama, which the United States assisted in seceding from Colombia in 1903, raising questions over intervention and sovereignty during civil war.

Parallel to these events China was experiencing internal turmoil. When in June 1900 the Boxer movement laid siege to the Foreign Legations in Peking an international relief force was organised to secure the diplomatic missions. 'We may, of course, be on the eve of the complete disintegration of China from within,' Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs William Brodrick warned the Commons in July 1900. 'I am not speaking of any action by the Powers from without. We may have to face the problem of 400 millions of people either in civil war or, at all events, not obeying the central authority at Peking.'⁶⁵ The legations were relieved, but China remained in a state of disorder with successive rebellions throughout the following decade. Curiously however the term civil war rarely surfaced in the discussion. Indeed from the British government's point of view, as Brodrick put it, civil war had been a possibility, but as events unfolded they did not fit that model. In stark contrast to Colombia, where Britain acknowledged a state of civil war, China was thought to be in a process of disintegration, leading to an entirely different assessment of the extent to which it could exercise sovereignty.

⁶² Robert Humphreys, 'Anglo-American Rivalries and the Venezuela Crisis of 1895', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 17 (1967), p. 163.

⁶³ 'Some Advice to Mining Investors', *The Economist* (5 September 1903), pp. 1533-1534.

⁶⁴ TNA, CO 137/675: Under Secretary of State to British Consulate Colombia, 6 February 1909.

⁶⁵ William Brodrick, HC, *Hansard* (3 July 1900), vol. 85 col. 432.

The correlation between civilization and civil war appears at first obvious. David Armitage⁶⁶ and Isabel Hull⁶⁷ both note references to the First World War as a European Civil War, precisely because it was fought within, and in the view of many participants in defence of, a rules based system that demarcated the limits of the civilised world. Armitage has argued that for Europeans there was a general view that if ‘to be civilised inevitably risked civil war, then it also followed that only the civilised had civil wars, while the less civilised might never ascend to that form of conflict.’⁶⁸ There was undoubtedly a relationship between these two concepts, but that relationship was complex; civil war was a term applied to conflicts beyond the perceived limits of civilisation at the time, in Uganda,⁶⁹ and among Maori tribes⁷⁰ for example. What determined whether a conflict was a civil war was its structure. In Colombia, the conflict was perceived as being fought between the Liberal and Conservative parties over issues of civic principle relating to the economy, and relations between church and state. Separatists, bandits and other rebels were generally thought to be fighting for one or other national movement, which both had representation in government. The war was a vertical division of the country. There was potential for such a conflict in China, but as numerous officials pointed out, rebellions were local, lacked a national objective, and were primarily the product of grievance against the government, rather than a divide within it. This difference in how each conflict was understood contributed to radically different approaches to each country’s government, and the role of outside powers in relation to the country’s security. Civil war did not directly correlate to race, levels of technology, or education, but to the cohesiveness of a country’s political community, and its capacity for division, rather than disintegration.

Understanding the dynamics of the Thousand Days’ War was not straightforward, and there were competing interpretations within the British government. The enigma that Colombia presented was that ‘[during] the first six

⁶⁶ Armitage, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Civil War’.

⁶⁷ Isabel Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law During the Great War* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 2.

⁶⁸ Armitage, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Civil War’.

⁶⁹ Charles Dilke, HC, *Hansard* (19 July 1901), vol. 97, col. 1048.

⁷⁰ Walter Gudgeon, ‘Maori Wars’, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1907), pp. 13-42.

decades of Colombia's existence as an independent nation, it experienced five major revolutions (1839-42, 1854, 1859-62, 1876-77, 1885-86) as well as innumerable uprisings confined to specific regions or localities⁷¹ and yet '[despite] such extreme violence, emphasised historiographically, Colombian politics developed around elections, which followed an almost uninterrupted, regular calendar from the 1830s.'⁷² It managed to maintain both two-party democratic institutions, and yet be on the verge of perpetual violence. 'Both parties faced levels of fragmentation that challenged the configuration of a neat bipartisan system, but the Liberal-Conservative dichotomy dominated the long-term politics of Colombia.'⁷³ Even in the wake of the most violent struggle in its history, Conservative President Marroquin incorporated Liberal revolutionaries into his cabinet within a year of the end of hostilities.⁷⁴

There were two prevailing interpretations of the conflict among British officials. In 1904, Spencer Dickson, Vice Consul in Bogota, penned a report examining some of the problems that he believed to be central to understanding the country's persistent instability. 'Shortly after the outbreak of the revolution' the need for public tenders on military procurement were removed. Dickson observed that many of the officers

do not enter the army from love of soldiering but rather for the commercial possibilities which that career opens to them in a time of civil disturbance... The Government grants to the leaders of each division full licence to appropriate all that it may need and to lay hands on all it may find for this purpose. The doors, by this means, opened to all kinds of abuses. The leaders and their officers become simply freebooters and here lies the explanation of the frequent revolutions. The causes are commercial rather than political.⁷⁵

For Dickson poverty was not just the cause of conflicts passed, but also the most likely cause of future disturbances. In 1906 he was warning Foreign Secretary Edward Grey that in 'the Departments of the centre of the Republic general discontent has taken the form of hostility to the existing Government. In

⁷¹ Helen Delpar, 'Road to Revolution: The Liberal Party of Colombia, 1886-1899', *The Americas*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1976), p. 348.

⁷² Eduardo Posada-Carbo 'Newspapers, Politics, and Elections in Colombia, 1830-1930', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2010), p. 942.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 941-942.

⁷⁴ Helen Delpar, *Red Against Blue: The Liberal Party in Colombian Politics, 1863-1899* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), pp. 185-190.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 55/421: Spencer Dickson, S2 Report, 19 December 1904.

the Departments of Cauca, Antioquia, and Bolívar it has raised the question of secession.' The cause of this was 'that of general poverty, the ruin consequent on a long civil war, and a depreciated currency, the fluctuations of which gave rise to all the disastrous effects of speculation.'⁷⁶ An emphasis on structural economic factors as a driver of conflict in Colombia is maintained in the historiography in the work of Charles Bergquist. In his 1986 study *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886-1910* Bergquist emphasised the economic elements of the balance of power between the Liberal and Conservative parties, with Liberal fortunes closely tied to commodity prices, and severe fluctuation prefiguring violence.⁷⁷

The second interpretation of Colombia's woes focused on the political divisions between the Liberal and Conservative parties. George Welby, who headed the British Consulate during the Thousand Days' War, warned of the risks of instability arising from an entirely different source to his deputy Dickson. In 1904, writing to the Marquis of Lansdowne, Welby pointed out that 'owing to the long and severe civil war which this country has experienced, the spirit of unrest still exists and is a factor to be reckoned with... The attitude of the opposition in Congress increased this danger,' made worse by the agitation of 'some of the more heated members of the opposition, which, I mention, are nearly all extreme conservatives.'⁷⁸ Welby saw the conflict in more specifically political terms, with an inextricable correlation between factions in the Liberal and Conservative parties, and armed groups in the localities. In 1906, the new Consul General, Francis Stronge - a veteran imperial diplomat who had served in Peking, Vienna and Constantinople - emphasised the importance of party divisions and ideology as increasing the risk of conflict, to Edward Grey:

Troubles and revolutions have hitherto occurred through the rivalry of the two parties - Conservative or Clerical on one side and Liberal on the other. General Reyes' personal rule has changed all this; the hostile feeling directed against him personally, and the conspiracies which have come to light have emanated mainly from what is nominally his own party. I do not expect any very serious trouble just yet; the memory of the misery and ruin caused by

⁷⁶ TNA, FO 371/43: Dickson to Grey, 6 June 1906.

⁷⁷ Charles Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886-1910* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ TNA, FO 55/421: George Welby to the Marquis of Lansdowne, 31 December 1904.

the three years of civil war is still too fresh in the mind of every Colombian.⁷⁹

The primacy of political drivers of violence is advanced within the historiography by Helen Delpar.⁸⁰ Both interpretations are differences in emphasis rather than being mutually exclusive. For Dickson conflict originated in widespread dissatisfaction with government as a result of economic deprivation, with the Liberal Party emerging as the figurehead of dissatisfaction. For Welby and Stronge the conflict centred on the nature of government, disputes over civic principles, such as the relations between church and state, and the parties utilised discontent to mobilize support for violent opposition, when the standard political process did not produce the desired change. For Colombia to have a civil war the conflict needed to be rooted in the state, with the multiple factions lining up behind the prevailing political ideologies. Whereas Dickson's view saw the fighting as the fraying of state control, Welby and Stronge perceived the fighting to be a continuation of politics by violent means; a civil war, in which the state was split vertically over political questions.

In contrast the prevailing interpretation of conflict in China after the Boxer Rebellion was much closer to Dickson's view of Colombia, and it is telling that civil war was rarely discussed in relation to China. This was not for want of fighting. In Britain there were alarmist warnings in the press of approaching catastrophe; as reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'the political outlook in China... is worse today than it was in 1900, prior to the Boxer outbreak.'⁸¹ In the wake of the Boxer rebellion China was convulsed by insurrections. The papers warned of massive rebel armies, 'Kwangsi province was on the verge of a huge rebellion... It is reported that over 30,000 men form the rebel band.'⁸² And British diplomatic correspondence was filled with accounts of unrest. Typical is a report from Wuchow in December of 1904:

The cordon which was drawn round the strongholds of the rebels appears to have been effective to some extent in intercepting their supplies for several bands endeavoured to cut their way through the surrounding troops. It is reported that some four or five thousand rebels were killed in the attempt and that several hundred rifles and at least one hundred horses fell into the

⁷⁹ TNA, FO 371/43: Stronge to Grey, 6 October 1906.

⁸⁰ Delpar, *Red Against Blue*.

⁸¹ 'Unrest in China', *Daily Telegraph* (24 October 1904).

⁸² TNA, WO 106/25: Press cutting from *Hong Kong Telegraph*, 23 December 1902.

hands of the Viceroy's generals.⁸³

Acting Consul-General Campbell described an incident in March 1905 in which 'a mob of 2,000 or more' gathered and after a magistrate 'summarily executed fifty persons, the mob outside burnt a village, killed several village officials, seized a gun-boat, destroyed school buildings, and forced young men to wear the red badge under pain of death.'⁸⁴ The numbers of people involved in these clashes, the failure of the Chinese government to stamp out rebellions - as in Yunnan, where Acting Consul Litton noted how 'not counting minor disorders, this is the third serious rebellion which has occurred in Yunnan during the three years of Viceroy Ting's tenure of office'⁸⁵ - and the constant threat of banditry, which the British referred to continually, cannot and were not dismissed as trivial. Yet civil war, as a description of China's condition or as a threat in the near future, was almost entirely absent.

This cannot simply be explained by the correlation between civilization and civil war. It is true that many British officials considered the Chinese a lesser race; Litton, writing about the rebellion in Yunnan province, commented that 'the Peking authorities would do well to remember that Yunnan is a province with a long frontier along the territories of two civilised Powers, and that these conditions require that it should be administered on principles less thoroughly Chinese.'⁸⁶ The historian Phil Billingsley, in his history of banditry in Republican China, notes how:

Bandit outrages confirmed the racist and imperialist conviction already held by contemporary advocates of the 'white man's burden' and provided the pretext for constant threats of foreign intervention. Japanese and American 'China Watchers' concluded almost simultaneously that China itself was no more than one huge bandit gang ('400,000,000 outlaws'), so that a study of banditry might reveal no less than the hidden workings of the Chinese national character.⁸⁷

While racial prejudice undoubtedly contributed to the way in which Chinese

⁸³ TNA, WO 106/25: Telegram from Consulate Wuchow, Sir Ernest Satow, 26 December 1904.

⁸⁴ TNA, WO 106/25: Acting Consul-General Campbell to Satow, 27 March 1905.

⁸⁵ TNA, WO 106/25: Litton to Satow, 12 August 1905.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

governance was perceived by British officials however there is a serious flaw in the view that because the British saw the Chinese as racially inferior they therefore thought the Chinese could not fight civil wars. British officials wrote of the Boers,⁸⁸ Colombians,⁸⁹ and Persians⁹⁰ as inferior races, among others, and yet thought that civil wars took place in territories controlled by all of these peoples. They had also discussed the possibility of civil war in China before, and would do so again. A better explanation is found in the way that British officials understood the causes and structure of the various rebellions.

Although British officials were aware of a number of revolutionary groups in China, they did not see them as cohesive, or ideologically consistent, and did not see strong links between these groups and factions within the government. Intelligence reports and accounts of uprisings regularly suggested the presence of sinister organisations; risings were ‘undoubtedly fomented by the secret societies.’⁹¹ But where some historians like Michael Gasster have argued that there ‘can be little argument about the existence of a revolutionary situation in China before 1911; it had been developing for decades,’⁹² the British did not see these groups as a national movement, or the rebellions as being motivated by a clear political ideology. The British saw them as local, and generally grievance based, while acknowledging that they provided an ocean of unrest in which revolutionaries could swim. In Yunnan, Litton wrote that ‘none of these rebellions would have occurred if the most ordinary efficiency and honesty had been exercised. Viceroy Ting’s government is a calamity to his own people and a nuisance to his neighbours.’⁹³ Nine days earlier Litton had written to the Government of India, arguing that ‘the rebellion was the work more especially of... the Russian party. It was easy to raise disorders, generally on account of the

⁸⁸ Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, pp. 1-24. The Boers are portrayed as the quintessential noble savage: heroic, courageous, stubborn, but cunning rather than intelligent and rude of manner and principle.

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 55/421: Intelligence Report, Spencer Dickson, Vice Consul, 19 December 1904.

⁹⁰ ‘The Civil War in Tabriz’, *The Times* (19 October 1908), p. 6.

⁹¹ TNA, WO 106/25: Acting Consul Wilkinson, 7 October 1904.

⁹² Michael Gasster, ‘Reform and Revolution in China’s Political Modernization’, Mary Wright (ed.), *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 67.

⁹³ TNA, WO 106/25: Litton to Satow, 12 August 1905.

increasing weakness and corruption of the Chinese Government.⁹⁴ His conclusion was that 'it appears to me that the trouble, though serious enough, is of merely local importance... and was directly caused by the misconduct of the Chinese on the spot, and still more by the incompetence and negligence of the Yunnan Viceroy.'⁹⁵ This was in line with the British Minister in Peking Ernest Satow's thinking. A year earlier he had told the Foreign Secretary that 'I fear we are in for a troublesome affair in Thibet. I suppose the Chinese Government is absolutely powerless.'⁹⁶ The consistent view was that China had not experienced civil war, instead it was the other future envisaged by Brodrick that had materialized: the people were 'not obeying the central authority at Peking'.⁹⁷ Chinese sovereignty had disintegrated.

Litton's reports on the Yunnan rebellion are typical. Reports from across China emphasised the local causes of conflicts, the high proportion of 'brigands' in the rebellious groups, and the lack of a clear ideological impetus or national objective: 'The fact is, the so-called rebels are principally disbanded soldiers.'⁹⁸ There was also consistency between the Foreign Office assessment and analysis conducted by military intelligence in 1903, which concluded that while:

There is at the present time much talk in different parts of the Chinese Empire concerning the possibility of an anti-dynastic movement... [and] There are other signs tending to show that revolutionary ideas are at work... What is lacking to bring matters to a head is someone willing and able to collect together under one flag all the disunited revolutionary bodies and all the robber bands - in short a leader.⁹⁹

Historians of China have come to similar conclusions. Edward Rhoads for instance has argued that 'these risings, unlike those in 1900, occurred in the absence of a revolutionary situation. They never seriously threatened the dynasty. They did not force the court to change policy, though they probably convinced it to

⁹⁴ TNA, WO 106/25: Litton to Government of India, 3 August 1905.

⁹⁵ TNA, WO 106/25: Litton to Satow, 9 September 1905.

⁹⁶ TNA, FO 800/120: Satow to Lansdowne, 25 June 1904.

⁹⁷ William Brodrick, HC, *Hansard* (3 July 1900), vol. 85 col. 432.

⁹⁸ TNA, WO 106/25: Consul-General Scott to Townley, Canton, 8 January 1903.

⁹⁹ TNA, WO 106/25: Military Intelligence Branch, China Force Report, 2 March 1903.

step up the pace of its reforms.¹⁰⁰ The rebellions, in the British view, did not represent a clear ideological split within the Chinese state, and were largely outside of, rather than linked to, factions in government. They were made possible because of mismanagement and incompetence. They were fuelled by grievance rather than principle. They were rebellions, insurrections, and uprisings, not civil war, and not even akin to civil war.

This distinction was not simply typological, but as in South Africa had policy implications. Whereas in Colombia the conflict was understood to be a civil war, and was therefore a domestic affair that did not warrant foreign intervention, in China, where the government had lost control, intervention was not only allowable, but to be expected, both to secure the interests of neighbouring states, and to counter competing imperial interests, especially Russian and German activity. In Colombia the British recognised a functional state. The civil war saw the government split into two factions, each controlling regions within the country. Thus, when the war was over, British diplomats encouraged British firms claiming 'for damage done by the Colombian Government troops during the civil war' to submit their claims to the Colombian government tribunal, whereas 'damage arising from the acts of revolutionaries should be raised by a civil action brought in the Colombian courts by interested parties against one of the insurgent leaders.'¹⁰¹ This respect for the Colombian legal process, and recognition that in spite of ongoing violence the Colombian system functioned, is in stark contrast to China, where there was a general acceptance among British officials that their citizens were above Chinese law, and that the Chinese state could barely enforce its laws on its own citizens to the point where:

The converts of the Roman Catholic Missions claimed that the Magistrate of the district had no right to punish them without special permission from the Roman Catholic father, thus implying they were not amenable to the laws of China, and supporting the idea which has given rise to a common saying in Chekiang that the Roman Catholic native pastors are Acting French Consuls

¹⁰⁰ Edward Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 100.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 371/43: Draft letter to Monsieur Cambon from the Foreign Office, 30 December 1906.

and not teachers of a belief.¹⁰²

The collapse of Chinese sovereignty was both practical, and legal in that China had, in the eyes of many British officials, long since signed away its sovereignty. The writ of Peking was seen as non-existent by the British in vast swathes of the country including Shantung, where if 'the Germans succeed in bullying the local Government into allowing German troops to patrol the entire railway system, the lid will have been placed on the coffin of Chinese sovereignty in Shantung.'¹⁰³ As a result, the British felt that the Chinese state had resorted to trying to play off foreign powers against one another, having signed away any hope of controlling them individually: 'Conscious of their own weakness they are making laudable effort... to induce other nations besides Germany to interest themselves in the province, in the hope that international jealousies may ward off the catastrophe.'¹⁰⁴ British officials presumed that all powers would intervene in China in whatever manner suited their interests, with other imperial powers being the only force to hold them in check. Thus the Marquis of Lansdowne encouraged the Foreign Office 'to persuade the Chinese that... they cannot possibly carry out themselves' the setting up of an Imperial Bank. 'By all means let us work with the Americans. If there is to be an Imperial Bank, it would be much better to have an American at the head of it than any other foreigner. If an Englishman is impossible.'¹⁰⁵ In China it was assumed that if Britain did not control it, another power would, and the British did not think twice about marching an army into Tibet in 1903 to counter Russian influence, although Lansdowne expressed surprise 'that the US Government felt so strongly on the subject.'¹⁰⁶

As the historian Alan Dobson has observed, when it came to Colombia's place in 'the great order of Britain's imperial concerns, it is fair to say that the things involved were all pretty minor.'¹⁰⁷ There was therefore no outrage when the

¹⁰² TNA, WO 105/26: Memorandum of Conversation with Mr. Millar, forwarded from Peking to the Ministry by Walter Townley 12 January 1903.

¹⁰³ TNA, WO 106/25: Confidential Remarks on the Province of Shantung by R F Johnston - V. German Influence in Shantung, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, FO 800/121: Lansdowne to Doreen, 14 September 1904.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Alan Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 24.

United States took advantage of Colombia's plight to back a separatist uprising in Panama in 1903. Britain was engaging in a rapprochement with the United States, in the middle of negotiations over the Alaskan border, and trying to collaborate with the US in China. But the idea of interference in the Colombian civil war, and the subsequent American intervention, were distasteful to the British government. The British viewed with distrust Venezuela's backing of the Liberals in the Thousand Days' War and were baffled by Venezuela and Colombia's insistence that they were not at war, in spite the arms Venezuela supplied to the rebels. Britain repeatedly asked for clarification, and welcomed the resumption of diplomatic relations as an example of General Castro of Venezuela taking a less 'unfriendly and uncurious'¹⁰⁸ attitude towards the proper conduct of diplomacy. While recognising that a civil war in which other states had genuine interests at stake might justify intervention, the British were annoyed and somewhat confused by Venezuela's policy, Welby writing to Lansdowne in 1904 that 'it is difficult to understand the motive for the repeated threats on the part of General Castro.'¹⁰⁹ The prevailing view within the British government was that a genuine civil war, unless it directly impinged upon the vital interests of another power, did not invalidate the sovereignty of the state, and was not an invitation for intervention. Although there was not a diplomatic protest from the British at the American landings in Panama, quietly the view was expressed

that Washington has displayed indecent haste in recognising the so-called Republic of Panama. England had a far stronger case in recognising the Southern Confederacy. What is most lamented is the vulgar air, the mercenary self-interest affecting the whole transition. Even the Jameson Raid could at least pretend to a humane end, whereas it is impossible to conceal the fact that the present enterprise is purely commercial.¹¹⁰

This was built atop an existing dislike among British observers for American anti-imperial rhetoric, which seemed to be disjointed from US policy. *The Economist* had previously hoped that 'the Government of the United States would be at last compelled to define that Protectorate of the Spanish-American States which it covers up by calling it the Monroe Doctrine.'¹¹¹ Panama seemed to fulfill

¹⁰⁸ TNA, FO 55/421: Welby to Lansdowne, 22 April 1904.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, FO 55/421: Welby to Lansdowne, 30 August 1904.

¹¹⁰ 'Position in Panama', *The Manchester Guardian* (7 November 1903), p. 7.

¹¹¹ 'The Position in South America', *The Economist* (24 August 1901), p. 1274.

that hope. As Isabel Hull has pointed out, international law, and respect for the legal process, was fundamental to the ideological outlook of the British government in the years preceding the First World War.¹¹² What particularly rankled with the US intervention in Panama was that it was done in spite of treaties signed by the US with Colombia and other nations. Even if they were not willing to act on the belief, British officials sympathised with the Colombian Senate in disapproving of ‘the unfriendly intervention of the American Government, - in the carrying out of this crime, which is contrary to international law and the principles of civilisation and opposed to the treaties existing between the two nations.’¹¹³ The perception in government was that Britain had been correct both morally and strategically not to intervene in the American Civil War, that unrealistic suggestions of European intervention in the South African War had caused Boer leaders to unnecessarily prolong the bloodshed,¹¹⁴ and that America’s actions in Colombia, her disregard for past treaties, was far from proper.

That the British could maintain such a morally high tone while at the same time intervening extensively in Chinese affairs was predicated on how British officials conceived of the condition of the two states, and the difference drawn between civil war, and collapse. In Colombia the separatists of Panama were a splinter group of a national divide and so even if the government could not exercise control, the state remained sovereign. In China the opposition was fractured, disconnected from the central government, and the central government was incapable of exercising authority whether there was a rebellion or not. Thus it could not claim sovereignty. For reasons of *realpolitik* nothing was done about America’s behaviour, in Britain or Colombia. Colombia was not popular across South America, and many of its neighbours valued good relations with the United States, so the acquisition was quickly recognised.¹¹⁵ Even in Colombia the public saw the reality of the situation; weary of war they did not dispatch troops to the isthmus, and ‘Panama was apparently not a major issue even during the

¹¹² Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, p. 3.

¹¹³ TNA, FO 55/421: Senate of Columbia, 20 July 1904.

¹¹⁴ TNA, CAB 37/61/44: P. R. Viljorn to Commandant H. Alberts, 26 July 1901.

¹¹⁵ E. Bradford Burns, ‘The Recognition of Panama by the Major Latin American States’, *The Americas*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1969), pp. 3-14.

Presidential campaign and election of 1904.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile the British sought to coordinate their own diplomatic efforts in Colombia with America's,¹¹⁷ but British unease is nevertheless revealing.

It might be argued that the examples of Colombia, China, and South Africa are too disconnected to be compared; that the linguistic nuances of officials in each state represent local terminology. For instance references to the Thousand Days' War as a 'revolution' were the direct result of both the Liberal opposition and Conservative Government calling the opposition 'revolutionaries' and 'revolutionists' respectively. This argument however fails to account for the movement of personnel, communication between officials involved in these conflicts, and the issues that connected the conflicts directly in the eyes of the British Foreign Office and politicians. The Thousand Days' War occurred in the context of an Anglo-American rapprochement in which the United States Government utilised the South African War for leverage in settling disputes with Britain.¹¹⁸ The American seizure of Panama, and its expanding power in the Pacific, also had implications in China where the British sought to cooperate with the United States to outmanoeuvre other imperial powers.¹¹⁹ Officials were concerned that the importation of labour from China to South Africa would precipitate an outbreak of violence, and potentially the resurgence of civil war. In Parliament, John Burns argued that 'I can assure you that the introduction of Chinese labour will be the first spark to the revolutionary powder in Africa... if the Chinese are landed here there is going to be civil war. That was from a man who went out to fight for the franchise.'¹²⁰ British officials had their own concerns over the effect on Chinese sovereignty of recruiting Chinese Labour and were in contact with South African officials on the subject.¹²¹ It is therefore possible to consider these conflicts together, when examining British official attitudes. What can be drawn from these

¹¹⁶ Joseph Arbena, 'Colombian Reactions to the Independence of Panama, 1903-1904', *The Americas*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1976), p. 130.

¹¹⁷ TNA, FO 371/43: Draft letter to Monsieur Cambon from the Foreign Office, 30 December 1906.

¹¹⁸ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century*, p. 24.

¹¹⁹ TNA, FO 800/121: Lansdowne to Doreen, 14 September 1904.

¹²⁰ John Burns, HC, *Hansard* (17 February 1904), vol. 130, col. 101.

¹²¹ TNA, WO 106/25: Letter from A. Brakhan, Chairman of the Chamber of Mines Labour Importation Agency to The High Commissioner for South Africa, 21 October 1904.

conflicts however can only go so far. Discussions relating to China and Colombia were ultimately on the periphery of British interests. The discussion was limited to key officials, without much public pressure, or very considerable risks. In particular, while British officials may have disapproved of American actions in Panama, because there was not a decisive policy response it is unwise to draw too strong a conclusion as to how British assumptions about civil war and sovereignty effected policy. To answer this question it is necessary to explore an episode that demanded a clear public policy.

A State in Transition: Persia, 1905-1912

The conflict between the Shah and Parliament that erupted in Persia in 1908 lay at the centre of Anglo-Russian rivalry, and was a matter of intense debate in the British Parliament, the press and government, with the policy of Edward Grey at the Foreign Office being attacked from all sides. In the ensuing debate the factors thus far explored in relation to South Africa, Colombia, and China all played a role. Firstly the conflict was widely understood as a struggle over civic principles that split the state vertically between opposing factions within government. As such, it was thought to be a civil war. The moral high ground in debate was to claim that the policy being advocated did not constitute intervention. Among the parties that saw the conflict as a civil war, intervention was considered immoral, and potentially dangerous. Those who argued for intervention did not see the conflict as a civil war, but as a Russian incursion against British or Persian interests. The intensity of the debate makes explicit thinking that was implicit in Colombia and China.

China and Persia were, in the view of many British observers, politically comparable. As the renowned scholar of Persian affairs Edward Browne described the country's political situation in his 1893 work *A Year Amongst the Persians*:

The jealousy with which the Persian people are prone to regard these railways, tramways, monopolies, concessions, and companies, of which so much has been heard lately, is both natural and reasonable. These things, so far as they are sources of wealth at all, are so, not to the Persian people, but to the Shah and his ministers on the one hand, and to the European promoters of the schemes on the other. People who reason about them in Europe too often suppose that the interests of the Shah and of his subjects are identical, when they are in fact generally diametrically opposed; and that the Shah is an enlightened monarch, eager for the welfare and progress of a

stubborn and refractory people who delight in thwarting his benevolent schemes, when in reality he is a selfish despot, devoid of public spirit, careful only of his own personal comfort and advantage, and most averse to the introduction of liberal ideas amongst a people whose natural quickness, intelligence, and aptitude to learn cause him nothing but anxiety.¹²²

Browne and George Curzon were the principal authorities on Persian affairs throughout the period, and the position set out above describes a state at risk of disintegration, with the people rejecting the authority of a government that did not represent their interests or values, and resenting the growing influence of foreign powers. That Persia did not become like China, forfeiting its sovereignty in the eyes of the imperial powers, lay in the fact that the anger and frustration that Browne described did not lead to a break down of state authority, but to a growing national movement with connections to the court, that demanded a constitution, representation in a Parliament, and a reassertion of Persian sovereignty. The Constitutional Movement fundamentally changed British attitudes towards Persia. As ambassador Cecil Spring Rice observed in 1907:

Of course we shall see here the same sort of chauvinism and distrust of foreigners which gives you so much trouble in China, but you would have more trouble in China... Persia is very different from China. There are not many newspapers and the people are lazy and ignorant. But there is an undoubted fund of patriotism here and it is being sedulously fostered from the pulpits, and delegates are being sent out far and near to rouse the people to a sense of the national dangers. Here in Tehran the popular movement was first believed to be simply a creation of the English Legation. It was said that it would disappear as soon as "English Money" failed. Since we have withdrawn our patronage the popular movement has grown in strength.¹²³

We see here how the emergence of a national political ideology in opposition to the Shah impacted upon the thinking of British officials. As a report to the Imperial General Staff had put it in 1905 'the position of the "King of Kings" has lost much of its former significance, the influence of Western civilisation, the presence in the country of representatives of foreign powers, and a respect for the Mullahs acting as a wholesome check on the Royal will and pleasure.'¹²⁴

¹²² Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the life, character, and thought of the people of Persia received during Twelve Months' residence in that Country in the Year 1887-1888* (Cambridge: CUP, 1927; first published 1893), p. 99.

¹²³ TNA, FO 800/70: Cecil Spring Rice to Grey, 3 January 1907.

¹²⁴ TNA, WO 33/333: Military Report on Persia, 1905, p. 87.

Absolutism was not just being challenged, but was being opposed by an organised political movement, partly led by intellectuals. Indeed the view of the Constitutional Movement as being powered by intellectuals espousing western values was not least the product of the movement's leaders; the early Iranian narrative of Ahmad Kasravi,¹²⁵ and his fellow constitutionalists was of a political awakening, inspired by enlightenment ideals imported from Europe. This narrative was politically convenient rather than accurate. As Christopher Ross has pointed out, popular anger stemming from 'the soaring cost of bread' brought together 'a diverse coalition of ulama, bazaaris, and Western-influenced intellectuals' which formed the Constitutional Movement.¹²⁶ Recent research has emphasised the innumerable internal contradictions that saw revolutionary groups including the socialist Armenian Dashnaksutiun Party¹²⁷ take up arms alongside nationalists and religious clerics who felt that 'the authority that had been vested in the monarchy to protect the Shia realm was being exploited by foreign powers to undermine the realm's interests' and 'viewed the ulama as a bulwark against monarchical absolutism and [was] instrumental in popularizing the movement.'¹²⁸ However the belief among British observers that the disparate components of the Constitutional Movement were united around liberal ideals legitimated it in their eyes. This became apparent during the conflict itself. For instance during the fighting in Tabriz *The Times* correspondent described how 'although to those of us who at least have read of modern war the fighting in Tabriz may seem primitive, it has been serious enough to the zealots who have participated in it, and, considering the crude intelligence of most of the rebels, I am lost in admiration at the discipline and system that the leaders have inculcated upon what must have been unpromising material.'¹²⁹ The perception of an intellectual organizing centre controlling the fighting groups gave them legitimacy.

¹²⁵ Ahmad Kasravi, *History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, vol. I, Evan Siegel (Trans.), (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publications, 2006).

¹²⁶ Christopher Ross, 'Lord Curzon and E. G. Browne Confront the 'Persian Question', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2009), p. 400.

¹²⁷ Houri Berberian, 'The Dashnaksutiun and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1911', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1/2 (1996), pp. 7-33.

¹²⁸ Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 28-29.

¹²⁹ 'The Civil War in Tabriz', *The Times* (19 October 1908), p. 6.

There was a general respect for both the aspirations and methods of the constitutionalists in Britain, not least because the movement 'was an attack on arbitrary government, not just an arbitrary ruler.'¹³⁰

The civil war in Persia became a fulcrum for the opposition to the foreign policy of Edward Grey. The competing pressures driving Britain towards intervention, and the attempts of the government to avoid it, clearly demonstrate how having been designated a civil war intervention was viewed as both immoral and a poor policy option. The drivers towards intervention were considerable. 'From London's point of view...' as the historian Mansour Bonakdarian observes, '[Persia] provided an avenue for the Russian invasion of British India.'¹³¹ But the reasons for rising tensions with Russia owed as much to local developments as to imperial strategy. As the historian Hafez Farmayan points out, 'close examination of Iranian sources suggest that major causes behind the sharp increase in British-Russian rivalry, during the first decade of the twentieth century, originated in Tehran rather than in London or St Petersburg.'¹³² The bureaucratic limitations of the Shah's governmental machine had accelerated the granting of concessions to imperial powers, since it provided easy revenue, while presenting a minimal administrative burden. The Constitutional Movement represented an opportunity for Britain to gain an advantage over Russia. It was noted throughout the British foreign service that Britain had 'no leverage over the Persian Government, and that Government has gradually come under the financial, and therefore to a large extent under the political control of Russia. It is not too late to regain our ground, but no time must be lost.'¹³³ In spite of the opportunity presented by the disruption of the status quo, this was in fact contrary to the designs of both imperial governments.

The outbreak of hostilities in Persia was decidedly awkward for the script being worked out in the imperial metropoles. The Anglo-Russian Convention of

¹³⁰ Homa Katouzian, 'Liberty and Licence in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1998), p. 160.

¹³¹ Mansour Bonakdarian, 'The Persia Committee and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran' in: *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1991), pp. 186.

¹³² Hafez Farmayan, 'Portrait of a Nineteenth-Century Iranian Statesman: The Life and Times of Grand Vizier Amin ud-Dawlah, 1844-1904', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1983), p. 337.

¹³³ TNA, FO 800/70: Persia Memorandum, 23 February 1906.

1907 was supposed to divide Persia into clear spheres of influence, allowing the two empires to put aside their differences and enabling Britain to pivot to confront Germany. Thus the British government had a considerable interest in arguing that the conflict in Persia was a civil war between Persian factions, and not a Russian provocation, as the government's critics claimed. This critique found cross party support. Lord Curzon and his fellow imperialists opposed the Convention because while 'there is nothing in this policy to which we on this side of the House would be at all likely a priori to object,'¹³⁴ he felt that 'the Russian sphere contains all that is best in Persia, all the principal centres of trade, all the main sources of political or commercial influence.'¹³⁵ For many conservatives the Shah's attempt to cow the Persian Parliament was an attempt by the Russians to reassert control over the Persian government. Liberals shared the view that Russia had intervened. The Liberal MP Henry Lynch, who led the opposition to Grey's Persia policy, tried to draw attention to Russian officers serving in the Shah's forces, demanding to know 'whether there are any precedents for the participation by foreign officers on the active list of their own armies in acts of civil war in the country to which they have been lent by their own Government.'¹³⁶ Grey cited the example of General Gordon. Although the participation of Russian officers was clearly a form of intervention, Lynch was misrepresenting their involvement, since they had been a part of the Shah's army for many years. In 1905 a report drawn up by the Imperial General Staff had observed that 'Russian officers are attached for a period of three years. The present efficiency of the brigade is largely due to the effect...' of their presence.¹³⁷ Thus Grey was allowing the Russians to do less than Lynch implied, since they were already in post.

Grey staunchly maintained that the situation was a civil war, and that Russian actions were limited to protecting their vital interests, telling the Commons in July 1908 that:

The general situation is... that there are two parties in Persia, the constitutional party and the reactionary party, and that there has been practically a state of civil war, in which the Shah has won in Tehran, and the nationalist or constitutional party has got the upper hand at Tabriz. The only

¹³⁴ George Curzon, HL, *Hansard* (6 February 1908), vol. 183, col. 999,

¹³⁵ Ibid., col. 1007.

¹³⁶ Henry Lynch, HC, *Hansard* (2 July 1908), vol. 191, cols. 956-957.

¹³⁷ TNA, WO 33/333: Military Report on Persia, 1905, p. 81.

course for us to take in these circumstances is that... we shall not go one inch further in intervention than we can help. As long as we abstain from intervention, I hope the Persians will fight out their affairs in their own way. The honourable Member for Ripon [Lynch] recommended friendly assistance. Yes; but it is a very difficult matter offering friendly assistance when there is a state of civil war. When you offer friendly assistance the party to whom you offer it are apt to ask how far you are prepared to go... I can assure the honourable Member for Ripon that if we have not intervened in Persia it is not because we are more on one side or the other or because we have not got sympathies; it is simply because it is not right to leave people to expect your assistance unless you are prepared really to intervene to protect them.¹³⁸

Grey repeatedly pointed to the risk of rising tensions with Russia in the event of British intervention, a risk that was far from attractive in the face of a growing threat from Germany. Moreover, intervention could set dangerous precedents; and was opposed within the civil service both on moral, and strategic grounds. As Cecil Spring Rice had warned:

The attitude of Russia towards the popular party here is as well grounded as our own towards similar movements in Egypt and India. They threaten our interests and we naturally object. If the popular party succeeds here it will be quite impossible for Russia to maintain her control, which she exercises through a certain number of priests and statesmen and especially the Shah. All her gold pieces have suddenly turned to rotten leaves and she naturally objects. If we take part with the popular party against Russia we shall be doing what the Germans are accused of doing in Egypt and Morocco. We shall be also giving a very bad example to other nations who would be justified in playing the same game in our gardens. But if we take sides against the popular party we cannot hope that the Mussulmans all over the world who are watching affairs here with the greatest interest will fail to take note.¹³⁹

Critics pointed out that Russia had already intervened, and some, especially in the Liberal and Irish Parliamentary Party, went further, suggesting that Grey was being disingenuous and had intervened already, ‘acquiescing in Russia’s open hostility to the Persian revolution.’¹⁴⁰ Lynch repeatedly made this accusation:

Sir Edward Grey accuses a section of the Liberal party of urging him to interfere in various parts of the world, especially Central Asia, ... I can only assume that the actual utterances of these critics have escaped the notice of our Foreign Secretary. What is complained of in our Persian policy is that we are continually interfering, after having given pledges to the Persian people

¹³⁸ Edward Grey, HC, *Hansard* (27 July 1908), vol. 193, col. 976.

¹³⁹ TNA, FO 800/70: Cecil Spring Rice to Edward Grey, 28 March 1907.

¹⁴⁰ David McLean, ‘A Professor Extraordinary: E. G. Browne and His Persian Campaign 1908-1913’, *Historical Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1978), p. 402.

that the object of our Agreement with Russia was to prevent both Russia and ourselves from interfering. We also told the Persian Government officially that the “Convention was based upon a guarantee of the integrity and independence of Persia”. What we are now doing is to interfere in Persian affairs in a manner calculated to destroy that integrity and independence.¹⁴¹

Lynch was referring to the clauses in the Anglo-Russian Convention that required either party to seek the permission of the other before acting in Persia. Irish Nationalists similarly argued that not only had Britain acquiesced in the intervention of an autocratic empire, but that the very concept of spheres of influence was by definition an intervention, carving up foreign lands.¹⁴² Grey’s defenders argued that there was a limit to the amount of leverage that Britain had over St Petersburg, and that the spheres of influence were a bilateral issue between Russia and Britain. As Grey wrote to the fierce imperialist Claude Lowther, ‘we explicitly recognised the independence and integrity of Persia. Persia would retain her full sovereignty, and remain as free as she was now to grant what Concessions she pleased.’¹⁴³

More revealing however than the points of disagreement is the remarkable number of mutually accepted assumptions about civil war that underpinned this debate. The onslaught against the Constitutional Movement and the shelling of the Persian Parliament in 1908 caused a great outpouring of sympathy in Britain. Persian émigrés were welcomed to London and given meetings with the editorial boards of newspapers from across the political spectrum.¹⁴⁴ In Parliament, the cross-party Persia Committee became a rallying point for opposition to Grey, bringing together unusual partnerships from the liberal Professor Browne, to the imperialist Lord Curzon.¹⁴⁵ The debate even divided the civil service, with Cecil

¹⁴¹ Henry Lynch, ‘Letter to the Editor’, *The Manchester Guardian* (22 January 1912), p. 14.

¹⁴² David McLean. ‘English Radicals, Russia, and the Fate of Persia 1907-1913’, *The English Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 367, (1978), pp. 338-352.

¹⁴³ TNA, FO 800/70: Grey to Lowther, 12 April 1907.

¹⁴⁴ Mansour Bonakdarian, ‘The Persia Committee and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1991), pp. 190.

¹⁴⁵ Ross, ‘Lord Curzon and E. G. Browne Confront the ‘Persian Question’, pp. 385-411.

Spring Rice, ambassador to Tehran until 1908, arguing with Grey¹⁴⁶ and Britain's defence attaché acting in direct contradiction of the Foreign Secretary's wishes to shelter political opponents of the Shah.¹⁴⁷ And yet all parties agreed that to intervene in a civil war was to lose the moral high ground, and was for practical reasons an undesirable policy. Those urging intervention either disputed whether the conflict was a civil war, or argued that British support for the Constitutionalists was justified on the basis of Russian meddling in a Persian conflict, and that the restoration of balance would similarly restore the sense that the conflict was a Persian concern. Moreover the argument that Persia was experiencing a civil war was not premised on the fact that there was fighting domestically, but that the fighting was between two clearly defined ideological camps, each politically represented, that split Persia vertically, and crucially that they advocated a national ideology, so that whichever side won Persia would remain Persia. It was not just a domestic war, but a war fought over domestic issues. What is also clear is the distinction made between states in civil war, and what today would be called 'failed states'. Although not synonymous, these two concepts are intimately related. But at the dawn of the twentieth century they were almost mutually exclusive.

Persia was perceived to be at the border of civilization in 1908. From London it could be seen as a state unable to exercise sovereignty over its people, or as a state debating through arms the form of government in which it would invest its sovereignty. It can be convincingly argued that at the time the world was organised under a bifurcated order of nation states and the colonial wilderness.¹⁴⁸ In the former the rules of sovereignty, the near sanctity of treaties, and respect for borders, were matters of faith among British officials. Across the rest, where local governments could not enforce their sovereignty, the only laws that applied were the bilateral agreements among the states competing over interests. Paradoxically

¹⁴⁶ Rose Louise Greaves, 'Some Aspects of the Anglo-Russian Convention and Its Working in Persia, 1907-14', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, col. 31, no. 1, (1968), p. 78.

¹⁴⁷ Mansour Bonakdarian, 'Iranian Constitutional Exiles and British Foreign-Policy Dissenters, 1908-9', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1995), p. 178.

¹⁴⁸ Christian Reus-Smit, 'The Concept of Intervention', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5 (2013), pp. 1057-1076.

however in the British view the capacity for civil war - in spite of the decent into violence that it entailed - and the capacity for questions of civic principle to divide the political community of a state, operated as markers of nationhood, and in turn represented a baptism by fire into the family of nation-states governed by international laws. This was the position of Persia. Of course the international system, drawn up by Britain and France, benefited its authors, and in Russia and Germany a different logic predominated premised on *realpolitik* governed by the balance of power.¹⁴⁹

Civil War in Law, 1900-1912

So far this chapter has focused on civil war as a political concept, and as a matter of policy. Whether a conflict was a civil war also presented a legal question, both in regard to the Law of Nations, and Britain domestically. It is necessary to fully appreciate the legal significance of civil conflict in order to understand the constraints that, in the context of a domestic crisis, constrained policymakers during the Ulster Crisis.

The renowned British international legal theorist, and secretary of the International Law Society, George Grenville Phillimore wrote in 1902 that British case law provided an established threshold for defining civil conflict domestically. He noted that if 'the Chancery Courts and the Courts of Westminster be shut up that are the officina justitia, it is time of war, but if the Courts be open it is otherwise; yet if war be in any parts of the kingdom, that the sheriff cannot execute the king's writ there, there is tempus belli.'¹⁵⁰ The mechanism in British law for declaring a state of civil conflict was, as Lord Coleridge explained, the imposition of Martial Law, and the 'only principle on which the law of England tolerates what is called martial law is necessity... When foreign invasion or civil war renders it impossible for the Courts of Law to sit or to enforce the execution of their judgments, it becomes necessary to find some rude substitute for them.'¹⁵¹ Under Martial Law military decree and the laws governing warfare replaced civil law. Thus the line between peace and civil war in British domestic law was the

¹⁴⁹ Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ George Grenville Phillimore, 'What Is a State of War in Law', *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1902), p. 130.

¹⁵¹ Lord Coleridge, HL, *Hansard* (17 March 1902), vol. 105, col. 123.

declaration of martial law, the imposition of which was justified by the courts being unable to function. As the historian Charles Townshend has observed, the apparent clarity of this distinction had often proved inadequate during civil disturbances, and was in any case premised upon rebellion by a standing army; insurgency would present a serious challenge to the operation of these principles, not least in South Africa.¹⁵²

South Africa presented a challenge to existing precedent because legally the conflict was an inter-state war between the United Kingdom and the Boer Republics, complicated by rebellion within Cape Colony. The British government did not wish to treat rebels as members of the Boer military, as this would afford them protections under the laws of war. At the same time the courts were able to function fully in the areas where they operated. On 17 April 1901 the governor of Cape Colony wrote to Lord Kitchener, drawing attention to the fact that there

are certain districts in the Colony at present time in which, though the Courts of Law are nominally open, the circumstances are such that these Courts cannot adequately deal with the grave cases of treason and rebellion which are increasing within their jurisdiction. And if Commander-in-Chief proposes, in that condition of things to deal with the graver of these cases by Military Courts, I am not prepared to disagree with such course.¹⁵³

Rather than establishing martial law, it was proposed to run a bifurcated judicial system in which

only those offences should be taken before Courts-Martial which directly and necessarily endanger safety of the troops; wrecking, or firing on trains; wanton personal outrages on His Majesty's subjects, and other acts of similar nature or gravity; whilst expressions of opinion, however strong, and trading or consort with the enemy, should continue to be dealt with by the ordinary laws.¹⁵⁴

The scale of the threat to Cape Colony in the view of the governor was immense. 'There seems no doubt that something like 50 per cent of the white inhabitants of the Cape Colony are now more or less in sympathy with the Boers. The Proclamation of Martial Law and the consequent disarmament of the portion of the population which is suspected of disloyalty has prevented so far a general

¹⁵² Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), pp. 15-23.

¹⁵³ TNA, WO 32/8012: Milner to Kitchener, 17 April 1901.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

rising.'¹⁵⁵ But by retaining the civil courts, the governor had placed Cape Colony in a unique position, between peace and civil war. This state created new legal challenges, as Phillimore pointed out, the 'Courts, being left in the exercise of their jurisdiction, had consequently to consider how they could reconcile rights given by the law of the land with the regulations of martial law.'¹⁵⁶ It was also something altogether new, as the 'qualification of the constitutional test of what is war and peace in judgment of law has never before been applied to British subjects.'¹⁵⁷ This evolution would have a profound impact in Ireland in 1914, when the capacity for legal innovation, demonstrated in South Africa, would accelerate, and thereby undermine the clarity of the legal definition of civil war in British law.

Under international law the parameters of civil conflict were altogether different. In 1905 the eminent legal scholar Lessa Oppenheim published the first volume of his *International Law: A Treatise*. The book rapidly became the central text in the field, with subsequent editions in 1912 and 1920, and further updates following his death. Oppenheim, a German who gained British citizenship in 1900, lectured at the London School of Economics until the publication of his treatise when he became Whewell Professor of International Law at Cambridge in 1908. The summation of Oppenheim's notes on civil war, encompassing the broad sweep of legal precedent on the subject was, in contrast to British domestic legislation, vague. As Oppenheim remarked, international law 'is the body of rules which the civilised States consider legally binding in their intercourse, every State which belongs to the civilised States, and is, therefore, a member of the Family of Nations, is an International Person. Sovereign States exclusively are International Persons.'¹⁵⁸ However 'insurgents recognised as a belligerent Power in a civil war... are not... real subjects of International Law, but in some points are treated as though they were International Persons, without thereby becoming members of the Family of Nations.'¹⁵⁹ Since a state of war in international law requires belligerents, in the technical sense civil conflict only escalated to civil war in

¹⁵⁵ TNA, WO 32/8012: Milner to Kitchener, 8 July 1901.

¹⁵⁶ Phillimore, 'What Is a State of War in Law'. pp. 130-131.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁵⁸ Lessa Oppenheim, *International Law; A Treatise* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 255.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

international law once the insurgent forces had gained the status of belligerents, either conferred by external powers as in the American Civil War, or by their opponents, as in Colombia. Oppenheim cited Colombia and the case of Panama as demonstrating recognition as legitimating rebellion, noting that 'in every case of civil war a foreign State can recognise the insurgents as a belligerent Power if they succeed in keeping a part of the country in their hands and set up a Government of their own.'¹⁶⁰ It is important to note that recognition was predicated on the control of territory, the exercising of sovereignty and the operation of laws, for there 'must... be a Government — that is, one or more persons who are the representatives of the people and rule according to the law of the land. An anarchistic community is not a State,'¹⁶¹ and cannot therefore be recognised. This underpinned the distinction between civil war and disintegration with the corresponding loss of sovereignty outlined in this chapter. Without recognition rebels constituted a domestic concern, and at the time there was no international legal framework limiting how a state could deal with internal criminals. Once recognised however, the question then arose as to rights of intervention, and indeed 'such untimely recognition contains an intervention.'¹⁶²

The case of Panama highlights an important element of international law. That Panama was recognised by the United States and a number of South American States created a precedent in international law. But those states recognised Panama for reasons of *realpolitik*, not because of the legal merits of Panama's position, which were doubtful, not least because the actions of the United States were in breach of treaties, which in international law are equivalent to statute. Yet because the US acted, and it was accepted, the action gained legitimacy. Intervention was similarly susceptible to an evolution of norms. The Holy Alliance had established a right of intervention in the interests of the Balance of Power. This was then used by the United States to justify the Monroe Doctrine, which gained recognition at the close of the century. The important point is that to a large extent – at this formative stage – international law was heavily shaped by the practice of states. To that extent the norms to which British officials conformed

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 257.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 278.

because of their underlying assumptions about civil war had legal significance, and changes to those assumptions, leading to the erosion of norms was equally significant. With regards to intervention for example, justifications included defence, maintaining the balance of power, breach of treaty, and protection of nationals. But in practical terms – while not recognised in international law as a right - there were many additional justifications deployed. As Oppenheim observed, ‘analysis of the rules of the Law of Nations regarding intervention and the hitherto exercised practice of intervention make it apparent that intervention is de facto a matter of policy just like war.’¹⁶³ The reshaping of British policy towards civil conflict, to be explored over the following chapters, therefore had legal implications in developing legal norms with regards to civil war and intervention contributing to the first attempt to set international law on the basis of statute through the League of Nations and Paris Peace Treaties.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 421.

Chapter Two

Ireland and Civil War, 1912-1919

Civil War was a widely fielded concept in British political discussion by 1912, but usually in relation to states far away, or through analogies to the distant past. The previous chapter surveyed the discussion of civil war as a foreign policy issue. Domestically MPs regularly traced constitutional precedents as ‘practically sacred in this island ever since the days of the Civil War.’¹ In the academy, the British Civil Wars were called ‘The Great Civil War,’² a title that accentuated their distance. Thus Halford Mackinder could argue that the British ‘have lived under conditions of internal peace so long, we have been free from revolution and from any attempt by the Legislature to prolong its own existence for the past two centuries.’³ Warnings of civil war were generally kept to the realm of rhetorical hyperbole in relation to ‘this dangerous and disastrous educational civil war’⁴ or ‘bringing a civil war... into the brewery.’⁵

The tenor of such discussions demonstrates the peculiar position of Ireland in the minds of British officials. Ireland was simultaneously close to yet distant from Whitehall; on some issues integral to the United Kingdom, on others comparable to a far-flung colony. For while Britain basked in its centuries of internal peace, Ireland – supposedly part of the Union – was routinely described as being on the verge of civil war, or even, as the Irish Nationalist MP John Dillon told the Commons in June 1900, emerging from ‘seventy years of smouldering civil war.’⁶ In matters of foreign policy officials used Ireland’s condition as a point of comparison in discussion of civil wars. The historian and jurist Frederick Harrison described South Africa as ‘the grave of so many reputations... a second Ireland.’⁷ During the Constitutional Revolution in Persia Cecil Spring Rice sought to explain religious politics there by likening the ‘Mullahs [who] know that the movement

¹ Lord Curzon, HL, *Hansard* (29 June 1909), vol. 2, col. 104.

² Hilda Johnstone, ‘Two Governors of Shrewsbury during the Great Civil War and the Interregnum’, *The English Historical Review*, vol. 26, no. 102 (1911), pp. 267-277.

³ Halford Mackinder, HC, *Hansard* (13 April 1910), vol. 16, col. 1286.

⁴ Dr Macnamara, HC, *Hansard* (25 November 1908), vol. 197, col. 514.

⁵ Lord Faber, HL, *Hansard* (26 November 1908), vol. 197, cols. 593-594.

⁶ John Dillon, HC, *Hansard* (28 June 1900), vol. 84, col. 1370.

⁷ ‘The Wars in South Africa and in China’, *The Manchester Guardian* (2 January 1901), p. 7.

'threatens them too,' to 'the Irish priests [who know] they must swim with the stream and there are some among them who are genuine patriots.'⁸ The historian Charles Townshend has described Ireland bridging the gap between foreign and domestic policy:

Although the UK possessed a single parliament, its administrative unification was less complete. Irish laws were made at Westminster, but their day-to-day implementation was carried out by an 'Irish Executive' in Dublin which was markedly different from its supposed parent in Whitehall. Its titular head, the Lord Lieutenant and Governor-General of Ireland came to be generally called the 'Viceroy', a title whose ambiguity emphasised Ireland's semi-detached - and perhaps semi-colonial - status within the UK.⁹

It is reasonable to conclude that with regards to civil war Ireland was more foreign than domestic in the minds of British officials before 1912. And yet as the Ulster Crisis would demonstrate, how officials conceived of Ireland's place within the Union, and Empire, was far from fixed. The focal length changed in relation to events. Historiographically the history of Ireland's relationship with Britain has centred on the Irish Parliamentary Party as the connective tissue to Westminster, with an emphasis on understanding the reasons for the sudden collapse of the IPP's political support after 1916.¹⁰ The result has been an expanding number of regional studies, exploring the depth of the IPP's engagement in Irish society. These address important questions, but the parochial nature of this research has led to its being poorly integrated into wider British political history. Quite separately a number of historians have taken up the question of Ireland's place

⁸ TNA, FO 800/70: Cecil Spring Rice to Edward Grey, 18 July 1907.

⁹ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 24.

¹⁰ Francis Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party, 1890-1910* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951); David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1977); Erhard Rumpf and Anthony Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1977); Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1981); Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912-1916* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996); Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (Oxford: OUP, 2005); Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1891-1921* (Oxford, OUP, 2005).

within the British Empire,¹¹ but these two areas of study have developed to a large extent in isolation. The discourse surrounding civil war in Ireland, bridging the gap between Ireland's domestic and imperial contexts, offers a unique insight into how British officials understood and misunderstood Irish society, and its connections to Westminster, as the seat of both the British and Imperial Parliaments.

The Parliament Act of 1911, paving the road to a third Home Rule Bill, which led to a threat by His Majesty's Loyal Opposition to support Ulster in insurrection, moved Ireland from a point of colonial comparison, to an acute concern of domestic policy, and sparked an intense debate that would reshape British officials' ideas about the boundaries of civil war. In a speech to open the Buckingham Palace Conference at the height of the July Crisis of 1914, the King warned that 'today the cry of Civil War is on the lips of the most responsible and sober minded of my people'.¹² This chapter charts the breaking down of the established concept of civil war through the policy challenges of the Ulster Crisis of 1912-1914 and the Easter Rising of 1916. The former is viewed through the contrasting perspectives of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, and Leader of the Opposition Andrew Bonar Law. Their clashes until the Curragh Incident of 20 March 1914 saw many of the same tests as had been used in relation to South Africa, Colombia, and Persia, discussed in the previous chapter, applied to the United Kingdom. The Curragh Incident of March 1914, highlighted the legal ambiguities separating civil war and civil disorder, and was the first major blow to the established conceptualisation, though the implications of this would only become felt in the wake of the Easter Rising. By 1916 the main lines of debate were between those who viewed Ireland from a military perspective, and those who maintained a political point of view. This collision, in the context of a global conflagration, further collapsed distinctions between police action, martial law, and civil war, so that by the end of the First World War, precisely what constituted civil war had become an open question.

¹¹ Keith Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford: OUP, 2004); Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Northern Ireland and the British Empire - Commonwealth, 1923-61', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 142 (2008), pp. 227-242.

¹² BLOU, MS. Asquith 39: The King, Buckingham Palace, 21 July 1914.

Ulster 1914: Civil War or Civil Disorder?

The promise of a third run at Home Rule had ensured a Liberal led government by winning the support of Irish Nationalist MPs. As the Bill was being planned in Cabinet the expectation was that it would lead to demonstrations in Ulster, potentially rioting, and some bellicose language, but the government felt that they would be able to come to an arrangement with the North, especially with Ulster's business community. The Ulster Volunteer Force, formed on 13 January 1912, was seen to be political theatre by British officials. David Harrel, former undersecretary for Ireland and in the words of Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell 'one of the best heads in Ireland,'¹³ reported on 8 February that:

In all this the Ulster man bearing in mind that he has not a house of lords as of old, conceived it to be his duty to fight every inch of the way, to demonstrate and protest, and so to influence the electorate of Great Britain. In all this I believe him to be quite serious, and thinking of a time when it may come to a fight in the open, but he is too shrewd and practical to place himself outside of the law upon hypothetical data. I do not believe there is any purposeful arming or drilling... I cannot think that platform speeches will materialise into deliberate armed resistance to authority.¹⁴

Birrell endorsed this assessment, circulating a report noting that although 'drilling is being practiced in all the counties in Ulster except Donegal and Monaghan... [it is] without arms, and there is no evidence available so far in any case where it has been said that rifles were used.'¹⁵

Asquith had good reason to believe that the promise of Ulster Unionists to resist by arms was political posturing. As has already been stated, the threat of civil war had long been a rhetorical device in Irish affairs, whether the debate was over land,¹⁶ religion,¹⁷ or education.¹⁸ It was so widely used that in 1906 the Chief Secretary for Ireland dismissed warnings of civil war, saying that he 'thought no prophet ever occupied so favourable a position as the prophet who was able to

¹³ TNA, CAB 37/109/23: Augustine Birrell to Cabinet, 14 February 1912.

¹⁴ BLOU, MS. Asquith 38: David Harrel to Birrell, 8 February 1912.

¹⁵ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7034: Report, Drilling in Ulster, W O'Connell, RIC, Written 23 February 1912, circulated to Cabinet by Birrell, 28 February 1912.

¹⁶ Lord Ashbourne, HL, *Hansard* (24 June 1907), vol. 176, col. 828.

¹⁷ John Redmond, HC, *Hansard* (21 February 1901), vol. 89, col. 745.

¹⁸ John Dillon, HC, *Hansard* (23 March 1907), vol. 171, col. 1442.

fulfill his own prophecy.¹⁹ And in Ulster Asquith did not believe that the Unionist leaders would work to make their dire warnings a reality. Nor were parades and demonstrations by armed men a new feature in Irish politics. In 1907 County Inspectors drew attention to gatherings such as on 15 August when it was reported that 'about 8000 members of the AOH [Ancient Order of Hibernians] were present, about 2000 of whom were armed with swords or pikes.'²⁰ Warnings about civil war in 1912 seemed to Asquith to be similarly rhetorical. The government expected Home Rule to lead to riots, as had occurred before in Ireland, but as the Irish Peer Dermot Bourke, Earl of Mayo, said in 1909, 'I do not wish it to be supposed that we are in a state of civil war in Ireland, for that is not the case; but crime and outrage are rampant there.'²¹ For the Government, rioting in Belfast, while undesirable, was a matter of civil disorder to be managed by the police, not civil war to be waged by the army. In retrospect the Third Home Rule Bill was a fulcrum in the Irish Struggle for Independence, but it is important to recognise that for contemporaries there was more continuity than change in events before 1914. The Bill was very similar to those that preceded it, and as the historian Joseph Lee points out, 'Ulster Unionists had organized mass movements in 1886 and 1893 to resist the first and second Home Rule Bills.'²² It was not immediately evident that in 1912 things would be different.

These factors go some way in explaining why Asquith and his ministers were so dismissive of the Unionist reaction to the Third Home Rule Bill. In July 1912 Andrew Bonar Law, Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition, gave a notorious speech at Blenheim Palace in which he declared that Ulster Unionists

would be justified in resisting [Home Rule] by all means in their power, including force... I say now, with a full sense of the responsibility which attaches to my position, that if the attempt be made under present conditions I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go in which I shall not be ready to support them and in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.²³

What was promised here was not rioting in Ulster, but the official opposition

¹⁹ James Bryce, HC, *Hansard* (12 December 1906), vol. 167, col. 505.

²⁰ PRONI, MIC 448/10: Possession of and Carrying of Arms, 17 September 1907.

²¹ Earl of Mayo, HL, *Hansard* (17 February 1909), vol. 1, col. 64.

²² Joseph Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1986: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 6.

²³ 'Speech by Mr Bonar Law', *The Times* (29 July 1912), p. 7.

supporting an armed struggle against the state. Reacting to Bonar Law's speech, Asquith told an audience in Dublin that 'I do not believe in the prospect of civil war.'²⁴ The line from the Government was dismissive, Churchill remarking on

a strong resemblance to what is commonly called 'bluff'; and no doubt there is a good deal of bluff in these proceedings. If a man is firmly persuaded that a certain thing is not going to happen, it becomes rather a cheap business for him to utter blood-curling menaces of what he will do if it does happen.²⁵

The accusation that the Unionists were using greatly exaggerated language was widespread and persistent throughout the Government. In September 1912 Asquith wrote a memorandum for the King arguing that the consequences of Home Rule coming into effect would be

organised disorder in the four north-eastern counties of Ulster. It is in my view a misuse of terms to speak of what is likely to happen as Civil War. The total population of the area concerned is a little over 1,000,000. It is divided between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and in that part of the world political and religious differences roughly coincide, in the proportion of 7:3... It is not, therefore, the case of a homogeneous people resisting a change to which they are unitedly opposed. On the contrary there will be a considerable and a militant minority strongly in favour of the new state of things, and ready to render active assistance to the forces of the executive.²⁶

The same argument would be reiterated by Lloyd George in February 1914, when he wrote that although he thought the Government 'underestimates the danger of civil disturbances in Ulster, I agree that the words Civil War are much too portentous a description to accord to the events which are likely to follow the setting up of an Irish Parliament.'²⁷ As late as March that year Birrell reassured the Cabinet that the 'whole question as to the reality of the movement regarded from a Civil War point of view is overshadowed by the general conviction amongst the rank and file of the Volunteers that the occasion will never arise.'²⁸

In this the government was mistaken. In part Asquith's miscalculation stemmed from a difference in understanding between himself and Bonar Law over

²⁴ Asquith, cited: Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (London: William Collins, Sons and Co, 1978), p. 281.

²⁵ 'Mr Churchill's Rejoinder to Mr Law', *The Times* (15 August 1912), p. 4.

²⁶ BLOU, MS.Asquith.38: Memorandum on Government of Ireland Bill, September 1913.

²⁷ BLOU, MS.Asquith.39: David Lloyd George response to Mr Devlin's Memorandum, 23 February 1914.

²⁸ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell to Cabinet, 5 March 1914.

what civil war was, and more specifically how it came about. Asquith's response to warnings of civil war focused almost exclusively on Bonar Law and Edward Carson, the political leaders of Unionism. Violent reaction within Ulster was categorized as riot. Fundamentally for Asquith civil war implied the irrevocable division of the government's institutions, with an opposing government established upon which the existing government would declare war. As discussed with regards to Persia in the proceeding chapter, it was the characteristic of leadership of a rebellion originating within government institutions that marked out a conflict as civil war. In part this Westminster-centric view was tactical. His biographer Roy Jenkins has written that for Asquith the 'House of Commons was the one battleground on which the Liberals always won. It was therefore in their interests to pretend that it was the only one that counted.'²⁹ But it also highlights Asquith's legalistic perspective. His view that civil war had to be initiated by the Unionist leadership led him to conclude that Bonar Law and Carson were bluffing because he did not believe that Carson personally had any intention of carrying out his threat. Asquith did not see a rebel in his friend, and as the historian Jeremy Smith has observed, 'Carson's public pronouncements before 1913 offer little to suggest that he was anything other than a traditional defender of Irish unionist interests.'³⁰ Given that Carson was from Dublin, and ostensibly the leader of Irish Unionism, north and south, it was difficult to conceive of his fixation with Ulster as anything other than political posturing. Besides, Asquith held Carson in high esteem, and retained his admiration in spite of their political differences, as attested to by Asquith's wife Margot in a letter to Carson in February 1914.³¹ This warmth would be hard to reconcile with a genuine belief that Carson was prepared to lead Ulster into civil war. Asquith was not familiar with Bonar Law, and might have judged his pronouncements differently if they were better acquainted. When they finally met privately in the autumn of 1913, Asquith found an absence of guile, with Law openly laying out the challenges he faced as leader of the Unionist party.

What Asquith had crucially missed was that in his speech at Blenheim the

²⁹ Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 281.

³⁰ Jeremy Smith, 'Federalism, Devolution and Partition: Sir Edward Carson and the Search for a Compromise on the Third Home Rule Bill, 1913-1914', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 35, no. 140 (2007), p. 500.

³¹ PRONI, D1507/A/5/7: Margot Asquith to Edward Carson, 11 February 1914.

leader of the opposition had not promised to set up a rebel government, to split the state, or to lead a Unionist rebellion; the impetus towards violence that he predicted came from within Ulster. Bonar Law was emphasising a different element in the traditional conceptualization of civil war, namely the centrality of conflicting civic principles. As had been understood of South Africa, or America, explored in the previous chapter, civil war divided society by forcing ordinary citizens to take a side. It was a moral issue, which is how Bonar Law saw the position of Ulster. Historians focusing on Westminster have largely concurred that Unionist leaders were bluffing. Jeremy Smith has written how in ‘Bonar Law’s “thought-world” civil war was never a serious consideration for him, it remained a threat which Asquith would eventually succumb to... Over the prospect of civil disorder, Bonar Law’s strategy was a huge game of bluff.’³² Ronan Fanning ascribes the progressive escalation of rhetoric to the artificial extension of the debate imposed by the Parliament Act. With the House of Lords destined to delay implementation of the Home Rule Bill until 1914, this created two years in which the parties could engage in ‘charades’.³³ But as the historian Alvin Jackson has argued, the determination of Ulster Unionists had ‘graduated into hostility with the evidence of local British indifference,’³⁴ some years before the crisis, and it ‘was against this background, and in the context of a more prolonged organisation that the Ulster Unionist Council took the initial steps toward a military defiance.’³⁵ The distinction between political brinkmanship as a parliamentary tactic, and determination to fight, is therefore a false dichotomy. For Carson and Bonar Law resistance from within Ulster was inevitable; the question was whether it was moral, and the issue in doubt was the nature of the fighting, and the outcome. Jeremy Smith was right to argue that the Ulsterization of the Irish question was a deliberate and calculated Unionist tactic, but failed to note that while many Unionists were not fundamentally attached to Ulster’s specific resistance, the Unionists of Ulster were, and many Unionists perceived that ‘the resistance of

³² Jeremy Smith, ‘Bluff, Bluster and Brinkmanship: Andrew Bonar Law and the Third Home Rule Bill’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 36, no. 1 (1993), pp. 171.

³³ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution 1910-1922* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), pp. 55-57.

³⁴ Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 308.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 315.

Ulster is the main obstacle in the government's way.³⁶ The formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force was not therefore a bluff, but a way of directing the readiness for violence towards what Carson and other Unionist leaders thought to be constructive ends. 'Victory comes to those who are organised and unified,' Carson observed. 'Those who are unorganised cannot help and may hinder our efforts.'³⁷ Carson's concern was that 'Ulstermen' would commit outrages against the police, which would make the British public sympathetic to military suppression. As Wilfrid Spender, Quartermaster General of the UVF and a former army Captain, recalled, 'Carson, who realised the danger of this provocative step, decided that at all costs discipline must be maintained by his followers.'³⁸

It was because Bonar Law thought violence would occur with or without him that he was earnest in his warning of civil war. One facet of his character upon which his biographers agree is that he spoke his mind. George Dangerfield wrote that he was 'absolutely honest'.³⁹ This is clearly an exaggeration, but no one disputes that he was blunt, and there are abundant examples where he said what he thought to the detriment of his interests, such as when he told the King that he would have to choose which half of his subjects to disappoint.⁴⁰ This is not to say that he did not make tactical choices. It was a conscious decision to focus his opposition to Home Rule on Ulster, rather than Ireland more broadly. But to bluff outright, to say what he did not believe, would have been quite contrary to Bonar Law's character. It is reasonable to conclude that his statements concerning civil war reflect how he understood the concept, and its implications. Bonar Law did not want civil war, nor did he feel he could prevent it, but if the Ulster Unionists moved to resist, he was convinced that their cause was justified. Law's personal sympathy for Ulster stemmed from three moral principles to which he attached great importance: that a minority should not be forced into exile from a community to which they are loyal; that a minority had the right to resist being

³⁶ PAW, BL/32/3/1: Robert Cecil to Bonar Law, 1 May 1914.

³⁷ PRONI, D1540/3/9: Edward Carson to Edward Sclater, 7 August 1913.

³⁸ PRONI, D1295/2/16: Memorandum by Wilfrid Spender, written in reply to the enquiries of Rev. C. Brett Ingram.

³⁹ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), p. 77.

⁴⁰ Robert Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 133.

subjugated by a majority that threatens their values; and that the use of the Parliament Act to force through legislation was unconstitutional.⁴¹ There is no contradiction between Law believing civil war to be a real danger, and using that fact to his political advantage. Tactically he saw that Ulster was the most effective tool for defeating Home Rule for all of Ireland, and for gaining a majority.

The basis for Law's strategy is indicated in a letter from Frederick Oliver in August 1912. Oliver argued that 'Ulster's refusal to accept [Home Rule] is in itself amply sufficient to kill it.'⁴² He set out all of the hurdles at which the Bill, or the Government, could fail, but the crucial point was that even if the Home Rule Bill did pass, and the government retained power, 'we may be quite sure', Oliver asserted

that the government is not going to put the Bill into force before they have gone to the country... But assume we are best: then the present Government has to put the Bill into force and is met possibly by passive resistance. That ought to break it for a certainty if the Ulstermen are those determined fellows.⁴³

It has been argued that Oliver did not support opposition beyond 'passive resistance.' Jeremy Smith⁴⁴ cites Oliver's assertion that 'I don't think the country will stand unconstitutional methods... until the constitutional weapons which appear to it to be so powerful have been used and have failed. Much less will it stand active violence or talk about active violence.'⁴⁵ The point in Smith's view was to make the threat credible, but to control it so as not to undermine public confidence; that is, to prevent the threat being carried out.

What Law recognised was that the question of public sympathy was not so much a question of whether there was violence, but of who had initiated it. And here we come to the crucial difference between why in 1912 Asquith did not see civil war as possible, but Law did. Asquith expected riots in Ulster. Law was helping to ensure that there was an organised rejection of Home Rule, and that if the government attempted to impose Home Rule by force then the country would

⁴¹ In both private correspondence and public speeches Law returned repeatedly to these core arguments, see for instance PAW, BL/34/2/45: Bonar Law to Asquith, 22 March 1914; 'Speech by Mr Bonar Law in Belfast', *The Times* (29 July 1912), p. 7; PAW, BL/39/1/6: Balmoral, September 1912.

⁴² PAW, BL/27/1/47: Frederick Oliver to Bonar Law, 20 August 1912.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Smith, 'Bluff, Bluster and Brinkmanship', p. 168.

⁴⁵ PAW, BL/27/1/47: Oliver to Bonar Law, 20 August 1912.

turn against the government. Implicit in Law's calculus was a preparedness to go over the brink as the surest way of bringing down the government and obtaining a majority, and thereby to overturn Home Rule. It was a 'heads I win, tails you lose' strategy in which either Asquith did not force Home Rule on Ulster, or he would see an outbreak of fighting, and as Law had already stated:

That is the point. Does anyone imagine that British troops will be used to shoot down men who demand no privilege which is not enjoyed by you and me and no privilege which any one of us would ever surrender? The thing is unthinkable. Nations, and great nations, have, indeed, taken up arms to prevent their subjects from seceding, but no nation will ever take up arms to compel loyal subjects to leave their community. I do not believe for a moment that any Government would ever dare to make the attempt, but I am sure of this, that if the attempt were made, the Government would not succeed in carrying Home Rule. They would succeed only in lighting fires of civil war which would shatter the Empire to its foundations.⁴⁶

Law was not advocating civil war, but felt that it was a fact that if the government sought to impose Home Rule by force then Britain, and not just Ulster, would be outraged, and under these circumstances he made clear that his sympathy, and the sympathy of many officers in the army, would be against the Government. Note also Law's explicit invocation of the Empire; he did not see the Ulster Crisis as a purely domestic concern. As Law's biographer Peter Blake observed, 'Bonar Law's violent public declarations ...were not belied by his private remarks... He saw little hope of averting civil war, or, failing that, a degree of dissension in the country that would strain the constitution to its uttermost limit.'⁴⁷ In fact he felt that the constitution had already been stretched beyond its limits. He was sympathetic to the argument put to him by Charles Beauclerk in September 1912 that when 'the State commands that which is repugnant to God's law, as understood by the conscience, one is not only allowed to resist, but one is bound to resist at least by protest.'⁴⁸ He was convinced that the Ulster Unionists would fight, that the government would fall, and if it did not he felt its behaviour unforgivable, resistance to be justified, and would expect to have the support of much of the country, and the sympathy of the rest. Law was 'certain that the people, if given the opportunity, would vote against Home Rule,' but that any

⁴⁶ 'Speech by Mr Bonar Law', *The Times* (29 July 1912), p. 7.

⁴⁷ Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 133.

⁴⁸ PAW, BL/27/2/8: Charles Sidney Beauclerk to Bonar Law, 5 September 1912.

attempt to prevent Home Rule was not unconstitutional because ‘the constitution is admittedly in suspense.’⁴⁹ In this context Oliver’s warning about unconstitutional methods appear less significant. This arose, as the historian Jeremy Smith observes, from a widespread belief in the Conservative Party of ‘the government’s subversion of the Constitution with the Parliament Act of 1911’.⁵⁰ When Law referred to civil war, he was not just referring to conflict in Ulster, but believed that ‘if they attempt without first obtaining the sanction of the electors, to drive Ulster out of the Union, the attempt will be resisted not only by the Loyalists of Ireland, but by an overwhelming majority of the people of Great Britain, and the attempt will not be made.’⁵¹ By civil war, he meant a civil war within the United Kingdom.

Bonar Law’s view that the constitution was ‘in suspense’ was the first step in the reconceptualization of civil war that would unfold over the following decade. Asquith conceived of civil war as being a legal process by which a portion of the United Kingdom formed a parallel government, with one or the other then declaring war, so that two governments were at war within one state. The state remained constant, and as with Persia, its sovereignty remained in effect. Asquith did not believe that an insurrectionary government would be formed in Ulster, and so what would occur would be civil disorder. Bonar Law conceived of the conflict as a national crisis over civic principles, an emotional rending of the body politic in a way less institutionally defined than Asquith anticipated. But where Asquith saw a legal process, Bonar Law saw the law’s suspension. Law was not arguing that civil war invalidated sovereignty, but the notion that the constitution was suspended during civil war would gain traction in government over the following years, and by logical inference would transform the notion of two governments one state, into two governments no state, which would become the basis for Allied intervention in Russia. The unraveling of Asquith’s legal process would begin with the Curragh Incident, which showed the legal distinctions to be wholly inadequate. To fully appreciate the extent of the challenge to the law it is necessary to follow

⁴⁹ PAW, BL/39/1/E6: Bonar Law to the King, September 1912.

⁵⁰ Jeremy Smith, *The Tories and Ireland: Conservative Party Politics and the Home Rule Crisis, 1910-1914* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 5.

⁵¹ ‘Mr Churchill And Ulster; Mr Bonar Law’s Reply’, *The Times* (13 August 1912), p. 4.

the events that brought legal principles into conflict.

The view of the Royal Irish Constabulary and civil servants in Ulster evolved from seeing the UVF as a continuation of earlier trends in Irish politics, to perceiving it as a serious threat. Harrel's assessment in February 1912 was typical in suggesting that drilling was essentially political.⁵² There was concern following reports of military involvement, such as that of Detective Inspector Murnane who observed 'a party, from fifty to sixty, assembled at the [Orange] lodge ... the drill being ... those in the new "Infantry Army Drill Book."'⁵³ The involvement of army officers and NCOs however was not thought to imply intent to take the field. Over time their assessment changed. Police reports on the UVF steadily became more ominous, progressing from parade drill to the movement and preparation of arms and stores. Typical is a report from Belfast in August 1913 detailing how 'four casks believed to contain rifles, arrived Belfast on the 18th of August. It is believed that they are intended for the Ulster Volunteer Force.'⁵⁴ In July the view of Special Branch was that 'the feeling of opposition to Home Rule in this County is daily becoming more accentuated, and for this reason until recently the people firmly believed that no Government would attempt to enforce Home Rule without first appealing to the country.'⁵⁵ The report explicitly acknowledged the inaccuracy of previous analysis:

It was asserted that interest in [drilling] would die out after a big Balmoral demonstration, and that it would be impossible to get the rank and file to keep up sufficient interest to hold drill classes, route marches, etc, for any length of time. It is now clear that such a view was entirely a mistaken one... The Volunteer Force has met with the support of the classes and the masses, both in town and country. The men have been drilled with the object of enabling them to resist armed and disciplined forces if necessary... A very large section of both the leaders and the rank and file are really in earnest in this matter, and believe that their Parliamentary leaders are the same. There is no doubt that the cry of 'bluff' must be laid aside and the question of resistance regarded as a real and definite fact.⁵⁶

By the autumn of 1913 Neville Chamberlain - Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary - emphasised to the Cabinet that

⁵² TNA, CAB 37/109/23: Harrel to Birrell, 8 February 1912.

⁵³ TNA, CAB 37/109/23: Report of DI Murnane, 2 February 1912.

⁵⁴ TNA, CO 904/27: Summary Police Reports, 1913.

⁵⁵ TNA, CO 904/27: Report, Special Branch, July 1913.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the reports I now submit embody the carefully considered views of some of the most experienced and reliable officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary. I have every reason to believe that these reports correctly represent the situation as it has developed up to the present time.⁵⁷

But the police report equivocated, concluding that it 'will be passive rather than active. There will be no armed rebellion. There will be no attempt to meet the British Army in the field, but there will be a determined attempt to produce a state of lawlessness and violence in Ulster as to amount to anarchy.'⁵⁸ Note the distinction between civil war, as a confrontation of organized forces, versus anarchy. In 1912 the Government's position was based upon the differentiation of 'a state of lawlessness and violence' and civil war. The former, as had become endemic in China at the turn of the century, was a challenge to state authority and had to be suppressed, preferably by the police, but potentially by the military giving assistance to the civil power. The latter was the division of the state, of its institutions and personnel, between competing ideological positions. The Ulster Crisis presented the first blow to this differentiation. Organised resistance clearly went beyond rioting, but if the objective was to cause anarchy the movement lacked the broader political objectives associated with civil conflict. This would make it difficult for the government to regain control without also appearing to be initiating civil war against Ulster, because confronting a disciplined force would require the implementation of martial law, which under British law was tantamount to a declaration of civil conflict.⁵⁹

Restoring order in Ulster meant disarming the UVF. Considering the standing orders of the UVF and RIC it is difficult to see how this could have been accomplished without escalation initiated by the government. Upon the RIC moving to seize the arms they would have been confronted by the UVF. The UVF had standing orders that attempts 'to search for or seize arms by police.... is to be resisted... by bringing greatly superior numbers against the police and by informing them that we do not intend to be deprived of our means of defence. It is

⁵⁷ TNA, CO 904/27: Inspector General of the RIC Neville Chamberlain, covering letter to reports, 25 August 1913.

⁵⁸ TNA, CO 904/27: Report, Special Branch, July 1913.

⁵⁹ Phillimore, 'What Is a State of War in Law', pp. 128-134.

hoped that seizure may be prevented without bloodshed.⁶⁰ But there was no indication that the UVF would not resort to bloodshed if the police initiated it. The police could either withdraw defeated, or escalate the situation by ordering the crowd to disperse, and reading the Riot Act.⁶¹ The UVF would not have initiated violence against the police, because its commanders were well aware, as Wilfrid Spender explained, that to do so would give the government support in applying force: '[my] friends in the Committee of Imperial Defence and in the War Office... [said] that, although the Army would refuse to coerce the Ulster people [sic]... it would still be its duty to assist the Irish Constabulary in suppressing riots.'⁶² But if the Riot Act was read and the UVF did not disperse the next step would be to initiate the use of force. Owing to the superior numbers of the UVF it is hard to see how the police would make much progress with batons, and so their next recourse would be to their carbines. The regulations governing the use of firearms by the RIC were unequivocal:

Whenever the necessity of firing shall unfortunately arise, it ought to be at the leaders of a riot, or the assailants of the police, and if possible, with effect. Firing over the heads of mobs engaged in illegal pursuit must not be allowed, as a harmless fire, instead of intimidating, will give confidence to the daring and the guilty, while comparatively innocent persons in their rear might thereby be injured.⁶³

UVF standing orders were that 'no rifles or revolvers are to be used until the last extremity... The use of firearms is always taken as putting the user in the wrong, unless it can be proved that someone on the other side fired the first shot.'⁶⁴ Moreover the Ulster Unionist Council was clear that if the police fired on them during a seizure, they would be viewed as combatants.

So long as the police were not used as actual combatants, but were confined to the duty of protecting life and property, the Ulster Volunteer Force would detail men... to co-operate with the Royal Irish Constabulary... Should however the police be used for purely combatant purposes, or purposes that

⁶⁰ TNA, WO 35/209: Standing Orders to Ulster Volunteers 1914.

⁶¹ Neville Chamberlain, *Standing Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Irish Constabulary* (Dublin: Alex, Thom & Co, 1911), pp. 392-394.

⁶² PRONI, D1295/2/16: Memorandum by Wilfrid Spender.

⁶³ Chamberlain, *Standing Rules and Regulations for the Royal Irish Constabulary*, pp. 191-193.

⁶⁴ PRONI, D1540/3/74A: Memorandum on UVF South Down, by Captain Roger Hall, 14 June 1914.

would lead to determined resistance, they will be treated as hostile and dealt with accordingly.⁶⁵

A fight under these circumstances would invariably favour the UVF because where they would be free to fire on the RIC, the regulations governing the appropriate use of force by the RIC were exacting: 'whenever police... shall receive directions to fire, they must not, upon any account, do so, except by regular word of command from the senior Constabulary officer.'⁶⁶ The officer meanwhile was obliged to 'give deliberate word of command to one or more of his men to fire a specified number of rounds,'⁶⁷ and the officer would be held legally accountable for the effect of every round fired so that 'however well justified a policeman may consider himself in firing, the act... must become the subject of legal investigation.'⁶⁸ The RIC could call for assistance from the military, but without the declaration of martial law, which would mean that the use of deadly force would be governed by the laws of war, the military would be similarly constrained in their fire discipline. Moreover it would not be the military authorities that would be held accountable for the excessive use of force, but the officer directly in command of the troops, who was expected to use precisely the appropriate level of force on pain of prosecution. This was an impossible standard, but was upheld after multiple inquiries because as Richard Haldane crassly explained it was 'much better to have one man whom you can hang, if necessary.'⁶⁹ Thus without the declaration of martial law, British forces were liable to be initiating firefights that they were likely to lose, both in the field, and politically, since the UVF would not have fired first. General Sir Arthur Paget has been roundly criticised for his handling of British troops in Ireland, because he sought clarification over their commitment to engage in active operations in Ulster. Given the restrictions outlined above, much of this criticism seems unfair. As the historian Charles Townshend has argued, 'Paget's position was both morally cruel and militarily

⁶⁵ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell to Cabinet, 2 April 1914.

⁶⁶ Chamberlain, *Standing Rules and Regulations for the Royal Irish Constabulary*, pp. 191-193.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Charles Townshend, 'Military Force and Civil Authority in the United Kingdom, 1914-1921', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1989), p. 268.

impossible.⁷⁰ If the government were going to restore their monopoly over the use of force they would need to declare martial law, and to do so would be to declare civil conflict against the UVF when it was far from clear that the military would support such a move.

In March 1914 the Cabinet, still convinced that the Ulster Unionists were bluffing, decided to make its move. The UVF's activity was escalating, with the War Office warning 'that attempts may be made in various parts of Ireland by evil disposed persons to obtain possession of arms, ammunition and other Government stores,'⁷¹ recommending special measures. After extensive discussion, and reassurances from Sir John French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that the army would do its duty⁷² the Cabinet gave Sir Arthur Paget instructions for the withdrawal of units from vulnerable barracks in Ulster. Orders were distributed preparing for the formation of an Irish Field Force with troops to be moved from Scotland, and field pieces to be deployed in Ulster.⁷³ The precise intentions of the Cabinet are a matter of debate between those who argued the military manoeuvres were a show of force,⁷⁴ those who say they were preparations for the military imposition of Home Rule,⁷⁵ and those who assert that in practical terms they amounted to little more than the moving of a few hundred men to protect government stores.⁷⁶ The Cabinet's precise intentions are unknowable as no notes were taken in the key meetings,⁷⁷ but it is also of limited significance. The movement of troops to protect stores can only have been intended if there was a genuine fear of an attempt by the UVF to attack military units, and a show of force is by definition coercive. Even if the government believed that it would not lead to

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 276.

⁷¹ TNA, WO 35/209: B. Cubitt, War Office, 14 March 1914.

⁷² Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 119.

⁷³ TNA, WO 35/209: Organisation of the Field Force in Ireland.

⁷⁴ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 370.

⁷⁵ As Paget believed, BL/39/2/19: Statements by army officers about the Curragh Incident, M L MacEwen, 31 March 1914.

⁷⁶ Mark Coulter, 'Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: Imperial Soldier, Political Failure', *History Ireland*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2005), p. 28.

⁷⁷ Joseph Connell, 'Countdown to 2016: The Curragh "Mutiny"', *History Ireland*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2014), p. 66.

fighting, the War Office had engaged in planning for an escalated confrontation,⁷⁸ while Paget had warned the Prime Minister in person of such a possibility.⁷⁹ Whatever the preferences of ministers therefore the action had the potential for conflict, and the question to be confronted was the same in all cases: if there was violence was the government restoring law and order or waging civil war, and would the military back the government?

The military found operating without the provisions of martial law to be deeply problematic. Sir John French emphasised the extent to which the government had misjudged the possible consequences when he exclaimed on 18 March that the Government were ‘scattering troops all over Ulster as though it were a Pontypool coal strike’.⁸⁰ Ulster was not a typical case of the military supporting the civil power. Paget called together his officers on 20 March 1914 and informed them that they were to carry out operations in Ulster; although officers domiciled in Ulster did not have to take part, officers seeking to resign rather than do their duty would face Courts Martial. Paget has been roundly criticised, by his contemporaries, and by historians, for his ‘superfluous ultimatum’⁸¹, giving officers choices, and for being ‘a lunatic, a tactless idiot, unfit to command anywhere’.⁸² This seems grossly unfair. That he felt it necessary to get an assurance from his men is very telling. The involvement of former soldiers in setting up the UVF had been noted from the outset.⁸³ It was widely known that the ‘UVF were permitted unofficially to use the Army Rifle ranges, and many regular officers and NCOs spent their leave in training our men’.⁸⁴ Sympathy for the UVF in the military was widespread, and extended to the Director of Military Operations, Henry Wilson, who did all in his power short of mutiny to disrupt the Government’s intentions. General Gough was known to be potentially mutinous on the point of Ulster. He had told Henry Wilson on Boxing Day 1913 that if it came to a fight he would

⁷⁸ TNA, WO 35/209: Organisation of the Field Force in Ireland.

⁷⁹ Paul O’Brian, *A Question of Duty: The Curragh Incident 1914* (Dublin: New Island, 2004), pp. 68-75.

⁸⁰ Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, p. 120.

⁸¹ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (New York: OUP, 1998), p. 46.

⁸² Adjutant General Ewart, cited by O’Brian, *A Question of Duty*, p. 151.

⁸³ TNA, CAB 37/109/23: Report of DI Murnane, 2 February 1912.

⁸⁴ PRONI, D1295/2/16: Memorandum by Wilfrid Spender.

resign and join the UVF,⁸⁵ and made clear to Major General Charles Fergusson that he had no intention of following his orders. Sixty other officers joined him in sending in their resignations, and those that remained loyal were

unanimously in sympathy with the Ulster loyalists and regard with the utmost disgust the possibility of having to lead our men against them. We are prepared to do our duty because: 1) We realise that we must obey the orders of our King under any circumstances. 2) We consider it incumbent on ourselves to preserve, as far as is in our power, the British Army from disruption.⁸⁶

Gough would later claim that if he had been ordered north, rather than given the choice, he would have done so.⁸⁷ Whether this is true or not, we cannot say. Many officers articulated contradictory positions at different times, Gough included. Most of the testimony was written after the event in a deeply politicised context. The important point is not whether, if Paget had rephrased his orders, Gough would have moved some of his men to a different barracks, but whether in the event of an escalation in violence the soldiers would have stood by the Government. That uncertainty existed on this point is sufficient to demonstrate that the danger was real. And the uncertainty over loyalty extended to the men. Paget wrote in a letter to the War Office that:

I am still to some extent in the dark as to the possible attitude of the rank and file. It is generally expected, and in this view I concur, that the men will follow their officers, but feeling on the subject is undoubtedly very bitter, and it is possible that the opinion which I hold may be even largely falsified by events.⁸⁸

Although Charles Fergusson's entreaties demonstrate that clear leadership might have persuaded the various regiments to follow their original orders, he was plain that no one was enthusiastic about them, and whether he could have forced them to fight is doubtful.⁸⁹ To descend a few ranks, Captain Forster, in a letter to his family shortly after the incident, wrote that '[you] ask about the men... now

⁸⁵ Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, p. 119.

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 35/209: Brigadier-General P. Rolt, 22 March 1914.

⁸⁷ O'Brian, *A Question of Duty*, p. 78.

⁸⁸ TNA, WO 35/209: Irish Command to WO, Reporting Situation Immediately After Curragh Incident, March 1914.

⁸⁹ TNA, WO 35/209: Major General Charles Fergusson's Memorandum, 27 March 1914.

that the example has been set I don't think they'll fight the UVF.⁹⁰ His letters are interesting because they were entirely private, had no political or military object, and highlight how officers were unclear where their duty lay. His attitudes are consistent with those described by more senior officers as representing many of his comrades. Forster noted that 'from inside [the Army] one felt absolutely certain that movements on a big scale were intended against Ulster at the end of last week.'⁹¹ He conceded that 'it is all very unfortunate and terribly bad for discipline. But if it has saved civil war I suppose we must hold it cheap at the price.'⁹² This last point is crucial, because it highlights that officers saw civil war as a possibility, and this makes Forster's observations about his duty in civil war all the more striking:

One's own views are, as stated in Parliament by some cove at the time of the American Colonies War – 'when a soldier's country is fighting he has no call to question the right or wrong of its cause,' But when it comes to civil war he can and should obey his own feelings.⁹³

In a subsequent letter Forster made it clear in which directions his feelings took him:

You may be quite sure none of us are going to fight the UVF. Police duty one must do if required, as we've often had to do before, much as we hate it. My mind was made up some time ago - the only question that troubled us was whether it was playing the game to hang on until the last moment and then chuck ones hand in... and give a direct example of mutiny.⁹⁴

Forster was not forced to make this decision, as the government backed down and stopped any attempt to force Ulster to accept Home Rule. From then on British policy shifted to try and reach an accommodation based on exclusion. Birrell eventually came around to the view that 'of the pluck of all the Ulster Volunteers and of the religious fury of many there can be no question - and that they are now well drilled and well armed is also certain,' although, ever the optimist, he argued that 'the Ulster Volunteers are already sick unto death of drilling... Their leaders are perceiving that their men must either fight now or Company by Company dwindle away and disappear.'⁹⁵ This assessment both

⁹⁰ IWM, Document 10978: Letter from Captain F. Forster to Family, 25 March 1914.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Letter from Forster to Family, Undated.

⁹⁵ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell to Cabinet, 15 June 1914.

admitted the readiness of the UVF to fight, and yet held out the hope that in stalling the Government might be able to finish the UVF by desertion; an unlikely prospect. The Government also stopped calling ‘bluff’ at warnings of civil war.

It has been argued that Bonar Law also wanted to avert escalation,⁹⁶ but this is to misunderstand his intent. Law saw the crisis as fatal to the government. ‘They have been lying like troopers,’ Law wrote to Carson, ‘and what is more important is that I think the country sees that they have been lying deliberately deceiving the House of Commons.’⁹⁷ He was not scared into finding a compromise having looked over the brink, but rather found his fears vindicated, and felt confident that the government would fall. Moreover as leader of the Unionist Party he was aware, as Lord Lansdowne warned, that ‘any settlement based on the acceptance of Home Rule, with special treatment for Ulster, would be bitterly resented by a number of our supporters.’⁹⁸ Letters from constituency officers were clear that

our attitude in the past has been so firmly against any weakening of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, that we should be false not only to our own principles, but also to our supporters in the constituency, if we did not maintain a strenuous opposition to Home Rule.⁹⁹

Law’s participation in talks seeking a special settlement for Ulster was therefore tactical. As Lord Selborne explained to Lansdowne:

If any arrangement about the exclusion of Ulster be come to, to which we are parties, our consent should be based on the avoidance of Civil War pending an appeal to the electors... If we have not assented at all to the Government of Ireland Bill, and if we have assented to the amending Bill solely for the purposes of avoiding Civil War pending an appeal to the electors, then we shall be free, and this I think is essential, to declare that, if the electors decide in our favour we shall hold ourselves authorised to deal with the Irish situation as we think best.¹⁰⁰

The point was not to come to an arrangement, but to appear to be a responsible party, so that when the government forced the issue and violence erupted, Home Rule could be repealed upon the collapse of the Liberal government. As the historian Jeremy Smith neatly explained, Bonar Law’s position ‘required footwork

⁹⁶ Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 149.

⁹⁷ PAW, BL/34/2/51: Bonar Law to Carson, 26 March 1914.

⁹⁸ PAW, BL/31/1/25: Lansdowne to Bonar Law, 11 December 1913.

⁹⁹ PAW, BL/32/3/7: Hugh Montgomery and Sidney Herbert to Bonar Law, 4 May 1914.

¹⁰⁰ PAW, BL/32/3/2: Selborne to Lansdowne, 1 May 1914.

of rare quality; to be seen dancing to the tune of compromise while never actually waltzing with Asquith.¹⁰¹

The principles involved had not changed, and consequently the Buckingham Palace Conference of 21 July was unsuccessful in its search for a negotiated settlement. It is nevertheless worth returning to the King's speech at the opening of the conference, as he appealed for compromise:

For months we have watched with deep misgivings the course of events in Ireland. The trend has been surely and steadily towards an appeal to force, and today the cry of Civil War is on the lips of the most responsible and sober minded of my people. We have in the past endeavoured to act as a civilising example to the world, and to me it is unthinkable, as it must be to you, that we should be brought to the brink of fratricidal strife upon issues apparently so capable of adjustment.¹⁰²

The King's comments highlighted a contradiction in how civil war was conceived. On the one hand he argued that Britain was an example of civilization, and that those on opposite sides of a potential civil war were 'the most responsible and sober minded' people, and yet he also implied that 'fratricidal strife' would undermine Britain's status as a civilizing example, and by implication that civil war was not civilized conduct. The civil thing to do was to negotiate. This was a fundamental and tragic paradox in the established conception of civil war; because it arose from questions of civic principle, issues that ought to be settled by civilized means could not be. In 1914 civil war was perceived as a tragedy befalling civilized states, because it represented the recourse to arms to settle questions of civic principle. In the years that followed this would give way to the view that states that descended into civil war risked no longer being civilized. It was a subtle change, but as we shall see in the following chapters, one of great significance.

Unionist brinkmanship in 1914 was undermined by the outbreak of the First World War, which, as Unionists and Nationalists joined the colours, prevented the unpacking of the conceptual issues raised by the Curragh Incident, until the Easter Rising of 1916. The debates surrounding the Curragh Incident highlight how Asquith and Bonar Law emphasised different strands of the traditional conception of civil war. These differences were not as apparent in non-existential foreign policy issues, but in the context of Ireland they led to a divergence in how the two

¹⁰¹ Smith, 'Bluff, Bluster and Brinkmanship', p. 173.

¹⁰² BLOU, MS. Asquith 39: The King, Buckingham Palace, 21 July 1914.

leaders understood events. The intensity of the Ulster Crisis exposed the ambiguities in their thinking, and as they improvised, under intense political pressure, and without the analytical detachment possible over foreign policy, key concepts conflicted. The questions raised by these contradictions were not settled, but remained open, paving the way for the language and ideas surrounding civil war to be reshaped by events. The Curragh Incident opened three crucial questions as to how civil war was understood. Firstly there was the question of leadership and the impetus for violence. Asquith considered civil war to be an armed struggle declared and organised by a community's political leaders, thereby splitting the political institutions of the state. Violence from below was civil disorder. Bonar Law and Edward Carson by contrast saw the drive towards violence stemming from the determination of the people of Ulster, and Law, sympathetic to their position, made clear that he would feel obliged to follow them into the fray.

The second question concerned the role of the law. Asquith largely understood civil war as a legal process. Once an insurrectionary government was formed the state would declare war on it, and thereby transition to the laws of war. At the heart of this idea however lay an awkward contradiction: how could it be legal to take up arms against the government? Bonar Law argued that what was at stake in civil war was a fundamental disagreement about how the country should be constituted, and that it therefore put the constitution in suspense. Yet since law and the authority of institutions are legally derived from the constitution, this opened the door to questions about the implications of civil war for the integrity of the state.

Finally there was the legal distinction itself. The threshold for civil conflict in British law was whether the courts could function. If they could not, the government was compelled to implement martial law, which marked the opening of hostilities. This distinction had been tested in South Africa, with the implementation of a bifurcated legal system, but the Curragh Incident undermined the distinction, because the blurring of the line between military aid to the civil power and civil conflict opened the way for the expansion of what was understood to constitute civil war. The Ulster Crisis disrupted the existing consensus; the Easter Rising of 1916 would propel British thinking towards a new outlook on civil conflict, its causes, and implications.

Easter 1916: Irish Insurgents or German Puppets?

As the historian Thomas Kennedy has argued, ‘the Liberals foolishly ignored Ulster until it was too late,’¹⁰³ and were eventually forced to rethink the threat posed by the UVF, acknowledging the risk of civil war. But if Bonar Law was more perceptive of the challenges posed by Ulster, he was willfully blind to what might happen if Home Rule were denied; ‘ultimately, the Tories disregarded or disdained, admittedly at a greater cost to the nation than to their party, any persons in Ireland who were not Protestants living in six Ulster counties.’¹⁰⁴ In this respect Asquith had a broader perspective. In order to deconstruct the effect of the Easter Rising on the conceptualisation of civil war among British officials, it is first necessary to unpack their preconceptions concerning Irish nationalist militias and revolutionary groups from a civil war perspective.

As in the north, militant organization was not a new phenomenon. There was a long tradition of both secret,¹⁰⁵ and open armed mobilization among Irish nationalists. However historians widely agree that the scale of the militarization of Irish politics before 1914 ‘went far outside the normal conventions of liberal politics,’¹⁰⁶ with the institutions central to the Irish struggle for independence created through a process of mirroring. Social organizations like Na Fianna Eireann were launched ‘in order to counteract the influence in Ireland of the pro-British Boy Scout’s movement.’¹⁰⁷ Similarly the UVF were established to fight against Home Rule, whether it was to be imposed by a devolved Irish executive, or the Imperial Government, and were, as the historian Charles Townshend put it, ‘the decisive spur to the militarization of nationalist politics.’¹⁰⁸ The Irish National

¹⁰³ Thomas Kennedy, ‘Troubled Tories: Dissent and Confusion Concerning the Party’s Ulster Policy, 1910-1914’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2007), p. 572.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ James McConnell and Fearghal McGarry, *The Black Hand of Republicanism: The Fenians and History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); Brian Jenkins, *The Fenian Problem: Insurgency and Terrorism in a Liberal State, 1858–1874* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Marnie Hay, ‘The Foundation and Development of Na Fianna Eireann, 1909-16’, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 41 (2008), pp. 54

¹⁰⁸ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 36.

Volunteers emerged as a counterweight to what ‘the north began.’¹⁰⁹ This created a cycle of escalation, for as Paul Bew argues, ‘Ulster unionists undoubtedly saw Redmond’s Irish Volunteer movement as an attempt to “coerce a province under the yoke of home rule.”’¹¹⁰ This narrative of action, reaction and counteraction, of the emergence of the ‘two Irelands,’¹¹¹ is widely accepted in the historiography, though it must be noted that it does not apply to the Citizen Army, established to defend the picket from strikebreakers.¹¹² It is important to appreciate however that among British officials the INV were not initially seen as a nationalist version of the UVF.

When Asquith feared rioting in Ulster, the risk in the South seemed to be comparable, but on a greater scale. In September 1912 he told the King – as summarised by Lord Lansdowne - that ‘the rejection of the Home Rule Bill would occasion a conflagration in the rest of Ireland by the side of which an Ulster outbreak would pale into insignificance.’¹¹³ In the wake of the Curragh Incident however it was no longer the case that one side posed a greater but essentially comparable threat, but that the type of threat was altogether different, civil war in the North, as opposed to civil disorder in the South. The significance of this distinction is that it further highlights the importance Asquith attached to the institutional and political ties of an insurrectionary movement in turning an internal conflict into civil war.

Shortly after the Curragh Incident, Augustine Birrell submitted a report to Cabinet ‘because I wish the Cabinet to be in a position to watch the growth of the “National” as distinguished from the “Ulster Volunteers” movement,’¹¹⁴ in which he argued that although ‘at present these Irish National Volunteers are composed of somewhat ragged regiments, ill equipped as yet and not particularly well disciplined, they are daily increasing in number and may become a formidable

¹⁰⁹ Eoin MacNeill, ‘The North Began’, *Claidheamh Soluis* (1 November 1913), p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Paul Bew, ‘Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3 (1999), p. 732.

¹¹¹ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*.

¹¹² D R O’Connor Lysaght, ‘The Irish Citizen Army, 1913-16: White, Larkin and Connolly’, *History Ireland*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2006), pp. 16-21.

¹¹³ PAW, BL 39/1/E7: Memorandum by Lord Lansdowne, September 1912.

¹¹⁴ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell to Cabinet, 2 April 1914.

force in the future.'¹¹⁵ There was recognition that the Cabinet had allowed the UVF to take root and expand to the point where it was a serious threat, and the INV ought to be confronted before it posed a comparable problem. But Birrell also stressed to his colleagues that he did not see the INV as a parallel force to the UVF, noting that the 'practical dangers of the immediate situation may have been increased by the existence of this new force, owing... to their lack of responsible leaders. This perhaps may be so, but I am not sure of it by any means.'¹¹⁶ He felt that they were separate issues, and again, we see the distinction between an organisation with political leadership, and one without. This was consistent with what the Government was receiving in police and intelligence reports. Days before Birrell began reporting to the Cabinet on the INV, a report had emerged emphasising the differences between the two forces:

Compared with the UVF the INV at present are nearly 2 years behind in organisation and drill; are only about 1/10th as strong; have not as leaders the men who are the principal people in any locality, e.g. country gentlemen, business men, or factory owners; have not the funds that exist in the wealthiest province; have not the open support of a political party at Westminster.¹¹⁷

Another report stressed the shallowness of support for the INV in Irish society, and emphasised the limited social grouping from which it drew its strength:

No great enthusiasm for INV at present in neighbourhood of Enniskillen. In County Tyrone about 1100 INV are reported to exist. They are not supported by R C [Roman Catholic] Clergy and their danger at present consists in their being an undisciplined body. The R C Bishop of Raphoe is reported not to approve of the INV.¹¹⁸

Although the potential for the size of the INV to expand, and for it to become more disciplined, was appreciated, even at the same size as the UVF it would not pose a comparable threat. There was no question that the British Army could defeat the UVF or the INV if they ever fought. But fighting the UVF meant fighting the population of Ulster, meant fighting the opposition, meant a potential split in the army and the collapse of public support for the government in Britain. So long as the INV was deemed to be disconnected from the majority of the Irish

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell to Cabinet, 15 June 1914.

¹¹⁷ TNA, WO 35/209: Memorandum comparing the INV and UVF, 26 March 1914.

¹¹⁸ TNA, WO 35/209: Summary of reports received on INV, 1 April 1914.

population, lacking the support of influential members of society and poorly funded, attacking it would not present the same risks. If the INV opened hostilities the rebellion would be crushed, and the question of civil war would not arise. There was, in the view of many officers, an important difference between waging a war against separatists, as opposed to loyalists. This was admitted, not least, by the INV. Maurice Moore, an INV organizer, wrote to Birrell on 15 May 1914 to warn that 'if an attempt is made to cut off national counties such as Tyrone and Fermanagh or a city like Derry from Nationalist Ireland, very serious trouble will ensue... and you will have to send in General Gough and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade.'¹¹⁹ But Moore admitted that 'the cavalry conscience will not be so tender charging Nationalists, but the Government will be disgraced for ever.'¹²⁰ The Government did not want to confront the Nationalists - it would lose the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party - but such a move would not necessarily ruin the Conservatives, especially if, as Moore intimated, the Nationalists started the fighting. Nor would it undermine the British state.

A well-drilled and equipped INV would not pose a comparable threat to the UVF, but it was nevertheless an undesirable development, and recognising that the UVF had armed without much opposition, the Government wanted to ensure the same mistakes were not repeated in the South. The difference in the risks involved in fighting the INV also prompted the government to take a harder line, which led to accusations of bias. In early July Arthur Lynch demanded to know why the Government was '[showing] an unfair discrimination against the Nationalist force?'"¹²¹ Birrell was forced to concede that

on Saturday last 5,000 armed men or thereabouts, with five machine guns, marched through the main streets of the city of Belfast. These men were members of the Ulster Volunteers. General Macready was in Belfast. No orders of any kind were given to the police to hold up the Volunteers or to demand the surrender of their rifles and machine guns.¹²²

Birrell denied bias, but conceded anxiety about the consequences of clamping down on the UVF. In contrast when the Nationalists landed arms at Howth on 26 July 1914 they were confronted by the military, who were pelted by the crowd and

¹¹⁹ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7034: Maurice Moore to Birrell, 15 May 1914.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Arthur Lynch, HC, *Hansard* (9 July 1914), vol. 64, cols. 1214-1216.

¹²² Augustine Birrell, HC, *Hansard* (27 July 1914), vol. 65, col. 936.

eventually opened fire, killing four civilians. The incident was a public relations disaster, and underscored the difficulties inherent in the military providing aid to the civil power. It would be wrong to attribute the contrasting military deployment primarily to the different assessment of the INV and UVF - the Howth landing was conducted openly, and the authorities feared an armed march on Dublin Castle - but that the Government did not confront the UVF when it was openly brandishing its arms shows the greater caution used in relation to Ulster following the Curragh Incident. This would have serious implications later. The long running perception that the risks in confronting Irish nationalist groups were less severe than confronting unionist ones would be one of the 'unspoken assumptions' underpinning the harsh crack down on the Easter rebels.

The outbreak of the First World War diminished the immediate significance of these distinctions, at least on the surface. As the historian George Boyce has noted, there 'was in all parts of Ireland a genuine and spontaneous sympathy with the allied cause,'¹²³ though political maneuver continued at Westminster, as the IPP lost their hold on the Cabinet with the formation of the unity Government.¹²⁴ The UVF and the INV became vehicles for general recruiting and the Military Authorities declared that 'under the altered state of the existing conditions it is not now considered necessary to trouble you to supply any further reports'¹²⁵ on INV activity. However one group did catch the interest of the police. When Redmond took over the Volunteers some splintered to form the separate Irish Volunteers who refused to join the war effort, and instead worked towards revolutionary ends.¹²⁶ The activities of this branch alarmed the authorities when 'efforts of the leaders of the Irish Volunteers (Sinn Fein Section) to obtain arms and ammunition' surfaced:

No less than 675 rifles with ammunition were reported as being forwarded by Messer's Holloway and Naughton, Gunmakers, of Birmingham, to these firms in Dublin of whom it was known that they had already delivered rifles

¹²³ George Boyce, 'British Opinion, Ireland, and the War, 1916-1918', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1974), p. 576.

¹²⁴ Patricia Jalland and John Stubbs, 'The Irish Question after the Outbreak of War in 1914: Some Unfinished Party Business', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 96, no. 381 (1981), pp. 778-807.

¹²⁵ TNA, CO 904/27: Irish Command to Dublin Castle, 15 September 1914.

¹²⁶ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp. 90-121.

to members of the Irish Volunteer Committee.¹²⁷

This was a small minority within a group that had already been considered by British officials to be on the fringes of Irish society. The government view of the group was typified by the assessment of Robert Starkie, Resident Magistrate in Cork, who assured Birrell that 'the Sinn Feiners in the Volunteers represented less than one-seventh of the total number.'¹²⁸ Informers consistently gave a similar story, such as source 'Granite' who in early 1916 told his case officer how 'the organisers appear to be supplied with plenty of money, and every effort is being made to win over as many as possible of the members of the National or Redmond Volunteers. They have not, Granite observes, so far made any headway in this direction in Dublin.'¹²⁹ British officials were not entirely wrong in this assessment. As the historian Fearghal McGarry has observed in his study of the individuals who participated in the Easter Rising, by 'the turn of the century, Irish separatism remained a marginal and politically divided force.'¹³⁰ In the years leading up to the Rising of 1916, only 'a small minority joined radical bodies.'¹³¹ What was not appreciated by officials however was the myriad connections, familial, social, and cultural, that linked this minority into the wider Irish community, and which would lead many Irish citizens to feel a connection with them following the rising. This was a failure of analysis rather than a lack of information. One important cause of this analytical failure may have been the significance placed by British officials on German involvement in fermenting radical separatism. In the government's assessment, where the INV had some sympathy for their objectives among wider Irish society, the 'Sinn Feiners'¹³² as they came to be known, were

¹²⁷ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7034: Memorandum of the Steps Taken by the Irish Government Acting in Conjunction with the Military Authorities in Ireland to Control the Importation, Sale, and Manufacture of Arms, Ammunition, Explosive, and War-Like Stores in Ireland, 19 December 1914.

¹²⁸ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7034: Memorandum of Interview, 7 December 1914.

¹²⁹ PRONI, MIC 448/10: Memorandum of Interview with Source Granite, 27 March 1916.

¹³⁰ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising; Ireland, Easter 1916* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 19.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 41.

¹³² Although they were not part of the Sinn Fein movement, this mislabeling was the standard term of reference among British officials, in the press, and among many Irish civilians. It is therefore used in this thesis, so as to avoid confusion by applying labels inconsistent with the sources being cited.

thought to be pro-German, and therefore abhorrent to their neighbours whose sons were giving their lives in France. Early in 1915 Birrell circulated to Cabinet reports detailing the connection with Germany:

Clan-na-Gael are an American society... who advocate extreme measures and the employment of physical force for the purpose of obtaining the complete independence of Ireland... At the present crisis they look to the success of the German arms to procure Irish independence, and they have welcomed the pronouncements of Sir Roger Casement, Mr James Larkin, and Professor Kuno Mayer. I also annex a note on the Irish volunteers which explains how Mr Redmond detached from the original Provisional Committee the large section of the Volunteers willing to follow his leadership in friendliness to Great Britain, and how the small (Sinn Fein) section remaining under Mr John McNeill... carried on during the months of October and November last, in coordination with Larkin's Labour Organisation and Citizen Army, violent anti-British propaganda.¹³³

The report stated that:

The Clan-na-Gael have taken over military control of the Sinn Fein section of the Irish Volunteers. They will arrange the formation of an executive in New York with an inspecting officer who will work in conjunction with the local committees this side.¹³⁴

As is clear from the above the understanding in government was that the orders came from abroad, whereas in reality these were associations built upon mutual interest. This error not only caused the government to underestimate the threat, but also had implications for whether or not any ensuing rebellion was understood to be a civil conflict or a part of the global conflict. As outlined in the previous chapter, in Colombia and Persia foreign intervention had been perceived to be secondary, fuelling, but not causing the conflict, which was internally generated. That British officials thought the Sinn Feiners were being directed from abroad shows that they also thought the cause of the violence to be in part foreign. This presumption was important in determining why they would clamp down so harshly on the rebels, and why the Easter Rising was not thought of as civil war. Crucially, where in South Africa, British politicians had stressed the importance of leniency in reintegrating society after a civil conflict, because the Easter Rising was not interpreted as a civil conflict, that lesson was missed. But when, after the

¹³³ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Birrell, circulated to Cabinet, 15 January 1915.

¹³⁴ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7035: Report from Owen Brien on Clan-Na-Gael and Sinn Fein Volunteers, 28 December 1914.

rising, it was recognised that the impetus for rebellion was domestic this raised questions about when it was appropriate to intervene. In the Persian crisis of 1908 the argument had been made that if Britain backed the Constitutional Party they would give other countries the right to stir up trouble in Egypt, India or elsewhere. German interference in Ireland, and fears of foreign governments taking advantage of civil conflict, would blossom after the Easter Rising, and play a significant role in Russia. The immediate impact of the focus on foreign support was that the provision of foreign aid became the principal metric for measuring the likelihood of rebellion. In spite of warnings from informants prior to the Easter Rising, the Rebellion took the authorities completely by surprise. Reports had noted

that the young men of the Irish Volunteers are very anxious to start 'business' at once, and they are being backed up strongly by Connolly and the Citizen Army and things look as if they are coming to a crisis, as each man has been served out with a package of lint and surgical dressing etc, and a tin of food similar to that issued to soldiers.¹³⁵

But the British authorities did not envisage a rising without foreign backing, and as Sir John Maxwell concluded in the wake of the rebellion:

It is clear... that the Irish Executive... were satisfied that with the capture of Sir R. Casement and the failure of the German attempt to land arms, together with the postponement of the advertised Easter Sunday meeting of the Sinn Fein Volunteers, all danger was, for the time, over.¹³⁶

Sir John French, by then Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, agreed with Maxwell's assessment, stating that it was reasonable to 'assume that the capture of Sir Roger Casement and the sinking of the ship containing arms, would put an end to any projected rising.'¹³⁷ Representatives of Irish Nationalist opinion were as surprised and aghast as the Government - although they too had been warned in even greater detail¹³⁸ - John Redmond telling the Commons that 'the whole of this incident in Ireland has been to me a misery and a heart breaking... I entirely agreed with [Mr Birrell's] view that the danger of an outbreak of this kind was not a real

¹³⁵ PRONI, MIC 448/10: Detective Office, 16 March 1916.

¹³⁶ TNA, WO 32/4307: John Maxwell to Sir John French, 30 April 1916.

¹³⁷ TNA, WO 32/4307: Field Martial Commanding-in-Chief Home Forces to The Secretary War Office, 2 May 1916.

¹³⁸ Conor Mulvagh, *The Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp. 130-131.

one.'¹³⁹ These developments are important because they make plain the assumptions underpinning British official thinking about the rebels in the immediate aftermath of the rising. The rebels were an extremist minority, without roots across wider Irish society, and backed by a foreign adversary. They were guilty of treason and rebellion. The conflict was not civil war, because although the battlefield was within the community, the enemy was outside the boundaries of Ireland's political landscape. For a long time the 'Sinn Feiners' lack of traction among the population had been a reason for official restraint; the argument was that measures designed to suppress their 'sedition' would invariably affect Irish nationalists who were loyal to the war effort, and lessen enthusiasm for recruitment; an argument frequently advanced by John Dillon among others and which Birrell accepted.¹⁴⁰ This policy was deemed to have failed in the wake of the Rebellion. In the House of Lords the Government was criticised for 'making any but the most feeble efforts to suppress' armed groups and seditious publications, despite being 'perfectly aware that in Dublin alone large bodies of Sinn Feiners have existed, perfectly armed, perfectly equipped, and constantly drilled for some months past.'¹⁴¹ In the press too the claim by Nationalists such as Colonel Moore that harsh measures might fuel rebellious sentiment was brushed aside as a case already disproved by events; as John Strachey, editor of *The Spectator* observed, 'we were warned that if we interfered with the Sinn Fein movement the result would be insurrection. We did not interfere with it - and the insurrection came.'¹⁴²

The language employed by the government to describe the threat was of rebellion, a treasonous internal uprising, but simultaneously orchestrated from beyond Britain, in America and Germany. Sir John Maxwell, justifying the fierce response from the authorities, stated publicly that in 'view of the gravity of the Rebellion and its connection with German intrigue and propaganda, and in view of the great loss of life and destruction of property... [it was] imperative to inflict the

¹³⁹ John Redmond, HC, *Hansard* (3 May 1916), vol. 82, cols. 36-37.

¹⁴⁰ BLOU, MS.Eng.c.7034: Memorandum of Interview with John Dillon, 16 March 1916.

¹⁴¹ Viscount Middleton, HL, *Hansard* (26 April 1916), vol. 21, col. 821.

¹⁴² PAW, STR/21/1/22: Strachey to Mrs Green, 4 May 1916.

most severe sentences on the known organisers.¹⁴³ This duality of the external threat from within is reflected in the charges against the rebel leaders, such as Countess Markievicz, who was found guilty of ‘an act to wit did take part in an armed rebellion and in the waging of war against His Majesty the King, such act being of such a nature as to be prejudicial to the Defence of the Realm and being done with the intention and for the purpose of assisting the enemy.’¹⁴⁴ Note that she was accused of ‘waging a war’, but not a civil war. The view that assisting Germany was the ‘intention’ and ‘purpose’ of the rising, rather than an effect of it, is revealing.

Evidence rapidly emerged of the importance of German support in the eyes of rebel leaders. Patrick Pearse admitted from gaol that ‘I understand that the German expedition which I was counting on actually set sail but was defeated by the British.’¹⁴⁵ Other rebels attested to the importance of belief in German aid; as one wrote from prison, the ‘yarn about 20,000 Germans landing put great spirit into our lads. They feared nothing but God and really thought that Ireland’s hour had come.’¹⁴⁶ The initial response across Ireland was hostile to the rebellion, as was widely noted in intelligence reports and personal accounts such as in the diary of Captain Brett, a member of a flying column of the Connaught Rangers, who described how he ‘marched to Enniscorthy - 12 to 15 miles - where we were told the rebels had felled trees across the road to impede our advance. They had, but the engineers soon blew them up and we arrived safely... in the early afternoon and had a great welcome, the rebels having fled.’¹⁴⁷ Responsible for finding billets for the men he would ride alone ahead of the column on a motorbike and found that ‘everyone was very nice to me.’¹⁴⁸

The problem was that British policymakers fell victim to projection: assuming that the Irish population would see things the same way. Although the rebels’ political opinions had little traction, many Irishmen and women looked past

¹⁴³ PRONI, D989/C/5/51: Irish Times Hand Book, Easter 1916, Sir John Maxwell in Daily Mail, 18 May 1916, p. 62.

¹⁴⁴ PRONI, D4131/K/1/4/3/2A: Court Schedule in the Field Court Martial Countess Constance Georgina Markievicz, 4 May 1916.

¹⁴⁵ BLOU, MS. Asquith 43: Patrick Pearse to Mother, from Prison, 1 May 1916.

¹⁴⁶ BLOU, MS. Asquith 43: Joe, Prisoner E50 to James Caffey, 5 June 1916.

¹⁴⁷ IWM, Document 7332: Private Papers of Captain C Brett.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

their differing politics and saw countrymen, neighbours, young boys foolishly swept up in a disaster. Reports started suggesting that 'sympathy for the rebels has generally increased,' and that 'more general disapproval is shown at the alleged severity of the Government.'¹⁴⁹ This did not mean that there was a growing support for a republic, which the rebels had proclaimed, but that people were sympathetic to the individuals. Typical was the attitude of the people of Louth; 'While the vast majority of the people have no sympathy with the rebels, they do not approve of severe punishment for the rank and file many of whom they consider dupes...'¹⁵⁰ Likewise in Mayo: 'Public feeling generally against the Rebellion and its speedy suppression afforded generally satisfaction and relief. Some sympathy for the dupes of the rebellion and hopes expressed that they will not be severely dealt with.'¹⁵¹ The experience of many loyal inhabitants when confronted by Imperial forces was unpleasant. F. Powell, living in Dublin at the time, described the aftermath of the rebellion:

Monday Morning 6:15: ... a sharp rap at the door and I call come in, and an instant afterwards a Military officer stands at the foot of my bed pointing a pistol at my head. I laugh and tell him to put away his plaything for I didn't like the looks of it. He tells me he wants to see what's in the large tin trunk at the top of the house. I explain that the box belongs to my son who is away at... a Cadet School... I show sufficient matter to convince him that what I say is true. However they were here to search the whole house and I'm told to get out of bed. I quickly struggle into my clothes and go into the next room [where] I found all the other members of the family, some in pyjamas and a sheet round them, we were all there while the Military... ransacked the house, they had been sniped at the night before from our block so they thought and were looking for the enemy.¹⁵²

In Dublin, such procedures were understandable, but that such behaviour could be extended across Ireland, to areas untouched by the rebellion, caused an intense sense of military dominance and arbitrary justice. The result, as Sir John Maxwell told Asquith, was a lack of cooperation; 'I fear the total arms given up or seized [by the flying columns] was not large... due to the action of Irish MPs in voicing the protests against the actions of the Military Authorities, also to the fear

¹⁴⁹ BLOU, MS. Asquith 44: Public Attitude and Opinion as to the Recent Outbreak, 25 May 1916.

¹⁵⁰ BLOU, MS. Asquith 44: State of the Country at the End of May 1916.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² IWM, Document 16420: Private Papers F. Powell.

that we would disarm the National Volunteers.'¹⁵³ That sense was quite justified. There was to be no confusion over military aid to the civil power this time, all of the usual thresholds for martial law were put aside, and the legal system was thrown into confusion. Although Birrell warned Cabinet 'that grave possibility of very bad effects was anticipated if Martial Law was extended to the very large areas which, at preset, show no sign of disturbance,' the Cabinet decreed that Martial Law would be declared across Ireland, though with the baffling provision that 'the power exercisable under the proclamation will be not put into force... unless urgent local circumstances necessitate immediate action, and that otherwise the ordinary machinery of the law will continue to operate.'¹⁵⁴

To read the *Irish Times* one would get the impression that the legal procedures were followed as usual, since 'insurgents had taken over the Four Courts and its precincts during Easter Week' and because the 'courts, offices, judges' chambers and Law Library had been... rudely thrown about and in some cases injured' it was 'not to be expected that the administration of the law could pursue its ordinary course.'¹⁵⁵ In consequence Martial Law was enacted. Except that it was not. Martial Law was declared but not implemented, and while the courts at Dublin may have been made dysfunctional this was not the case for the rest of the country. This threw the entire concept into confusion, with no clear line of authority, since after Birrell's resignation General Maxwell became the *de facto* head of the Irish Government, though he did not hold any such post. Maxwell repeatedly asked for clarification of both his role and the legal position. In doing so he advanced entirely contradictory arguments showing the confusion into which Britain's legal process had sunk. In the first place Maxwell, while emphasising the foreign links of the rebellion, recognised that it was a civil conflict within Britain: 'I do not think rebels should be allowed to be classed as prisoners of war. It would create a dangerous precedent and give colour to the rebel contention that Ireland is a separate nation.'¹⁵⁶ Moreover he felt that 'the fact that martial law is proclaimed undoubtedly acts as a deterrent to crime, the agitation for its repeal is

¹⁵³ BLOU, MS. Asquith 37: Maxwell to Asquith, 26 May 1916.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, CAB 42/12/12: Draft Conclusions of the War Committee, 28 April 1916.

¹⁵⁵ PRONI, D989/C/5/51: Irish Times Hand Book, Easter 1916, The Rebellion and the Law, p. 245.

¹⁵⁶ TNA, WO 32/4307: General Maxwell to Mr Davis, 11 July 1916.

not genuine and would be interpreted as weakness by most and with dismay by loyalists.¹⁵⁷ And yet, in the very same letter, Maxwell noted that 'I do not want the military to intervene until called on by the police and I had directed that all arrests must be made by the latter,'¹⁵⁸ and that 'things are practically normal. The Law Courts and Courts of Summary Jurisdiction are exercising their function and there has been no necessity or reason for military interference.'¹⁵⁹ But an area of consistent concern was that the 'idea is prevalent that I have been entrusted with greater powers than is the case.'¹⁶⁰ Maxwell had been reporting for some time that the ambiguity of his legal status was leading to hostility to the Government. Almost a month earlier he had written that:

A grievance is now manufactured because martial law has been declared. All public bodies spend their time in passing resolutions against it. There is confusion in that the Defence of the Realm Act and Regulations are thought to be Martial Law regulations. The fact remains that no one in Ireland has been hurt by martial law, because it has not been enforced... The tendency now is to discredit the government and shift on its shoulders all blame for the rebellion.... There is no Lord Lieutenant or Chief Secretary. No one quite knows where they are or to whom to appeal. My position in regard to Civil Government should be clarified; it seems to be thought that I have been vested with powers that I do not possess.¹⁶¹

An unsympathetic observer might conclude that Maxwell was altogether confused. Lloyd George certainly felt that Maxwell was the cause of a lot of trouble in Ireland, complaining to Asquith that 'I am afraid Maxwell is making agreement impossible. If he succeeds the situation with which we shall be confronted in Ireland will be a serious one. The country must be governed, and if Home Rule is impossible, coercion will be the only alternative.'¹⁶² Maxwell, in Lloyd George's estimation lacked 'tact and restraint.'¹⁶³ This however is unfair to Maxwell. He showed much better foresight than many Cabinet members as to the likely long-term effects of 1916, and while his statements on Martial Law were contradictory, his fundamental point - that the legal position was unclear - was both true, and

¹⁵⁷ BLOU, MS. Asquith 37: Maxwell to Asquith, 17 July 1916.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ PAW, LG/D/15/1/18: Report on State of Ireland Since the Rebellion, Written by Maxwell, Circulated by Asquith, 24 June 1916.

¹⁶² PAW, LG/D/13/2/22: Lloyd George to Asquith, 10 June 1916.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

more important than he or the Cabinet appreciated. In the South African War martial law was enacted on top of, rather than replacing, civil law. The clear boundary between the two was further undermined in 1914 when the limitations of military aid to the civil power undermined confidence in the process. In 1916 this legal drift was taken further, and the boundaries between war and peace, between internal and external conflict, between fighting for the enemy, political opposition, and treason, were blurred. This had important consequences, not least for the concept of civil war, but the foremost result was arbitrary government.

The Royal Commission tasked with assessing the causes of the Rebellion came to the conclusion that from a policy point of view, the reason that the extremists were able to get arms in sufficient quantity was because of the relaxation of the laws on arms importation, the break down of the legal process owing to intimidation and obstruction, and a slow slide into lawlessness.¹⁶⁴ The solution was therefore the restoration of law and order. What the British Government did was to confuse law and order with control, and in place of a functional legal system, they utilised lawlessness and disorder to clamp down on the opposition. Both at the time and in subsequent histories the outcry at the execution of rebel leaders has received a great deal of attention. The historian Paul Bew described the executions as 'politically disastrous... [and] by British standards especially in Ireland, abnormally severe. It was an aberration generated by the pressure of total war.'¹⁶⁵ Perhaps just as important as the executions themselves however was that the trials were carried out in closed courts martial¹⁶⁶ in which even clemency was at the discretion of the Prime Minister;¹⁶⁷ information presented to the public was scarce; and Irishmen and women knew that some people were being wrongfully deported. The people of Fermoy, petitioned the Government to release detained 'men, who have been respectable, peaceable, and law abiding citizens of our town and district, were in no way connected with the

¹⁶⁴ PAW, BL/104/5/13: White Paper report of the Royal Commission on the Irish Rebellion 1916.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Bew, 'The Real Importance of Sir Roger Casement', *History Ireland*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1994), p. 45.

¹⁶⁶ TNA, WO 32/4307: GOC Dublin to Director of Personal Services. 24 May 1916.

¹⁶⁷ TNA, WO 32/4307: WO to Maxwell, 27 May 1918.

disturbances.'¹⁶⁸ In short, the sheer arbitrariness of the process undermined British claims to be the force of law and order. The Irish Attorney General, James Campbell, was ironically prescient when he argued that the repeal of Martial Law would lead to 'the disloyal and seditious element in the population' to become 'the real and effective Executive of Ireland.'¹⁶⁹ In fact it was the continuation of arbitrary legal practices that would lead to precisely this outcome.

The extent to which the British government's practices were believed to be arbitrary can be seen in how prepared people were to believe exaggerated reports. When John Dillon heard that the Bishop of Limerick had been arrested, he readily believed it. Dillon was assured by Lloyd George that 'there never was the slightest idea of arresting him. That of course would have been lunacy too fabulous, even for Maxwell.'¹⁷⁰ In fact Maxwell remained cautious in dealing with the Bishop. He wrote to Asquith that 'it is an exceedingly difficult matter to deal with... and I think that if His Holiness the Pope could be induced to advise the Cardinal Archbishop and Bishops in Ireland to prevent Priests mixing themselves with matters political, seditious, or unconnected with their spiritual position, some good might come of it.'¹⁷¹ But this did not matter, because people had lost faith in the judicial process. This was why Maxwell reported that harsh measures led to sympathy for the rebels, while the 'policy of clemency has not been attended with the best results,'¹⁷² since it was the process, not the outcome, that was causing such offence. Thus the belief that the British were a foreign and occupying power expanded, and the sentences against Irishmen and women felt like an affront to the country, rather than the fulfillment of the law. This was made plain in petitions, such as that for a stay of execution for Roger Casement. The petitioners did not make their case on the grounds of his guilt, innocence, or any previous act of nobility or service but simply on the basis of his nationality:

We feel that the death penalty has already been enacted upon too many of

¹⁶⁸ BLOU, MS. Asquith 43: Resolutions Passed unanimously By Fermoy Urban Council, 25 May 1916.

¹⁶⁹ PAW, LG/D/15/1/17: Memorandum of Irish Attorney General, James Campbell, 23 June 1916.

¹⁷⁰ PAW, LG/D/14/2/20: Lloyd George to Dillon, 9 June 1916.

¹⁷¹ BLOU, MS. Asquith 43: Maxwell to Asquith, 1 June 1916.

¹⁷² PAW, LG/D/15/1/18: Report on State of Ireland Since the Rebellion, Written by Maxwell, Circulated by Asquith, 24 June 1916.

our Countrymen and if carried out in his case will create a very deep feeling of distrust and unrest, not only in Ireland, but amongst Irishmen and Irishwomen in all parts of the world.¹⁷³

The Royal Commission also made clear that the rebellion was part of a process intimately connected with the events of 1912-1914. This may now seem obvious, but it was not the immediate conclusion of British officials, who had seen the rebels as disconnected from the mainstream political question of Home Rule. Some Home Rulers saw an opportunity in the aftermath of the rebellion, and openly argued that the 'feeling of the mass of the Irish nationalists at home and abroad is being turned from hostility to the Sinn Feiners to sympathy with them and to a deep distrust of England's bona fides as to Home Rule.'¹⁷⁴ The British, by creating the perception of arbitrary government and in creating a space for speculation about a new form of government by leaving Birrell's post vacant, made this a self-fulfilling prophecy. Maxwell was once again quite prescient when he wrote that:

The fact that the rebellion has brought Home Rule again onto the political platform induces them to think, with some reason that rebellion pays better than constitutional methods. Hence there is a widespread opposition to Mr Redmond and his party. We must now expect more extremist views to prevail.¹⁷⁵

His prediction was born out within the month as the 'police report that in some districts the nationalist and Irish Volunteers show a tendency to merge as Sinn Feiners.'¹⁷⁶

Following the failure of Lloyd George's attempt at an Irish settlement in 1916 - torpedoed in Cabinet by Walter Long and Lord Lansdowne - British attention was overwhelmed by the war. As the historian George Boyce has argued, 'Ireland was perceived as essentially subordinate to the war effort, as fairly low in the British order of priority; and the pattern of Anglo-Irish relations was determined by strategic necessities.'¹⁷⁷ Although Lloyd George succeeded in removing Maxwell,¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ BLOU, MS. Asquith 43: Petition for Stay of Execution of R Casement.

¹⁷⁴ PAW, LG/D/14/1/3: T P Gill, Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, Dublin, to Mr Asquith, 20 May 1916.

¹⁷⁵ PAW, LG/D/15/1/18: Report on State of Ireland Since the Rebellion, Written by Sir John Maxwell, Circulated by Asquith, 24 June 1916.

¹⁷⁶ BLOU, MS. Asquith 37: Maxwell to Asquith, 17 July 1916.

¹⁷⁷ Boyce, 'British Opinion, Ireland, and the War', pp. 578.

Irish policy became increasingly dominated by the War Office's foremost concern: recruitment. The collapse in support for Home Rule and the Irish Parliamentary Party in Ireland, with the corresponding political ascension of Sinn Fein, has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. Causes include widespread anger at the harsh measures taken against the Easter Rebels,¹⁷⁹ growing resentment against recruitment generally and outrage at the prospects of conscription in particular,¹⁸⁰ and the extent to which Redmond had stopped being an independent voice for Ireland.¹⁸¹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to add any judgement to the balance between these factors. Instead this chapter has focused on the

¹⁷⁸ IWM, Private Papers of John French, Document 7813: Lloyd George to John French, 26 October 1916.

¹⁷⁹ The 'staccato' and secretive process of execution outraged Irish public opinion, see Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 390-392. Patrick Pearse's belief that the Easter Rebels would become a 'blood sacrifice', may not have been the objective instead of victory, but was nevertheless viewed as a favourable outcome, see James Heaney, 'Chesterton, Pearse, and the Blood Sacrifice Theory of the 1916 Rising', *Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 103, no. 411 (2014), pp. 307-317. Although the Catholic Church opposed rebellion, and remained quiet on the rising, it did not on the subsequent executions, see Oliver Rafferty, 'The Church and the Easter Rising', *Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 105, no. 417 (2016), pp. 47-57.

¹⁸⁰ From 1914 support for recruitment had 'quickly become a key issue defining political allegiance among nationalists', see Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party*, p. 204. Those extolling recruitment, notably the IPP, 'were weakened by the unexpectedly protracted and bloody nature of the conflict', see Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 175. Henry Duke's argument against conscription was, as summarised by Alan Ward, that 'the Irish parliamentary party could not survive the contest with Sinn Fein if it failed to avert conscription', see Alan Ward, 'Lloyd George and the 1918 Irish Conscription Crisis', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1974), p. 108. As Ronan Fanning observes, conscription 'devastated what remained of the Nationalist Party's credibility', see Fanning, *Fatal Path*, p. 176.

¹⁸¹ Denis Gwynn noted that 'for a brief period John Redmond had attained... a status of almost unquestioned authority as the elected leader of the Irish people', and that such status could only precede a fall, see Denis Gwynn, 'John Redmond', *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 45, no. 180 (1956), p. 391. Fearghal McGarry identifies the rising as the transformative moment that created 'a new political elite' dedicated to republicanism and not Home Rule, see Fearghal McGarry, '1916 and Irish Republicanism: between Myth and History', John Horne and Edward Madigan (eds.), *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution, 1912-1923* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013), p. 47. Though as David Fitzpatrick observes, the 'impact of the Rising on popular nationalism was neither immediately obvious nor unambiguous', and took time to coalesce, which demands a recognition that the transition to Sinn Fein was far from inevitable, Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, p. 63.

arbitrary nature of British government after the Easter Rising, because it was the detachment of policy from established legal processes that would enable the increasing conflation of civil war with anarchy explored later. Henry Duke, Birrell's successor, may have received an unfair hearing in history, and been a competent administrator,¹⁸² but this is because his capacity to maintain a compromised system solved nothing. When the system of government in Ireland was altered, it was militarized, with the appointment of Sir John French as military viceroy in 1918.

Where many British officials appreciated the danger inherent in the two live wires of Home Rule and the revolutionary minority coming into contact, French did not. Upon taking office, he continued to see Sinn Fein as he had understood the pre-war Irish Revolutionaries: a disconnected minority, who had been co-opted by Germany. He saw Sinn Fein just as British officials saw the Bolsheviks in the third quarter of 1918, as a tool of German power, stoked to disrupt the Allied war effort. In spite of widespread police reports and independent memoranda to the contrary, French was convinced that the Irish were grateful for military government, and would not seriously complain of conscription. The extent to which this was a product of a blind refusal to recognise facts is demonstrated in a letter to the King from June 1918 in which his views were summarised:

The country - as regards crime and outrage - is greatly improving, although it must always be remembered that fear of the troops has something to do with this... the large majority of the people - who are prospering and making money on an unprecedented scale - are really very glad to see order restored and Sinn Feinism checked. They won't allow it, but this is what they really think.¹⁸³

Here we see the open disregarding of Irish views as expressed by Irish people; French knew what the Irish really wanted. Suffice to say most officials were less delusional, and had resigned themselves to a fight. The Royal Irish Constabulary reported in May 1918 that:

No matter what Home Rule Bill is passed except it is one which gives full fiscal autonomy, the Sinn Fein Party will not recognise it. No matter how Conscription is enforced they will resist it... De Valera insisted that he would

¹⁸² David Boyce and Cameron Hazlehurst, 'The Unknown Chief Secretary: H E Duke and Ireland, 1916-1918', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 20, no. 79 (March, 1977), pp. 286-311.

¹⁸³ IWM, Document 7813: Letter to His Majesty, 7 June 1918.

resist conscription by armed force and that in his conscience it was consonant with the law of God.¹⁸⁴

And everywhere it was reported that Government warnings of Sinn Fein's German associations were met with a skeptical demand for evidence, while the party began to win by-elections.

Discussion of civil war in Ireland did not seriously re-emerge until the onset of the Anglo-Irish War in 1919, to be explored in the fourth chapter of this thesis. By then intervention in Russia was having a significant impact on the discourse. However discussion of civil war was also shaped by the developments explored in this chapter. There were three crucial aspects of the concept of civil war that had been reshaped by the Ulster Crisis and the Easter Rising. The first was the breakdown in the legal and theoretical boundary separating civil war and civil disorder in the case of Ulster, and civil war versus political crime after the Easter Rising. With the constitutional test of functioning courts abandoned this opened the doors to more innovative legal and policy approaches. The second and third arose from a conceptual collision. The old idea of civil war as a division within the state's institutions, tested in the Curragh Incident, had long been deemed a separate phenomenon from an insurrectionary separatist minority. In the aftermath of the Easter Rising however Sinn Fein eclipsed the Irish Parliamentary Party and to a large extent took over the movement for Home Rule. Because the Home Rule issue raised ideological divisions within British institutions risking civil war, and because the methods of insurrectionary separatists had previously been distinct from civil conflict, the merging of these two political branches blurred the conceptual distinctions. Sinn Fein's foreign support in the context of the war with Germany blurred the boundary between civil war as a domestic and civil war as a foreign policy issue. Ireland had destabilised the existing understanding of civil war. Russia would cause the emergence of new ideas that would in turn shape British policy during the Anglo-Irish War.

¹⁸⁴ IWM, Document 7813: RIC Report, 2 May 1918.

Chapter Three

Russia and Civil War, 1917-1919

In the annals of civil war, Russia's was unsurpassed in geographic scope, destructive scale, or political significance. It was, as Stanley Payne observed, 'the paradigmatic revolutionary civil war of the twentieth century'.¹ For the British government the Russian Civil War reshaped official thinking about civil war, intervention, and sovereignty. As we have seen in the previous chapter, constitutional crises in Ireland had undermined British domestic law regarding civil war. Intervention in Russia would challenge the British government's precedents in foreign policy. In the process civil war would stop being a purely domestic concern, and become an international responsibility as a threat to world peace. Rather than the manifestation of representative government continued by violent means, civil war became the collapse of a state into chaos, the breaking down of its frontiers, and proof that the government lacked the support of its people. This chapter will explore this evolution in thinking.

'The Russian Civil War' is a highly problematic label. While it has a voluminous historiography, there is very little agreement concerning when it started, ended, or even which geographical spaces can be considered a part of the conflict. 'My own view', wrote the historian Evan Mawdsley, 'is that the Civil War began with the October Revolution'.² Jonathan Smele,³ Sheila Fitzpatrick,⁴ Robert Service,⁵ and Eric Hobsbawm,⁶ all give starting points for the war, which are all different. Geoffrey Swain⁷ in *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* proposes that there were really two synchronic civil wars in Russia. Smele, in his latest work, has described the conflict as 'a continuum of crises, wars, revolutions, and civil wars that ebbed and flowed across the collapsing Russian Empire for a decade'.⁸ The important point about these differences is that they are the result of the different

¹ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, p. 33.

² Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2008), p. 4.

³ Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920* (New York: CUP, 1996), p. 1.

⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 70.

⁵ Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution: 1900-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 82.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 2011), p. 59.

⁷ Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War*.

⁸ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, p. 1.

analytical frameworks that historians have used to limit the scope of their research, or to emphasise particular aspects of the fighting. Thus Mawdsley rejects the idea that the civil war started in the summer of 1918 because, 'it suggests a peaceful start to Soviet Power,'⁹ and because 'armed civil conflict seethed in Russia in the winter of 1917-1918.'¹⁰

Historicizing the chronological boundaries of the Russian Civil War would not produce a definitive answer either. There is similarly little consensus among historical actors as to when the Russian Civil War began. Lenin considered civil war to have started with the Kornilov Affair in August 1917.¹¹ His opponents argued that Russia entered civil war with the Bolshevik *coup d'état* in November 1917.¹² Detailed analysis of the conceptualisation of civil war by the actors involved has only been undertaken with reference to Lenin's view of civil war as a means of advancing the revolution,¹³ and discussion of the effects of international revolution, and therefore international civil war, waged by the Bolsheviks, on political thought.¹⁴ David Armitage in his history of the idea of civil war manages to avoid discussing Russia altogether.¹⁵ The British government did not start to call the conflict in Russia a civil war until 1919, either in public, or in private deliberations. Initially seen as part of the global conflagration, after conceding that Russia was facing civil war, the government continued to see the struggle against Communism in international terms, and so understood the conflict to be taking place across a far larger geographic space than is taken into consideration in the historiography.

One consequence of this is that some historians have treated British aims in Russia rather perfunctorily. There are two predominant narratives surrounding Allied intervention. The first emphasizes how British policy in Russia constituted a series of half-baked contingencies made by officers and officials with far more

⁹ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

¹¹ Vladimir Lenin, 'They Do Not See the Wood for the Trees', *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp. 255-260.

¹² 'A Struggle Predicted in Petrograd - Social Revolutionaries and the Assembly', *The Manchester Guardian* (15 January 1918), p. 5.

¹³ Israel Getzler, 'Lenin's Conception of Revolution as Civil War', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 74, no. 3 (1996), pp. 464-472.

¹⁴ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, pp. 15-25.

¹⁵ Armitage, *Civil Wars*.

pressing concerns. In this view, as John Bradley put it, the Allies conducted 'no real planning at all' and ended up siding with 'disintegrating factions of Russian society'¹⁶ to no discernible advantage. According to this argument the intervention was 'something of a farce... None of the Western powers knew what their aims were.'¹⁷ Without aims it was impossible to establish criteria for success or failure and consequently Allied policy stagnated, with policymakers unable to decide whether to reinforce their forces or withdraw. Eventually their disgruntled and war-weary publics made the decision for them. This argument either focuses on internal dysfunction,¹⁸ or on the inability of the Allied powers to coordinate their efforts.¹⁹ As Orlando Figes wrote of Allied policy, they 'could not decide whether to make war or peace with the Soviet rulers – and thus ended up doing both.'²⁰

The second interpretation might be called the 'crusade thesis', which beyond historians like Clifford Kinzig,²¹ has been widely advanced by American officers²² in their memoirs after the intervention, and has a general currency in the media.²³ The Crusade thesis suggests that Allied policy in Russia became embroiled in a division between those who wished to launch a Crusade to expunge Bolshevism, and those with more limited and short term military goals. According to this interpretation these two policy goals vied for pre-eminence, generating mission creep and confusion. The continued presence of the Allies in Russia after November 1918 shows that the anti-Bolshevik camp had enough influence to keep up the fight but lacked the influence to launch a full invasion. This was demonstrated most vividly at the Paris talks where Churchill - the leader of the

¹⁶ John Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 211.

¹⁷ Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (London: Pimlico, 1997) p. 651

¹⁸ David Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: US Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 293.

¹⁹ Ian Moffat, *The Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1920: The Diplomacy of Chaos* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 265-275.

²⁰ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 574.

²¹ Clifford Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade: The British Invasion of Russia 1918-1920* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006).

²² William Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure: 1918-1920* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941).

²³ Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class, and Empire* (New York: Atlantic Books, 2006), pp. 180-199.

anti-Bolshevik camp²⁴ - unsuccessfully proposed 'the most extreme of the interventionist schemes'²⁵ regarding Russia. Rather than there being no plan therefore, it is proposed that a party within the Allied governments had a very clear plan but lacked the political strength to bring it off.²⁶

Both of these frameworks are problematic. Any analysis of British policy must begin by recognising that objectives changed over time. During the period when intervention was initiated, in March and August 1918, 'the uppermost priority' as the historian Richard Pipes observes, 'was reactivating the Eastern Front.'²⁷ This included potential cooperation with the Bolsheviks. The armistice fundamentally changed the calculus, but by then intervention was a fact that had to be managed. Over the winter of 1918-1919, as Evan Mawdsley points out, 'everything was new and unclear. The Allies... could not know how things would turn out.'²⁸ In this context it is hardly surprising that there were a wide array of positions taken, and debated, within government. Moreover policymakers were balancing competing objectives, between domestic and foreign priorities, and as Jonathan Smele points out, between containing Bolshevism and Germany, and between Russia, and the new nationalities of the Baltic.²⁹ The compromises that fed into what became the 'bolstering policy' – supporting anti-Bolshevik governments until they could 'stand alone' - were far more rational than is generally credited, while it was Churchill who ruled out a large-scale invasion in Cabinet, and Lloyd George who would front the policy in the Commons. The policy failed; but the reasons for its failure were more complex than ministerial infighting, and poor coordination.

When Britain intervened in Russia the government did not see the conflict as

²⁴ There is a tendency to portray intervention as Churchill's personal policy, see Damien Wright, *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin: British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920* (Exeter: Helion, 2017), or Michael Kettle, *Churchill and the Archangel Fiasco, November 1918-July 1919* (London: Routledge, 2005).

²⁵ Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade*, p. 149.

²⁶ On the particular antagonism of Churchill and Lloyd George on this point see Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 45-46.

²⁷ Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, (London: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 588.

²⁸ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 177.

²⁹ Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars*, pp. 62-63.

a civil war. When they came to the conclusion that it was in fact a civil war, it was clear that their actions broke with precedent, and demanded justification. Intriguingly this retrospective re-categorization was also a process that would occur with regards to Ireland. In both cases it led to new policy, and the articulation of new concepts to justify them. It would also fundamentally reshape how civil war was conceptualised among British officials. It is impossible to accurately chart this development without also delving into the evolving policy priorities that brought about and shaped intervention, because the reconceptualization of civil war was driven by the need to explain that process. Much of this chapter therefore reconstructs the decision-making that led up to intervention, and to the emergence of the 'bolstering policy', in spite of the near absence of the term 'civil war' prior to the armistice.

The re-evaluation of Russia also led the conflict to be partially evaluated in one context with Ireland, and *vice versa*. As has been examined in the previous chapter, the Easter Rising of 1916 was not initially understood as civil war. Over time however, notions of German interference diminished, and the rise of Sinn Fein as a political, as well as an insurrectionary force, left British officials anticipating civil war in Ireland by 1919. In Russia too the conflict had been understood primarily in relation to Germany until the armistice, and as the Anglo-Irish War began, and the Allies evacuated Russia, questions over sovereignty, obligation, governance, and the relationship between a lack of governance and civil war, would be discussed in relation to both conflicts, together and in parallel.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first examines British official assessments of the likely consequences of the February Revolution, and whether it presaged a civil war along traditional lines between parliamentarians and Tsarists, and later between the military and civil power. The conclusion in both cases was that civil war was unlikely. Instead officials expected the malaise of the Russian army to lead to a collapse. The disintegration of the state left civil war along traditional lines impossible. Part two considers the divergence in language between British officials, the British press, and the Bolsheviks. As journalists reported what was said publically, and British policy discussion was not only held in private, but the press were not briefed owing to the demands of official secrecy, the framing of the conflict as a civil war became prominent in the British press, and

among the opposition. The third part explores the path to intervention, and how the British government came to see the war in Russia as a struggle between themselves and Germany over a vast ungoverned space. The fourth section will turn to 1919 when the British government came to see conflict in Russia as a civil war, and how this necessitated a reinterpretation of civil conflict that would alter established language and ideas about when it was appropriate, and when inappropriate to intervene.

Collapse and Analytical Pessimism, 1917

British officials had forecast the collapse of Russian autocracy for over a decade. In the wake of the failed revolution of 1905 Cecil Spring Rice wrote to Edward Grey that it 'is plain that the armed insurrection has failed and that the policy of a general strike will for some time at any rate also be a failure. But for how long will the army keep faithful and for how long will the government be able to pay its way?'³⁰ He advised the British government to 'keep on good terms with the Russian people and to build up for ourselves a treasure of gratitude in the future.'³¹ His emphasis on the people, rather than the Russian government, is telling, for while he argued that the Tsar and his court 'will have the natural and instinctive hatred that Bismarck and all other ministers of would be autocracies have for our manner of political life and thought,'³² he argued that 'the Russian people will sooner or later make itself felt.'³³

When the fall finally came in March 1917 it was met with hope and alarm, pitching the future of the largest Entente power into uncertainty. On the one hand British officials felt that the Provisional Government might invigorate the Russian war effort. Alfred Knox, British military attaché, reported at the end of March that the 'new Government has more brains, honesty and breadth of view than the old. It has the confidence of the vast majority of the Russian people, and it is sound on the war.'³⁴ On the other hand Knox noted that the 'soldier's new won liberty has gone to his head, and he loses no opportunity of making his officers feel that he is their

³⁰ TNA, FO 800/72: Cecil Spring Rice to Edward Grey, 16 January 1906.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ TNA, CAB 24/12/35: Alfred Knox, Dispatch Z2, 31 March 1917.

equal,'³⁵ so that the army was thrown into disorder. *The Times* warned that resistance by the Tsar to the new government 'would certainly mean civil war, and in all probability civil war complicated and envenomed by an Anarchist insurrection.'³⁶ Note that civil war, and anarchist insurrections were distinct phenomena. The government did not share the press's fears of a bout of fighting between Tsarists and revolutionaries. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff had assurances that senior Russian officers were behind the Tsar's abdication.³⁷ However there was concern that fighting could erupt within the Russian army between officers and some supporting regiments, and the common soldiery.³⁸ Nevertheless the inclination in Cabinet was to be publicly supportive. On 21 March Cabinet approved a message offering

the Duma its fraternal greetings, and tenders to the Russian people its heartfelt congratulations on the establishment among them of free institutions, in full confidence that they will lead not only to the rapid and happy progress of the Russian nation, but to the prosecution, in close alliance with the constitutional Governments of Western Europe, and with renewed steadfastness and vigour, of the war against the stronghold of autocratic militarism which threatens the liberty of Europe.³⁹

The government felt that the Russian revolt against autocracy could have a useful propaganda effect in the struggle with the Central Powers. Earlier that day Arthur Lynch had urged the government to take advantage of 'the propagandist effect... [and] send a Proclamation of approval and congratulation to the Russian Duma'.⁴⁰ Although the government adopted Lynch's suggestion, the fact that it had come from an Irish Nationalist flagged the elephant traps surrounding the Government's stance. Irish Nationalist MPs, who had so effectively used the Persian Constitutional Crisis to put pressure on the government's policy towards Russia in 1907, geared up to do the same now, in 1917. John Dillon followed Lynch in asking whether Britain was interfering in Russian internal affairs, while the day before Joseph Devlin had, while denouncing the secrecy of the courts martial of the Easter rebels, noted that 'the worst form of reaction that existed in Russia before

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 'The Situation in Russia', *The Times* (17 March 1917), p. 7.

³⁷ TNA, CAB 23/2/17: War Cabinet Minutes, 19 March 1917.

³⁸ TNA, CAB 24/12/35: Knox, Dispatch Z2, 31 March 1917.

³⁹ TNA, CAB 23/2/18: War Cabinet Minutes, 21 March 1917.

⁴⁰ Arthur Lynch, HC, *Hansard* (21 March 1917), vol. 91, col. 1890.

the nation liberated itself from thralldom was not anything comparable to the form of reaction in Ireland, because there you do it under the cover of democratic institutions.⁴¹ It is understandable therefore, that the British government were wary of aligning themselves too closely with the revolution, and while wishing the Duma well, asserted their intention to remain out of Russia's internal affairs.

The War Cabinet were circumspect, fearing that 'Germany would exploit the situation if work was not resumed and if disorder continued.'⁴² Given 'the existing obscure situation in Russia' the British Government authorised their Ambassador 'to take independent action if circumstances necessitated such a course.'⁴³ Although they did not want for information, the Cabinet was aware that events could develop in a number of directions, with a great deal of volatility and uncertainty. As the historian Rex Wade notes, the Provisional Government, in spite of its initial support, was inherently unstable because it was premised upon its own demise, with all major questions for the future delayed until the formation of the Constituent Assembly.⁴⁴ The prevailing attitude in government was captured in an extensive report by Major Nielson, a British liaison officer with the Russian army, who wrote at the end of March that the 'feeling is still so strained that a trifling incident may turn the tide in either direction,'⁴⁵ towards renewed vigour in the war, or collapse. These were the perceived options, and directly contributed to the Allies' refusing Russian requests to revise their war aims: a decision that bound the Provisional Government to a politically toxic course.⁴⁶ The central dichotomy Nielson highlighted was between the forces of change, and those of order. On balance, he felt the situation would deteriorate, not through ill will - though he noted the damage caused by agitators from 'The Labour party' - but through poor management, produced by the elevation of the uneducated. Of the Russian soldier he observed that

an uneducated and unintelligent mass has suddenly emerged from a form of slavery and been placed on a level with cultured and developed nations. In a

⁴¹ Joseph Devlin, HC, *Hansard* (20 March 1917), vol. 91, col. 1856.

⁴² TNA, CAB 23/2/17: War Cabinet Minutes, 19 March 1917.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Rex Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), pp. 54-55.

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 106/1129: Report on the Russian Revolution, Major J Nielson, 31 March 1917.

⁴⁶ Wade, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 172.

word, the man has to raise himself to the level of his new treatment. Could we rule an African tribe by treating them as Englishmen? The Russian soldiery may eventually raise itself, but the process will take many years, and in the interval chaos must reign. Unfortunately it is precisely this interval which most concerns us. The situation today is that the officers no longer rule the Army.⁴⁷

The emphasis on civilisation provides an interesting point of reference when considering official attitudes to the revolution from a civil war perspective. During the Constitutional Revolution in Persia British observers had noted how in spite of 'the crude intelligence of most of the rebels, I am lost in admiration at the discipline and system that the leaders have inculcated upon what must have been unpromising material.'⁴⁸ Persia had experienced civil war because in spite of its people, the leaders of both the Monarchical and Constitutional parties were perceived to be civilised. The Russia of March 1917 by contrast appeared to the British to follow the Chinese pattern, where civil war had not been anticipated because 'what is lacking to bring matters to a head is someone willing and able to collect together under one flag all the disunited revolutionary bodies and all the robber bands - in short a leader.'⁴⁹ Similarly the 'Labour Party'⁵⁰ and anarchist agitators were - like Irish rebels before 1916 – thought to occupy the fringes of political consciousness, contributing to a chaotic maelstrom without being able to guide it. The prevailing expectation was therefore of 'the disintegration of the Russian State fabric caused by a revolution following on a long period of inept administration'⁵¹; a prediction that would become accentuated as the Cabinet lost patience with the lack of forecasting from British officers in Russia. On 14 April the Chief of the Imperial General Staff wrote to British military liaisons demanding a firmer assessment of the outlook in Russia, based upon an appraisal of the fundamental soundness of the Russian army and government:

In order... to form working basis for future action, we must now reach definite conclusion regarding the assistance to be expected from Russia in the course of next six months.... You should divest your mind of claptrap such

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ 'The Civil War in Tabriz', *The Times* (19 October 1908), p. 6.

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 106/25 Report - Military Intelligence Branch, China Force, 2 March 1903.

⁵⁰ A term used inexactly by Nielson in a similar manner to 'the Extreme Left', encompassing a number of political factions.

⁵¹ TNA, CAB 24/4/2: Report by Arthur Henderson MP, 16 July 1917.

as determination to win and fighting for freedom and so forth, remembering that without discipline and reasonable administrative efficiency, an army is merely a leaderless armed mob. Also, that unless the Army is supported by a stable government and sufficiently united public opinion, successful results are impossible.⁵²

Following this rebuke British military enthusiasm for the revolution waned. Intelligence reports before the Russian summer offensive were grave. Knox argued that the Russian military would be unable to achieve anything without the restoration of military discipline, but noted that 'without bloodshed... I am convinced permanent order will not be restored.'⁵³ By June British officers were predicting Russia's departure from the war, owing to 'the morale of the Russian Army... [as] unless it improves the Russians will declare an armistice before long, for no Government would dare to prosecute the war vigorously.'⁵⁴ The expectation of disaster led to calls by General Poole - who would later command the Allied intervention in North Russia - for British arms supplies to be curtailed.⁵⁵ Once the summer offensive had failed Knox argued that no further assistance could realistically be expected from the Russian Army 'unless the Government here has the courage to stop agitation and to restore the death penalty in martial law.'⁵⁶

Political observers remained more optimistic. When Ramsey MacDonald – former and future leader of the Labour Party - applied to travel to Russia, the interviewing officer at the Foreign Office 'said to him frankly that he was in a position to do a great deal of good, and also a great deal of harm in Russia,'⁵⁷ echoing British hopes for Russia to be revitalized by their new government. As late as September, Balfour encouraged Lloyd George not to do anything to undermine the confidence of the Russian Government, arguing that 'I still entertain some hopes that Russia will be in a position, not indeed to best the Germans - but to compel them to keep a large number of divisions on their Eastern front.'⁵⁸ But among military observers - including Russian officers - this enthusiasm was seen

⁵² TNA, CAB 24/10/89: CIGS to Hanbury Williams and Knox, 14 April 1917.

⁵³ TNA, CAB 24/14/1: Knox to DMI, 20 May 1917.

⁵⁴ TNA, CAB 24/18/58: Ballard to Buckley, 6 June 1917.

⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 24/16/76: War Cabinet, Supply of Guns to Russia, 13 June 1917.

⁵⁶ TNA, CAB 24/19/88: Knox to DMI, 9 July 1917.

⁵⁷ PRONI, D1507/B/31/27: Memorandum of Interview with Ramsey MacDonald for Passport Application to Visit Russia, Circulated to War Cabinet, 29 May 1917.

⁵⁸ PAW, LG/F/3/2/30: Balfour to Lloyd George, 24 September 1917.

as ridiculous. Knox was inundated with requests from Russian colleagues to be transferred to the Western front. In private correspondence Russian officers were pessimistic. General Polovtsoff, commanding the Petrograd garrison, described to a friend how ‘it is not easy to manage huge army of reserve battalions who have just made a revolution and upset the Government. The wildest buffalo on the Kamaiti River is much tamer than my chaps... I hope the war will soon finish.’⁵⁹ British Intelligence concluded in the wake of the Kornilov Affair that although ‘the past week has been quieter in Russia than most of the immediate predecessors,’ it could ‘only be a lull before another tempestuous outbreak in internal politics,’ most likely caused by the growing power of ‘the Extreme Left.’⁶⁰ Indeed after the Kornilov Affair the expectation of a Russian surrender moved beyond the military, for ‘continued paralysis in Russia might result in a situation which would leave her no option but a separate peace.’⁶¹

The complacency with which the British government met the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of 7 November could be seen as evidence that British policy was confused, and the government was blind to events. On Whitehall the ten days that supposedly ‘shook the world’⁶² barely registered a tremor. As the historian Brock Millman has noted, ‘when the Bolshevik revolution took place... it seems to have been scarcely noted in London,’⁶³ a fact that Millman cited as an example of a bias towards pessimism in British analysis. Viewed from a Russian perspective – and most histories of the Russian Revolution are primarily concerned with these events in their Russian context – it was a tumultuous affair. Smaller in scale than Soviet propaganda would suggest,⁶⁴ the *coup* nevertheless saw the death of the Provisional Government, and marked an open breach between the Bolsheviks and their opponents. But from the British point of view what had occurred was not the rise of Bolshevism, but merely the final collapse of the Russian state; the creation of a long predicted vacuum. It surprised no one. In August, Knox had been warning

⁵⁹ PRONI, D3332/1/104: General Polovtsoff to Mr. Twigg, 11 July 1917.

⁶⁰ TNA, CAB 24/27/74: Weekly Report on Russia, Intelligence Bureau, 1 October 1917.

⁶¹ CCC, CHAR 27/23: Sir George Barclay, 13 September 1917.

⁶² John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919).

⁶³ Brock Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy: 1916-1918* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 55.

⁶⁴ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 573.

that 'the whole State fabric was crumbling away,'⁶⁵ and predicted that it 'would seem impossible, if Kerenski remains at the head of a Government which is at the beck and call of the Sovyets, that Russia should avoid an armistice for many weeks more.'⁶⁶ Thus the Bolsheviks were merely the passing symptom of a problem long in the making, and their policy of a separate peace – while undesirable – was no different from that to which the Provisional Government had been expected to eventually succumb. The perception of collapse left the British scrambling to find a body in Russia that would be the basis for a partnership, or the establishment of stable government. The Bolsheviks, it was felt, were a temporary affliction, best ignored. By December the decision had been made that the 'policy of the British Government was to support any responsible body in Russia that would actively oppose the Maximalist movement, and at the same time give money freely, within reason, to such bodies as were prepared to help the Allies' cause.'⁶⁷ A power vacuum had emerged in Russia, brought about by the fundamental faults in the Russian army after the revolution. This did no amount to civil war, because Russia's civic institutions around which such a conflict could occur no longer existed. The greatest danger, from the British government's point of view, was that the Central Powers would exploit the vacuum. Thus, while looking favourably on groups that might become the basis for a new Russian government, Balfour stressed that 'we ought if possible not to come to an open breach with the Bolsheviks or drive them into the enemy's camp.'⁶⁸

Much has been made in the historiography of the poor quality of Allied intelligence in Russia.⁶⁹ It is worth noting however that one of the most problematic and persistent assumptions underpinning British policy in Russia was

⁶⁵ TNA, CAB/24/34: Knox to War Cabinet, 1 November 1917.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ TNA, CAB/23/4: War Cabinet Minutes, 3 December 1917.

⁶⁸ TNA, CAB/23/4: Balfour Memorandum, Notes on the Present Russian Situation, 9 December 1917.

⁶⁹ The argument has either been that intelligence was in short supply, see Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia*, p. 212, or that the Allies were supremely susceptible to misinformation from anti-Communists, so that the quality of intelligence was terrible, see George Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 110-111. In any case the assumption has been that the government were profoundly ignorant of Russia, and so could not make use of the information they had, see Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 574.

a failure of analysis, not of collection, and that was a belief that Bolshevism would eventually collapse because of the failure of the Bolsheviks to provide basic services for the population. Predicting further disintegration as a result of a lack of administrative efficiency became something of a default position in analysis; the safe bet in diplomatic reporting. It is also worth noting that the validity of this hypothesis was undoubtedly reinforced because with regards to the Provisional Government it had proven accurate. This goes to demonstrate the importance of conceptual assumptions in Britain's Russia policy, and therefore reinforces the importance of understanding how civil war was conceptualised.

The absence of civil war from government discussion in 1917 is not only important in understanding the assumptions about Russia, and the status of the Bolsheviks, that would underpin British policy after the Bolshevik *coup d'état*, but is especially significant because other actors were using the term 'civil war', and British officials noted its usage, but decided not to employ it themselves. In the wake of the Kornilov affair, Ambassador Buchanan told the Foreign Office that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs 'was happy to say that danger of Civil War had now been averted'.⁷⁰ The term was central to Russian political discourse at the time, with several parties accusing each other of encouraging civil war, not least the Bolsheviks. Its absence from British official language was thus deliberate, rather than a product of convention, and the divergence of language between British official discussion and public debate would have a lasting and important impact on later British policy.

Civil War, Lenin, and the Press

Civil war was widely used in British public discussion of Russia from the February Revolution onwards, and was much more influenced by the nomenclature adopted in Russia itself than official discussion. As has already been noted the press speculated about the threat of civil war in March 1917 between parliamentarians and Tsarists. When the Tsar abdicated, *The Times* argued that:

The great danger was that the Tsar might fail to realise the position with sufficient promptitude, and that he might either resist the Revolution or defer his decision. He has had enough of wisdom and of unselfish patriotism not to take either of these courses. By laying down the supreme authority of

⁷⁰ CCC, CHAR 27/23: Buchanan to FO, 13 September 1917.

his own free will, he has saved his people, we may trust, from civil war and his capital from an outbreak of social anarchy.⁷¹

Throughout the Provisional Government's short existence stories emerged across the British press to the effect that 'there are here the possibilities of civil war.'⁷² Much of this was the product of reporters quoting Russian politicians, and adopting their nomenclature in their reportage. For example on 10 May the *Pall Mall Gazette* published a proclamation issued by the Provisional Government stating that 'the phantom of anarchy and civil war arises before Russia,'⁷³ conflating two concepts usually separated in Britain. Within Russia the charge of inciting civil war was wielded as a political weapon to disparage opposing parties across the spectrum, and so the term gained common currency. When the Bolsheviks did not seize power during the July Days *The Times* reported that it represented 'the definite failure of the attempt to compromise the work of the revolution by promoting civil war.'⁷⁴ It was used, not just in quotation, but also in commentary across the British press. *The Manchester Guardian* for instance responded to the Kornilov Affair by warning that 'Those... who are... echoing the demand of the Russian Right for a dictatorship and the stopping of the Revolution would be wise to remember that... the attempt to establish any such regime would be the signal for civil war.'⁷⁵ After the incident *Reuters* filed copy paraphrasing the Provisional Government's plea for all parties to negotiate 'in a spirit of complete unity, so as to save Russia from civil war.'⁷⁶ In defence of Kornilov the *Pall Mall Gazette* had argued that "it has been realised for some time that Russia was rushing headlong into civil war."⁷⁷ Thus we see a remarkable consistency between the press's selected quotations of Russian officials, the nomenclature adopted when paraphrasing and in reportage, and the language employed in opposite editorials and commentary. This also continued after the Bolshevik coup, when

⁷¹ 'The Russian Revolution', *The Times* (16 March 1917), p. 7.

⁷² 'The Situation in Russia', *The Manchester Guardian* (10 April 1917), p. 4.

⁷³ 'Government's Grave Warning, Fears of Anarchy, Probable Coalition', *The Pall Mall Gazette* (10 May 1917), p. 5.

⁷⁴ 'Lenin's Escape from Petrograd; No Toleration for Treachery', *The Times* (21 July 1917), p. 6.

⁷⁵ 'Summary of News: The War' *The Manchester Guardian* (28 August 1917), p. 4.

⁷⁶ 'Korniloff Crisis Overcome. Government Striking a Balance', *The Times* (21 September, 1917), p. 5.

⁷⁷ 'A Word for Korniloff', *The Pall Mall Gazette* (12 September 1917), p. 2.

papers would adopt the labels used by Bolsheviks and their opponents in claiming that civil war had begun,⁷⁸ and directly published statements by the Bolsheviks and others to that effect,⁷⁹ while using the same nomenclature in their commentary.⁸⁰ This survey, focusing on three papers from across the political spectrum, is representative of the wider press in Britain.

The divergence in language between the public discussion of events in Russia and discussions within the British government was exacerbated by the fact that reporters were able to get quotes from Russian politicians, and Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks regularly released public proclamations. In contrast, British government deliberations were secret, and for reasons of national security press access was minimal. Even reporting of minor government business in the House of Commons lobby sparked investigations from the Cabinet Office to suppress leaks.⁸¹ Thus the public understanding of what was happening in Russia was very different to the government's understanding, and would establish a set of public expectations, which the government were not in a favourable position to address. The widespread use of the term 'civil war' in public discussion, and its studied absence from official discussion, also emphasizes that it was a deliberate omission. But the disconnect would render it very difficult for the British government to win public support for 'intervention', as the public were already familiar with events in Russia as a 'civil war', while the government did not see it as such.

Another facet of the disconnect between press and government in its language and assessment of events was that the press did not closely interrogate what Russian politicians meant by 'civil war'. In many cases, for Russia's advocates of Parliamentary democracy, the accusation of inciting civil war was an accusation of attempting to carry on disputes over civic principles by violent means on the part of political parties, a description that was entirely in keeping with the generally understood concept of civil war outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. However this was not what Lenin meant by civil war, and his distinct views on the

⁷⁸ 'Civil War in Caucasus', *The Manchester Guardian* (26 January, 1918), p. 4; 'The Civil War in Russia', *Pall Mall Gazette* (24 December 1917), p. 2.

⁷⁹ 'Russian Civil War; Maximalist Report of Victory', *The Manchester Guardian* (14 November 1917), p. 5.

⁸⁰ 'Russia's Civil War', *The Times* (28 December 1917), p. 7.

⁸¹ TNA, CAB 35/3/60: War Cabinet Minutes, 20 March 1918.

subject would have a significant impact on the thinking of British officials, not least Winston Churchill. Lenin, like many of his contemporaries, warned of civil war several times in 1917, writing that the ‘class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has reached the limit and on April 20 and 21, as well as on July 3–5, the country was within a hair’s breadth of civil war.’⁸² Note here however that Lenin was not suggesting that civil war meant a breakdown among political parties, but was the most severe expression of the struggle between social classes. Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto* had written that:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.⁸³

But where many Marxists concluded that civil war represented the ‘common ruin of the contending classes’, Lenin saw it as an essential step in the triumph of the proletariat. On this he was very consistent. Lenin, reflecting on the Paris Commune in 1908, concluded that the chief lesson to be learned was ‘the power of civil war’, arguing that the Commune ‘ought to have annihilated its enemies rather than attempt to influence them morally [...] it underestimated the importance of purely military operations in civil war.’⁸⁴ Thus Lenin saw the Kornilov Affair as not just tending towards civil war, but as its outbreak:

Everyone knows that the history of all revolutions the world over reveals an inevitable rather than an accidental transformation of the class struggle into civil war. Everyone knows that it was *after* July 4 that we in Russia saw the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie starting civil war, the disarming of regiments, executions at the front, and assassination of Bolsheviks. Civil war is “impermissible” for revolutionary democrats, if you please, just when the course of events has inexorably brought about a situation in which the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie have started civil war.⁸⁵

And it was an outbreak he welcomed. For Lenin, ‘civil war is the sharpest form of

⁸² Vladimir Lenin, ‘The Beginning of Bonapartism’, *Lenin’s Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp. 223-226.

⁸³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Books, 2002; first published 1848), p. 219.

⁸⁴ Lenin, cited in: Getzler, ‘Lenin’s Conception of Revolution as Civil War’, p. 466.

⁸⁵ Vladimir Lenin, ‘They Do Not See the Wood for the Trees’, *Lenin’s Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), pp. 255-260.

the class struggle,' and 'such rivers of blood would give victory to the proletariat and the poor peasantry, and it is a hundred to one that this victory would bring peace in place of the imperialist war.'⁸⁶ Lenin would maintain this position publically and as late as 1922 proclaim the civil war as essential in forging the Soviet Union.⁸⁷

For Lenin, as well as Trotsky with his doctrine of permanent revolution, it was not just a 'Russian Civil War', but also an international class struggle, and since the classes were the constituent components of society, this meant the promotion of international internal conflict. In Lenin's view, the First World War was itself a grand international struggle waged against the working class, who were slaughtered in pursuit of the interests of the bourgeoisie of their own countries. Where the British press picked up the Bolsheviks' use of the term 'civil war' and repeated it to describe the situation in Russia, Lenin saw it as a universally applicable descriptor. This explains why he saw no contradiction between declaring that his internal opponents were all puppets of foreign powers, and yet still called the conflict a civil war, as well as a foreign invasion. The dynamic for him remained the international bourgeoisie intervening to crush the one front on which the working class was winning. This use of the term 'civil war' was not initially picked up in the press, but officials within the British government noted it, and its implications would feature prominently in discussion when Britain came to see Russia as in a state of civil war. Churchill in particular framed the conflict as between 'the "Russian National Government" as opposed to the International conceptions of Lenin and Trotsky',⁸⁸ and justified confronting Bolshevism because it was attempting to expand the sphere of civil conflict world wide, believing that the Bolsheviks 'must have hopes that Germany and Austria will collapse into Bolshevism in the same way as Hungary has done, and... they may move forward into new regions with their propaganda and their political system among the defeated States of Central Europe'.⁸⁹ This view would take time to evolve; at the

⁸⁶ Vladimir Lenin, 'The Russian Revolution And Civil War: They Are Trying To Frighten Us With Civil War', *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 28-42.

⁸⁷ Getzler, 'Lenin's Conception of Revolution as Civil War', p. 465.

⁸⁸ CCC, CHAR 2/105: Churchill to Curzon, 1 May 1919.

⁸⁹ CCC, CHAR 16/7: Churchill to PM, 21 May 1919.

time of the *coup d'état* the Bolsheviks were not seen to be powerful enough to merit such concern, but it is important to note that the British government was not unaware of how others were using the language of civil war, and that their own views on the subject were entangled, and shaped by how it was used by their adversaries.

German Intrigue, Germanophiles, and Intervention, 1918

Over the course of 1918 the British government saw Russia as a battlefield in their struggle with Germany. The Bolsheviks, as the most organised Russian force, were central to that struggle. Germany's leverage over the Bolsheviks turned British policy against the Bolsheviks directly, and this caused an important shift in British official attitudes towards civil war. The British came to see the promotion of internal discord as a tool employed by Germany in Russia, Ireland and further afield. In 1907, one of the arguments of the British Government against intervention in civil wars was that it would set a precedent for German intervention during internal conflict in the British Empire.⁹⁰ When it became apparent to the British that the Germans were promoting civil war in Ireland and Russia, this removed British restraint, and one core objection to foreign intervention in civil war.

At the beginning of 1918 both the Imperial General Staff and the War Office held military attaché Alfred Knox in high regard. They found his analysis, based on the fundamental weaknesses of the Russian army and state, to be sound. Thus the military took the view that whether Kerensky had remained in office or not, Russia would have collapsed. Dealing with the Bolsheviks was therefore pointless; they were perceived to be both dangerous and incompetent, attempting to build an edifice of government upon foundations of sand. To this end Knox and CIGS began to draw up plans for a Japanese intervention to secure Allied interests against a German incursion into the Russian vacuum as early as December.⁹¹ Many in the Foreign Office had initially concurred in this assessment including Robert Cecil,⁹² who would later be one of the chief architects of the League of Nations, but over

⁹⁰ TNA, FO 800/70: Cecil Spring Rice to Edward Grey, 28 March 1907.

⁹¹ TNA, CAB 24/43/25: Robert Cecil, Memorandum on Russia, Circulated to the King and War Cabinet, 23 February 1918.

⁹² Ibid.

the winter of 1918 the prevailing outlook changed. In December Balfour shifted the Cabinet to take a more cautious approach to the Bolsheviks, leaving open the door for cooperation. On 10 December it was decided that:

His Majesty's Government was not... concerned with the composition of the Russian Government... Our dominant purpose... should be:

(a) if possible, to keep Russia in the war...; or

(b) if this could not be secured, then to ensure that Russia was as useful to us and as harmful to the enemy as possible...

...if, as seemed likely, [the Bolsheviks] maintained an ascendancy for the next few months only, these months were critical.⁹³

That the Bolshevik regime survived the elections to the Constituent Assembly - which they lost - surpassed many British officials' expectations. By February intelligence officers were describing the Bolsheviks not as a source of chaos, but as the only source of order. Colonel Jones, in the weekly intelligence report to Cabinet, argued that:

The Bolsheviks by their energy and audacity have made themselves complete masters of the greater part of Russia, and their influence has latterly been on the increase. Their former political rivals... are completely in the background, and it is hardly to them that the Bolsheviks would have to yield place in case of failure. Until peace has been concluded and normal conditions are restored no moderate parliamentary party is likely to control the situation; the fall of the Bolsheviks would see the rise of something far more extreme and chaotic - the Anarchists... the Bolsheviks, in spite of their destructive influence, are essentially centralist.⁹⁴

This assessment implicitly accepted the argument that the struggle in Russia was between forces of order and forces of disorder, rather than a civil war between Russian parties, but it moved the Bolsheviks from the side of disorder to the side of order. The policy ramifications of this change were dramatic. The starting point for British policy was to counteract German influence. Jones' assessment, that an anarchic 'Russia would fall an easy prey to its neighbours or to any autocrat who had the ability to assert himself,'⁹⁵ was shared across government. If the Bolsheviks were perceived to be leading Russia into anarchy then British policy would aim to find and co-opt a centralizing force to prevent German exploitation, while intervening to protect Allied core interests. If the Bolsheviks were the most

⁹³ TNA, CAB 23/4: War Cabinet Minutes, 10 December 1917.

⁹⁴ TNA, CAB 24/41/41: Intelligence Bureau, Weekly Report on Russia by Colonel Jones, 5 February 1918.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

plausible centralizing force, then the question arose as to whether they would lean towards the Entente or the Central Powers. British officials did not have any illusions that the Bolsheviks saw the Allies favourably, but as the Bolsheviks were ideologically no less committed to the overthrow of the Central Powers, it was felt that *realpolitik* would dictate which way they leant. An important point about these considerations is that while they were intensely debated over the first six months of 1918, all paths led to an interventionist policy, and none considered Russia from the perspective of civil war. Bruce Lockhart, former Consul General in Russia, was dispatched to establish relations with the Bolsheviks, and counter German diplomatic efforts. His instructions noted that while 'we do not of course desire at this moment to go back on the past - the broken treaties, the repudiated debts... There are no doubt many important but less fundamental questions on which judicious diplomacy might prove very valuable.'⁹⁶

The central object of this 'judicious diplomacy' was to put the Allies in a favourable position should the Brest-Litovsk negotiations collapse. These efforts were much maligned at the time from within the War Office, and subsequently by historians including Richard Pipes who concluded that British officials were fooled by a Bolshevik ruse into delaying a more assertive intervention.⁹⁷ These accusations fail to properly consider the potential outcomes of the Brest peace, which were far from certain. The Bolsheviks' early attempts at a peace treaty failed because the Germans offered unacceptable terms. The ensuing German offensive however demonstrated that the Bolsheviks could not hope to continue a contest of arms without being destroyed. Lenin wrote in a private note that 'we cannot fight at the present time, for the army is against the war and is unable to fight. The week of war against the Germans, in the face of whom our troops simply ran away... has fully proved this. We are prisoners of German imperialism.'⁹⁸ The final terms were therefore exceedingly harsh, but it was far from clear whether the Bolsheviks could sell the peace, or whether either party to the treaty seriously intended to recognise it. Lenin denounced the treaty as nothing more than a 'scrap of paper'⁹⁹

⁹⁶ TNA, CAB 24/41: Lindley to Lockhart, February 1918.

⁹⁷ Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, p. 598.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Lenin, 'Note on The Necessity of Signing the Peace Treaty, 24 February 1918', *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), p. 57.

⁹⁹ Vladimir Lenin, 'Report On Foreign Policy', *Pravda*, no. 93 (15 May 1918).

while the Germans continued to seize Bolshevik territory and sink Russian vessels long after it had been signed. The only leverage the Bolsheviks had against Germany was the threat of Allied support, and if the Germans decided to put the Bolsheviks to the sword, Lenin's only hope of survival would have been the Entente. However ideological, Lenin and Trotsky were nevertheless pragmatic. As the historian Jon Jacobson has written, many of the Bolshevik leaders were to a significant degree 'political realists... with a Soviet foreign policy founded on power politics and conducted by conventional means' while in the pursuit of ideological goals.¹⁰⁰

Thus Lenin, in the lead up to the Brest-Litovsk treaty, told Lockhart that 'so long... as the German danger exists, I am willing to risk a temporary co-operation with the Allies.'¹⁰¹ In a clear signal of how serious Lenin was in this statement, hours before the treaty was signed, Trotsky requested Allied assistance to defend the northern port of Murmansk. Fearing that the negotiations were breaking down and having received a telegram indicating that the port was soon to come under attack from Finnish troops allied to Germany, Trotsky told the local soviet that it 'is your duty to do everything to protect the Murman Railway.... The Germans are advancing in small detachments. Resistance is possible and obligatory... You must accept any and all assistance from the Allied missions and use every means to obstruct the advance of the plunderers.'¹⁰² George Kennan's contention, that Trotsky's telegram - leading to the landing of British marines and guns by Admiral Kemp - was issued in panic, going 'further than anything Moscow had bargained for,'¹⁰³ is belied by the fact that the order was not withdrawn, and Trotsky continued to seek Allied assistance for over a month. Days later, ahead of the treaty's ratification, Trotsky wrote to Colonel Robins of the US consulate to inquire about the willingness of the Allies to supply military aid:

In case (a) the All Russian Congress of Soviets will refuse to ratify the peace treaty with Germany, or (b) if the German Government... will renew its offensive... or (c) if the Soviet government will be forced... to renew

¹⁰⁰ Jon Jacobson, 'Essay and Reflections: On the Historiography of Soviet Foreign Relations in the 1920s', *The International History Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (May, 1996) p. 347

¹⁰¹ Lenin, cited in: Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War*, p. 135.

¹⁰² Trotsky, cited in: Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, p. 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 53

hostilities... Can the Soviet Government rely on the support of the United States of North America, Great Britain and France in its struggle against Germany? ...To what extent... would aid be assured from Great Britain through Murmansk and Archangel? What steps could the government of Great Britain take in order to assure this aid...?¹⁰⁴

The apparent willingness of the Bolsheviks to entertain the possibility of siding with the allies opened up a bitter rift in the British government between advocates of a unilateral intervention against Germany - most likely pioneered by the Japanese - and those arguing that the Bolsheviks could be co-opted to fight the Germans. This debate would shape the basis for Allied operations throughout the Russian Civil War, and until November 1918 were pivotal in shaping the assumptions of British officials about the dynamics of the fighting that they expected to encounter as Allied forces intervened.

Knox was incensed by attempts to bargain with the Bolsheviks. As Trotsky submitted his inquiry about aid, Knox penned a report outlining his views on Russia. Of the attempts at diplomacy he noted that 'our diplomatic representatives are now fugitives trying to escape from Russia. During the past four months they had not succeeded in protecting a single national interest or in hindering by half an hour the march of German policy.'¹⁰⁵ He explained that even if the Bolsheviks could be made to oppose Germany, supporting them would bring no benefit to Britain because 'their days are numbered,'¹⁰⁶ owing to an increasingly hostile peasantry, and budding nationalisms on the periphery of the former Russian empire. Most importantly Knox argued that the Germans would not be stopped from extracting what they wanted from Russia by the peasantry because 'German command would soon put a stop to this sort of thing if tried on in Russia by making villages responsible.'¹⁰⁷ Instead, the conflict centred on building a national resistance to German incursion by deploying small Allied detachments. Knox noted that 'any success gained by the Spanish guerrillas in the Peninsula War was as much owing to the constant pressure of a nucleus of organised British troops on Spanish and

¹⁰⁴ Leon Trotsky, 'Note from Commissar for War Trotsky to Colonel Robbins on the Attitude of the Allies should Brest-Litovsk go Unratified', J. Degras, (ed.), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy: Vol. 1: 1917-1924* (New York: OUP, 1951), p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, WO 106/1098: Knox to CIGS, Possibilities of Guerrilla Warfare in Russia, 5 March 1918.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Portuguese territory,' and declared that 'we must form military bases of reliable foreign elements on Russian soil or we can do nothing.'¹⁰⁸ This assessment was taken seriously in London. After being circulated to the Cabinet, Knox was requested to present oral testimony at Versailles, and it is from this report that the Allies commenced discussion of an intervention at Archangel.¹⁰⁹ The reasons for interest in Knox's proposal are obvious. At a time of manpower shortage on the Western front, Knox was arguing that small numbers of Allied troops could not only prevent Germany from accessing Russia's resources, but could also tie down large numbers of German troops in the East. Other officers concurred, Alex Proctor noting that a 'trifling force at Archangel would give Germans considerable anxiety and probably require three to four times a bigger force of Germans (Austrians no use) to force its withdrawal.'¹¹⁰ This calculation underpinned Allied deployments in Russia. It also framed the conflict as a foreign war, not a civil war, in which Russians either fought for their country, or were co-opted by Germany.

There was one point however on which the Cabinet did not agree with Knox, and that was his assessment of the merits of working with the Bolsheviks. As the most organised force in Russia, if intervention could occur with Bolshevik consent, this would tie down many more German divisions, and secure much more territory. As late as mid April Lloyd George was arguing that 'the port of Murmansk... was... the last ice-free port in [Russia], giving access to the open sea. If we attempted to save it from the White Guards, we could... expect the goodwill of the Local as well as the Central Soviets.'¹¹¹ Five days later he followed this up with the observation that the signals coming from Trotsky 'pointed to his desire for Allied support.'¹¹² General Poole likewise felt that 'it might be possible to obtain Trotsky's whole hearted support of the scheme,'¹¹³ to land forces at Archangel. Trotsky continued to suggest his willingness to cooperate, saying that 'once Russia is engaged in life struggle she would welcome help from the Allies even if this

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, WO 106/1098: Hankey to Wilson, 16 March 1918.

¹¹⁰ TNA, WO 106/1098: Alex Proctor, Important Points for Guidance in Connection with Seizure of Archangel by Allies, 12 March 1918.

¹¹¹ TNA, CAB 23/6: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 April 1918.

¹¹² TNA, CAB 23/6: War Cabinet Minutes, 19 April 1918.

¹¹³ TNA, CAB 24/47: War Cabinet Memorandum by General Poole, 'British Occupation of Murmansk', 10 April 1918.

should entail a Socialist army fighting side by side with imperial army.'¹¹⁴

The War Office found these suggestions infuriating. Knox decried Lockhart's reports as a Bolshevik ruse, stating that 'Mr. Lockhart acts as Trotski's official spokesman so his views are interesting as showing the ideas of the international groups of Jews which now pretends to govern Russia. He telegraphs that intervention will alienate every class of the population from the Emperor to the peasant. This is ludicrously untrue.'¹¹⁵ Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, was even more scathing, adding when he presented Knox's report to Cabinet that 'Mr. Lockhart's military advice is so bad that I hope he will be told not to give a military opinion in future or be recalled.'¹¹⁶ Lockhart responded in kind, writing that 'our expert military advice on Russia has been so notoriously wrong throughout whole war that it is hardly worthy of consideration and I should be more than sorry if at this critical hour a man of General Knox's hasty and changeable judgement should be considered as a more reliable authority than myself.'¹¹⁷

Accusations that the Cabinet was either misinformed, or relying on unreliable sources, were widespread. Beyond the mutual recriminations between soldiers and diplomats, some British officials held serious concerns about the frame through which the British government was analysing Russian developments. In April, Professor Bernard Pares, attached to the British embassy, and a renowned historian of Russia, proposed the expansion of dedicated Foreign Office resources to Russia:

While Russia was an autocracy, decisions were in a few hands. The educated class is small enough for a few English-men to keep in good touch with everyone who counts in it. But when the great questions of peace, land and bread became dependent on the moods of mobs, our little efforts were drowned in a storm of lying German gramophones, and there arose the opportunity for an enormous mob-delusion which is even now approaching the bankruptcy inevitable to its moral emptiness.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ TNA, WO 106/5726: Lockhart to FO, 28 March 1918; TNA, WO 106/5726: Lockhart, 3 April 1918.

¹¹⁵ TNA, WO 106/1098: Note by Knox on the Present Situation in Russia.

¹¹⁶ TNA, WO 106/1098: Henry Wilson, The Delay in the East.

¹¹⁷ TNA, WO 106/5726: Lockhart to FO, 31 March 1918.

¹¹⁸ TNA, FO 175/19: Memorandum on the Creation of a Special Service of the Foreign Office for Russia, Professor Bernard Pares, 15 April 1918.

This implicitly suggested that the centre of the conflict was within Russia, not between Russia and Germany. Had it been heeded, such an assessment could have brought civil war back into the discussion, but as German divisions began to shift from the Eastern Front, Allied policymakers struggled to look beyond the threat posed by the Central Powers. Note however that Pares also maintained the assumption of Bolshevik weakness.

For the Bolsheviks' Russian opponents, who found themselves fighting for their survival, the claim that they were fighting a civil war seems altogether reasonable. The Bolsheviks also described themselves as fighting a civil war, Trotsky going so far as to declare that 'our Party is for civil war! ...long live civil war! Civil war for the sake of the children, the elderly, the workers and the Red Army, in the name of direct and ruthless struggle against counter-revolution.'¹¹⁹ And yet Lenin and Trotsky feared foreign enemies far more than Russian adversaries at this juncture. Britain's framing of the conflict in Russia as between Russians and a German invasion was broadly consistent with how Lenin viewed his position in the spring of 1918. Lenin explained how his aim was 'to preserve our socialist island in the middle of stormy seas.'¹²⁰ He concluded that this was only possible by appeasing the Germans because 'the war party has gained the upper hand in German politics [and could]... at any moment... [launch] an immediate general offensive against Russia.'¹²¹ Lenin openly stated that given the immensity of the German threat, and the fact that 'the Brest Treaty was violated by the German',¹²² 'we do not in general reject military agreements with one of the imperialist coalitions against the other.'¹²³ However Lenin also made it clear that 'we cannot at the present moment enter into a military agreement with the Anglo-French coalition.' Open alliance with the Entente would prompt a German attack,

¹¹⁹ Leon Trotsky, *The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky; How the Revolution Armed, Volume 1: The Year 1918*, Brian Pearce (Trans.), (London: New Park Publications, 1979), p. 85.

¹²⁰ Vladimir Lenin, 'Report On Foreign Policy, 14 May 1918', *Lenin's Collected Works*, vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 365-381.

¹²¹ Vladimir Lenin, 'Theses On The Present Political Situation, 12 May 1918', *ibid.*, pp. 360-364.

¹²² Vladimir Lenin, 'Protest to the German Government Against the Occupation of the Crimea, 11 May 1918', *ibid.*, pp. 358-359.

¹²³ Vladimir Lenin, 'Theses On The Present Political Situation, 12 May 1918', *ibid.*, pp. 360-364.

which 'would mean the complete collapse of Soviet power.'¹²⁴ Meanwhile Lenin felt that it was more important to appease the Germans 'because the danger of the Japanese advance can more easily be paralysed (or can be delayed for a longer time) than the threat of the Germans occupying Petrograd, Moscow and a large part of European Russia.'¹²⁵ It seems strange therefore that the Bolsheviks would consider themselves to be fighting a civil war when their survival would be decided in Berlin, rather than by the Russian opposition to their rule. As we have seen however for the Bolsheviks the German High Command were one and the same with the ranks of Russian wreckers, serving the bourgeoisie, in the context of an international class civil war. Thus their use of the term is also internally consistent.

The British understood the Bolsheviks' survival to also be in the hands firstly of Berlin, and if Berlin decided that the Bolsheviks must fall, then secondly in Versailles. Jonathan Smele¹²⁶ and Evan Mawdsley agree that 'the main line of [Bolshevik] policy had to be the appeasement of the Central Powers, who were clearly the greater threat - and a threat against which Soviet Russia had no real power.'¹²⁷ But if it is accepted that Russia's fate was principally in the hands of non-Russians, then does it make sense to speak of the conflict as civil war? The British government felt that it did not, and given the significance of German policy in early 1918, their view cannot be dismissed as the product of ignorance. Knox was affronted by the suggestion that he and his colleagues were not giving the Cabinet an accurate view of developments, declaring that 'the situation in the Eastern Theatre has reached its present dangerous stage, not owing to the scantiness or the inaccuracy of your information but because of the delay in coming to a rapid decision in London... on the information received.'¹²⁸ While it is reasonable to conclude that a lack of granular local information hindered British horizon scanning, and strategic contingency planning, it is a substantial exaggeration to claim that 'none of the Western powers knew what their aims

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Jonathan Smele, *The Russian Revolution from Tsarism to Bolshevism* (Audible, 2009), 05:53:00-05:55:00.

¹²⁷ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 63.

¹²⁸ TNA, WO 106/1098: Note by Knox on the Present Situation in Russia.

were.'¹²⁹ The mismatched nomenclature of historians and British officials with regards to 'civil war' does not therefore show that the British were simply wrong or misguided, but reflects the perspective from which they were examining events.

The central flaw in the attempted rapprochement with the Bolsheviks was – as Lenin had indicated – the disparity in threat presented by the Germans as opposed to the Entente. The Germans had far more leverage. Berlin was not blind to the Allies' moves and in early April 'sent protest to Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs against French British organising defence of Russia stating this against Brest-Litovsk terms.'¹³⁰ The Germans began to seize more territory, citing the Bolsheviks' cooperation with the Entente as one justification. The issue came to a head on 10 May. When the Germans seized the fleet in the Crimea, Chicherin, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, informed the Germans that 'the advance on the Crimea is a serious violation of the Brest Treaty since it is an incursion into the territory of the Soviet Republic.'¹³¹ The crisis sparked a fierce debate on the party Central Committee where, as the historian Robert Service describes, 'Sokolnikov, the man who signed the Treaty of Bresk-Litovsk' told the Central Committee 'that the Germans were no longer to be trusted and that the Treaty had been a mistake.'¹³² Had the vote gone in favour of a resumption of the war, Lockhart's policy would have succeeded. A passionate intervention from Lenin however defeated the motion. The British understood why Lenin was unwilling to move against Germany. In the very telegram in which the Foreign Office approved Lockhart's push to gain Bolshevik permission for intervention, the government acknowledged 'that even if the general body of the population were prepared to fight, which is extremely doubtful, Russia could not put up any serious military resistance to German armies for months to come.'¹³³ Lenin recognised that the support the Allies could provide would never arrive in time to prevent Germany taking Moscow and Petrograd. But for the Bolsheviks to overlook Germany's breach of the Brest-Litovsk treaty left them powerless to oppose German demands.

¹²⁹ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 651.

¹³⁰ TNA, WO 106/5726: C X 026150.12956. Petrograd, 5 April 1918.

¹³¹ Chicherin, 'Protest to the German Foreign Ministry, 22 April 1918', *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, p. 71.

¹³² Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010), p. 360.

¹³³ TNA, WO 106/5726: FO to Lockhart, 8 April 1918.

Lenin had sought to keep his options open as the Red Army was built, by retaining his relationship with the Allies, but Germany steadily increased pressure on the Bolsheviks to eject the allies from the ports. By the beginning of June 'in regard to the sinking of Russian ships, the Germans had stated that sinkings would cease when the British withdrew from Murmansk.'¹³⁴

The growing pressure from Berlin explains one of the more surprising moves by the Bolsheviks, which would reignite serious internal conflict within Russian territory. On 14 May 1918 a group of soldiers from the Czechoslovak Legion, trying to rejoin the Western Front by exiting Russia via Vladivostok, brawled with Hungarian prisoners of war. They were arrested, but their comrades broke them out of gaol and disarmed the Bolshevik garrison. In response Trotsky ordered that the Czechs be 'organised into labour artels or be drafted into the Soviet Red Army.'¹³⁵ Moreover 'every armed Czechoslovak found on the railway is to be shot on the spot.'¹³⁶ Given that the Czechoslovaks were stronger than any Bolshevik forces in the region historians have been understandably puzzled by Trotsky's orders. Orlando Figes notes how 'it was in everyone's interest to get [the Czechs] out of Russia... Trotsky's overreaction created a hostile army in the heart of Soviet Russia.'¹³⁷ In the context of Anglo-Bolshevik relations the decision is baffling. Days before, Lloyd George had suggested that '[Trotsky] could... have the use of the Czechoslovaks now in Russia and Siberia'¹³⁸ as a component of potential Allied aid. But in light of the threats emanating from Germany the move becomes understandable. The Czechoslovak Revolt, left unchallenged, would have given the Germans cause for declaring the Bolsheviks in breach of the Brest-Litovsk treaty. A clear signal needed to be sent that Russia was not in breach of its 'neutrality'.

For London, the Czechoslovak Revolt ended any hope of cooperation with the Bolsheviks. Their responsibility to support the Czechoslovak Legion was clear, and this precipitated intervention. The relationship rapidly deteriorated so that by late June open fighting broke out in Murmansk after the Murmansk Soviet showed the

¹³⁴ TNA, CAB 23/6: War Cabinet Minutes, 3 June 1918.

¹³⁵ Trotsky, cited in: J. Bunyan, *Intervention, Civil War and Communism in Russia: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936), p. 88.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 577.

¹³⁸ Bruce Lockhart, *British Agent* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), p. 237.

British a telegram signed 'Lenin and Trotsky' ordering that 'the British were to be ejected immediately from Murmansk; that anyone dealing with them or helping them in any way was to be treated as a felon; and that we were there only to upset the Revolution and install the Bourgeoisie in power,' promising a division of troops to carry out the task.¹³⁹ It took a month to prepare the intervention forces, but Archangel was taken on 2 August, with landings at Vladivostok shortly after.

These actions were not just undertaken as a move against Germany; the British government was considering the Bolsheviks to be tools of German power. Reports before and after the intervention confirmed officials in their view that the Bolsheviks had placed themselves entirely at the disposal of Germany. For instance, on 19 July 1918 Francis Lindley, the British Consul in Russia, received an intelligence report detailing events at the Reval Naval Base on the Baltic:

The official who is charged by the Bolshevik Government with the liquidation of affairs of the Reval Naval port, arrived from Reval to Petrograd. In conversation he stated that the naval port, with the forts, guns and defences, are being systematically destroyed by the German authorities ... The large factories, such as the Ovigatel Railway Wagon Works, are ... supplying rolling stock for Germany ... Kruhl's Engineering Works is making field kitchens for the German army in considerable numbers. Wiegand's Works are supplying Germany with a large quantity of machinery ... The yards and works are carried on under German control, but with a Russian Staff.¹⁴⁰

The report highlights how the Bolsheviks appeared to be turning over functioning materiel to Germany. The British were deeply concerned that the same could happen in Archangel and Vladivostok. Having come to see the Bolsheviks as being aligned with the Central Powers, the British government not only feared that the Germans might march on Archangel from Finland, but that even under Bolshevik control, the port could become usable for German shipping and military operations. As Lindley put it in early July, 'the economic concessions made to Germany... would give the latter the right to exploit Russia to any extent.'¹⁴¹

The British fear, that the Bolsheviks were openly cooperating with the Germans, fuelled concern over the number of prisoners of war of the Central Powers across Russia. In Siberia, for example, the Cabinet received news that the forces fighting the Czechs comprised '15,000 Red Army, 12,000 armed prisoners,

¹³⁹ PAW, LG/F/18/1/26: Sir Eric Geddes to Lloyd George, 29 June 1918.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, FO 175/6: Petrograd to Lindley, 19 July 1918.

¹⁴¹ TNA, FO 175/7: Lindley to Balfour, 14 July 1918.

50 guns and a reserve of 25,000 armed Red Guards.¹⁴² That so many Germans were involved in military action against the Allies suggested to the British a potential German presence in Vladivostok, enabling the Germans to make use of the port, just as they might obtain the war materials in Archangel and the naval facilities in Murmansk and the Crimea. These fears were exaggerated, but not entirely false. In mid August the Bolsheviks signed a supplementary treaty with Germany to the effect that 'should the Russian action against the forces of the Entente in North Russia not be immediately successful, Germany would itself be obliged to undertake such action, if necessary with help from Finnish troops.'¹⁴³ In short, the Germans did indeed force the Bolsheviks to concede their right to access and operate in Archangel, signaling their intention to circumvent the Allied blockade.

Allied intervention was therefore carried out against Germany and its proxies, and was not explicitly intended to settle internal political disputes inside Russia. The government however were well aware both that Russia was widely described as being in a state of civil war, and that they would be accused of intervening in one. Thus when Balfour rose in the House of Commons to answer questions on the intervention he said that 'the aim of His Majesty's Government is to secure the political and economic restoration of Russia, without internal interference of any kind, and to bring about the expulsion of enemy forces from Russian soil.'¹⁴⁴ The term 'internal interference' was an established phrase within British politics and almost always used in reference to civil war. Balfour's use of the term was therefore to some extent a concession to his critics; a recognition that from a certain point of view there was validity in seeing Russia as being in a state of civil war, but that was not the basis upon which the British had undertaken their policy. For those involved in the British government's discussion of the issue it is reasonable to conclude that their denial of 'civil war' was sincere. It was based upon an internally coherent, and, from a strategic perspective, reasonable interpretation of the facts on the ground. Balfour's assurances did not address the concern of his critics however, who viewed the claim as outright deceit. For those

¹⁴² TNA, CAB 23/14: War Cabinet Minutes, 5 July 1918.

¹⁴³ 'Secret Protocol of the Russo-German Supplementary Treaty 27 August 1918', *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Balfour, HC, *Hansard* (5 August 1918), vol. 109, col. 905.

immersed in the public discussion of Russia the idea that there was no civil war seemed to be a denial of reality. Philip Snowden, responding to Balfour's statement in the Commons, demanded to know whether 'it is the view of the Government and the Allies that the best way to promote the political restoration of Russia is to accentuate civil war there?'¹⁴⁵ Balfour replied that 'we do not propose to interfere in the internal arrangements of Russia. Russia must manage her own affairs.'¹⁴⁶ Critics could not see how this was possible. An article summing up the opposition critique appeared in *The Manchester Guardian* two days after Balfour's statement observing that whatever the government's intentions in intervening, 'in practice... [it illustrates] the inevitable trend of all such expeditions to take the form of supporting one side in a civil war against another.'¹⁴⁷ What these critics did not see was that as far as the British government were concerned the Bolsheviks were not an internal Russian faction in a civil war, but a German proxy facilitating the invasion of Russia, both direct and indirect, by the Central Powers. The distinction was important. As discussed in the previous chapters it had long been the position of the British government that civil war did not negate a nation's sovereignty and therefore was not a basis for intervention. But to fight a foreign invader, and their proxies, on behalf of a military ally was another matter entirely.

While in public the government gave little ground to their critics, in private Balfour was prepared to concede that they had a point. He did not accept that Russia was in a state of civil war – with all the specific structures that this entailed - but he recognised that Russia was fractured between internal factions, and that intervention would invariably help some factions at the expense of others. Two weeks before the intervention Balfour wrote of his concerns to the Prime Minister:

It is of course perfectly true that, however strong and genuine be our desire to keep out of Russian politics it will probably be in practice almost impossible to prevent intervention having some (perhaps a great) effect on Russian Parties. The intervening Force must necessarily work with those who are prepared to work with it. Indirectly it will strengthen the parties who are prepared to fight the Germans. It will directly injure the parties that turn to Germany for assistance. We can do no more than attempt, to the best of our ability, to keep aloof from these internal divisions, and to give full

¹⁴⁵ Philip Snowden, *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁶ Arthur Balfour, *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁷ 'The Allies at Archangel', *The Manchester Guardian* (7 August 1918), p. 4.

opportunity to the Russian people to determine the future of their country.¹⁴⁸ Balfour also admitted, writing in private to the Prime Minister, that Britain did have strong interests in Russia's internal politics, and that 'our political convictions... and our imperial interest should lead us to favour the establishment of a free Government in Russia.'¹⁴⁹ Balfour was therefore not denying that Russians were fighting one another, or that Britain would side with some of those Russians. But the conflict did not constitute civil war because the aggressors were German proxies. He recognised that there were internal political disputes, but in the context of German intervention, British policy was not first and foremost an intervention into Russia's internal affairs. What Balfour had clearly appreciated however was that as there would be consequences for Russia internally, the British ought to be thinking about them.

For the War Office, the collapse of Lockhart's talks with the Bolsheviks, and Lenin's alignment with Germany, vindicated Knox's contention that the fight was between Germany, using Russian proxies, and a coalition of Russian nationalists supported by the Allies. Reports of German prisoners fighting for the Bolsheviks had long been a subject of contention between government departments. Through the spring there had been a continual stream of reports of German officers consolidating prisoners of war into functional detachments.¹⁵⁰ These were often challenged or contradicted.¹⁵¹ After the intervention however, opinion swung in favour of Knox's assessment. By September he was reporting to the Director of Military Intelligence that

Bolshevik forces are now organised and led by German officers and so have become a more formidable enemy to Czechs. The systemic massacre in European Russia of officers and all pro ally elements is evidently permitted by Germany. It is General Dietrichs opinion that Germany left with nothing but the starving peasantry to deal with will be able to recruit Russians to fight as she has already for labour purposes.¹⁵²

Foreign Office officials began to adopt the military's language with regards to

¹⁴⁸ PAW, LG/F/3/3/18: Balfour to Lloyd George, 15 July 1918.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ TNA, WO 106/5726: Sir C. Greene, 4 April 1918.

¹⁵¹ TNA, WO 106/5726: Paraphrase of a Cablegram from the Navy Department, Washington Transmitting A Report Made By Admiral Austin Knight US Navy On Conditions In The Far East.

¹⁵² TNA, WO 106/1233: Knox to DMI, 18 September 1918.

drawing no line between the Bolsheviks and Germans. For example the Consul at Irkutsk wrote to Balfour to warn that ‘Germans busily intriguing everywhere and Russians cannot be trusted. Unofficially reported Bolsheviks and Germans have reached and taken Samara.’¹⁵³

The understanding that Germany and her proxies had overrun the country, rather than Russia being in the grip of civil war, would dominate British official thinking until the armistice of November 1918. The peace, in removing the necessity of countering Germany, also undermined the justification of intervention. But because the British had not considered Russia to be fighting a civil war, they had entangled themselves with Russian factions that they did not feel they could abandon. Thus all of the unaddressed questions that Balfour had raised prior to intervention came to the forefront, and the British were forced to reinterpret their actions over the previous year. That reinterpretation would substantially change Britain’s approach to civil war. One important lesson that would remain at the centre of British thinking was the international security implications of conflict in Russia, and the use of civil war as a tool by foreign powers. Both of these factors would drive official thinking towards an understanding of civil war as an international concern, instead of an internal affair.

Russia, Civil War, and International Security, 1919

The armistice of November 1918 saw the success of Allied policy in Russia. If the objective had been to defeat the Central Powers, this was now achieved. On these grounds the preponderance of military opinion favored withdrawal. In November, the War Office and Foreign Office pre-empted the Cabinet to advise its officers serving in Russia that there ‘can be no question of any general anti-Bolshevik crusade.’¹⁵⁴ When the Cabinet finally turned to address its options in Russia in January 1919 the Imperial General Staff made clear its view, suggesting that defeating the Bolsheviks could only be achieved with the deployment of an impossibly large number of troops, and that if no such reinforcement were available, ‘the only alternative was withdrawal’¹⁵⁵ from Murmansk and Archangel,

¹⁵³ TNA, FO 175/13: Consular Office Irkutsk to Balfour, 9 September 1918.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, WO 106/1288: WO to Knox, Ironsides, and Maynard, 20 November 1918.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 10 January 1919.

while it was ‘recommended that the two British battalions at or about Omsk should be withdrawn from Siberia altogether.’¹⁵⁶

This was rendered physically impossible because Archangel was icebound, and it was feared that withdrawing forces from other parts of Russia would allow the Bolsheviks to concentrate against the small remaining Allied force. The result was that the British government was left with five months to work out their policy. At the end of that period they had fundamentally changed their understanding of what they faced in Russia. Laying out the government’s policy before the House of Commons in April 1919, Lloyd George explicitly stated that they had intervened in a ‘civil war’, explaining that

we want peace in Russia. The world will not be pacified so long as Russia is torn and rent by civil war. We made one effort. I make no apology for that. That was an effort to make peace among the warring sections, not by recognising any Government, but by inducing them to come together, with a view to setting up some authority in Russia which would be acceptable to the whole of the Russian people, and which the Allies could recognise as the Government of that great people.¹⁵⁷

This was not just a new policy for a new situation, but a departure from the principles underpinning the established policy in response to civil conflict. As cited in the first chapter, Edward Grey had explained with regards to Persia in 1908 that the ‘only course for us to take in these circumstances is that... we shall not go one inch further in intervention than we can help. As long as we abstain from intervention, I hope the Persians will fight out their affairs in their own way.’¹⁵⁸ Civil war was understood as a domestic matter; intervention as a foolish way of increasing the likelihood of great power confrontation, and a violation of sovereignty that would set a dangerous precedent, encouraging meddling in British territory. Lloyd George, by contrast, argued in 1919 that civil war in Russia was not an internal concern, but threatened international peace, and the international community had a responsibility to ensure a government that had the support of the population. Thus he was advocating a responsibility on behalf of Britain not only to ensure Britain’s interests, but the interests of the Russian people. The question is what had caused such a fundamental reframing of policy?

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ David Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (16 April 1919), vol. 114, col. 2944.

¹⁵⁸ Edward Grey, HC, *Hansard* (27 July 1908), vol. 193, col. 976.

Arguably there were three important factors that shaped British official thinking. The first was the belief that Germany was using proxies to stimulate civil conflict to extend their influence. The second was the nature of the Bolshevik government, its ideology, and conduct. The third was Britain's commitment to the emerging White administrations.

To begin with Germany, if the Allied war aims were to defeat the Central Powers, and the Bolsheviks were understood to be German proxies, then their continued resistance represented a tool of German power still in the field. As the French General Maurice Janin suggested shortly after the Armistice, 'the Germans must be compelled to withdraw from Russia, not only the German troops there but also the German prisoners who formed the cadres of the Bolshevik troops, and the Germans must be made formally responsible for any prolongation of the war caused by their failure to carry out this condition.'¹⁵⁹ Of course the Bolsheviks, while previously vulnerable to German leverage, were not actually under German control. But fears of German influence, or that they would become an avenue for the rehabilitation of German militarism, persisted. Even a Bolshevik defeat could aid Germany, as Balfour had indicated prior to intervention, writing that 'a restored Tsardom would be more dangerous to British interests than the Tsarism which has just vanished: for it would almost certainly be dependent upon German support.'¹⁶⁰ British observers in Russia briefly speculated that the collapse of Germany might undermine the Bolsheviks. Colonel Elmsley noted in a dispatch to the War Office that 'the Bolsheviks... have a numerical superiority of 200,000 and they also have the advantage of interior lines' but felt 'since [the] fall of German power Bolshevik reported to fear hostile activity,' and argued that supporting Britain's allies in Russia by 'a half measure' would 'at this critical period [be] undoubtedly [a] dangerous course to pursue,'¹⁶¹ advocating 'full support on this and Black Sea front... until Russian forces can stand alone.'¹⁶² By the end of 1918 the evidence suggested that the Bolsheviks could stand without Germany, but the desire to close Russia to German influence would remain. As late as April 1919 reports to the Foreign Office still highlighted the view that 'Russians I have

¹⁵⁹ TNA, WO 106/1288: General Janin, 20 November 1918.

¹⁶⁰ PAW, LG/F/3/3/18: Balfour to Lloyd George, 15 July 1918.

¹⁶¹ TNA, WO 106/1288: Colonel Elmsley to WO, 29 November 1918.

¹⁶² Ibid.

questioned are absolutely unanimous in stating their conviction that Germans are behind Bolshevik movement in South Russia and that Bolshevik leaders are in touch and directed by Berlin.¹⁶³ In August 1919 officials were debating how to block the sale of German arms to Russia because it would 'bring purchasers into close touch with Germany thus defeating object of our mission which is to eliminate German influence in Baltic States and North Western Russia.'¹⁶⁴ This paranoia about German power provided a strategic interest in the British prolonging the intervention in Russia beyond the armistice. It also connected the outcome of the Russian civil war to the likelihood of a stable peace settlement in the minds of British officials.

Although the British government quickly came to appreciate that the Bolsheviks were principally a Russian faction they were acutely aware that Bolshevism as an ideology was not limited to Russia. As has already been noted, the Bolsheviks' internationalism provided a justification for the British government to argue that the Bolsheviks in Russia represented a direct threat to Britain and Europe. As Lloyd George explained to Parliament

we are supplying all these countries with the necessary equipment to set up a real barrier against an invasion by force of arms. The Bolsheviks may menace or they may not. Whether they do so or not, we should be ready for any attempt to overrun Europe by force.¹⁶⁵

Similarly Bolshevik propaganda was perceived to be used outside of Russia as a weapon, aimed beyond Russia's borders. Churchill wrote to Lloyd George describing the seductive and dangerous power of Bolshevik ideology in states that were suffering from privation:

They think that Germany is on the verge of a complete collapse, and there is no doubt that it would from many points of view pay her to escape the consequences of the war by taking refuge in Bolshevism. Once you are a Bolshevik you are apparently immune. All past crimes are forgiven and forgotten; all past sentences are remitted and all debts are forgiven; all territory that you want to have is restored to you.¹⁶⁶

Colleagues felt Churchill to be rather extreme in his hostility to the Bolsheviks, but

¹⁶³ TNA, FO 608/189: High Commissioner Constantinople to Balfour, 21 April 1919

¹⁶⁴ TNA, FO 608/199: British Mission Helsingfors to Balfour, 2 August 1919.

¹⁶⁵ David Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (16 April 1919), vol. 114, col. 2944.

¹⁶⁶ CCC, CHAR 16/6: Churchill to PM, 9 April 1919.

they did not dispute his basic point, especially with the January and Munich Uprisings in Germany. The Bolsheviks were also thought to pose a direct threat to the British Empire and Britain itself. As early as July 1918 the Foreign Office noted with alarm that 'Mr. Lenin takes a special interest in the oppressed masses of India.'¹⁶⁷ Furthermore German promotion of insurrection had brought about fears, as Mark Sykes told Parliament, that 'Sinn Fein is the potential nucleus of a Bolshevik movement in the United Kingdom.'¹⁶⁸ Rothermere warned Lloyd George that 'without land legislation of a most revolutionary character, it will be impossible to save this country from movements which will have a Bolshevik tendency.'¹⁶⁹ The result was that British officials felt they had a genuine and serious security concern in the outcome of Russia's conflict, even if it was a war primarily between Russians.

A further aspect of Bolshevism that caused the British to maintain their position in Russia, and would form a component of their justification for what they conceded to be an intervention in a civil war, were Bolshevik atrocities. Because British troops were already involved in defending civilian populations the government felt that to withdraw would render them responsible for the consequences. Through the winter of 1919 Beilby Alston - Deputy High Commissioner at Vladivostok - reported how 'the mutilations and tortures performed on wounded and others before death baffle description for rank barbarous brutality. Ferocity of the Turks in Armenia cannot compare with what is now going on in Russia.'¹⁷⁰ Typical was a report on 14 January that described how

number of innocent civilians brutally murdered by Bolsheviks at Argo and other Ural towns runs into hundreds; some of these people have been found with eyes pierced out, others without noses, officers taken prisoners by Bolsheviks here had their shoulder straps nailed into their shoulders, girls have been raped, and amongst others, Bishop Andronick was buried alive at Perm whilst 25 priests were shot there.¹⁷¹

A military observer, Colonel Robertson, concluded that 'Bolshevism is here more

¹⁶⁷ TNA, FO 175/7: Lindley to Balfour, 14 July 1918.

¹⁶⁸ Mark Sykes, HC, *Hansard* (25 June 1918), vol. 107, cols. 952-953.

¹⁶⁹ CCC, CHAR 2/103: Rothermere to Lloyd George, 14 November 1918

¹⁷⁰ TNA, WO 106/1225: Beilby Alston to FO, 18 January 1919.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 14 January 1919.

and more sinking into sheer brigandage.¹⁷² Alston had already wired that he believed the

interpretation that Allied participation in struggle against Bolsheviks is an intervention in internal affairs in Russia is attributed to lack of information. Bolsheviks are ruining Russian culture and destroying flower of Russian people in masses. The termination of such barbarity is no longer considered a purely Russian affair but duty of whole civilised world.¹⁷³

Alston's view is significant because it presents a departure from established policy. A government's treatment of its own people had not, hitherto, been considered the business of other states. But Alston was arguing that the treatment of Russians by Russians invalidated the legitimacy of that government, and justified or even obligated foreign intervention. He was not alone in advocating this view.

As Balfour had pointed out before the intervention started, remaining aloof from Russia's internal affairs would be impossible. He was proven right within days. The conceptual framework that placed Russia beyond civil war produced two justifications for the inevitable interference. British officers would either proceed on the assumption that the Allies would support whatever governmental structures were erected by the Russians, while keeping out of constitutional matters, or the Allies could work from the basis that if the anti-Germans were the true Russians, and their opponents hostage to a foreign power, or to an ideology that sought to expunge Russian identity altogether, then any military advance against the Bolsheviks would hand power back to Russia, and Allied intervention should be geared around ensuring military success. In practice both ways of thinking were used to justify Allied actions; Knox asserted that 'military necessity is the only consideration that could possibly justify such interference.'¹⁷⁴ Although early attempts to engage with local political factions were made in August 1918, Allied officials became frustrated with the in-fighting that plagued these administrations. The effective functioning of local government in supplying food, and ensuring security, certainly fell within the remit of military necessity. Allied forces had not been in Russia for a whole month before Knox was arguing - based on the recommendations of Kolchak - that the 'Allies should go through to the

¹⁷² TNA, WO 106/1240: Report of Colonel Robertson, 25 May 1919.

¹⁷³ TNA, WO 106/1225: Alston to FO, 8 January 1919.

¹⁷⁴ TNA, WO 106/1233: Knox to WO, 20 September 1918.

Urals without committing themselves to any government but clearing the Zemstva of the few Bolsheviks contained in them and making use of former local administration,'¹⁷⁵ thereby shaping by decree the composition of local government. In North Russia too British officials felt that

the [local] government committees are undoubtedly badly organised and unbusinesslike and are always entangled in party politics and party intrigues and consequently the Allies will have to exercise a considerable amount of direct control, although it is appreciated that the [local] Government Committees cannot be ignored.¹⁷⁶

The result of this frustration was the establishment of Allied shadow institutions to direct Russian administration. Set up to improve the efficiency of the new governments, these chanceries had the unintended consequence of making the functioning of Russian administration dependent upon Allied officials. In Vladivostok the relevant institution was the 'inter-allied control bureau'¹⁷⁷ run by Allied diplomats. In Archangel it was called the 'chancery.' Both organisations preferred to work through the Russians. In Omsk for example Allied diplomats noted that 'although friction very great between reactionary Siberia and revolutionary Russia I believe that under the influence of certain members of Assembly who realise seriousness of moment and indispensable formation of Central Power having as chief aim salvation of Russia.'¹⁷⁸ The orders would come from the military, which would pass them to local administrations through the Allied chanceries, as illuminated by correspondence between Consul Lindley and Major-General Poole in Archangel. Poole, Commander-in-Chief of Allied forces, commented that such 'a liaison between the military authorities and the local government... appears to be an excellent proposition provided that it is clearly understood that situations will frequently arise where military considerations are paramount.'¹⁷⁹ Consul Lindley conceded that urgent military imperatives would justify unilateral action, but warned that situations 'involving the relations between the military authorities and the local government will frequently occur in which it will be desirable for the views and requirements of the Allies to be

¹⁷⁵ TNA, WO 106/1233: Knox to DMI, 28 August 1918.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, FO 175/9: Suggested Organisation of Food Control, 31 August 1918.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, WO 106/1233: Knox to DMI, 21 September 1918.

¹⁷⁸ TNA, FO 175/13: Preston to Balfour, 9 September 1918.

¹⁷⁹ TNA, FO/175/7: Poole to Lindley, 16 August 1918.

presented to the Local Government by a civil organisation.¹⁸⁰ The implicit dynamic in this was that local authorities would do as they were told, an expectation frustrated by party politics. By September, political friction was causing exasperation, with Foreign Office officials writing to Balfour to report that the 'Siberian Government are responsible for most difficulties in forming Central Government and their attitude is absurd.'¹⁸¹ The solution was to turn local government - on the grounds of military necessity - into an organ for the implementation, rather than drafting, of policy, for 'political strife continues to increase and future looks bleak. Only a military dictator, I consider, [can] save the situation.'¹⁸² Meanwhile the officers of the new Russian army were to be trained by Allied staff, and as cadets, fall under Allied command.

One result of British officials inserting themselves into local administration was that the new Russian governments became dependent upon the Allies, not just financially, but upon the personnel that made their governments function. This was accentuated by the tendency of the Allies to ignore central administrations when distributing food, as in Archangel. As the historian Liudmila Novikova notes, 'at least 90 out of 119 volosts of Arkhangelsk province in one way or another welcomed the overthrow of the Bolsheviks.'¹⁸³ For the Allies, many of the subsequent local committees proved far more efficient than the central government. The tendency to work around, rather than through, Russian bureaucracy increased dependence on the Allies and tarnished the reputation of the new governments. As Peter Kenez has pointed out, 'the Whites failed to organise well-functioning local administrations, because they were unable to find reliable and competent administrators.'¹⁸⁴ By the Armistice 'they were forced to rely either on pre-Revolutionary functionaries with outdated psychologies, or on military officers with monarchist inclinations... Combining civilian and military administration led to massive abuses of power, the theft of state property,

¹⁸⁰ TNA, FO/175/7: Lindley to Poole, 17 August 1918.

¹⁸¹ TNA, FO 175/13: Consular Office Irkutsk to Balfour, 9 September 1918.

¹⁸² TNA, FO 175/13: Nash to Balfour, 9 September 1918.

¹⁸³ Liudmila Novikova, 'Northerners into Whites: Popular Participation in the Counter-Revolution in Arkhangelsk Province, Summer - Autumn 1918', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2008), p. 284.

¹⁸⁴ Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia 1919-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 61.

unjustified brutality, and acts of restoration.'¹⁸⁵

British officials therefore felt that without them the populations would suffer, and to withdraw would render them responsible. During discussion of the new policy to be adopted in Russia Austin Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke for the Cabinet with the view that 'no one believed that the non-Bolshevik Governments in Russia could by themselves stand for a moment.'¹⁸⁶ Churchill effectively used the emotional lever of this obligation on his colleagues, telling Cabinet that while he 'believed we ought to intervene' if Britain decided to withdraw 'the sooner they [the Russians] were told the better.'¹⁸⁷ Lloyd George sought for clarification as to 'the extent of the obligation we had undertaken in promising the protection of such States,'¹⁸⁸ not because he was uncertain as to his legal position, but because he felt that establishing legal obligations would effectively tie the Americans to continuing their support. Senior and junior officials, both in Russia and London, made this argument publically and privately. Robert Cecil, addressing the Commons, argued that

it is quite an easy thing to go into Russia; the difficulty is to get out. No better illustration could be given than the complications which have followed our perfectly legitimate intervention during the War. It necessarily follows that numbers of the people in Russia who worked with us and became our Allies have had their position altered in reference to the great civil war which was going on in Russia, and for us now simply to abandon them, and to leave them in the lurch would be... quite impossible and improbable. To induce people to take a certain responsibility and then merely to leave them without a word - that is the kind of action which this country has never been guilty of, and, I hope, never will be.¹⁸⁹

Note that Cecil ascribed intervention to 'the War' as in the First World War, as distinct from the 'great civil war' going on in Russia. Yet he was admitting that Britain was now entangled in it. On this he sounded remarkably similar to officials in Archangel, one of whom wrote to George Barnes, a fortnight earlier, declaring that

England has at least as great an obligation to defend the Northern Territory

¹⁸⁵ Viktor Bortnevski 'White Administration and White Terror (The Denikin Period)', *Russian Review*, vol. 52, no. 3 (July, 1993), p. 360.

¹⁸⁶ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 February 1919.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Cecil, HC, *Hansard* (29 July 1919), vol. 118, col. 1982.

of Russia as she had to defend Belgium. For a year we have fed the population, financed the government... we are not popular, the people are not grateful. But they rely on us: I think they trust us. If we withdraw our army, theirs will not stand. By evacuating... [we leave the population to] the reprisals that are humanly inevitable.¹⁹⁰

The importance placed on civil administration forced the British to consider Russia from the perspective of civil war. This was pressed upon them shortly after the armistice. The British had supported Kolchak in a *coup* to take control of the Siberian government in November of 1918, which Knox described as 'an absolutely honest attempt to restore order and that if this step had not been taken within a few weeks we would have had Bolshevik SR Risings.'¹⁹¹ The Admiral however was not very pliable and demanded that the Allies take note that 'the war in Siberia is really a civil war, and not strictly speaking a military operation.'¹⁹² The point Kolchak was making was that victory would be decided by which side the population supported, and this was a political as much as a military question. Security and supply were essential, but strategically so was a political cause. Kolchak used this to argue that Russians must lead the Siberian Army and be seen to be in command. The Allies ought to make their support less conspicuous. In short, if the Allies felt invested in the new government, they must treat the conflict as a civil war. This argument was widely accepted by British officials in theory; implementing it was hampered by the shortcomings of the White administration, and because they felt the implications went beyond putting Russians visibly in command. As Lloyd George himself commented, the White forces were well equipped and 'if the Russian population had been behind [the anti-Bolsheviks] they would certainly have made headway.'¹⁹³

All of these arguments contributed to a general acceptance within the Cabinet that it was in Britain's interest to remain in Russia, and that it was necessary to understand Russia as being in the midst of a civil war. A large-scale intervention was ruled out because it was financially ruinous and politically impossible, potentially risking mutiny in the army. The public, who for decades had heard politicians advise against intervention in civil conflict, and who were reading in the

¹⁹⁰ TNA, CAB 24/84: Letter received by George Barnes, 15 July 1919.

¹⁹¹ TNA, WO 106/1288: Knox to WO, 20 November 1918.

¹⁹² TNA, WO 106/1289: General Janin to FO, 16 December 1918.

¹⁹³ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 February 1919.

papers that Russia was indeed in the midst of a civil war, did not approve of the policy. In spite of this there was little enthusiasm for withdrawal in Cabinet. The idea that prolonged intervention was Churchill's policy, as Clifford Kinzig characterizes it,¹⁹⁴ and which is widely maintained in the historiography, is inaccurate. Churchill was a firm advocate of intervention, and he was influential, but the decision to maintain a presence in Russia was signed off by the Cabinet. Britain stayed in Russia because there was a general agreement, for an array of conflicting reasons, that the British must support the new Russian governments. Curzon eventually brought the Cabinet to conclude that 'a determined and thoroughgoing intervention was held to be impossible. Before deciding on the other extreme, a complete withdrawal, the War Cabinet should be perfectly clear that they were doing all they could in what he would call the bolstering policy.'¹⁹⁵

Curiously the government were prepared to be much more interventionist than they in fact went, and it is in their hopes for a democratic Russia that we see an important transformation not just in policy towards civil war, but in the British government's understanding of what a civil war was. Having accepted the civil war frame, the British became deeply concerned not only with the functioning of government, but also with the relations between government and population. Churchill for instance expressed a desire to create 'a civilised democratic state friendly above all to us'.¹⁹⁶ Writing to Bonar Law, Churchill argued that 'Russia must work out her own salvation. It is only by Russian manhood that this can be achieved. We have no intention... of sending British or Allied armies into Russia to enforce any particular solution of their internal affairs'.¹⁹⁷ By this he meant that the outcome in Russia must be a government that reflected the will of the people, and as the Bolsheviks suppressed that will, 'there is no use concealing the fact that we are helping the anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia against the Bolsheviks'.¹⁹⁸ Seeking to waylay concerns about the autocratic nature of Kolchak's government he wrote that it was

necessary... to secure from these anti-Bolshevik Governments... definite

¹⁹⁴ Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade*, p. 318.

¹⁹⁵ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 February 1919.

¹⁹⁶ CCC, CHAR 16/7: Churchill to Lloyd George, 7 May 1919.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Churchill to Bonar Law, 21 May 1919.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

guarantees that their victory will not be used to reestablish a reactionary Czarist regime. We do not intend a Red Terror to be succeeded by a White one. We are therefore seeking guarantees from Admiral Koltchak's Government which will secure the summoning of a constituent assembly based on a wide democratic franchise, which assembly will decide the future Government of Russia and secondly will secure an agrarian policy of a genuinely democratic kind.¹⁹⁹

Although Churchill's colleagues, including Lloyd George, shared these hopes,²⁰⁰ they were undermined by military priorities. There was a serious tension between the short-term effectiveness of government, and its strategic structural and ideological integrity. Churchill conceded that 'I do not... think that it would be fair to expect the Koltchak Government to carry out elections at the present time. They are struggling for life under conditions of war and internal discord of the most extraordinary kind.'²⁰¹ Across the White administered territory brutality and terror were commonplace. Justice was summary: 'the relevant investigations did not take more than twenty-four hours; after this interval the prisoner, whatever his standing, was either freed and furnished with appropriate documents, or was executed. We did not have any other form of punishment [because] everyone having taken one eye must pay with two.'²⁰² General Graves commanding American forces in Siberia commented that 'I doubt if history will show any country in the world during the last fifty years where murder could be committed so safely, and with less danger of punishment, than in Siberia during the regime of Admiral Kolchak.'²⁰³ For all of Churchill's concerns for democracy, British officers on the ground either turned a blind eye to the situation, or rendered themselves complicit in its abuses. In North Russia Captain Roeber wrote in his diary how upon capturing a Bolshevik sympathizer a White officer 'held a court martial on him and he was guilty of robbing a peasant and shooting some. He was shot. Not right without GOC's sanction. So we reported he died of wounds.'²⁰⁴ Arbitrary government left the Russian people, living under the White Administrations, facing a litany of cruelties, without any unifying narrative to justify it, or any promise of a

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ CCC, CHAR 16/7: Churchill to PM, 7 May 1919.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Churchill to PM, 21 May 1919.

²⁰² N. Sigida, cited in: Bortnevski, 'White Administration and White Terror', p. 358.

²⁰³ William Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure: 1918-1920*, p. 245.

²⁰⁴ IWM, Diary of Captain W. C. T. Roeber, 13 October 1918.

future deliverance. By July, the British Government recognised that 'the atrocities committed by Admiral Kolchak's force had alienated the whole of the Siberian peasantry.'²⁰⁵ Of the Admiral, the Foreign Office concluded that 'he is still respected as an honest and brave man and there is no movement against him personally but do not think his character is improving and he shows no sign of understanding his task is to provide an administration which people will feel to be preferable to Bolshevism.'²⁰⁶

The British failed to encourage democratic institutions in Russia. That trying to do so was so widely discussed however reveals a great deal about what the British thought was important in winning a civil war, and therefore reveals a change in thinking about the nature of the conflict. As outlined in the first chapter, the established view was that civil war was a conflict between political parties over questions of civic principle. The fighting was organised, and won or lost through military action. In South Africa, as in America, the expectation in civil conflict was total military victory. Political reconciliation came after the fighting had concluded. In Russia British officials were arguing that defeat or victory would be decided by convincing the population to support the government. Thus the measure of civil war was not just division over a clear ideological question, but also whether the population were resisting the government, or the government could not govern. This conflated two concepts that had previously been distinct, anarchy and civil war. In the past the onus had been on the rebels in civil conflict to gain recognised belligerent rights. This tension was not removed in Russia, but a new dimension was added: that the legitimacy of the government depended upon the acceptance of the population. Although this was precisely the justification for British action in Russia, little thought was immediately given to the broader implications of the principle. It would raise challenging questions the next year, as Ireland descended into a state that many, both in and out of government, considered to be civil war. Evolving ideas surrounding sovereignty and self-determination were influenced by, but not limited to, the conflict in Russia, and need to be considered in the context of Ireland, and the wider Paris Peace settlement. These issues will be dealt with in the following chapter.

²⁰⁵ TNA, CAB 23/11: War Cabinet Minutes, 14 July 1919.

²⁰⁶ TNA, FO 608/189: Sir Charles Eliot, 29 July 1919.

Chapter Four

Civil War, State, and Nation, 1918-1922

From 1919 to 1922 two conflicts dominated British discussion of civil war: Russia and Ireland. Officials were wary of comparing them directly, displaying their awareness of just how damaging that comparison could be. When the comparison was ventured in the House of Commons, Churchill insisted without explanation that 'my honourable and gallant Friend cannot connect Ireland with Russia'.¹ Yet the issues involved in both conflicts were fundamentally comparable, and as the British government sought to establish, align, and justify, its policies regarding self-determination, the legitimacy of government, and the rights of populations, the conflicts in Russia and Ireland became unavoidably linked in official discussion. This would have a significant effect upon how British officials thought about how to win, and end civil wars, with a departure from the total victory doctrine espoused during the South African War, to a tendency to seek settlements reconciling government and population. This tendency would also become the prevailing principle in international institutions towards civil conflict and survives to the present day.

In spite of the synchronic conflicts in Russia and Ireland, the links between them are not reflected in the historiography, which has treated each conflict as distinct and separate. The study of relations between the Bolsheviks and IRA underscores the lack of material connections; while arms and funds were discussed, little real support ever reached Ireland from Russia.² Further separating the historiography of the two conflicts are the divergent trajectories of social attitudes in Russia and Ireland - the former radical, the latter conservative – culminating in widespread support for Franco in Ireland during the Spanish Civil War,³ in contrast to the USSR's extensive material support to the Spanish Republic. Tying Ireland's national ambition to the rising nations of Eastern Europe,⁴ and

¹ Winston Churchill, HC, *Hansard* (5 August 1919), vol. 119, cols. 144-145.

² Emmet O'Connor, 'Communists, Russia, and the IRA, 1920-1923' in: *The Historical Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1 (March, 2003), pp. 115-131.

³ Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999).

⁴ Julia Eichenberg, 'The Dark Side of Independence: Paramilitary Violence in Ireland and Poland after the First World War', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 19, no. 3 (2010), pp. 231-248.

Irish insurgency to unrest in Egypt or India,⁵ has principally been undertaken from a cultural perspective, or focusing on transnational radicalism. Maurice Walsh, for instance, ties events in Ireland into the global tumult,⁶ but for the British state, and from a policy perspective, some revolutions were more closely tied to Ireland than others; some concepts presented a more immediate threat. As Paul McMahon observes, ‘the international aspect of the militant republican movement has been neglected in histories of the Irish revolution... yet it posed a serious threat to Britain and was a preoccupation of the British intelligence community and government.’⁷ This chapter therefore aims to examine critically how Ireland and Russia were connected in policy decisions within the British government, and how this affected long-term thinking about civil war, insurrection, and sovereignty.

Russia and Ireland became linked in official discussion before the British considered either to be in a state of civil war. Both countries were believed to have fallen victim to German intrigue, and this would shape how the two conflicts were problematised. This chapter therefore begins by exploring how the two conflicts became intertwined in official thinking, starting with allegations of German subterfuge. The chapter then considers three themes in the discussion of both conflicts that contributed to a new assessment of the way in which civil war was understood. The first section covers the debate over recognition of Russian opposition governments, the Bolsheviks, the Dail, and Ulster, examining how civil war affected the legitimacy of government. The second section will explore British attempts to develop consistent principles for the limits of self-determination, and how this impinged upon policy in response to civil war in Ireland and Russia. Finally the chapter will turn to debates over international governance, and the responsibility of the League of Nations in the context of civil war. Although the League did not become a mechanism for tackling civil conflict, the discussion of how it might do so contributed to a number of new practices.

⁵ Kate O’Malley, *Ireland, India and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

⁶ Maurice Walsh, *Bitter Freedom: Ireland in a Revolutionary World, 1918-1923* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015).

⁷ Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 97-98.

The Emergence of 'a Russian Ulster'

Russia and Ireland were linked in the minds of British officials by the pervasive concern over the role played by German intrigue. The Easter Rising of 1916 was described officially as 'an attempt, instigated and designed by the foreign enemies of our King and Country to incite rebellion in Ireland.'⁸ As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the rise of Bolshevism in Russia was similarly seen as a product of German skullduggery. There was therefore an overlap, which did not go unnoticed. As shown in the second chapter, German diplomats had assisted Irish groups in America prior to the 1916 rising, and German promises of aid encouraged the Easter rebels. In Russia German officers signed treaties of cooperation with the Bolsheviks. In the Spring of 1918 officers in Ireland warned of landings by German agents to coordinate arms shipments with Sinn Fein 'by means of a fishing boat... or by means of a neutral ship to reach Scandinavia and so to Germany.'⁹ In the wake of the intervention in Archangel Scandinavia was similarly connected to German activities in Russia. Intelligence began to emerge of 'Norwegian fishing vessels attempting to land unauthorized passengers on the Russian coast... There is also evidence that passengers - probably Bolshevik agitators - are smuggled into Norway.'¹⁰ Goods were also moved, including currency, and 'there is no doubt that the ultimate destination of rubles has been Germany.'¹¹

Reports of espionage might have remained a concern of security personnel if it were not for the opportunity for political rhetoric that such connections presented. In June 1918 Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, a confidant of Balfour, and a crucial backer of the Arab revolt, told the Commons that 'I believe that it has been in Germany's interest to set Englishmen against Irishmen before and since the War' and that 'Sinn Fein is the potential nucleus of a Bolshevik movement in the United Kingdom.'¹² Ever since the attempted 1905 revolution in Russia the British government had studiously avoided discussing Russia and Ireland in the same context. The comparison had regularly been advanced, but by Irish Nationalists.

⁸ PRONI, MIC 448/10: Proclamation, 24 April 1916.

⁹ IWM, Private Papers of Sir John French: Cipher No. 172, 21 April 1918.

¹⁰ TNA, FO 175/13: Edward Titterington to Lindley, 4 December 1918.

¹¹ Ibid., 3 December 1918.

¹² Mark Sykes, HC, *Hansard* (25 June 1918), vol. 107, cols. 952-953.

Yet in July 1918 the government suddenly seized upon this rhetoric with Edward Shortt, Chief Secretary for Ireland, making a remarkable reversal in Parliament. John Dillon found that after years of denying his comparisons of Russia and Ireland, Shortt quoted him to defend British policy, noting an article in which Dillon had argued Sinn Fein would 'lead the people to disaster and chaos, such as that which reigns in Russia at present.'¹³ Shortt went on, quoting Dillon, to describe Sinn Fein as seeking a 'form of liberty... which is characterised by wholesale murder, unpunished robbery, universal civil war, and the dispersal by machine guns and bayonets of the lawfully elected representatives of the people.'¹⁴

There were obvious reasons for trying to link Sinn Fein to the Bolsheviks. In Ireland, Viceroy Sir John French was pursuing a policy of enacting conscription, while trying to rally Irish opinion against the threat posed by Germany. Sinn Fein vehemently opposed conscription, and so to link them to the King's enemies seemed a sensible ploy. Eventually French hoped to be able to ban Sinn Fein as foreign agents, arguing once 'Sinn Feiners [were] declared by Proclamation to be "dangerous", we can proceed at once to declare it "illegal" anywhere or everywhere. The Object, in the first place, of declaring it to be "dangerous" is to enable us to declare it "illegal."¹⁵ Once the comparison was publicly made however, with the endorsement of the Government, it could not be readily disavowed. In July 1918 the Government did not have immediate reason to fear being put in an awkward position by the comparison. If anything it fitted different elements of British policy into a unified narrative of confronting Germany and her proxies. However the comparison was seized upon by Unionists, who declared Sinn Fein to be 'but part of the German Bolshevik campaign to foment separatist movements in every country,'¹⁶ and this rhetoric would continue after the armistice, when such statements became problematic for the government, raising the question as to whether Ireland was in a state of civil war. By 1919 the comparison had become a component in the discussion of Irish affairs.

There was a considerable gap between the perceived scale of German and Bolshevik intrigue, and the reality. As Stanley Payne points out, during the war

¹³ Edward Shortt, HC, *Hansard* (29 July 1918), vol. 109, col. 110.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ IWM, Private Papers of Sir John French, French to Stanfordham, 17 July 1918.

¹⁶ PRONI, D627/434/103: An Imperial Danger, November 1918.

Germany 'developed a broad, if not entirely integrated, strategy of subversion, sabotage, and revolution to promote the collapse of enemy home fronts and of opposing empires from within.'¹⁷ In Russia this strategy was not only centrally directed, but far exceeded the expectations of German planners. The German officers who escorted Lenin to Russia were 'briefed for the mission by the director of German military operations, General Erich Ludendorff, in person,'¹⁸ while as Evan Mawdsley notes, German policy was 'the most important foreign intervention in the Civil War,'¹⁹ a fact long underappreciated in the historiography. However, as shown in the previous chapter, British perceptions of German conspiracy in Russia outlasted its actual significance. Within the United Kingdom the perception of German espionage far exceeded the somewhat farcical reality. On the outbreak of war 'reports flooded in of German agents planning mayhem, and communicating with the enemy by a variety of improbable means,'²⁰ which turned out to be entirely false. The government was less carried away than the public, but even by the end of the war tended to overestimate German activity. When Joseph Dowling was arrested after landing from a German U-Boat, his claims of a German invasion force, and imminent rising, prompted authorities to make a serious blunder in moving fiercely against Sinn Fein.²¹ It is, as John Callaghan and Kevin Morgan argue, important when examining documents 'almost exclusively from the records of the British secret state,' not to take assertions in intelligence reports of Bolshevik conspiracy as proven without substantive corroborative evidence, for 'it is in the nature of the subject that unambiguous forms of evidence are often in short supply.'²² Secret is not the same as true. However, as the case of Dowling demonstrates, inaccurate intelligence can nevertheless have a tangible impact on policy, and as this chapter is an examination of official thinking, the emphasis of the research is on the effect of intelligence within government, and not upon the

¹⁷ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Catherine Merridale, *Lenin on the Train* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 148.

¹⁹ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 59

²⁰ Christopher Andrew, *Defense of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 53.

²¹ McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels*, p. 24.

²² John Callaghan and Kevin Morgan, 'The Open Conspiracy of the Communist Party and the Case of W N Ewer, Communist and Anti-Communist', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2006), pp. 550.

inherent veracity of the information. With regards to Bolshevik activities in Britain, as with German intrigue, fears obscured the reality, but that does not make the fear unimportant.

The second process by which Russia and Ireland became linked was less publicly visible, but far more consequential. As the issues dominating policy in both Russia and Ireland became similar, the two conflicts steadily became associated in the thinking of senior officials who were, on a regular basis, discussing policy in both Russia and Ireland in the same meetings. Many of the officers and officials involved in the campaign in Russia were intimately bound up with an Irish settlement. Alfred Knox, Britain's Military Attaché to Russia, was from Ulster. General Hubert Gough, liaison officer to the Baltic, tasked with the dual mission of 'assisting the Baltic States to provide for their own defence against the Bolshevik forces on the one hand and German domination on the other,'²³ was the same officer who had been at the centre of the Curragh Incident in 1914. General Henry Wilson, the erstwhile Director of Military Operations in 1914 who had conspired with Gough, and leaked government decision making to aid the Ulster Unionists, was by 1918 Chief of the Imperial General Staff overseeing all operations in Russia. He was also central to British policy in the Anglo-Irish War, and upon his resignation in 1922 would join the nascent Northern Irish government. Then there was Churchill, one of the few to attend the meetings that decided upon the movement of troops that set off the Curragh Incident in 1914, then Minister for War during intervention in Russia and the Anglo-Irish War, and Minister for the Colonies during the Irish Civil War. There were a plethora of more junior officials and officers who similarly worked both theatres, and many Cabinet Ministers had responsibilities covering both conflicts. The point is that even when not explicitly compared, the same people were discussing civil war, legitimate government, insurrection, and conspiracy in relation to both countries simultaneously. Historians of Ireland, most notably Ronan Fanning, have argued that Irish policy during 1919 was neglected, with British officials preoccupied by European affairs.²⁴ This has been used to justify treating Ireland separately, as an

²³ TNA, FO 608/199: Instructions for British Military mission to Finland and The Baltic States, 3 June 1919.

²⁴ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, pp. 188-191.

exceptional policy area that British officials stepped into periodically. The same might be said of European historians studying violence in Europe. Robert Gerwarth in *The Vanquished*, acknowledges Ireland, but treats it as exceptional because it was not one of the defeated states, and thereby justifies excluding it from his analysis.²⁵ But if British officials were preoccupied with events elsewhere it is more, rather than less, likely that their thinking about Russia, or Poland, would shape their judgments with regards to Ireland, and that precisely because Ireland did not fit into the patchwork of defeated and emerging states, it was particularly awkward for British officials to align with their rhetoric and policies elsewhere, like the proverbial pebble in the shoe of a hiker. Thus the two areas should be studied together, as well as in isolation.

Where the Russian situation would truly become linked to Ireland in official discussion was over the nationalities question, and the issues arising from self-determination, especially after the British government recognised Russia to be in a state of civil war. From the very beginning of the Allied intervention the British government were aware that many of the most experienced Russian officers had supported the Entente rather than Germany precisely because they felt the Allies would not force the break up of Great Russia. A chain of correspondence between the influential Russian politician Pavel Milukoff, and the former Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Alexeieff commanding the Volunteer Army, brings into sharp relief how vulnerable the pro-Allied stance of the White Movement was in 1918. Both fierce opponents of the Bolsheviks, Milukoff explained to his friend how 'I have collected several items of accurate information indicating that a *coup d'état* in Moscow, the establishment of a Constitutional Monarchy with a march on Moscow, is part of the immediate German programme.' He poured scorn on the prevalent argument that the Bolsheviks would soon collapse: 'The hope of Bolshevism outliving itself is an empty one... our chief aim must be the establishment of a united Russia.' Later he told his friend that the Germans in Ukraine were waiting for the cooperation of the Volunteer Army before it would launch the assault, warning that 'this object even with a Monarchical *coup d'état* in Moscow cannot be attained with the aid of the Allies. We cannot tear the south out of German hands and thus operations will result in the creation of an internal front

²⁵ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, p. 14.

and the further disintegration of Russia into two distinct portions.' Finally he warned ominously that 'some of your friends will not be convinced by these arguments, but such as are not convinced will soon find themselves swinging mid air.'²⁶ Alexeieff's response does not deny the limited support from the Allies, in fact he saw this as a reason for accepting Allied help: 'the German is our bitter enemy with whom accounts are not yet settled and who at the same time is the father and creator of Bolshevism which has brought our country to ruin.' Alexeieff went on to argue that the more plausible course of German policy would be the 'formation of four or five vassal states... I fully understand how strong and favourable is the position of the Germans, know also their ability of showing us a fist larger than it really is. Even with the poor signs of activity the Allies show we are quite unable to make ourselves servants.'²⁷ Kolchak especially supported a Great Russia and pressed hard for Allied recognition of a single Russian government, both as a catalyst to political unification, and a guarantee of Allied commitment to restoring Russia in its entirety.

As the British government came to recognise Russia to be in a state of civil war they gave additional credibility to the propaganda effect of acknowledging a Russian government. Charles Eliot, High Commissioner in Siberia, wrote 'that public opinion [in Siberia] is much exercised as to Russia's position in relation to the League of Nations. It is understood that... she will be left out of the League now but may be invited to join later on at the discretion of signatory powers. This position is felt to be ignominious.'²⁸ Churchill, and to a lesser extent Curzon, both felt that official recognition of Kolchak would provide a clear signal of Allied commitment and have a powerful effect on the war effort. Writing to Lloyd George, Churchill urged the Prime Minister to recognise Kolchak, which

is the advice given by Eliot as well as by the military men, and I most earnestly press it upon you at this juncture. Its influence on the military situation would be most favourable. It would give the greatest possible satisfaction to the overwhelming mass of your Parliamentary supporters. It would consolidate our Russian policy and strengthen your hand in many directions. It would be entirely justified on account of the solid support

²⁶ TNA, FO 175/6: Milukoff to Alexeieff, 20 June 1918.

²⁷ Ibid., Alexeieff to Milukoff, 1 July 1918.

²⁸ TNA, WO 106/1240: Charles Eliot, 15 May 1919.

which we are giving in munitions and organisers.²⁹

But there was strong opposition to recognition, because Great Russia included a number of states that had claimed independence and were, as the Foreign Office concluded, ‘distinguished during the past few months by a will to resist Bolshevism and Germanism alike which has not been equaled in any part of Slav-Russia’.³⁰ Georgia, Finland, Poland, Estonia and Lithuania all received British assistance, and as Lloyd George made clear to Cabinet, ‘we had to defend those States which would come under the protection of the League of Nations’.³¹ As Jonathan Smele notes, ‘these regimes were dominated by chiefly liberal politicians who had been scorned and sometimes persecuted or even imprisoned by the occupying Germans’.³² To publicly acknowledge support for a Great Russian solution would alienate effective allies in these territories, while to explicitly promote self-determination among the nationalities would undermine the White administrations in Russia. The very fact that there were three major power centres within Russia further complicated the situation. The administration in North Russia was, in Churchill’s view, ‘the most democratic of the three Russian National Governments’.³³ However Kolchak’s was the most effective. While facilitating military cooperation between the different Russian forces, the British government was wary of Kolchak subsuming the others. They experimented with wording a recognition that would not define the territory over which each government was responsible, but failed to find an appropriate formula. The result, as one official serving in Archangel put it, was to ‘want me to fight for a Russian Ulster’.³⁴ The comparison with Ulster was a reflection of the questions of nationality and loyalty that did not cut cleanly along geographical boundaries but were disputed, with populations intertwined. To clearly define what the British were fighting for in Russia was a persistent challenge in a conflict that was increasingly understood to centre on the loyalty of the population.

The Government’s position in Ireland in 1919 was similarly complicated by

²⁹ CCC, CHAR 16/6: Churchill to Lloyd George, 26 April 1919

³⁰ TNA, FO 608/189: Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic, 9 July 1919.

³¹ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 February 1919.

³² Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars*, p. 62.

³³ CCC, CHAR 16/6: Churchill to Lloyd George, 26 April 1919.

³⁴ TNA, CAB 24/84: Letter received by Mr. Barnes, 15 July 1919.

questions of nationality. The Government was committed to Home Rule, and in theory to the self-determination of peoples, but Ulster refused Home Rule, while the South refused partition. The historian Paul Bew has argued that before March 1920 ‘it did appear, for a moment, that de Valera was now willing to accept less than complete unfettered sovereignty for Ireland.’³⁵ But whatever the solution envisaged by Irish nationalist leaders, the Long Committee’s proposals for Ireland fell far short of expectations, so that ‘mainstream nationalist Ireland was... not interested in these ethereal possibilities.’³⁶ The Cabinet considered that the ‘ultimate aim was a united Ireland with a single Parliament of its own.’³⁷ But on what basis could Ulster be denied its right to self-determination? Moreover, Ulster represented a mixture of nationalist and unionist counties. Should self-determination extend to the county level? If not, why not? The Cabinet recognised that these questions had ramifications beyond Ireland, noting ‘that one of the principal aims of the Government’s policy was to produce a good effect in the Self-governing Dominions, as well as in the United States of America and other foreign countries.’³⁸ The idea of civil war complicated these dilemmas. When civil war re-emerged as a discussion point in Ireland, concerns were raised about how America would react. As early as March 1918 Lloyd George was being briefed on the issue, with one rather optimistic assessment concluding that:

The suggestion is that the USA will break off relations with us for the prosecution of the war because a portion of the inhabitants of that part of the United Kingdom called Ireland have not been allowed to do what the Americans waged their great civil war for four years to prevent a section of the Citizens of the United States from doing, namely secede.³⁹

By 1919 the British Government recognised that a civil war was occurring in Russia, but it was explicitly government policy not to define where the boundaries of Russia were. Thus civil war was no longer tied to a conflict within a state. In Ireland it remained unclear whether a hypothetical conflict between Nationalists and Unionists would be an Anglo-Irish War or an Irish Civil War? Or was it an

³⁵ Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity*, p. 398.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 396.

³⁷ TNA, CAB 23/18/13: Cabinet Minutes, 10 December 1919.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ PRONI, D627/436/9: Remarks by a member of the Advisory Committee on the Prime Minister’s Letter to Mr Barrie MP, March 1918.

Imperial Civil War? The detachment of civil war from state boundaries proved similarly problematic. The nature of cabinet discussion, which strictly divided issues along geographical lines, prevented these questions being tackled together in Government. But they regularly followed each other in minutes, covering much of the same ground. Steadily this produced clear examples where the two issues were lumped together in official discussion. In 1919 for instance George Barnes submitted an overview of Labour Party policy in relation to Russia, and Ireland. In the memorandum they were clearly separated as two policy areas, but the fact that they belonged in the same memorandum betrays how the two issues had become linked. Similarly we observe in semi-official correspondence, a tendency for officials to link the conflicts indirectly. Chief of the Imperial General Staff Henry Wilson, writing to Churchill in September 1919, signed off 'with Russia, Somalia, and Ireland I wish you luck on your work in the near future.'⁴⁰ Typical is a letter from Curzon to the King's Private Secretary, Lord Stanfordham, concerning the withholding of honours to a French cleric who, 'signed a scandalous letter of intrusion into Irish politics. But it is true that the pockets of the French-man bulge with orders and ribbons as amply as the corn bins of Russia do not bulge with grain.'⁴¹ This is a strange and in the context of the correspondence unprompted comparison that betrays Curzon's association of the two issues. Similarly Churchill, in a speech on Allied policy in Russia, argued that 'we shall have to try to understand what is going on in Germany and Russia with the same sympathy and the same vigilance that we used to apply to Farmanagh and Tyrone.'⁴² That he made this allusion in a speech shows that he expected the essential similarity between the two contexts to be readily understood by his audience. Given that the two sets of issues were thus associated, it is important, in considering British attitudes to civil war, to recognise that officials came to their various conclusions via a synthesis of their experiences across Russia, Ireland, the Near East, Persia and South Africa.

⁴⁰ CCC, CHAR 16/11: Wilson to Churchill, 16 September 1919.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 800/149: Curzon to Stanfordham, 9 January 1921.

⁴² CCC CHAR/8/36: Russia and Germany, 23 November 1919.

Legitimacy and Civil War

The position of the British Government during civil wars in Colombia, Persia, and elsewhere, as explored in the first chapter, had been that they constituted the internal affairs of those states, and did not invalidate the state's sovereignty, because the belligerents in the conflict were arguing for control of the state, and not over the state's right to exist. The parties in the conflict were not seeking to change the boundaries of the state, merely its constitution. Russia presented a serious challenge to this conception. The British had intervened and had to justify their departure from past norms. Moreover they did not recognise any of the existing Russian governments as legitimate. This was partly in order to avoid defining Russia's territorial limits, and thereby siding with the Great Russians, but also because there was considerable disagreement as to the precedents established by recognition, and how this might define legitimate government in the future. The eventual position adopted by the British was to avoid taking a position; with the result that the definition of civil war was rendered ambiguous.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Allied intervention in Russia was undertaken to prevent the spread of German influence, and to tie down German troops. Thus while Whitehall was clear about its military objectives, the political objectives with regards to the budding Russian administrations in Archangel, Vladivostok, and the Crimea were left to officials on the spot. Francis Lindley, Consul in Archangel, was told that '[His Majesty's Government] do not recognise any Russian Government and you are not accredited to any.'⁴³ At the same time the proper functioning of these administrations was essential for providing the population with food, and the military with recruits. Thus each was independently furnished with the trappings of government. As Lindley cabled the Cabinet in September 1918

[in] order [to] insure for our Northern Region [the] possibility [of a] stable currency recognised by other states [the] provisional government... will issue new bank notes. This money printed in London and surcharged here... will be guaranteed by Sterling at the Bank of England Rate [of] forty rubles to [the] pound.⁴⁴

Separately in Siberia the British Trade Mission recommended a new currency

⁴³ TNA, FO 175/7: Balfour to Lindley, 7 June 1918.

⁴⁴ TNA, FO 175/4: Lindley to Cabinet, 3 September 1918.

printed in the United States that was given top priority and rapidly implemented.⁴⁵ In the South it was France who initially funded Allied efforts.⁴⁶ Yet alongside these independent foundations, Allied officials remained concerned about the integration of these administrative blocks. In South Russia Sidney Reilly was deeply impressed by institutions of local government, especially that of the Kadet dominated administration of Solomon Krym, though as the historian John Ainsworth has noted, Reilly's assessment of Krym's cooperation with the Volunteer Army was 'anything but accurate'.⁴⁷ Reilly concluded that 'Crimea could, with moderate Allied assistance, quickly become [a] model of political and economic reconstruction for [the] whole [of] Russia'.⁴⁸ Meanwhile in Archangel, Lindley felt that 'the new currency... can in no case form an obstacle to the introduction of any general money system for the whole of Russia'.⁴⁹ This discussion of a system for the whole of Russia implicitly meant that at some point, these administrations, either individually or collectively, would become recognised as a state or states. This then demanded a measure to establish when recognition of legitimacy was appropriate.

The need for this measure became much more pressing once 'the stated reasons for the presence of [Allied] forces in Russia lost what little validity they might previously have had',⁵⁰ following the Armistice. Once the British started to consider Russia to be in a state of civil war, which government was recognised to be legitimate was of considerable value to their prestige and authority. As Charles Eliot observed, after Churchill and Curzon failed to produce a formulation to recognise Kolchak, 'it is clear to me that Omsk Government and Koltchak himself are... disappointed at not receiving any definite statement about recognition and I understand their difficulty. Army and public are familiar with idea that recognition

⁴⁵ TNA, FO 371/3367: Mr Metcalf's Notes regarding the Economic Situation, 23 September 1918

⁴⁶ John Bradley, 'The Allies and Russia in the Light of French Archives (7 November 1917-15 March 1918)', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1964), pp. 166-185.

⁴⁷ John Ainsworth, 'Sidney Reilly's Reports from South Russia, December 1918-March 1919', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 50, no. 8 (1998), p. 1450.

⁴⁸ TNA, FO 371/3962: Reilly's Dispatch No. 1, Sevastopol, 28 December 1918.

⁴⁹ TNA, FO 175/4: Lindley to Cabinet, 3 September 1918.

⁵⁰ Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, p. 470.

will mark a turning point in fortunes of Government.⁵¹

Complicating the question of recognition was the position of the Baltic States. These had, until the armistice, been dominated by Germany, and while the Allies cooperated with Bolshevik Finns to pin down German troops,⁵² the British government's view was that 'historical events do not alter the fact that the present Finnish government is entirely Germanophile and that the Germans are in complete command of the country, which can therefore only be considered at the present time as a hostile one.'⁵³ However the nationalist movements that Germany had coopted were not intrinsically supportive of German hegemony. In Lithuania and Finland democratic institutions were established hostile to both Germany and Russia. The British treated these states as though they were sovereign. When British forces landed at Archangel, they were specifically instructed that 'the Finnish frontier should not be crossed by any of our troops, and thereby give colour to the German propaganda, which is to the effect that the invasion of Finland by the Allies is intended.'⁵⁴ After the armistice a key military challenge was coordinating White forces. Discussions to combine Finnish operations against the Bolsheviks with Kolchak's, and thereby to turn the Bolsheviks' advantage of internal lines into a disadvantage, by forcing them to fight on multiple fronts, ran into the problem that the Finns demanded recognition from Kolchak of their independence. Although Allied arm twisting managed to gain assurances that 'Koltchak will raise no objection to a Finnish Military occupation of Petrograd provided Russian forces participate in operation and Yudenitch takes the Administration of Petrograd on occupation,'⁵⁵ he was not prepared to clearly support self-determination. In an attempt to reconcile forces opposing the Bolsheviks, the Allies began to work on a range of federal proposals in the summer of 1919. Those studies made clear that coercing the peripheral states was not an option, for 'to force these States unconditionally back into Russia would simply be

⁵¹ TNA, WO 106/1308: Charles Eliot, Omsk, 21 June 1919.

⁵² Craig Gerrard, 'The Foreign Office and British Intervention in the Finnish Civil War', *Civil Wars*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2000), p. 96.

⁵³ TNA, FO 175/7: Lindley to Balfour, 31 August 1918.

⁵⁴ TNA, WO 106/1154: WO to Maynard, 6 August 1918.

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 106/1308: CIGS, 24 June 1919.

to leave Russia ringed around with a system of Alsace-Lorraines.⁵⁶ The conclusion of a long assessment of options was that the government could 'not feel optimistic as to the prospects of a Russian federation.'⁵⁷ Again, the central question was the status of these states, whether the conflicts within them were Finnish and Lithuanian Civil Wars, or part of a Russian Civil War, and whether a formulation for a legitimate government could be established to ensure peace.

If historians have shown some sympathy for the small Allied landings in Archangel and Vladivostok, the attempt by the Allies to support, coordinate, and even direct the White Movements has received almost universal condemnation. The chief indictments of Allied policy in 1919 are that policymakers were ignorant of the situation in Russia, their policy was contradictory, and lacked strategy. As Clifford Kinzig argues, while 'in England Churchill was denouncing the Bolsheviks in the most dehumanizing language... British troops in Russia were finding that the Whites were no better.'⁵⁸ The central critique has not significantly developed since John Bradley observed that the 'chief causes of these failures were exceptionally bad intelligence on the spot and international rivalry affecting vitally the local situation.'⁵⁹ Even within government coordination was little better, for the 'British advocated different policies in different parts of Russia.'⁶⁰ The result, as George Kennan characterised America's role in Russia, was that 'never in the history of American diplomacy has so much been paid for so little.'⁶¹ As political judgments these are all very well, but as historical analysis they suffer from the same flaw as the pervasive condemnation of the Paris Peace treaties, and of the League of Nations, typified by Edward Carr in his *The Twenty Years Crisis*,⁶² which treat failure as inevitable. In essence there is a tendency to argue that because of the unfavorable outcome every decision, inaccurate report, or simplification in an official memorandum, explains that failure. More recent histories of the Paris

⁵⁶ TNA, FO 608/189: Suggested Basis for a Russian Federal Republic, 9 July 1919.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade*, p. 321.

⁵⁹ Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia*, p. 212.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 213.

⁶¹ Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene*, p. 471.

⁶² Edward Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: an Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1939).

Peace Conference⁶³ and the League of Nations⁶⁴ have emphasised the scale and complexity of the challenges faced by policymakers, as well as the massive constraints that limited their options. This is not to say that the League, the Paris Peace Conference, or policy in the Russian Civil War were successes, but it is important to appreciate that the decisions being made were more rational than is often recognised.

The historical record demonstrates that officials were well aware of the shortcomings of intelligence, and the contradictions they were trying to bridge. Many of these contradictions were internal to the White Movement, a diverse coalition ranging from socialists, to democrats, to monarchists and autocrats. As Jonathan Smele points out, Kolchak and Denikin ‘elaborated political programs in 1919 that might broadly be described as “liberal”’⁶⁵, and the White movement held a ‘variously evasive and contradictory stance’⁶⁶ on the question of nationalities, rights, and democracy. Certainly in early 1919 it was not clear how these movements would develop. It is therefore more helpful to envisage the British position as a case of hedge betting, with enthusiasm for particular groups shifting depending upon their success or failure. Ian Moffat has pointed out that ‘strategic aims in Russia were... fluid’,⁶⁷ and shaped by rapidly changing events on the Western Front, and later at the Paris Peace Conference. By the summer of 1919 British confidence in their Russian allies collapsed, while support for the peripheral nationalities expanded, leading to a progression of policy from what Evan Mawdsley calls ‘intervention’ to ‘quarantine’ of Bolshevism, and the support of emerging nations.⁶⁸ This evolution saw a steadily increasing emphasis on self-determination as a justification for the legitimacy of the nations Britain supported. But self-determination created further contradictions, not least in Ireland.

The question of forcing Ireland into an unstable unity not only posed the same questions, but was intimately bound up with the discussion of an Eastern settlement. In December 1918, a disgruntled Irish Nationalist wrote to Churchill,

⁶³ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, pp. 173-174.

⁶⁴ Susan Pedersen, ‘Back to the League of Nations’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 112, no. 4 (2007), pp. 1091-1117.

⁶⁵ Smele, *The ‘Russian’ Civil Wars*, p. 105.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶⁷ Moffat, *The Allied Intervention in Russia*, p. 268.

⁶⁸ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, p. 179.

accusing him of

indulging in the flapdoodle that Ulster must not be coerced, or in other words that the doctrine of majority rule must not prevail in Ireland, certainly a nice example of the consistency of English statesmen, why is this doctrine not applied to German Poland and Alsace-Lorraine, etc., which have a larger Ulster than Ireland. Are we not entitled to the same measure of justice as other small nations in Europe, a nice travesty on the rights of small nations.⁶⁹

The implementation of The Government of Ireland Act 1914 had been postponed until the end of the war, but the structure that was to replace 'Castle Government' had not been agreed upon by the time of the armistice. Thus the law demanded the transition to Home Rule, but the structure of the Irish Parliament, the relationship between Ireland and the British Empire, or the relationship between Southern and Northern Ireland, were not settled. Meanwhile Sinn Fein, swept to victory in the elections of 1918, had begun to act as though Ireland were already independent. Sir John French informed the King that Sinn Fein 'are fully determined not to take their seats at Westminster, and from all that can be gathered, their idea seems to be to establish a kind of mock parliament in Dublin and leave injunctions to the people regarding taxation, etc.'⁷⁰ What is more, French expected Sinn Fein to engage in a violent campaign, arguing that because 'the general municipal elections will take place next June throughout Ireland. The Municipal Authorities will then become absolutely Sinn Fein, and have in their hands the use of some two to three millions of Government money.' He predicted that 'the leaders will have to take some drastic action to retain their hold over their followers long before next June,' and declared that order would depend upon 'the Irish Government [remaining] firm, strong and determined, and [retaining] a sufficient military force in hand.'⁷¹ The initial British response of 'remaining firm' was in essence to ignore the Dail, and to some extent this made sense for, as the historian David Fitzpatrick observes, the 'Dail's early forays into administration were mainly elaborate propagandist gestures.'⁷² The Sinn Fein leadership did not seriously believe they could build a government with the British still in Ireland. And yet over 1919 the

⁶⁹ CCC, CHAR 2/103: Thomas Nathan to Churchill, 11 December 1918

⁷⁰ IWM, Papers of Sir John French: French to King, undated.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, p. 82.

'demand for practical innovation came from local republicans who had taken the Dail's rhetoric at face value and discovered ingenious methods of applying it.'⁷³ The resultant courts were functional, and popular. When the British moved to ban the Dail in September 1919 it was too late; many of the governmental structures it had initiated were working along their own course, and with the retreat of British police, their functioning was of value to local communities. The remarkable fact here is that these conditions - the establishment of secessionist institutions, dividing the existing governmental structure, and prepared to use force - was practically the textbook definition of civil war before the First World War.

Civil war was very much on the minds of Sir John French and his colleagues in the Irish Executive. In May 1918 the Attorney General of Ireland had been warning that there 'is grave and well-grounded anxiety that [Ireland] is on the verge of a civil war, and that it will be a war of religion, like the previous Irish rebellions.'⁷⁴ And the Viceroy was poised to respond to an expected outbreak. Until the serious escalation of violence in March 1920 however war remained a possibility, rather than a fact. When the war came the British remained reluctant to call it a civil war in public because it would set an exceedingly dangerous precedent, especially in the context of Russia, where the British were being forced to justify intervention into a civil war, and therefore argue that intervention in civil wars was in principle justifiable. It also posed a problem because to acknowledge civil war in Ireland risked undermining the legitimacy of British government in Ireland, precisely because it was the break down in relations between the people and government that was being used to deny recognition to governments in Russia.

The first step in recognising government legitimacy in Russia was to be bureaucratic order. The tone was set by President Wilson, who declared at the close of 1918 that:

Excesses accomplish nothing. Unhappy Russia has furnished abundant and recent proof... The present with all that it holds belongs to nations and peoples who preserve their self-control and the orderly processes of their governments... They will find that every pathway that is stained with the blood of their brothers leads to the wilderness and not to the seat of their hope... We must hold the light steady until they find themselves. And in the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ PAW, LG/F/44/9/2: Dublin Castle to PM, 2 May 1918.

meantime, if it be possible, we must establish peace that will justly define their place among the nations.⁷⁵

This sentiment was the basis upon which the League of Nations constructed the mandate system, in which the mandatory powers would nurture the sovereignty of new states until they 'reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.'⁷⁶ The diplomatic wrangling both between and within governments, which produced this language, is a matter of considerable scholarly attention. The diverse interests that propelled the creation of the mandates is outside the scope of this thesis; what matters here is that the language as agreed established an objective that demanded new legal tests for which there were no clear precedents. As Michael Callahan has observed, this 'new system that the British bureaucracy confronted in 1919 was a mixture of established colonial practices and untested administrative theories.'⁷⁷ Those theories presented legal and policy challenges that could not be addressed with reference to past practice. As Roger Louis put it, on the issues of sovereignty and nationality within the Mandates, 'British statesmen in 1919 thought those questions were almost unanswerable; but the creation of the League demanded precise answers to them.'⁷⁸ As late as 1932, as Susan Pedersen observes, there continued 'consequential and sometimes bitter debate over when a territory under the effective control of an imperial power could be declared sovereign.'⁷⁹ Under these circumstances therefore the practices of officials in Russia, and elsewhere, trying to implement policy, set, rather than followed, precedents for future policy.

⁷⁵ TNA, FO 175/13: President Wilson, Speech distributed by American Embassy, Archangel, 27 November 1918.

⁷⁶ Article 22, Covenant of the League of Nations.

⁷⁷ Michael Callahan, 'Nomansland: The British Colonial Office and the League of Nations Mandate for German East Africa, 1916-1920', *Albion*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1993), p. 443.

⁷⁸ Wm. Roger Louis, 'The United Kingdom and the Beginning of the Mandates System, 1919-1922', *International Organization*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1969), p. 74.

⁷⁹ Susan Pedersen, 'Getting Out of Iraq - in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 115, no. 4 (2010), p. 976.

To enable the Russian governments 'to stand alone'⁸⁰ was explicitly the intention of the 'bolstering policy' adopted by the Cabinet in February 1919, which envisaged the drawing down of Allied assistance by the autumn. And yet the results were far from satisfactory. As late as June, Charles Eliot in Siberia was proposing 'British help for reconstruction of Russian Society. This in practice will mean training Russians and English for various posts in Russian public service especially local Government Authorities. It is admitted that both Siberian and European Russians cannot do without a large number of foreign specialists.'⁸¹ Meanwhile the British felt that Kolchak's autocratic instincts were undermining many of the most successful systems of Russian governance, such as the Zemstvo councils, who complained to British diplomats that the 'attitude of [the] Omsk Government was increasingly hostile to Zemstvos, instancing that Zemstvos are not to elect members for new consultative and deliberative organ, but only candidates nominated by Government.'⁸² In Archangel the British Government were more sanguine, but conceded that the enclave was both exceedingly fragile, and no less dependent upon Allied support. For instance, the assessment of the administration of Murmansk claimed that since 'the latter part of 1918 there has been a very striking component in civil administration of the Murmansk Area. Orderly Government has replaced what was formerly chaos.' However the report stated that for 'this result M. Ermoloff, the Deputy Governor General, is solely responsible, and the weak factor of the situation in this area is that his Government is entirely a "one man show"... The remaining characters do not count. They are either inefficient or dishonest.'⁸³

The military situation was even worse. Knox was certain that as far as Siberia was concerned, it 'should be recognised that there is no longer any possibility of a decisive success on this front during the present summer... it looks as if three out of every four wounds men had inflicted their wounds themselves.'⁸⁴ Charles Eliot's assessment was that he 'did not think that [the Omsk Government] could maintain

⁸⁰ TNA, CAB 23/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 12 February 1919; the same terminology being used in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

⁸¹ TNA, WO 106/1308: Eliot to FO, 24 June 1919.

⁸² TNA, WO 106/1308: Sir B Paros, 23 June 1919.

⁸³ TNA, WO 158/731: Civil Situation, August 1919.

⁸⁴ TNA, WO 106/1272: Knox, 29 July 1919.

order in Vladivostock district without foreign aid,'⁸⁵ let alone make headway at the front. Things were no better in Archangel. In conversation with Zemstvo and municipality representatives, the British assessment was that the Russian administration had 'no real illusions as to possibly raising moral to a point which would render it possible to hold Archangel district after we have gone.'⁸⁶ If the model of states successfully transitioning to independence, and therefore to recognition, was one in which the number of British officials running the administration 'will be reduced as the native governments become less and less dependent upon the assistance of the Mandatory Power,'⁸⁷ then the White administrations in Russia exhibited the opposite traits. When the 'bolstering policy' had been settled upon the assessment of the General Staff had been that as

we are pledged to support the North Russian Government we can only in honour evacuate their territory when they are sufficiently strong to take over its protection for themselves. It is impossible to rely on getting ships in or out of Archangel until the middle of July; consequently, before that date no steps whatever towards evacuation could possibly be taken.⁸⁸

Thus the summer of 1919 represented the point at which the British had to decide whether to continue the policy or not. The failure of the White administrations to become increasingly independent delegitimized them in the eyes of the British government, and was used to justify withdrawal.

One problem with the 'functionality' test of legitimacy was that while the White administrations failed it, it was possible that the Bolsheviks might pass. Ever since the Bolshevik *coup* of November 1917 the assumption underpinning British policy was that the structure of the Bolshevik government meant that the regime was surviving by stealing, and that it was therefore living on stolen time. By the summer of 1919 it had become apparent that this line of argument could not be maintained. The Bolsheviks were still in the field, and getting stronger. However the grounds for refusing recognition to the Bolsheviks were not solely based on the disorder that their ideology was believed to produce, but because in suppressing

⁸⁵ TNA, WO 106/1308: Eliot, Omsk, 21 June 1919.

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 106/1159: Hoare to DMO, DMI, 10 August 1919.

⁸⁷ TNA, FO 800/149: Curzon Memorandum, A Middle Eastern Department, 16 August 1920.

⁸⁸ TNA, WO 106/1169: Notes on Possible Evacuation of Murmansk and Archangel, General Staff, 26 February 1919.

all representative institutions, they were understood to rule by tyranny, without the support of the population. The significance of popular support as a basis for government legitimacy, especially in the context of self-determination, was strengthened by reports of Bolshevik atrocities, as explored in the previous chapter. It was hoped that this would provide a contrast between the Bolsheviks and the White Administrations. It was on precisely these grounds that Kolchak urged that the Bolsheviks be declared 'outlaws and ineligible as members of the League of Nations.'⁸⁹ The British Government were prepared to accept this argument, though the White administrations failed to pass it also. The military assessment was that the White military was dominated by

the Cossack officer type, who believe that men, provided that they are beaten and flogged sufficiently, will fight for the present Government. The latter have learnt nothing from the revolution and are the rottenest and most harmful element in the country. Unless some attempt is shortly made to rectify this evil which is being aggravated by a series of defeats, this government will fall just as Kerenski's did, as 90% of the population I am informed are daily growing more and more bitter.⁹⁰

The political assessment was worse:

While recognition of Kolchack by the Allied Governments is a necessary step towards the re-establishment of order through his forces, nevertheless the widespread distrust on the part of large elements of the Russian population of the intention of many of the individuals who surround him and Denikin, who, it is felt, are being brought back into power by Allied aid therefore with the implied goodwill of the Allies, seems to make it imperative that His Majesty's Government should protect themselves from any future possibility of being held liable for participation in a White Terror, or whatever forms of suppression may accompany that assumption of the supreme power throughout Russia on the part of Admiral Kolchak.⁹¹

Despite Churchill's entreaties to continue, opinion shifted to accepting that the White movement was doomed. Lloyd George in particular felt that the failure to win the support of the public rendered the White administrations no better than the Bolsheviks. In September 1919 Lloyd George was reported to be arguing that

a great Russia was a thing of which we should be afraid that it would be a menace to India or to Europe, and that our safeguard was to have a Russia broken up into small States. He spoke of the Ukraine, a Cossack Republic, and various other possible component parts. He considered that we had done

⁸⁹ TNA, WO 106/1240: Eliot, 15 May 1919.

⁹⁰ TNA, WO 106/1272: Steveni to Knox, 29 July 1919.

⁹¹ CCC, CHAR 16/11: Tom Bridges to Churchill, 30 September 1919.

enough to reach the equilibrium between the two factions and should now drop Russia and let the best man win. That it was indeed by no means certain which was the best man.⁹²

By the end of the year, this line of thinking had moved from expressions of private frustration to public policy. In the Commons in December, Lloyd George responded to questions over legitimate government in Russia by demanding to know ‘who is Russia? The trouble is that there is no Russia. A civil war is going on in Russia to decide that very issue.’⁹³ This conception was incompatible with how civil war had been understood prior to the First World War. If the very fact of civil war rendered the legitimacy of the state, and its territorial borders, doubtful then intervention was no longer a violation of sovereignty. The twin tests of functional administration and popular support - with the former often dependent upon the latter - allowed the British Government both to sever its obligations to support the White administrations, and justified recognising Finland, Poland, and Lithuania without reference to Great Russia. This conceptualisation therefore solved problems for British policy in the East. Indeed Lloyd George went further in February 1920, telling the Commons that ‘the Volunteer army, during its occupation of large tracts of Southern Russia, managed to alienate the populations... the Bolsheviks in their re-advance have learned a good deal from the blunders they committed the first time, and they are not repeating them to the same extent and alienating the populations.’⁹⁴ He went on to suggest that to continue supporting the Volunteer Army ‘could relight the fires of civil war,’⁹⁵ further linking the concept of civil war to good relations between government and population, rather than the balance of forces between opposing institutions.

Lloyd George had been cautious about recognising the smaller states of the Baltic; but by September 1919 British officials were encouraging this line of policy. Seeking to assuage Lloyd George’s concerns, Churchill argued that ‘so long as we do not have to guarantee their independence I do not see why we should not recognise it, even if the Russian reactionaries are displeased... As a matter of fact now is the time to make good terms for the small States with the Russians, in

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (18 December 1919), vol. 123 col. 764.

⁹⁴ Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (10 February 1920), vol. 125, col. 42.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

return for their aid against the Bolsheviks.⁹⁶ The Chief of the Imperial General Staff was similarly in favour of supporting nationalist movements, writing that ‘the more we can support the Balkan States [sic] and the longer we can support them without heavy cost to ourselves, the better for North Russia, for the Balkan States, for Denikin and for Kotchak.’⁹⁷ Citing the advice of General Gough, Wilson suggested Britain ought “1st - Get rid of the German troops. 2nd - Support the provinces and open trade with them. 3rd - Drop the Russians”. I think this is sound advice.⁹⁸ These sentiments were reflected in the reports of British officials on the ground. Where reports from the White administrations were deeply pessimistic, British diplomats were sanguine about the prospects for Poland, Lithuania, and Finland. A report forwarded to Curzon by the petroleum expert Sir John Cadman, described how ‘National spirit throughout the country [Poland] is nothing less than wonderful,’ arguing that ‘we ought to give to Poland all the strength and support we can,’ ‘not only to prevent German supremacy further east, but also to check the spread of Bolshevism westwards.’⁹⁹ Strengthening the case for expanding support to the Baltic states, ‘the Provisional Government of Estonia and Latvia have received de facto recognition,’ while it was felt that recognising Lithuania would ‘regularise the position of Lithuania in the Baltic States and would seem to be justified.’¹⁰⁰ Curzon too supported recognition, based in part on the legitimacy derived from popular support, arguing that the ‘pro-Entente Government at Kowno, supported by the bulk of the people, have so far controlled the situation,’¹⁰¹ and suggesting financial aid. The Cabinet went further, agreeing that ‘while the British Government were not prepared to give to the Baltic States supplies for the purpose of aggressive operations against the Bolsheviks, they would, nevertheless, in the event of an attack by the Bolshevik Government on the freedom and liberties of the States, be prepared to reconsider the situation.’¹⁰²

Further spurring a willingness to embrace these new states was that this course represented the path of least domestic opposition. The government’s critics

⁹⁶ CCC, CHAR 16/11: Churchill to PM, 20 September 1919.

⁹⁷ CCC, CHAR 16/11: Wilson to Churchill, 11 September 1919.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ TNA, FO 800/149: F. W. Robertson Butler to John Cadman, 25 September 1919.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, FO 608/199: Spicer to Balfour, 18 August 1919.

¹⁰¹ TNA, FO 608/199: Curzon to Balfour, 15 July 1919.

¹⁰² TNA, CAB 23/12/9: War Cabinet Minutes, 25 September 1919.

were more supportive of the nationalities. As Aneurin Williams, a prominent campaigner for the plight of the Armenians, contrasted Allied policy in North and South Russia: ‘in Northern Russia we are taking part in a civil war; taking one side, and fighting against the other side. It may be right or it may be wrong... but that is... totally unlike the position in Southern Russia. In the Caucasus we... have been there maintaining peace and order impartially amongst all the races.’¹⁰³ In this distinction he was backed by the Irish Nationalist Thomas O’Connor. Williams’ emphasis on race is particularly interesting as it marginalizes the significance of the state. In Northern Russia – where Williams’ argued there was civil war – the combatants on both sides were overwhelmingly Russian. In Southern Russia the political issues were ultimately similar to those in the North, but the number of ethnic groups and minorities introduced a further dimension to the conflict. As Williams argued of Southern Russia, ‘if we go the turbulent elements of all those races will be at one another’s throats in a minute.’¹⁰⁴ This, he felt, justified intervention on humanitarian grounds. However, if civil war constituted a political conflict within an ethnic group, and it was justifiable to intervene to prevent inter-ethnic violence, then the boundaries of what constituted civil war, and when it was appropriate to intervene, would not necessarily correlate to the borders of states. Civil war, therefore, was something that could all too easily become transnational, and involve multiple states. Many at the time did consider Southern Russia to be no less a civil war than the north, but the increasing emphasis in discussion on ethnicity, and the nation, as opposed to a fixed state, would further undermine the idea of civil conflict as purely an ‘internal affair’ in subsequent discourse.

Self Determination and Civil War

As the government pivoted from prioritizing the White administrations in Russia, to backing the peripheral states, tensions across Ireland were escalating. Over the summer of 1919 the Royal Irish Constabulary were demoralized by boycott, and targeted by the IRA, which killed 12 policemen and wounded 20.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile

¹⁰³ Aneurin Williams, HC, *Hansard* (18 August 1919), vol. 119, col. 2061.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The relatively small number of murders in 1919 has been used to suggest that the intent at this time was not warfare; as Charles Townshend observes however, these attacks were largely a process of arming, forcing the RIC to concentrate, and

strikes, and a concerted effort to break down the institutions of British government, left Sir John French to conclude in January 1920 that the 'great problem which now confronts the Irish Government is to crush the campaign of outrage and murder which is growing in strength and intensity every day, and spreading over increasing areas of the country.'¹⁰⁶ But where the idea that government legitimacy rested on effective governance, and public support, was proving useful in Eastern Europe, this presented significant problems in Ireland.

If legitimacy was derived from the people, then what constituted the legitimate voice of the people? This question, contentious in peacetime, was complicated further in the context of civil war. With regards to the demarcation of Ulster, Balfour wrote to Lloyd George in February 1920 that 'if the Peace Conference had been delineating the new frontier, in accordance with the general procedure adopted at Paris, we should not have included in the Protestant area so large and homogeneous a Roman Catholic district as that (say) of the greater part of Donegal.'¹⁰⁷ He went on to observe that 'If you have a Hibernia Irredenta within the province of Ulster, you will greatly add to the difficulties of the Ulster parliament.'¹⁰⁸ The notion of Irredenta - of a land ethnically Irish, but politically British - referred to the broader challenges of the new territorial settlements in the east, based as it was upon the old challenge of Italian lands under Habsburg rule. But it also played on the fact that in Balfour's view, the conflict in Ireland centred on religious and national identity, and that these two elements would mark the boundaries in civil conflict. This implicitly tied civil conflict to notions of communal identity, and not to state institutions. Balfour was convinced that the solution to Irish affairs was to be found in clearly separating sectarian and national communities, and felt that this would have a positive effect beyond Ireland, since

our Home Rule policy has been largely influenced by our desire to show the world that the principles we apply to other peoples are those we accept for ourselves, and thus to diminish the chronic nuisance which Irish agitation

thereby facilitating raids to capture weapons, see Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-1921', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 371 (1979), pp. 324.

¹⁰⁶ IWM, Papers of Sir John French: French to Stanfordham, 21 January 1920.

¹⁰⁷ PAW, LG/F/3/5/2C/8: Balfour to PM, 10 February 1920.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

produces throughout the English-speaking world.¹⁰⁹

Balfour did not use the term civil war, but his comments were made in the context of an ongoing conversation about civil war in Ireland. Through early 1920 the IRA attacked police barracks, forcing the RIC to withdraw. The barracks were subsequently burned. By March, Colonel Stephenson, pro-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, described the Government's policy as one that 'left to the Irish themselves to evolve a complete scheme of self-determination. In the meantime the position of Ireland... is approximating to civil war.'¹¹⁰ This strikingly draws together the notion of victory in civil war being a matter of loyalty, to be decided by the people, the principle of self-determination, and civil conflict. It also indicates the extent to which British government had collapsed. In public the government disputed this characterization. In private they wholly agreed. Seeking to establish a response to mounting IRA attacks, modeled on Boer rebels during the South African War, Sir John French advised the Cabinet that 'it was now a question either of making a truce with the rebels or taking measures of war against them.'¹¹¹ Laying out the descent into conflict, French described how Sinn Fein

had established their Parliament, appointed Consuls, entered into communication with Foreign Powers, and had thought in this way to rouse the world. But nothing had happened. Then about August or September 1919 the outrage and murder party told the more moderate Sinn Feiners that, if they could not attain better results, they (the extremists) would take the matter in hand. The more moderate men - Idealists, as they are sometimes called - at first strongly objected; but the extremists represented that they were making war upon the English and were therefore not guilty of murder. Gradually they appear to have brought the Sinn Feiners round to their view and the whole organisation was now imbued with the idea of war and justified murder on that ground. The organisation had grown in strength and could be ousted only by force. The rebels had the advantage of using methods of war and those methods were denied to us. It would be more effective to put the struggle on a war basis, as had been done in the Boer War when the rebels were seized and put into concentration camps.¹¹²

There is a great deal to unpack from this. Firstly, the British government were clearly of the opinion that what they faced in Ireland was civil war. It could not be a foreign war. The rebellion in the South African War had prompted the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Colonel Stephenson, HC, *Hansard* (30 March 1920), vol. 127, col. 1185.

¹¹¹ TNA, CAB 23/21/6: Minute Sheet, Ireland, 30 April 1920.

¹¹² Ibid.

imposition of measures that legally defined civil conflict in Britain. Moreover the reasons given for opposing a public declaration of war were not analytical but political. When Lord French pushed to know whether 'you go so far as to declare war,' Bonar Law responded that to do so 'would be a confession of failure,' while Lloyd George observed that 'you do not declare war against rebels.'¹¹³ Whereas in 1914 Cabinet ministers had challenged the assertion that civil war was threatened in Ireland, in 1920 the view was simply that it would be a mistake to publicly confer such legitimacy on the IRA. As in the South African War, British officials did begin to discuss civil war and Ireland publicly, but indirectly, by reference to other civil conflicts. As Lloyd George told the Commons in March 1920,

self-determination does not mean that every part of a country which has been acting together for hundreds of years shall have a right to say, 'We mean to set up a separate Republic.' That is the very thing which was fought for in the Civil War in America. If any section in Wales were to say, 'We want to set up a Welsh Republic,' I should certainly resist it to the utmost of my power. Not only that, Britain in its own interests, including the interests of Wales, would be absolutely right to resist it, and yet Wales has a definite and clear nationality. The same applies to Scotland... There must be that limitation to the application of any principle; otherwise you might carry it to every fragment and every area and every locality in every country throughout the world. When you lay down a principle of that kind you must lay it down within the limitations which common-sense and tradition will permit.¹¹⁴

The other significant point about French's comments in Cabinet is the relationship between legitimacy, self-determination, and civil war. His description of Sinn Fein's transition into the 'murder and outrage party', which was by then the common nomenclature across government, bears a striking resemblance to why the British refused to recognise the Bolsheviks as legitimate representatives. As Colonel Gretton noted in the Commons in June 1920, with regards to the Bolsheviks, there 'is abundant precedent for refusing to establish relations with a Government which depends upon violence for its existence.'¹¹⁵ This notion was directly reinforced by Churchill who six days later gave a speech calling for 'any reputable, responsible body of Irishmen, backed by strong elements among their fellow-countrymen, come forward and say, "If the Bill is broadened in these respects we will help you put down the murder campaign and thereafter we will

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (31 March 1920), vol. 127, col. 1323.

¹¹⁵ Colonel Gretton, HC, *Hansard* (7 June 1920), vol. 130, col. 149.

undertake the responsibility of governing the country'.”¹¹⁶ It was precisely the absence of such a body, Churchill argued, that prevented the British from recognising the legitimacy of calls for a republic. Behind the scenes the British government were, as the historian Paul Bew has observed, ‘very anxious to make peace in Ireland, but could find no one with authority to speak for Sinn Fein’.¹¹⁷ While government rhetoric about the minority of Irish extremists undoubtedly played down popular support, it is important to bear in mind that the control exerted by Sinn Fein on IRA attacks was limited, and that operationally at least, as Peter Hart has pointed out the fighting was ‘not so much a national conflict as a collection of regional ones’.¹¹⁸

Churchill, in his June speech, also placed conditions in Ireland in the context of civil war by reference to America, telling his audience that ‘the Americans waded through the agony of the Civil War, involving the destruction of more than a million lives, in order to preserve the vital integrity of their country. British patriotism and, indeed, the British sense of self-preservation are not less vigilant and resolute than theirs.’¹¹⁹ Tellingly - as with the South African War - there was no rebuttal made to those describing the conflict as a civil war. When the Earl of Winterton declared that ‘civil war has broken out in His Majesty's home dominions’,¹²⁰ Bonar Law did not challenge the assertion, but rather replied that ‘I fully realise the gravity... we at once in London took steps to satisfy ourselves that the Irish Government were using every weapon in their power to deal with the situation.’¹²¹ The Cabinet discussions quoted above demonstrate that the government too saw the situation as war, and their refusal to declare it as such publicly was a product of the international political ramifications, more than the reality on the ground. The policy that emerged was civil war without a declaration; the use of paramilitaries to carry out reprisals and punitive raids.

An apparent contradiction between British official discussion, and British policy, is that while officials emphasised the importance of what would today be

¹¹⁶ CCC, CHAR 8/36: The Murder Campaign in Ireland, 13 June 1920.

¹¹⁷ Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity*, p. 400.

¹¹⁸ Peter Hart, ‘The Geography of Revolution in Ireland, 1917-1923’, *Past and Present*, no. 155 (1997), p. 143.

¹¹⁹ CCC, CHAR 8/36: The Murder Campaign in Ireland, 13 June 1920.

¹²⁰ Earl Winterton, HC, *Hansard* (22 June 1920), vol. 130, col. 2012.

¹²¹ Bonar Law, HC, *Hansard* (22 June 1920), vol. 130, col. 2012.

called a population-centric approach to civil conflict,¹²² their actions on the ground often targeted the population. If their primary critique - and justification for abandoning - the White Russians was that they alienated the Russian people, why did the British set about doing exactly the same thing in Ireland? One explanation could be the limited attention paid to Irish affairs. The historian Ronan Fanning has argued that the number of officials in Paris seriously disrupted Cabinet government, and Irish policy was left in the hands of Hamar Greenwood, Walter Long, and Lord French.¹²³ Lord French, who was not involved in operations in Russia, saw Ireland largely in terms of South Africa. As was explored in the first chapter of this thesis, the prevailing opinion in South Africa had been that ideological conflicts demanded harsh measures to show ideologues that they were utterly defeated. But the key points of escalation in the policy of reprisals in Ireland were agreed by Cabinet, and Lord French kept both the Cabinet and the King updated on the measures being taken. Another explanation resides with the divisions of opinion within the cabinet. The cabinet was constrained because it was a coalition, and while the Conservatives had come a long way in accepting the need for an Irish settlement, the terms of a possible settlement were more contentious than accepting Lord French's latest proposals for stern measures. Perhaps most important however was the pervasive – and not entirely inaccurate – belief that the IRA constituted a minority of extremists.¹²⁴ From this stemmed the error of believing that because murders carried out by the IRA were unpopular the Irish population would respond favourably to an uncompromising, and aggressive response. Lord French presented intelligence reports to Cabinet emphasising public hostility to the IRAs tactics, and the narrative of IRA unpopularity held sway within government. In June, this was articulated in the Lords by the Earl of Denbigh, who explained that

the present situation has been largely led up to by what you may call the better portion of the Irish people... losing all confidence in British intentions respecting self-government in Ireland. The result is that now we have an inner ring of desperate revolutionaries who have taken charge of

¹²² Population centric warfare is to measure military progress by reference to the attitudes of the population, rather than control of territory.

¹²³ Fanning, *Fatal Path*, pp. 188-196.

¹²⁴ Peter Hart, 'The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 1 (1999), p. 209.

the situation, and the country seems to be drifting rapidly towards that appalling calamity, civil war... I say advisedly that I believe it is really an inner ring of revolutionaries... I do not think for a moment that the vast majority even of those who call themselves Sinn Feiners are really in sympathy with this campaign of murder.¹²⁵

There was also outrage at how the IRA conducted the war, which produced an uncompromising attitude in Cabinet. As Paul Bew has observed, 'Churchill's disdain for the IRA's mode of warfare was genuine.'¹²⁶ Churchill in particular was disgusted that 'the political action of the Irish race should take the form of shooting policemen from behind hedges or conducting bush-whacking forays against British soldiers and the Royal Irish Constabulary.'¹²⁷ In response he argued in Cabinet that

the position of the troops, always liable to be murdered by Sinn Feiners, is such that it will not be possible to restrain their anger when outrages occur in their neighbourhood. I do not consider that the present Government attitude on reprisals can be maintained much longer. It is not fair on the troops, it is not fair on the officers who command them.¹²⁸

On these grounds he suggested 'a policy of reprisals within strict limits and under strict control in certain districts in which it should be declared that conditions approximating to a state of war exist'.¹²⁹ This was demarcated in the usual procedure for declaring civil conflict, through the enacting of Martial Law. The belief that dishonourable conduct justified reprisals targeting those responsible would shatter what remained of public support for the British government in Ireland.¹³⁰

The policy of reprisals exposes a fundamental contradiction in Britain's European and Irish policies, partly brought about by the changing conception of civil war. On the one hand Britain argued that state legitimacy depended upon how states treated their citizens; because the Bolsheviks and Sinn Fein wielded power

¹²⁵ The Earl of Denbigh, HL, *Hansard* (6 May 1920), vol. 40, cols. 191-192.

¹²⁶ Paul Bew, *Churchill & Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p. 93.

¹²⁷ CCC, CHAR 8/36: The Murder Campaign in Ireland, 13 June 1920.

¹²⁸ CCC, CHAR 22/3: Churchill to Cabinet, 3 November 1920.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Despite official belief that reprisals worked, they neither reduced Sinn Fein activity, nor won the respect of the population, see Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918-1923* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 165. Reprisals also gave Sinn Fein a powerful propaganda tool in Ireland and abroad, see Francis Costello, 'The Role of Propaganda in the Anglo-Irish War, 1919-1921', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1989), p. 6.

by murder, they were not legitimate. On the other hand, because Britain was increasingly emphasizing communities as the key components in civil war, rather than institutions, communal identity was seen as a predictor of loyalty. Thus communities were liable to be held accountable for facilitating – or failing to combat – insurgents. This was the basis for reprisals in Ireland. In the East, the empowerment of ‘nationalities’ through the principle of self-determination, and their centrality to attempted conflict resolution, similarly made them targets. Nowhere was this contradiction more apparent than in British policy towards Jewish communities.

Jewish communities all over Europe were often homogenized into a single ethnic, national, and religious group, within official discourse, when those same communities were exceedingly diverse in economic condition, social status, political outlook, and cultural and religious practice. Typical is an intelligence report on the ‘Congress of Nationalities’ held in Kiev shortly before the Bolshevik coup of 1917, which described how the congress was ‘attended by representative Georgians, Tartars, Don Cossacks, Letts, Lithuanians and Jews.’¹³¹ As the historian Norman Davies points out however, ‘all the movements of the age were represented,’ among the region’s Jews; ‘nationalism, socialism, Marxism, liberalism, conservatism - each one fragmented... A Polish Government enquiry in July 1920 listed fifteen... Jewish parties. The Zionists alone were split into five groups.’¹³² If civil war were understood as a political crisis, it would have made perfect sense for different Jewish groups to be on different sides. However if civil conflict were understood as a struggle for nation, then not only were minorities vulnerable, but minorities that were to be found on both sides were suspect.

As has already been seen in the third chapter, Alfred Knox and Henry Wilson both drew attention to the prominent Jewish leaders of the Bolsheviks.¹³³ This was widespread in government. In a lecture at King’s College London, Bruce Lockhart said in 1919 that Bolshevism ‘was essentially a non-working man’s movement, its leaders for the most part being violent revolutionaries of the upper and intellectual

¹³¹ TNA, CAB 24/27/74: Weekly Report on Russia, Intelligence Bureau, 1 October 1917.

¹³² Norman Davies, ‘Great Britain and the Polish Jews, 1918-20’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1973), p. 124.

¹³³ TNA, WO 106/1098: Note by Knox on the Present Situation in Russia.

classes, and by far the most active of the members were Jews of the real revolutionary type. ...[with the] object of turning the European military war into a European civil war.¹³⁴ Fear of Bolshevik subversion, and of the prominence of Jewish Bolsheviks, gave weight to conspiracy theories of Jewish subversion. As the historian Sharman Kadish notes, in Britain, where the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* were published in 1920, along with a slew of similar fabrications, notably in *The Morning Post*, 'the Jew, once identified with the German capitalist, was now metamorphosed into the Russian Communist. He was no less intent upon wreaking havoc in the countries of the Entente.'¹³⁵

Many officials held anti-Semitic assumptions, typified by Robertson Butler, reporting on Jewish pogroms in Galicia, who accused the Jewish inhabitants of Lemberg/Lvov/Lviv, in the space of one report, of 'openly [joining] forces with the Ruthenians,' while helping Germany to 'do all she can to weaken the new Republic... [for which] her agents are most likely to be the Jews,' and of agitating for the Communists, since 'whatever Bolshevik tendency there is in Poland... it is the work of the local Jews or of Bolshevik agents from Russia.'¹³⁶ Of attacks on Jewish Poles, Robertson Butler asked 'if the Germans had been able to invade England, and our own Jews had issued a declaration of their "neutrality", is it likely that we should have been less resentful than the Poles?'¹³⁷ As Lemberg was captured and recaptured the position of its Jewish inhabitants became increasingly precarious, leading to the creation of a Jewish militia. As the legal scholar Philippe Sands puts it, the choice given to many Jews was to 'assimilate, or face difficulties',¹³⁸ but assimilation presented its own challenges when control of the city was in such regular flux.

British officials were prepared to entertain the idea that assimilation was a mark of loyalty, and that a failure to do so suggested sinister sympathies. Churchill declared in February 1920 that the Jewish 'race may at the present time be in the

¹³⁴ 'What Bolshevism is', *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 1919, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Sharman Kadish, 'Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution, *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3/4 (1988-1993), p. 242.

¹³⁶ TNA, FO 800/149: F. W. Robertson Butler to John Cadman, 24 September 1919.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Philippe Sands, *East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016), p. 74.

actual process of producing another system of morals and philosophy, as malevolent as Christianity was benevolent... it would almost seem as if the gospel of Christ and the gospel of Antichrist were destined to originate among the same people.'¹³⁹ He argued that 'there are three main lines of political conception among the Jews, two of which are helpful and hopeful in a very high degree to humanity, and the third absolutely destructive.' The first were 'Jews who, dwelling in every country throughout the world, identify themselves with that country, enter into its national life, and, while adhering faithfully to their own religion, regard themselves as citizens in the fullest sense of the State which has received them.'¹⁴⁰ The second was communism, which Churchill claimed to predominate among 'men reared among the unhappy populations of countries where Jews are persecuted on account of their race.'¹⁴¹ These Jews were the proponents of a 'world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilisation and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality,' who by 1920 had 'gripped the Russian people by the hair of their heads and have become practically the undisputed masters of that enormous empire.'¹⁴² The third was Zionism, which in Churchill's estimation presented to 'the Jew a national idea of a commanding character. It has fallen to the British Government, as the result of the conquest of Palestine, to have the opportunity and the responsibility of securing for the Jewish race all over the world a home and a centre of national life.'¹⁴³ The choice Churchill presented to the Jews of Europe was either to assimilate completely, take up their own national cause, or else *de facto* to be seen as the proponents of 'Bolshevism... [which] means in every country a civil war of the most merciless kind.'¹⁴⁴

The depth and scope of anti-Semitism within the British government at this time is a matter of historiographical debate,¹⁴⁵ beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹³⁹ CCC, CHAR 8/36: Zionism versus Bolshevism, 8 February 1920.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ CCC CHAR 8/36: The Foreign Policy of Britain, 22 June 1919.

¹⁴⁵ Several prominent figures were clear anti-Semites from the future Home Secretary Joynson-Hicks, to the Duke of Northumberland, see Markku Ruotsila, 'The Antisemitism of the Eighth Duke of Northumberland's the "Patriot", 1922-

Attitudes within Cabinet were diverse. The Balfour Declaration, as the historian Mark Tessler has explained, had 'a long list of objectives', ranging from the strategic, to the tactical, to the moral, and which differed across the Cabinet, producing a policy that the Cabinet knew to be contradictory.¹⁴⁶ The British Government both applied pressure on the White movement in Russia to protect Jews, and simultaneously publicly excused them for widespread pogroms and rabid anti-Semitism, as explored by the historian Oleg Budnitskii.¹⁴⁷ But partly because British attitudes towards Jewish communities were so contradictory, the issue highlights important aspects of the prevailing attitudes towards civil conflict. The plight of Europe's Jews represented a special case; as Balfour told Lloyd George in February 1919, the

weak point of our position of course is that in the case of Palestine we deliberately decline to accept the principle of self-determination. If the present inhabitants were consulted they would unquestionably give an anti-Jewish verdict. Our justification for our policy is that we regard Palestine as being absolutely exceptional; that we consider the question of the Jews outside Palestine as one of world importance, and that we conceive the Jews to have an historic claim to a home in their ancient land, provided that home can be given them without either dispossessing or oppressing the present inhabitants.¹⁴⁸

Balfour may have been justified in February 1919 to envisage Palestine as 'being absolutely exceptional', but by 1920 this seemed less plausible. The actual employment of self-determination, or what represented a legitimate versus an illegitimate claim, and what structures should be established in response to partition, was proving highly inconsistent, not least in Ireland. In Palestine the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations legitimized the codification of its

1930', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 39, no. 1, (2004), pp. 71-92. Anti-Semitism was certainly a feature of British politics, see Gisela Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England, 1918-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978); Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (Oxford: OUP, 1987). However it was often subordinated to wider anti-alien or anti-communist expressions, with wider appeal, making assessments of its depth difficult, see Colin Holmes, *Antisemitism in British Society, 1879-1939* (New York: Holmes and Mayer, 1979).

¹⁴⁶ Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israel Palestinian Conflict* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 148-150.

¹⁴⁷ Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ PAW, LG/F/3/4/12: Balfour to PM, 19 February 1919.

exceptional status. In Eastern Europe, the Paris Peace Conference would delineate borders. To some extent Palestine was seen as a way of disentangling one of the most dispersed races. Those that could not be disentangled would be protected under Minority Treaties, as a condition of international recognition. These treaties, imposed by the Peace Conference, guaranteed the rights of local minorities to have equal citizenship and access to the legal system. If a state could not guarantee those rights, then as the historian Carole Fink explained, 'it ostensibly legitimated the right of "friendly interference" by outside powers in the internal affairs of their neighbours in eastern Europe.'¹⁴⁹ In Ireland the institution of international governance appealed to was the Empire, which although subordinate to British interests was nevertheless distinct from the British government, with its own norms and procedures that were undergoing developments at the end of the war. The use of international institutions to legitimate singularities would raise the question of how civil conflict was to be treated in reference to these institutions. Was civil war in Russia a concern of the League of Nations when the Bolsheviks were not a member of the League? Was civil war in Ireland the concern of the League? Was such a civil war a British civil war, an Irish civil war, or an Imperial civil war? Or was it a war between the Irish and British?

International Governance and Civil War

By the close of 1920 British policy in Ireland had become reactive, and had entered an escalating cycle of attack, reprisal, and counterattack, with little evidence to suggest that the situation was improving, or likely to improve in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless there was a lack of initiative to change direction in Cabinet. The impetus would eventually come from outside, when the King, having urged South African Premier Smuts to offer advice to Lloyd George, strongly intimated that he wanted a solution to be found, and a change of policy on reprisals. This was ironic, because after years of declaring Ireland to be a domestic concern of the United Kingdom, a solution would eventually be found through the institutions of international governance that held together the patchwork assortment of

¹⁴⁹ Carole Fink, 'Minority Rights as an International Question', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2000), p. 390.

constitutional improvisations of the British Empire.¹⁵⁰ This intervention by the King was decisive, but it also dramatically shifted the context in which Irish policy was being debated. As Lloyd George told the Cabinet in May 1921

he had come to the conclusion that the Cabinet ought to advise the King to go to Belfast to open the new Parliament in person, provided he was invited by the new executive. He thought that the King should also be advised to express his willingness to open the Parliament of Southern Ireland if invited by the executive. The Prime Minister said that he himself had been induced by the strong arguments brought forward to alter his original point of view.¹⁵¹

The King's speech at the opening of the Northern Irish Parliament on 22 June 1921 was not so much delivered in his role as Britain's monarch, but as the head of the Empire. 'This is a great and critical occasion in the history of the Six Counties', he declared, 'but not for the Six Counties alone, for everything which interests them touches Ireland, and everything which touches Ireland finds an echo in the remotest parts of the Empire.'¹⁵² The speech not only couched Irish affairs in an imperial and global context, but was a product of imperial processes. As the historian Keith Jeffery has observed, the speech was 'drafted by Jan Christian Smuts (The South African statesman), criticised by Arthur Balfour (the ex-Prime Minister), modified by Edward Grigg (private secretary to Lloyd George and devoted imperialist), and delivered in Belfast by King George V.'¹⁵³ This was, as the Cabinet freely acknowledged, new territory. 'Neither the Gladstone-Asquith Home Rule scheme, nor the Coalition Bill which is now law, were originally intended to raise any Imperial question,' Balfour noted in a memorandum seeking to outline the chief difficulties raised by putting Ireland in an imperial context:

The Imperial aspect of the Irish question has only emerged through the fact that we are now discussing Irish questions with persons who start with the

¹⁵⁰ When it was suggested that the government might wish to clarify the constitutional structure of the Empire for Sinn Fein representatives, during the Anglo-Irish negotiations, the government concluded that such, 'a document would become of supreme constitutional importance and have permanent and far-reaching significance, not only in the Irish controversy, but in the determination of imperial relations', and promptly dropped the proposal, see TNA, CAB 43/1: Conclusions of the British Representatives to the Conference with Sinn Fein, 14 October 1921.

¹⁵¹ TNA, CAB 23/35/35: Conferences, Prime Minister, 30 May 1921.

¹⁵² 'The King's Triumph', *The Times* (23 June 1921), p. 11.

¹⁵³ Keith Jeffery, 'The Road to Asia, and the Grafton Hotel, Dublin: Ireland in the British World', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 142 (2008), p. 244.

view that if Ireland had all her rights she would be an independent republic. The exact question before us is to determine by how much this claim must be reduced before an arrangement can be come to with Southern Ireland which they would accept and which we should deem should be consistent with the general interests.¹⁵⁴

Those interests, as Balfour made clear, were no longer just the end of Sinn Fein's 'war of assassination'¹⁵⁵ - an acknowledgement that a state of war existed in Ireland - and Britain's domestic security, but also comprised the precedents set for other dominions and colonies.

The use of international institutions for the settlement of civil conflict in Ireland presented two significant developments in the conceptualisation of civil war. In the first place, the use of international institutions as platforms for mediation between factions in a civil war further eroded the principle that a civil war was a domestic concern. In the second, the use of international institutions to legitimize the settlement of a civil conflict, and the adherence of the parties involved in that conflict, was new, and prioritized the reconciliation of interests between the parties over the victory of a given party. Implicit in the process was that the outcome would not be victory, but a new basis for governance that restored the relationship between the government and people. As Balfour made clear in his memorandum, the object was to come to an 'arrangement.'

It may be pointed out that to describe the British Empire as an institution of international governance, distinct from the British Government, is to suggest that the former was overly detached from the latter. While British dominance in imperial institutions meant that it was very unlikely for the Empire to trump British interests, imperial institutions nevertheless forced the British government to take interests other than their own into careful consideration. This would be demonstrated at the Imperial Conference of July and August 1921 at which the British government had to mediate between the interests of New Zealand and Australia, against those of Canada, in framing their policy towards Japan and the United States. Similarly, once Ireland had become an Imperial concern, Britain's dominions did not withhold expressing their views on the process and its outcome. The Governor General of New Zealand for instance told the Colonial Office that his

¹⁵⁴ PAW, LG/F/3/5/15: Balfour Memorandum, 15 July 1921.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

'earnest advice to you is not to bring coercion to bear on Ulster. Any move in that direction will make very serious trouble all over the Empire. It must be understood that people who are loyal will be treated fairly and justly. To create contrary impression would be exceedingly dangerous.'¹⁵⁶ Irrespective of whether historians today accept that imperial institutions did represent institutions of international governance, it is clear that contemporaries saw them as such. 'I am for a League of Nations... in fact the league of nations has begun. The British Empire is a League of Nations,'¹⁵⁷ noted Lloyd George in September 1918. As the historian Mark Mazower has observed, there was a natural overlap between advocates of a British Imperial Commonwealth, and a League of Nations, perhaps embodied by Jan Smuts.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, recent historiography has shifted from understanding the expansion of international law as a progressive development from Westphalia, to an evolution driven by 'inter-imperial politics, including the legal relations of imperial powers and indigenous subjects.'¹⁵⁹ Lloyd George wrote in 1922 that:

The Imperial Conference has a very delicate and momentous part to play in maintaining the peace of the world, the interests of the different nations of the Commonwealth, and the unity of those nations in a world wide system of citizenship under one sovereign. It is feeling its way in accordance with the practical sense of the British People. It is making its own precedents, and it is bound to do so with the utmost care if its character and procedure are to represent the will and sentiment of all the constituent nations.¹⁶⁰

Note Lloyd George's use of the phrase 'peace of the world' and not 'empire', and his view that imperial institutions had to represent 'all constituent nations.' He openly acknowledged that those sentiments could be divergent. The above could, with few adjustments, encapsulate Susan Pedersen's case for why the League of Nations was significant, forcing nations to formulate policy through institutions beyond the nation-state, and effected by 'imperial contestations, bureaucratic innovation, and pressure from below', in a manner that evolved to some extent independently of

¹⁵⁶ PAW, LG/F/10/1/42: Governor General of NZ to CO, 11 November 1921.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd George, cited in: Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: the History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), p. 128.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 128-135.

¹⁵⁹ Lauren Benton, 'From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty, 1870-1900', *Law and History Review*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2008), p. 595.

¹⁶⁰ PAW, LG/F/30/1/2: Draft Telegram from Prime Minister to Mr Mackenzie King, 21 June 1922.

the designs of its framers.¹⁶¹ This is not to state that the Imperial Conference was as innovative an institution of international governance as the League of Nations, but to assert that the two are comparable. The gap between foreign and imperial policy may be wide, and is open to a great deal of dispute, but handing the Irish situation over to imperial institutions took the process of ending a civil war firmly out of the domestic sphere. Whether foreign or colonial, the settlement process was no longer simply an internal concern of the United Kingdom.

Paradoxically, the internationalization of the search for a settlement in Ireland did not internationalize the status of the conflict; that Ireland was in a state of civil war was reinforced over the same period. While Churchill was advocating the expansion of reprisals in 1920, Lord French had suggested that the measures passed did not go far enough. By 1921 the military became even more vocal that if a settlement was not reached then military measures would need to be stepped up. Days before the King's speech to the Northern Irish Parliament General Macready informed the Cabinet Irish Situation Committee that extending military measures would mean 'the extension of Martial Law and "Crown Colony Government" to the South.'¹⁶² His argument was simple; 'if coercion is to succeed at all it can only succeed by being applied with the utmost thoroughness' and that 'half-hearted coercion made the position of the troops and police farcical.'¹⁶³ Macready intended to shock, demanding to know whether 'the Cabinet realise what is involved? Will they go through with it? Will they begin to howl when they hear our shooting a hundred men in one week?'¹⁶⁴ But in practical terms the escalation of the conflict to an out-and-out war was very much in line with measures employed in South Africa. In short, there was precedent within British policy in response to civil conflict and rebellion to take such a firm line, and in the past it had been justified on the grounds that it was the only way of ending the conflict. What is striking is that Balfour, Worthington Evans, Shortt, Greenwood and other members of the committee did not express opposition to the course on practical or moral grounds. Chamberlain's chief point of concern was Parliamentary reaction. In short the

¹⁶¹ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, p. 11.

¹⁶² PAW, LG/F/25/1/42: Thomas Jones, Offices of the War Cabinet, to the Prime Minister, 15 June 1921.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

choice to escalate was seen as a legitimate option. Macready urged negotiation, and with the opportunities created by the King's intervention, talks were made possible, with a truce initiated in early July. Escalation to total victory was considered a legitimate option, but was not implemented in favour of a negotiated settlement in which the British knew they would have to make concessions.

While agreeing to negotiate however the government also clarified its view that the only plausible alternative was civil war. Macready's suggestions were held in reserve in the event that the truce broke down. When direct negotiations started, the position of the British government was that in the event of 'hostilities recommencing... Martial Law should be proclaimed in the 26 countries... followed by intensive propaganda', with a large deployment of troops and widespread internment.¹⁶⁵ Most significant of all, 'the Irish rebels, whilst not recognised as belligerents, will, as an act of grace, be treated as belligerents if they conduct their operations in accordance with the rules of war laid down in Article 1 of the Annex to the Hague Convention, subject to the reservation of the right to try and punish for high treason all leaders and organisers of rebellion.'¹⁶⁶ Although it did not *de jure* recognise its opponents, the British government was offering *de facto* recognition. Moreover, it was again constraining its operational methods against domestic opponents by reference to international law. That this was in part because of the risk of international backlash to the harsh measures to be adopted does not mitigate the fact that it was again through international law, and norms, that the British government sought to legitimate its policy for what had up until that point been considered a purely domestic concern. This therefore mirrored claims that intervention in Russia was legitimated by the failure of actors there to uphold those international norms in their conduct.

The emphasis on good government as a ward against civil war was not just held by the principal proponents of international law and institutions but was picked up by more domestically focused politicians. Lord Londonderry for instance, shortly after taking up his position in the Government of Northern Ireland, wrote to Churchill in September to report that 'the two populations

¹⁶⁵ TNA, CAB 43/2: Memorandum by the Secretary for War, Ireland, 22 October 1921.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Protestant and Catholic in the bad quarters are frightened to death of each other. Any concentration is dispersed by sniping from one side or the other, for fear that a concentration is going to raid a certain street or quarter.¹⁶⁷ He argued that ‘these are not civil disturbances to be dealt with by police; this is Civil War, and should be dealt with as such,’¹⁶⁸ by the army, and requested a free hand to deploy troops. He also argued that ‘Ireland wants good British Government and the moment you produce one all this silly but tragic nonsense will come to an end.’¹⁶⁹ Even this inveterate Unionist wrote of civil war in communal, sectarian, rather than political and institutional terms. While he was an advocate for a strong military response, he also saw the causes of the civil war in the breakdown of trust between public and government, and argued that therein was the long-term solution.

The relationship between Northern and Southern Ireland, as envisaged by British officials during the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, moved civil war away from being conceptualised around state institutions, and further into the realm of an international concern. This was demonstrated clearly by Lloyd George who told the Sinn Fein negotiators that ‘any attempt by the Irish Free State to quarter any of their troops in Northern Ireland without the sanction of its Government would precipitate Civil War.’¹⁷⁰ That the term ‘civil war’ entered cabinet records was in itself highly unusual. It is unclear whether Lloyd George meant by this an imperial civil war, or a civil war within the Irish race. In the context of imperial institutions, such an eventuality would theoretically see the King at war with himself, one crown against the other. Whichever sense Lloyd George meant however, the warning clearly placed civil war outside of the borders of a single state. It would also, as he made clear, precipitate British intervention.

The basis for that intervention would be the preservation of the treaty by the empire. The same principle applied to events in Southern Ireland. Following the signing of the treaty, the British Government expected civil war to break out between the hardline IRA, and more moderate members of Sinn Fein. Intelligence had for some time highlighted the hostility within the IRA and its foreign backers

¹⁶⁷ CCC, CHAR 2/116: Lord Londonderry to Churchill, 11 September 1921.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, CAB 43/1: Conclusions of the British Representatives to the Conference with Sinn Fein, 1 December 1921.

towards negotiating. ‘Sir, your honourable recourse is resignation, before consideration of any Peace Terms with England,’ noted a card addressed to De Valera from a backer in the United States, ‘their acts show merciless unjust and unlawful persecution... absolutely unpardonable in the eyes of God and unrecognizable by honourable descendants in the years to come.’¹⁷¹ However, and this was crucial, during the negotiations, British intelligence concluded that the ‘more extreme members of the IRA have shown an inclination to break away from Sinn Fein, or the moderate section, and this inclination is daily increasing,’ but the ‘civil population on the whole however, still backs the moderate section so that it is at present the stronger of the two.’¹⁷²

The fact that the truce was maintained was held as proof that the moderates were in the ascendancy, for as Herbert Fisher wrote to Lloyd George in response to De Valera’s correspondence, ‘I can hardly believe that the Dail wants war. The whole sentiment of Ireland is passionately averse from a rupture of the truce.’¹⁷³ Thus, while the British government expected civil war, they also counted on the Free State winning it, with popular support. This notion further reinforces the argument that the government increasingly saw victory in civil conflict in population centric terms, and this shaped the contingencies developed in the event that their expectations in Ireland were confounded. In early 1922 the government set out its plans for the expected IRA challenge to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Contingencies drawn up by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff declared that, the ‘British Government and the Army will maintain a neutral attitude in the event of civil war between the Free State Government and the Nationalists.’¹⁷⁴ Churchill subsequently crossed out ‘maintain a neutral attitude’, replacing it with ‘not in the first instance directly intervene’,¹⁷⁵ indicating that Britain was not neutral in the conflict, and rejecting the idea that civil war was the internal concern of Ireland. No concern whatever was expressed over the principle of intervention. Instead,

¹⁷¹ PRONI, D640/6/23: Copy of post Card Addressed to Mr E De Valera c/o Sinn Fein, Belfast, Ireland, posted from Richmond USA, 9 July 1921.

¹⁷² TNA, CAB 43/2: Intelligence Briefing, Sinn Fein Dissension, Captain C Kelly, 10 October 1921.

¹⁷³ PAW, LG/F/25/2/13: Herbert Fisher to PM, 4 September 1921.

¹⁷⁴ TNA, WO 35/182B: CIGS, Civil War or Republic, Military Agenda for Conference, 31 March 1922.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

the Army understood its orders to be that 'If... the Free State Government joins the Nationalists, or disappear, or Mr Valera proclaims a Republic, Ireland would be blockaded from the sea and the Army will hold strategic points... The General Staff understand that should there be *coup d'état* and the proclamation of a Republic in Dublin itself, the Army will act at once.'¹⁷⁶

For reasons of political expediency it was felt that if the Free State Government could win the civil war without overt British intervention, then that would be preferable, so that if the 'Free State Government... move against the Republican Government... while they act the Army takes no direct or active part.'¹⁷⁷ However 'the Free State Government may be incapable of acting and do nothing... in the above case, after a certain interval, the British Government may say to the Free State Government "if you don't act, we shall", in which case it is probable the Free State Government would resign, ~~and both states would become our potential enemies.~~'¹⁷⁸ The final clause was struck through by Churchill in his red ink. Note also that although the British were referring to both parties as 'governments' they did not recognise the IRA as belligerents. This document is of great significance because it acknowledges that the Free State was a separate state from Britain, that would be in a state of civil war, and into which the British would intervene, as the empire upholding treaty obligations. Thus we see the mechanism for instruments of international governance underpinning a peace settlement. One might also note the resemblance of the test applied to the Free State Government, and the principle of 'unwilling or unable' as grounds for intervention in contemporary international law.¹⁷⁹ No direct line of causation may be drawn between this point and today's concept, but it does suggest the extent to which the disruption to the conceptualisation of civil war outlined over the last three chapters of this thesis opened up new avenues of reasoning.

The right to intervene, proposed by Britain in Ireland, was not dissimilar to the zones of influence overseen by the League of Nations in the Middle East, and elsewhere, enabling the Great Powers to intervene in the event of civil unrest in

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Eric Heinz, 'The Evolution of International Law in Light of the "Global War on Terror"', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2011), p. 1079.

mandated territories, or states who had signed minority protection treaties. And yet the League of Nations was not the mechanism applied to Ireland; in fact as the historian Patrick Keatinge has described, the British strove to keep Ireland out of the League, and the League disinterested in Ireland.¹⁸⁰ The reasoning advanced for this however was not what one might expect, and reveals some interesting points about how the League was expected to respond to civil war, especially in light of broader conversations about the League's role and function. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that those drawing up the League, both opponents, and advocates, discussed a number of mechanisms that impinged upon state sovereignty, and could apply to civil conflict. The eminent international legal theorist, Professor Lassa Oppenheim, advising the British Government, noted that

it will be impossible to draw the boundary lines in such a way that the population of each new State is absolutely homogeneous as regards nationality, race, and creed. It would therefore be advisable that the Covenant of the League of Nations should comprise a stipulation securing equal treatment in every State of individuals in spite of difference of nationality, race, or creed.¹⁸¹

He also suggested that as wars may break out in spite of the League, 'the Covenant should comprise a clause stipulating the right of the League to intervene in case a belligerent party violates the fundamental rules of warfare.'¹⁸² These two proposals were met favourably by many officials, although diluted in the negotiations of the subsequent treaties dependent on the League. Although there was not unanimous agreement as to which rights specifically were to be protected, even Curzon pushed for certain rights of citizens to be advanced by the League, such as that 'every state and people shall maintain in their integrity the lawfully acquired property rights of Friendly non-nationals as same existed under constitution and laws in force at time of acquisition of such rights.'¹⁸³ Any of these guarantees implied that full sovereignty was conditional upon the maintenance of certain norms of behaviour, consisting of upholding the rule of law, and conforming to the rules of war. These were enforced through the minority treaties.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick Keatinge, 'Ireland and the League of Nations', *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 59, no. 234 (1970), p. 135.

¹⁸¹ TNA, FO 608/243: Oppenheim to Baker, 1 March 1919.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ TNA, FO 608/243: Curzon to Balfour, 31 March 1919.

Note however that these treaties and guarantees were made by virtue of it being impossible for state and nation to perfectly conform. The conformity of state and nation was, nevertheless the ideal. That these provisions, and mechanisms of enforcement, did not make it into the actual structures of the League of Nations does not undermine the fact that they were widely supported by its founders, and this influenced how the League's mechanisms were applied. For instance, in 1919 much discussion arose about the humanitarian duties of the League with regards to feeding Eastern Europe, including Russia. However, as Francis Lindley in Archangel argued, 'famine produces Bolshevism in countries where ordinary Government exists, it weakens Bolshevism in country with Bolshevik Government.'¹⁸⁴ Such selective delivery of aid to try and combat what was widely acknowledged to be a threat to international peace, and contrary to the League's objectives, highlights how the League provided innumerable tools for intervening in civil wars, that could be applied, even if the structures for military intervention were not formulated.

Many of the League's critics within government, while skeptical of its legalism, hoped for its utility. The Cabinet Secretary, Maurice Hankey, for instance, commented to Curzon that 'my personal opinion has always been that the Covenant was a badly drawn instrument. I hope, however, that I have stifled my personal feelings and not said anything which could in any way damage the League.'¹⁸⁵ The League's value, for many participants, was that it created a forum for improved negotiation among the Great Powers, and effective consultation with small states. As Martin Dubin points out, the League provided something of a "clearing houses for transgovernmental linkages",¹⁸⁶ facilitating those endeavours that required international cooperation.

In this regard the League formed an important role in limiting civil conflict, by providing institutions that gave legitimacy to the parties in civil war settlement. The League of Nations, through its support for refugees, sponsoring of arrangements between Lithuania and Poland, and legitimizing new governments through membership, was central to the policy of partition that was being

¹⁸⁴ TNA, FO 608/204: Lindley to FO, 21 April 1919.

¹⁸⁵ TNA, FO 800/149: Hankey to Curzon, 11 October 1920.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Dubin, 'Transgovernmental Processes in the League of Nations' in: *International Organization*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Summer, 1983), p. 471.

employed to settle civil conflict across Eastern Europe. The mechanisms established would have a lasting impact beyond the League's collapse. As David Stone notes, 'the League's greatest successes grew from its "technical articles"',¹⁸⁷ yet the deployment of these technical instruments was uneven since, as Zara Steiner points out, the League 'was not a substitute for great-power politics... but rather an adjunct to it. It was only a mechanism for conducting multinational diplomacy whose success or failure depended on the willingness of the states, and particularly the most powerful states, to use it.'¹⁸⁸ Where it was able to act however, it created precedents and a legacy of its own, distinct from the powers that enabled it. Russia highlights many of the limitations of the League beyond its constituent members because the Bolsheviks rejected the system of international norms, not least the laws of war and rights to property that many wished to protect through the League. It was on these grounds that White Russian officials in Siberia pressed the British Government to have 'the Bolsheviks declared outlaws by the Allied Governments and by the League of Nations later on.'¹⁸⁹ League membership was, in the eyes of the White movement, to be gained by 'Russia as soon as she shall have settled Government.'¹⁹⁰ Although the British government had raised the possibility of the Bolsheviks being represented at Paris, the preponderance of opinion was against it. The French Government 'was quite unmoved and immovable with regard either to inviting or receiving Bolshevik representatives at Paris. He is afraid in the first place that this may give rise to some street rioting, which would need to be put down by force.'¹⁹¹ Again we observe the association of Bolshevism with the inevitable tide of civil disorder. For Churchill, as he repeatedly stated in public, it was clear that 'Bolshevik Russia can never form part of such a League,'¹⁹² because

theirs is a war against civilised society which can never end. They seek as the first condition of their being the overthrow and destruction of all existing

¹⁸⁷ David Stone, 'Imperialism and Sovereignty: The League of Nations' Drive to Control the Global Arms Trade', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2000), p. 214.

¹⁸⁸ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 299.

¹⁸⁹ TNA, FO 608/204: Knox to WO, 14 May 1919.

¹⁹⁰ TNA, FO 608/243: Eliot to FO, 24 May 1919.

¹⁹¹ PAW, LG/F/3/4/7: Balfour to PM, 19 January 1919.

¹⁹² CCC, CHAR 8/36: The Foreign Policy of Britain, 22 June 1919.

institutions and of every State and Government now standing in the world. They too aim at a world-wide and international league, but a league of the failures, the criminals, the unfit, the mutinous, the morbid, the deranged, and the distraught in every land; and between them and such order of civilisation as we have been able to build up since the dawn of history there can, as Lenin rightly proclaims, be neither truce nor pact.¹⁹³

While Churchill could not see how to integrate the Bolsheviks, he did see that leaving Russia outside the League would undermine the purpose for which it was established:

We may therefore affirm with absolute conviction that a League of Nations which does not include representatives of a Germany cured of Imperialism and of a Russia rescued from Bolshevism, and which does not at the same time secure the full continuous support, guidance, and succour of the United States, will never be strong enough for the work it will have to do and in attempting that work will only produce a continuance of the present chaos, steadily intensifying into a renewed explosion of war.¹⁹⁴

Churchill was vindicated when the League of Nations was asked by the Supreme Council of the Allies to take up the condition of Russia in March 1920, 'to appoint a Commission of Investigation to obtain impartial and reliable information regarding the conditions now prevailing in Russia.'¹⁹⁵ As was pointed out by White Russian representatives in Paris, and endorsed by Churchill and Knox, without extensive measures to ensure its independence 'the proposed Commission of Enquiry will be completely hoodwinked as it will represent Bolshevism as an ideal state that should be copied liberally in the west.'¹⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly the Soviet government was not willing to cooperate, so that the League Council concluded that 'the Soviet Government has put forward conditions practically amounting to a refusal.'¹⁹⁷ This both proved the League to be an ineffective instrument for resolving civil conflict, and further convinced the High Contracting Parties that if the League was to function, its membership had to be made up of those committed to its goals. Otherwise, any member could obstruct the League's business.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ TNA, CAB 24/103: Resolutions passed at Third Session of the Council of the League of Nations, 13 March 1920.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, WO 32/5714: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War on the Commission of Enquiry in Bolshevik Russia, 23 March 1920.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, WO 32/5714: Reply to Soviet Authorities by League of Nations, 19 May 1920.

This was the reason for excluding Ireland. Initially, the British government had considered Ireland a domestic concern, but as soon as an Irish settlement was pursued through the mechanisms of the British Empire it became apparent that

if Ireland gets anything which puts her on a level with Dominions, she will claim to join League of Nations as an independent Member. Existing status of India and proposed position of Albania must be also remembered in this connection. I do not know that Ireland's membership of League of Nations would be necessarily a very serious calamity but if she was out to wreck machine she would not find it very difficult.¹⁹⁸

The concern was not immediately that Ireland would oppose Britain's interests, but that Irish representatives would undermine the functioning of the League's mechanisms, demonstrating the continued skepticism of the more revolutionary wing of Irish politics, and its similarities to Bolshevism. Of course Balfour was also concerned about Ireland using its status in the League to impede Britain, but more because of the impact on other small states, rather than Ireland itself, as he observed in July 1921, Ireland ought to be given

no claim to separate representation on the League of Nations. Cuba, dependent as she is on the United States of America; has obtained membership; Egypt would without doubt like to have the same position though I should regard her gaining it with much misgiving. But to give any part of Ireland the right of veto on the international policy pursued by the rest of the United Kingdom would surely be utterly indefensible.¹⁹⁹

What is clear is that while British officials wanted the League of Nations to function, and to use it as a mechanism for resolving civil conflict, they could not establish a way of doing so that would not force their hand on a number of sensitive issues. The construction of clear mechanisms for civil conflict resolution presented too many risks. Nevertheless the desired method was to disentangle the warring factions, to clearly identify them as a national block, and thence to treat them as separate states, with their governments given legitimacy by their conformity with, and recognition from, institutions upholding international norms. Civil war had become an international concern, and the justifications for intervention had been dramatically expanded, even practically encouraged. Even if the international institutions were inadequate, the discussion of their role in civil war reveals the change that had occurred in attitudes towards civil war,

¹⁹⁸ PAW, LG/F/25/2/24: Balfour to Hankey, 30 September 1921.

¹⁹⁹ PAW, LG/F/3/5/15: Balfour Memorandum, 15 July 1921.

intervention, and legitimacy. Civil war had become the breakdown in relations between a government and its people, the rejection of international norms, the spread of anarchy, and as such, it was a threat to the international order and to peace, to be dealt with externally, whether through economic or military means.

This chapter has overwhelmingly focused on policy discussion within government. During the First World War the unity government, and Imperial War Cabinet operating under strict official secrecy, were never entirely detached from the public, but their discussion was distinct from wider public discourse. The armistice, the election of 1918, and the almost utopian hopes surrounding the Paris Peace Conference, would force officials to take a wider set of interests and opinions into consideration. As Jay Winter has noted, there arose a strong sentiment that the Paris Peace Conference 'had to abolish war, or risk the total destruction of society.'²⁰⁰ The continuation of war anywhere, was publicly perceived as a threat to peace everywhere. As Churchill explained in a speech in June 1919, the 'war of the giants is over; the wars of the pygmies have begun.' The collapse of Empire had left an array of 'small States, [whose] external aspirations, their internal weakness, their jealousies, their poverty, and their racial entanglements, must inevitably confront us for a long period with profound and recurring causes of anxiety.'²⁰¹ Russia and Ireland simultaneously embodied widespread utopian ideals, of socialism and self-determination respectively, as well as dystopian fears, showcasing the collapse of civilization. The next chapter will explore the intersection between official discourse, and wider political, scholarly, and legal debate surrounding the idea of civil war in Russia and Ireland.

²⁰⁰ Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 49.

²⁰¹ CCC, CHAR 8/36: The Foreign Policy of Britain, 22 June 1919.

Chapter Five

Civil War in Theory and Practice, 1918-1924

In 1922 the author and politician John Buchan published *A Book of Escapes and Hurried Journeys*, which was recommended by *The Times* as a Christmas book for boys, capturing ‘the true atmosphere of breathless excitement which he knows so well how to create.’¹ The book included Winston Churchill’s escape from Boer captivity in South Africa, along with a plethora of pursuits across history from the English Civil Wars, to the French Revolution, and the American Civil War. One concerned the Marquis Montrose, who is described as

originally... a Covenanter... but as time went on he began to see that more was involved in the struggle than the question of liturgies. He realised that the Church in Scotland was beginning to make claims which meant the complete abolition of civil government. He therefore drew towards the King’s side, and there began that antagonism with the Marquis of Argyll which was inevitable between two men with such different temperaments and creeds.²

Another of the stories recounts the exploits of a spy during the American Civil War who was ‘one of these daring adventurers who, in a civil war of volunteers... could perform exploits impossible in a normal campaign.’³ In both accounts Buchan was conforming to the traditional depiction of these conflicts. The actors are motivated by ideological conviction, their allegiance to either side is honourable, and their conduct heroic. If they could bridge their differences of creed, the adversaries would doubtless get on well together. The tragedy of civil war in such stories is that it drives good men to kill one another, and thus strips society of its most upright, and morally committed leaders. As Buchan argued in a lecture in 1923, the American Civil War ‘was a conflict on the heroic scale, a conflict of honest ideals but of half-truths. It was a war of amateurs, but the four years struggle had foreshadowed almost all the main strategical and tactical developments of the Great War.’⁴

This vision of the American Civil War was pervasive in British society. As the historian Nimrod Tal has observed, ‘imprinted onto the political discourse, military

¹ ‘Christmas Books’, *The Times* (5 December 1922), p. 15.

² John Buchan, *A Book of Escapes and Hurried Journeys* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, 1922), p. 196.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴ ‘American Civil War, Mr Austin Chamberlain’s Views’, *The Scotsman* (16 March 1923), p. 6.

thought, intellectual life and popular culture, the American Civil War left a deep, lasting mark on British society.⁵ But whereas during the South African War the American Civil War was seen as the natural example in discussion of civil conflict, in interwar Britain the comparison, while frequently invoked, was nonetheless awkward. Irish Nationalists were uncomfortable with the British government using the American Civil War to justify the suppression of secessionism, while the British government felt uncomfortable drawing attention to the legitimacy they themselves had afforded to the southern states. Curiously in the period after the First World War British novelists, journalists, and politicians were less inclined to reinterpret the American Civil War, as they were to distance it from their own time; it became an example from a nobler, and undoubtedly past age.

In her 1919 novel *The Veldt Trail*, the Anglo-Rhodesian novelist Gertrude Page contrasted the tranquility of life on the ranch, with 'the great unrest in the world, which had followed upon the great war. Everywhere strikes, agitators, revolutionaries, Bolsheviks - wide spread discontent and a blind grasping after some elusive state of imagined happiness.'⁶ The world as seen in the weekly paper was tearing apart beneath the onslaught of 'strife of creeds, and strife of tongues, of all dogmas, ambitions, rivalries, graspings; of unmerited success, undeserved praise, unearned emoluments, which breed bitterness in all hearts and turn peaceable citizens everywhere into revolutionaries.'⁷ If Buchan typified the historical writing of his time, Page here encapsulates the way in which contemporary civil conflict was portrayed. It was fuelled by grievances rather than principle, and tended towards the moral degradation of civilization. The tragedy was no longer that civil war caused good men to kill one another, but that it was a product, and progenitor of evil.

Placing the civil war into a past age was not the case in America where disputes over its meaning and cause were still hotly contested. In 1915 the renowned American classicist Basil Gildersleeve departed from his usual research on the Greek of the early Christians to address what he saw as the misrepresentation of a cause in which, as a young man, he had risked his life. In

⁵ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 3.

⁶ Gertrude Page, 'The Veldt Trail', *Quiver* (June 1919), p. 641.

⁷ Ibid.

The Creed of the Old South, he gave short shrift to the predominant nomenclature for the conflict, writing that:

'The war between the States,' which a good many Southerners prefer, is both bookish and inexact. 'Civil war' is an utter misnomer. It was used and is still used by courteous people, the same people who are careful to say 'Federal' and 'Confederate.' 'War of the rebellion,' which begs the very question at issue, has become the official designation of the struggle, but has found no acceptance with the vanquished. To this day no Southerner uses it except by way of quotation... 'The war of secession' is still used a good deal in foreign books, but it has no popular hold. 'The war,' without any further qualification, served the turn of Thucydides and Aristophanes for the Peloponnesian war. It will serve ours, let it be hoped, for some time to come.⁸

For a scholar of ancient Greek to term 'civil war' an 'utter misnomer' is hardly surprising. As David Armitage notes, *bellum civile* is a distinctly Roman concept, quite distinct from the Greek idea of *stasis emphylos*, or faction within the polity.⁹ In Britain however, this distinction was a source of bemusement; there was little doubt that America had experienced a 'civil war' and Gildersleeve himself was viewed as the quintessential Southern gentleman, typifying one side in that war who, like the Boers, had fought in defence of outdated beliefs, but with honour and sincerity. Nevertheless such conflicts were, like Gildersleeve, perceived to be of a different age, as was made clear in his obituary in *The Times* where his service in the civil war was described thus:

A slight limp, the result of a wound received in the Civil War when, like all true sons of the South, he took his part in the heroic struggle, added, rather than otherwise, to the dignity of his presence. Or when again one met him at a gathering in a New England town, the indescribable look with which he turned to a sympathetic Englishman, on seeing or hearing some expression commemorating the Northern Dead, made one realise that he had grown up in an earlier epoch - an epoch in which loyalty was given to the State, not to the still unformed nation.¹⁰

The contours of the new epoch were as yet unknown. Theorists in international law, politics, military strategy, and cultural commentators in the press and periodicals, consistently acknowledged after the First World War that the assumptions and categories that underpinned their understanding of warfare - civil and foreign - had undergone a transformation, but by 1919 they were only

⁸ Basil Gildersleeve, *The Creed of the Old South* (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins Press, 1915), pp. 114-115.

⁹ Armitage, *Civil Wars*, pp. 37-45.

¹⁰ 'Dr. Gildersleeve, A Great American Scholar', *The Times* (10 January 1924), p. 7.

just beginning to identify what warfare might have transformed into. The development of a new conceptualisation of civil conflict, which would take place over the following years, was intimately bound up with contemporary political events, not least civil war in Russia, and Ireland. The debates over intervention and sovereignty, liberties and loyalty, surrounding these conflicts were less precise, less consistent, and ultimately less conclusive, than the evolving policy discussions within government. But the wider discussion of civil war in British society did follow some clear trends across the political spectrum, and would have an appreciable mark on discourse within government, sparking ideas integral to modern concepts of crimes against humanity, genocide, humanitarian intervention, and terrorism.

This chapter seeks to explore civil war in wider discourse within and between the legal, academic, literary, and political spheres. No such survey can comprehensively describe the plethora of ways in which civil war was discussed across all of these areas. Instead this chapter seeks to highlight three consistent trends. Firstly, civil war as a concept was increasingly detached from splits across a state's institutions, and rather became a synonym for localized violent disorder, anarchy, and the failure of state structures. Secondly, both in international and civil warfare the distinction between the military and the civilian blurred, along with the distinction between the battlefield and the home front, between war and peace. Thirdly, civil conflict was no longer seen as a purely domestic concern, but a generalized blight upon civilisation, and a specific threat to an increasingly integrated global political, economic and social body.

Anarchy and Civil War

The armistice of 1918 was greeted with jubilation in Britain, the *Daily Mirror* reported that, 'conversation in the Strand was impossible owing to the din of cheers, whistles, hooters and fireworks.'¹¹ Gertrude Page captures the spontaneous enthusiasm in *The Veldt Trail* where her main characters embark on a boisterous night of festivities across London, culminating in a procession 'through the laughing, shouting, rejoicing throngs, and beheld the amazing spectacle of

¹¹ 'With Flags of the Allies', *Daily Mirror* (12 November 1918), p. 2.

stately England more or less gone mad.'¹² She described some people 'with a grunting plea that the war was not over', but they were ignored. That she chose to take note of these dissenters no doubt bears testimony to the fact that she was writing six months after the events she described, for as the historians Robert Gerwarth and John Horne point out, 'the end of the Great War did not immediately bring peace to Europe. On the contrary revolutions, counter-revolutions, ethnic strife, pogroms, wars of independence, civil conflict, and interstate violence continued from 1917-1923.'¹³ In spite of the armistice British soldiers continued to die in Russia, and would soon be killed in Ireland, while Europe was convulsed by violence.¹⁴ Yet in none of these conflicts had a declaration of war actually been made, throwing into some doubt how to describe events.

As was explored in the third chapter, the British press had taken to calling the conflict in Russia a civil war over a year before this term became widely used on Whitehall. Journalists paid careful attention to Bolshevik statements on both civil war, and international revolution, logically concluding that the promotion of such revolution was unavoidably the subversive promotion of civil conflict. Thus when Karl Radek arrived in Berlin at the beginning of 1919, the British press portrayed him as an apostle of civil conflict. 'The arrival at Berlin of the well-known Russian revolutionary leader Radek has given the signal for the beginning of an undisguised Bolshevik campaign in Germany,' declared *The Daily Telegraph*, quoting Radek as saying that

if the armies of the Entente enter Russia, its revolutionary atmosphere will affect them as it affected the German army, and the Bolshevik ideas will spread all the more quickly. In the same way, if the French and their Allies advance into Germany, they will see that the German worker has at last become master in his own house, and so the flood of Bolshevism will continue to flow westward. As to civil war, if it is necessary such a war will be waged.¹⁵

Once civil war was being used to describe the threat, the subsequent general strike leading to the January Uprising was quickly labeled a civil war in the British

¹² Page, 'The Veldt Trail', p. 619.

¹³ Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, *War in Peace, Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁴ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, pp. 69-76.

¹⁵ 'Leninite Campaign in German Capital, Sensational Speech', *The Daily Telegraph* (2 January 1919), p. 7.

papers. *The Daily Mail*, on 8 January 1919, reported that 'Berlin today is practically in a state of complete anarchy... The banks are barricaded. The principal papers and the telegraph offices are in the hands of Liebknecht's Spartacus (Extremist) Group... In all forms the civil war has begun.'¹⁶ As was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, anarchy had long been seen to be quite distinct from civil war, both within the British government, and in the papers. Ireland and Russia had loosened the clear delineations between these concepts. The result was that by 1919 they were being used almost as synonyms. There are a number of significant aspects to this nomenclature. Firstly, what was being described as 'civil war' was not a nationwide rift but a localized event. Secondly the fighting developed in parallel to the state, rather than originating as a split within state institutions. Many troops declared themselves neutral, and the bulk of the subsequent fighting was between the Spartacists and paramilitary Freikorps. It also blurred the line between civilians and combatants. This was therefore a fight among civilians in which the state had limited control. There was no clear fight between institutions – the Spartacists had not planned the uprising, and were internally split with regards to how to move forward.¹⁷ And yet, as *The Times* reported, 'negotiations initiated by the Minority Socialists with the view of bringing about a cessation of hostilities have failed, and Berlin, it is now announced, is faced with civil war.'¹⁸ The threshold for civil war in public discourse had been lowered, and once equated with the collapse of order, could be described in relation to particular cities without reference to the broader national situation. When a subsequent uprising occurred in Bavaria, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that 'Civil War broke out in Munich at two o'clock on Friday afternoon. The Church bells began ringing, and ten thousand workmen from the suburbs marched into the centre of the city. A short time later violent firing was heard and the mob began plundering the shops.'¹⁹

Another feature of this revolutionary violence was that while it reduced the

¹⁶ 'Berlin Civil War, Liebknecht Leading. Many Street Conflicts', *Daily Mail* (8 January 1919), p. 5.

¹⁷ Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), p. 173.

¹⁸ 'Martial Law in Berlin, Failure of Mediation, Civil War said to be Inevitable', *The Times* (10 January 1919), p. 8.

¹⁹ 'Munich under Soviet Rule, Garrison supporting extremists, Shooting of Ministers in the Diet', *The Manchester Guardian* (24 February 1919), p. 5.

threshold for civil war it was strongly associated with criminality. As the historian Gerhard Bassler has noted, during the German revolution of 1918-1919, 'communism as a revolutionary movement meant not only an abstract quest for the abolition of private property, capitalist exploitation, and class discrimination. It also meant a revolt against the kind of organisation through which this exploitation and regimentation was made possible and experienced.'²⁰ Communism was not just a struggle for control of the state, but an attack on the very institutions of government. This linked criminality, anarchy, Bolshevism, and civil war, into a continuum.

In the wake of the First World War there was a widespread perception that the war had brutalized people. 'Between January and August 1919,' writes the historian Jon Lawrence, 'towns and cities across Britain were gripped by a series of bloody riots in which soldiers and ex-servicemen appeared to play a prominent part... [while] would-be revolutionaries were arguing that the workers must turn the lessons of war against their upper-class masters.'²¹ In the minds of contemporaries war, revolution, and moral degradation were linked. The Great War's 'consequences do not end with destruction,' declared an article in *Nation*. 'The people who have taken serious part in it are not the same people as those who went into it... The epidemic of crimes of violence is the natural sequel of war.'²² The explanatory value of George Mosse's 'brutalization thesis'²³ – proposing that the experience of fighting at the front left a European generation psychologically accustomed to employ violence in their endeavours - is widely contested among historians. Writing of Germany Richard Bessel observes that 'to ascribe political radicalism and political violence to the brutalizing effects of the war seemed to me

²⁰ Gerhard Bassler, 'The Communist Movement in the German Revolution, 1918-1919: A Problem of Historical Typology?' *Central European History*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1973), p. 237.

²¹ Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 75, no. 3 (2003), p. 557.

²² *Nation*, XXVI (10 January 1920), p. 498.

²³ George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: OUP, 1994). The thesis was carried forward in Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York: OUP, 1996).

unsatisfactory and altogether too simple.²⁴ Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth contend that there were more significant changes in political engagement predating the First World War, which explain pervasive politicized violence in interwar Europe.²⁵ It has been widely noted that countries that did participate in the Great War like France and Britain did not see comparable political violence to, for example, Germany.²⁶ John Horne has argued that these discrepancies are best understood with regards to ‘a process of cultural demobilization’.²⁷ Britain is often cited as a case study of where the brutalization thesis falls short, but the perception of brutalization among contemporaries in Britain was real, as was a growing fear of crime and subversion. The American novelist Robert Chambers wrote in his 1919 novel *The Crimson Tide* of a group of Russian émigrés’ struggle against The Red Flag Club, ‘a revolutionary organization of the violent type’,²⁸ whose organisers are portrayed as living in squalor and who use threats and blackmail to advance their schemes. In this Chambers captured the widespread association of Bolshevism, subversion, and criminality, all spreading like a disease. In the novel, one character composes a poem, ostensibly about influenza, though it could be read in a more political light:

A square fabric
Once white
With intention.
Soiled, soiled, soiled.

²⁴ Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Mark Jones has argued of Germany, that the events surrounding the armistice were far more important than the experience of trench warfare in shaping a period of exceptional violence in German politics, see Jones, *Founding Weimar*, p. 22. Detailed research of the interaction between Front and Home, suggests that the trenches were less isolated than previously thought, and that brutalization was highly qualified, see Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experience in Rural Germany, 1914-1923* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

²⁵ Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth (Eds.), *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: CUP, 2011).

²⁶ Gerwarth, *The Vanquished*, p. 12.

²⁷ John Horne, ‘Demobilizing the Mind; France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919-1939’, *French History and Civilization; Papers from the George Rude Seminar*, vol. 2 (The George Rude Society, 2009), p. 102. Though the explanatory power of demobilization also has its limits, see Mark Edele and Robert Gerwarth, ‘The Limits of Demobilization: Global Perspectives on the Aftermath of the Great War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2015), pp. 3-14.

²⁸ Robert Chambers, ‘The Crimson Tide’, *Nash’s and Pall Mall Magazine* (1919), p. 271.

Six hundred million
Swarm like vermin,
Without intention.
Redder. Redder.²⁹

In his 1919 novel *The Undying Fire*, Herbert Wells wrote in the voice of his protagonist that 'I can see nothing to redeem the waste and destruction of the last four years and the still greater waste and spiritless disorder and poverty and disease ahead of us.'³⁰ Of the League of Nations he demanded to know 'on what will you set up your World League of Nations? What foundations have you made in the last four years but ruins?'³¹ This malaise was often portrayed not as emanating from the trenches, but from Russia:

You can see chaos coming again over all the east of Europe now, and bit by bit western Europe crumbles and drops into the confusion. Art, science, reasoned thought, creative thought, such things have ceased altogether in Russia; they may have ceased there perhaps for centuries; they die now in Germany; the universities of the west are bloodless and drained of their youth.³²

In contemporary writings all that was required for crimes of violence to escalate to civil war was that they were undertaken with political intent. Typical is an editorial against direct action, described as 'the negation of government', in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The paper argued that

direct action of Trade Unions for political ends... would, if successful, be entirely subversive of good government and productive of nothing but social anarchy. A general strike to force the hands of the Government on a political issue would be a direct challenge to Parliament by which alone the whole country is represented, and would have to be taken up by the nation as a whole. Virtually it would be civil war.³³

Note the conflation above of civil war and anarchy. The association of politically motivated criminality and civil war was encouraged by the Bolsheviks, with the British press taking note of Lenin's writing to the effect that 'outside civil war for Socialism there is no possibility of progress in Europe... [we are] prepared to

²⁹ Ibid. p. 286.

³⁰ Herbert Wells, *The Undying Fire* (New York: Broadman & Holman, 1998), p. 119.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ 'Direct Action, The Negation of Government', *Pall Mall Gazette* (26 June 1919), p. 6.

engage in a revolutionary civil war all over all of Europe and the world.³⁴ It was the use of crime for political ends that would link Ireland and Russia in the public discourse, often cited as evidence of Bolshevik influences upon Sinn Fein. It is curious that William Butler Yeats, in his poem 'The Second Coming', which drew upon his belief in a crisis of Western civilization as a result of materialism and Bolshevism,³⁵ highlighted anarchy specifically as the affliction of contemporary Europe:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned³⁶

To compare Russia – by then universally described to be in a state of civil war – to Ireland, was to connect anarchy and civil war as related phenomena. And it was in this vein that the British government began to publicly compare Ireland and Russia. Describing the challenge in Ireland, Lloyd George told the Commons at the end of 1919 that Ireland 'is the one country in Europe, except Russia, where the classes who, elsewhere, are on the side of law and order, are out of sympathy with the machinery of law and order.'³⁷ The IRA's use of crime to subvert the British state was associated with the tactics of revolutionary Bolshevism, and to what was increasingly being called civil war on the continent. The British Government at this stage were not prepared to publicly call conflict in Ireland a civil war, but the term was prominent in the press. Within a month of the January Uprising in Berlin, the former Irish nationalist Member of Parliament Stephen Gwynne wrote in *The Observer*

Sinn Fein can only justify the shooting of soldiers and policemen as acts of civil war. The mass of the community, however, has no desire for civil war, actual or latent; and it has still less wish for the spread of Bolshevik ideas. Nevertheless, Sinn Fein is becoming more and more committed to Bolshevism - partly by sympathy, partly by the necessity of things.³⁸

His argument, that the crimes committed by the IRA could only be considered

³⁴ 'The Creed of Lenin', *The Times* (22 December 1919), p. 13.

³⁵ Roy Foster, *WB Yeats, A Life II: The Arch Poet, 1915-1939* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 147-151.

³⁶ William Butler Yeats, 'The Second Coming', *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (Churchtown: Cuala Press, 1921), p. 19.

³⁷ Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (22 December 1919), vol. 123, col. 1169.

³⁸ Stephen Gwynn, 'The Outlook in Ireland', *The Observer* (16 February 1919), p. 5.

moral if they were undertaken as part of a formally declared war, pinpoints a serious challenge for the British government. As violence escalated ministers needed to decide what framework of laws governed their treatment of the IRA, how they distinguished civilians in Ireland, and what powers could be used by the military without a formal declaration of war, recognising the IRA as belligerents. The Government was constrained simultaneously by its public pronouncements of a commitment to uphold law and order, and yet its unwillingness to clearly define what legal framework applied to Irish affairs. That no clear answer could be publicly articulated led to the increasing ambiguity of legal structures, so that operations in Ireland were conducted within what the historian David Leeson has termed 'the margins of tolerated illegality.'³⁹

This state of affairs was to some extent facilitated by uncertainties in international law that had been exposed by the Great War. It was difficult for the government's critics to demand adherence to legal principles, the meaning of which were contested. Long before the armistice, international legal theorists raised concerns that the First World War posed serious challenges to established legal principles governing the status and conduct of warfare. Speaking to the Grotius Society in May 1918, George Grenville Phillimore - who in 1902 had commented upon the increasing ambiguity between civil war and policing in British domestic law in relation to South Africa - gave a lecture on neutrality in which he argued that

The new instruments of warfare, the mine, the submarine and the aircraft used in the present war have made the former rules and practices of international law generally appear inadequate to the present condition of warfare, and the immense scale of the struggle and its employment of economic as well as military force tend to render belligerent nations impatient of any action by neutrals which seems unsympathetic to their cause. The fabric of that law, and especially neutrality, is therefore undergoing a severe test.⁴⁰

The expansion of the sphere of military activity would have no less a disruptive influence in the context of insurgent warfare. The renowned legal theorist Lassa Oppenheim, who had advised the British government during the

³⁹ David Leeson, *The Black and Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence, 1920-1921* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 223.

⁴⁰ George Phillimore, 'The Future Law of Neutrality', *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, vol. 4 (1918), pp. 43.

formation of the League of Nations, was able to begin the preparation of the third edition of his magnum opus, *International Law: A Treatise*, before his death in 1919. The 1920 edition includes some intriguing additions. Oppenheim argued that '[the] time-honoured distinction between members of the armed forces and civilians is threatened'⁴¹ by several developments in warfare. 'Wars are nowadays fought by whole nations in arms... the whole male population of military age being enrolled in the fighting forces; all other men and all fit women are asked, or even compelled, to assist the fighting forces as workers.'⁴² Furthermore:

The fact that it has been considered legitimate for air vessels to bombard, outside the theatre of war, munitions factories, bridges, railway stations, and other objects of value for military communication and preparation, must necessarily blur, or even efface, the distinction between members of the armed forces and civilians.⁴³

Oppenheim also argued that democracy, because in theory it rendered the whole population responsible for government policy, made the whole population complicit in the conduct of warfare, 'so that wars are no longer dynastic but national.'⁴⁴

Isabel Hull has argued that the First World War was to some extent a war between two approaches to international law, with the British in particular committed to an international legal order. She argues that although the British changed their interpretation of legal norms with regards to blockade, the status of neutrals, and other elements of warfare, their arguments were founded upon legal precedent, and with concern for upholding the legal system.⁴⁵ New interpretations of established principles created serious ambiguities however. Heather Jones has argued that the First World War marked a significant departure in the treatment of civilians in warfare, blurring existing boundaries.⁴⁶ Far less attention has been given to the implications of this departure in the context of civil conflict. Oppenheim did not distinguish between civil and foreign wars when discussing

⁴¹ Lassa Oppenheim, *International Law: A Treatise* (London: Longman, Greens and Co., 1920), p. 73.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hull, *A Scrap of Paper*.

⁴⁶ Heather Jones, 'The Great War: How 14-18 Changed the Relationship Between War and Civilians,' *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 159 (2014), pp. 84-91.

this blurred distinction. This however was because in international law either the laws of war applied, or they did not, depending upon whether an armed conflict was understood to exist. If we compare Oppenheim's notes on the blurring of this distinction with his comments on what constituted civil war, we are confronted with an alarming development, with a comparable ambiguity growing between war and peace.

As has been explored in the first chapter, civil war was understood to be a recognised armed conflict when the forces opposing the government were accorded recognition of their belligerent status, either by their opponents, or by foreign states. This was still the case in 1919.⁴⁷ However this notion was also premised upon the rebel force holding territory and commanding a regular army; 'a civil war becomes war in the technical sense of the term by recognition.'⁴⁸ Oppenheim however saw the need to add a text on guerilla war, as distinguished from the tactic of guerilla warfare. This he characterised as '[carrying] on the contention by mere guerrilla tactics. Although hopeless of success in the end, such petty war can go on for a long time, thus preventing the establishment of a state of peace, in spite of the fact that regular war is over and the task of the army of occupation is no longer regular warfare.'⁴⁹ He concluded that such a conflict could not realistically be deemed a state of war under international law. However, as he indicates above, nor was it a state of peace. If it was neither a state of war, nor a state of peace, then what was it, and what laws governed the actions of a state in that space?

Anarchy – the absence of laws and of sovereignty – was not a legally defined status within international law. Oppenheim noted that although 'theoretically such extinction of International Persons is possible... through a permanent anarchy within a State... it is evident that such cases will hardly ever occur in fact.'⁵⁰ But developments in 1919 rendered precisely this situation rather more likely. The principle of national self-determination created distinct challenges for international law, because it required a way of distinguishing between legitimate

⁴⁷ Edwin Dickinson, 'International Recognition and the National Courts', *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 18, no. 6 (1920), p. 531.

⁴⁸ Oppenheim, *International Law* (1920), p. 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 77.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 287.

and illegitimate claims. Many tests were proposed, but one concept that was widely accepted was laid out by US Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who observed in 1921 that

those who subscribe to ‘self-determination’ and advocate it as a great truth fundamental to every political society organised to protect and promote civil liberty, do not claim it for races, peoples, or communities whose state of barbarism or ignorance deprive them of the capacity to choose intelligently their political affiliations... when the attempt is made to apply it in every case, [it] becomes a source of political instability and domestic disorder and not infrequently a cause of rebellion.⁵¹

The distinction between the civilized and uncivilized was not clear, but one criterion was the rule of law. As has been explored in the preceding chapter, the 1919 minorities treaties, signed with the emerging states of Eastern Europe made their recognition as sovereign (civilized) states dependent upon equal access to the law, and the upholding of the rule of law, for minority groups. Failure to maintain rule of law, or to protect minorities, was thus a breach of treaty, allowing for foreign intervention, and invalidating these states' recognised sovereignty. But if the rule of law was a measure of sovereignty, then how did this impact upon the status of an area like Ireland, where British officials, as explored in the previous chapter, were becoming alarmed by the steady collapse of the courts, and the retreat of the police? Anarchy within the state was not therefore simply the refrain of journalists, but was legally relevant. As the legal theorist Edwin Dickinson observed in 1923, British and American courts were increasingly recognising ‘a sort of legal vacuum’⁵² in states experiencing civil conflict. Whether Ireland was in a state of war or not was therefore a grey area, shaped more by political debate than legal precedent.

Rebellion, Reprisals, and Civilians

The example that Robert Lansing used to argue that self-determination ought to have limits was the same that Lloyd George appealed to in opposing Irish

⁵¹ Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations* (Washington: First World Library Literary Society, 2004; first published 1921), p. 104.

⁵² Edwin Dickinson, ‘The Unrecognized Government or State in English and American Law’, *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, (1923), pp. 29.

independence: the American Civil War.⁵³ Lansing observed that, 'if the right of "self-determination" were sound in principle and uniformly applicable in establishing political allegiance and territorial sovereignty, the endeavour of the Southern States to secede from the American Union in 1861 would have been wholly justifiable,'⁵⁴ a contention he felt would be opposed by a majority of Americans.. When John Drinkwater premiered his play *Lincoln* in the spring of 1919, *The Spectator* immediately read it as a political allegory, suggesting that Lloyd George watch the performance as 'he will there hear of something to his advantage, and to the advantage of the nation. If he will pay attention to Scene ii, he will learn how a great statesman, English-speaking and English-minded, Abraham Lincoln, handled a situation very much like that with which Mr. Lloyd George is now confronted in Ireland.'⁵⁵ The thrust of the argument in *The Spectator* was that Lloyd George needed, like Lincoln, to confront the separatists, rather than seek out a political compromise. The notion would be bandied about in the press for some time, but it gained a remarkable significance after the IRA turned from crime and subversion to violent attacks on the police in 1920. In June 1920 escalating violence in Ireland led to articles across the press declaring Ireland to be in a state of civil war. A typical article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* described how 'Civil War prevails, and the authorities appear absolutely powerless. The city [of Londonderry] is in the possession of armed men... Soldiers have been called out but when they occupy one danger zone the shooting develops in another quarter of the town.'⁵⁶ Lloyd George responded to events in Londonderry by citing Lincoln as his justification for using force, arguing that 'to all costs the Government's agents and law-abiding citizens would be protected. Rather than have a republic in Ireland they would do what Lincoln did in the war with the Southern States- "face a million casualties and a five years' war."⁵⁷

The fighting was not strictly between the state and Sinn Fein, but between rival paramilitary factions, interspersed with guerilla attacks on government

⁵³ Lloyd George, HC, *Hansard* (31 March 1920), vol. 127, col. 1323.

⁵⁴ Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations*, p. 103.

⁵⁵ *The Spectator* (9 May 1919), p. 5.

⁵⁶ 'Reign of Terror, Sinn Feiners use Rifles', *Pall Mall Gazette* (21 June 1920), p. 1.

⁵⁷ 'Critical Days in Ireland, Premier Ready to Face Civil War, No Republic', *Daily Mail* (21 June 1920), p. 7.

troops and police. Frustrated at the unwillingness of Sinn Fein to openly confront the forces of the crown, the military began to conduct reprisals, often targeting civilians who, either individually or collectively, were thought to sympathize with the rebel cause. As the historian Joost Augusteijn observes, 'with the development of guerilla warfare, the Crown Forces were forced to operate more and more indiscriminately,'⁵⁸ owing to the collapse of the police and intelligence. This was not initially announced as policy but dismissed as justified excesses by troops under extreme stress. As reports of reprisals mounted however the government's position changed. In October Asquith denounced the government's policy, describing how

the administration in Ireland has become impotent to secure the first conditions of any civilised society. The task in which it is engaged is not the task of Government, but of war, and civil war - war in its worst and most hideous guise... The vast majority of the cases were in no sense acts of self-defence; they were acts of blind and indiscriminate vengeance. In not a few instances these so-called "reprisals" were deliberately aimed at the destruction of local industries. The government proposed to continue the civil war on the absolutely false assumption that the problem was simply to put down a handful of assassins.⁵⁹

Bonar Law challenged allegations that the government was violating the law, advanced by Robert Cecil, by arguing that the law could not function without security:

He [Robert Cecil] told us that the supremacy of British Law... has been preserved through all our history... I gather he thought it was for that reason the Civil War took place. But does my Noble Friend really think that while that Civil War was going on, and they were fighting for the ultimate aim of supremacy of the law, they were doing it in the academic way of which he spoke? The very essence of getting, in the long run, and permanently, the supremacy of law is to put down disorder and murder.⁶⁰

By putting the invocation of the English Civil Wars into the mouth of Robert Cecil, Bonar Law avoided committing the government to the view that a state of civil war existed in Ireland. Nevertheless he was asserting that the ordinary function of the law had broken down, and that this allowed the government to act

⁵⁸ Joost Augusteijn, *From Public Defiance to Guerilla Warfare; the Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921* (London: Irish Academic Press, 1998), p. 229.

⁵⁹ "'Full' Dominion home Rule, An Irish Army and Navy, Mr. Asquith's Policy,' *The Times* (15 October 1920), p. 12.

⁶⁰ Andrew Bonar Law, HC, *Hansard* (20 October 1920), vol. 133, col. 983.

extra-legally. That reprisals were in fact official policy would however be demonstrated the following month when material was distributed to troops in Ireland highlighting ‘a proclamation by General Paine during the American Civil War announcing a policy of reprisals,’ with MPs demanding to know ‘whether he will see that this incitement to reprisals on the part of the police is withdrawn.’⁶¹ During that debate, on 22 November, Hamar Greenwood avoided the question. However MPs continued to press for answers. Asquith, two days later, declared that

it is one of the most extraordinary documents I have ever read... Amongst other things, by way of stimulating the soldiers and police in Ireland in the discharge of their duty, it cited, not with disapproval, a proclamation issued in the stress of the American Civil War by perhaps one of the most bloodthirsty of the Federal generals who was raiding Kentucky, which announces to the population of that State, the rebel State, as it was called, his intention, if any of his men or adherents are shot, of seizing bankers, citizens, and miscellaneous members of the community without any regard to their innocence or guilt and shooting them at sight.⁶²

Pressure would continue to build until Greenwood told the Commons in February of 1921 that ‘as far as reprisals are concerned, in the martial law area they are now conducted according to the rules governing reprisals under martial law in civil war... In my opinion they are effective.’⁶³ Until this point the fact that the government was treating the conflict as a civil war in private was contrasted by their public demurring on the point. Hamar Greenwood’s admission is therefore extraordinary, because he was admitting that reprisals were being undertaken on the basis that a state of civil war existed. The problem with this was that the British government did not recognise the IRA as a belligerent adversary, a point they would concede if the peace negotiations broke down later in the year. Citing either the American Civil War, or the South African War, as precedent therefore was highly dubious, since in both of those cases a state of armed conflict took place between recognised belligerents. In Ireland, Greenwood had admitted that suspected collaborators with the IRA would be treated as enemy agents, but without recognition of belligerent status, neither were they afforded the protections associated with civilians in armed conflict. Greenwood tried to walk

⁶¹ James Hogge, HC, *Hansard* (22 November 1920), vol. 135, col. 33.

⁶² Herbert Asquith, HC, *Hansard* (24 November 1920), vol. 135, col. 490.

⁶³ Hamar Greenwood, HC, *Hansard* (21 February 1921), vol. 138, col. 635.

back the conflation of civil war and Ireland in *The Times* four days later, writing that ‘outrages by the Kuklux Organization in the Southern States of America after the Civil War, equaled in horror those which have been committed during the past year in Ireland.’⁶⁴ This shifted the comparison to a period outside of an armed conflict.

The ambiguous legal status of the conflict was not entirely of the government’s making, however. The laws of war, as codified in the Hague Conventions of 1907, had recognised insurgents as constituting soldiers if they wore designated markings, carried their arms openly, and reported to a chain of command, which ensured that identifiable persons were responsible for their conduct.⁶⁵ The IRA did have a command structure, but did not adhere to any of the other requirements, for the simple reason that to do so would have been to lose. The idea of affording belligerent rights to individuals conducting a war by murder would set extremely dangerous precedents in future conflicts. As a commentator wrote in the *New York World*, and republished in *The Daily Mail* with a ringing endorsement, ‘killing men in their beds is not civil war but murder, and nothing can make it anything else.’ However the editorial continued by noting that when ‘the Irish authorities attempt to suppress Irish murders by a series of police pogroms they confess that the great British administrative system which has long been one of the bulwarks of civilisation, has broken down.’⁶⁶ This editorial captures the essential legal ambiguity created by the conflation of civil war and anarchy: what laws applied when no legal framework was in place? The responses to the government’s policy of reprisals shed light on the diverse array of answers to that question. It is also important, in the context of civilization being an accepted precondition of self-determination, that it was being discussed in Press and Parliament as having been lost in Ireland.

For many Communist observers what was happening in Ireland was the process they hoped to emulate in Britain. When the Independent Labour Party wrote to the Communist International to enquire as to their position, they received

⁶⁴ Hamar Greenwood, ‘Crime in Ireland, Failure of Force and Terror’, *The Times* (25 February 1921), p. 6.

⁶⁵ Laws and Customs of War on Land, Hague IV, 1907, Section 1, Chapter 1: The Qualifications of Belligerents, Article 1.

⁶⁶ ‘Not Civil War, but Murder.’ *Daily Mail* (25 November 1920), p. 7.

the response that 'the workers should prepare not for an easy parliamentary victory but for victory by a heavy civil war.'⁶⁷ It was, as the *Daily Mail* reported, the moment when the 'Bolshevist call to civil war... reached this country.'⁶⁸ What was envisaged was an assault on institutions that would pave the way for a revolutionary insurgency.⁶⁹ When the author Herbert Wells visited Moscow in late 1920, Zinovieff confronted him with the Irish situation, proclaiming that 'you have civil war in Ireland.' As Wells described it, Zinovieff 'worked like a man with a jigsaw puzzle trying to get the Irish situation into the class war formula,' though he added that the 'jigsaw puzzle remained unsolved.'⁷⁰ Whether Ireland fitted the model or not, it remained an inspiration.

In this communist observers had a remarkably similar understanding of events on the ground as conservatives. Bonar Law's argument⁷¹ that in civil war special measures were justified to restore law and order, and that adherence to the law was not possible when the institutions of the law had broken down, lamented precisely what Communists admired, and advocated the same essential solution: the application of force. As Major General Sir Charles Townshend told the Commons days before the truce of 1921, 'we have to stop the rebellion first, because that is civil war... I admire the Chief Secretary's resolution and his tenacity in sticking to the most difficult and awful task... enforcing vigorous methods against a people one loves.'⁷² 'Vigorous methods' referred to extra-legal actions, justified because the rebels sought to undermine the institutions of the state, rather than simply challenge those leading it. *The Spectator* advanced the same argument in justifying extra-legal measures against Communist agitation, noting that 'revolutionaries are always and everywhere in a minority.'⁷³ The article

⁶⁷ 'Call to Red War, Attack on Messrs. Snowden and MacDonald', *Daily Mail* (31 July 1920), p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ The *Workers' Dreadnought* under the editorship of Sylvia Pankhurst endorsed civil war as the means of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, see Mark Shipway, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism: The Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain, 1917-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 39.

⁷⁰ Herbert Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1920), p. 78.

⁷¹ Bonar Law, HC, *Hansard* (20 October 1920), vol. 133, col. 983.

⁷² Charles Townshend, HC, *Hansard* (14 June 1921), vol. 143, col. 350.

⁷³ *The Spectator* (10 September 1920), p. 4.

continued, 'If the miners and their supporters are in a majority they can carry out their revolution by means of the freest democratic constitution that has ever existed.' Thus, it was argued that 'the majority must show that they are quite as capable of Direct Action as a minority, and that the Direct Action of the majority when it comes is far more certain, more potent and more firm than that of any minority.'⁷⁴

The use of violence in the restoration of order gained widespread acceptance at the time, and subsequently, being one of the principal points of sympathy in Britain with Mussolini. As the historian Richard Thurlow has observed, the willingness of a strain of British politics to pursue extra-parliamentary means, and even resort to violence in the street, directly fed into the rise of Fascism in Britain.⁷⁵ Martin Pugh makes the point that 'the second and most obvious explanation for the favourable reception of Italian Fascism [in Britain] lay in the perceived threat of the Bolshevik revolution,'⁷⁶ and the self-styled image of Fascists as willing to confront Bolshevik subversion on its own terms. As the *Daily Mail* reported in March 1921, 'Apulia... [is] in the throes of civil war... The Fascisti (young patriots of all classes, who aggressively combat sedition wherever they encounter it) and police in turn are hunting the raiders,' with the aim of '[giving] Bolsheviks some of their own Physic'.⁷⁷ Even the *Manchester Guardian* indulged this argument when Mussolini came to power, reporting that 'we may congratulate Italy that she has so far escaped bloodshed. The discipline of the Fascists has been good... [which] suggest that [Mussolini] may pursue a policy more moderate than the speeches he has sometimes made'.⁷⁸

There were two prominent counter arguments to this position. As *The Scotsman* pointed out, '[the Fascists] have climbed to power by tyranny, which is a dangerous precedent for a party professing to uphold law and order'.⁷⁹ The same argument had been made consistently with regards to Ireland. Robert Cecil

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Martin Pugh, *Hurrah for the Blackshirts!: Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London: Random House, 2013), p. 40.

⁷⁷ 'Lively Anti-Reds, Men Who Give Bolsheviks Some of their own Physic', *Daily Mail* (2 March 1921), p. 7.

⁷⁸ 'A Bloodless Revolution,' *The Manchester Guardian* (31 October 1922), p. 8.

⁷⁹ 'Fascism in Italy', *The Scotsman* (30 October 1922), p. 6.

characterised British policy in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, as criminal, telling the Commons that ‘in addition to the murders, you had the policy of reprisals. My honourable and gallant Friend talks of the present policy of the Government as a surrender to crime. The real surrender to crime was made when the Government began to imitate the crimes of others.’⁸⁰ Far from re-establishing order, this was, in the eyes of a correspondent for *The Daily Mail*, a descent to the level of Sinn Fein by the British State, in which ‘both sides subscribe to the policy of violence. Men are being shot and property destroyed every day, and both sides hide their own complicity and condemn the activities of the other.’⁸¹ At the heart of this argument was an ethical judgement, that extra-legal activity by the state produced a moral equivalence between the government and the insurgents.

Related to the ethical objections to extra-legal actions by the government was a parallel claim regarding efficacy. William Benn made the core points of the case, well before the policy of reprisals came into being, in the Commons in December 1919, when he observed that:

Public order in any country does not rely on the ultimate sanction of force. The Bolsheviks have got the police, but we do not believe that the Bolsheviks will remain in power, because we are convinced that the public opinion of Russia is opposed to that government; and it is not the possession of the Royal Irish Constabulary... which gives him the real power to maintain law and order in Ireland. What would give him the power to do what this... would be public opinion in Ireland, and, instead of relying on that or using that to support the police, as it does do in this country, the right hon. Gentleman step by step is alienating it.⁸²

Benn’s case is especially interesting because it insinuates moral equivalence between the British and Bolshevik governments, and because it highlights how the question of legitimacy resting on the consent of the governed was not simply a point of contention with regards to the efficacy of reprisals, but also tied into a wider debate about the foundations of government. This argument had its origins in developing ideas about the relationship between the state and the citizen, ideas explored in the third chapter of this thesis with regards to British officials stationed in Russia. Victory in civil conflict was increasingly understood with

⁸⁰ Robert Cecil, HC, *Hansard* (12 April 1922), vol. 153, col. 517.

⁸¹ ‘Free Hand for Coercion, Soldier Rule in Ireland, Law Courts to be Fortified, Road to Civil War’, *Daily Mail* (18 August 1920), p. 5.

⁸² William Benn, HC, *Hansard* (9 December 1919), vol. 122, col. 1238.

regards to winning over the population. As the British academic – and later radical Labour politician – Harold Laski wrote in 1919, ‘if the courts use noble words about an infallible crown or a state that refuses responsibility, there are other means of reversing their judgments. It was to a sovereign parliament that the Declaration of Independence was issued; and the Dred Scott decision did not survive the Civil War it in part entailed.’⁸³ Laski’s argument that the state’s authority did not rest upon its sovereignty, but upon the interconnected local associations that bound people to its institutions, was not universally accepted. As a pluralist, he was arguing from a particular worldview. But the notion that populations granted sovereignty to a state, enshrined in the principle of self-determination, was nonetheless widely influential at the time. The case was made privately within government, by ministers and officials, as explored in the third and fourth chapters; it was also made publicly, by politicians and academics. When Lassa Oppenheim published his trio of essays on *The League of Nations and its Problems* in 1919, he observed of sovereignty that ‘if sovereignty were absolutely unfettered liberty of action, a loss of sovereignty would certainly be involved by membership of the League... but in fact sovereignty does not mean boundless liberty of action.’⁸⁴ It was not a controversial position in British politics to understand sovereignty to be constrained both by treaties, the customary conduct that underpinned recognition, and by the trust between citizen and state. William Benn consistently pointed out the consequences of the betrayal of public trust in Ireland. As violence escalated in the summer of 1920 he told the Commons that ‘the Courts maintaining law and order are doing so by the only weapon by which any Courts can hope to get the confidence of the people, namely, the sanction and rule of the people around. Is it to be wondered at, when the constitutional way which we here believe in has so utterly and completely failed.’⁸⁵ His point was that the Sinn Fein courts held legitimacy because they functioned for the local population. Moreover that in abandoning legal norms, the British state ensured that without access to justice, the local population would turn from recognising

⁸³ Harold Laski, ‘The Theory of Popular Sovereignty: I’, *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1919), p. 202.

⁸⁴ Lassa Oppenheim, *The League of Nations and its Problems; three lectures* (London: Longman’s Green and Company, 1919), pp. 75-76.

⁸⁵ William Benn, HC, *Hansard* (28 June 1920), vol. 131, col. 158.

British authority.

As ever, how to interpret the American Civil War was central to this argument. As we have already seen, commentators in the press, like the government in its instructions to troops, invoked the American Civil War to justify reprisals. But critics interpreted it differently. As the conservative MP George Cockerill wrote in *The Times* in March 1921,

[of the] analogy between the situation in Ireland and the American Civil War... I may venture... that the only indispensable preliminary to peace on which Lincoln insisted was the abandonment of armed resistance by the insurgents. He announced publicly that the war would cease on the part of the Government whenever it should have ceased on the part of those that began it.⁸⁶

Here we see the usual argument that the American Civil War demonstrated the necessity of absolute victory, turned into proof that negotiation, and the reconciling of the population would end the conflict. This was not the conventional view, which was typified by Halford Mackinder's characterization of the conflict in his 1919 book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* where he argued that the 'Great American Civil War was fought to a finish, and... the two questions of Negro slavery and of the right of particular states to secede from the Federation were finally decided... The Boer War was fought to the finish, and today General Smuts is an honoured member of the British Cabinet.'⁸⁷ But those with a conventional understanding of the American example also attacked the Government's position. By the truce of 1921 the Government's use of the American example in debate was growing wearisome, with *The Scotsman* editorializing that 'Lloyd George's friends would [do well to] persuade him to drop his Abraham Lincoln stunt. The American Civil War and the case of Ireland are not at all parallel.' Here it was maintained that America's conflict had been ended militarily, but 'Ireland has to be persuaded by argument, not by threats, that her place is in the Empire, not outside. Ireland can be persuaded and is already persuaded that

⁸⁶ George Cockerill, 'Irish Policy, A Reply to Lord Charnwood', *The Times* (4 March 1921), p. 8.

⁸⁷ Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality; A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Washington DC: National Defence University Press, 1996; first published 1919), p. 111.

the ultimate decision must rest with the rank and file of the Irish people.⁸⁸

An important feature of all of these arguments is that none of them insisted that in carrying out extra-legal killings of its own citizens the state was in violation of international law. For advocates of the policy of reprisals the act was justified by the need to restore law and order. For those opposing reprisals on the grounds of efficacy, they were arguing that it was a bad policy, rather than in principle wrong. The critics of reprisals on the grounds that the state was ignoring its own laws were primarily concerned with the debasement of the state, rather than asserting a universal principle that the officials of the state should not be able to pursue such a policy. Communists opposed the targets of the policy, but not the method. It is important to bear in mind that although the pogroms of Eastern Europe, especially those in Lemberg/Lvov/Lviv, would inspire Hersch Lauterpacht to conceptualize Crimes Against Humanity,⁸⁹ the concept neither had legal nor practical hold at the time. Thus the drift towards the justification of targeting civilians was not seriously confronted.

Paradoxically however, the argument that repression alienated the citizen from the state did affect the way in which the human experience of civil war was discussed, with a new emphasis on civilian suffering, rather than participation. As was explored in the first chapter, the great calamity of civil war had, for centuries, been discussed in terms of brother fighting brother, father fighting son, and the impoverishment of both. In short, the harm was the division of the community. During the First World War, and the rise of revolutionary and insurgent warfare, while treatment of the population was emphasised as important in bringing conflict to a close, the civilian often became a passive victim of violence. The suffering of the Russian people was often not portrayed as Red against White – both these groups being cast as perpetrators – but against a broader apolitical mass. Partly this was a product of the way the Bolsheviks themselves spoke of the Russian peasantry. As one Bolshevik leader – identified as Serge - asked the British writer Thomas Barclay when challenged over the lack of democracy under Lenin, 'how such a people, inaccessible to elementary knowledge, without any national ideal - an inarticulate nation - can possibly express itself? You talk of a Russian

⁸⁸ 'The Lincoln Argument', *The Scotsman* (30 August 1921), p. 3.

⁸⁹ Sands, *East West Street*, pp. 57-114.

nation as if it were being defrauded of something it never has had.⁹⁰ The lack of agency recognised in the Russian peasantry was reinforced by the testimony of Allied soldiers returning from Russia, who described the peasantry as essentially apolitical victims of the war, whose lives were ruined in the fighting.⁹¹ The general suffering of the Russian people is captured by Herbert Wells in *Russia in the Shadows* when he describes how, ‘nothing will be left of Russia but a country of peasants; the towns will be practically deserted and in ruins, the railways will be rusting in disuse. With the railways will go the last vestiges of any general government... They will become a sort of human swamp in a state of division, petty civil war, and political squalor.’⁹²

The sacking of towns, and looting by soldiers living off the land, were all well-established motifs in war literature, from Tacitus’s description of the burning of Cremona, written between 100 and 110 CE,⁹³ to Defoe’s portrayal of the sack of Magdeburg,⁹⁴ or Tolstoy’s account of the fall of Moscow.⁹⁵ Like the ‘battle piece’,⁹⁶ there were consistent tropes in these descriptions. But the particular pain of civil war, the point highlighted as making it the worst form of warfare, distinct from foreign wars, was, as the MP George White put it, that ‘a civil war’ occurred ‘in his own community’.⁹⁷ It turned neighbour against neighbour. Duncan Pirie, when he characterised South Africa as facing civil war, discussed in the first chapter, emphasised how the ‘whole community there may be said to form one large

⁹⁰ Thomas Barclay, ‘With a Russian Bolshevik in Berlin’, *Fortnightly Review* (1920), p. 845.

⁹¹ Lewis Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks – Campaigning in North Russia 1918-1919* (Lexington: Filiquarian Publishing, 2013; first published 1920), pp. 106-107.

⁹² Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, p. 146.

⁹³ Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals and The Histories*, Alfred John Church and William Jackson Broadribb (Trans.) (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 478-479.

⁹⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Memoirs of a Cavalier* (Cambridge: CUP, 1908), pp. 42-46. First published in 1720.

⁹⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, vol. 3, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1932) pp. 156-174. First published 1869.

⁹⁶ The description of battle has a long established set of epithets, euphemisms, and accepted structures that often obscure a true description of events, see John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (New York: Random House, 2014), p. 15.

⁹⁷ George White, HC, *Hansard* (25 November 1908), vol. 197, col. 475.

family.'⁹⁸ And it was expected that the whole community would be divided; standing by the sidelines was not an option. If the American Civil War was the model, British commentators marveled at how 'the great bulk of that enormous Army which was in existence at the close of the Civil War was raised by voluntary enlistment.'⁹⁹ This was not the case in Russia, where the civil war was characterised by forced conscription and mass desertion.¹⁰⁰ Nor was it the case in Ireland. During the Anglo-Irish War much was made of 'moderate opinion', the majority of Irish inhabitants, prepared to dislike England, but 'sickened of bloodshed on both sides... [and the] miserable pretense at civil war has perhaps gone far enough to convince people of the futility of securing a republic by force.'¹⁰¹ Regular attention was drawn, amidst descriptions of violence, to damage to civilian property, and disruption to the civilian population, such as when 'great damage was done by incendiary forces in Cork... armed and masked men ordered the overseer at Messrs. Forest's draper's shop in Patrick Street to arouse the women on the premises and then clear out. They had barely taken shelter farther up the street when loud explosions occurred.'¹⁰²

The emphasis on the suffering of a passive civilian population only intensified as the Irish Civil War followed the Anglo-Irish War. Stephen Gwynne, writing in *The Observer*, and echoed in *The Spectator* observed that 'where there could be freedom, there is anarchy; where there could be prosperity, beyond most lands in Europe, there is distress and the threat of ruin.'¹⁰³ In England, the conflict was understood to be between groups of extremists destroying the livelihoods of a peaceful majority. As *The Scotsman* described,

all Ireland is suffering cruelly for the misguided fanaticism of a small minority of Republican irreconcilables, who, although without any prospect of victory in the open field, have, by guerrilla warfare, by terrorism, and spoliation, brought the social and business life of large areas of the country to

⁹⁸ Duncan Pirie, HC, *Hansard* (15 December 1900), vol. 88, col. 880.

⁹⁹ The Duke of Devonshire, HL, *Hansard* (20 February 1900), vol. 79, col. 544.

¹⁰⁰ Orlando Figes, 'The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War 1918-1920', *Past & Present*, no. 129 (1990), pp. 168-211.

¹⁰¹ 'Ireland Sickened of Bloodshed', *The Manchester Guardian* (27 November 1920), p. 12.

¹⁰² 'The Civil War in Ireland, More Soldiers and Police Killed; Shops Burned,' *Daily Mail* (29 November 1920), p. 9.

¹⁰³ *The Spectator* (26 May 1922), p. 5.

a complete standstill.¹⁰⁴

Whereas in past wars crime was understood as an unfortunate byproduct of a victorious and drunken soldiery, or the misery of having to live off the land, in Ireland it was understood to be the method by which civil war was conducted. As Lord Salisbury lamented, 'damage almost beyond belief had been done to property. The reason was that the criminals coveted other people's possessions, desired to destroy law and order.'¹⁰⁵ Particularly telling is that while he noted that the 'King's authority had long disappeared,' he also emphasised that in this 'rather contemptible kind of civil war... no authority had taken its place.'¹⁰⁶ This sense of chaos and disorientation is consistent with personal accounts from civilians in Ireland, who found themselves in a war without clear front lines, or military procedures. As Henry Maxwell described in a personal letter from Limerick in September 1922

the Free Staters came in and the Republicans bolted about a month ago. Then we had peace for a few days, when sniping began at night... getting worse and then ended up in two nights regular battle... bullets flying around the house and one went through the Dining Room window... Darreen had been raided, doors broken and bedding, linen and such like, taken... I never saw anything like it when we arrived. The House surrounded by carts: men, women and children fighting over the loot, glass broken and furniture all gone... The two Free State leaders were surprised in their beds and murdered before a shot was fired in the morning, the Free Staters surrendered and the Republicans walked in. Since then everything has been turmoil.¹⁰⁷

The strain on civilians living under these conditions began to produce cases psychological breakdown. Doctor Charles Easterbrook, Physical Superintendent of a psychological institution in Dumfries reported that 'during the last six months of 1922 several cases were admitted for treatment in which the exciting cause of the mental attack was worry, anxiety, and fear, arising... from the strain of the civil war and trying social conditions in Ireland.' The illnesses were, as he put it 'clearly attributable, to a state of anxiety and fear produced by the barbarous methods of the revolutionaries.'¹⁰⁸ On one level these observations are unsurprising. As the

¹⁰⁴ 'Ireland's Civil War', *The Scotsman* (20 July 1922), p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ 'Lord Salisbury on the Irish Treaty', *The Manchester Guardian* (20 October 1922), p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ PRONI, D3817/4/5: Henry Maxwell to Issy, 13 September 1922

¹⁰⁸ 'Irish Mental Patients in Scotland, Strain of the Civil War', *The Scotsman* (27

historian Ted Bogacz observes of the work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’, it was widely believed that ‘conscript armies were more likely to have neurotics and potential hysterics.’¹⁰⁹ Civilians were thought to be more vulnerable, and Irish civilians in particular given, as Joanna Bourke notes, the widespread ‘assumption that Irishmen were predisposed to lunacy,’¹¹⁰ among psychiatrists at the time. However trauma was almost exclusively associated with ‘the atrocious conditions of the western front’,¹¹¹ with men ‘driven mad by the horror that inevitably loiters on the battlefield.’¹¹² The historiography of trauma in the First World War is voluminous,¹¹³ but overwhelmingly focused on the military. Thus at a time when the causes of psychological trauma among soldiers was hotly disputed, the attribution of neurosis specifically to the civilian social stresses of civil war is interesting, and significant, because it underscores the perception that civil war was distinct, and worse, than inter-state conflict. It is indicative of the blurring boundary between civilians and combatants, between home and the front, which was increasingly expected in civil war.

The evolving status of the civilian, and the conflation of anarchy and civil

February 1923), p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Ted Bogacz, ‘War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1989), p. 241.

¹¹⁰ Joanna Bourke, ‘Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2000), p. 65.

¹¹¹ Bogacz, ‘War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England’, p. 241.

¹¹² Bourke, ‘Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma’, p. 58.

¹¹³ A far from exhaustive survey must include: Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Hans Binneveld, *From Shellshock to Combat Stress: Comparative History of Military Psychiatry* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Body, Britain, and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago Press, 2005); Roger Cooter, Steve Sturdy, and Mark Harrison (eds.), *War, Medicine and Modernity* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999); Peter Leese, *Shell Shock, Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain During the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); notable exceptions to the military focus of these histories include: Elaine Showalter, *Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987); Mark Micale and Paul Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

war, would have an important impact on ideas of sovereignty and intervention. The public debate over intervention was strongly influenced by war-weariness, and is perhaps a subject of significant contrast between the views of officials, versus public opinion. However objections to intervention on the grounds of cost and interests do not constitute opposition to intervention in principle. In the years following the war a number of factors influenced discussion of intervention, but the conception of civilians as passive victims of criminal violence, in territories where government had broken down, rather than their being active participants in a conflict between opposing political positions within a state, altered how intervention was debated.

Intervention and International Responsibility

For British officials serving in Russia – as well as in Whitehall – the expected suffering of civilians in communities liable to come under Bolshevik control made withdrawal from Archangel a painful decision. For the public, and for many troops serving in Russia, however, the campaign should have ended with the armistice. It is important to understand the details of the debate over withdrawal as it played out in the press, and in wider political discourse, because the experience of troops in Archangel produced a context in which debates over intervention took place. The winter war of 1919 was a miserable experience, brought to life by the accounts of soldiers on the front line. Lewis Jahns, who compiled testimony from his comrades after the intervention, wrote how ‘that Ruski thermometer was well below forty and the canteen on the hip was solid ice within twenty minutes of leaving the house.’¹¹⁴ Frozen food was a constant complaint.¹¹⁵ Troops moving to the front were exposed to the Russian winter for up to twenty days and, once in the line, were crammed into blockhouses, ‘so isolated that they must have been compelled to talk to themselves in order to be convinced that they were not dead,’¹¹⁶ concealed in the wilderness between Vologda and Kotlas, from which the sections would carry out ski patrols. Throughout the winter it was night, save for the aurora borealis and the brief period of twilight around noon. A few thousand

¹¹⁴ Jahns, *The History of the American Expedition Fighting the Bolsheviks*, p. 105.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Soutar, *With Ironsides in North Russia* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 26.

troops of various nationalities were stretched over a line of some five hundred miles. The tiny patrols, their weapons so cold they would weld to the skin, were left '[wondering] how long you would be able to handle your rifle if you should be ambushed by a party of Bolos.'¹¹⁷ On 18 February 1919, Sergeant Thompson of the Royal Engineers described how the 'weather during last four days has been bitterly cold... All liquids, canned goods and even bread being frozen as hard as a rock.'¹¹⁸ Not only that but the Americans and King's Liverpool Regiment had seen fierce fighting through February, in which Allied troops were driven back. Private Riley Rudd of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) gives a vivid account of the Bolshevik counter attack from the village of Kodish:

29 Jan: Bolsheviks commence simultaneous attacks on this front and the river... capture half of Tevesceva. Terrific fighting going on. Terrific fighting on river side. Shemkusk evacuated by us. Report of many wounded on this front... 31 Jan: Tevesceva falls entirely to Bolsheviks who appear in large numbers. They continued advance during day to Gora. This village after they succeeded in taking. They continued to advance, our troops fighting a rearguard action and inflicting heavy casualties.¹¹⁹

A fortnight before the Allies had suffered a number of casualties while failing to capture the village. The winter war was a war of movement with an ambiguous front line.

As Allied forces came under pressure around Kodish, 13 Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment, after three months training with skis and sleds while living in freezing railway carriages, were being moved to relieve the weary Americans South of Seletskoe. Approaching the line the Yorkshires would have passed dead and wounded, and heard discouraging tales of their horrific enemy. A correspondent for *The Times* described the troops he saw as 'thin-faced men, staring intently at nothing eyes wide open, uncanny in their complete lack of expression.'¹²⁰ On 22 February they stopped. 'All have gone on strike,' wrote Riley Rudd,

held meetings in IM but last night and passed resolutions that they must be withdrawn from Russia immediately. Others to the effect that censorship be removed from letters in order that the people in England may get to know the true state of the affairs out here and that a cable be sent to L. George demanding the immediate withdrawal of all troops in Russia. They all

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ IWM, London, Document 8007-03: Private Papers of A. E. Thompson.

¹¹⁹ IWM, London, Document 4615: Private Papers of Private Riley Rudd RAMC.

¹²⁰ Soutar, *With Ironsides in North Russia*, p. 26.

positively decline to go up the line or to obey any orders but are conducting themselves in an orderly manner.¹²¹

The stand off was only brought to an end when General Ironsides – Commander-in-Chief Archangel – told the troops that they would be withdrawn in the spring. The leaders of the mutiny were arrested and convicted, though their death sentences were commuted to mollify public opinion in Britain.¹²² As was explored in the third chapter the Cabinet were not set on withdrawal. Though planning for evacuation started shortly after the mutiny, the whole purpose of the ‘bolstering policy’ was to try and create opportunities in the summer. Yet the troops were set on departure. Officers tried to censor the access of soldiers to reports on the peace negotiations unfolding in Paris, and discussion of their potential withdrawal from Russia. These attempts failed. In South Russia ‘the Home wireless had announced that we proposed to withdraw our troops from Russia.’¹²³ Meanwhile in the North Rudd noted with excitement that they ‘got news of proposal to settle Russian question by meeting of delegations from every political party in Russia, with Allied representatives. Meeting takes place on Feb 15 to endeavor to bring peace to Russia.’¹²⁴ Frequent references to this peace initiative in Rudd’s diary reveal a longing to get home, and a little sense of purpose in continued fighting. With morale collapsing, officers were also concerned about Bolshevik subversion. The historian Clifford Kinvig argues that ‘the virus of political activism was spreading among the troops stimulated by the wave of peace propaganda which the Bolsheviks directed at them.’¹²⁵

The wider ongoing debate over the principles of intervention in civil war developed against a backdrop in which the *Daily Express* was proclaiming that ‘the frozen plains of Eastern Europe are not worth the bones of a single British grenadier.’¹²⁶ This public hostility to the ongoing deployment of troops was exacerbated by defeat. As the commander of the Archangel evacuation, General Bridges, described, ‘from time immemorial the penalty for mixing in a family

¹²¹ IWM, London, Document 4615: Private Papers of Private Riley Rudd RAMC.

¹²² Lawrence James, *Mutiny in the British and Commonwealth Forces, 1797-1956* (London: Buchan and Enright, 1987), pp. 133-134.

¹²³ TNA, CAB 23/9: Cabinet Minutes, 10 January 1919.

¹²⁴ IWM, London, Document 4615: Private Papers of Private Riley Rudd RAMC.

¹²⁵ Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade*, p. 268.

¹²⁶ Editorial, *Daily Express* (3 January 1919), p. 2.

quarrel had been a thick ear, and our ill-staged interference in the Russian civil war cost us some thousands of British soldiers lives, and £100,000,000 in money... On the credit side I can think of nothing.¹²⁷ The failure of the Russian policy was not seriously disputed – though Bridges' numbers could be¹²⁸ - but his aphorism on intervention was less widely felt. That is to say those most strongly opposed to intervention in Russia were more critical of its efficacy than the principle. As *The Spectator* noted shortly after the withdrawal of British forces, 'the Prime Minister stated with considerable force the reasons why we must cease from our armed intervention in Russian affairs, and he explained why we could have no dealings with the Bolshevik gang. Most people, we think, would accept his policy as he defined it on Monday.' The article went out of its way to note that 'the problem is to find the best means of ending the interminable and ruinous civil war,' and that 'abandonment of the policy of intervention is in no sense tantamount to accepting the Bolsheviks.'¹²⁹ The distinction is important, because paradoxically, while there was strong public opposition to specific interventions, there was little push back against the idea that interventions could be justified in principle. As Lloyd George argued following an address by Colonel Ward who had formerly commanded British troops in Siberia,

there is nothing that has struck me more than his account of the civil war in Russia, and its cruelties, the reprisals and the counter-reprisals which are inseparable from such warfare. That is what I am afraid of. I am afraid of its continuing. The world cannot afford it... There will be no peace until peace is established in Russia. It means that you have got war in half Europe, and nearly half Asia as well.¹³⁰

The argument that violence was contagious, and intervention in settling the disputes of other states might be necessary to ensure the peace for which many yearned, had purchase across the political spectrum. In spite of wide disagreements over the prescription to ensure stability, there was remarkably little challenge to the idea that intervention, and the forceful settlement of other people's conflicts, was often necessary. For imperialists like Halford Mackinder,

¹²⁷ Tom Bridges, *Alarms and Excursions: Reminiscences of a Soldier* (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1938), p. 295.

¹²⁸ Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade*, p. 315.

¹²⁹ *The Spectator* (22 November 1919), p. 7.

¹³⁰ 'The Guildhall Banquet, The Prime Minister on Russia,' *The Times* (10 November 1919), p. 9.

the settlement of Eastern Europe depended upon diminishing German power. He argued that 'we must settle this question between the Germans and Slavs, and we must see to it that East Europe, like West Europe, is divided into self-contained nations.' Failure to do this, he argued, would 'leave ill-feeling which will not be based on the fading memory of a defeat, but on the daily irritation of millions of proud people.'¹³¹ For liberals like the historian Albert Pollard the civil violence convulsing Europe was part of its coming together, and thus its outcome needed steering. 'The war is a civil war because the world has become a single community,' he wrote in 1919. 'That sounds like a paradox in the midst of this world-wide strife; but civil wars have often been the unconscious symptoms and the growing pains of unity.'¹³² In contrast to Mackinder, John Maynard Keynes argued that if

we aim deliberately at the impoverishment of Central Europe, vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp. Nothing can then delay for very long that final civil war between the forces of Reaction and the despairing convulsions of Revolution, before which the horrors of the late German war will fade into nothing, and which will destroy, whoever is victor, the civilization and progress of our generation.¹³³

The conservative position was more rooted in national interests, but this was much more about when intervention was desirable, rather than whether it was justifiable. The question of national interests posed by Russia was summarised in an article in *The Times* in January 1920:

Granted that our policy is one of non-intervention in the Russian civil war, what are we to do if that war sets aflame the world outside? Supposing that the Bolshevik successes were to affect our security in Asia, or that the Russians were to attack Poland or any of the other political arrangements made by the Paris Conferences, what in that case would our policy be? It is an issue quite distinct from any that has yet been decided. It is no longer a question of supporting military operations in Russia, but of the defence of India, which is as much British territory as Ottawa or Melbourne, or Kent. It is no longer at issue whether Russians shall be well governed or ill, but whether we shall govern ourselves as we wish or as others may choose to dictate.¹³⁴

These ideas held sway beyond Britain. French negotiators in Paris told the British press that 'international and national peace depended upon one another,

¹³¹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 111.

¹³² Albert Pollard, 'The Monroe Doctrine', *History*, vol. 4, no. 13 (1919), p. 12.

¹³³ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 251.

¹³⁴ 'The Military Situation in Russia', *The Times* (23 January 1920), p. 13.

and if they failed to give satisfaction to national desires it would be impossible to reach an international solution... We might be faced not only with the duty of providing against international war, but against civil war.¹³⁵ Prior to the First World War the legal status of the Red Cross was that 'the convention can not become operative as respects the sick and wounded in war unless two or more signatory Powers are parties to the conflict,' thereby excluding civil war.¹³⁶ By 1921 the Red Cross had decided upon 'a mandate... to intervene in the case of civil wars.'¹³⁷ Central to all of these arguments was a rejection of the belief – pervasive before the First World War – that a civil war constituted the 'internal affairs' of a state. Instead, in what David Armitage would call 'a cosmopolitan conception of conflict,'¹³⁸ civil wars had become an international concern, and a threat to international security, as already discussed in the third chapter. This was undoubtedly exacerbated by Communist subversion. When the Third International appealed for 'heavy civil war in Britain,' the leader of the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald, declared that 'the Third International and the ILP are like oil and water, and will not mix,'¹³⁹ in a statement that demonstrates the damage he knew the association would do his party with the British public. There were widespread concerns about Communist agitation in the armed forces, especially after disturbances in Regiments previously destined for Russia. When, in April 1921, the secretary of the Communist Party was arrested, he was accused of circulating 'literature of a seditious character among persons in different parts to the island in order that these persons might address meetings of civilians, soldiers, and non-commissioned ranks of men in his Majesty's Navy.' His pamphlets included proclamations to soldiers, stating that 'Civilian War is forced upon the labouring classes by their arch-enemies. Working classes must answer blow for blow.'¹⁴⁰ Such events underpinned arguments that civil conflict on the continent could spill

¹³⁵ 'League of Nations Covenant, Frank Criticism of the Draft', *The Manchester Guardian* (12 March 1919), p. 9.

¹³⁶ 'The Red Cross in Civil Wars', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April, 1911), p. 438.

¹³⁷ 'Red Cross and Civil War', *The Manchester Guardian* (7 April 1921), p. 7.

¹³⁸ Armitage, 'Cosmopolitanism and Civil War'.

¹³⁹ 'Red Call for Civil War', *The Times* (30 July 1920), p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ '"Victory by Civil War" Communist Secretary Charged, The Papers Found', *Pall Mall Gazette* (11 May 1921), p. 3.

over into Britain.

Ireland was seen partly as a victim of that spillover from the continent's violence, and a cause of violence in Britain. Pamphlets from Irish Unionists claiming that 'one of the principal aims of Sinn Fein in Ireland is Bolshevism pure and simple,'¹⁴¹ were not taken seriously. However, as covered in the fourth chapter of this thesis, violence in Ireland was perceived to be connected, and to emulate Bolshevik activities elsewhere. It was also feared as a possible vehicle for expanding Bolshevik activities in Britain. Often overlooked in the historiography of the Anglo-Irish War, with its understandable focus on Ireland, is the large security operations conducted in England to safeguard railways and civic infrastructure,¹⁴² as well as the extensive mobilisation of IRA sympathizers in Britain, explored by the historian Peter Hart.¹⁴³ International dimensions of the Irish conflict both fascinated and terrified British officials. They were extremely cautious about American influence in Ireland, and intervention more generally. That these fears eclipsed the actual threat betrays the awareness that the principle of intervention was far less controversial in the context of the ongoing civil conflicts of Eastern Europe. During the truce of 1921 Lloyd George used the threat of the internationalization of the conflict to try and emphasise the necessity of coming to an arrangement. He explicitly predicted civil war leading to foreign intervention, arguing that

if you had severance it would lead in Ireland itself to the most cruel and terrible civil war that Ireland has ever seen. Help would be rushed in from all sides, from every part of the world, to assist the parties who were fighting out the battle. We could not witness a civil war of that kind at our own door, which would involve our own people throughout the Empire, and other people as well.¹⁴⁴

This was not an idle threat. As explored in the previous chapter, in the event of a breakdown in negotiations the British government intended to treat Sinn Fein as belligerents, and undertake a policy of vigorous civil conflict. Similarly they

¹⁴¹ PRONI, D989/C/2/17: Development of Communist Ideas

¹⁴² TNA, CAB 43/2: Memorandum by the Secretary for War, Ireland, 22 October 1921.

¹⁴³ Peter Hart, "Operations Abroad": The IRA in Britain, 1919-23', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 115, no. 460 (2000), pp. 71-102.

¹⁴⁴ 'The Choice for Ireland, Prime Minister on Freedom', *The Times* (29 August 1921), p. 4.

would later have a policy of intervention if the Irish Civil War developed unfavorably. Irish politicians took this threat seriously, Michael Collins noting, in a speech that caused debate in the Commons,¹⁴⁵ that 'if civil war breaks out - and unless there is an immediate change of tone and tactics it looks as if civil war can only be averted by a miracle - there is little doubt that the British will return... and they would have come back to restore the order which we would have shown ourselves as having been unable to preserve.'¹⁴⁶

Increasing acceptance of intervention, and of the link between rule of law, recognition, and therefore sovereignty, was not limited to the United Kingdom. Responding to the outbreak of the Irish Civil War the French newspaper *Journal des Debats* editorialized that:

The fate of Ireland is now in the balance. If she sinks into anarchy and prolonged civil war her independence will not endure, and we shall be obliged to recognise that she has not deserved it; but if, as we hope and believe, she is able to surmount this crisis and finally organise herself in peace and order in loyal execution of the clauses of the treaty with Great Britain, then she will take her place among the free nations of the world.¹⁴⁷

The article was reported by *Reuters* and thereby syndicated widely. It is important to note the emphasis placed on Irish treaty obligations. As explored in the first chapter, the violation of treaties was an accepted justification for intervention in international law. Just as with the minority treaties in Eastern Europe, the legal basis for intervention – the breach of a treaty – was lagging behind the political justifications, which were increasingly humanitarian, or asserted that the internal instability of a state threatened international peace.

Opposition to particular interventions was widespread, and there were strong objections to the limitations on sovereignty implied in the Minority Treaties with Eastern Europe. However it is a marked feature of these opposing views that they accepted the underlying logic of official thinking, while challenging specific policies and objectives. In short, in spite of substantial disagreements between officials, the conceptual evolution charted over the preceding chapters is remarkably consistent across the political divide. To take the fall of Lloyd George's

¹⁴⁵ HC, *Hansard* (12 April 1922), vol. 153, cols 509-536.

¹⁴⁶ 'Danger of Civil War in Ireland – Collins's Urgent Appeal', *The Manchester Guardian* (10 April 1922), p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ 'Ireland in the Balance', *The Manchester Guardian* (24 August 1922), p. 7.

coalition, it was precipitated when Bonar Law reacted fiercely to proposed British intervention in Anatolia in October 1922, writing in *The Times* that 'we cannot alone act as the policemen of the world.'¹⁴⁸ This line appears as a stinging rebuke to Lloyd George, Churchill, and other proponents of intervention. And yet as Law wrote, the 'prevention of war and massacre in Constantinople and the Balkans is not specially a British interest; it is the interest of humanity. The retention also of the freedom of the Straits is not specially a British interest; it is the interest of the world.'¹⁴⁹ His objection to government policy was that 'it is not... right that the burden of taking necessary action should fall on the British Empire alone.'¹⁵⁰ He therefore conceded the principle that localized conflict was a threat to international peace, and that intervention could be justified. His objection was to who bore the cost.

Perhaps more surprising is that Labour accepted many of these principles implicitly in their critiques of government policy. Ramsay MacDonald would become Prime Minister in 1924 after the collapse of the Conservative government. In 1922, in a debate over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, MacDonald observed that the 'difficulties that it may create [are] of a much wider character than merely the difficulty of defining the exact relations between Ireland and ourselves.'¹⁵¹ He recognised that the settlement with Ireland created new precedents, ambiguous legal frameworks, and yet welcomed these facts, for 'I hope the time will never come when there will be any attempt made to define in rigid legal formulae the relationships between the different parts of this self-governed Empire. The one safety of the Empire is that the relationships shall remain organic rather than legal.'¹⁵² He showed little alarm at the inconsistencies this created, and which contributed to serious ambiguities in international law. Nor did he object to intervention in principle, arguing in December 1922 that the

political territory now known as Austria is in its present unfortunate position very largely owing to the Allied peace policy. The settlement of its boundaries and the economic conditions imposed on it, the way it was... left, as a victim,

¹⁴⁸ Bonar Law, 'The Near East; Pronouncement by Mr. Bonar Law', *The Times* (7 October 1922), p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ramsay MacDonald, HC, *Hansard* (27 November 1922), vol. 159 col. 332.

¹⁵² Ibid.

not only to its own internal passion, but a victim to the small States created round about it is altogether the responsibility, and the blame, of the Supreme Council and the united Allies... Therefore this House has got a great responsibility.¹⁵³

The intervention in the internal affairs of Austria that MacDonald advocated was economic in this case, and to be carried out through the League of Nations, but his argumentation left no ambiguity that internal conflict in the state was the responsibility of Britain, not simply an internal affair for Austria. Of Russia his policy was contrary to that of Lloyd George. Upon becoming Prime Minister he set about to normalize relations, and even offered the Bolsheviks a loan on very favourable terms. Here too, however, his government did not challenge the principle that the recognition of a state ought to rest on its conduct. In a debate in the Commons on the proposed Anglo-Soviet Treaty in August 1924, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Arthur Ponsonby argued that Britain was afflicted by 'a degree of animosity and prejudice... against the Soviet regime, which I think is almost unequalled in the feelings displayed in this country against any other country.'¹⁵⁴ He did not challenge the notion that recognition ought not be granted to a government whose conduct fell beneath certain standards. Rather he denied that the Bolsheviks had in fact done this. Asked¹⁵⁵ whether he was dismissing the account of Mrs Snowden¹⁵⁶ of Bolshevik atrocities, Ponsonby said that 'I have always been interested to read and believe in letters and articles and speeches about various countries in Europe, but when I have seen paragraphs, speeches and letters about what is taking place in Soviet Russia, experience has taught me that they are not to be relied on.'¹⁵⁷ Ponsonby had chosen his adversary poorly. Mrs Ethel Snowden was a prominent Labour activist in her own right, and when her book was reviewed in *The Manchester Guardian*, the paper observed that it 'is very desirable that a book like Mrs Snowden's should be widely known both in the Labour movement and beyond it. It is, with one possible exception, the most

¹⁵³ Ramsay MacDonald, HC, *Hansard* (6 December 1922), vol. 159, col. 1837.

¹⁵⁴ Arthur Ponsonby, HC, *Hansard*, (6 August 1924) vol. 176, col. 3013.

¹⁵⁵ Henry Croft, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Ethel Philip Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia* (London: Cassell and Co. 1920).

¹⁵⁷ Arthur Ponsonby, HC, *Hansard*, (6 August 1924) vol. 176, col. 3013.

valuable account of Bolshevik Russia that we have seen.¹⁵⁸ It was a disagreement that Ponsonby and MacDonald would lose; their minority government being forced to the ballot over their handling of Russia, which led to a decisive electoral defeat. Insofar as elections are a measure of public opinion, the centrality of Russia to the election suggests widespread public agreement with official concerns as to the Bolshevik's methods and motives.

The growing acceptance, or even assumption, that foreign interference in civil conflict would occur, was not supported by international law, but would itself reshape international legal precedents. Legally the status of humanitarian intervention did not substantially change as a result of the First World War. In 1921 the eminent American scholar of international law Ellery Stowell – who had been an advisor during the Paris Peace Conference – published *Intervention in International Law*, which attempted to assert the right of humanitarian intervention.¹⁵⁹ Stowell set out to demonstrate, not that a new time needed a new legal mechanism, but rather that humanitarian intervention was already a well established principle in international law, even reinterpreting Britain's protests against Russia in 1863 as a humanitarian intervention when Britain had justified its policy on the grounds of treaty violation.¹⁶⁰ The book was praised for its thoroughness and 'exhaustive bibliography', one reviewer noting that 'he does not fail to appreciate the importance of facts, and the book is replete with discussion of actual instances of intervention,' as opposed to propounding upon theory.¹⁶¹ However Stowell's central argument was met with skepticism. While praising the work 'in the present chaotic state of what passes under the name of international law' because 'the book has the value resultant upon industrious labour and judicious collection of instances,' Jackson Ralston – the prominent attorney and scholar of international law - observed that Stowell 'accepts too readily, we conceive, the principle that might makes right, coupling this with the idea that that

¹⁵⁸ 'Mrs. Philip Snowden on Russia', *The Manchester Guardian* (22 October 1920), p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Ellery Stowell, *Intervention in International Law* (Washington: John Byrne and Co., 1921).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-107.

¹⁶¹ Douglas Arant, 'Review: Intervention in International Law', *Virginia Law Review*, vol. 8, no. 8 (1922), p. 638.

which has been done by nations, if repeated sufficiently often, makes law.¹⁶² Perhaps most damning of all was the political scientist Quincy Wright, who responded to the book with condescension rather than challenge, stating that ‘the bibliography of eighty pages will probably prove the most valuable part of the book... [though] the reader may question whether he [Stowell] had thoroughly digested all of this material when he began to write.’¹⁶³ In spite of this hostility to elevating humanitarian intervention to a justification for a breach of sovereignty however, this was precisely what had in practice occurred. As explored in the first chapter of this thesis Oppenheim had noted of humanitarian intervention in his 1912 edition that:

Many jurists maintain that intervention is likewise admissible, or even has a basis of right, when exercised in the interest of humanity... whether there is really a rule of the Law of Nations which admits such interventions may well be doubted. yet, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that public opinion and the attitude of the Powers are in favour of such interventions, and it may perhaps be said that in time the Law of Nations will recognise the rule that interventions in the interest of humanity are admissible.¹⁶⁴

In 1922 the legal theorist Theodore Woolsey wrote of the challenge of codification of international law, as an issue raised by Oppenheim. He argued that ‘because no authority is empowered to enact statutes’ in international law, codification in international law was established through ‘the general acceptance by States under treaty.’¹⁶⁵ However he noted that codification in national law was the distinction between case law precedent, and statute. Thus in international law the practice of states still held significant legal sway in the absence of codified treaties. As Oppenheim had argued, ‘intervention is de facto a matter of policy just like war.’¹⁶⁶ Thus state policy in this context built legal precedent. However uncomfortable legal theorists were therefore with Stowell’s idea of a right to humanitarian intervention, Stowell was asserting a practice that was already the conduct of states, and therefore existed as precedent. It cannot be argued that intervention

¹⁶² Jackson Ralston, ‘Review: Intervention in International Law’, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 16, no. 4 (1922), p. 744.

¹⁶³ Quincy Wright, ‘Review: Intervention in International Law’, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, vol. 71, no. 2 (1923), p. 201.

¹⁶⁴ Oppenheim, *International Law* (1912) p. 229.

¹⁶⁵ Theodore Woolsey, ‘Practical Codification of International Law’, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1922), p. 423.

¹⁶⁶ Oppenheim, *International Law* (1912) p. 229.

into civil wars became justified under international law after the First World War. However it can be argued that the increasing ambiguity of a state's sovereignty during civil conflict, combined with a growing public acceptance of such interventions, made it hard to call such interventions illegal. Quincy Wright himself observed in 1924 that 'under international law... war is not a lawful institution, but an event, an unfortunate event, like invasion under municipal law, which renders the operation of normal law impossible.'¹⁶⁷ Civil war presented even greater challenges to existing norms. Growing legal ambiguity allowed states to break with existing precedents in their policies, and thus create new precedents to justify intervention and interference in the future. Perhaps even more alarming was that as the rules governing inter-state war became codified, and increasingly restrictive, with intervention in civil conflict becoming more ambiguous, intervention and interference presented attractive policy options. George Grenville Phillimore, chairing a lecture at the Grotius Society in 1924, would prove prescient when he commented that 'it is hopeless to expect States which are not at peace within themselves to contribute efficiently to external peace; or - I will put the matter in another way - it will be worse for the world if external peace between nations prevailed and internal civil war took its place.'¹⁶⁸ This is exactly what has occurred over the course of the twentieth century. As explored by Stanley Payne,¹⁶⁹ and widely commented upon among political scientists, 'civil war has replaced international war as the most prevalent form of large-scale violence.'¹⁷⁰ But in making this observation we must acknowledge that our understanding of what constitutes civil war has itself undergone a transformation over that period, expanding to include anarchy, and state failure.

¹⁶⁷ Quincy Wright, 'Changes in the Conception of War', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 18, no. 4 (1924), p. 761.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Duke and George Phillimore, 'The Problem of International Law and Order', *Transactions of the Grotius Society*, vol. 9, (1923), pp. 32-33.

¹⁶⁹ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*.

¹⁷⁰ Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner, 'Beyond Greed and Grievance', p. 1.

Conclusion

When Spanish officers launched an attempted *coup* on 17 July 1936, British officials quickly came to the conclusion that what was unfolding was civil war.¹ The following month Whitehall adopted a policy of ‘non-intervention’. In doing so it may appear as though the British government were maintaining a long established policy, consistent with the British reaction to the American Civil War, of treating civil conflict as an internal affair. Yet this well-worn language described a policy at variance with past practice, revealing the extent to which the concept of civil war had shifted among British officials. Basic terms no longer meant what they had prior to the Ulster Crisis.

The historiography of British policy in the Spanish Civil War has either stressed the diplomatic and strategic context in which the war erupted,² or the importance of official concerns about Communism, which left the government reluctant to aid the Republic. As the historian Jill Edwards writes, although ‘fascism and communism were regarded in the Foreign Office as the “mumps and measles” of world society, the former was believed to be an urgent but short-term problem; the latter a longer-term one, which in consequence was never quite out of view’.³ British expectations before the *coup* were, as Enrique Moradiellos observes, founded upon ‘the situation in Russia in 1917, when Kerensky had presided over a weak liberal-bourgeois government until its overthrow by the Bolsheviks, [which] served as the blueprint for the analysis of the Spanish situation’.⁴ Douglas Little, whose work on British policy traces its evolution over the decade prior to the

¹ Initially described as a Rebellion by officials, the Government did nothing to contradict it being called a civil war in the fortnight following the *coup* (HC *Hansard* (27 July 1936), vol. 315, cols. 1071-1072), and then adopted this nomenclature in August (TNA, WO 106/1576: Summary of Intelligence Prepared by MI3a, 10 August 1936), without any changes to the recognised status of the parties to the conflict (TNA, CAB 23/86: Cabinet Minutes, 25 November 1936).

² Peter Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), p. 137; Francisco Salvado, *The Spanish Civil War: Origins, Course and Outcomes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 71.

³ Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 3.

⁴ Enrique Moradiellos, ‘British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain’, *Contemporary European History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1992), p. 124.

Spanish Civil War,⁵ notes that the characterization of the British response as a cold calculation of national interests misses long-term ideological influences on official thinking. He concluded that the historiography largely ‘underestimates the ideological dimension of UK foreign policy and emphasizes instead strategic concerns and bureaucratic politics.’⁶

This dichotomy, between a policy driven by imperial strategy or anti-communism, appears to overlook deeper ‘unspoken assumptions’ that affected British policy in Spain. This becomes apparent when comparing Britain’s Spanish policy to its response to past conflicts. Although British officials rapidly concluded that Spain was experiencing civil war, they never conceived of the Spanish crisis as an internal affair of Spain. It was, from the outset, a component of an international struggle, with intervention to be expected, and the outcome invariably to advance the interests of the Comintern, or anti-democratic forces. The conclusion of British intelligence one day before the first meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee was that there ‘is no doubt that Italy and Germany are actively assisting the insurgents, and there is evidence that Portugal is doing so. It is also almost certain that France and Russia are helping the Government, though the evidence is not quite so good.’⁷ When the Spanish Ambassador asked the Foreign Secretary in the weeks following the *coup* ‘if any nation could intervene to stop the bloodshed in Spain’, the response was not that the conflict was Spain’s internal concern, but that while Britain could not immediately intervene, ‘the moment might come when, either officially or unofficially, the League or this country, in concert with other countries, might have an opportunity to offer good offices.’⁸ The Cabinet supported this sentiment.

When Britain embarked upon a policy of non-intervention it was not a policy of traditional neutrality but a proactive interference in pursuit of international aims. As the Earl of Plymouth told the House of Lords in November 1936, the ‘main object, as has also been frequently explained, has been to localise

⁵ Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: the United States, Great Britain, and the origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁶ Douglas Little, ‘Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1988), p. 292.

⁷ TNA, WO 106/1576: Spain, Military Situation, 8 September 1936.

⁸ TNA, CAB 23/85: Cabinet Minutes, 29 July 1936.

the civil war in Spain and to do everything in their power to prevent it from spreading outside of the Spanish frontiers.⁹ This was fundamentally different to neutrality as traditionally understood. In the American Civil War Britain had rapidly recognised both sides to be belligerents,¹⁰ and allowed private companies to sell arms to both parties in the conflict. Although Britain paid compensation for the damage caused by the commerce raider *Alabama*, the United Kingdom made sure that this did not set a precedent in international law.¹¹ Indeed in 1907 all major powers agreed that a ‘neutral Power is not called upon to prevent the export or transport, on behalf of one or other of the belligerents, of arms, munitions of war, or in general, of anything which can be of use to an army or a fleet.’¹² Although in the 1920s licensing was introduced in the international arms trade, constraints upon private exports were fiercely opposed by the United States, in spite of the US protest at this practice during the American Civil War.¹³ In consequence the Cabinet initially acknowledged that with regards to Spain, if ‘a request should be received to purchase arms from private manufacturers’, then it would be dealt with ‘in the ordinary way’.¹⁴ The Foreign Secretary concluded that the ‘Spanish Government... was a recognized Government, and we could not act otherwise unless it was decided to recognise the Spanish insurgents.’¹⁵

Non-intervention in Spain was not therefore an adherence to Britain’s obligations under international law, or the pursuit of past practice. It was a proactive policy to contain the Spanish conflict by restricting arms, and actively policing shipping to Spain. This required changes to Britain’s domestic legislation,¹⁶ the negotiation of new agreements, and active policing by the Royal

⁹ The Earl of Plymouth, HL, *Hansard* (3 December 1936), vol. 103, col. 586.

¹⁰ Mountague Beranard, *A Historical Account of the Neutrality of Great Britain during the American Civil War* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1870), pp. 114-117.

¹¹ *The Treaty of Washington*, (1871) Article Six.

¹² *Convention Respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers And Persons in War on Land* (1907), Chapter 1, Article 7.

¹³ David Stone, ‘Imperialism and Sovereignty: The League of Nations Drive to Control the Global Arms Trade’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2000), pp. 213-230.

¹⁴ TNA, CAB 23/85: Cabinet Minutes, 29 July 1936.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ ‘Great Britain: Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Munitions to Spain) Act, 1936’, *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1937), pp. 100-102.

Navy. The Non-Intervention Agreement also established no commitment of neutrality on the part of its signatories.¹⁷ Furthermore, Britain did not implement the usual procedure of recognising the rebels on the basis that they had a standing army, a clear chain of command, and controlled territory. Although it was frequently discussed, recognition was withheld, despite the Cabinet referring to 'General Franco's Government.'¹⁸ British officials acknowledged that this was a breach of precedents.¹⁹ Indeed the peculiar position adopted was not to treat the Spanish Government as a government – though without withdrawing recognition – nor the Rebels as belligerents. It is intriguing that in early August the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, in a summary to the Cabinet approved by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, observed that 'our latest summary of information about the Civil War in Spain... [is that] it seems to be resolving itself into one of Rebel v. Rabble.'²⁰ The word rabble – extensively used in relation to Ireland during the War for Independence and Civil War²¹ - precisely referenced the assumption of illegitimacy in a government unable to control its own territory. It captures the belief among British officials that Spain was disintegrating, and that civil war was an international concern. As the political scientist Richard Little observed in comparing British responses to the American and Spanish civil wars, in Spain although Britain 'initiated the standard practice for dealing with civil wars, by adopting a policy of non-intervention and endeavouring to ensure that all other states complied with this practice, they quickly began to diverge from established procedures,'²² so that the 'contrast with the international response to the American Civil War could not be starker.'²³ If the difference in policy was stark, the abandonment of long held principles was more so. British officials defended the arms embargo on the grounds of expedience, rather than arguing that civil wars were in principle a domestic matter. Rather the expectation was that they

¹⁷ Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 131-149.

¹⁸ TNA, CAB 23/86: Cabinet Minutes, 25 November 1936.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ TNA, WO 106/1576: Summary of Intelligence Prepared by MI3a, 10 August 1936.

²¹ Ferriter, *A Nation and Not a Rabble*, pp. 1-16.

²² Richard Little, 'Intervention and Non-Intervention in International Society: Britain's Responses to the American and Spanish Civil Wars', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 39, issue. 5 (2013), p. 1125.

²³ Ibid., p. 1128.

were an international concern. Little explains this divergence by arguing that Britain found itself the lone defender of international norms abandoned by other powers.²⁴ While the actions of the USSR, Italy, Germany, and France, were undoubtedly central to the formation of British policy, this conclusion misses the conceptual changes that effected British official discussion between these conflicts.

We see here the limitations of a comparative approach. By exploring case studies in isolation different policies can only be explained by their immediate context. A combination of factors from the Parliamentary recess, to the disinterest of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin,²⁵ and the presence of three former Foreign Secretaries in the Cabinet,²⁶ left decision-making on Spain in the hands of a large number of officials, not least Maurice Hankey and Robert Vansittart.²⁷ Hankey had been Cabinet Secretary since 1916 while Vansittart, having served in the British embassy in Persia during the Constitutional Revolution, and having deputized for Lord Curzon after the First World War, held views shaped by long experience of the conflicts explored in this thesis. In Cabinet, Ramsey MacDonald, and Samuel Hoare, who served as an intelligence officer in Russia,²⁸ had similarly been heavily involved in events covered in this thesis. The willingness of Cabinet to embrace an innovative policy on Spain, and the assumptions underpinning their language to describe the conflict, reflect therefore many of the changes that had occurred in the conception of civil war explored in this thesis.

There are many issues that Spain does not illustrate – insurgency, domestic crisis, self-determination – but the response to Spain highlights how core assumptions about what it meant to intervene, and the role of the international community, had shifted among British officials. This thesis has traced five key areas of conceptual development. It has argued that at the beginning of the twentieth century civil war was understood as the division of a state's political institutions over differences of civic principle. It was distinct from anarchy, was associated with war within 'civilized' states, and was understood as the internal

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 39.

²⁶ Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 10-11.

²⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 395.

²⁸ John Cross, *Sir Samuel Hoare: A Political Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), pp. 39-51.

affair of a state. This broad understanding was undermined by events in Ireland. The first area of conceptual evolution came about through responses to the Ulster Crisis and Easter Rising, which blurred the distinction between civil war and civil disorder. This blurring was exacerbated when the rise of the Bolsheviks, and Sinn Fein, caused the British government to begin conflating civil war and anarchy. Observations of Irish public sentiments after the Easter Rising, and frustration at the unpopularity of anti-Bolshevik governments in Russia, drove the second area of conceptual evolution, whereby the discourse on victory in civil war moved away from the absolute defeat of an enemy's military forces, and towards gaining the support of the population. Winning civil wars therefore moved from a largely military, to an equally political objective. Parallel to this process was a diminishing emphasis on institutions as the focal point of societal division, towards an emphasis on communities. This presaged the third area of conceptual evolution traced in this thesis. The fight against communism, the conflation of civil war and anarchy, and the emerging discourse on national self-determination, moved the discussion of civil war away from the state. Communist agitation, crime, and nationalities, rarely conformed to the boundaries of states, and therefore civil war stopped being the internal affair of a state, and instead became an international threat to security, destabilizing neighbouring territories. Furthermore if civil war represented the breakdown in relations between government and people, then its existence marked a point of transition from civilization to barbarism, rather than a conflict within a 'civilized' polity. The response to this brought about the fourth area of conceptual evolution; namely the transition from a non-interventionist norm, to an interventionist one. Because civil war was an international concern, it therefore became a concern of international institutions, and even non-intervention shifted from a position of neutrality, to a policy of active containment. The final conceptual shift was a blurring of the distinction between war and peace. There were many elements contributing to this – the blurring of the distinction between civil war and civil disorder, the reluctance to grant belligerent rights in Russia and Ireland – but the result was that Britain could seek to contain a war in Spain without ever recognising the parties to the conflict as such.

These developments were facilitated by the nature of British governance. It is strikingly apparent how the definitions of terms – even legal terms – were

susceptible to change as they were applied in new contexts. As Charles Townshend has noted, the domestic legislation surrounding civil war in Britain arose from the common law, and was heavily influenced by case law precedent, rather than being primarily governed by statute.²⁹ As this thesis has argued, because the transition from peace to civil war depended upon recognition – a political rather than legal act – in international law, and because Britain’s power at the close of the First World War obliged other states to recognise British policy as legitimate, international law was similarly susceptible to be changed by the actions of Britain. Conceptual changes within the government therefore had tangible and lasting implications for how civil war was dealt with legally, and practically. However, as the military theorist John Nagl notes, the British government, and especially the military, did not incorporate changes through doctrine.³⁰ Thus the new norms that emerged in the 1920s, identified in this thesis, did not completely, or uniformly replace older ideas about civil war. Spain was still characterised as a contest of civil principles, even if that struggle was not confined to Spain’s borders.

Because British institutions were not doctrinal, the ideas that developed during British involvement in Russia and Ireland neither had inevitable longevity or significance. As has been outlined in this thesis the notion of conduct as a basis for government legitimacy – partly in response to the need for justifications to avoid recognising the Bolsheviks, or anti-Bolshevik governments in Russia, but also a consequence of the Minority Treaties – was a significant step in the development of the notion that a government’s domestic conduct could be the concern of foreign states. If civil war was now an international concern, with intervention in support of international ideologies to be expected – and in Spain Britain’s proactive non-intervention was carried out under the presumption of, and as an attempt to limit, precisely this development³¹ – then nations could be fighting without being at war, a trend that has become prevalent since 1945. The crucial caveat is that although the conceptual evolutions explored in this thesis fed into powerful new ideas that would come to play a crucial role in shaping the post 1945 world order, the former does not inevitably lead to the latter. There was

²⁹ Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*, p. 13-15.

³⁰ John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³¹ The Earl of Plymouth, HL, *Hansard* (3 December 1936), vol. 103, col. 586.

fierce pushback against the growing infringements on sovereignty, not least from the subjects of the minority treaties. Hersh Lauterpacht worked for years to get Crimes Against Humanity enshrined in law, while the British Government arduously opposed Raphael Lemkin's idea of Genocide.³²

It is also important to recognise that there were other ways in which these ideas could have developed. In Ireland the blurring of the distinction between civil war and civil disorder facilitated the acceptance of reprisals, often targeting civilian 'sympathizers'. The growing emphasis on community made the community partly responsible, while the blurring of crime with civil war enabled calls for military, or more accurately paramilitary force, to be carried out against domestic political opponents. As detailed in the fifth chapter this fed into approval of paramilitary activity, extra-legal reprisals, and sympathy for Fascism. Similarly the increasingly international conception of civil war as between ethnicities, or ideologies, reinforced prejudice against Jewish and other dispersed ethnic and religious communities. Such communities could be seen as rendering a community more susceptible to civil war, more vulnerable to Communist agitation, and crime. These lines of thinking were not predominant, but nevertheless present in official discussion.

It is in its examination of the interplay between competing political instincts and ideologies, forced to cooperate in the context of existential policy challenges in Russia and Ireland, that this thesis hopes to make its most important contribution to the historiography of civil war. David Armitage argues that civil war is at least in part a cosmopolitan idea, and that the

implications of this cosmopolitan conception of conflict would not be fully realised until the twentieth century, when, as in the Enlightenment, the proliferation of warfare across the world spurred philosophical reflection on the ever-extending boundaries of civil conflict. The century's great transnational conflicts, from the First World War to the Cold War and thence to the 'Global War on Terror' of the early twenty-first century, were often seen as civil wars cast onto broad continental, and even global, screens.³³

The findings of this thesis support Armitage's argument, demonstrating the process of conceptual development by which civil war changed from the internal affair of a state, to an international concern, thereby building the basis for the

³² Sands, *East West Street*.

³³ Armitage, 'Cosmopolitanism in Civil War'.

modern conception of a Global Non-International Armed Conflict.³⁴ The boundaries of civil war certainly expanded. But whereas Armitage portrays this development through the lens of a particular intellectual concept, by narrowing the period under consideration, and focusing on policy, this thesis demonstrates that the causes of the expanding boundaries of civil war were more diverse than a particular cosmopolitan notion. Also, Armitage concludes that civil war – because of conceptual expansion – became more cataclysmic, so that by the twenty-first century, ‘the stakes are now so high for applying the label “civil war”... [and it] conjures so many images and associations of horror and destruction that it is hard to imagine any good that might come of using it,’³⁵ as a tool of political rhetoric, or policy. Similarly Armitage argues that civil war today ‘has not only political connotations but legal implications that can trigger action from the international community.’³⁶ But if the horizons of civil war expanded, there was also an inverse process by which inter-state confrontation became increasingly tied to highly localized conflicts. Far from legal clarification – as occurred with inter-state warfare – this thesis has explored a process of growing legal ambiguity on the concept of civil war. This cleared a path for a more interventionist approach, and also made the legal implications of intervention less clear. Thus, far from civil war being more dangerous, or less politically useful, its very ambiguity became attractive to policy makers. The Cold War, as Stanley Payne put it, became essentially a ‘world war by proxy,’³⁷ in which the growing legal, and existential risks of inter-state warfare encouraged the use of civil war as a policy opportunity. With widespread intervention and proxy conflict in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and other civil conflicts today, this shows no signs of abating.

This thesis has also sought to contribute to the historiography of the conflicts that played a pivotal role in shaping British official thinking about civil war, namely Russia and Ireland. In Ireland there has been a historiographical

³⁴ *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law*, vol. 103 (2009), p. 140.

³⁵ Armitage, *Civil Wars*, p. 232.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Payne, *Civil War in Europe*, p. 228.

tendency to isolate its history from the rest of Europe.³⁸ Histories of British policy have characterised Ireland as an afterthought, neglected, and left to officials focused on Ireland, to justify excluding the impact of events in Europe on Britain's Irish policy.³⁹ In contrast this thesis has argued that precisely because British officials were heavily invested in events elsewhere, those events shaped their assumptions and thinking on Ireland. Specifically fears of German and then Communist espionage left a deep mark on British official concerns about Ireland, while Ireland was seen as setting both imperial and international precedents on questions of self determination, and sovereignty. This thesis therefore supports the arguments advanced by Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, and others in favour of understanding violence in Ireland in a European context.⁴⁰

In Russia there has been a tendency to characterize British policy as either accidental,⁴¹ or else ideological.⁴² Instead this thesis has sought to show how British policy in Russia evolved, and became entangled in its own implications. Furthermore histories of intervention have often drawn a dichotomy between whether intervention was aimed against Germany or the Bolsheviks. This thesis has demonstrated that by August 1918 this was a false dichotomy, because the Bolsheviks were thought to be an unwilling German proxy. In both Russia and Ireland historians have widely attributed British policy failures to bad intelligence, a lack of interest, or sense. This thesis has argued however that a paucity of reliable information, and the accumulation of conflicting reports, is a constant in policy making, and has tried to demonstrate how poor analysis, founded upon unchallenged and faulty assumptions, rendered even accurate information unhelpful, because policymakers drew the wrong conclusions from it. In Ireland the conception of civil war as a struggle over civic principles primed British officials to conclude that the limited support for the Easter rebels' republicanism

³⁸ Delaney, 'Our Island Story?', pp. 599-621; Walker, 'Ireland's Historical Position: "Colonial" or European"', pp. 36-40.

³⁹ Boyce, 'British Opinion, Ireland, and the War', pp. 578; Fanning, *Fatal Path*, pp. 188-191.

⁴⁰ Julia Eichenberg, 'Soldiers to Civilians, Civilians to Soldiers: Poland and Ireland after the First World War', Gerwarth and Horne (eds.), *War in Peace*, pp. 184-199.

⁴¹ Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia*, p. 211; Moffat, *The Allied Intervention in Russia*, pp. 265-275; Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, p. 574.

⁴² Kinzig, *Churchill's Crusade*; Wright, *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin*; Kettle, *Churchill and the Archangel Fiasco*.

ensured that they would not have the support of the Irish polity, whereas the Irish population often saw them first and foremost as countrymen and women. In Russia, policy was persistently distorted by a belief in Bolshevik brittleness, and the assumption that communist rule would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. This was at least partly built on the notion that the Bolsheviks were dependent upon Germany, and that they lacked popular support. As Richard Aldrich and Rory Cormac, and others,⁴³ have argued, the lack of systematic analytical processes in the British government in this period made it particularly susceptible to such biases.

There is, inevitably, a great deal that has been omitted from this thesis. The impact of technological advances – expanding the destructive capabilities of the individual⁴⁴ – on civil war and insurgency, has avoided consideration, even though British officials discussed it.⁴⁵ Ideas that evolved in parallel to the events described in this thesis, such as pluralism, or pacifism, and which often impacted upon the wider discourse surrounding civil war, have also not been addressed. Reactions to the policies and ideas explored in this thesis, such as the fierce advocacy of sovereignty by those under the Minority Treaties, have been dealt with superficially. The opinions of those outside of central government and the military, press or academy, have been largely excluded from consideration. Civil wars in Persia, Russia, and Ireland, all sparked social activism within the United Kingdom, and the works of Tom Buchanan⁴⁶ and Jim Fyrrh⁴⁷ on the Aid Spain Movement, show just how much can be gained from studying popular responses to such conflicts. Perhaps most striking is the almost complete absence of women from this thesis. Prior to the First World War it was argued in Parliament that on

⁴³ Richard Aldrich and Rory Cormac, *The Black Door; Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers* (London: William Collins, 2016), pp. 34-35; Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921: Britain and the Russian Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 174.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Powell, *Talking to Terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014), p. 7.

⁴⁵ TNA, WO 106/1098: Knox to CIGS, Possibilities of Guerrilla Warfare in Russia, 5 March 1918.

⁴⁶ Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

⁴⁷ Jim Fyrrh, *The Signal Was Spain; The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986).

subjects opposed by men, women ‘must possess physical force, otherwise the law will be disobeyed or civil war ensue.’⁴⁸ The notion of suffrage as creating discord in the home was a component of civil war discourse, which similarly became entangled in debates over Bolshevism, and Irish rebellion, thanks to Sylvia Pankhurst,⁴⁹ described by *The Spectator* as ‘the leader of the most violent of the various little Communist parties in Great Britain’.⁵⁰ The reasons for these omissions are not that they are unimportant, but because the constraints of space rendered it impossible to address them adequately, presenting a potential avenue for future research.

This underscores how, as a new field of historical inquiry, there is an abundance of research still to be undertaken on the concept of civil war. Alongside these parallel issues, there are important questions arising directly from this thesis. Foremost among these is the evolution of civil war as a concept among American, French, German, Italian, and Soviet officials. There is also much more work to be undertaken on the evolving understanding of the role of international organizations in the context of civil war. The League of Nations work on refugees,⁵¹ arms control,⁵² counterterrorism treaties,⁵³ and many other areas has been extensively studied in relation to inter-state conflict, but not in the context of civil war. Within the British policy community it would also be valuable to explore further the evolution of military policy on insurgency and civil conflict after involvement in Russia and Ireland. Neither conflict were successful, and perhaps for this reason their relevance in subsequent policy formulation has not been deeply considered. And yet the use of paramilitary local forces, and train and assist

⁴⁸ Annan Bryce, HC, *Hansard* (11 July 1910), vol. 19 col. 75.

⁴⁹ Lucy Delap, ‘The Woman’s Dreadnought; Maritime Symbolism in Edwardian Gender Politics’, Andrew Lambert (ed.), *The Dreadnought and the Edwardian Age* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 104-105; Geoffrey Bell, ‘Sylvia Pankhurst and the Irish Revolution’, *History Ireland*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2016), pp. 38-41.

⁵⁰ *The Spectator* (30 October 1920), p. 6.

⁵¹ Martyn Housden, ‘When the Baltic Sea was a “Bridge” for Humanitarian Action: The League of Nations, the Red Cross and the Repatriation of Prisoners of War between Russia and Central Europe, 1920-1922’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2007), pp. 61-83.

⁵² Ondrej Ditrych, “‘International Terrorism’ as Conspiracy: Debating Terrorism in the League of Nations”, *Historical Social Research*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2013), pp. 200-210.

⁵³ David Stone, ‘Imperialism and Sovereignty’.

missions, would form a core components of British military activity in civil wars throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. The evolution of such policies deserves greater historical attention.

Civil war is inherently paradoxical; as David Armitage observes, war is not civil.⁵⁴ This is no less true in law. No government can tolerate rebellion being legal, and the threshold of civil war is the emergence of the rebel as a legitimate belligerent. That transformation comes from recognition, which is necessarily a matter of policy, and does not arise from a fixed legal standard. That civil war conceptually, politically, and legally, occupies such a grey area means that it cannot be used without clarification. As a term it demands elaboration and therefore provides an invaluable lens for examining the shifting boundary between war and peace, between legitimate and illegitimate conduct, between ideas and action. Civil war is a powerful, and yet elusive idea. How it is employed reveals a great many unspoken assumptions about other concepts that submit to more concrete definition. And thus civil war is a vital concept to study, and demands further study. In the ambiguities that are created by its interaction with other ideas, we may perceive our follies, our conceits, and our fears.

⁵⁴ Armitage, *Civil Wars*, p. 233.

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