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Review Article

Crooked Lessons from the Indian Wars

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One aim of this article is to chide the U.S. military—and Americans overall—for not paying sufficient attention to our historic relations with American Indians. After all, American Indians are the non-Westerners we Americans should know best. A review of American Indian history can shed important light on our current encounters with tribal peoples elsewhere. At the same time, however, great care needs to be taken. Instead of just citing similarities—as analogies lead us to do—we must also take note of differences, which we can best do by using history as a foil.

Most wars invite analogies. Future historians will likely have a field day with the U.S.'s recent incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq. Some of the analogies that pundits and others used between 2001 and 2011 are bound to strike them as little more than bad history. Others might be provocative, although not always in the ways intended. For instance, take the analogy that is the premise for this article.¹ A number of years ago Robert Kaplan wrote, “the American military is back to the days of fighting the Indians.”² Tellingly, he was not the only one to invoke Indians. The “imperial grunts,” or soldiers and Marines he spent time with, also referred to Afghanistan and Iraq (as well as Colombia, Mongolia, and Yemen) as Injun Country—a term also used during the Vietnam era.³

As for why, out of all the irregular warfare comparisons made, this one deserves particular attention, just consider: not only are Indians the non-Westerners we Americans—and members of the U.S. military—should know best, which means our shared history could (or should) have something to offer when dealing with tribal peoples elsewhere. But also, if only we had re-considered our relations with Indians we would have at least drawn on our own history and would have been able to compare our current selves to our past selves instead of to ancient Roman, British, or French imperialists.

One caveat: the argument made in this review article is not that American Indians offer the best lens through which to consider why Islamists, or certain Afghans or Iraqis, chose to fight us as they did. Rather, it is to suggest that a re-appraisal of our relations with Indians may help us better appreciate what we *still* do not sufficiently understand

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about tribal peoples. A second caveat is that to understand the source code for any conflict requires digging deep into the local context. We should want to look at changes over time, critical events, and local interpretations of history. We should also want to focus on who has inhabited the neighborhood, for how long, and how everyone has, or has not, gotten along. However, one problem with being too contextualized is that teasing apart the local from the global can be difficult. At the same time, taking too global or macro a view can cause its own distortions. For instance: Al Qaeda. Are we better off regarding Al Qaeda as an "it" or a "them"? Al Qaeda declared war against the United States. Did that then render members of Al Qaeda terrorists or insurgents? What about the Taliban—are its members terrorists or insurgents? Or are most Taliban just accidental guerrillas?

The U.S. military entered a terminological hell quite some time ago. Just look at all the ink spilled trying to distinguish among 4th Generation warfare, hybrid warfare, asymmetric warfare, irregular warfare, and so on. Small wonder disagreements persist among government agencies, across military services, and between commanders over how to operationalize whatever it is these terms refer to. Ironically, the tried-and-true cross-cultural (or anthropological) approach to both Afghanistan and Iraq would have been to figure out what terms our opponents were using for the fight they picked with us and then adopt some variant of those. This is what the Israelis did in the wake of the first *intifada*, which they could not treat as if they or anyone else had seen something similar before, because they had not. The international community likewise had no problem referring to Afghans who fought the Soviets in the 1980s as *mujahadin*, a term that signaled that more was at stake than just nationalism or communism; religion had been injected into the mix, too.

Yet another source of confusion future historians will have to sort through is the ways in which we have characterized our adversaries' motivations. For instance, several years ago Al Qaeda terrorists were referred to as Islamo-Fascists. Yet, some of the same people who used that term also insisted that Osama bin Laden and his associates were promulgating a radical ideology, not anything religious. In fact, according to Daniel Pipes, "militant Islam resembles fascism and communism more than any religious movement."⁴ Even General John Abizaid seemed to believe we were "fighting an ideological vanguard similar to the Bolsheviks."⁵ Yet, during fascism's heyday in the 1930s there were Italian fascists, Spanish fascists, Rumanian fascists, Nazi fascists, but there was no pan-fascist movement devoted to creating a fascist *uber-umma*. In fact, as the Nazis themselves strove to prove, the goal was just the opposite: the Nazis sought a hierarchy with themselves at the top, while communists stood for a nation-dissolving ideology that, as an ideology, eschewed any hint of Divine Judgment or the Afterlife. This cannot possibly describe Islamists' goals, and especially not when the supra-community of believers is meant to include Arabs, Somalis, Malays, and anyone, actually, willing to submit to an omniscient, omnipotent Allah.

Indians—Foil, Not Analogs

One easy explanation for why we remain so confused about our Islamist adversaries' motivations is because no one can politically afford to agree with them that they have embroiled us in a cosmic struggle. A second reason has to do with the nature of our response, which has been military, and our military's orientation—which is technophile. Nor does the "tech" prefix refer solely to technology. Our military also heavily invests in techniques. Call something an "insurgency" and you should then be able to apply counterinsurgency *techniques*. As for a third explanation: we have never been very good at understanding non-Western values. Non-Westerners' exploitable fissures and political structure, sometimes. But their priorities, rarely.

Here is where our all-too-American history of never understanding American Indians should shed important light.

For starters, many American Indian tribes continue to be riven by old splits between traditionalists and accommodationists. Put most simply, accommodationists are individuals for whom traditional tribal practices evoke nostalgia, but no special reverence. In contrast, traditionalists try to follow age-old prescriptions for how tribespeople should conduct themselves. As far as traditionalists are concerned, traditions are not just a matter for occasional ceremony, they are the stuff of life.

Just on the face of it, the fact that such divides persist in many Indian communities suggests that after hundreds of years during which the U.S. government, missionaries, and others have introduced program after program to try to get Indians to assimilate, there must be *something* about Westernization that still cannot be squared with Indian values. Or, perhaps a better way to put this is that for those Indians who want to stay Lakota, Apsaalooke, or Hopi, the only way to stay distinctively themselves is . . . to stay distinctively themselves. In other words, when one's paramount duty is to past and future generations, certain practices should never be shed. If this makes tribalism sound like a tautology, that is exactly what it is; its circularity is what helps keep people(s) distinct.

Say, for a moment, you belong to Tribe X. And say you are committed to Tribe X's survival. If that is the case, then you should do everything in your power to ensure Tribe X stays intact, while if someone were to ask you what most matters to you *as* a member of Tribe X, your answer would likely be: "the integrity of my tribe." If you were then asked "what accounts for the integrity of the tribe?" the answer would be: "that it matters to its members." Worth noting is that tribalism is implicitly chauvinist. But—and here is one profound difference between tribalists and us (who are Western individualists)—tribes do not proselytize. Also, continuity is critical. In fact, the very persistence of tribes suggests that the same ideas of sovereignty, autonomy, and distinctiveness that inspired members to fight the U.S. government way back when must still inspire people.⁶ Or, as one of Techumseh's biographers wrote, the "constant, crucial ambition of Shawnee was to remain Shawnee, which they were unshakably convinced was much better than being anyone else." This meant that for Techumseh and his followers, it was better to fight for being able to die as a Shawnee than surrender and become something else.⁷

Again, from a tribalist perspective, tribes not only had (and have) a corporate (and sovereign) right to exist, but their members bear a responsibility—a duty even—to value collective over self.⁸ This explains a lot. Even when individual warriors were motivated to attain glory or prove their manliness, so long as these were also tribal values, individuals could prove their collective worth whenever they went to war; they did not need to be (re)socialized for selfless service, as the Army needs to do today.⁹ The flip side of collectivism is that leaders sometimes found themselves having to wage war despite themselves. For instance, Mow-way, leader of a Comanche band, continued to wage war even when he knew the effort was doomed. Until his followers were ready to give up, he did not feel he could.¹⁰ Captain Jack of the Modoc likewise went against his own better judgment during the Modoc War, which he led.¹¹ Or, as was the case in the 2nd Seminole War: "For the Indians who had decided to stay and fight, maintaining solidarity was of extreme importance. To go against the expressed wishes of the entire tribe was considered treason."¹²

The Fight Against Westernization

Contrast this with what underpins our solidarity as a nation of American individualists. For us, the individual is the unit of account. Everything we (non-Indian) Americans most value

flows from, or is built around, the sanctity of the individual. From the Bill of Rights and the Constitution to our legal system we are protected by law *as* individuals. Of course, more than just our rule of law rests on the primacy of the individual. Democracy, capitalism, the notion of *universal* human rights, even our convictions about evolution—all are predicated on the significance we accord *the* individual. In fact, few of the things we consider integral to the development of the West—not exploration, nor science, nor the quest for personal progress—would have been likely had individuals not been encouraged to compete against one another *as* individuals.

Now, compare this to how ambition is channeled in societies where reputations are secured by giving things away. In most tribal societies, conspicuously acquiring, keeping, and displaying anything—beyond (maybe) food and attire for a transitory feast—is frowned upon, and an individual's well-being should never come at the expense of the spiritual well-being of his or her larger kin group.

Another source of contrast is that *we* are addicted to constant improvement or, at the very least, change.¹³ *They* aim for social harmony at almost all costs. These represent antithetical goals. Consequently, our insistence on progress is bound to engender resistance from at least some in all tribal societies.

As the last several hundred years attest, Westernization—our penetration of other people's world(s)—represents the most consistently aggressive transformative force in human history. Yet, no matter how consistently aggressive Westernization is, it is only fitfully violent. This paradox lies at the heart of the West's success. It means the threshold for people recognizing that they have changed (or are being changed) from what they were into something else is hard for them to often detect.

Without question, too, Westernization's effects have differed different places. Nonetheless, the same overall dynamic applies. People are much more likely to absorb new practices and ideas piecemeal, at their own pace, so long as they can do so without feeling themselves fundamentally changing, or changing against their will. This means entire societies almost never acculturate overnight. Instead, usually some coercive authority from without or from on high, or alternatively some faction from within, has to apply pressure. But then, as soon as force is felt, as soon as some portion of the community begins to turn, this poses a threat to the corporate "whole," and traditionalists—those committed to preserving the integrity of the group—react. They either reach out and rally their followers or their followers call on them to help the group resist.

In an effort to restore what was, leaders bent on tribal revitalization will usually strive to return to first principles. They shed polluting foreign practices. Yet, at the same time, some degree of syncretism creeps in. This means that people bent on not changing will wind up changing some things in order to not have to change what they regard as most sacred or essential to their identity. In other words, traditionalists never give up everything, just anything that (in their view) jeopardizes the moral order.

This is why distinguishing between modernization and Westernization is so important. People everywhere adopt new technologies—even from their enemies. As people adapt to changes in the broader environment they cannot help but modernize. It is not the least bit hypocritical, then, for groups like Al Qaeda to recruit supporters via the internet. Rarely has technology upset those who decry Westernization. Or to return to the American Indian example, Indians did not reject firearms any more than they rejected steel-edged tools or cast iron cooking pots. Instead, they objected to missionary and government efforts to change social relations. From a tribal point of view, changing gender relations posed grave cosmological dangers, which is one reason Quaker efforts to "alter the sexual division of labor" helped precipitate the Creek Civil War, which in turn helped trigger the 1st Seminole

War—with ripple effects up and down the Eastern seaboard and as far afield as Oklahoma and Texas.¹⁴

One commonality across all tribes was (and is) the extent to which respect for the past matters:

A group's sacred history (oral traditions, stories of origin, creation, and tricksters, etc.) linked the other aspects of peoplehood together. The sacred history told about a group's territory and how the group got there, was a "how-to" in regard to religion, defined the group's kinship structure, and was the resource for sociopolitical organization.¹⁵

If it sounds like belonging to a peoplehood entails commitment to a "way of life," it does. As Elsie Clews Parsons put it when describing the Pueblos and Hopi (circa the 1920s), "economic life is so integrated with religion that anything hurtful to the economy tends also to be hurtful to religion"—a description that could actually be applied to any group of people who strives to abide by its faith.¹⁶ Thus, even though Islam is always described as "a way of life" and not just a religion, the same actually holds true for remaining resolutely Diné or Seneca (or Amish, Hutterite, Hasidic, or Baptist).

To be fair, Westerners did not initially pose a clear and present existential threat to tribal integrity or to Indian practices.¹⁷ For decades, White traders and trappers and Indians lived more or less symbiotically. It was not until emigrants began acquiring, owning, and buying and selling land that differences hardened. From the Indian perspective, the treatment of land as a commodity was both alien and alienating. Worse, it was Whites encroaching on Indian land, and White Indian agents, missionaries, and do-gooders who sought to change Indians—never the reverse. So, where was the middle ground?

By the 1860s:

... the underlying assumption of the architects of . . . treaties was that within thirty years with the help of education, the powerful motivation of private property, which would encourage greed (which was held to be inconspicuous in Indian societies), and the inculcation of Christian values by missionaries, the Indians would be sufficiently acculturated to enter the mainstream of American society.¹⁸

It should not take much to fast forward from policies like that to our present-day attitudes toward the "developing world." We Americans have long been solipsists, committed to the notion that if only we affect the right kind of liberation, we can help others become more like us.¹⁹ Yet, scan Indian country. The fact that plenty of American Indians continue to remain adamantly Indian suggests that, when push comes to shove, at least some members of tribes most places are likely to want to stand their ground.²⁰

"How!"

American Indian history offers all sorts of apposite lessons. Another that should resonate today is just how adept the most famous Indian fighters were at cultivating the media. Take General George S. Crook, whom many rate as America's preeminent Indian fighter. According to one of his biographers, Crook recognized early on "that advancement in the army depended on actions for which an officer received credit rather than an actual

achievement.”²¹ Thus, something else Crook availed himself of was John Gregory Bourke, a gifted memoirist and ethnographer.

But Crook does not just deserve our attention because he sought attention. He really was successful. He bested Indians in three different regions—the Northwest, Southwest, and the northern Plains—altering tactics to suit each tribe, yet always taking the same overall approach. According to Crook, his method was simple: to always be fair.²² According to Bourke, Crook had no “policy” toward the management of Indians “in which respect he differed from every other man I have met.”²³ Instead, he applied principles. Or, as historian Charles Robinson writes, “whatever Crook’s faults, they were offset by his fundamental humanity. None could deny the faith he inspired among the Indians. In war, he could be as cruel as they, but he always respected them as human beings.”²⁴

Much the same has been said of Kit Carson. Although Kit Carson’s career was about as different from Crook’s as it is possible to imagine—Carson started off as a mountain man and then served as an Indian agent before ever accepting a military command—their attitudes were strikingly similar: “He [Carson] was acquainted with their customs and their ways of thinking, and these he respected. He would listen to them with attention, and would respond in ways they could understand, and he told them the truth as he saw it.”²⁵ Also, “Carson believed, as did many whites of the time, that a military defeat severe enough to convince Indians of the futility of resistance was a necessary precondition of lasting peace, at least in some cases. People with warrior traditions might not give up their way of life unless they were genuinely convinced of the necessity.”²⁶

One other thing Crook and Carson shared was their attention to the literal, and not just human, terrain—Carson thanks to years of travel, and Crook because he insisted on traversing an area before deploying his forces. Not only did both men thus appreciate who and what they were up against, but when operating in the Southwest both did their utmost to wear out their quarry. Their aim: to keep Indians on the run. Crook’s strategy in Arizona was to encircle and relentlessly pummel any Indians his units came across. He would then have mobile units continue to crisscross the area until all resistance was smashed.²⁷ At one point he mounted nine expeditions simultaneously.

Yet, as impressive as this sounds, it was hardly unique. It turns out that Anthony Wayne, who took command of the Legion of the United States in 1792 on the heels of two disastrous defeats by the Shawnee, studied the Shawnees’s strengths and weaknesses, and once he discovered that they were neither sufficiently well organized nor well enough provisioned to conduct a long campaign, embarked on a war of non-stop attrition.²⁸ To contend with the Seminoles in the late 1830s, Zachary Taylor divided his area of operations into squares, and built roads in order to force the Seminoles further and further south into uninhabited areas. Walker Armistead (who succeeded Taylor) then ratcheted up the pressure by pursuing the Seminoles throughout the summer, denying them any possibility of respite.²⁹

One thing to note is that in each of these campaigns, although successful commanders analyzed their predecessors’ failures and thereby seem to have been innovators in their own right, none operated in a vacuum. As Crook’s own career suggests, plenty of institutional knowledge was available. Not only did Crook himself serve in three different regions, but in each location he would have served with (and was served by) others who had prior experience fighting Indians—to include other Indians.³⁰

Techniques—Auxiliaries and Scouts

Most successful campaigns waged against Indians fit a common pattern, which went something like this: strike; chase whoever got away; prevent the enemy from refitting and recovering; locate their hideouts; strike again—all while offering the prospect of surrender.

Variations on this theme were legion. The most successful Indian fighters targeted Indians during whatever season made it most difficult for Indians to recover: winter on the northern plains, summer on the southern plains. Or successful Indian fighters sent forces to penetrate Indians' safest redoubts. Sometimes they adopted both strategies together. This is what finally worked against the Navajo—whose flocks were seized, crops destroyed, and sanctuary penetrated in a single sweep. In other words, attrition alone proved insufficient. Instead, to get Indians to surrender required visibly destroying their means of collective self-reliance.

Crook, for example, understood that one difference between Apaches, who had "so few artificial wants," and Plains tribes boiled down to property.³¹ Ergo, he went out of his way to burn Plains Indian villages in winter when, if tribes lost their teepees they lost everything.³² But not everyone relished the idea of such pitiless destruction. According to Thomas Dunlay, Kit Carson did everything possible to avoid the sweep he was ordered to make through Canyon de Chelly, the Navajo's most impregnable safe haven.³³

Numerous officers accepted the ugly reality that Indians had to be defeated if the United States was to develop. Appreciating what was needed did not mean they always approved of the policies they were asked to carry out. Yet, in a counterintuitive twist, their empathy may have eased their consciences regarding the use of overwhelming force. Because Carson, for instance, knew it would take ruthlessness to get the Navajo to surrender, he dragged his feet. It also may help explain why he so willingly turned to the Utes.

Carson's use of Utes (and Apaches) when fighting the Navajos reveals a lot. First, if one of the country's most adept mountain men needed Indian assistance to subdue Indians in harsh terrain, who did not. Second, the fact that their traditional enemies were on the loose in Canyon de Chelly proved instrumental in the Navajos's willingness to come to terms.³⁴ But third, while Carson's use of Utes impelled the Navajo to surrender, they still would only surrender to him, in person. This signals that, in their view, Carson himself hardly fought them like a Ute.

Worth noting is that very few, if any, Western armies in the Americas succeeding against Indians without making use of other Indians. The fact that local enmities pre-dated the arrival of Europeans made it relatively easy for outsiders to recruit local auxiliaries and scouts.³⁵ Typically, using Indians to fight Indians offered four advantages. First, local knowledge proved indispensable for tracking down war parties and locating hideouts. Second, using Indians versus Indians kept tribes from uniting. This, in fact, is one reason James Carleton, Carson's commander, encouraged him to use Jicarilla Apaches and Utes against the Navajo; Carleton wanted to ensure that the Rocky Mountain and Plains tribes did not join forces in an anti-U.S. coalition.³⁶

The third edge Indian allies offered was psychological. As John Bourke noted about subduing the Apache, "They had never been afraid of the Americans alone, but now that their own people were fighting against them they did not know what to do."³⁷ Crazy Horse and his followers likewise "yielded because they saw that it was impossible to stand against the coalition made by General Crook between the white soldiers and their own people."³⁸ Basically, once Whites and Indians showed up in places where fugitive groups felt safest and most hidden, they knew their days of freedom were numbered.

As for the fourth advantage auxiliaries and scouts provided: the cavalry could stay cavalry. Soldiers did not *have* to fight like Indians. Although it has become commonplace to assert that the most successful Indian fighters fought Indians using Indian methods, this is not true. Yes, cavalry units rode further and harder once they learned to lighten their loads. But they never lived off the land, let alone off of buffalo (like, say, the Plains tribes), let alone off the land and via raiding like the Apaches or Comanches. In the most

profound ways, Western Indian fighters instead stayed quite Western. Certainly those who were successful did learn to negotiate with Indians *to* Indians' satisfaction. But—and this is the critical point—Indians no more mistook Whites for Indians when it came to peace talks than they did in battle. This, too, underscores the takeaway that Whites never *really* adopted Indian approaches to warfare. To suggest they did distorts history.

Equally significantly, Crook—the exemplar—never tried to turn his Indian auxiliaries into something other than Indians: “General Crook makes of his Indian auxiliaries, not soldiers, but more formidable Indians.”³⁹ This, too, helped ensure soldiers remained soldiers. In other words, just because the U.S. Army found itself waging wars *against* Indians did not mean the U.S. army transformed itself into some hybrid new thing.⁴⁰

As for those who were the real experts at Indian fighting—namely, other Indians—auxiliaries and scouts usually fought in multiple campaigns. Witness the Delaware. Delaware mercenaries were employed *for generations*, and from one side of the country to the other. Or take the Pawnee. Between 1864 and 1877, Pawnee

scouts rendered invaluable assistance to the United States Army. . . . The Pawnee scouts led missions deep into contested territory, tracked resisting bands and spearheaded attacks into their villages, protected construction crews of the Union Pacific Railroad against Indian raiders, carried dispatches through dangerous territory, and, on more than one occasion, saved American troops from disaster on the field of battle.⁴¹

This is another under-recognized aspect of the Indian Wars. While Crook et al. continue to receive the lion's share of the credit for coming up with new ways to fight Indians, worth considering is just which of their innovations should really be considered most significant or valuable.

Arguably, the most important thing any successful Indian fighter did was prove able to read Indian people(s), both as friends *and* foes—and to respond to them accordingly.

A Few More Comparisons

By now it should be clear: the common counterinsurgency trope that “American ground troops had better learn to be more like the natives” may be wrong-headed. As for what else a reappraisal of American Indian history suggests, one can find a range of other illuminating parallels and counterpoints.

Take, for instance, the bane of most commanders' recent existence: competing agendas across different branches of the U.S. military and throughout the interagency. At the height of the Indian Wars (1846–1890), the problem of stove pipes, rice bowls, and split jurisdictions with both the Indian Bureau and the War Department responsible for Indian affairs created endless difficulties. Compounding them were Congressional rivalries played out in personnel appointments in these very same departments. Not only were Indian agents—the contractors of their day (!)—notoriously corrupt, but they tended to have short tenures and thus came to understand little and could have cared less about their charges. Or, as the Apaches were wont to complain to John Bourke: the lack of “continuous relations” with their agents led to chronic inconsistency.

As for the media, not only was the nineteenth-century press prone to inaccurate reporting, but it could sensationalize and whip up public sentiment unusually effectively, not all of which was always anti-Indian. For instance, the media could and did turn atrocities committed against Indians into national causes that then prompted Congressional

investigations. For their part, humanitarians instigated all manner of pro- and anti-assimilation campaigns. To say do-gooders often competed with one another (as they do today), or that they seized on any connection or opportunity to lobby politicians, barely does the situation in the late 1800s justice. Indeed, today's development efforts hardly look novel compared to much that was tried out on Indians.

Of course, at least some of what Indians were subjected is no longer possible. Crook, for example, was a fierce proponent of workfare. He felt that putting Indians to work would keep them from brooding over the wrongs they had suffered, while hard physical labor would likewise prevent their reacting to boredom via violence.⁴² Thus, as soon as the Apaches surrendered he put them to work digging irrigation ditches and tilling fields. For better or worse, this program did not last, while Crook's other idea of enlisting Indians in the military never got off the ground.

From Crook's perspective, Apaches lived in a tribal society; Caucasians belonged to an individualized civilization. He recognized that his Apache scouts had enlisted as individuals. Over time he felt sure that their military service would help them to individuate.⁴³ Nor was Crook alone in this conviction. Other generals, like Sherman, agreed with him.⁴⁴ How ironic, then, that American Indians have not only been among the U.S.'s staunchest patriots, serving in the military in disproportionate numbers, but that after more than 100 years, tribes still have not dissolved. No doubt tribes' privileged status as quasi-sovereign entities has helped prevent their dissolution. But no less important has been all the programmatic churn and serial experimentation by the federal government. Indeed, combine the federal government's lack of a coherent and consistent policy with the fact that enough Indians have lived remotely for long enough, and we have one plausible explanation for why tribes continue to persist.

However, the overriding reason for tribes, and not just Indians, persisting might lie deeper still. After all, not even Kit Carson, who had two Indian wives, seemed to fully appreciate the depth of Indians' attachment and thus their commitment *to their* sense of "peoplehood," and the difference this has always made.

Conclusions

There are books' worth of other striking parallels one can find between our experiences with tribes in this country and with non-Westerners abroad. But similarities represent only one side of the coin. Differences are no less revealing. For instance, opponents today possess organizational capabilities and technologies, geopolitical reach, and numbers of potential sympathizers that American Indian leaders could never have dreamed of. We would be fools many times over to fight Al Qaeda's future progeny as though they are tribesmen from our past.

At the same time, we need to remember: we got Indians to submit by destroying or, at the very least, curtailing their way of life. There is no nice way to put this. We successfully turned Indians from independent into domestic-dependent peoples. Doing so took decades. And we had two distinct advantages. First, Indians did not stand a demographic chance. We vastly outnumbered *them*.⁴⁵ Second, they depended on resources, like buffalo or deer, on which we did not. In contrast, our current (or any likely future) adversaries do not have a unique way of life we can successfully single out for destruction. If anything, the opposite is the case, since it is our presence, our global clout, our profligate ways, and our values (which themselves require that we promote all of the above) that create friction, lead to grievances, and help put us in others' crosshairs. Among other things, it is our methods of engagement *with* them that people resent. Yet, to the extent that our aggressive commercialism is part and parcel of who we are, redressing ourselves as a grievance may

not be possible—at least not without a radical reappraisal of how we do business. Yet, how do we do that if doing so defies who we are?

This is one conundrum we face. A second challenge inheres in how we sort through learnable lessons from the past decade at war. And here is where much care will be needed since, from certain angles, our tribal encounters in Afghanistan and Iraq *do* bear an uncanny resemblance to tribal encounters from our past—highlighting these has been one purpose of this review article. But what about the flip side of those encounters? What about what these encounters reveal about us. For instance, what if tribal non-Westerners are less like our Indians than it is *we who remain too much our Westernizing selves?*

Whose similarities would we do better to focus on then? This is a question that points to one of the perennial problems with analogies. They tend to focus us on only certain sets of comparisons, deflecting us from inconvenient other truths. This harkens back to the lumpers/splitters problem alluded to at the outset of the article: *should* every armed movement be labeled an insurgency? The failsafe answer to such a question has to be “no,” since differences always matter, and differences are what make every case unique. Consequently, cases drawn from American Indian or *any* history should only ever be used as foils, since foils—unlike analogies—help throw both differences *and* similarities into high relief.

In that spirit, then, and as a thought exercise, imagine where we might be today if only we had remained more familiar with our country's long history with American Indians prior to 9/11. Presumably, a more appreciative re-consideration of *our* non-Westerners might have helped us realize why we would engender resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq. Just as a re-examination of relations with the living, breathing non-Westerners we should know best—American Indians—might have better prepared us for the difficulties we would experience understanding non-Westerners we did not really know at all. Alternatively, had we been able to acknowledge how little we *still* appreciate about the non-Westerners in our midst we might have more honestly *self*-assessed. That alone could have been eye-opening useful—especially since, in hindsight, we ended up once again ignoring Sun Tzu's commonsense dictum of understanding our adversaries *and* ourselves—something that, more than 100 years ago, men like Crook and Carson instinctively knew to do.

Notes

1. In his 2008 article in *American Anthropologist* (“The ‘Old West’ in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country,” 110(2), pp. 237–247), Stephen Silliman treats “Indian Country” as a “heritage metaphor.” He focuses on how this metaphor is used, and what its use reveals about the U.S. military and its attitudes. He also discusses anthropologists', Indians', and others' responses to its use. He does not dig deeper, into the nature of warfare itself.

2. Robert Kaplan, “Indian Country,” *The Wall Street Journal* (21 September 2004), p. A22.

3. Robert Kaplan, *Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground* (New York: Random House, 2005).

4. “An Interview with Daniel Pipes,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (2 May 2004). Available at www.danielpipes.org/article/1759 (accessed 24 May 2004).

5. David Ignatius, “Victory could Take Decades,” *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (3–9 January 2005), p. 23.

6. Clearly, a skeptic might claim Indians only stay Indian in order to keep receiving federal dollars. However, even if this were the case, they would not have to uphold all or nearly any of the tribal traditions that they do.

7. Bil Gilbert, *God Gave Us This Country: Tekamthi and the First American Civil War* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 51. Ironically, this same sentiment is exemplified in *Seediq Bale*, a 2011 movie about aborigines' fight against the Japanese in Taiwan (circa 1930).

8. Since my fieldwork days in Somalia—where people think in terms of genealogies, not collectivities that are neatly bounded, fixed, corporate structures—my definition of tribalism has been: if you are a member of my tribe I consider you trustworthy until you prove yourself untrustworthy. If you are not a member of my tribe I consider you untrustworthy until you prove yourself trustworthy (and since I will be scrutinizing your every move, what I am looking for I will often see). Corollary to this: who decides who's a member of the tribe? The group. Who comprises the group? Its members.

9. "Manhood was defined in terms of ambition, hard work, bravery, generosity toward the poor, and loyalty toward friends. One way for a man to satisfy his ambitions was to go to war" (Mark Van De Logt, *War Party in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the U.S. Army* [Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010], p. 12).

10. T. R. Fehrenbach, *Comanches: The History of a People* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003 [1974]), p. 514. For three more recent, scholarly books, see: Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

11. See, for instance, Arthur Quinn, *Hell with the Fire Out: A History of the Modoc War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).

12. John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), p. 92.

13. The threat to people's ability to continue to do what they *need* to do in order to remain who they are clearly separates those who want to stay who they are from those who do not.

14. Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 135.

For the Spanish equivalent, consider the Pueblo Revolt in 1680, an uprising that:

required careful planning to coordinate "an offensive involving some 17,000 Pueblos living in more than two dozen independent towns spread out over several hundred miles and further separated by at least six different languages and countless dialects, many of them mutually unintelligible" (Colin Calloway [citing David Weber], *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003], p. 174).

Among the impetuses for the Pueblo Revolt: Franciscan missionaries' efforts to get Pueblo Indians to abandon women's fertility societies. In other words, the Spaniards had engaged in persistent interference in gender relations (Calloway, p. 152). Compounding this "sin" was the Spaniards' inability to protect the Pueblos from outside raiders. In other words, the Spaniards proved unable to provide security. Inherent in this case are all sorts of echoes of Afghans's (and Iraqis's) mistrust of us.

15. Tom Holt, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans & Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. xiv.

16. Elsie Clews Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion, Volume 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996 [1939]), p. 1141.

17. Not until what historian Richard White calls the "middle ground" began to fall away. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

18. William Hagan, *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), p. 18.

19. These policies date back to Founders like Thomas Jefferson, who advocated purposely indebting Indians.

20. One group of non-Westerners who, curiously, never did mount armed resistance: Hawaiians, who have recently adopted a number of sovereignty-oriented tactics pioneered by American Indians.

21. Charles Robinson, *General Crook and the Western Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), p. 83.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
23. John Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971 [1891]), p. 142.
24. Robinson, *General Crook and the Western Frontier*, p. 311.
25. Thelma Guild and Harvey Carter, *Kit Carson: A Pattern for Heroes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 213.
26. Thomas Dunlay, *Kit Carson & the Indians* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2005), p. 182.
27. Robinson, *General Crook and the Western Frontier*, p. 127.
28. Gilbert, *God Gave Us This Country*, p. 165.
29. Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, pp. 159 and 184.
30. Unfortunately, what would not have been available to Crook were the experiences of prior governments. As T. R. Fehrenbach points out in his magisterial (but politically incorrect) history of the Comanche, lessons learned over *generations* of fighting the Comanche were never collectively learned or collated. For instance, in the late 1770s, Don Juan Bautista de Anza:

believed that the Comanche problem could not be solved unless the Spanish first gained the Amerindians' respect. Ordered to seek peace, he was convinced that the surest route to an understanding lay through war. **He resolved to fight the horse *indios* with their own methods.** In the fall of 1779, he gathered a great force of lancers and armed civilians, an army of six hundred men, including 259 Amerindian auxiliaries. Moving cautiously behind a screen of Amerindian scouts, taking devious routes, and making every effort to avoid detection, de Anza marched north onto the eastern Colorado plateau, deep in Comanche country. . . (Fehrenbach, pp. 221–222, emphasis added)

With the exception of the one line I have highlighted, this could almost be a description of Crook—or Carson, or the handful of successful Comanche fighters who Fehrenbach describes reinventing the wheel at least three, and possibly four, times over. Or, for that matter, it could describe Colonel Benjamin Grierson, commander of the 10th Cavalry, who chased Victorio and his Mimbres Apache followers to ground in the early 1880s (Kendall Gott, “The Victorio Campaign: Hunting Down and Elusive Enemy,” in Richard Davis ed., *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare 1775–2007* [Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2008]).

31. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, p. 127.
32. Robinson, *General Crook and the Western Frontier*, pp. 174–175.
33. Dunlay, *Kit Carson & the Indians*, p. 261.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
35. Beginning with Hernan Cortes in Mexico.
36. Thomas Dunlay, *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the United States Army, 1860–90* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 30.
37. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, pp. 212–213. Of course, we also have to bear in mind that although the Apaches had Mexico to retreat into, their finite numbers made it possible for the United States to effectively decimate entire bands (this is a point made by Michael Lieder and Jake Page, *Wild Justice: The People of Geronimo vs. the United States* (New York: Random House, 1997)).
38. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
39. Dunlay, *Wolves for the Blue Soldiers*, p. 95.
40. A potential lesson: instead of trying to turn “them” into us today, we should be helping “them” become more formidable versions of whatever best fits *their* underlying social structure. Critical questions should be: *does* a country have to field a military that looks like a professional Western military in order to successfully secure itself? Or secure its country’s place in the world?
41. Van De Logt, *War Party in Blue*, p. 3.
42. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook*, p. 216.

43. Ibid., p. 225.

44. Van De Logt, *War Party in Blue*, p. 161. Van De Logt also cites a letter that Crook wrote to General Sheridan in 1876 in which he argues that "As a soldier the Indian wears the uniform, draws rations and pay, and is in all respects on an equal footing with a white man. It demonstrates to his simple mind in the most positive manner that we have no prejudice against him on account of his race, and that while he behaves himself he will be treated the same as a white man. Returning to his tribe after this service he is enabled to see beyond the old superstition that has governed his people, and thinks and decides for himself" (p. 247, fn 2). Crook's attitude is classically solipsistic: Indians have all the potential in the world to become "us." Until they do so, they are victims of their simple (collective) mind.

45. This was both thanks to diseases, which decimated Indian societies, and endless supplies of emigrants.