

Wartime Prisoner of War (POW) Abuse and the Rise of Postwar Insurgencies*

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Abstract

What effect, if any, does wartime prisoner of war (POW) treatment have on the likelihood of a postwar insurgency against the victorious combatant? Drawing on interstate wars since 1898, we find that POW abuse is associated with a nearly 9% increase in the probability of an insurgency onset after the formal cessation of hostilities in the post-1949 era. We argue that veterans possess important organizational skills that, when coupled with wartime POW experience, provides them with the ability, means, and motives for the creation of insurgent organizations against their victorious foe. We further test the logic of this argument with a paired comparison of POW treatment and insurgency onset in the two Persian Gulf Wars.

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1 Introduction

Peter Katzenstein and his fellow contributors to the landmark *The Culture of National Security* helped usher in a now-decades long research program that privileges the role of culture, norms, and identity in the study of national security (Katzenstein, 1996). In what might fairly be termed the “Cornell school” of constructivism, Peter Katzenstein and his students have explored a wide range of issues, including alliance relations, military doctrine, and taboos on the use of nuclear and chemical weapons, using a blend of careful historical analysis, eclectic theorizing, and a commitment to the normative (in both senses of the word) forces at work in world politics.

We follow that tradition here by exploring how (and if) the wartime abuse of prisoners of war (POWs) contributes to the postwar onset of insurgency among the defeated populace. We adopt a mixed-methods approach that pairs a quantitative study of POW abuse during interstate wars since 1898 with a focused comparison of POW treatment during the First (1991) and Second (2003-) Gulf Wars. And, following Peter Katzenstein’s recent work on eclectic theorizing (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010), we argue that adherence to normative principles—in this case, abiding by the Geneva Conventions—yields instrumental gains in the postwar environment. We find, for example, that POW abuse is associated with an almost 9% increase in the odds of insurgency onset in the post-1949 era, suggesting that combatants may gain from adhering to normative prescriptions even if reciprocity is not anticipated and no sanction for norm violations exists. Put differently, *how* combatants choose to fight their wars may dictate the quality, and sustainability, of the peace that follows.

Our paper proceeds as follows. We first outline our theoretical expectations linking wartime POW conduct to the rise of insurgencies while also detailing alternative explanations. In particular, we argue that theories of war onset have neglected the often destabilizing role that returning veterans can play in shaping (post-)war environments (Jha and Wilkinson, 2011; Lyall, 2010*a*). We next test our argument using new data on POW abuse and postwar insurgencies for all interstate wars from 1898-2010. We then investigate our proposed causal mechanisms using a focused comparison of the First (1991)

and Second (2003-) Gulf Wars. We close by discussing the implications of our findings for the study of wartime conduct and the role of international norms in world politics.

2 Theory

We concentrate here on a neglected pathway to the onset of an insurgency: the prior treatment of POWs during wartime.¹ More specifically, we privilege the role played by returning veterans who, through their prison camp experiences, possess the motives and skills necessary to organize an insurgency against the victorious state.

We focus on veterans since they possess the requisite social capital—notably, the organizational skills—that are crucial for overcoming collective action problems that often frustrate efforts to create insurgent organizations. In addition, their military training obviously provides soldiers with weapons training that renders these individuals both more willing and more able to use military force to achieve their political ambitions. Indeed, as Jha and Wilkinson (2011) argue, military experience and, in particular, front-line combat experience, likely habituates soldiers into the use of violence while also lowering inhibitions about its use. Veterans thus constitute a ready-made pool of rank-and-file recruits as well as senior leaders capable of organizing institutions that generate combat power under the threat of violence.

While all veterans may have these skills, we privilege the role of POW camps as the incubators of nascent insurgencies. POW camps forge deep bonds through shared experiences (often negative ones) that facilitates the creation of tight-knit trust networks between soldiers. These networks in turn provide the means by which would-be insurgents can reconstitute their ranks in the postwar era. Moreover, these tight bonds frustrate state (or occupier) efforts to penetrate—or, in some cases, even discover—the nascent insurgency. As a consequence, the defection constraint (Berman, 2010, 29-59), which often frustrates nascent terrorist and insurgent organizations, does not bite as deeply for veteran-based organizations, as their preexisting bonds and shared experiences reduce the likelihood of informants or outright defection.

In addition, the prison camp experience, if rife with abuse, provides the source of grievances that can lead to vengeance-seeking once the soldiers are repatriated. More

¹On wartime POW treatment, see Wallace 2010.

generally, given that prison camps are the site of intense interaction between combatants, they are formative in shaping expectations about the future conduct and intentions of the victorious party. This is especially true in wars that follow the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Having created and codified an expectation of reciprocal good treatment of POWs, the Geneva Conventions, if violated, act as a clear signal of a combatant's (postwar) intentions while also providing a focal point for moral outrage that can fuel postwar mobilization efforts. Note, too, that while rationalist bargaining models of war suggest that combatants fight until enough information is revealed on the battlefield to strike a credible postwar settlement (Reiter, 2003; Fearon, 1995), the information revealed in POW behavior may actually create new incentives to continue the war, albeit in a different form, after the peace settlement. This new information about actor type thus helps explain conflict recurrence, a puzzling omission from rationalist models since it is unclear why, if fighting only ceases once enough information has been revealed to strike a bargain (i.e. solve a commitment problem), conflicts nonetheless recur.

Finally, moral outrage at the (poor) treatment of POWs helps connect the soldiers-as-vanguard of a new movement to the broader population. This "scale-up" facilitates recruitment efforts as well as wider attempts to win popular support, especially if there are multiple groups forming. Indeed, if competition among insurgent groups is present, the moral symbol of POWs-turned-insurgents, as well as their superior combat skills, would make such organizations an attractive option among civilians seeking some measure of security in a possibly chaotic postwar order (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007).

This discussion generates a number of testable hypotheses. First, we maintain that the higher level of POW abuse by a combatant, the more likely we are to witness a postwar insurgency from within the defeated combatant's population. This is a falsifiable claim, however, and it is possible that the alternative holds: namely, that higher levels of abuse lead to a lower probability of insurgency onset as would-be insurgents are deterred from considering a return to arms or have had their numbers reduced below a level consistent with launching a viable insurgency.

We might imagine that a time-dependent process is also at work in the relationship between POW treatment and insurgency onset. We would expect, for example, that violations of POW rights are much more consequential in the post-1949 era given the codification of expectations of reciprocity in the Geneva Conventions. As a result, we should expect that the odds of POW abuse sparking insurgency onset are (1) higher in the post-1949 era

than the preceding period and (2) increase over time through the post-1949 era.

2.1 Alternative Explanations

There are several prominent explanations for insurgency onset (or, more generally, civil war) in both the microlevel and crossnational studies of civil war. To date, however, microlevel studies have privilege within-conflict dynamics, not conflict recurrence, while cross-national studies typically center on prewar structural conditions rather than dynamics that may have emerged from a prior conflict. Nonetheless, there are three broad families of explanations for onset.

First, the onset of insurgency after cessation of hostilities may be a function of civilian victimization, not the narrower issue of POW treatment, during wartime. Though the literature has reached mixed conclusions about how effective indiscriminate violence actually is (Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009; Downes and McNabb Cochran, 2010; Kocher, Pepinsky and Kalyvas, 2011), it is plausible that the odds of insurgency onset increase as the degree of wartime civilian victimization increases. Alternatively, we might imagine that the opposite relationship holds: the more civilians are victimized, the less the likelihood of an insurgent response, as the population has been cowed into submission and potential fifth columnists eliminated. From this viewpoint, civilian victimization is not simply a war-winning strategy but one that is designed to prevent a destabilization of the subsequent peace. More generally, we might imagine that an attritional war-fighting strategy might increase grievances among the (defeated) population, though such strategies may also have clear deterrent effects toward a defeated and exhausted population.

Second, it is likely that the emergence of an insurgency hinges on the characteristics of the victorious combatant. Here, at least two variables should be relevant: the relative power imbalance between victor and defeated and the victorious state's regime type. There are, however, no clear predictions about the nature of the relationship between these variables and insurgency onset. For example, it is possible that would-be insurgents are deterred by an unfavorable power balance so that as the gap between victorious and defeated powers increases, the odds of insurgency onset diminish. On the other hand, it is plausible that victorious states struggle to issue credible commitments not to exploit their defeated foes as the power imbalance between the two sides increases. In such cases, a victor's material preponderance may actual spark resistance, a failure to translate power advantages

into (lasting) settlements that we observe in interstate crisis diplomacy (Slantchev, 2011; Sechser, 20010) and civil war termination (Walter, 2002; Fortna, 2008).

In addition, insurgency onset may also be conditional on the victorious power's regime type. Democracies, for example, may be better able to signal credibly that they will not exploit their advantageous postwar situation than autocracies. Moreover, democracies may prove less likely to abuse POWs in the first place, thus reducing the odds of onset, though Downes (2008) has argued that democracies are in fact more likely to victimize civilians if they become enmeshed in wars of attrition.² Yet it is possible that the opposite relationship holds, namely, that democracies may be especially prone to sparking insurgencies given either their proclivity for embarking on extensive nation-building operations or a more general reputation for weakness given their casualty aversion and impatient publics (Pape 2005; but see Lyall 2010*b*). Here, democracies' greater ability to issue credible commitments is a two-edged sword, since groups potentially marginalized in the new order may seek to shape the postwar environment through force of arms. Efforts by foreigners to impose regime change (a FIRC) may also heighten the odds of insurgency onset as new (and old) actors scramble for dominance in the postwar political vacuum (Downes, 2011).

Finally, the characteristics of the defeated power may also shape the odds of insurgency onset. First, the relative number of casualties taken during the prior war may influence decisions to organize an insurgency; heavy losses may act as a deterrent that prevents a subsequent challenge, not least because the defeated power may also now lack the manpower necessary to orchestrate resistance. Second, terrain may also help determine the probability of onset, with more mountainous (or equally difficult) terrain associated with higher odds of onset (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Third, the extensive literature on civil war onset continues to debate whether ethnic heterogeneity is associated with increased odds of war. It may be that (threatened) ethnic status reversals leads these groups to take up arms (Petersen, 2001), though the opposite may also hold: societies marked by high degrees of ethnic fractionalization may have a harder time organizing around a nationalist frame against the outside power and may be more susceptible to divide-and-conquer strategies.

²Empirically, we find that democracies are highly correlated with mass killing and civilian victimization. Democracies are negatively associated with POW abuse, though this relationship narrowly misses conventional levels of significance in the reduced form regression ($p=.11$).

3 Data Analysis

3.1 Data and Variables

We take as our starting point the Correlates of War’s Version 4.0 list of interstate wars since 1898 (Correlates of War, 2011)³ We then cross-referenced this list with the insurgency data in Lyall and Wilson (2009). Since we are primarily interested in the effect of each side’s wartime conduct toward their opponent, the unit of analysis is the warring-directed-dyad. This implies two observations for each pair of states fighting against each other in a given war, where each state is measured as a violator or victim respectively. Because many small states taking part in wars involving large coalitions frequently do not possess the material or organizational capabilities to target civilians or prisoners, we focus on the leading belligerents in these cases.

Our dependent variable, `INSURGENCY_ONSET`, records whether an insurgency arose in the aftermath of a cessation of hostilities between two (or more) combatants. It is coded from the perspective of the first country in the dyad. Following Lyall and Wilson 2009, an *insurgency* is defined here as a protracted violent struggle by non-state actors to obtain their political objectives — often independence, greater autonomy, or subversion of existing authorities — against the current political authority (the incumbent). Two rules for defining a case were chosen. First, we imposed a minimum 1000 battle death inclusion rule, with at least 100 casualties suffered on each side within two years of the official cessation of prior hostilities. Second, the non-state actor must have adopted a guerrilla warfare strategy. Here, *guerrilla warfare* is defined as a strategy of armed resistance that (1) uses small, mobile groups to inflict punishment on the incumbent through hit-and-run strikes while avoiding direct battle when possible and (2) seeks to win the allegiance of at least some portion of the noncombatant population. There are 25 instances of insurgency onset in our dataset.

³We divide several long multi-actor wars into separate military confrontations to more accurately reflect the actual fighting on the ground. World War I is divided into four individual conflicts; World War II into nine separate conflicts; and the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War into the Iraq-Kuwait and U.S. Coalition-Iraq conflicts. Note that this is an undercount of insurgency onset in three ways: we exclude pre-1898 cases; we restrict our sample only to wars recognized by COW, and thus omit wars such as the Soviet reconquest of Ukraine; and we do not examine how POW treatment *during* war may influence recruitment and patterns of violence in an on-going insurgency (i.e. the two Chechen Wars).

3.2 Explanatory Variables

Our central explanatory variable, POW ABUSE, is a categorical variable that records the treatment of enemy prisoners during wartime. Observations are classified as exhibiting either low, medium, or high levels of abuse, which is based on conduct across a wide range of possible violations, including execution, torture, and hazardous living or working conditions. (For further information on the coding rules, see Wallace 2010.)

We use a binary variable (CIV TARGET) to capture whether a state employed a strategy of civilian victimization where civilians are intentionally targeted or force is used so indiscriminately that tens of thousands of civilians are killed (Downes, 2008, 44).⁴ CIV TARGET gauges a state's overall policy toward enemy civilians, but does not provide a direct measure of the magnitude of civilian suffering.

Alongside the treatment of POWs and civilians, we include two variables assessing the nature of the fighting during the interstate war. ATTRITION is a binary variable that measures whether the conflict devolved into a war of attrition involving pitched, static fighting typified by sieges or trench warfare.⁵ Since the number of soldiers dying in battle may either heighten grievances or deter enemy combatants from subsequently rising up, we also use the number of battle deaths suffered by the victim state during the war, which is then logged (CASUALTIES).

As many of our hypotheses examine properties of the violating country, we include several relevant variables. DEMOCRACY is a binary variable distinguishing democracies from autocratic governments. The variable equals 1 if the country scores above 7 on the 21-point Polity2 index (-10 to +10) before the war, and 0 otherwise (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>).

To assess whether power differentials between states deters the prospects for an insurgency, we estimate relative capabilities (REL POWER) based on the material capabilities controlled by each state as a percentage of the total capabilities of all participants in the war using COW's Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) data (Correlates of War, 2011). We also consider the impact of the overall level of economic development of the

⁴CIV TARGET includes both direct attacks against civilians, such as aerial or artillery bombardment, as well as indirect methods, including deaths from starvation or disease as a result of sieges, blockades, or other similar actions.

⁵Downes (2008, 60) also codes counterinsurgency warfare as a form of attrition war. To distinguish cleanly between wartime conduct and postwar insurgency onset, we only code insurgency onset if it occurred after a formal cessation of hostilities or the collapse of the combatant's government.

violating state by including the country’s GDP per capita (GDP).⁶ Since the removal of the enemy’s government is likely to increase opposition irrespective of wartime conduct, FIRC is a binary variable measuring whether the state achieved a foreign-imposed regime change during or immediately after the war (Downes, 2011). To take into account the possibility that ratifying the laws of war provides a credible signal of proper conduct both during and after the war, we include a binary variable measuring whether the state was party to the prevailing international agreement governing wartime conduct (TREATY).⁷

Given the strategic nature of deciding whether or not to initiate an insurgency, we also hypothesize that several properties of the victimized state should also play a role. TERRAIN is an estimate of the roughness of the terrain based on the proportion of the victim country that is mountainous (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). To assess whether an opponent who starts the war makes it more likely the victim will feel aggrieved, INITIATOR is a binary variable equalling 1 if the combatant initiated the war. Defeated combatants may also be more likely to initiate an insurgency against opponents with different cultures or religions. We therefore draw on Downes 2008’s measure of civilizational differences, where a “1” indicates that the combatants possess different cultures (CIV DIF). We also record the number of ethnic groups (GROUPS) in a country in the post-1945 era since ethnic heterogeneity may either provide the raw material for a nationalist resistance or may prevent its formation by inhibiting collective action across groups. We draw on the Ethnic Political Relations (EPR) dataset for these data (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010).

Finally, we include several control variables. In light of the prominence of the many resistance movements against Nazi forces in occupied countries during the Second World War, WW2 is a binary variable for all observations for this conflict.⁸ The outcome of the prior interstate war also likely plays an important role in subsequent motivation and ability to mount an insurgency. DEFEAT is a binary variable that equals 1 if the victim country lost the interstate war, and 0 otherwise.

⁶GDP per capita is measured using Gleditsch (2002) supplemented with figures from Maddison (2006).

⁷The relevant treaty for each time period is as follows: from 1899-1907 the 1899 Hague Convention; from 1907-1929 either the 1899 or the 1907 Hague Convention; from 1929-1949 the 1929 Geneva Convention; and from 1949 to the present the 1949 Third Geneva Convention.

⁸Seven of the 25 insurgencies in our data occurred during World War Two. Note that we exclude resistance movements in Belgium, Netherlands, and Norway since they do not meet our casualty and time thresholds for inclusion.

3.3 Findings

We provide findings from statistical analysis in Table 1 and graphically depict the relationship between POW abuse and postwar insurgency onset for three time periods in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Several findings are notable in the 1898-2003 sample (Models 1 and 2). First, as predicted, our POW abuse indicator is statistically significant in both the reduced form regression and with all covariates. REL POWER is also highly significant and positively associated with insurgency onset, suggesting that as the power imbalance between combatants increases, the probability of a postwar insurgency also increases. Our dummy variable for World War Two is positively associated with insurgency onset—a legacy of resistance movements against German occupation forces—while mountainous terrain is also correlated with insurgency onset. Interestingly, no other variables, including DEMOCRACY, CIV TARGET, and CASUALTIES, are associated with insurgency onset.

We must be careful, however, when interpreting these results, as it can be misleading to pool data if there are reasons to expect heterogeneity in the causal effects of variables over time. Indeed, it is likely that the post-1949 Geneva Convention era is marked by different combatant behaviors than the pre-1949 era given the codification of laws of armed combat (LOAC). We therefore divide our sample into pre-1949 and post-1948 eras (Models 3-4 and 5-6, respectively, in Table 1).

Indeed, once we split the sample, we discover that POW ABUSE alone is no longer statistically significant (though in the predicted direction) in the pre-1949 era (Model 3). And while it does reach statistical significance in the full Model 4, its substantive effects are weak, with only a .3% increase (or 0% to 1.5% with a 95% confidence interval) in the probability of insurgency onset when moving from low to high abuse levels.⁹ Figure 1 demonstrates this pattern clearly, with the predicted change of POW ABUSE on the probability of insurgency onset nearly constant across different levels of abuse.

Instead, several other covariates have a more robust relationship with onset. DEMOCRACY is clearly strongly associated with onset but, surprisingly, it is *negatively* associated

⁹All substantive interpretations reported here were obtained using first differences in *Clarify* (Tomz, Wittenberg and King, 2003). All continuous variables were set at their mean, all dichotomous variables were set at median values, and $K=1000$ simulations were estimated.

with insurgency, though its substantive effects are small: a shift from a non-democracy to a democratic victor is associated with a -0.1% decrease in the likelihood of onset (95% CI at -0.3% and 0%). By contrast, both GDP and REL POWER are positively associated with onset and substantively important. A shift from the 10th to the 90th percentile of GDP results in a 5.4% increase in the odds of insurgency (or 0% to 36% at 95% CI), for example, while a similar shift in REL POWER results in a smaller $+1.2\%$ increase (0% to 9% at 95% CI).¹⁰ Finally, mountainous terrain also has a small substantive effect on conflict onset: a shift from 10th (i.e. Poland) to 90th percentile (i.e. Iran) is associated with a $.4\%$ change in probability of onset (0% to 2.4%).

Many of these relationships are overturned when we examine the post-1949 era, however. Most importantly, POW ABUSE emerges as statistically significant and associated with sharp increases in the probability of onset. Substantively, a shift from low to high POW ABUSE is associated with an 8.3% increase in the probability of onset (95% CI at 0% to 52%). A closer look reveals that most of the explanatory weight is actually associated with the move from “medium” to “high,” which increases the odds of insurgency onset by 7% (or 0% to 43% with 95% CI).

DEMOCRACY, too, has a statistically significant correlation with onset but, intriguingly, the relationship has flipped direction: a democratic victor is now highly associated with a 7% increase in the probability of onset in the post-1949 era (0% to 31% with 95% CI).¹¹ Unlike before, ATTRITION is now statistically significant and is associated with a -1.2% decrease in the odds of insurgency (-10% to -66% with 95% CI). By contrast, CASUALTIES are no longer significant in the post-1948 era. Finally, GROUPS is positively associated with onset; a shift from the 10th percentile (i.e. 1 group) to the 90th percentile (i.e. 10 groups) results in a 6% change in the predicted probability of insurgency onset (95% CI at 0% to 42%).

Equally interesting is the changing relationship between indicators of power—notably, relative military strength and per capita wealth—and insurgency onset. Neither variable is statistically significant, and per capita wealth’s sign has flipped. TERRAIN, too, is no longer significant and has turned negative, suggesting that for at least this subset of insurgencies non-structural factors may play a more decisive role in sparking insurgency.

¹⁰We might worry about colinearity between these variables. Yet the correlation between REL POWER, GDP and DEMOCRACY is low in this era, with only the correlation between DEMOCRACY and GDP fairly high (at $.416$).

¹¹DEMOCRACY’s inflection point is approximately 1941.

Finally, FIRC, which was negatively associated with onset in the pre-Geneva Convention era, reverses its sign and is now highly correlated with onset, though this relationship does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.¹²

4 Evidence from Cases: The Two Gulf Wars

The large-N statistical analysis allows us to examine broad patterns in the determinants of insurgency onset over time, but proves more difficult for directly testing the mechanisms underlying the impact of wartime conduct. Consequently, in this section we offer an initial plausibility probe of how prisoner abuse creates grievances and shared bonds among enemy combatants, which can in turn help spark an insurgency movement.

We employ a paired comparison of the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. The wars differed sharply in the treatment of Iraqi prisoners, with captives in the first war faring much better than those in the later conflict. The two conflicts also show startling divergences in their ultimate outcomes in spite of similar definitive victories by U.S.-led coalitions in the convention phase of hostilities. The 1991 Gulf War ended with the removal of Iraqi forces from neighboring Kuwait, continued economic sanctions, and the imposition of a stringent no-fly zone over large sections of Iraqi territory. Although far from peaceful, the situation on the ground was relatively stable and Iraqi combatants did not take to large-scale irregular warfare. By contrast, the 2003 war ended with the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. The initial welcome for U.S. coalition forces was quickly replaced by a brutal insurgency that has continued for years at the cost of thousands of additional deaths of soldiers and civilians.¹³

Comparing two wars involving the same primary players that took place just over a decade apart allows us to control for a number of confounding variables, including regime type, time period, the prevailing laws of war, and cultural and ethnic differences. Table 2 summarizes some of the main factors of interest. The conventional phases of each war

¹²We subjected these findings to a number of robustness checks not reported here for space reasons, including decade fixed effects, substituting CIV TARGET for Valentino (2004)'s mass killing indicator, and four alternative measures of ethnic relations from the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset (<http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/epr>). Our results remain substantively unchanged; analyses available from authors.

¹³Estimates from Model 6 predict an 81% likelihood of insurgency onset after the Second Persian Gulf War. By contrast, Model 6 predicts only a 1% chance of insurgency onset after the First Persian Gulf War.

show close parallels in many respects. Although several thousand civilians were killed in both conflicts, in neither case did the U.S. target civilians directly as part of its military strategy. Both wars also ended relatively quickly and convincingly without producing any significant stalemates on the battlefield. Apart from prisoner abuse, the one additional variable that did differ prominently concerns the foreign-imposed regime change ending the 2003 invasion compared to the more limited aims of the earlier conflict. While regime change certainly played a large role in spurring the subsequent insurgency, we delve into the historical record to isolate the impact of prisoner abuse, or lack thereof, on the decisions of former Iraqi combatants to take up arms.

[Table 1 about here.]

4.1 Persian Gulf War

The handling of Iraqi prisoners across each war offers a study in contrasts. Although the conflicts involved a coalition fighting against an Iraqi opponent, in both cases the United States largely governed prisoner policy on the ground. During the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S.-led UN Coalition provided meticulous care for Iraqi prisoners falling into their hands, going so far as to prepare culturally appropriate meals, and even outfitting each prisoner with a gas mask in case of a chemical weapons attack by Saddam Hussein's remaining forces (Rowe 1993, 198, Vance 2006, 168). Providing decent conditions was all the more remarkable given Coalition resources were stretched to their maximum because far more Iraqis surrendered than was initially expected — approximately 80,000 troops in just four days of fighting (Springer, 2010, 193). Earlier propaganda operations, which involved dropping millions of leaflets promising good treatment to Iraqi soldiers who surrendered, turned out to be so successful that organizing and transporting the legions of prisoners in fact slowed down the Coalition's offensive in many areas (Gordon and Trainor, 1995, 363). It bears emphasizing just how impressive the U.S. Coalition's conduct toward Iraqi prisoners was in historical terms. Breaking from its usual principles of impartiality and discretion, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) publicly stated that “The treatment of Iraqi prisoners of war by US forces was the best compliance with the Geneva Convention by any nation in any conflict in history” (U.S. Department of Defense, 1992, 577).

Despite complicating the initial Coalition offensive, prisoner policy proved to be a central component of the overall planning for the war (Rowe, 1993, 204). Promises of humane treatment were used as a tool to induce enemy soldiers to surrender, thereby weakening defenses against the Coalition advance and hastening the defeat of Iraq forces. Prisoner policy would also generate several additional benefits even after hostilities ceased that are especially relevant for the particular question of the determinants of insurgency onset. Far from alienating prisoners under their control, Iraqi captives were for the most part very satisfied with their treatment in U.S. Coalition camps. As one historian of the war remarked, “At the enclosures, the prisoners reported that they received better food, clothing, medical supplies, and shelter as prisoners of war than what they had been provided by their own army” (Springer, 2010, 194).

The humane treatment of Iraqi prisoners greatly reduced the potential for grievances against their captors, or the tightening of group bonds often resulting from harsh internment experiences. If anything, decent wartime conduct weakened animosity toward Coalition forces, while heightening distrust of the Hussein government. Looking to their prospects back home, over 13,000 prisoners refused to return to Iraq, and were subsequently reclassified as refugees (Roberts 1993-1994, 161). With these soldiers completely removed from the battlefield, even those wishing to go back home were generally not viewed as a threat to U.S. security interests in the region. The United States was actually eager for a prompt repatriation, so that returning Iraqi soldiers could recount their decent treatment, and publicize the Iraqi leadership’s poor military performance to further undermine the regime (Gordon and Trainor, 1995, 450).

Although the U.S. post-conflict troop presence was not nearly as pronounced compared to the aftermath of the 2003 war, substantial numbers of soldiers remained on Iraqi soil as potential targets for would-be insurgents. The ceasefire line was drawn on Iraqi territory with several U.S. divisions deployed throughout Southern Iraq (Gordon and Trainor, 1995, 445). In response to Iraqi repression of a Kurdish revolt, the United States and allies initiated Operation Provide Comfort in April 1991, which placed 5,000 U.S. troops and several thousand soldiers from allied countries in Northern Iraq to protect the Kurdish population and provide humanitarian relief (Freedman and Karsh, 1993, 424). Throughout all of these post-conflict operations, U.S. and allied forces did not encounter any meaningful insurgency, though the Hussein regime would later test other aspects of the settlement, including the no-fly zones over much of the country and the WMD inspections regime.

Rather than opposing the U.S. presence, many Iraqi soldiers continued to surrender to Coalition forces even in the aftermath of the war in order to avoid instability within their own country (Carvin, 2010, 133). Proper treatment of Iraqi prisoners thus served not only important moral ends, but also was instrumental for U.S. strategic interests both during and after the war, allowing most of the 500,000-plus U.S. troops deployed to the region to return home not long after conventional hostilities ended.

4.2 2003 Invasion of Iraq

In the 1991 Gulf War the United States stopped short of overthrowing Saddam Hussein, preferring instead to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, and subsequently limit Iraq's power and influence in the region. By comparison, regime change became the main rationale for the 2003 war due to allegations of the Iraqi leadership's continued weapons of mass destruction programs and links to terrorist networks, both of which would later turn out to be unfounded. Although dealing with the same foe and lasting around the same amount of time, U.S. conduct toward prisoners during the 2003 Invasion of Iraq stood in stark contrast to its behavior in the conflict a decade earlier.

The battlefield performance of the United States and other members of the Coalition of the willing during the 2003 invasion was similarly dominant to the previous war. Coalition forces did meet much fiercer resistance in certain areas as it marched toward Baghdad, but the capital would fall just three weeks after the initial invasion on March 20, 2003. When turning to conduct toward prisoners, however, several differences stood out. Many fewer Iraqi soldiers were willing to surrender to Coalition forces this time around; only about 7,000 were taken prisoner compared to the tens of thousands who lay down their arms in just four days of fighting during the 1991 war. The greater unwillingness to surrender did not necessarily mean that the vast majority of troops continued to engage U.S. coalition forces directly in battle, but rather most simply deserted and melted back into the civilian population (Keegan, 2005, 3).

Those Iraqi combatants that did fall into allied hands encountered a very different experience from those in the earlier Gulf War. Living conditions were generally much worse since, in contrast to 1991, the United States received no help from neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia for housing or other resources to care for prisoners. Keeping with a pattern of poor postwar planning, no allowances had been made for building permanent

structures to hold prisoners. Desperate to find facilities, the United States turned to using former prisons of the Iraqi regime, which would come to include the notorious Abu Ghraib detention center. This decision in and of itself sent a foreboding signal to both Iraqi prisoners and the wider population, given the prisons represented some of the most brutal symbols of the repressive Hussein regime (Springer, 2010, 198).

Despite U.S. promises to abide by the law of war during the invasion, incorporating Iraq into the larger War on Terror also complicated prisoner treatment, since the precedent of rejecting the Geneva Conventions was well-known to both U.S. and Iraqi troops, as well as the Iraqi public (Human Rights Watch, 2004, 1-2). To make matters worse, insufficient resources were allocated to prisoner care, leading to poorly trained guards working in overcrowded prisons, which made abuses more likely (Ricks, 2006, 271-72). Although many abuses were perpetrated by individual or small groups of soldiers on their own accord, the documentary record generally indicates systematic prisoner abuse developed in Iraq. A report from the ICRC was leaked which outlined in extensive detail the abuses committed by Coalition forces against Iraqi prisoners from the very beginning of the war (International Committee for the Red Cross, 2004, 3). While many regular enlistees would eventually be released relatively quickly, officers and other captured members of the Iraqi military elite were held on for further interrogation (Doyle, 2010, 314). During the earlier phases of the war, those Iraqi soldiers with some of the greatest military and leadership skills were thus turned into likely opponents to the United States.

Other dimensions of U.S. postwar policy certainly did not help in dealing with the brewing insurgency. Most importantly, the quantitative results show that a foreign-imposed regime change is associated with a higher risk of insurgency onset. Yet the initial overthrow of Saddam Hussein was generally welcomed in Iraq with much of the population happy to see the dismantling of a repressive regime. To be sure, those most loyal to Hussein fought against the U.S. presence from the beginning, but the insurgency would come to include many groups that had been opposed, or at least ambivalent, to the previous Iraqi government (Hashim, 2006, 122).

What contributed far more toward the onset of the insurgency than the simple act of regime change was *how* the United States conducted itself, especially with regards to former combatants. In May of 2003 under the direction of L. Paul Bremer, the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority announced Orders No.1 and No.2, which effectively dismantled broad swathes of the civilian government and security apparatus as part of the larger policy of

de-Baathification. Order No.2 dealing with the armed forces and other security services was particularly incendiary as it disbanded over 300,000 troops and prohibited any officer at the rank of colonel or above from ever serving again in the future (Gordon and Trainor, 2006, 484). Soldiers were thus denied employment, salaries, and even pensions in many cases, which was largely credited with solidifying opposition to the U.S. occupation among Iraqi military contingents (Cordesman, 2008, 48-50).

The policy in many ways intensified ill feelings stemming from the poor treatment of those Iraqi combatants who had been captured by Coalition forces. As General Anthony Zinni, former chief of U.S. Central Command and who oversaw operations in Iraq in the preceding years, noted “We had spent a decade psyopsing the Iraqi army, telling them we would take care of those who didn’t fight. And he [Bremer] disbands it” (Ricks, 2006, 164). Unlike in the 1991 Gulf War, the failure to keep prior promises would seriously undermine U.S. trust in the country and consequently solidify loyalty to the growing insurgency. Taken together, the cases highlight the important role wartime conduct can play, either positively or negatively, both during the conventional phase of the conflicts but also long afterward.

5 Conclusion

We have demonstrated that wartime POW abuse is associated with a substantial increase in the risk of sparking a postwar insurgency, especially in the post-1949 era. We point to veterans’ organizational skills, and to wartime camp experiences in particular, as key factors that help explain the onset of insurgency once formal hostilities have concluded. To be sure, much work remains to be done, including the microlevel processing of soldiers’ wartime experiences and their subsequent proclivity to join insurgent organizations. Yet clearly normative considerations such as wartime POW treatment should be taken seriously as one, largely neglected, pathway to insurgency.

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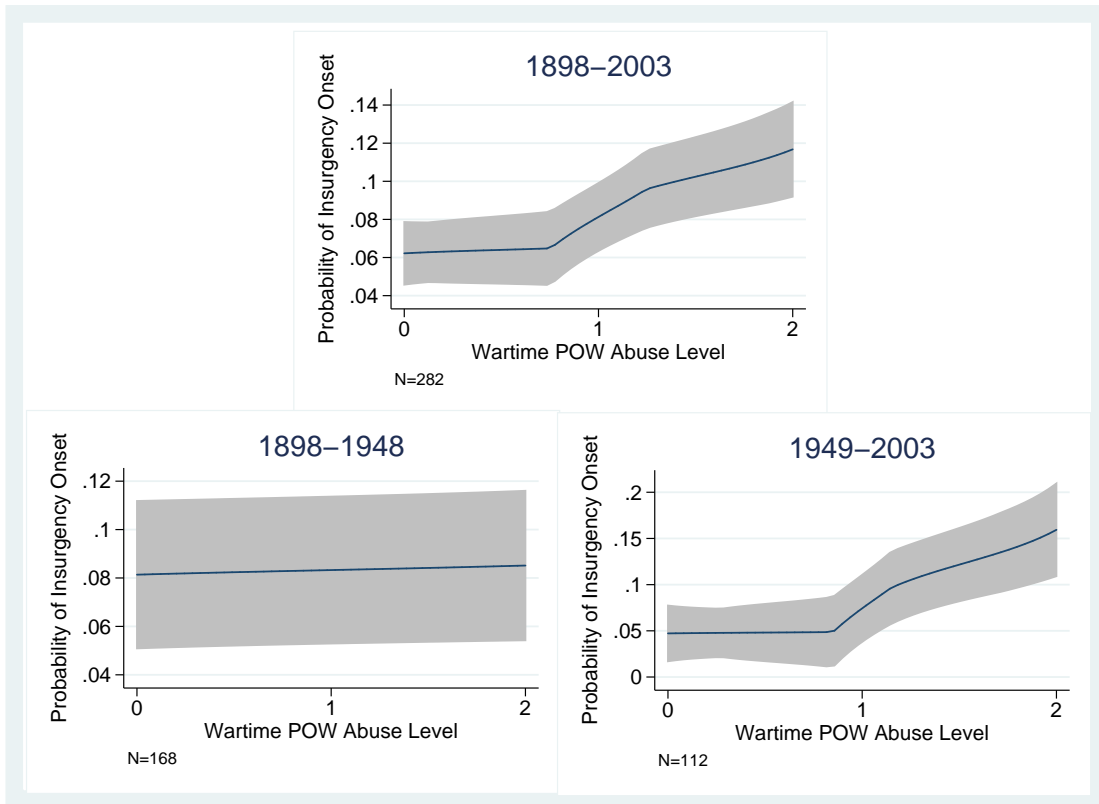
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Table 1: Wartime Prisoner Abuse and Postwar Insurgency Onset, 1898-2003

Variables	<i>Full Sample</i>		<i>1898-1948</i>		<i>1949-2003</i>	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
POW ABUSE	0.515*	0.846**	0.232	1.519*	0.914*	2.628**
	(0.234)	(0.299)	(0.295)	(0.696)	(0.394)	(0.896)
CIV TARGET		0.279		0.884		2.028
		(0.564)		(0.771)		(1.570)
REL POWER		2.254*		5.922**		0.593
		(0.926)		(2.144)		(1.034)
DEMOCRACY		-0.320		-5.291***		3.237*
		(0.690)		(1.405)		(1.386)
CASUALTIES		-0.043		-0.248		0.216
		(0.131)		(0.213)		(0.239)
TERRAIN		0.379*		1.087**		-0.128
		(0.182)		(0.375)		(0.386)
FIRC		-0.428		-4.886*		0.425
		(0.789)		(2.316)		(1.172)
ATTRITION		-0.660		-0.429		-1.891*
		(0.711)		(1.689)		(0.849)
INITIATOR		0.632		-0.017		0.666
		(0.524)		(1.444)		(0.699)
TREATY		-0.065		-1.103		-0.047
		(0.672)		(1.747)		(0.951)
CIV DIF		-0.412		-1.914		-0.617
		(0.514)		(1.627)		(0.402)
GDP		0.307		4.217**		-0.183
		(0.431)		(1.554)		(0.376)
WW2		1.256*		0.781		
		(0.585)		(0.677)		
GROUPS						2.505**
						(0.942)
DEFEAT		1.859**		4.828***		2.117
		(0.661)		(1.472)		(1.696)
<i>Constant</i>	-3.005***	-8.256†	-2.727***	-40.765**	-3.484***	-12.498†
	(0.459)	(4.243)	(0.561)	(14.154)	(0.722)	(6.424)
N (Clusters)	303 (72)	282 (68)	181 (43)	168 (40)	122 (50)	112 (45)
Wald χ^2	4.86*	171.33***	0.62	2011.23***	5.39*	982.76***
Loglikelihood	-84.396	-61.029	-49.054	-20.349	-34.542	-26.348
r^2	0.02	0.28	0.00	0.58	0.07	0.42

Note: Variance-covariance standard errors clustered on Correlates of War country code. † Significant at 10% *Significant at 5% **Significant at 1% ***Significant at .01%

Figure 1: Wartime POW Abuse and the Probability of Postwar Insurgency Onset



Graphs are drawn from Models 2, 4, and 6, respectively, and use kernel-weighted local polynomial regressions with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 2: Gulf Wars Compared

Variables	Persian Gulf War (1991)	Invasion of Iraq (2003)
Prisoner Abuse Level	Low	High
Number of POWs Taken	approx. 80,000	7,000-8,000
<i>Control variables</i>		
Civilian victimization	No	No
Civilian deaths	3,000	7,404
War of attrition	No	No
Battle deaths	25,000	9,200
Duration	43 days	45 days
FIRC	No	Yes
<i>Outcome</i>		
Insurgency onset	No	Yes

Sources: POW figures from Vance (2006:168, 210); Cordesman (2003: 247); Doyle (2010: 314). Figures for civilian and battle deaths from Downes (2008) and the Iraq Body Count project (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>). Estimates refer to POWs taken or civilians killed during the conventional phase of the war.