Long Wars: Demonstrating the Corrosive Effects of Irregular Wars on Dominant States

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Abstract: Great powers overextend their security apparatus attempting to maintain an international system from which they benefit. Costly expenditures of internally mobilized hard power in irregular wars increases the the decline of relative power while externally mobilized power in the form of partisans may delay or defeat power transition. This paper examines the U. S. war in Vietnam and the Soviet war in Afghanistan in order to determine if long periods of irregular war had an effect on those state's relative position in the internaitonal system. This paper will demonstrate that those wars eroded each position without the large, structural war predicted by normative IR theory.

Keywords: Internal Mobilization, External Mobilization, Power Transition, Irregular War, Dominant States

1. Introduction

Given the propensity towards conflict in history, realists have been arguably correct that great powers will always exercise and resist influence in an attempt to increase their own security. Beginning with the Rome-Carthage wars, through the Franco-Prussian and World Wars, states sought to change the structure of the international system in a way more amenable to their views. IR theory has largely focused on these war and power to explain changes in the system. Accordingly, these so called "structural wars" involving great powers have been the subject of the most important international relations literature [1]. These wars' importance is simple: Loss in war can dramatically decrease the influence a state has in the international system. The very real risk since 1945 has been the threat of great power wars going nuclear. Still, states pursue strategies to strengthen their relative position and weaken their adversaries' position.

Using the Correlates of War (COW) data, specifically the Composite Indicator of National Capabilities (CINC), one can graph the rise and fall of the dominant powers (figure 1) [2]. Structural wars explain these changes. The problem I seek to explain arises during the Cold War, with the transitions between the U. S. and the former Soviet Union. These transitions occurred without the structural wars envisioned by IR theorists. In this paper, I will argue that dominant states internalize internal conflicts in order to gain advantages over rivals. I will show the type of state mobilizations and the challenger response in these conflicts can have a systemic effect on great powers, that is, these irregular wars changed the relative power of the state involved. Likewise, decisions by states to pursue strategies of external power mobilization can effectively improve the position of the state in the international system. This subject has become very important in the twenty-first century as a myriad of conflicts in all forms affect the security and power projection ability of states with irregular conflict being the most pervasive. Since 1945, there have been only 51 interstate wars and 418 internal conflicts [3]. Militarily weak actors, particularly partisans, in these conflicts have steadily increased their ability to achieve their political objectives primarily through the production of asymmetry. The trend holds steady: In 2016, there were two interstate conflicts, and forty-seven internal and internationalized-internal conflicts [4]. Indeed, there have been no wars between great powers since 1945. In the past two hundred years, states have gone from winning some eighty percent of internal conflicts to less than half that by the end of the twentieth century [5].
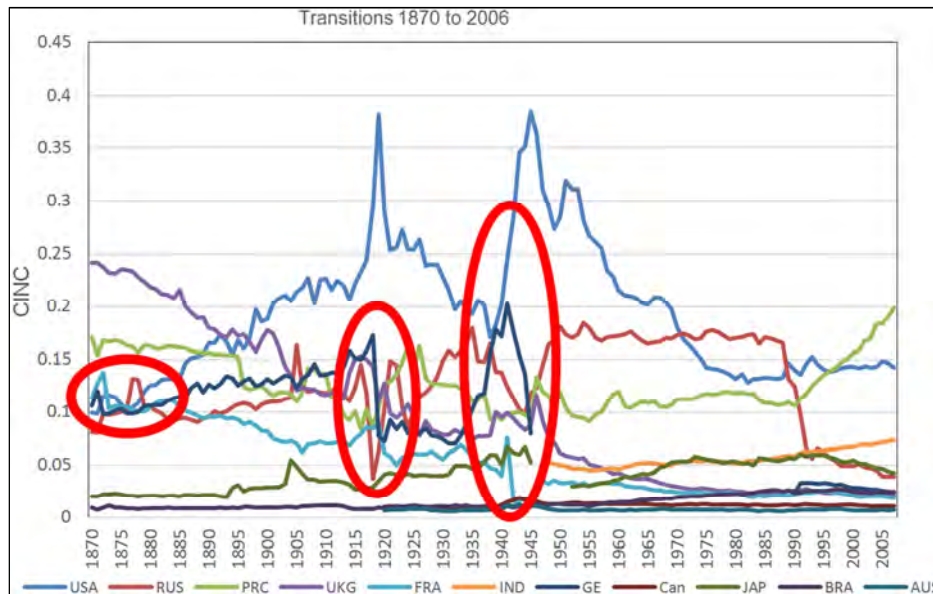
Figure 1. Transitions between dominant powers due to war in the 1870s, mid-1910s, and mid 1940s [2].
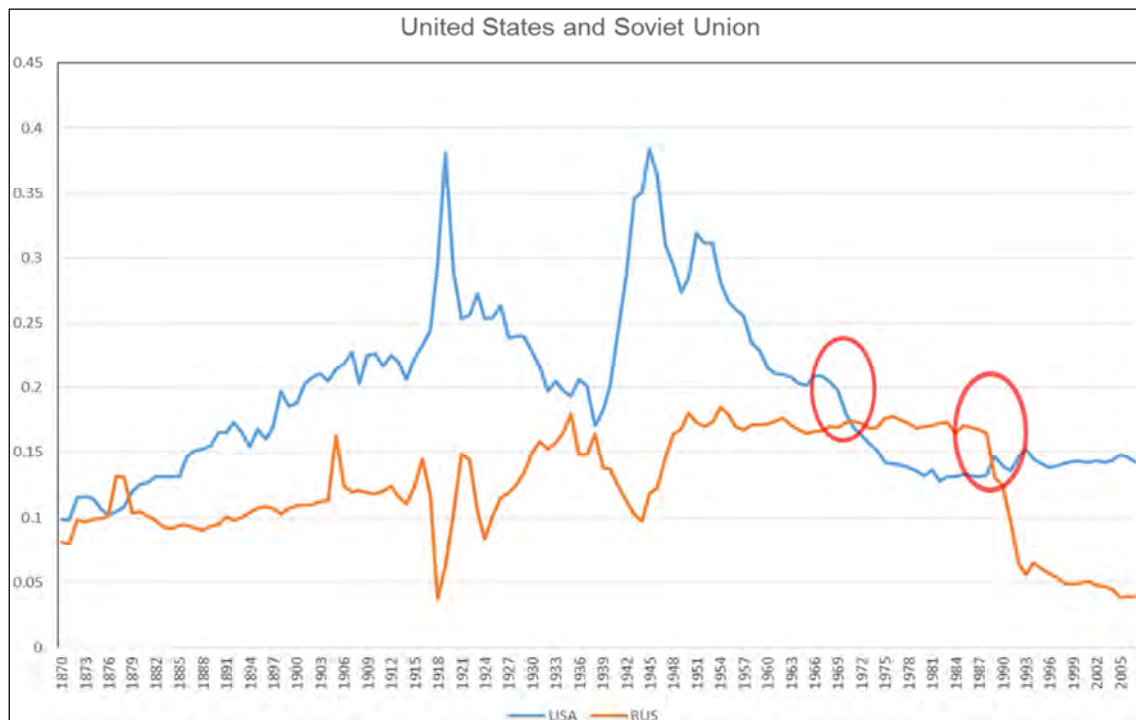
2. Hypothesis

Figure 2. Transitions between dominant powers due to war in the 1870s, mid-1910s, and mid-1940s [2].

I believe involvement in internationalized internal armed conflicts[*] can help explain how the USSR achieved

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[*] I use the conflict definitions from the UCDP, wherein interstate armed conflict occurs between two or more states; Internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group (s) without intervention from other states; Internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group (s) with intervention from other states on one or both sides. Nils Gleditsch, Wallensteen, P., Eriksson, M., Sollenberg, M., & Strand, H. (2002). Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset. Journal of Peace Research, 39 (5), 615-637.

dominance in the 1970s and the United States in the 1990s (see figure 2). Explaining the effect of these irregular wars on the international system may provide additional information on how changes can occur without conventional or hegemonic wars. This effect may also explain how an emerging power can rapidly improve its relative position vis-à-vis the dominant power by inducing the latter to commit to resource-intensive warfare such as counterinsurgency campaigns and nation-building. Instead of large, systemic war,

states could employ relatively cheap strategies, such as supporting irregular warfare, a form of external mobilization, to maintain its position against emerging powers. The effectiveness of irregular conflict could alleviate the pressure dominant states might feel when rising opponents achieve a high rate of internal growth that creates significantly greater options for offensive action by that opponent [6].

I hypothesize that *dominant states* come under risk as the costs of internal mobilization and the expenditure of national power in large scale, *defensive wars* become too great (see figure 3). *Challengers* are likely able to foster favorable change

by inducing the state to increase the expenditure of national power by raising the costs of internal mobilization. The choice to engage in internal mobilization, i.e., employing large expensive, conventional forces, or mobilizing external forces has an effect on the political economy of the great power state. This could catapult the challenger into dominance while avoiding the heavy burden of great power conflict as envisioned by the bulk of the literature. As states attempt to compensate for the effects of prolonged conflict they fall prey to power transition by challenging states.
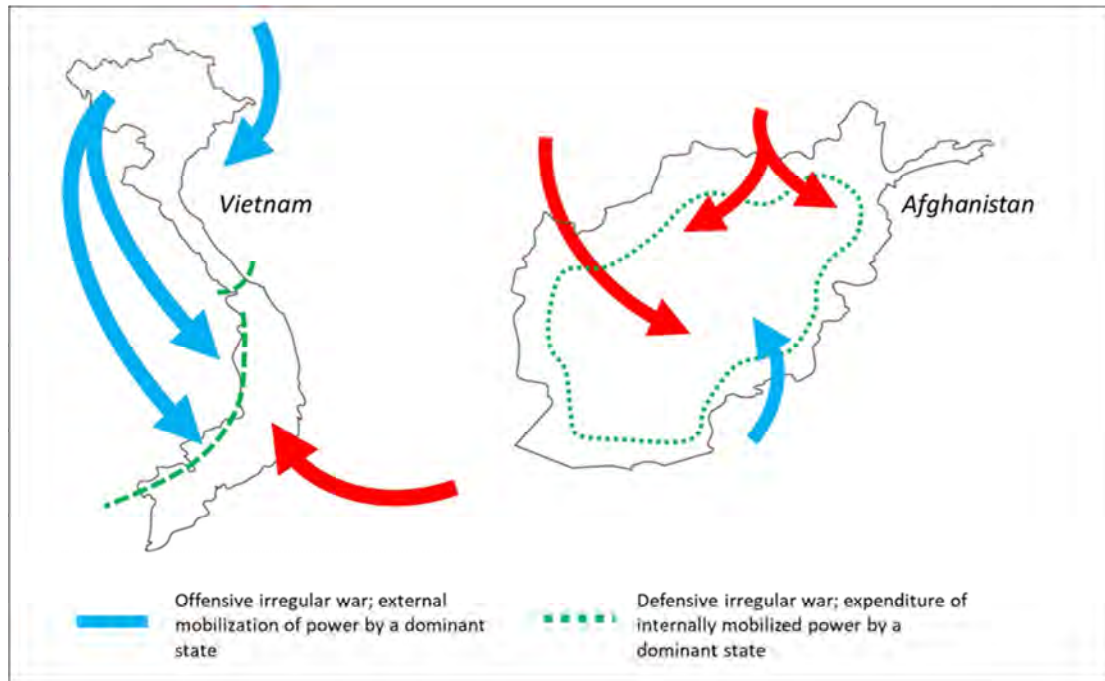

Figure 3. Some dominant states project expensive, internally mobilized power into conflicts, thus internationalizing them. This puts the state at risk from peers waging offensive irregular war.

3. The State Problem

The internationalization of these conflicts have transitioned through three distinct phases. Following the Second World War, and reaching its peak in the mid-1960s, were the decolonization wars, primarily against the European states. The second period ran to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and saw the diametric opposition of the two superpowers in many developing world states. In the first half the 1990s, there was first a collapse in internal conflicts as one side or another was abandoned by the U. S. or the now defunct Soviet Union who saw no further benefit from supporting opposing sides, then a bump-up as resistance groups geared up with no clear external power restraining them [7]. Analysis of these conflicts covers a vast academic area from justice studies to normative IR. Generally, the literature falls in two categories: the first is academic in nature and analyzes the variables of decolonization and ethnic conflict which attempt to proceed inductively from cases to general principles. The second category are studies which look at irregular wars as a problem of tactics and strategy, using eyewitnesses, military, and

political accounts as evidence. The first will be explored in some detail in this section, while the second will largely be addressed through the cases studies.

At the global level of analysis, the risk of war requires states to adopt policies in line with theories of defensive realism while the realities of the current international environment drives states to pursue actions in line with offensive realism. Defensive strategies have arguably preserved the status quo for centuries. The Congress of Vienna created a never before seen European stability even while the greater powers pursued colonial empires around the world. The United States initially followed an isolationist line, relying on its ocean barriers and immense resources to insulate itself from global conflicts, while expanding via the Indian Wars and the Spanish-American war. These are a few examples which show that states are pragmatic, choosing to balance or expand based on relative advantage.

Offensive realism begins with the realist paradigm, but then posits that states, especially dominant powers, are motivated primarily by the pursuit of power [8]. They may do this through coalition building, a form of balancing, or creating

massive offensive capabilities. This allows great powers to devise rational policies in which they perceive the costs of conflicts to be less than the benefits [9]. States will also seek to manipulate their coalition in order to achieve more favorable outcomes for the state [10]. Incidentally, the hyper-power of the US since the 1991 would allow the U. S. to skew the cost/benefits calculations far in favor of offensive actions.

Dominant powers can also increase their own power by the developing hierarchies [11]. Regional middle and small powers magnify this effect by band-wagoning, where power relationships filter downward. As their hierarchy coalesces around the dominant power, security threats homogenize in a way so that the entire hierarchy reflects the security objectives and global outlook of the dominant power. Wars between dominant powers can filter down, igniting lower level conflicts, but the preponderance of power at the top limits the ability of reginal wars to become global war [12]. This explains how World War One and World War Two became global, while Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan remained local. This is consistent with Waltz' ordering principle of hierarchies and explains that it is not simply conflict between superpowers, but the relative position of client states that increase the risk of conflict [6]. In other words, superpowers can and will participate in regional conflicts between middle and small states in order to preserve their relative power.

In these wars, the "distribution of capability will determine what form the war will take [14]." Once dominant powers enter a war, weak states will pursue strategies that emphasize state militaries' weaknesses. This change from state versus state war, to irregular wars was quickly discerned in the aftermath of World War Two. Raymond Aron, Hans Morgenthau and Ken Waltz each understood the important changes in conflict that were occurring. Aron in 1962's *Peace and War*, theorized that nuclear weapons had made war impossible, but states would continue to pursue security objectives via alternatives to total war [14]. Aron believed that war could become limited in nature, avoiding the total war envisioned by strategists since Clausewitz. Aron could see war ceasing to be primarily a military imposition of force and become political. The Korean War seemed to be a turning point since "for the first time in its history, the United States gave up an annihilating victory [15]." Beyond the analysis of risk versus benefit of war for doubtful objectives, Aron predicted that states would maximize the use of irregular war, where "the rivalry will be pursued in traditional ways with or without the use of conventional military techniques *with guerrilla warfare playing an increasingly important role* (italics added) [16]."

Hans Morgenthau believed that states, particularly great powers, would be subjected to the pressure of norms and values of international law, international morality, and global public opinion which would restrain their actions in war [17]. As the international system coalesced into a balance-of-power structure dominated by a few powerful states, competition will devolve into contests between subordinate clients in local power systems [17]. Morgenthau believed the Indochina wars

were an important link between the purely military objectives of total war and the political objectives of limited wars. He wrote that "the Indochina war for all practical purposes obliterated the distinction between combatants and civilian population [17]." It was this inclusion of the population as a legitimate tool, and target, of war that would become the main characteristic of irregular wars. Ken Waltz' central ideas revolved around the stability of the international system at its higher levels while allowing conflict at the lower echelons, writing that "never in this century have so many years gone by without the great powers fighting a general war," while "small wars have been numerous [18]." He added that "the striking characteristics of world politics since the [second] world war [has] been… the failure to lead to wider wars at higher levels of violence [18]." Small and middle states could and would still engage in conflicts for their own relative gain because "lesser states acquire an increased freedom of movement" when great powers are stalemated [6].

Irregular conflicts have their own structure and follow their own logic. Instead of neat lines on a map, reinforced by expert analysis, irregular conflicts grow and shrink, disappear in time and place, only to show up again in another. Irregular conflicts often have a diverse construct, ranging through asymmetric, unconventional, and conventional activities [19]. During the Cold War, irregular conflicts were common as much of the world decolonized and the superpower blocs jockeyed to influence new state formation. Most irregular conflicts have periods of heavy regular warfare with mechanized and information heavy combat, and even have both types of conflict- regular and irregular- occurring simultaneously. This is significant for analysis of the future of conflict as it helps erase the increasingly illogical divide between the 'regular wars' that states pursue and the 'irregular wars' of their vastly overmatched foes [20].

The military mismatch between the two can be overcome through total political mobilization. Irregular forces "gained their objectives in armed confrontations with industrial powers which possessed an overwhelming superiority in conventional military capability [21]." A group fighting an irregular war under a resource imbalance is able to avoid defeat largely through the information mismatch and the local superiority they hold over state forces, i.e., a group under a resource imbalance *will* fight irregularly because they *can only* fight irregularly. Thus, avoiding military defeat on one side inflicts a political defeat on the other when the justification for entering the conflict and rationale for consuming expensive state power is lost. This loss of political will to continue the war, the total mobilization achieved by the weaker group, and pressure to limit the war in the stronger state creates the strategy that leads to victory: avoiding military engagement on the strong side's terms. The nature of partisan war and its identity entanglements make this kind of conflict greater than the sum of its parts, and in Andrew Mack's words "the conflict as a whole which must be studied in order to understand its evolution and outcome [21]."

This is why Mack's *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars* is so influential [21]. Its socio-political approach to understanding

conflict attempts to account for the origins of the phenomena, the relationship of politics to conflict, and the processes that influence the whole. Mack's work in 1975 sought to understand the process that drove resistance groups into irregular conflict. His research meant "to undertake an analysis of several asymmetric international conflicts in which an external power confronts indigenous insurgents." His analysis roved over the U. S. war in Vietnam and conflicts in Indonesia, Algeria, Cyprus, Aden, Morocco, and Tunisia. In all of these, "local nationalist forces gained their objectives in armed confrontations with industrial powers which possessed an overwhelming superiority in conventional military capability [21]." Mack's hugely influential article offers deductive hypotheses only in terms of outcomes, but it does away with the idea that there was ever going to be a purely military solution to victory in war. The inability of the state power to impose its will on the enemy, long a *first principle* of warfare, provided the partisan force the opportunity to avoid military defeat. Mack's explanation of defeat included the loss of political will to continue the war, the complex motivations of the weaker force, including mobilization for total war and commitment to limited war by the dominant state, the use of an irregular strategy by the weak party- avoiding military engagement on the strong side's terms, and the pressure to the international community to stop fighting. Gil Merom extended Mack's hypothesis that political and moral considerations take precedence over material power relations. Merom argued that society is not a passive "amorphous collective" but shapes a state's ability to wage war [22]. Like Clausewitz, Merom described the "modern power paradox" as the struggle between the state and its influence wielding middle class over the three dilemmas in small wars: The educated middle class' humanitarian values and the inherent violence of conflict; the unwillingness to find the balance between force and civilian casualties; and preserving moral support for the conflict without resorting to repressive political tactics [22].

Ivan Arreguin-Toft looked at the strategic interaction between the two adversaries in an effort to determine its outcome [23]. One side uses direct strategies of a military nature, i.e., the normative ideal of war of which the goal is the destruction of its counterpart's military forces and resources. Indirect strategies are pursued by weaker opponents and look to wear away the will to continue the war all the while avoiding direct confrontation. Arreguin-Toft identified weak opponent's ability to attack the moral factors of a stronger opponent's strategy as capitalizing on the "democratic social squeamishness" and external support to the weak [23]. Arreguin-Toft has theorized that greater compliance with international norms and standards, the "global public opinion" of Morgenthau, forced powerful states into agreements which negated their military superiority. These combined with the indirect strategies pursued by weak groups such as [guerrilla warfare strategy] or terrorism presents "strong actors with three unpalatable choices: an attrition war lasting perhaps decades; costly bribes or political concessions, perhaps forcing political and economic reforms on repressive allies as well as adversaries; or the deliberate harm of noncombatants in a risky attempt to win the military contest quickly and decisively [23]."

At the same time that states were grappling with the problem of small wars, leaders in developing countries were developing offensive guerilla strategy, which seemed to be the most efficient mode of liberating their countries. Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, Ernesto Guevara and T. E. Lawrence all wrote down their ideas on the tactics weak groups can use to achieve their goals. T. V. Paul proposed four structural conditions that create the opportunity for weaker groups to initiate conflict. Serious disagreement over an issue of interest, which the weaker side places great value than the state, in a political system that is unable to address the issue or one which is used to block the weak from non-violent political redress [24]. This directly speaks to Clausewitz' polarity of political goals. The weaker group places a higher value on its objective than the strong side, which also bears a strong resemblance to the "moral superiority" of Clausewitz.

Michael Fisherkeller examined these moral imperatives of weaker states who engage in aggressive war with stronger states. He found the 54% of all major power/weak power conflicts in the period 1916-1996 started this way. Fisherkeller found that:

"…the weaker state's judgement of the target as culturally inferior results in discounted capability evaluation of the quantitatively superior enemy. Viewing itself as culturally superior to its rival, the weaker state is encouraged to sound the trumpets for war when its quantitative inferiority seems to call for a more cautious policy [25]."

Fisherkeller's research separated out the moral factors that weigh on a state's decision to go to war. He determined that the perception of the adversary as a cultural equal had the effect of reinforcing the quantitative analysis of power. Materially weak states "[are] encouraged to adopt a defensive, independent fortress or containment strategy." When the adversary is perceived as culturally inferior the opposite is true with "the perceiving power is encouraged to adopt an aggressive, imperialist strategy" in spite of any material difference [25].

The 'myth of the offensive' and states' success in conflicts like WWII and the first Gulf War has bred the belief that when the nation goes to war, it goes all in, and nothing less that unconditional defeat is acceptable. Dominant states create vast military-industrial complexes to support this notion. However, it appears to be as false notion, since most conflicts in history have not ended with our enemies' unconditional defeat. In wars of attrition, it is not size, but endurance and public opinion, that matters. At least twice in the past seventy years, the evidence points to the inability of vastly superior, *offensive-technological* militaries to achieve security objectives against opponents what has arguably become the most common type of warfare.

4. Case Studies

In theory, the transitions indicated by the CoW data should

have followed large scale structural wars between the Soviets and the United States. The changes in the relative power of the states involved were driven by the changes in the internal structure of those states- those changes occurred because of the loss of political legitimacy driven by the corrosive effects of long term irregular conflicts- remember, the tenants of regular war call for finite objectives, a clear end, achieved by speed and mass, i.e., quick wars. Instead, the protracted conflicts in Vietnam and Afghanistan caused a weakening in those states' positions. In the two case studies that follow I have explored the inability of both dominant states to achieve their security objectives in the face of a local foe supported by a powerful external ally. In Afghanistan, the U. S. used offensive IW while the Soviets committed conventional forces in a defensive irregular war. During Vietnam, the U. S. suffered a loss of political legitimacy and similarly, the effects of the war in Afghanistan caused great turmoil in the Soviet Union, a factor that eventually led to the disintegration of the communist empire.

4.1. The U.S. in Vietnam

In Saigon, much to the detriment of the United States, the South Vietnamese government was proving incapable of mobilizing resistance against communist gains [26]. The U. S. escalation began early with advisor strength rising from 200 in 1962 to over 23,000 in 1964 [26]. The Soviets responded by sending their own advisors to North Vietnam, with the CIA reporting that an "estimated 2000 Soviet military technicians presently are in North Vietnam advising and giving training on the SAM systems, aircraft, communications and logistics support [27]." The Vietminh and the Vietcong were a battle hardened and experienced force, requiring little tactical training. The Soviets immediately grasped this, understanding their focus on maneuver warfare would not be needed. Instead, they provided military advisors and trainers, primarily technical, who trained and conducted maintenance on Soviet supplied equipment, particularly the air defense systems meant to negate the power US air power advantage.

While unwilling to commit Soviet ground troops to Indochina, Moscow nonetheless viewed all of Indochina as necessary to North Vietnamese success. As it was, the Soviets took steps to support indigenous movements in Indochina. As early as 1957 support from communist nations, led by Moscow "[had] created favorable conditions for the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam [28]." Accordingly, in 1960, the Soviets began an 18-month airlift of supplies to the Pathet Lao in neighboring Laos. Richard Thornton writes that "the operation included the shipment of several tanks and artillery pieces, along with light arms and ammunition. In all, the Soviet Union flew more than 2,000 sorties carrying in excess of 3,000 tons of materiel and equipment into Laos. Its efforts were supplemented by North Vietnam, which ran truck convoys into Laos. The Soviet airlift and North Vietnamese convoys significantly increased the military capability of the Pathet Lao, which by the spring of 1961 had greatly expanded the territory under its control along the DRV-Lao border [29]."

The U. S. Department of Defense advised President Johnson that ground troops waging a conventional war would be needed if the war was to be won quickly. By the middle of June, 1965, U. S. troop strength in Vietnam had risen to 103,000 and a year later had increased to 322,000. At its peak, troop levels would reach over a half-million, with General Westmoreland requesting the mobilization of the National Guard and Reserves in order to deploy another quarter million troops [30]. Heavily committed to a conventional strategy, the United States would find that its large formations were being ground down by the very operations meant to wear down the enemy. Search and clear missions like Operations *Junction City* and *Kingfisher* did little to blunt the soft power advantage the Soviets were enjoying through the guerilla campaigns of the Vietnamese [31].

The U. S. intensified its bombing campaign, designed to seal off the area of operations from external support. Still, deliveries of materials to North Vietnam increased every year [27]. By mid-1965, a series of talks over economic and military aid led to Soviet ships bearing more than $300 million in military and economic aid to begin arriving at Haiphong Harbor. More than 14,000 trucks arrived for use not only in North Vietnam but also for hauling supplies south on the Ho Chi Minh Trail [32]. Economic aid increased to 340 million USD (1968 dollars) while military supplies to North Vietnam would peak in 1972 at 750 million [33]. Reluctance on the part of the US administration to the bombing of Haiphong and Sihanoukville harbors greatly aided deliveries.

Earlier support from Hanoi for the Pathet Loa was not simply altruistic support to fraternal socialism. By bolstering the Pathet rebels, who now controlled parts of Laos, North Vietnam could effectively control the infiltration routes into South Vietnam, which would later become known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Increased supply, primarily via the land route from the USSR, and carried south by newly arrived trucks, allowed communist forces in the south to increase to about 220,000, leaving Hanoi with an edge in available combat forces [29]. Parity in ground combat forces tipped in the Americans favor in 1966, but Hanoi felt strong enough to launch the Tet Offensive over Christmas, 1968. Executed primarily by Vietcong guerrillas in the south, the attack netted little tactical gains for the North. However, the American public, comforted by increasingly opaque military pronouncements on a successful war strategy, was shocked. Johnson did authorize another increase in troop levels, to a war time high of 549,500, but signaled a change by removing Westmoreland from command. Convinced the war was unwinnable, he stopped the bombing campaign, hoping to entice the North to the negotiating table.

In Vietnam, continued requests for more troops and optimistic reports of the effectiveness of the war strategy indicated that progress was being made, an illusion shattered by the Tet offensive in January, 1968. The loss of credibility seriously affected the domestic US audience and caused concern for US allies. Core democratic supporters began to seriously protest the war and the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. The anti-war senator Eugene McCarthy was surprisingly well received in democratic primaries that

encouraged many middle class voters to support ending the war. Johnson famously chose not to seek re-election. Ultimately, the decision of Johnson to not run in 1968 was a result of both Democratic and Republican challengers running on a platform of significant changes for the war-strategy in Vietnam. To many US allies around the world, this presaged a collapse in the willingness to confront communism. Debate in the post war Congress tended to center around whether the US would or would not fight, which "disturbed existing allies, doubtless encouraged its foes, and caused wobbling neutrals to consider re-insuring themselves with the other side [34]." The costs of internal mobilization were proving too high, and were confirmed by the changes which occurred in 1969. While the strategic direction General Abrams took was closer capitalizing on the benefits of external mobilization, the fact that a change is proof of the failure of employing internally mobilized power with its exorbitant costs of irregular warfare methods means that the costs of mobilization may prove too high.

As the US inserted ground forces into Vietnam, Moscow and Beijing kept their own support limited largely to economic aid and military supplies. President Nixon resumed an extensive bombing campaign, stopping only to gain breathing space from an increasingly angry American public incensed over the invasion of Cambodia. The Soviets, watching the increasing political turmoil in the United States, noted with interest the hostile Congress to further military action in Southeast Asia. With considerably less risk, the Soviets embarked on a massive build-up of North Vietnamese forces. General Van Tien Dung, chief of staff of the North Vietnamese Army, later recalled that "massive amounts of tanks, armored cars, rockets, and long-range artillery" were also being unloaded [35]. Neither China nor the Soviet Union entertained the notion of introducing their own heavy ground units, as the Beijing did in Korea in 1950. Even as the North Vietnamese reverted to guerilla tactics and delayed their general offensives until 1972, Moscow understood that US involvement in Vietnam was draining away resources that could have threatened the socialist bloc in Europe [36]. Moscow concluded the US was unlikely to respond to any offensives by the North by increasing air or ground forces. In 1974, the best Soviet military strategist was sent to Hanoi to help plan the final conquest of the south [37].

4.2. The Soviet Union in Afghanistan

Having successfully used the Vietnam War as a proxy to increase its relative power (see figure 3) the Soviets did the opposite in Afghanistan less than a decade later. Having produced a large conventional armed force very similar to the US' own, Soviet support to nascent communist government in Kabul began in 1979 with the shipment of Mi-24 attack helicopters to Afghanistan. The slow flying tanks had proven effective in Ethiopia [38]. However by August 1979, the Soviet advisors were advocating a combat brigade be sent to Kabul "in the immediate future [39]." The Soviets moved it Fortieth Army, 15,000 men, into Kabul. Eventually, Soviet

troop strength would reach a high of 115,000 men by 1987. Fully sixty percent of those forces deployed to Afghanistan were committed to secure Kabul and the highways linking the capitol with Kandahar in the south, Herat in the west, and the Soviet border station at Termez (present day Uzbekistan) via the Salang Pass [40]. In attempting to defeat the growing guerrilla threat, the Soviet military conducted repeated offensives into resistance held territory. There was little finesse to these operations, with heavy bombing and artillery preparations proceeding movement by heavily armored units. Armored task forces targeted suspected resistance pockets, destroying villages and crops with heavy weapons.

The long, costly defensive wars produced ill-effects in the domestic politics of both the US and USSR. Similar social unrest effects caused by the war in Afghanistan began to multiply in the Soviet Union. As the war entered the second half of the decade, some journalists began reporting on the gap between the official pronouncements of the war and the reality on the ground. Like America in Vietnam, criticism was raised about the justice of universal conscription policies. Letters from fathers appeared in *Pravda*, *Krasnaia zvezda* and *Literaturanaia gazata* alleging that the privileged children of officials had avoided service in Afghanistan and the military [41]. Gorbachev himself called the war "burdensome and painful [42]." In the early years of the war, the Soviet state press portrayed the war as an international duty. But as the war dragged on, the press began to report on negative statements made by the Soviet leadership. In 1986, both Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze referred to Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound, [45]" and "a sin [44]." Significantly, in 1989, the Soviet Congress publicly condemned the intervention in Afghanistan. Shevardnadze noted that "the deliverance of our country from the oppressing moral and material burden of involvement in the Afghan war is one of the biggest… achievements of perestroika, [45]" and later noted that the Soviet reforms in the late 1980s, which ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union were inextricably linked to the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, that "everything else flowed from that [46]."

For the United States, supporting the resistance movement in Afghanistan, the *Mujahedeen*, increased its own ability to raise externally mobilized power without resorting to expensive internally produced power as in Vietnam. Intent on avoiding the mistakes in Vietnam, the United States reacted to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan quite differently. Early in 1979, the US began small covert operations to support Afghan rebels fighting the communist government in Kabul [47]. Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to Carter, informed the president that 'this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention'. Years later, he would tell a French reporter: "We didn't push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would. The secret operation... had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap [48]." CIA director William Casey was blunter, wanting Afghanistan to become "their Vietnam [49]." A broad plan was quickly approved that ordered the CIA to provide military supplies and humanitarian aid to the

mujahedeen [49]. By 1987, total US aid to the mujahidin was $700 million a year and the total through the 1980s would come to over 3 billion dollars [47].

In Afghanistan, the US emphasized the use of proxies and allies, channeling the material through Pakistan. The CIA was able to convince Egypt and China to provide excess Warsaw Pact weaponry in order to maintain the secrecy and misdirection crucial to covert operations [49]. Charles Cogan, Pakistan desk officer at the CIA, wrote that "we took the means to wage war, put them in the hands of people who could do so, for purposes which we agreed [50]." As the war progressed, the CIA assisted in planning mujahedeen missions and instruction in demolitions proved vital in the urban guerilla tactics [51]. Tactically, the Red Army was innovating on the battlefield, but what were needed were additional resources in men and equipment. As Stinger missiles blunted the Soviet advantage in helicopter gunships, Moscow entered a spiral of increasing casualties and requests for more troops. The deeper problem was the Soviet Union itself. However, the Soviet economy was moribund and in no position to support a surge or change in strategy other than withdrawal. Like the US in 1968, the war was a lens which magnified problems internal to the Soviet machine. Unlike the US the political restrictions laid on the economy meant there would be little motivation to change and produce growth in new areas.

Over reliance on production and the prioritization of defense ahead of consumer goods contributed to inelasticity in the Soviet economy [52]. The Soviet economy was more brittle by the time the Soviet Union found itself decisively engaged in Afghanistan. As productivity declined the burden of defense prioritization caused significant problems for the economy as a whole [53]. Workers employed in defense industries were paid more than other workers in other sectors and had better benefits, causing resentment. Military inspectors in would ensure goals were met and quality was maintained, but un-forecasted requirements would cause instability in the supply chain. The heavy industry sector of the economy, which had benefited from the extensive growth input model became saturated [54]. The over accumulation of iron and steel led to increased orders of products from heavy industry, particularly the highly prioritized defense industry. Systemic inefficiencies were increasingly burdening the system and the Soviet productivity declined from the 1960s [55]. The high growth following World War II had slowed to 2 percent by the mid-1980s [56]. The initial gains from increasing labor participation by a huge population and increasing, universal education and heavy investment stagnated. Still, the burden of the allocation of resources to support national defense in the Soviet Union remained high. Defense spending had risen from a low of 10 percent in the 1950s to 13 percent in 1970. Reductions in spending were lost as prices of defense goods were increased by the hyperinflation around the world in the late 1970s. The rising sophistication of technology for weapons systems needed to keep up with NATO led to ever greater problems as the Soviet central planners attempted to compensate [57]. By the mid-1980s, the CIA estimated that the share of GNP consumed by defense spending alone was between 15-17 percent [58]. The effect of the economic slowdown caused serious legitimacy issue across domestic audiences who began to perceive their sacrifices for the greater Soviet may have been in vain. Consumer goods became increasingly hard to obtain and Soviet citizens saw a shrinking of their purchasing power. The inability of the Soviet economy to switch gears from an input model to a consumption model may have led to a weakening of the central planning system, the increase in elitist interests', and declining worker morale [59].

5. Conclusions

In both case studies, a dominant power attempted to increase its relative position in the international system by supporting a hierarchical client state in a regional war. Each dominant state failed to achieve this objective, moreover, each state suffered a power transition with the other. The COW data demonstrates that there was a power transition between the U. S. and Soviet Union in roughly 1969 and 1989. I have concluded that the long period of irregular war, fought with conventional forces against a politically mobilized partisan force, supported by a powerful external ally, had a corrosive effect on the state involved.

In Vietnam, the U. S. committed itself to halting Soviet expansion via defensive war with massive conventional forces. This effectively created a head-to-head contest fought by proxies [60]. A successful advisory strategy would have cemented the external mobilization advantage in favor of the US. Unable to effectively capitalize on its partnership and soft power advantages, the US doubled down on its hard power advantage. Conversely, Soviet support to the North Vietnamese was accomplished at little loss of hard power [27]. The effects of the U. S. using its expensive conventional forces went far beyond the battlefield. In 1969 alone, the most expensive of the conflict, the price tag was almost 80 billion dollars, a hefty 2.3 percent of GDP [61]. Total defense outlays around the Cold War world had crept up to 9.5 percent [82]. Paying for the war released a flood of dollars onto the international market, totaling over $200 billion by 1973 [63]. Domestically, spending on Great Society would reach almost seventy billion dollars in 1969 [61]. President Johnson's desire to fund both his 'Great Society' programs and the war in Vietnam led to inflation with the rapid injection of money into the system forcing commodity prices upwards. The effect of belt tightening on domestic consumers who saw their purchasing power stagnate may have fueled some of the anger demonstrated by protest all across the country. Arguably, introduction of the large ground force in Vietnam caused great damage to the dollar. By 1966, the wage-price guideposts, designed to hold inflation in check, were being aggressively challenged by the heavy industries [61]. The defense orders for additional supplies caused some industries to increase their prices at rates greater than the inflationary goals. The Federal Reserve, in an effort to control this inflation, began increasing the cost of borrowing money from the central bank [61]. Deficit spending to fund the war and domestic programs

would drag down the US economy and create painful inflation that was not brought under control until the early 1980s [60].

In Afghanistan, the Soviets launched a conventional campaign to prop up a communist regime. The U. S. responded by supporting an offensive irregular war at a time when Soviet power was growing (figure 4). Soviet leaders had no qualms about using the military to hold together an extensive empire. The Soviet Army had been used to suppress freedom movements in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). The universal education espoused by the Soviet leadership had the unintended effect of increasing nationalist tendencies. To Moscow, it was inconceivable that people living under communist rule would revolt, so massive military responses to crush uprisings sponsored by the West were appropriate [64]. Too late, it occurred to the Moscow Politburo that the aging Soviet empire was risking the "possibility that incipient nationalist tendencies emerging in the Central Asian republics were being encouraged by the war in Afghanistan [65]." Incidents of

non-compliance with Moscow directives increased within the Soviet Union and in Afghanistan, secessionists movements among Central Asian ethnicities spilled into the units heavily peopled with Tajik, Uzbek and Kazakhs. In late 1985, Central Asian troops mutinied following the execution of an afghan civilian. Russian and Central Asians, both in the Soviet Army, fought near the city of Konduz and "450 people [were killed] … and 500 military vehicles were entirely destroyed [66]. Moscow was incapable of innovating or adopting new efficiencies nor were there appropriate incentives in the absence of free-market competition. As civilian discontent with the shortages caused by an unresponsive central planning system, the shock of the losses in Afghanistan became unbearable. The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan pierced the screen of the monolithic Soviet Truth. Shortly after, the Lithuanian separatist leaders declared their goal of formal independence from the Soviet Union, triggering an avalanche of revolutions that ended the Soviet Empire [67].
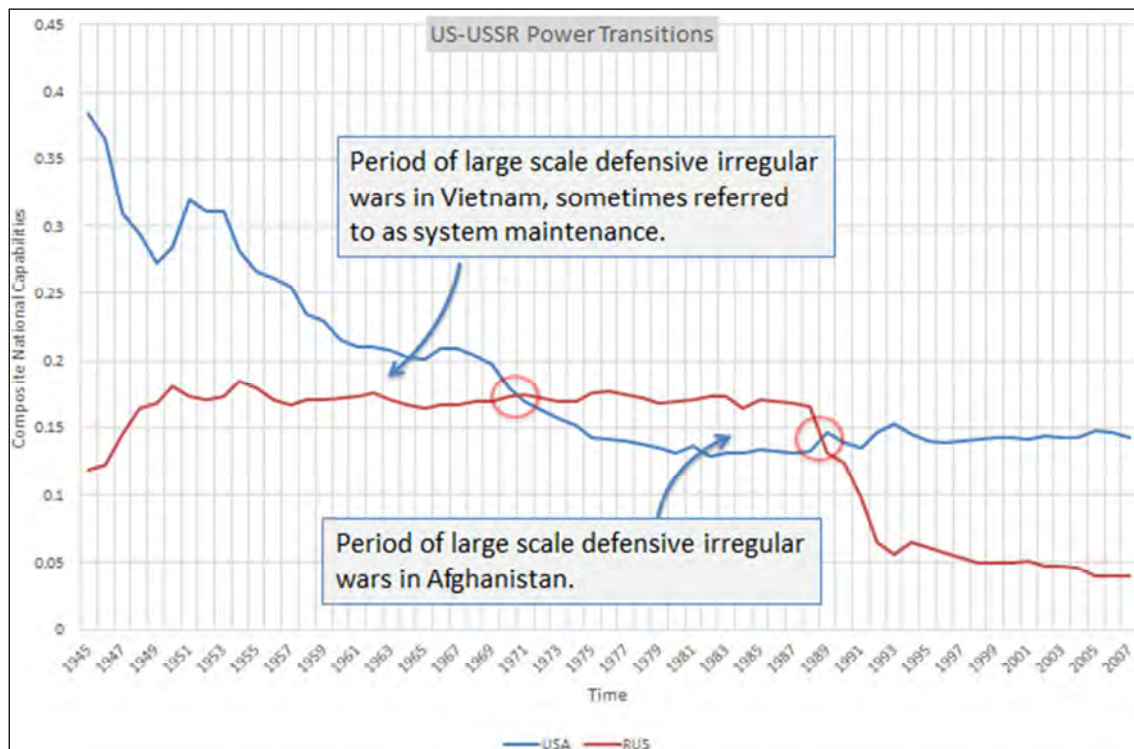

Figure 4. Showing the twin transitions between the U. S. and the Soviet Union caused by irregular conflicts in Vietnam and Afghanistan [2].

6. Implications

In both case studies, there appears to be a miss-application of military power designed to defeat *state* threats. All dominant states establish some form of internal balancing, creating military strategies that are meant to match other states. Uncertainty of the purpose of large armies drives others states to create large armies, one side balancing with tanks, bombers and aircraft carriers means others will match these tools. The risk of not doing so is to be destroyed. This kind of power is prevalent among states because the greatest threats to their security, i.e., existential threats, is understood to come from

states with similar power. States grow accustomed to pursuing strategies of annihilation, powerful states go to war with heavy firepower, coupled with increasing technology, which destroys the enemy. This derives from the belief that maximum effort should be expended to overwhelm the enemy. All militaries foster this attitude of aggression at all levels of war, which, combined with careful planning is meant to produce a decisive battle. States like the U. S. and Soviet Union commit themselves to powerful offensive forces, long seen as the most credible deterrent against strategic threats. Powerful offensive capabilities translate into strong desires for offensive actions and first strike imperatives [68]. This

idea of preemption would be codified when President Bush announced his national defense strategy in 2002.

In both cases, we see the evidence of states pursuing a strategy of *less-than-total-war* to achieve security objectives. Long ago, Raymond Aron said that rivalries will be pursued in non-traditional ways, largely signaling an end to the predictive power of state war as a system changing policy. Instead, states will focus on new methods of increasing security such as economic war, environmental war, and increasingly, anthropomorphic war, a war that combines massive data trawling in order to specifically target discrete individuals with either traditional kinetic weapons, or in the nearer future, nano-weapons. However, the idea that total war is no longer possible is at some risk. The move of dominant states from total war to limited war did not limiting the objective of increasing security. Likewise, for the populations engaged in irregular war, the conflict is total in that the population must be totally mobilized in order to withstand the assault and sacrifice required in wars against powerful states. In both case studies, the dominant state's strategy of offensive irregular war was greatly aided by a partisan group deeply tied to their tellurian identity [69]. These partisans, the Vietnamese and the Mujahadeen were triggered by the perceived existential threat to their chosen way of life, whether communism or religious convictions. Carl Schmitt translated the classic guerrilla in his jungle and mountain perch to the interstate trotting communist vanguard. The modern partisan has moved on from the 'real enmity' which ends with the ejection of the invader from the sacred homeland. That territorial anchor has been translated from the physical to the abstract through the threat to identity, which being existential, is absolute [69]. In the same way, the creation of ISIS and AQ is a reaction to the vast spread of the proto-culture of neoliberalism which threatens their way of life, however crude it is. The unlimited enmity of nationalism has been replaced by the unlimited enmity of *identity*-action in defense of placeness.

The method of conflict undertaken by weaker resistance groups- asymmetric, guerilla or insurgency, is part and parcel of the resistance group's knowledge advantage. The resistance group possesses a superior knowledge of the operating environment. This translates into tactical speed- the ability to physical move over the battlefield to assault, defend and disappear before an army can arrive. This physical speed implies faster, leaner cognitive processes. This is particularly true under the singularity where every partisan is essentially a sub-contractor of the larger cause. He only has to convince himself of the utility of the action before committing to the attack. This is the goal mismatch between the two actors. The state, possessing vast resources, lacks the strategic purpose, i.e., the existential threat, to engage in unlimited war. The ethnic group possesses few physical resources, but faced with a real or imagined threat to survival, are able to achieve total mobilization. This full commitment to the conflict is expressed in generational terms with fathers indoctrinating sons (and daughters) in the methods of warfare over historicized grievances. With fewer resources, non-state groups engage in irregular conflict, with the state, with violent acts executed primarily to extract political concessions, not to impose their will on the battlefield.

The case studies show that the idea of irregular war is slippery in that it exhibits characteristics of all types of war. Indeed, history has shown that the idea of 'regular' war was always a phantom. In the future, war will be a phenomenon that crosses all conflict domains. In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the dominant states employed conventional forces, unconventional forces, and asymmetric activities aimed at civilians. Recently, the U. S.-Iraqi war, the U. S.-Afghanistan war, and the Israeli conflicts have followed a similar pattern, with periods of highly technical, low force counter-insurgency interspersed with periods of heavy volume, high troop level combat operations, as in 2006 in Lebanon.

The indirect strategies of both the Vietnamese and Afghans, supported by external powers, were able to affect the dominant state's ability to impose its will on the battlefield. Mack and Arreguin-Toft were correct that in an irregular war, the socio-political front is the decisive campaign. This must be addressed by dominant states who cannot resist the urge to meddle in the downstream conflicts of their clients. Liberal interventionism drives the idea of jus ad bello in conflicts, causing the state to see the war in extreme terms which require a high upper limit on the violence employed to gain their objectives. However, the norms and values of Liberalism then limit the state's appetite for the violence of war. The case studies show that dominant state military power designed to defeat existential threats is ill suited for the endurance runs of irregular wars. The influence of realist theories on intervention policies has been such that even while acknowledging the changing security environment, few understood that conventional power applications and the states that used them had become outmoded. The benefits of the current offensive doctrines of simple mass and speed must be parsed as the security environment becomes more complex.

Putting together the pieces of the puzzle, one can surmise that great powers motivated by offensive capabilities will suffer deleterious effects because militaries created for defensive strategies are ill-equipped to deal with the irregular conflicts of client states. The mobilization of the civilian populations to engage in war transferred the prerogative of total war from the state to the irregular force. As the costs of weapons decrease, the cost of maintaining dominance increases if states attempting to extend their influence or position become embroiled in irregular wars [70]. If one accepts the argument laid out here, that there is an effect of irregular conflicts on states, then it follows that the effect can be predicted. If the effect can be predicted, it can be harnessed by states to do much damage to challengers at little risk to themselves. If this is the case, then the danger of long wars, the likes which the U. S. engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan becomes clear. Beyond the battlefield, it is probable that the U. S. position has been weakened to the benefit of challengers like Russia and China. Even small powers like Iran can establish themselves as regional powers simply by allowing the dominant power to expend power against in squishy irregular wars. This is very important because it reflects the

culmination of realist theory to predict the outcomes of war, particularly the impact of irregular conflict and provides a necessary jumping off point to my theoretical model which argues that it is the response of the state to irregular conflict which leads to defeat, erosion of influence, or, in some cases as the case studies will show, power transition.

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