Introduction
Local Militaries and Imperialism

At its root, imperialism, as an idea and a process, denotes a relationship of dominion. This incursion of one power into the sovereignty of another, however, can take many forms.[1] In Charles Reynolds's telling, the inter-action between an imperial power and weaker state can be explicit (political sovereignty asserted by force over subject peoples) or implicit (a system of control and restraint exercised over peoples and territories).[2] If imperialism operates across a spectrum – with loose supervision of intermediaries at one end and tight top-down control at the other – then it stands to reason that the methods used to establish and maintain this subordination also vary. In short, great powers employ different reper-toires for projecting power depending on the circumstances.[3]

Scholars often accredit the success of European territorial expansion since the late fifteenth century to the harnessing of superior technologies and the professionalism of their own military forces. Yet European powers would not have made such gains without local manpower.[4] When it came to the Raj, for example, it is unlikely that the British could have taken control over large parts of India without local allies. From the beginning, the English East India Company raised the forces it used for expanding its presence almost entirely through recruiting from

[1] Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688–1914* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 3.
[2] Charles Reynolds, *Modes of Imperialism* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), p. 1.
[3] This line of thinking forms the central theme of Jane Burbank and Fredrick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 16–17.
[4] On how Western European states harnessed new technologies for military advantage refer to Daniel R. Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982); and Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

India's traditional military labour markets.[5] As David Killingray has aptly observed: 'For reasons of cost, and because of the difficulties of employing European soldiers in tropical campaigns, most colonial powers sought to recruit "native armies".'[6] Also, because subjected peoples are typically difficult wards, many imperial powers needed means of internal control to suppress revolts and deal with unrest. European powers were, however, reluctant to commit metropolitan resources to empire; dispatching a fleet or army from the home country was and is a costly and logistically taxing enterprise. Those delegated with the authority for managing imperial interests in overseas territory usually had limited military means at their disposal as a result.[7] Moreover, the need to call for military resources from the home government was seen as a failure.

Throughout history and across geography imperial powers have used subjected people to maintain order in newly conquered territory, raising auxiliaries from among indigenous populations or utilising existing forces as proxies. Like the Aztecs, who maintained their empire with great economy of force, Britain also relied on local resources for security and order.[8] This strategy had drawbacks. Although indigenous recruits were cheaper and often healthier in relation to their local

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5 Douglas M. Peers, 'Revolution, Evolution of Devolution: The Military and the Making of Colonial India', in Wayne E. Lee (ed.), *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 82 and 98–9; Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770–1830* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 1; and T. R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849–1947* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1998).

6 David Killingray, 'Introduction' to David Killingray and David Omissi (eds.) *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of Colonial Powers, c. 1700–1964* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 7. See also, Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

7 R. Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 117–42 reprinted in Wm. Roger Louis (ed.), *The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (London: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 142–3.

8 Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), p. 19. On Britain's use of local manpower to police the empire see in particular Killingray and Omissi (1999); and T. R. Moreman, 'Small Wars and Imperial Policing: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919–1939', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1996), pp. 105–31.

climes, a question mark remained over their reliability. The Sepoy Revolt of 1857 for instance resulted in metropolitan troops garrisoned in India (until 1947) at a strength whereby they could extinguish any future uprising by local soldiery.[9]

Imperial powers often took the use of local forces in conquered territory a step further, deploying them to fight in other parts of the empire. The Roman Empire, for example, recruited conquered people into an *auxilia*, organised into cavalry or light infantry cohorts. These non-citizen soldiers complemented the traditional legionary forces in far-flung parts of the empire.[10] Returning to the British, David Omissi has argued that:

The empire could never have depended upon its white soldiers alone … British soldiers cost far more than those raised from the indigenous population. The empire therefore obtained much of its military manpower from local sources. It was easier and cheaper to dominate the world if Asians and Africans could be induced to shoulder much of the white man's burden.[11]

Indian troops especially were used in the nineteenth century as an imperial 'fire brigade', dealing, as Killingray notes, 'with crises from China to Africa'.[12] Moreover, manpower from India and other colonies was utilised extensively by Britain in the campaigns on the Nile (1880s), the South Africa War (1899–1902) and both world wars.[13]

Wayne E. Lee concludes in his study of Spanish imperial expansion into the Americas that 'if it was possible to convince, cajole, and coerce indigenous agents to harness their own resources in the imperial interest then this was the strategy employed'.[14] Using local proxies where possible also suited Britain's general approach to imperialism, which the

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[9]   For a detailed treatment of the British military as a garrisoning force after 1857, refer to T. A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India, 1600–1947* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[10] Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 16.

[11] David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 1–2.

[12] Killingray and Omissi (1999), p. 4.

[13] David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial Africa Army', *Journal of African History*, Vol. 20 (1979), pp. 421–36.

[14] Wayne E. Lee, 'Projecting Power in the Early Modern World: The Spanish Model?', in *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 2.

historians Robinson and Gallagher have categorised as 'informal control if possible, formal control if necessary'.[15] The type and level of control Britain employed across the empire depended to a large degree on the success the British had in attracting local collaborators: the scarcer the imperial resources and the less formal the imperial arrangements, the more the British had to collaborate with elites in an indigenous society and rely on local means for control. Thus, in many far-flung places of the world Britain used local intermediaries to extend its hegemony where it would have struggled to enter and stay with its own military force alone. According to Gulf historian James Onley it was 'the collaboration and mediation of indigenous elites in the invaded countries themselves that provided the imperial administrations with their military and administrative muscle'.[16] Onley believes that this paradigm best represents Britain's approach to the Gulf.[17] Here the British succeeded in getting local rulers to collaborate in the pacification of the area and, later, in excluding foreign influences that could threaten its position in India.[18] To be sure, the leading chiefs of the Arab coast were willing to collaborate with Britain only after it achieved maritime dominance in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, when Britain required peace and stability in the interior of the Gulf Arab states, it preferred to develop local coercive instruments under the existing political structures rather than use its own forces. The thinking here was that efficient local forces would reduce the need for Britain to intervene with its own troops.

There are myriad reasons why outside powers in the past and today try and avoid direct military intervention in support of subordinate

[15] Wm. Roger Louis, 'Introduction: Robinson and Gallagher and Their Critics', in *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 2–51; and Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 117–42.

[16] James Onley, 'Britain's Native Agents in Arabia and Persia in the Nineteenth Century', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2004), p. 130.

[17] James Onley, 'Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820–1971', *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 87 (2005), p. 35. See also Mathew Elliot, 'Independent Iraq': The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941–58* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), Chapter 5.

[18] Onley (2005), p. 42.

governments, making the use of local proxies an attractive alternative.[19] Andrew Mumford writes how 'proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare'.[20] Firstly, intervention often degrades the legitimacy of the protégé's leaders. Secondly, the presence and use of foreign troops might incite the local population. Lastly, intervention in a foreign territory can cause controversy at home for the intervening power.[21] In his widely read study comparing British counter-insurgency efforts in Malaya with those of the United States in Vietnam, John Nagl makes it explicit that building up the capabilities of local forces is a *sine qua non* for a successful campaign.[22] The fact that the 2006 *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* sets great store by training and mentoring of host-nation forces is a further indication that building indigenous security capacity continues to be viewed by strategists as a critical means of exercising control or extending influence in a subordinate state.[23] By using local forces to advance and protect its interests in the Gulf, Britain was employing a time-honoured strategy of attempting to achieve security on the cheap.

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[19] Yora Gortzak, 'Using Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations: The French in Algeria, 1954–1962', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2009), pp. 307–33; and Richard L. Millett, *Searching for Stability: The US Development of Constabulary Forces in Latin America and the Philippines* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010).

[20] Andrew Mumford, 'Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 182, No. 2 (2013), p. 40.

[21] For a wider discussion on the controversies of foreign deployments, see Robert E. Harkovy, *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[22] John Nagl, *Learning to East Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), pp. xiv–xv and 99–100. See also: Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies* (New York: Routledge 2001); and Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919–60* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1990).

[23] The 2006 *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (The US Army Field Manual No. 3–24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3–33.5) was first issued in December 2006. It was published by the University of Chicago Press as *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* in 2007. The publication devotes a chapter to the developing host-nation security forces. See Chapter 6, pp. 199–236. For a recent treatment of the influence this manual has had on US military doctrine and operations towards the War on Terror refer to Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Patraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon Schuster, 2013).