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NDU Press

Zellen, Barry S. "Clan, the State, and War: Lessons from the Far North." *Joint Force Quarterly*: JFQ 58 (2010): 20.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/69601>

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Clan, the State, and War

Lessons from the Far North

By BARRY S. ZELLEN

Since the modern state first encroached upon their pristine and sparsely inhabited homeland 400 years ago, the Inuit of the Arctic have aspired to restore their Aboriginal rights and cultural traditions, and whenever possible, to reclaim components of their indigenous sovereignty. As the Inuit learned more about the systems and structures of governance that were exported from Europe and later the newly independent capitals of North America, they found new ways to reclaim many lost powers through innovative domestic diplomacy, negotiation, and various forms of political protest.

This contrasted elsewhere in the Americas, where the modern state collided more forcefully with the interests and sovereign aspirations of hundreds of indigenous empires, nations, and tribes from the late 15th century onward. The result was annihilatory warfare, genocide, forced migrations, and coercive assimilation policies—all aiming at the general extinguishment of indigenous identity. It was a brutal chapter in history that pioneered the art of ethnic cleansing but that resulted through its decisive results in domestic security and opened up an entire continent to American power. While a part of American history that evokes much guilt nowadays, our three centuries of Indian wars provided us with a useful testing ground for counterinsurgency, coalition warfare with tribal allies, balance-of-power diplomacy, and many an improvised admixture of hard, soft, and smart power. Who we are as a nation, and how we fight wars around the world, continues to be shaped by our experience tackling the many security challenges presented by America’s first inhabitants and their spirited defense against our inevitable expansion.

In the Far North of our continent, the state collided with indigenous tribes much later in history, with economic contact, and later military interaction, starting in the 17th and 18th centuries. By the time the presence of a rapidly modernizing state began to be felt in the Far North, its methods for asserting political control began to mellow, with hard power shifting to soft power and treaty negotiation replacing conquest for the final integration of the last, virgin territories into the American and the Canadian polities.

In 1867, America purchased Alaska from Russia and with it Russia’s assertion of sovereignty over Alaska’s interior tribes, and because of its harsh climate and remote location, most Americans thought William Seward was foolish to have spent \$7 million on these frozen acres, dubbing the new territory “Seward’s Ice Box” or “Seward’s Folly.” Great Britain, and later Canada, similarly bought their way to sovereign expansion, not by purchasing the land from a competing power but by entering into a series of numbered treaties, nation to nation, that brought the

western tribes into its expanding confederation. Thus, largely through negotiation between two unequal parties, tribe and state, the new territories of the Far North entered into southern control without, by and large, recourse to war—with exceptions including the Métis rebellion from 1871 through 1885, and the more limited armed uprising at Oka, Quebec, in 1990. Because the political integration of the Far North was achieved largely without war, the preferred tools for reconciling the interests of tribe and state would remain predominantly nonviolent, modeled on the treaty process, with negotiation helping to bring some balance to the many other asymmetries—such as economic and military power—that separated the indigenous tribes from the modern states laying sovereign claim to the North.

While the expansion of the modern state into the North did not require frontier warfare as experienced elsewhere in America’s expansion, modern warfare did have a profound sociopolitical impact on the relationship between Alaska Natives and the modern state. This was most dramatically illustrated in June 1942 when Japan bombed Dutch Harbor and invaded the islands of Attu and Kiska in the Western Aleutians. With Japan’s forcible resettlement of the surviving native Aleuts from Attu to Hokkaido for the remainder of the war, Alaska Natives quickly recognized that they too faced grave danger, and the crucible of war would help to tighten the bond between Alaska’s indigenous peoples and the rapidly expanding modern state, which mobilized for war by building new air-strips, surging manpower, and cutting the Alaska Highway across 1,400 miles of northern wilderness in 1942.

While this rapid mobilization would create many stresses and strains on the long-isolated Native population, including the painful odyssey of the remaining Aleut population as it was relocated outside the war zone to camps in Alaska’s southeast, the wartime experience would also help bring the two peoples closer together—most evident in the formation of the Alaska Eskimo Scouts in 1942, the famed “Tundra Army” organized by Major Marvin “Muktuk” Marston, which would become the Alaska Territorial Guard, with thousands of volunteers representing over 100 Aleut, Athabaskan, Inupiaq, Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Yupik, and non-Native communities. In the high North Atlantic, the dual impact of the Battle of the Atlantic, and America’s defense of Greenland and maritime Canada, would similarly bring modern state power into remote and traditional Inuit territories in Labrador, Baffin Island, and Greenland. Later, during the Cold War, the massive DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line Project and integration of the isolated Arctic coast into North America’s air defense would have a similarly transformative impact, extending modern state power deeper into the homeland of the Canadian Inuit.

Native participation in the defense of Alaska would provide a powerful unifying force, stimulating the movement for Native rights that culminated in the historic 1971 passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the pioneering land treaty transferring 44 million acres of land title and \$1 billion in compensation to Alaska Natives, a model embraced and later enhanced

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as Inuit land claims were negotiated across the entire North American Arctic, with Inuit gaining title to nearly one-tenth of their traditional land base, and new co-management structures enabling a joint approach to managing natural resources, land access, and economic development.

A new spirit of reconciliation between tribe and state thus emerged in the Far North, recognizing two fundamental truths on the ground: that the modern state had arrived, and with it a preponderance of power; but also that the indigenous tribes had long been there, with their own traditions and cultures—and that these cultures still mattered. This reconciliation has resulted in new governing institutions to moderate this “clash of civilizations” along the last frontier, as new forms of local, regional, territorial, and even tribal governance have taken root—some using a public governance model while others embracing a more traditional tribal model. At the municipal level of government, there is the North Slope Borough in Alaska, a vast municipality that sustains itself through property taxation of the Prudhoe Bay oil facilities, a borough larger in size than the state of Massachusetts but governing a population of just 6,000—with hundreds of millions in petro-dollars to build world-class infrastructure and provide modern government services. At the territorial level, there is the vast Nunavut Territory, governing one-fifth of Canada’s landmass, home to just 30,000 people, almost all Inuit, scattered across 28 villages in an area larger than Europe—and a source of much of Canada’s future natural resource wealth and strategic waterways. And at the tribal level, there is the new Inuit government of Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador, which has a unique Inuit constitution that governs its 2,000 Inuit residents living in six villages in a traditional manner, rejecting a public governance model in favor of one that is more distinctively tribal in nature.

As shown by these innovations in northern governance, indigenous culture has become increasingly recognized not as a fault line of conflict but as a new and viable boundary line for political institutions, providing a foundation for political stability. The experience in the Far North suggests that with prudence and innovation, and a willingness to redraw political boundaries to better reflect the underlying ethnocultural topology, it is possible to create stable frontier regions free of war, and with effective mechanisms for mediating tribe-state disputes before they explode into violent conflicts.

“multicultural nationalism”—and important indigenous groups allied themselves so openly and collaborated so closely.⁴ Today, even Correa must rein in political bravura while wondering if past is prologue.

And in Peru, contending national forces conduct their arm wrestling in the arena of ethnic politics, a development that has already claimed the lives of scores of poor Indians and underresourced police, two communities that share a common status-gap with their country’s ruling elite. The case of Peru is significantly unlike that found in neighboring Bolivia and Ecuador, as the armed forces in the former embarked on a herculean but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to radically restructure the country so as to prevent a violent revolution from below. There, military

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government and movements, not by elected democracy, have historically ushered in measurable progress for indigenous peoples, although with varying degrees of respect for their indigeneity.

In Central America, the entire eastern region of Nicaragua has been declared an independent state by a majority of that country’s indigenous peoples, many veterans of the anti-Sandinista struggles of the 1980s, with a call for a new ethnic armed force.

Ethnicities and Militaries

Ethnicity and the roles played by military and security forces thus have obtained a relevance that belies the paucity of contemporary scholarship on them. Three decades ago, before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the resurgence of nationalities in the former Soviet empire, before the emergence of Native Americans as a political force in a broad swath of Latin American countries, and before the latticework of extra-hemispheric ethnic revivals ranging from Greenland to western China, a small but important body of academic literature emerged on the intersection between ethnicity and the military in the developing world. U.S. political scientist Cynthia Enloe

Library and Archives Canada (O.B. Buell)



Indigenous Métis men taken prisoner during rebellion against Canada, 1885

U.S. troops land on Attu after Japanese invasion, May 1943



Emmerdorf Air Force Base History Office

produced two of the most indispensable of these pioneering studies, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* and *Police, Military, Ethnicity: Foundations of State Power*. Together, these works defined and highlighted the importance of military policy in determining ethnic frontiers and their prominence in governance of unstable multi-ethnic societies.

Enloe examined the extent to which military and security policies represented elite manipulation of ethnicity. She assayed the impact of ethnic strategies that formed part of the personnel policies of national security establishments, including how they were organized to ensure both ethnic group allegiance and national service. She looked at the historical and contemporary outcomes that influence class, religion, and ethnicity and their effect on the loyalty of the military and the police. Showing the extent to which ethnic identification served to limit national security planning, Enloe presented a working model for analysis about the role played by the military in the operation of the security core of the state vis-à-vis ethnic issues. The differentiation between the army on one hand, and the navy and air force on the other, formed part of her analysis, as well as the role played by the police and the impact that the relative gap in uniformed status suffered by law enforcement had on the calculations of security establishments.

Enloe offered what she called an "ethnic state security map" of elite expectations of various ethnic groups as well as their perceived political dependability. This, she found,

offered the possibility to predict political postures vis-à-vis the state, "often an ideal design matching expectations to strategic formulas." She observed that mapping is the mental calculation by which nation-state elites find an optimal way of securing the state by means of interethnic architecture. The most important were:

- ethnic groups residing along sensitive frontiers
- ethnic groups fulfilling strategic economic roles (exploited or privileged)
- ethnic groups with sufficient political resources to challenge the existing political order
- ethnic groups with ties to potential foreign state rivals
- ethnic groups with the greatest access to the state structure as currently organized.

In Latin America, a number of nation-states meet two or more of these criteria with regard to indigenous peoples, with the combinations suggesting in several cases the potential for geostrategic hecatomb. None, however, except for Bolivia, are represented in the last category.⁵

The relevance of the work of Enloe and a few more recent researchers such as the late political scientist Donna Lee Van Cott earlier in her career, historian Cecilia Méndez G., and Selmeski take on new brio as conventional elite assumptions about the armed forces' archetypal national and integrative functions are challenged by facts on the ground south of the Rio Grande. In

Latin America, the military still plays an integral role in institutionally defending the state against external foes while assuring its domination over the national population. And as Méndez points out, the armed forces not only play a political role, but also have an impact on daily life that helps define national character. In many countries in the region, the military and the police remain a primary point of contact between rural indigenous peoples and the nation-state, with their interface extending to questions of education and social mobility.

As ethnic unrest continues to build in underperforming democratic states, key issues are the social composition and elite direction of the legal forces arrayed to repress unrest among those groups where such

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instability is most likely. In addition, against shibboleths about the military as a catalyst for modernization and the creation of primary group identities around the nation-state, this emerging literature may fill in the blanks about the enduring appeal and relevance of ethnicity. Perceptions of a nation-state elite, and who they are, can be key in determining military-ethnic relations. As Enloe shows, the

Museo de la Memoria



Residents of Villa el Salvador, Peru, point to suspected member of Sendero Luminoso, September 1992

Republic of Ecuador (Santiago Armas)



Presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Rafael Correa of Ecuador greet crowds in Quito

equation includes questions such as whether a particular group can be trusted based on their position on a continuum of ethnic/national identification, whether consensus or political fragmentation is a better political strategy to pursue, and the degree to which the state can forgo additional military manpower from conscription of “unreliable” ethnic groups.⁶

In countries where ethnicity is not necessarily determinative alone in creating security challenges within the ranks of the military and the police, it nevertheless arises when paired with the social, economic, and political fault lines that modernization and market economies pose to communal societies. Perhaps for that reason, when violence erupts, as it did in the Peruvian Amazon in June 2009 over the national government’s failure to consult native peoples before allotting vast tracts of their ancestral homeland to national and foreign companies, the non-Indian elite in Lima needed to question whether it could count on the loyalty of the military, the lower ranks of which were made up largely of people from the rebellious region, to loyally restore order.⁷ In the month before the violence, police officials repeatedly warned of the increasing numbers of Indians pouring into the area, their reports including the amount and kinds of armaments the protestors were carrying and the fact that many were veterans of Peru’s brief border war with Ecuador in 1995.⁸ The Peruvian General Intelligence Directorate reportedly informed the national law enforcement ministry 2 weeks earlier that police efforts to remove the roadblocks thrown up by protestors would cause a violent confrontation. Later, government officials publicly contradicted each other as to whether they had advanced knowledge of their indigenous adversaries, while privately suggesting the indigenous communities did have useful intelligence about the government’s own plans—by means of a network of lower ranking military and police officials sympathetic to the imprisoned former military officer Antauro Humala, spokesperson for an ultranationalist Indian ideology.⁹

The case of Peru, where more than 45 percent of the population is Indian and an additional 37 percent is mestizo, is particularly worthy of greater examination, in part because of the stark contrast between events there and those in neighboring Bolivia and Ecuador. Radical mestizo, or mixed-race, former military officers Antauro Humala and his brother Ollanta (the latter the winner of some

45 percent of the votes in a 2006 presidential contest) are the products of exclusive private schools. Although they lead two separate ultranationalist political parties, the ultimate aim of their ethnocacerist movement is to reunite “the three Inca republics, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru,” while seeking not “a change of government, of people or of a face, but of the state”—in other words, the very foundation upon which Peru’s government rests. The manner in which these and other ethnocacerists engage in a nationalist historiography calls to mind the dictum of historian of nationalism Elie Kedourie—that “nationalists make use of the past in order to subvert the present.”¹⁰

were in other parts of the continent already being questioned.

Different from the example of Ecuador, Bolivia, and other countries where Indian activism emerged from civilian popular and union movements, “in Peru, the pro-indigenous movement that would have the greatest impact had military roots, bases and ideology.” That ethnocacerism appealed largely to low-ranking personnel with the military and police suggested not only the ethnic glass ceiling that is an unwritten rule in those institutions, but also the inability of Peru’s national defense and public safety institutions

USAPD (Maureen Taft-Morales)



K'iche'maya women show inked fingers after voting in Guatemala

In some ways reminiscent of the regime of left-wing nationalist General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968–1975), ethnocacerism, as observed by Cecilia Méndez G., projected itself as:

the flag carrier of Peruvian peasants and Indians and especially of the thousands of [military] reservists of overwhelmingly Andean origin who fought against Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path guerrillas], and in less proportion against Ecuador [during a 1995 border conflict], and who the State and the political parties seemed to have abandoned. . . . In effect, it was the first post-velasquista political movement that took an openly critical posture regarding anti-indigenous racism and neo-liberal policies, which

to serve as a channel for the emergence of a Native American middle class.¹¹

The case of Bolivia represents another, diametrically different example of the phenomenon offered by Enloe. There, amid great social tension, Morales appears able to count on the continued support of the military in what is still remembered as Latin America’s most coup-prone nation. By accepting indigenous peoples in their senior officer ranks, the military and state have helped themselves to be seen as more legitimate by the majority Native American population. Upon assuming the presidency, Morales—an important antagonist of the security forces from his time as the coca growers’ leader in the semitropical Chapare—worked hard to recreate the

military according to his own needs. The membership of the officer corps was drastically remodeled, with several classes of senior officers forced from their posts—particularly those Morales considered disloyal or critical of his international allies. At the same time, Morales created an atmosphere in which

patriotic holidays, national hymns, and flag ceremonies, and public monuments are dedicated to wars and military heroes sometimes with greater frequency than those that recall civilians. In calling for a fundamental refoundation of Bolivian society, Morales issued his own call for a new military-peasant pact,

ethnocacerism's appeal largely to low-ranking personnel with the military and police suggested the inability of Peru's defense and safety institutions to serve as a channel for the emergence of a Native American middle class

officers could, and were encouraged to, serve as peoples of indigenous origin.

Morales's efforts had effects extending beyond the officer ranks. As Selmeski has observed, the day after Morales visited the Presidential Guard's garrison for lunch, declaring himself "still 'a reserve soldier' despite holding the position of 'Captain General,' hundreds of Indian youth presented themselves voluntarily for service," in the process overcoming a "general distain [*sic*] for conscription [that] is particularly true for Indians." Military service, Selmeski noted, can be viewed as a win-win situation, as it "provides opportunities for *indigenas* to accept or challenge the state-idea (and concomitant notions of nation and citizenship), and the Army to resist or accommodate the contentious process of indigenous self-identification, organization, and action." With an Indian commander in chief, it also offered the armed forces the opportunity to redefine (and redeem) its relationship to the country's chief executive. Morales, too, went further to win uniformed hearts and minds, adopting a "nationbuilding" model for the military promoted by his mentor, Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez, which involved the armed forces in development projects—road building and other infrastructure development, health care, and education—that were once the fiefdoms of civilian cabinet ministries. When the Constituent Assembly met in August 2006, 32 indigenous nations that had been previously trained by the armed forces paraded in front of the president at his request.¹²

Over time, Morales's actions suggested that he understood, in the words of Cecilia Méndez G., the continuing cardinal importance of the military in Latin American society—not only in terms of their much-remarked political impact, but also in daily life and socialization, where the pace of national identity itself is set by martial parades during

one that this time would be led by indigenous people and not uniformed populist *caudillos*.¹³ Few are betting, in the short run at least, that he will not continue to be successful.

The potential for ethnic conflict in "Latin" America is likely to remain a significant security question in the region for generations, all the more so given the growing expression of indigenous demands through the prism of ethnic nationalism. Key to the successful resolution of these real and potential conflicts is the role played by the police and military—the latter in particular traditionally a potent collective symbol of nationalism.

The questions posed by Enloe three decades ago and only partially addressed in recent scholarship remain central to unraveling the Gordian knot of how to make democracy real for millions of people in Latin America still outside the arc of its benefits and who look to non-Western ideas for answers to issues such as land tenure, the administration of justice, and interethnic relations. Answers to these questions will also achieve the unfinished hemispheric business of decolonization—including that necessarily needing to be carried out within nation-state bureaucracies, particularly within its security and defense establishments. Only by doing so will a broad assurance be offered that the clock will not be turned back on the progress of indigenous peoples seeking to regain full citizenship in lands once ruled by their ancestors. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Kees Kooning and Dirk Kruijt, eds., *Armed Actors: Organised Violence and State Failure in Latin America* (London: MacMillan, 2005).

² Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon C. Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 9th ed. (New York: Pearson, Longman, 2009), 163, 174.

³ Captain Paula Videla del Real, "El Conflicto Mapuche y su Impacto en la Seguridad Nacional," available at <www.mapuche.info/fakta/cesim1999.html>; Ivan Fredes, "Empresarios piden al Gobierno aplicar 'mano dura' por los atentados mapuches en el sur," *El Mercurio* (Valparaíso and Santiago), October 22, 2008.

⁴ Brian R. Selmeski, "Multicultural Citizens, Monocultural Men: Indigeneity, Masculinity, and Conscription in Ecuador," Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2007, 2–3.

⁵ Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 15, 17.

⁶ Cecilia Méndez G., "Populismo militar y etnicidad en los Andes," *Iconos, Revista de Ciencias Sociales* No. 26, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Flacso), Sede Quito, September 2006, 14.

⁷ Author interview with Peruvian defense and security expert Luis Giacoma Macchiavello.

⁸ Raúl Sohr, "Peru and the Law of the Jungle," *The Santiago Times*, June 18, 2009; Rocío Otoyá, "Disturbios en la Amazonía revelan fractura social en Perú," *Efe Spanish News Agency*, June 6, 2009; Paola Ugaz, "Indígenas peruanos, en guardia contra Alan García," *Terra Magazine*, May 12, 2009, available at <www.ar.terra.com/terramagazine/interna/0,EI8867-OI3760404,00.html>; Kristina Aiello, "Peru's Cold War against Indigenous People," *Worldpress.org*, July 19, 2009; "Inteligencia para ciegos," Instituto de Defensa Legal, August 26, 2009, available at <www.seguridadidid.org.pe/.../26.../inteligencia-para-ciegos.htm>.

⁹ Sohr, "García's development plans trigger bloody clashes in Peru's Amazon," *Latin News .com Weekly Report*, June 11, 2009 (WR-09-23); Doris Aguirre, "¿Quién dio la orden de desalojar a indígenas sin prevenir represalias?" *La Republica .pe*, June 12, 2009, available at <www.larepublica.pe/bagua-masacre/12/06/2009/quien-dio-la-orden-de-desalojar-indigenas-sin-prevenir-represalias>; "Editorial: Renuncia, diálogo y pacificación nacional," *El Comercio.com.pe*, June 8, 2009, available at <www.elcomercio.com.pe/imprensa/notas/renuncia-dialogo-pacificacion-nacional/20090608/297631>. Information about the use of the Antauro Humala network to spy on the government was obtained in confidential interviews with the author.

¹⁰ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed., expanded (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 70.

¹¹ Méndez G., "Populismo militar," 13–14; Manuel Piqueras Luna, "Etnicidad, Ejército y Policía en el Perú: Una aproximación," undated, available at <<http://blog.pucp.edu.pe/item/44822>>.

¹² Selmeski, 10; Douglas Farah, "Into the Abyss: Bolivia under Evo Morales and the MAS," *International Assessment and Strategy Center*, June 17, 2009, 33–36, available at <www.strategycenter.net/docLib/20090618_IASCIntoTheAbyss061709.pdf>; Pablo Stefanoni, "Arranca en Bolivia la Constituyente," *Página/12* (Argentina), August 6, 2006.

¹³ Méndez G., "Populismo militar," 14.

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