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COLLAPSE: THE FAILURE OF WESTERN-BASED LOCAL FORCES AND THE LESSONS FOR HYBRID WARFARE

ABSTRACT: *The sudden collapse of the Afghan army in August 2021 brought public attention to a well-known phenomenon again: western countries invest time, resources, and money in building local militaries. Yet, those forces collapse as soon as the western power leaves and they come under pressure, and in one case – even before the western country left. This article will analyse one aspect of hybrid war: the attempt to use local forces, and the question why western forces that attempt to shift responsibility to local forces as part of their 'exit strategy'*[1] *fail time and again to do so, while countries such as Russia or Iran succeed more, or at least fail less, in their attempt to create and use local forces to advance their aims, as part of their hybrid strategies.*

KEYWORDS: *hybrid warfare, Afghan National Army, Afghanistan, South Lebanon Army, Palestinian Security forces in Gaza, Iraqi Army*

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THE PROBLEM

The sudden collapse of the Afghan army in August 2021 brought public attention to a well-known phenomenon again: western countries invest time, resources, and money in building local militaries. Yet, those forces collapse as soon as the western power leaves and they come under pressure, and in one case – even before the western country left. This article will analyse one aspect of hybrid war: the attempt to use local forces, and the question why western forces that attempt to shift responsibility to local forces as part of their 'exit strategy'[2] fail time and again to do so, while countries such as Russia or Iran succeed more, or at least fail less, in their attempt to create and use local forces to advance their aims, as part of their hybrid strategies. Indeed, if most wars today are hybrid wars, it can be argued that still some wars are more hybrid than others, and that the use of local forces – with its successes and failures – is tied to the ways in which western and non-western countries fight hybrid wars. Thus, I will attempt to show that this aspect is relevant to other conflicts, including

[1] See Clark S. A. "Exit Strategy: The Nexis of Policy and Strategy". Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2006. https://scholarsprogram.wcfia.harvard.edu/files/fellows/files/clark.pdf and Rose, G. "The Exit Strategy Delusion". Foreign Affairs, 77 (1), 1998.

[2] See Clark, S. A. "Exit Strategy: The Nexis of Policy and Strategy". Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2006. https://scholarsprogram.wcfia.harvard.edu/files/fellows/files/clark.pdf and Rose, G. "The Exit Strategy Delusion". Foreign Affairs, 77 (1), 1998.

cases in which western countries face hybrid warfare within their own borders,[3] and try to present what can be done to improve the situation.

The problem of collapsing local forces cannot be traced to lack of time to train them and build a capable military. Of the four main examples in this article, the 'youngest' army was also the one that did not completely collapse – the Iraqi Army, which nearly collapsed as it faced the advance of ISIS in 2014, some 11 years after its inception.[4] Yet in a few years it was capable of defeating ISIS in its stronghold of Mosul. The other examples' main cases of this article, namely the Palestinian Security Forces in Gaza, the South Lebanese Army and the Afghan National Army, all existed for 13, 17 (or 23, if one counts its short-lived predecessor, The Free Lebanon Army) and 19 years respectively, yet collapsed within days. Furthermore, in all cases, while post-facto many argued that the collapse was inevitable, the collapse caught western countries by surprise. Policymaker not only publicly argued that those forces are capable of surviving and fighting on their own, but made policy decisions based on the assumption that those forces would hold.

Table 1 *A comparison of the collapse of Western-trained local militaries*

The force	Existed for	Trained/ supported by	Collapsed in	Average number of troops	KIA during existence	Enemy
South Lebanon Army, 2000	17 years/ 23 years[5]	Israel	Right before Israeli withdrawal	2500+ in two brigades	660	Hezbollah
Palestinian Security forces in Gaza, 2007	13 years (still existing in the West Bank)	varied	Two years after Israeli withdrawal, "The battle of Gaza": 6 days.	Thousands	Few dozen	Hamas
Afghan National Army, 2021	19 years	US/NATO	2 weeks (a month, including Panjshir Valley)	Seven corps (Nominally, 180,000+)	60,000-92,000 (Including police)	Taliban
Iraqi Army, Northern Iraq, 2014	11 years	US	3 weeks	Five divisions lost	Thousands +	ISIS

[3] As other articles in this volume deal with the definitions and problems of defining Hybrid Warfare, this article will not discuss those topics in depth.

[4] While of course Iraq had more than enough seasoned military personnel, the "De-Baathization" policy of 2003 effectively meant that most professional soldiers and officers find themselves out of the army, and the new army lacked experienced commanders and NCOs.

[5] The Free Lebanon Army was created in 1977 By Lebanese major Saad Haddad (https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/15/obituaries/maj-saad-haddad-47-israel-s-christian-ally-in-southern-lebanon.html), and it later changed name into the South Lebanon Army. The militia underwent reorganization in 1983.

Post-facto explanations tended to centre on issues such as the lack of will to fight, poor training or corruption. But while the armies discussed here were indeed usually plagued by some, if not all, of those problems, those are insufficient explanations – either because there were exceptions to the rule, or because in advance those factors weren't considered crucial enough. It actually can be said that those explanations tend to suffer from the streetlight effect: they concentrate on the facts that are easily visible, but that does not mean that *the* reasons are so clear to spot and predict – otherwise, everyone would have predicted them. Self-illusion by western countries can of course explain why those failures were not identified in advance, but this again will bring us back to the same question, only from a different angle: why do western countries, time and again, fail to create self-sustaining local forces?

THE WILL TO FIGHT?

The problem with the supposed lack of will to fight is that despite this alleged lack, most Western-trained local forces suffered severe casualties for years without collapsing. In some cases, like the Iraqi army in northern Iraq in 2014 and the Palestinian security forces in Gaza, some of them trained by Western police or military forces,[6] the first significant challenge brought a collapse or a near-collapse (yet, that same Iraqi army did manage to recover and overcome ISIS in Basra in 2016–2017). The Afghan National Army suffered horrible casualties over the years, estimated as some 60,000 killed (including police) and according to Afghan sources up to 92,000.[7] It was pushed back from significant parts of Afghanistan before the final US pull-out, but it did not collapse until after the pull-out – and then, it did so at such a speed that not only western countries but many Afghans as well were caught unawares. Despite having probably the worst of all militaries described here (with the possible exception of the Palestinian forces in Gaza), it still held out until the Western forces left – including the year before the final withdrawal, when no American soldier was killed in battle. That means that apart from air support, the Afghan forces bore the full brunt of the fighting (in 2015–2020, 93 US soldiers were killed in Afghanistan).[8] Beforehand, some Western officers rained praise on the Afghan soldiers or officers. A senior Australian officer, who was a trainer in the ANA officers' course, said in October 2020 that "The Afghans are incredibly resilient. They regularly fight in exceptionally difficult terrain, in extreme weather conditions, but they have a mindset of perseverance."[9]

The Iraqi army in Northern Iraq, which collapsed under the ISIS onslaught, should have had the same will to fight as the Iran-supported Shi'ite militias. It was mostly Shi'ite as well, and as the Sunni ISIS attacked and after years of bloody internecine fighting between

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6 In 2007, a short time before the collapse, US general Keith Dayton, United States Security Coordinator to the Palestinian Authority, praised the ability of the Palestinian security forces (International Crisis Group). Middle East Report No. 68. "After Gaza," 2 August 2007, 22. https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/68-after-gaza.pdf. His trained forces fared better in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria – though admittedly they had the backing of the Israeli army to deal with Hamas. Haaretz [Hebrew], 26 May 2010.

7 George, S. "Final weeks of fighting among deadliest for Afghan security forces, former official says: 4,000 dead and 1,000 missing". Washington Post, December 30, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/30/afghanistan-security-forces-deaths/

8 Simpson, E. "Do not blame the Afghan army for what's happening now". Financial Times, August 29, 2021. https://www.ft.com/content/5a35e66f-ccf1-4625-a248-3c425b77a4e8

9 Bree, M. "Mission complete at Afghan Army Academy". Australian Government Defense News, 28 October 2020. https://news.defence.gov.au/international/mission-complete-afghan-army-academy

Shi'ites and Sunnis, it could have expected no quarter. Indeed, Iraqi soldiers who surrendered were slaughtered *en masse*. Yet, despite having all the incentives in the world to fight, it did not. But Iraqi PMF Groups – virtually the same population pool[10] – fought on and attracted many volunteers. The Iraqi army itself was able to develop the will to fight in a relatively short time, though not before nearly collapsing again in 2015, and by 2017 it ousted ISIS from Mosul and re-captured most of the territory it had lost.

The South Lebanon army fought well on many occasions during its existence, having suffered some 660 KIA over the years from a relatively small force (for a comparison, Israel lost in Lebanon, from the end of operation "Peace for Galilee" in 1982 to the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, 675 KIA, including a few civilians).[11] Before the upcoming Israeli withdrawal in 2000, it mostly held its own up to two weeks before the withdrawal – and then started to collapse, forcing the Israelis to withdraw earlier than they planned. Yet, in the first two weeks of May 2000, when the planned Israeli evacuation from Lebanon was already in sight, and after some prominent SLA commanders or family members were assassinated, still only ten out of some 2,500 soldiers of the South Lebanon Army deserted;[12] in April the number was seven.[13] Despite the low Israeli estimate of the SLA, most soldiers held their position almost to the day of the sudden collapse, though a few outposts *were* abandoned shortly after the IDF turned them to the SLA as part of the IDF's withdrawal plan.[14] In one example, an Israeli staff officer testified later that not only did quite a few officers of the SLA keep operating up until the withdrawal, despite the uncertainties, but even the withdrawal of the Israeli brigade HQ from the town of Bint-Jbel would not have been possible without the aid of "SLA administration personnel, without which we couldn't have evacuated even one match". Only after the Israeli withdrawal was a given fact did they evacuate their own families.[15] In another example, on 21st May, the day the collapse began, an SLC company commander led a combat engineer detachment on patrol as usual and disarmed some Hezbollah-planted mines. Indeed, some members of the SLA definitely had the will to fight – yet the organization, as a whole, collapsed almost instantly, and forced the Israeli forces to withdraw somewhat earlier than they planned.

Of course, the classic case of military collapse is that of the ARVN forces in 1975, which had enough will to fight for years, yet the country disintegrated fast in the face of the NVA onslaught in 1975. In the aftermath, many senior South Vietnamese military and civilian

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[10] On Shiite Militias in Iraq see Smyth, P. "The Shia Militia Mapping Project". The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 20, 2019. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/shia-militia-mapping-project. On the ethnic composition of the Iraqi Army at the time see Mohammed Salman Al-Tai, "Ethnic Balance in the Ministry of Defence (Iraqi Army – Counter Terrorism Service)". The Center Of Making Policies For International & Strategic Studies, 13 July 2018. https://www.makingpolicies.org/en/posts/ethnicbalance.english.php

[11] Levi, S: "The veterans of Lebanon claim: 675 Israelis were killed until the IDF's withdrawal". [Hebrew], Mako, 14 May 2020. https://www.mako.co.il/pzm-magazine/Article-73db727c7621271026.htm

[12] Yediot Aharonot [Hebrew], 17 May 2000.

[13] Data in Author's possession.

[14] The Israeli withdrawal took place on 21–24 May 2000 (mostly 23rd). In 1999 SLA evacuated the Jezzin enclave, and concentrated its forces in Southern Lebanon. In February 2000 Both IDF and SLA forces withdrew from the outpost of Sojud, in the northeastern part of the Israeli "Security Zone" in Lebanon. SLA soldiers evacuated or withdrew from five outposts up to 20 may 2000; once the collapse began in May 21st, they evacuated or withdrew from 49 outposts in three days. Data in Author's possession.

[15] Amal, formerly senior staff officer (operations) at the western brigade of the Lebanon Liaison Unit, "The Withdrawal from Bint-Jbeil, South Lebanon, 21–23 May 2000" (Hebrew), undated, author's possession.

officials blamed the US "abandonment" of South Vietnam, with "The psychological effects of no longer being regarded by the US as worth saving" while the enemy received support "from *his* allies" no less important than any material reason.[16] Yet, even in the last days of the war, many ARVN forces fought: according to the North Vietnamese, in the last stages of the war their forces lost (that is after it was clear that South Vietnam lost, and during the battle for Saigon) more than 6,000 men, killed and wounded, and some 33 tanks and armoured vehicles. Most South Vietnamese senior officers stayed with their men and fought almost to the end.[17]

Apparently, the lack of "will to fight" made itself clear only when those forces had to fight *without Western support*. This is not the same as a total lack of will to fight – therefore, the relations between Western support and the capability to fight may be more important than the "will to fight" as the culprit for collapse. Of course, bad political leadership and confused orders added to most collapses (South Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestinian authority), but the lack of *Western* support seems to be the decisive part, as also will be shown in some cases where local militaries *did not* collapse.

POORLY TRAINED?

The argument blaming "lack of training," or "poor training" of those forces in the collapse, is even more problematic. First, some of those forces were trained adequately. The SLA, for example, had units, which were definitely well trained[18] and inflicted significant casualties on Hezbollah and other organizations.[19] The same was true for the Iraqi and Afghan army; while there is no doubt that many Afghan recruits got poor training, some units were much better – not to mention the commandos, which apparently were good enough that Britain considered incorporating them as a Gurkha-style unit in the British army.[20] The Taliban's assassination campaign against ANA pilots shows us that at least the air force fighting men and women were good enough for the Taliban to target them personally in the fear that they would be a formidable foe.

Moreover, some of the officers in the collapsing forces were trained in the best military academies in the Western world (e.g. Sandhurst), which have decades of experience in

[16] Hosmer, S. T. et al. "The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders". Santa Monica: RAND, 1978, V.

[17] Veith G. J. "Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973–1975". New York: Encounter Books, 2013, 496.

[18] Some SLA soldiers were directly trained by the Israelis, including some who passed officer courses in the IDF's school of officers (BAHAD 1). While the 5-week officer course for SLA candidates was shorter than the IDF's combat courses (12 to 24 weeks, depending on the branch), SLA officers usually had prior experience, at least at first, and didn't have to learn to maneuver within a combined arms unit, therefore shortening the effective length of training needed. Data in Author's possession.

[19] In a military bookkeeping trick, Israel tended to separate the casualties list of IDF soldiers and SLA soldiers, but usually did not bother differentiating enemy fighters killed by SLA from enemy fighters killed by the IDF, thus creating the impression of better casualty ratio. In reality, not only did the SLA suffer more casualties than the IDF, but it killed a significant amount of enemy fighters. Classified IDF document written by the author, 1998.

[20] Atlamazoglou, S. "After taking in Afghan commandos, the British military may try to build another elite special-operations force". Business Insider, 20 December 2021. https://www.businessinsider.com/british-army-considering-gurkha-style-unit-with-afghan-special-forces-2021-12

bringing officers from all sorts of countries to a reasonable level.[21] The Afghan National Army even had the "National Military Academy of Afghanistan" and the "Afghan National Army Officer Academy (ANAOA)," modelled after West Point and Sandhurst respectively. ANAOA, the brainchild of a Sandhurst-trained Afghan army's Chief of General Staff, was built by the UK, had British and Australian trainers to "train the trainers," as well as an Afghan staff with serious credentials. The first commandant was Soviet-trained and studied at the Indian Staff College; his deputy and Chief of Staff attended the UK Staff College, with the COS being a graduate of Sandhurst too. *The Spectator* proudly reported in 2013 on it as "The one good thing we're leaving in Afghanistan… a remarkable and radical experiment in social engineering".[22] From its inception in 2013 to the time the whole training was turned over to the ANA in late 2020 it already had 5,000 graduates – some seventy five percent of Afghan officers.

Some trainers complained about the quality of Afghan officers or about cultural problems, and some argued that their mission was "to make the Afghans good enough to deliver the training – not to produce the best officers". This view led one scholar to conclude in 2013 that it "makes it necessary for the international military to forego their usual procedures and instead settle for lesser goals".[23] However, in 2020 General Nick Carter, Chief of British Defence Staff, said that the Afghans "have proven to be more than capable of taking ownership," as their mentors did "the most impressive job."[24] He called the ANAOA "one of the proudest achievements of UK forces in Afghanistan."[25] As late as July 2021, almost exactly a month before Kabul fell to the Taliban, the UK Ministry of Defence was still boasting about the ANAOA.[26] The Afghan Army also had its artillery and armour courses run by Western trainers – it was not just those poor bastards in the infantry and the militias. It is well known that a good officer can mould poor soldiers into cohesive fighting units – 'Sheep led by a lion'. Theoretically, this should have happened with the ANA. It did not.

If poor training is to blame, should Western militaries point the finger at themselves, and why did many Western officers and trainers not recognize the problem beforehand?

If lack of training is to blame, the Taliban would probably have never won, and neither would have ISIS or Hamas (Hezbollah, which was trained by Iranians as early as 1985, is an exception). Generally, the adversaries of the Western-trained forces – those who, in the end, won or nearly won – were hardly ninja fighters themselves. They have a mixture of well-trained fighters and poorly trained volunteers, can be no less messy than 'pro-government'

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[21] E.g. UK Ministry of Defence, "Afghan general visits Sandhurst," 6 February 2014. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/afghan-general-visits-sandhurst At that time there were 7 Afghan candidates in Sandhurst, and the General himself had been a Sandhurst Cadet, and had passed an impressive list of military Courses in the US, Egypt and other countries.

[22] Foreman, J. "The one good thing we're leaving in Afghanistan". 2 November 2013. https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-one-good-thing-we-re-leaving-in-afghanistan

[23] Christensen, M. M. and Jakobsen, C. O. "Cultural Frictions: Mentoring the Afghan Army at 'Sandhurst in the Sand'". Small Wars Journal, 19 November 2015; Jarstad, A. K. "Unpacking the friction in local ownership of security sector reform in Afghanistan". Peacebuilding, 1(3), 2013, 387.

[24] "Afghan National Army Officers Academy graduates its 5000th officer". 10 September 2020. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177902.htm

[25] General Sir Nick Carter: "General Sir Nick Carter congratulates 5,000th Afghan Officer graduating from 'Sandhurst In The Sand'". The Telegraph, August 30, 2020. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/30/general-sir-nick-carter-congratulates-5000th-afghan-officer/

[26] UK Ministry of Defence voices of the armed forces, "'Sandhurst in the sand' explained," 14 July 2021. https://medium.com/voices-of-the-armed-forces/sandhurst-in-the-sand-explained-fb8ed745cecc

forces. The British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee wrote in 2011, that the "Afghan insurgency is a mix of Islamist factions, power-hungry warlords, criminals and tribal groupings, all pursuing their own economic, political, criminal and social agendas and interests, from local feuds to establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate."[27] Those insurgents fought badly many times, clashed among themselves, evaded a fight with Western forces even without any heavy weapons, and were by no means a first-rate military force.[28] In the end, however, those forces prevailed and the Afghan Army collapsed. Even if we attribute much of their success to Pakistani intelligence service,[29] nobody argues that not all or even most Taliban (whatever the term means) were trained in Pakistan or at all. Their success in assassinations, blackmail, spreading rumours etc., was not the result of a PSYOP manual or professional military training.

If we dismiss or minimize the role of training in the success of irregulars employing hybrid tactics, we cannot attribute much of the failure of Western-trained or Western-equipped forces to poor training. An argument that holds to its own; a Western-supported force must be highly trained, yet none of that is required to defeat it, just is not convincing.

CORRUPT?

Last but not least, it was argued that those forces collapsed because of corruption. Indeed, there was much corruption in most of them if not in all of them.[30] Yet, even that explanation is not sufficient, as many military forces suffered from corruption but were reasonably effective, and others managed to recover from corruption, over time. Other forces managed to benefit from corruption. Marshall Dostum in Afghanistan was one of the most notorious and corrupt warlords that the country managed to produce (by no means a feat itself) yet he was also, for a time, one of the strongest and most powerful warlords.[31] The insurgents in Afghanistan, as noted earlier, included quite a few corrupt warlords. In Zimbabwe, despite

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[27] UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee – Fourth Report, The UK's foreign policy approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan. 9 February 2011, Ch. 5 (103). https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmfaff/514/51410.htm

[28] Former British officer Emile Simpson argued that the war in Afghanistan was a "Mosaic conflict" in which there is "a multitude of sub-narratives" it would be wrong to divide the many actors into pro-government and Taliban, as many were on their own sides and switched loyalties as needed, and "tactical actions often need to be considered primarily in terms of their local political effect". Emile Simpson "War from the ground up: Twenty first century combat as politics". Oxford: Oxford University press, 2018, 93., 97. This may be true, but in 2021, when Afghan National army collapsed, it collapsed in the face of a Taliban assault, where all those insurgents managed to act towards a unified goal.

[29] E.g. Riedel, B. "Pakistan's problematic victory in Afghanistan". Brookings Institute, August 24, 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/24/pakistans-problematic-victory-in-afghanistan/

[30] In 2019 the Afghan Police chief Khoshal Sadat apparently tried to do something about police corruption, and among other actions fired 30 of 34 provincial police chiefs, eliminating some road blocks which were used for extortion, etc. In the long run, apparently it was either too late or not enough or both. Hamid Shalizi "New commander takes on corruption 'mess' in Afghan police". Reuters, June 4, 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-police-idUSKCN1T51UC

[31] On Dostum see Williams, B. G. "The Last Warlord: The Life and Legend of Dostum, the Afghan Warrior Who Led US Special Forces to Topple the Taliban Regime". Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013. See Also Emran Feroz "Afghan Warlord's Promotion Highlights the Bankruptcy of America's Longest War". Foreign Policy, 17 July 2020. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/17/afghan-warlord-abdul-rashid-dostum-power-sharing-war/

high levels of corruption, the Army was a quite effective fighting force.[32] In the Korean war, the South Korean army and government were probably no less corrupt than the Afghan government and army,[33] and were quite close to collapse on some occasions. The country itself was not westernized by any means: until 1970, the GDP per capita of North Korea and South Korea was almost identical, and it was a brutal dictatorship well into the 1980s.

Yet in the end, despite the fact that corruption was rife in higher echelons and the political echelon, the military survived, and transformed into an effective force with US help. The FARC in Columbia gave a hard time to government forces for decades, despite the fact that it became effectively a corrupt, for-profit force masquerading as an ideological guerrilla movement. One of its leaders, Géner García Molina ("John 40") benefited so much from drug shipping that he built himself a guitar-shaped pool in one of his farms.[34] Even Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian army ventured into the business of drugs, both to subsidize their operations and to make some of the high-level commanders very rich.[35] Yet Hezbollah is considered an efficient fighting organization and the Syrian army gained the upper hand in the ongoing civil war with Russian help.

This hints that the problem, tactically speaking, is not corruption *per se,* but that the character of corruption in modern-day Western-supported forces does not enable them to be effective, while other forces, corrupted all the same, still manage to fight. So the problem lies at least as much with the character of Western support as with corruption itself. It seems that the ways in which Western support creates corruption, or enables corrupt leaders to exploit it, are detrimental to warfighting abilities, more so than corruption in similar forces not supported by Western forces. If, as alleged, American commanders and advisors knew all too well the character and scale of corruption and ignored it, then again it becomes the question of Western actions, not just of corrupted locals.

WESTERN SUPPORT AS A DETRIMENT

To make matters worse, not only are all those explanations insufficient on their own, it seems that modern Western help hastens the collapse of forces that previously managed to fight on their own. To be blunt: forces which fought for years without Western support tend to collapse fast after they have become accustomed to Western support – or should we say backup.

Dostum's forces in Afghanistan, when Western aid was behind the scenes or non-existent, managed to fight for and against the Taliban for years, before his defeat in 1998; in 2001, Dostum's forces defeated thousands of Taliban fighters with American air support; yet Dos-

[32] E.g. Young, E. T. "Chefs and Worried Soldiers: Authority and Power in the Zimbabwe National Army". Armed Forces and Society, 24(1), Fall 1997, 133–149.

[33] More on that later.

[34] "Los corridos del capo de la guerrilla". El Spectator (Columbia), May 3, 2009. https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/los-corridos-del-capo-de-la-guerrilla-article-138934/

[35] Hubbard, B. and Saad, H. "On Syria's Ruins, a Drug Empire Flourishes". New York Times, 5 December 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/05/world/middleeast/syria-drugs-captagon-assad.html; Levitt, M. "Hezbollah's Corruption Crisis Runs Deep". Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 20 July 2018. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hezbollahs-corruption-crisis-runs-deep; Ottolenghi, E. "The Laundromat: Hezbollah's Money-Laundering and Drug-Trafficking Networks in Latin America". Ramat Gan: Begin-Sadat Center, July 2021. https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/194web.pdf

tum's forces in 2021, when he was the Afghan vice president, did not slow the Taliban one bit. He unceremoniously escaped from the country, leaving his mansion and belongings behind.

Ahmad Shah Masoud fought the Soviets, and then other factions, and finally the Taliban, for years; he was assassinated just days prior to September 11th, 2001, yet his forces were still strong enough to play a part ousting the Taliban, with the newly-acquired US fire support. His son's forces, on the other hand, collapsed rapidly in the face of the final Taliban offensive. The mighty Panjshir valley, with which the Soviets had significant problems capturing and holding in the days of the father, due to the topography and the strong resistance, proved virtually no obstacle to the much-weaker Taliban with limited air support in the form of drones, some probably operated by Pakistani intelligence. The resistance in the Panjshir valley collapsed within a few days of the beginning of the Taliban's September 2021 offensive, and the resistance is, at the moment, limited to a very low-key guerrilla operations.[36]

THE SHORT LONG WAR: ANALYSING THE WESTERN WAY OF FAILURE

It seems that all the explanations for the rapid collapse of Western-trained local militaries hold explanatory power only with one additional factor: Western-dependency. In other words, it is the modern Western way of war that finds it extremely hard to produce local armed forces capable of holding their own when facing a hybrid enemy with some offensive capability, which wages (at least in all the above cases) a hybrid campaign against them, with a mixture of semi-conventional assault, assassinations, guerrilla warfare, terror, political influence and psychological warfare.

I would argue this happens because the West tends to fight a specific kind of war, which can be dubbed the Short Long War.

The Western forces usually come in with overwhelming superiority. Sometimes (as Israel found in the second Lebanon war) it may not be enough even to crush an outgunned and outmanned opponent; but other times, as happened to the PLO in Lebanon in 1982, Saddam's forces in 2003, or the Taliban themselves in 2001, the Western steamroller crushes everything it faces. This is the "Short War". But when that period finishes, Western forces try to de-escalate ASAP and turn the power over to friendly local actors. It almost never works, and we get the long, long war. And then the Western forces leave, and their allies collapse.

[36] "Exclusive: Taliban Claim to Have Conquered Entire Panjshir". Tasmin News Agency, 12 September 2021, https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2021/09/12/2570233/exclusive-taliban-claim-to-have-conquered-entire-panjshir; Huylebroek, J. and Blue, V. J. "In Panjshir, Few Signs of an Active Resistance, or Any Fight at All". New York Times, 17 September 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/17/world/asia/panjshir-resistance-taliban-massoud.html; "Ahmad Massoud's forces clash with the Taliban in Kapisa province". Islamic World News, 8 December 2021. https://english.iswnews.com/21711/ahmad-massouds-forces-clash-with-the-taliban-in-kapisa-province/ "Panjshir: Pak Air Force dropped bombs via drones to help Taliban, say reports". Hindustan Times, 6 September 2021. https://www.hindustantimes.com/videos/world-news/panjshir-pakistan-air-force-dropped-bombs-via-drones-to-help-taliban-say-reports-afghanistan-101630909614845.html; Qazizai, F. "The Drone Unit that Helped the Taliban Win the War". New Lines Magazine, 15 September 2021. https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/the-drone-unit-that-helped-the-taliban-win-the-war/

The Western forces try their best to avoid this situation. The idea – ever since the 1990s[37] – of the "exit strategy" became one of the most important questions for a Western force: do not go in unless you know how to get out. Incidentally, the more the term became popular, the less successful the exit strategies were.

However, as Michael J. Forsyth argued recently,[38] "exit strategy" as an all-compassing demand causes derogation of strategy. First, instead of asking how strategic goals would be best served, it asks how we leave; second, it undermines itself by telling enemies and potential allies alike, that we *will* leave and that leaving is our priority, whatever we will say to the contrary. The surprising thing is not that many people oppose Western and pro-Western forces; it is that the latter actually exists at all, when people know that the West will leave and their problems would stay.

The need for an "exit strategy" creates incentives to shift aims and hasten developments: achieve a semblance of nation-building so one can have a nation to which transfer the responsibilities to, or friendly actors capable of acting on their own. Therefore, for example, the existence of an Afghan government and an Afghan army capable of fending off the Taliban was not an objective question; it was a condition for an exit strategy. No wonder that the coalition forces argued, and perhaps even believed, that it was the case: without that, there would be no exit strategy. As US President Biden explained on 8th July 2021: "With our NATO allies and partners, we have trained and equipped… nearly 300,000 current serving members of the military… hundreds of thousands more… trained over the last two decades. We provided our Afghan partners with all the tools … training, and equipment of any modern military. We provided advanced weaponry. And we're going to continue to provide funding and equipment. And we'll ensure they have the capacity to maintain their air force".[39] In short, the Afghans are capable to hold for themselves. This was the basis for complete US withdrawal. It was not only Biden's opinion of course,[40] and not only in 2021. Take for example the quotes above about ANAOA, or General John Campbell's, ISAF commander in 2015, who argued that "Under the tutelage of Coalition advisors and trainers, and resourced and funded by the international community, the ANDSF have grown and matured in less than a decade into a modern, professional force of all volunteers… they can and will take the tactical fight from here".[41] Some were concerned but still optimistic: General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., Commander of CENTCOM, aired concern in April 2021 about "the ability of the Afghan military to hold on after we leave, the ability of the Afghan Air Force to fly, in particular, after we remove the support for those aircraft".[42] Yet in late July 2021, he said that the "Afghan Air Force is actually carrying out a lot of strikes and is having very good success against Taliban forces… the Afghan Air Force is

37 Rose: "The Exit Strategy Delusion".

38 https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/its-time-stop-using-term-exit-strategy

39 "Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan". 8 July 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-draw-down-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/

40 E.g. US Department of Defense, "Secretary of Defense Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Milley Press Briefing". 21 July 2021. https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2702966/secretary-of-defense-austin-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-of-staff-gen-mille/

41 General John F. Campbell "Operation Freedom's Sentinel and our continued security investment in Afghanistan". 5 October 2015. https://www.army.mil/article/156517/operation_freedoms_sentinel_and_our_continued_security_investment_in_afghanistan

42 Ali, I. and Stewart, P. "U.S. general concerned about capability of Afghan security forces". Reuters, April 22, 2021.

the significant asymmetric advantage that the Afghans have in this fight, and I believe they're applying it very effectively".[43]

This official view ignored many warning signs. For example, a classified US report warned in January 2021 that the Afghan Air Force is not sustainable without direct Western support and Western contractors maintaining its planes.[44] By the time General McKenzie was praising the Afghan Air Force, its condition had already deteriorated severely, and it was low on ammunition.[45]

In July 2021, less than a month before the collapse, another US report found that the US failed to make Afghan forces' institutions accountable, with the result that some of the institutions were "incapable of independently performing the most basic tasks".[46] The same could apparently be said on many of the ANA's combat forces, who collapsed, deserted, made local deals, or negotiated surrender in the face of the Taliban's poor-man's-blitzkrieg.[47] To paraphrase Upton Sinclair, it was difficult to get western countries to admit that local forces cannot hold their own when Western strategy depends of them being able to do so.[48]

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[43] US Central Command, "Gen McKenzie: Press Availability, July 25, 2021, Kabul, Afghanistan". 27 July 2021. https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/Transcripts/Article/2708310/gen-mckenzie-press-availability-july-25-2021-kabul-afghanistan/

[44] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, SIGAR 21-14 Audit Report, Afghan Air Forces: DOD Has Taken Steps to Develop Afghan Aviation Capability but Continued U.S. Support is Needed to Sustain Forces, January 2021 (de-classified January 2022). https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-21-14-AR.pdf

[45] By the end of June 2021, Afghan helicopters had to be sent abroad to be repaired. Five of the seven types of aircraft within Afghan inventory suffered significant reductions in their operational readiness – its AC-208 light attack aircraft readiness was 93% in April 2021, but only 63% in June 2021; the UH-60 Helicopter readiness level plummeted from 77% in April to 39% in June. It is clear that the situation continued to deteriorate further, and it is questionable just how many aircraft could the Afghan Air Force operate effectively in August 2021, right before the collapse. Losey, S. "After US Withdrawal, Can Afghan Air Force Keep Planes Flying?" Military.com, 29 July 2021. https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/07/29/after-us-withdrawal-can-afghan-air-force-keep-planes-flying.html See also Stewart, P. "Special Report: Pilots detail chaotic collapse of the Afghan Air Force". Reuters, 29 December 2021.

[46] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, "SIGAR 22-03 Audit Report Conditions on Afghanistan Security Forces Funding: The Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan [CSTC-A] Rarely Assessed Compliance With or Enforced Funding Conditions, Then Used an Undocumented Approach". October 2021. https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-22-03-AR.pdf

[47] Lieven, A. "Why Afghan Forces So Quickly Laid Down Their Arms". Politico, 16 August 2021. https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/08/16/afghanistan-history-taliban-collapse-504977; Ruttig, T. and Sadat, S. A. "The Domino Effect in Paktia and the Fall of Zurmat: A case study of the Taliban surrounding Afghan cities". Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 August 2021. https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/the-domino-effect-in-paktia-and-the-fall-of-zurmat-a-case-study-of-the-taleban-surrounding-afghan-cities/

[48] A word of caution: as in all post-facto explanations, knowing what happens makes it easier to assume that this was the only possible outcome. Yet, As Roberta Wohlstetter said about the Pearl Harbor surprise, "it is only to be expected that the relevant signals, so clearly audible after an event, will be partially obscured before the event by surrounding noise" (Wohlstetter, R. Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962, 397). For an example, in 4th August 2021, an International Institute for Strategic Studies report quoted and April 2021 US intelligence report arguing that "the Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws," but the worse-case scenario drawn from the report was not Afghan collapse but "Descent into civil war" (Barry, B. "Three scenarios for Afghanistan's future".). IISS, 4 August 2021. https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2021/08/afghanistan-us-nato-withdrawal-taliban. With no hindsight, the collapse was less obvious than after it happened.

The Western approach leads to a very expensive way to make "war on the cheap". The main force is always the Western force, which is admittedly much more professional than local forces, and therefore the Western forces do most of the fighting, and consider local forces next to useless. As culture tends to Trump Doctrine, creating Western-like forces where none existed face significant obstacles. No Western country would want to declare that it would stay for a generation or two (even if, in the case of Afghanistan, the coalition DID stay for a generation), and pressure mounts to declare those forces capable and transfer control to them.

But those forces can rarely hold their own, and if the Western ground forces leave, the Western countries still have to provide air support and logistical support. If and when they do not, or even if the local forces have a good reason to believe that would be the case (for example, when the US ignored virtually all Taliban violations of the February 2020 US-Taliban agreement, short of targeting western forces), the local forces collapse. The bitter irony is that the West attempts to build independent forces by creating full dependence, so when the time comes, time and again such forces collapse in the face of theoretically inferior enemy[49] employing hybrid campaigns of warfighting, terrorism, diplomacy, and psychological warfare.

IMPLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY, LIMITED GOALS, NO EXIT STRATEGY: A NON-WESTERN APPROACH

Contrary to the West, Iran or Russia tend to approach the problem from a very different angle. This is not to say they are always successful or that either of those countries have a magic bullet to win a war;[50] The Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and the disastrous intervention in Chechnya in the first Chechen war (the Russians did win the second war, a few years later) testify to that fact.[51]

Yet in general, the Russian and Iranian approach is very different from the Western approach.

First, there is no exit strategy. Both Russia and Iran get involved in places where they want to keep their influence for an unlimited period of time. The cases in which Iran and Russia intervene are mostly those in which they want to stay. Iran does not want an independent Lebanon, which would be sympathetic to Iran but on equal footing; it wants to make sure that Lebanon would advance Iranian interests. Russia went into Crimea to get the peninsula under Russian control; the exact form of control is less important than the fact that such control exists.

Another important part of the Russian hybrid warfare tactics is what should be called "implausible deniability". Whereas "plausible deniability" of the past sought to enable a country to obfuscate the situation and cause confusion, either among its enemies or among

[49] Some commentators noted that the Afghan's security forces strength was in actuality way lower than the theoretical 300,000, and maybe half that number (Danner, C. "Why Afghanistan's Security Forces Suddenly Collapsed". New York Intelligencer, 17 August 2021. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/08/why-afghanistans-security-forces-suddenly-collapsed.html), yet even that number was almost twice as much as the number of Taliban fighters.

[50] As this article is reaching its final stages in late February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in almost fully conventional war, not very hybrid, and, at least in the first few days, very partly successful.

[51] Interesting enough, in Ukraine in 2014 one could find Chechens on both sides.

its own citizens. In one such case, the Suez War of 1956, Israel colluded with Britain and France that the former would launch an attack on Egypt to allow the latter to intervene against Egypt, ostensibly to protect the freedom of shipping in the Suez Canal. The aim was to convince the international community that Britain and France are not aggressors acting for their own interests but protectors of peace. The attempt failed, but its goal was to create an impression, advance a claim and confuse Egypt and its supporters at to what exactly was happening.

In contrast, operations such as the "polite green men" in Crimea with their unmarked uniforms did not convince anybody, and were not, it seems, meant to convince anybody. Everybody knew Russia was involved. Russia knew that everybody knew that Russia was involved. And everybody knew that Russia knew that everybody knew that Russia was involved. (Indeed, it did not take much for a Russian town to erect a statue to honour those men).[52] The goal of the denials was very different: to make sure that, since nothing could be proved in the short term, to prevent other countries from having to take steps that, had Russia acted openly, they may have felt obliged to take, but really did not want to take. It did not matter what people believed, as long as there was no legal proof that would force them to act.

Implausible deniability is only one part of information operations: while some parts cannot be hidden, the use of disinformation and the creation of discontent is an important part of any military operation.

Of course, Russian and Iranian goals depend on the self-estimation of their power. It is reasonable to argue that if the balance of power was different, they would have acted differently. Still, they did not. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta.*

The so-called "Gerasimov doctrine," which many in the West believed is a blueprint for Russian action, was in fact nothing more than the Russian army commander explaining the character of modern war.[53] Yet the reason so many people bought into it was the fact the Russia, despite all of its problems, proved to be quite adept in using relatively meagre (that is, relative to the US military and other Western forces) resources to facilitate hybrid warfare in Syria and Ukraine – and would probably continue to do so as long as it serves its interests.

When those countries employ hybrid warfare, they tend to do so for limited, clearly defined goals. As far as we know, Russia does not define its goals as "nation building," for example, even if its actions in the aftermath of the second Chechen war included large-scale reconstruction in the Chechen Republic. Iran does not care for the democratization of Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon: it cares for its influence and interests. The West, on the other hand, at least pretends to aim for democratization and nation building, therefore creating a goal, which is extremely hard to achieve.

Whereas the West regards the employment of local forces as the final stage after the Western army has done their part, Russia tends to employ local forces or mercenaries as a substitute for regular forces, and Iran employs local militias and organizations in places where it does not want or cannot employ regular forces.

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[52] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Russia Unveils Monument To 'Polite People' Behind Crimean Invasion". 7 May 2015. https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-monument-polite-people-crimea-invasion/27000320.html

[53] Galeotti, M. "I'm Sorry for Creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'". Foreign Policy, 5 March 2018. https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/

This also means that, on a whole, Russian or Iranian-supported local forces tend to be more independent than Western-supported forces. Even the Afghan army of the Soviet period, which collapsed after the collapse of the USSR and the lack of support thereof, fought on its own without Soviet support for almost three years, and then collapsed in a few months after Dostum defected to the Mujaheddin, which is still a better result than most cases mentioned here.

On the other hand, success in hybrid warfare does not mean that the forces employing it will win in a conventional war. An outstanding example is the botched Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was characterized by mediocre planning and bad execution. The Russians had basically ditched their own long-term strategy in Ukraine, which was limited in its goals, used mostly local forces to achieve them, and did not count on quick victory, in the failed hope of achieving a lightning victory and rapid regime change against a weaker enemy. The gamble has backfired remarkably, showing that performance in one way of war does not necessarily lend itself to different ways of war – in a way, a mirror picture of the Western habit of succeeding in rapid military campaigns only to botch the post-war situation.

THE ROLE OF AIR SUPPORT

The case of the Afghan defence forces also heightens the fact that, in the Soviet days as well as today, there is one important aspect that Soviet/Russian-supported local forces tended to be dependent on foreign support: that is, air support or anti-air support. The collapse of the Soviet Union rendered the Afghan air force unserviceable in much the same way that the American withdrawal did to the 2nd generation Afghan Air Force. In Ukraine, the Russians concentrated many SAM batteries near the border, and then attached some to separatist units, therefore inflicting heavy toll on the Ukrainian air force (ten helicopters and twelve planes), and, by the end of August 2014, preventing it from intervening at all against the pro-Russian (or Russian) forces.[54] Hezbollah was limited in its actions by the lack of anti-air missiles, a weakness it seeks to address. The reason is pretty simple: for all the capabilities of hybrid forces and militias, they can seldom stand an aerial attack in the open, and many times they cannot consolidate power without moving through open land in large formations. For this reason the Taliban could not seize Kabul (and many other Afghan cities) until the US withdrew and most of the Afghan Air Force was out of order as a result of the assassination campaign against pilots and the withdrawal of Western contractors who maintained its planes.[55] ISIS made its biggest gains in Iraq when the Iraqi Air

[54] Miller, J. et al. "An Invasion by Any Other Name: The Kremlin's Dirty War in Ukraine". New York: Institute of Modern Russia, 17–22.; Chris Pocock "Ukraine Has Lost 22 Aircraft to Rebel Forces". AIN Online, 26 November 2014. https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/defense/2014-11-26/ukraine-has-lost-22-aircraft-rebel-forces

[55] Stewart, P. et al. "Special Report: Afghan pilots assassinated by Taliban as U.S. withdraws". Reuters, 9 July 2021; Reuters, "Afghan Air Force Pilot Killed in Kabul Bombing; Taliban Claim Responsibility". 7 August 2021.

Force still lacked any operational combat planes.[56] (The Iraqi Air Force is still dependent on contractors to maintain its planes, and suffer from chronic shortages.[57])

While many cases show that guerrillas and insurgents can survive when the other side (as is usually the case) has air superiority, under those conditions they cannot come out in the open as a significant offensive force.[58] Therefore, air support or at least aerial denial remains crucial to the employment of local forces. While non-Western-supported forces are more independent than Western-supported forces, dependence cannot be fully eliminated, as air support may not win a war, but the lack of it can definitely lose it.

WHEN LOCAL FORCES SUCCEEDED

The failure of Western forces in building or supporting local forces is not predetermined: Western forces have done it successfully in the past, and even in recent years the US has one success story – the Kurds in the Kurdistan area – so some lessons can be learned, cautionary and limited as they may be.

A. The British Empire's approach

Britain, as it is well known, had a long tradition of training local forces, some of which became known all over the world as excellent fighting forces. And, for the most part, Britain did it not by deploying 'advisors' or 'trainers' to train a fully foreign force, but by putting those forces under British command, and training them as British soldiers, with British officers (in many places, fluent in local languages, as a precondition) being their commanders. From the Army of India to the successful counterinsurgency campaign in Oman (1974–1976), British officers commanded and trained those units, sometimes down to the level of NCO's.[59] In some cases, the armies of independent countries were commanded by

[56] Wilson Center "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State". 28 October 2019. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state

[57] Jennings, G. "Iraqi F-16s log first combat mission since return of contractor support". Jane's, 18 November 2020. https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/iraqi-f-16s-log-first-combat-mission-since-return-of-contractor-support; Paul Iddon, "How Capable Is The Iraqi Air Force?" Forbes, 26 January 2022. https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2022/01/26/how-capable-is-the-iraqi-air-force; The New York Times, "Russian Jets and Experts Sent to Iraq to Aid Army". 29 June 2014.

[58] The Houthis in Yemen are a notable example, as they managed to capture cities despite being attacked from the air and sea at the same time. Yet the size of Yemen and the great ranges involved meant that, at least at first, they were only subject to Sporadic air attacks. When trying to attack a unit or position which had close air support, they usually failed. The Houthis also have Air defense systems, some through Iran (their generous supplier of military equipment) and some which was incorporated from the Yemeni army together with tanks and other heavy equipment. Knights, M. "The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture". CTC Sentinel 11 (8), September 2018, 15–24.; Johnson T. et. al. "Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah? Iranian Proxy Development in Yemen and the Future of the Houthi Movement". Santa Monica: Rand, 2018, 51–113.; Nadimi, F. and Knights, M. "Iran's Support to Houthi Air Defenses in Yemen". Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 April 2018. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-support-houthi-air-defenses-yemen. Of course, the Houthis also use attack drones extensively as a poor man's air force.

[59] In Oman they also trained irregulars, the firqat, and provided Air support. A British Army Advisory Team (BATT) report argued than one of the keys to success was in selecting "a force of men who have their own motivation for fighting – not necessarily in tune with the aims and motivations of the advisers". Quoted in Simpson, War from the ground up, 152.

British officers who were seconded to those armies (as in Oman and the Jordanian Arab Legion before 1956). In most cases, officers and NCOs who were trained under this British method managed to rise in the ranks in the end and finally, as the result of independence or planned advancement, became at least reasonably capable fighting forces – from the Indian army to the Kenya Rifles. Even the African forces of the rebel colony of Rhodesia, who served the (mostly) white regime against the nationalist guerrillas of ZANLA and ZIPRA, were capable enough so that Robert Mugabe kept them as the backbone of the army when he became the country's ruler in 1980.[60] No Black Rhodesian unit ever disintegrated, even when uncertainty prevailed and the future looked grim. Indeed, there was hardly any force in Africa that was as good as those soldiers. There were some failures: the Uganda army after the independence was mutiny-prone, due to soldiers' dissatisfaction, some mistakes by British commanders, the very late start in training African officers, and government policy which preferred tribal loyalty over professionalism. Rapid expansion and later violent purges of the army left it in a sorry state, and it collapsed in the Uganda-Tanzania war of 1979.[61] But generally, to have *units* which were trained as British *units* with British personnel serving in them, while having their own problems, proved itself time and again as an effective way to build military forces: when you command, you know the local language, you set the rules and you *are* part of the unit, the chances of success are better. Of course, the heyday of such approach was during the imperial period of the United Kingdom, as it necessitates no limited-timeframe power transfer; but as the case of Oman has shown, in some conditions an effective military could be built even in an independent country where no colonial force (or any significant military force) had existed.

B. From corrupt to capable in a few decades: The ROK army

Another successful case of army-building, was the Korean armed forces. On the onset of the Korean War, much of the army was not more than a constabulary; less than a third of the units accomplished battalion-level training before the war broke out. Many formations collapsed in the face of North Korean onslaught. Corruption was endemic. In one particularly notorious case in the winter of 1951, known as the "National Defence Corps Incident," tens of thousands of recruits to the newly-created Korean National Defence Corps, starved to death or succumbed to disease, as a result of corruption, embezzlement of funds, and mismanagement.[62] Other forms of corruption were present too: for example, in order to dis-

[60] Howard, M. T. "Allies of Expedience: The Retention of Black Rhodesian Soldiers in the Zimbabwe National Army". Journal of Southern African Studies, January 2022, 1–19.

[61] Dinwiddy, H. "The Ugandan Army and Makerere under Obote, 1962–71". African Affairs 82 (326), Jan. 1983, 43–59.; Omara-Otunnu, A. "Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890–1985". London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987, 28–144.

[62] The government executed five commanders of the corps, which also helped it ignore the fact that some of the embezzled funds went to the south Korean president's political fund (though the president himself probably was not involved). Haruki, W. "The Korean War: An International History". New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014, 175–178.; New York Times, "50,000 KOREANS DIE IN CAMPS IN SOUTH; Government Inquiry Confirms Abuse of Draftees – General Held for Malfeasance". 13 June 1951; Roehrig, T. "The Prosecution of Former Military Leaders in Newly Democratic Nations: The Cases of Argentina". Greece, and South Korea, Jefferson: McFarland, 2002, 138–139.

rupt an investigation of a massacre committed by South Korean soldiers in February 1951, "The ROK military staged an attack by men disguised as communist guerrillas".[63]

The combat performance of many units was deplorable. A 1951 analysis of the ROK armed forces found that it suffered not only "leadership deficit at all levels of the officer corps but also serious training problems, shortages of weapons and equipment, poor logistical support and, most seriously, a lack of confidence".[64]

Had the US at the end of the Korean War transferred the power, Afghanistan-style, and left, it is almost certain that today we would have a united Korea, under communist rule. But it did not happen. Instead, the US stayed – US and UN forces are stationed in Korea to this day – and General James Van Fleet, Commander of the 8th army in 1951–1953, went on to build an effective training system in the Korean Army. He was concerned that "the primary problem in the ROK is to secure competent leadership in their army," otherwise, supplying weapons and equipment would be "a criminal waste of badly needed equipment".[65] To solve these problems, he decided on a multi-tiered approach. He supervised unit training and the creation of military colleges. He sent virtually all Korean army units to concentrated training with American advisors (unlike the advisory system in Afghanistan, where "we also failed to properly institutionalize advising large-scale conventional forces until far too late," as retired US Army Colonel Mark Jason wrote).[66] Van Fleet created a centralized military school system, trained units at brigade-level operations, supplied the ROK with both heavy weapons and trainers, who were responsible to all parts of the training, sent officers to US schools for long periods of time[67] and established the Korea Military Academy and the Command and General Staff College.[68] In a relatively short period of time, said then-ROK corps commander general Paik Sun-yup, "Units that completed the course lost 50 percent fewer men and equipment in combat… revealed an *élan* and confidence quite superior to what they had shown before".[69]

The success in re-training the Korean army and making it a professional force was due to several factors: the training of both soldiers and officers in the same time, which enabled them to reach a sufficient level relatively quickly; the cooperation with the Korean leadership, with all its problems, to commit it to the program; and a long-term commitment. While as early as 1952 the US started looking to expand the Korean army in order to enable US forces to return home, it was only after the ROK army was already much better compared to the beginning of the war. The US kept a significant force in South Korea, its air force and naval air power remained committed to the defence of Korea for years to come. ROK's then-president Syngman Rhee told a US senator that "we do not want you to sacrifice your own boys. All we ask for is… equipment and that you train our own people".[70] That, and

[63] Haruki. The Korean War, 176.

[64] Jongham Na "The Transformation of the Republic of Korea Army: Wartime expansion and doctrine changes, 1951–1953" in Blaxland, J. et al. (eds.). In from the Cold: Reflections on Australia's Korean War. Acton: Australian National University Press, 2020, 99.

[65] Haruki. The Korean War, 177.

[66] Jason, M. "What We Got Wrong in Afghanistan". The Atlantic, August 12, 2021.

[67] See Hurh, W. M. "'I Will Shoot Them from My Loving Heart': Memoir of a South Korean Officer in the Korean War". Jeferson: MacFarland, 2012.

[68] Na. "The Transformation," 101–109.

[69] Park, I. "The Dragon from the Stream: the ROK Army in transition and the Korean War, 1950–1953". PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2002, 151.

[70] Ibid. 113.

the US commitment, which meant that the ROK knew it would not have to fight on its own. The ROK army went from a "small and outdated Asian military force" to a "well-trained and effectively equipped first-class army. No longer Asiatic, it had become westernized".[71] This transformation has shown that despite cultural differences, corruption, lack of democracy and other assorted problems, an inferior local military *could* be, relatively fast, become a good fighting force, capable of taking large-scale offensive operations on its own and inflicting significant casualties on the North Korean forces.

Yet, without a long-term US commitment to Korea, all this would have been in vain. The ROK was poor and corrupt (until 1970 there was virtually no difference in the GDP per capita in North and South Korea), authoritarian and far from being a full democracy, and in 1961 suffered a military coup, other coups and assassinations followed; it took almost three decades until free parliamentary elections were held. As late as 1980, the army killed hundreds of civilians during the "Gwangju uprising," and committed numerous atrocities. Democratization and human rights did not come easily to the military.

But the combination of a massive training program, significant equipment supply, and a long-term commitment created effective forces, which in due time turned into the effective forces of a democracy. It is hard to imagine that, had the US withdrawn all its forces and its air support from Korea in 1953 instead of being committed, the ROK would have survived. The same goes for any attempt to turn it into a full liberal democracy in the 1950s.

For years after the war, the US financed most of the ROK budget, including the full cost of the army. It has done so despite the corruption and the misallocation of aid funds, and despite the American feeling, attributed to President Eisenhower, that aid to Korea was "Pouring aid down a rat hole"[72] – much assistance goes in, very little progress goes out. By 1963, "Many American officials were [still] predicting that [South] Korea would never get off the dole".[73] And in the end, it was a success.

C. Partially supported and more independent: The Kurds

The last successful example we will deal with is the Kurdish forces of Kurdistan. Indeed, they were trained in the 1990s by US trainers, and the US enforced the no-fly zone which enabled them to survive against Saddam Hussein's forces. The two main factions fought a limited civil war until 1998. When the US invasion of Iraq came, US ground forces did not fight their war for them. Indeed, even in 2003 the number of American soldiers on the ground was miniscule in Northern Iraq compared to the Kurds. It was not by design, but a constraint: since Turkey did not allow US forces to use it as a base for invasion, there was no way that a large-scale invasion could take place. Instead of the planned attack by the 4th Infantry Division and other forces, the US had to rely on the Kurdish militias, together

[71] Ibid. 115

[72] Eberstadt, N. "Western Aid: The Missing Link for North Korea's Economic Revival?" in Park, K. and Snyder, S. (eds.) "North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society, New York: Rowman and Littlefield". 2013, 144.; See also Seth, M. J. "An Unpromising Recovery: South Korea's Post-Korean War Economic Development: 1953–1961". Education about Asia 18(3), 2013, 42–45.

[73] Eberstadt, N. "Policy and Economic Performance in Divided Korea during the Cold War Era: 1945–91". Washington D.C.: the AEI Press, 2010, 228., n. 10.

with US Special Forces, CIA teams, and limited air support, which was still significant.[74] During operation "Viking Hammer," several thousands of Kurdish *Peshmergah* fighters and a few dozen American soldiers and CIA men, nearly destroyed the *Ansar Al Islam* Salafi group. (Its remains would continue to fight as insurgents, but with much less success and influence, until merging with the Islamic State in 2014.) They inflicted hundreds of casualties while suffering only three killed and 23 wounded[75] in an operation commanded by two American Lieutenant Colonels, Keneth Tovo and Robert Weltmeyer. Later, the mostly-Kurd forces would go on to attack Iraqi forces in North-eastern Iraq, and capture Mosul and Kirkuk (abandoned by the collapsing Iraqi army), before having to cede control of the area to David Petreus' 101st Airborne Division.[76] While it would be wrong to idolize the Peshmerga or other Kurdish forces,[77] their performance many times was not that great, and the factional strife made things worse,[78] one fact remains: they fared better in battle when many other Iraqi security forces collapsed. This has happened with the insurgency in Mosul in 2004, and again on a grand scale against ISIS in 2014: while Kurdish forces suffered defeats and withdrawals, fleeing or evacuating some parts of Northeastern Iraq too, their withdrawal did not turn into a rout, unlike what happened to many unfortunate Iraqi soldiers. It did not take long for the Kurdish fighters to reorganize and go on a counter-attack, earlier and more successfully than other Iraqi forces: they had taken control by 18th June, less than two weeks after the start of the ISIS offensive and more than a month before US air strikes began, and they repelled an ISIS attack on Kirkuk. By the end of August, they had succeeded in evacuating many Yazidis from the Sinjar area,[79] and by December (with significant US/NATO air support) they had managed to break through to the besieged Yazidis on Mt. Sinjar,[80] with some coordination between all Kurdish factions.[81] Their forces did not collapse even in the face of such disasters as the 2015 ISIS

[74] See Andrew L. et al. "Irregular Warfare: A Case Study in CIA and US Army Special Forces Operations in Northern Iraq, 2002–03". Middle East Institute, 2021. https://www.mei.edu/publications/irregular-warfare-case-study-cia-and-us-army-special-forces-operations-northern-iraq

[75] Landsford, T. "Viking Hammer, Operation" in Thomas R. Mockaitis (ed.) "The Iraq War Encyclopedia". Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013, 472.

[76] On the political side of those events see Abdulrazaq T. and Stansfield, G. "The Enemy Within: ISIS and the Conquest of Mosul". Middle East Journal 70 (4), 2016, 528–530.

[77] On the complicated nature of Kurdish forces in Iraq see Fliervoet, F. "Fighting for Kurdistan? Assessing the nature and functions of the Peshmerga in Iraq". The Hague: The Clingendael Institute, 2018. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fighting-for-kurdistan.pdf. Taking into account such factions as the Anti-Turkish PKK, the Turkish-Supported KDP, etc. complicates them even more. A direct comparison of all Turkish forces is beyond the scope of this article. See also Barfi, B. "Kurds Now Our Best Ally Against ISIS in Syria". Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 9 October 2015. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kurds-now-our-best-ally-against-isis-syria

[78] See Hasan, H. and Khaddour, K. "The Making of the Kurdish Frontier: Power, Conflict, and Governance in the Iraqi-Syrian Borderlands". Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021, 16–24.

[79] Shelton T. "If it was not for the Kurdish fighters, we would have died up there". The World, August 29, 2014. https://theworld.org/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/140827/if-it-wasn-t-the-kurdish-fighters-we-would-have-died-there

[80] "Kurds break Mount Sinjar siege against 'Islamic State,' free Yazidis". DW, 19 December 2014. https://www.dw.com/en/kurds-break-mount-sinjar-siege-against-islamic-state-free-yazidis/a-18140706

[81] Salih, M. A. "With the Islamic State gone from Sinjar, Kurdish groups battle for control". Al Monitor, December 10, 2015. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/12/iraq-kurdistan-sinjar-liberated-isis-hegemony.html

attack on Kirkuk, in which two Peshmerga generals were killed.[82] The Kurdish forces had the same incentives as any non-Sunny Iraqi (and many Sunnis as well) – group survival and status, at least – but they were probably the least dependent on Western forces, if only because they had decades-long experience of foreign forces helping them and then leaving or abandoning them.[83] They did use air support; some of them (but not all!) were trained by Western forces, and they got some of military equipment and support. Yet many of them were no more than garrison troops, incapable of offensive operations. A third of the Peshmerga Kurdish units had Western training, and another third were not trained at all (the rest were trained, but not by Western trainers). The trained Peshmerga were better than the non-trained units, and Western training improved not only their skills but their morale too[84] (unlike other forces which collapsed); but they were trained as an assistance to what they were already doing, and were much less tied to Western backing in full. They were not a Western-trained-and-equipped Kurd army in the way that there was an Iraqi army or an Afghan army. Much of their equipment was outdated. They certainly did not have better equipment than the Iraqi Army did (actually, in 2014, the Kurds improved their lot by using abandoned Iraqi Army vehicles and weapons). However, unlike the Iraqi Army, they were not *completely* dependent on the US, neither then, nor before. Even Peshmerga units with no training at all did not buckle at such speed as the 2nd division of the Iraqi Army – not before ISIS, and not, later, before the Turkish attack in Syria in 2019, after US support was removed, the YPG Kurdish militia suffered setbacks and lost much of its territory, but did not collapse.[85]

IMPLICATIONS

Strategy

The main lessons of the failures and successes of building successful local forces should be divided into strategic and tactical fields. While some of them may be limited to overseas interventions, others do seem relevant for European nations who, it must be assumed, may find themselves on the receiving side in a hybrid conflict.

The main strategic lesson seems to be that there is no effective way to do it fast. The failure of local forces is, on the whole, traceable more to the fact that they are dependent on Western backing and collapse when it is gone, than to any one specific deficiency of their own. The British army integrated locals into its own units, with British NCOs and officers

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82 "Second Kurdish commander killed as Peshmerga retake villages south of Kirkuk". Rudaw, 31 January 2015, https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/310120153

83 See Marshall, R. "The Kurds' Suffering is Rooted in Past Betrayals". Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 16, 1991. https://www.wrmea.org/1991-may-june/the-kurds-suffering-is-rooted-in-past-betrayals.html; On the history of the Kurds see McDowall, D. A "Modern History of the Kurds". 3rd Edition, London: I. B. Tauris, 2004.

84 Cancian, M. "Well trained partners are more likely to fight," Association of the United States Army, 7 May 2019. https://www.ausa.org/articles/well-trained-partners-are-more-likely-fight

85 See Aziz, L. The Syrian Kurds in the US foreign policy: long-term strategy or tactical ploy?, Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'étude des crises et conflits internationaux, 2020; Hubbard, B. et al. "Abandoned by U.S. in Syria, Kurds Find New Ally in American Foe," New York Times, 13 October 2019; al-Hilu, K. The Turkish Intervention in, Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, Fiesole: European University Institute, 2021.

who knew the local languages, trained their soldiers *and* commanded them, and stayed for a long time.

The Americans in Korea trained military forces on a massive scale at once, and then continued to support them for years, all the while accepting (for a time) levels of corruption and other excess that would be unacceptable for any Western nation, but slightly using their leverage to push things in the right direction. The US in Iraq supported existing Kurdish forces that were already accustomed to fighting on their own, without making them answer to Western forces and to be dependent on them, as happened in Kurdistan. In all cases, it was a long process.

Before getting involved with a country, what is needed is not "exit strategy," but "staying strategy". What are the goals I want to achieve? How to achieve those goals in the long run? Are they worth pursuing, when most likely it will require an indefinite support of some kind? Instead of asking beforehand "How do I get out of this," one has to ask: am I ready to get "in this" for a generation or more? How to do it with the minimal commitment possible, making the burden and cost (first and foremost in human lives, but financially too) sustainable for an indefinite period of time? This requires a very different and long-term thinking.

General Bruce Palmer said about Vietnam that "our leaders should have known that the American people would not stand still for a protracted war of an indeterminate nature with no foreseeable end to the US commitment".[86] The problem may have been more the "indeterminate nature" than the "with no foreseeable end," but even if it was – then intervening only when there is a foreseeable end means avoiding any conflict in which the enemy actually *can* fight for a long time. But this may not be possible, as the enemy has its say. Going in looking for the way out will definitely make sure that a way out would be found, though it may leave unanswered the question why to go in in the first place.

Moreover, it may not even be a faster approach: after all, the US stayed in Afghanistan for twenty years; Israel left Lebanon in 1985 just to be promptly drawn in again for fifteen years; the US left Iraq after a decade and then found out that it was somewhat premature, when ISIS attacked. If a Western nation is likely to find itself entangled for many years in the country in which it chooses to intervene, it may be better to acknowledge it beforehand and plan for a very long stay. One may argue that it is an imperialist approach; but the counter argument would be staying years while wanting to leave at the earliest moment is a *bad* imperialist approach, not a non-imperialist approach.

Of course, there are other possibilities. If Western forces are trying to reach a short-term goal (i.e. removal of Saddam) and get out, then of course it is possible. If they are trying to create a supporting force which will take some of the responsibilities while they are there, it would usually work too (it would be a good idea to plan evacuation of that force beforehand). But trying to create an independent force where none existed, doing it in a short period of time, and expecting that force to take on any determined enemy on its own, without Western air and combat support and sometimes without logistical support – it just does not work. If *that is* the end-state, it will require a long, long investment, or at least backup.

[86] Palmer, B. Jr. The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984, 190. In 2009, Retired US Colonel and military historian Andrew Bacevich used this quote to argue that a similar situation unfolds in Afghanistan. Bacevich, A. J. "Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 23, 2009". https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/BacevichTestimony090423a1.pdf

A useful analogy can be borrowed here from Michael Shellenberger's *Apocalypse Never*. Though that book is not at all related to military strategy, two of its arguments are very relevant: First, everything is *good* or *bad* not on any absolute merits but only on the basis of the available alternatives. Coal is 'polluting' if the alternative is hydroelectricity, but not if the alternative is burning wood. Second, there is no shortcut to success: "you can't go directly from making bikes to making a satellite. First, you make bikes and that allows you to make motorcycles. From there you go to automobiles. From automobiles you can start thinking about satellites".[87] Having a corrupt army (and government) is bad if the alternative is good government;[88] but it is better than no government and no army. And so forth. A tribal militia probably does not transform into a Western army without being an inefficient or corrupt army earlier etc.; and building an army while ignoring the prevailing political culture needed for a modern, Western-style army, probably will not work too well. The process, as in Korea, may be hastened and influenced. Similar things did happen in other places: for example, Ngô Quang Trưởng's 1st division of the South Vietnamese Army in Hue, 1968, and I Corps in 1972, have shown that it is indeed the case.[89] But on the whole, it will take time.

Still, building an army where none existed or transforming it is a Herculean task – and there are no shortcuts. Therefore, it may be well-nigh impossible to take a militia, or even a third-rate army, and make an independent fighting force within a short period of time; continuous support may be required for years, if only in logistics, air support and the occasional push to get the army up to better standards.[90]

B. Tactics

In addition to the strategic considerations, some tactical factors should be taken into account as well.

The first is, the importance of force protection, and family protection too. In virtually every case here, the collapse of local forces was preceded by a campaign of assassination – either of officers and soldiers, or their families, or, many times, both. Protecting the soldiers/officers off base and their families can be a hard task, but without such protection, the forces under pressure will find it hard to fight. It is no surprise that massacres of family

87 Hinh Dinh, quoted in Shellenberger, M. Apocalypse Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All, New York: HarperCollins, 2020, 104.

88 The US SIGAR 22-03 Audit noted that the Combined Security Transition Command– Afghanistan (CSTC-A), when funding Afghan Forces, "rarely assessed" compliance with the conditions it set or failed to enforce them. However, one may wonder if the problem was the lack of compliance or enforcement of the 684 conditions, 438 penalties and 102 incentives that the CSTC-A set from 2014 to 2019, or the fact that the US tried to make Afghan government and security forces run like a bureaucracy-loving American administration.

89 I Corps collapsed in 1975 mostly due to contradictory orders from the country's leaders. Not all units of the corps were up to the same standards, showing further that there are limits to the ability to hasten the cultural evolution of an army. Same goes for the career of Trưởng's predecessor, General Hoàng Xuân Lãm.

90 Sometimes armies may decline and improve very fast, as happened to the IDF – which won Israel's 1948 war of independence, degraded in three years into a force that in one battle had a full infantry battalion retreat in disarray facing a squad of Jordanian national guardsmen, and in another three years turned back into a first-rate army capable of defeating the Egyptian army in Sinai. But in that case, the cultural foundations were there, the institutions were there, and the army built itself on a dual tradition – both members of the Hagana underground and conventional soldiers who served in WWII. See Torgan, S. "No general will come out of me": training field commanders in the IDF, 1946–1956. [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Yad Ben Tsvi, 2017.

members of security forces is a common tactic: a few examples are the Lari massacre during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the Dak Son massacre during the Vietnam war,[91] killings of South Lebanon Army officers and family members, and the assassination campaign against Afghan pilots and family members. Families may have to be evacuated into special, well-protected camps – not a good solution, but probably better than leaving each member of the security forces prone to pressure, threats, or violence. People are not very likely to perform well during their work hours if they know they are likely to be killed off-hours.

Second, it is nearly impossible to stress the importance of air support to local forces. Not only, as said, does it serve as a very useful measure of signalling commitment, but it can also prevent irregular forces from launching conventional, mobile attacks in the open, and bring the collapse of Western-trained force.

The Taliban probably would not have taken Kabul or other major cities had they known that they face credible air threat, which would exact a terrible toll on their forces in the open, especially considering the weakness of the ANA tank and artillery units.[92] ISIS attacked and reached the peak of its influence when Iraq did not have air capability to use against it, and US planes were not readily available for support. The Tigrai forces in Ethiopia suffered a reversal of fortune and their very successful attacks stalled once they had to move through open ground with combat vehicles and were the target of drone attacks by Ethiopian air force.[93] Sometimes (like in the Chechen attack on Grozny in 1996) a military force can succeed in taking a city and forcing a ceasefire even without air superiority.[94] But such cases are the exceptions. Air power does not win guerrilla wars, nor does it always win hybrid conflicts. However, it is critical for not losing such conflicts, and preventing irregular or hybrid forces from crossing the line and becoming regular, mobile forces capable of causing a rapid collapse of local forces.

It is therefore not surprising that the Russians, as they supported local militias in the Donbass and Luhansk areas and sent soldiers without identification patches into Crimea, also put a massive amount of anti-aircraft forces near the border, to prevent the Ukrainian air force from wreaking havoc on the separatists.

Also, using drones as a 'poor man's air force' seems to be a good idea – the Taliban has done it on their final assault of the Panjshir valley, and most air defence systems cannot shoot down a very-low flying drone, thus it can help deny AA protection to the enemy. The Russians in 2014 launched raids on the Ukrainian air force, with the same logic – but a drone force, while no substitute for a 'real' air force, is much more resistant to air strikes

[91] "The Massacre of Dak Son". Time Magazine, 15 December 1967; Anderson, D. Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire, New York: W. W. Norton, 2005, 119–150.

[92] The ANA had 20 operational Tanks, all old Soviet T-62 and T-55. They were in low readiness, since they didn't have much role during the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. In addition, the ANA had 109 field guns and 666 mortars – not an insignificant force on the surface, but in reality much less than Iraq (391 tanks, most of them modern) about the same number of guns (Iraq had at least 108 plus three multiple rocket launchers) and less mortars (Iraq had more than 950). Considering the fact that Afghanistan is significantly larger than Iraq and the problems moving tanks and artillery along the country, it means that the role of those forces was limited too. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), The Military Balance 2020, 250., 353.

[93] Walsh, D. "Foreign Drones Tip the Balance in Ethiopia's Civil War," New York Times, 12 December 2021; Evans, M. and Flanagan, J. "Ethiopia's war turns into a testing ground for the deadliest drones," The Times, 31 December 2021.

[94] Henkin, Y. Either we Win or We Perish! The History of the First Chechen War, 1994–1996. [Hebrew], Tel-Aviv: Maarachot, 2007, 475–502.; Smith, S. Allah's Mountains: The Battle for Chechnya (New Edition). London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, 240–257.

and can be launched almost everywhere. Therefore, investing in drone capabilities of local Western-trained forces seems to be a cheap and effective way to provide significant air support – and investing in counter-drone measures would probably be the new air defence of the 21st century.

As for fighting local, hybrid forces: since local militias, "polite green men" etc. are used in a hybrid war scenario as a substitute for 'official' armed forces, this means that those militias should be considered, from the minute they appear, a military threat. Fighting them is not a police action or mere riots, and not even an 'anti-terrorist' campaign: if they act (and especially if they even look) like soldiers (e.g. in Crimea), the situation is not civil anymore, and then immediately what the government faces is an armed insurgency.

Local forces in a hybrid war scenario usually succeed or fail in direct relation to their ability to coordinate with the states who employ them for their own goals. Therefore, if one is to fight local forces who are part of a hybrid campaign, the targeting should take *that* into account. The Kurds, although relatively effective on their own, could not face Saddam's divisions in 2003 without the coordination with the US airpower through Special Forces teams; those teams were critical. Russian embedded command groups in Syria served much the same purpose. It was said that the Taliban's final offensive was supported by the Pakistani secret service. Taking out such groups would probably hurt the ability of local forces to present an effective threat.

CONCLUSION

In the end, tactics are important, but they have to serve a strategic goal. International defence and peacekeeping forces can help if their goals are more clearly defined, and show commitment. With long-term commitments, in a costly, lengthy, and sometimes painful process, stable local forces can be built and trained, until one day, they can and will fight on their own. But this can hardly be hastened: the process and commitment may well last more than a generation, one way or another. It is not a happy outlook: the illusion of short, victorious interventions is much more tempting. Yet, the alternative is worse, as the way the West "goes in" today and the way it approaches the problem of building and maintaining local forces, almost guarantees that when it leaves, whatever built would amount to a house of cards, soon to collapse.

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