CHICAGO JOURNALS

Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923*

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On May 25, 1919, the conservative Austrian newspaper *Innsbrucker Nachrichten* observed that the end of the Great War had not made Europe a more peaceful place. Under the headline "War in Peace," the paper pointed to the extraordinarily high levels of ethnic and revolutionary violence that had recently erupted across the collapsed European land empires.[1] Indeed, if anything, the cessation of hostilities on the western front on November 11, 1918, was the exception rather than the rule. The war had finished a year earlier on the eastern front, as the Bolsheviks extricated Russia from the conflict. Yet despite this, violence continued there and spread to the Central powers as they were defeated in the fall of 1918. Ethnic strife, pogroms, revolutions, counterrevolutions, wars of independence, civil conflict, invasions, and interstate wars went on until 1923. One or more of these kinds of violence affected Russia, the Ukraine, Finland, the Baltic states, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Anatolia, and the Caucasus. Ireland experienced a war of independence and civil war in the same period.[2]

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[1] "War in Peace," *Innsbrucker Nachrichten* (Innsbruck), May 25, 1919.

[2] Recent literature on some of the conflicts discussed in this article includes Serhy Yekelchyk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford, 2007); Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003); Michael Reynolds, "Native Sons: Post-Imperial Politics, Islam, and Identity in the North Caucasus, 1917–1918," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56 (2008): 221–47, and *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge, 2010); and Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20*, 2nd ed. (London, 2003). See also Peter Gatrell, "War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–23," in *A Companion to World War One*, ed. John Horne (Oxford, 2010), 558–75.

PARAMILITARY VIOLENCE AND THE EUROPEAN "POSTWAR"

Paramilitarism was a prominent feature in all of these conflicts, and this essay seeks to explore the origins, manifestations, and legacies of this form of political violence as it emerged between 1917 and 1923. By "paramilitary violence," we mean military or quasi-military organizations and practices that either expanded or replaced the activities of conventional military formations. Sometimes this violence occurred in the vacuum left by collapsing states; on other occasions it served as an adjunct to state power; in yet others it was deployed against the state. It included revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence committed in the name of secular ideologies as well as ethnic violence linked to the founding of new nation-states or to minority groups that resisted this process. It shared the stage with other violence, such as social protest, insurrection, terrorism, police repression, criminality, and conventional armed combat.[3]

The term "paramilitary" was not formulated until the 1930s, when it was used to designate the emergence of armed political formations organized on military lines in fascist states; it was subsequently extended in the 1950s to describe such formations in the wars of decolonization and in postcolonial conflicts.[4] But paramilitary formations have a much older history, whether as local militias, guerrilla movements, or armed adjuncts to the forces of order. They have proved significant in periods of defeat, notably in Spain, Austria, and Prussia during the Napoleonic Wars, when standing armies were unable to halt the French advance. In their respective "wars of liberation," Spanish guerrillas, Andreas Hofer's Landsturm in the Tyrolese Alps, and the German *Freikorps* of 1812–13 achieved legendary status and their influence was still perceptible following World War I, if only as a historical reference point for emerging paramilitary movements that sought to legitimate themselves and emulate the success of anti-Napoleonic resistance.[5] What was distinct about these new movements, however, was that they appeared after a century in which national armies had become the norm and modern police formations, penal codes, and prisons had helped to firmly establish a largely unchallenged monopoly of force in the hands of the state—a monopoly that eroded as the Great War dissolved into widespread, smaller conflicts.[6] Moreover, the fact that this occurred as part of a major transition in state forms, social structures, and political ideologies meant that paramilitary violence was imbued with a

[3] Sven Reichardt, "Paramilitarism," in *World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Cyprian P. Blamires, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), 1:506–7.

[4] "Paramilitary Forces," in *International Military and Defence Encyclopedia*, ed. Trevor N. Dupuy, 6 vols. (Washington, DC, and New York, 1993), 5:2104–7.

[5] Daniel Moran and Arthur Moran, eds., *People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2002).

[6] Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Rise of the Modern Police and the European State System from Metternich to the Second World War* (Cambridge, 1992).

double significance, as a force that affected the outcome of military conflicts but also as a new source of political authority and state organization. Its impact was political and symbolic as well as military and operational.

In this sense, our essay aims to think afresh about one of the most important trajectories that led from the violence of war to the relative quietude of the second half of the 1920s. Historians have proposed a number of concepts in order to assess this process. One is the presumed "brutalization" of postwar societies. But the war experience itself (which was not dissimilar for German, Hungarian, British, or French soldiers) does not sufficiently explain why politics was "brutalized" after 1918 in some of the former combatant states but not in others.[7] If the brutalization thesis, once widely endorsed, has come under sustained criticism in recent years—notably for failing to account for the fact that the vast majority of veterans returned to peaceful civilian existence—it has not, as yet, been replaced by empirically sound alternative explanations for the widespread escalation of violence after the end of the war.[8]

Perhaps one of the most convincing explanations for the uneven distribution of paramilitary violence in Europe lies in the mobilizing power of defeat. Defeat should be seen not just in terms of the balance of power but also as a state of mind (including the refusal to acknowledge the reversal) that Wolfgang Schivelbusch has termed a "culture of defeat."[9] The nation had played a central role during the Great War in organizing and endorsing the mass deployment of violence by millions of European men. By the same token, the nation was a potent means of legitimizing, reabsorbing, and neutralizing that same violence once the conflict was over. Where the nation had been defeated,

[7] On the "brutalization thesis," see, among others, George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990). A similar argument in favor of the brutalization thesis was put forward by Adrian Lyttleton, "Fascism and Violence in Post-War Italy: Political Strategy and Social Conflict," in *Social Protest, Violence, and Terror*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (London, 1982), 262–63. For a critical view that argues against the usefulness of the concept for France, see Antoine Prost, "Les limites de la brutalisation: Tuer sur le front occidental, 1914–1918," *Vingtième Siècle* 81 (2000): 5–20; for Britain, see Jon Laurence, "Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post–First World War Britain," *Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003): 557–89.

[8] For Germany in particular, see Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914–1923* (Oxford, 2007); and Dirk Schumann, "Europa, der Erste Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit: Eine Kontinuität der Gewalt?" *Journal of Modern European History* 1, no. 1 (2003): 24–43. See also Antoine Prost and Jay Winter, eds., *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005); and Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge, 2009).

[9] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York, 2003); John Horne, "Defeat and Memory since the French Revolution: Some Reflections," in *Defeat and Memory: Cultural Histories of Military Defeat since 1815*, ed. Jenny Macleod (London, 2008), 11–29.

however—either in reality or in perception (as in nationalist circles in Italy)—it was more difficult for it to play this role; indeed, it may have done precisely the opposite, exacerbating violence and generalizing it to a host of groups and individuals who chose to take it upon themselves to redress defeat and national humiliation.[10] The nature of the homecoming in a context of victory or defeat was thus an important variable, but it is one that must be studied empirically on a regional and not just a national basis. Defeat was infinitely more real for those who lived in the ethnically diverse border regions of the Central powers than it was for those in Berlin, Budapest, or Vienna, and it is no coincidence that young men from these disputed border regions were highly overrepresented in the paramilitary organizations of the postwar years.[11] A recent investigation of the geographical origin of Nazi perpetrators has confirmed that they, too, were disproportionately drawn from lost territories or contested border regions such as Austria, Alsace, the Baltic countries, the occupied Rhineland, and Silesia.[12]

Another prominent concept in historiographical debates relevant to our topic is that of demobilization seen as a political and cultural process rather than a purely military and economic one.[13] "Cultural demobilization," of course, implies a possible refusal or failure to demobilize. The incidence of paramilitarism and the contexts in which it proved most violent provide a good means of tracing those individuals and group members, especially in states and regions in which the conflict had been lost, who found it hardest to leave the violence of war behind, whether they had experienced it directly as combatants or as adolescents on the home front.[14] The peace of the mid- to late 1920s was relative and short-lived. The legacy of postwar paramilitarism in

[10] For the general argument, see Josh Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (De Kalb, IL, 2003), 165–200.

[11] For the complex German case, see Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, 1993); and Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*.

[12] Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge, 2005), 239.

[13] For the concept of cultural demobilization, see John Horne, ed., "Démobilisations culturelles après la Grande Guerre," special issue, *14–18 [1914–1916] Aujourd'hui-Heute-Today*, no. 5 (2002).

[14] For Germany in particular, see Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*; and Schumann, "Europa, der Erste Weltkrieg." Also important in this respect is Mark Cornwall's recently completed project "Victors and Victims: The Male Wartime Generation in East-Central Europe, 1918–1930" (funded by the Arts and Humanities Council), which investigates the ways in which the male generation of the Habsburg Empire that had passed through the First World War coped with the wartime sacrifice and the transition to peacetime conditions. His work complements the recent work of cultural historians on war commemoration and demobilization in individual states in Western Europe in the 1920s. The results of the project will be published in Mark Cornwall and John Paul Newman's forthcoming volume *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Great War in East-Central Europe* (Oxford and New York, 2012).

turn supplies one of the connections between the cycle of European and global violence of 1912–23 and its successor, which, on a political and cultural level, began ten years later.

Our own approach to paramilitary violence after the Great War builds on these concepts and debates while simultaneously proposing an approach to this period that is somewhat different from those usually adopted. First, the geographical scale of the violence necessitates a comparative and transnational analysis.[15] As the Great War destroyed the dynastic empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Ottoman Turkey and created a "bleeding frontier" in Germany's east, it left "shatter-zones," large tracts of territory where the disappearance of frontiers created spaces without order or clear state authority.[16] Waves of violence occurred in many of these zones but not all—and where they did, they had identifiable causes that need to be analyzed and compared.[17] The fashionable idea that there are certain states in Europe that are inherently violent (such as Russia, Yugoslavia, and Ireland) and others that are not (such as the "peaceable kingdom" of Great Britain) obscures more than it reveals. As all twentieth-century historians would recognize, the body count in some parts of the Continent has been vastly higher than in others. But such comparisons make no sense unless one examines the material, ideological, political, and cultural factors that explain that difference. The geography of violence—and, in this case, that of paramilitary violence—is one way to do so.

Second, the interplay between the short-term and long-term causes of postwar paramilitary violence requires a temporal approach that breaks the conventional time span of the Great War. As already noted, the focus on the years 1914–18 makes more sense for the victorious western front powers (Britain, France, the United States) than it does for much of central-eastern and southeastern Europe or for Ireland. The paroxysm of 1914–18 was the epicenter of a cycle of armed conflict that in some parts of Europe began in

[15] Despite recent attempts to write transnational histories of the Great War, the global history of its immediate aftermath has yet to be tackled. The most recent attempts at transnational histories of the Great War include Alan Kramer, *Dynamics of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford, 2008). On the global ramifications of the Paris peace treaties, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007).

[16] The term "shatter-zone" was first used in Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford, 2009), 81.

[17] For an overview of the ethnic violence attendant on the collapse of the multiethnic empires, see Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London, 2001). For the chaos and violence in the Russian countryside, see Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 170–83.

1912—with, for example, the formation of paramilitary forces in Ulster determined to preserve the Union of Ireland with Britain and in the first two Balkan Wars, which reduced Ottoman power to a toehold in Europe before setting Bulgaria against its former allies in a conflict over Macedonia and Thrace.[18] The violence continued until 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne defined the territory of the new Turkish Republic and ended Greek territorial ambitions in Asia Minor with the largest forced exchange of populations before the Second World War.[19] The end of the Irish civil war in the same year, the restoration of a measure of equilibrium in Germany after the occupation of the Ruhr, and the confirmation of the New Economic Policy on Lenin's death in 1924 were further indications that the cycle of violence had run its course.

Third, the period 1917–23 was marked by the articulation of competing ideologies that by 1923 had taken shape in new states and in the system of European international relations. Here, too, the origins lay much further back, as far back as the 1870s, a decade of rapid cultural, socioeconomic, and political change. The transitions to new forms of mass politics that occurred in much of Europe with the franchise reforms of the 1870s and the emergence of mass movements around democratization, socialism, and nationalism marked a durable change in the terms of European politics and intellectual debate. Revolutionary socialism and syndicalism challenged a parliamentary democracy that was far from established as the predominant state form. New variants of nationalism (sometimes democratic in flavor, sometimes overtly hostile to liberal democracy) triggered internal crises in the Ottoman, Romanov, and Habsburg empires, whose governments in turn sought to assert their authority through violent demonstrations of strength at home and abroad.

It is therefore possible (at the risk of some inevitable simplification) to trace a continuum of political violence in southern and Eastern Europe during the half century that followed the Eastern Crisis of the 1870s—violence that prefigured many of the forms of violence that emerged subsequently in Central Europe. The dismantling of large swaths of the Ottoman Balkan domains from the 1870s onward gave rise to aggressively insecure, ethnically exclusive new states that were prey not only to each other but also to the agendas of greater powers, to secessionist terrorism, and to acts of ethnic murder. Following revolts against Ottoman rule in Herzegovina, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Montenegro in 1875–76, the Ottomans repressed the uprisings with a ferocity that aroused indignation throughout Europe. In the embattled Balkan lands, paramilitarism in the form of anti-Ottoman guerril-

[18] Richard Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London, 2000).

[19] Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford, 2009).

las—the Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian *comitadji*—foreshadowed forms of political violence that would become dominant throughout Eastern and Central Europe after 1917. At least in this respect, paramilitary violence between 1917 and 1923 formed part of a larger cycle of violence that predated and outlasted the Great War itself.[20]

Yet it was the radicalization of politics during and after the Great War that converted these competing movements and doctrines into a pan-European ideological conflict. The year 1917 saw the redefinition of democracy and nationalism by Woodrow Wilson as an inter-Allied crusade. At the same moment, the Bolsheviks seized power in the name of the legitimacy (and violence) of a class revolution.[21] Whether the successor nation-states of Central Europe and Eastern Europe would assume the democratic form advocated by the Allied leaders at the Paris Peace Conference, and notably by Woodrow Wilson, was a pivotal issue. Already, antidemocratic, anti-Bolshevik nationalism had provided the language for the remobilization of the radical right during the last year of the war in Germany.[22] With the dissolution of political legitimacy as well as the dissolution of the dynastic empires, new varieties of counterrevolutionary movements emerged in much of Central and Eastern Europe from the end of 1918, mobilizing paramilitary forces. In the case of Italian Fascism, they had taken power by 1923 and begun to remodel the state.

The history of paramilitary violence, then, has to be explored in terms of these larger developments—revolution, imperial collapse, and ethnic conflict—and they in turn shape the structure of the following pages. A final section will point to some of the legacies of postwar paramilitarism for Europe's midcentury crisis.

The Russian Revolution and Paramilitarism

The revolutions—political, social, and national—that occurred across the diverse territories of the Russian Empire between the early months of 1917 and the summer of 1918 may not have been inherently violent. The path that led from the February Revolution of 1917 to the Russian civil war of the summer of 1918 was one that could have taken many directions. But the

[20] Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, eds., *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2011).

[21] See the classic studies by Arno Mayer: *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven, CT, 1959), and *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York, 1967). See also Daniele Rossini, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Myth in Italy: Culture, Diplomacy, and War Propaganda* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

[22] Heinz Hagenlüke, *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei: Die nationale Rechte am Ende des Kaiserreiches* (Düsseldorf, 1996).

successful consolidation of power by a determined revolutionary minority of
Bolsheviks during the winter of 1917–18, in the midst of a massive military
conflict that had already set in train its own dynamics of ethnic struggle,
injected a powerful new energy into revolutionary violence. In response,
equally determined counterrevolutionary armies emerged whose overriding
goal was the violent repression of revolution—and, more especially, of rev-
olutionaries. Revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence ignited, spread-
ing violence across the territories of European Russia (and, beyond, into the
Caucasus and Central Asia) that dwarfed the specific but intense upsurges of
revolutionary violence that had occurred in prewar Europe. In some areas, the
collapse of state power and the economic upheaval consequent on the revo-
lutions resulted in a breakdown in social order by 1918–19 that prompted
primitive forms of military organization in local self-defense. The answer of
the Bolsheviks, however, was a new and durable phenomenon in twentieth-
century politics: the modern Communist revolutionary, trained in political
action and experienced in the necessity of violent action, who built a new state
based on the party.[23]

From the Red Guards who played a role in the overthrow of the Provisional
Government to the armed groups that conducted "War Communism" in the
countryside and contributed to the civil war, the Russian revolutionaries
developed various formations that operated alongside the Red Army, itself
initially drawing on Red Guards and worker volunteers. But paramilitary
violence did not legitimate the new regime. Rather, in line with Bolshevik
understanding of Marxist theory and with Leninist practice, the party was the
source of authority and organization in the new state, and it was the party (not
the army) that provided the most important forms of extrajudicial violence,
such as the Cheka (the notorious Bolshevik state security agency founded by
Lenin) and the Terror. Indeed, the Bolsheviks' deep-seated hostility to "mil-
itarism," alongside their fear of "Bonapartism," meant that even a class-based
levée en masse had its dangers, especially with the violence that pervaded
Russia down to 1920. A regular conscript army led by professional officers
but framed by political commissars was the preferred solution. It was on this
that the new regime relied to solve both the civil war and its border wars
(notably with Poland).[24] The Bolsheviks absorbed paramilitary violence in the

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[23] Daniel H. Kaiser, ed., *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from
Below* (Cambridge, 1987); Steve Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and
China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008); Martin Conway and Robert Ger-
warth, "Revolution and Counter-revolution," in Bloxham and Gerwarth, *Political
Violence.*

[24] Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the
Soviet Socialist State, 1917–1930* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 20–40, 327–34; Sanborn,
Drafting the Russian Nation.

growing dominance of the party and had no need of it as a legitimating principle.

Conversely, the White Russian armies had little more than the military to rely on once tsardom had fallen, especially given the diversity of political perspectives involved. In some parts of Russia, the White cause was largely fought by private armies and irregular forces, such as those of Atman Semenov and Baron von Ungern-Sternberg in Central Asia. The principal paramilitary rivals to Whites and Reds in the western part of the former Russian Empire—the Ukrainian nationalist "Green Army" and Nestor Makhno's anarchist "Black Army"—also drew on the undercurrent of armed groups free from all state control as they played their separate roles in the civil war.[25] An important question for further research, therefore, is the degree to which paramilitarism was used by the anti-Bolshevik forces and whether it served to legitimize the counterrevolutionary cause following defeat. The exile of the army of Baron Wrangel in Gallipoli in 1920–23 and the spirit of the Gallipoli Society, which converted the experience of defeat into the ideal of the "White Dream," supplied an identity and cause to many of those who would form paramilitary groups in exile (such as the Russian All-Military Union, founded in Yugoslavia in 1924) and mount operations on Soviet territory in the interwar years and during World War II.[26]

The Bolshevik Revolution interacted with paramilitary counterrevolutionary violence further afield. Not entirely dissimilar to the situation in the late eighteenth century when Europe's horrified ruling elites feared a Jacobin "apocalyptic" war, many Europeans after 1917 feared that Bolshevism would spread and "infect" the rest of Europe, prompting paramilitary mobilization against the perceived menace. This occurred not only where the threat was plausible—in the Baltic states and Ukraine, in Hungary, and in parts of Germany—but also in more peaceable victor states such as France and Britain. Conservative French veterans mobilized in civil defense formations (or Unions Civiques) in response to a general strike declared by the Confédération Générale du Travail in May 1920, which was widely perceived as an attempt at revolution orchestrated from Moscow. In Britain, the government used volunteers from a comparable background to the form the Supply and Transport Organization as a similar mechanism for breaking a wave of

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[25] Serhy Yekelchyk, *A Nation Born at War: The Ukrainian Civil War and the Making of Modern Ukraine* (Oxford, forthcoming).

[26] Anatol Shmelev, "Gallipoli to Golgotha: Remembering the Internment of the Russian White Army at Gallipoli, 1920–23," in Macleod, *Defeat and Memory*, 195–213, esp. 207–8.

industrial militancy in 1919.[27] Reconstructing the imaginary categories of "communism" and "revolution" outside Russia is vital for understanding how, and where, paramilitary force was seen as a legitimate defense against revolution—or even as a vector of counterrevolution.[28]

COUNTERREVOLUTION AND THE RISE OF MODERN PARAMILITARISM

In parts of Central Europe and Eastern Europe, the politics of class in the context of military defeat and the disintegration of established political authority resulted in a counterrevolutionary mobilization in which paramilitary organizations such as the *Freikorps*, the White Guards, or the *Heimwehren* assumed a prominent role. Central to this development were new political personnel that tried to implement ideas that were not in themselves new (antidemocratic nationalism, authoritarianism) but that now became the object of military conflict. From 1917 to 1918, the revolutionary politics of the left and the right were no longer dominated by the lawyers, intellectuals, and trade union officials of the pre-1914 era. Instead, power—and, more especially, the levers of violent action—had passed to new figures, many (if by no means all) of whom had had direct experience of military violence in World War I and depended for their authority on their radicalism of rhetoric and action.[29]

This transition was most emphatic on the extreme right, where the immediate postwar years witnessed the emergence of a new political culture of the armed group. In these paramilitary formations, ex-officers brutalized by the war and (in some areas) infuriated by defeat and revolution joined forces with members of a younger generation who compensated for their lack of combat experience by often surpassing the war veterans in terms of radicalism, activism, and brutality. For many of these young officer cadets and nationalist students, who had come of age in a bellicose atmosphere saturated with tales of heroic bloodshed but had missed out on firsthand experience of the "storms of steel," the militias appear to have offered a welcome opportunity to live a romanticized warrior existence. Together they formed explosive subcultures of ultramilitant masculinity in which brutal violence was an acceptable, perhaps even desirable, form of political expression. In addition, large numbers of unemployed ex-soldiers and landless laborers were attracted by the

[27] John Horne, "The State and the Challenge of Labour in France, 1917–20," in *Challenges of Labour: Central and Western Europe, 1917–1920*, ed. Chris Wrigley (London, 1993), 239–61; Chris Wrigley, "The State and the Challenge of Labour in Britain," in ibid., 262–88.

[28] The theme of the international revolution has not aroused scholarly interest since the weakening of labor and social history in the 1980s. See, however, A. S. Lindemann, *The "Red Years": European Socialism versus Bolshevism, 1919–1921* (Stanford, CA, 1974).

[29] Conway and Gerwarth, "Revolution and Counter-revolution."

prospect of theft, plunder, rape, and extortion or simply by the opportunity to settle scores with neighbors of different ethnicity without fear of state reprisals. Action, not ideas, was the defining characteristic of these groups. They were driven forward not by a revolutionary vision of a new politics but by a common rhetoric of the creation of a "new order" and an interlocking series of social antipathies. Anti-Bolshevism, antisemitism, and antifeminism operated as touchstones for these paramilitary movements of the right.[30]

Although grimly nationalist in outlook, such paramilitary activists during this period proved to be highly mobile, both nationally and internationally. If, as Ute Frevert has suggested, the Great War generally constituted a powerful transnational experience in a period of multinational contacts and transfers, the same applies to the conflict-ridden postwar years.[31] German ex-officers were highly sought-after military instructors during the myriad civil wars that raged in China and South America, and large numbers of non-Russian anti-Bolshevik volunteers fought alongside the White armies during the Russian civil war. Paramilitary activism provided an important space for personal encounters and exchanges between counterrevolutionaries of different nationalities and created networks that survived the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and German empires. Despite continuing Austro-Hungarian tensions after 1918, for example, Vienna remained the principal center for Hungary's sizable refugee community, both before and after Miklós Horthy's accession to power. During the brief period of the communist Béla Kun regime in 1919, almost 100,000 Hungarians fled to Austria, among them roughly 10,000–15,000 officers (while 1,200 Austrian *Volkswehr* soldiers fought in the Hungarian Red Army).[32] Not all of these refugees were, of course, willing or able to resort to violence against the Kun regime, but the Austrian capital hosted many prominent counterrevolutionary refugees, radicals such as Gyula Gömbös as well as moderates such as Anton Léhar and István Bethlen, whose influential Anti-Bolshevik Committee, founded in April 1919, was based in the palace of an Austrian aristocrat, Karl von Schönborn-Bucheim.[33]

After the collapse of the short-lived Kun regime, Hungary in turn provided a safe haven for ultranationalist radicals such as Franz von Stephani, respon-

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[30] Robert Gerwarth, "The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria, and Hungary after the Great War," *Past and Present* 200, no. 1 (August 2008): 175–209; Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephan Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987–89).

[31] Ute Frevert, "Europeanizing German History," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 36 (2005): 9–31, particularly 13–15.

[32] István I. Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I: The Uprooted; Hungarian Refugees and Their Impact on Hungary's Domestic Politics, 1918–1921* (New York, 1983), 104. On the *Volkswehr* volunteers, see Karl Glaubauf, *Die Volkswehr 1918–1920 und die Gründung der Republik* (Vienna, 1993), 27.

[33] Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I*, 106.

sible for the killing of eight workers' emissaries during the Spartacist Upris-
ing, and Heinrich Tillessen, the assassin of Matthias Erzberger. Tillessen
found refuge on the country estate of the subsequent Hungarian prime min-
ister, Gyula Gömbös.[34] While the German republican police unsuccessfully
tried to extradite these terrorists, the national borders between Germany,
Austria, and Hungary proved to be no significant obstacle to counterrevolu-
tionary activists, who received active support from the Bavarian border
guards. Tibor Eckhardt, for example, fondly recalled his visits to Munich "to
maintain good relations with our anti-Communist friends there."[35] Hermann
Ehrhardt, the German co-organizer of the failed Kapp Putsch and leader of the
radical nationalist terror organization Consul, and Waldemar Pabst, the as-
sassin of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, spent more time in Austria
during the 1920s than in Germany. Pabst, in fact, remained the main military
organizer of the *Heimwehr* movement until he was expelled from Austria on
the well-founded charge of counterrevolutionary activity in the early 1930s.[36]
Nor was the transfer of counterrevolutionary personnel from Germany to
Austria a one-way street. The subsequent *Heimwehr* leader, Ernst Rüdiger
Starhemberg, participated in the crushing of the Munich Councils' Republic
as well as in the battle of Annaberg (1921) in Upper Silesia, where he and his
future deputy and compatriot, Hanns Albin Rauter, volunteered to fight Polish
insurgents.[37]

High mobility and transnational adventurism also characterized the life of
one of the most notorious paramilitary leaders during the Russian civil war,
Baron von Ungern-Sternberg. Born in 1885 in Graz, Austria, into a family that
descended from the Teutonic Knights (the German monastic order that con-
quered the Baltic coast in the Middle Ages), Ungern-Sternberg had fought
during the Great War in East Prussia, the Carpathians, and on the Turkish-
Russian front, earning himself a reputation for cruelty. At the time of the war's
end, the revolution's beginning, and the tsar's abdication, he made his way to

[34] On von Stephani, see Bauer Papers, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, NL 22/69, 24. On
Tillessen, see "Akte des Oberstaatsanwalts bei den Landgerichten Mannheim und
Heidelberg/Strafsache Tillessen," Staatsarchiv, Freiburg, F179/13–14; and "Vertrau-
licher Bericht der Deutschen Gesandtschaft Budapest vom 17.4.1923," Staatsarchiv,
Freiburg, StA Offenburg, 1984/553/87.

[35] Tibor Eckhardt, *Tibor Eckhardt in His Own Words: An Autobiography*, ed.
Katalin Kádár Lynn (Boulder, CO, 2005), 7.

[36] Pabst Papers, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, NY4035/3–5; Klaus Gietinger, *Der Konter-
revolutionär: Waldemar Pabst, eine deutsche Karriere* (Hamburg, 2009).

[37] See Ernst Rüdiger Starhemberg, *Memoiren* (Vienna, 1971); and Rauter Papers,
Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie [Netherlands Institute for War Docu-
mentation], Amsterdam, Doc I, 1380, H, 3–4. On Munich, see Martin H. Geyer,
Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation und Moderne; München 1914–1924 (Göttingen,
1998).

Siberia, where former tsarist army officers were planning to fight the newly powerful Red Army. Following a rift with the White generals who were leading the anti-Bolshevik resistance—his politics were far too reactionary even for them—Ungern-Sternberg attempted to create a powerful new Central Asian kingdom—Mongol, Buriat, Tibetan, Uighur—that would stand up to the Bolsheviks, fight Western decadence, eliminate the Jews, and reconquer Europe in the name of ancient imperial values. By the summer of 1920, he had created a short-lived kingdom in Mongolia, but he was captured by the Red Army in 1921 and subsequently sentenced to death and executed.[38]

In times of rapid socioeconomic change and a perceived existential threat at the hands of "international Bolshevism," paramilitary organizations offered networks that protected their members from social isolation, and their perpetual activism provided outlets for their members to express their frustrations in a violent manner. Members of paramilitary organizations were characterized by their downward social mobility, although they had no coherent class background. Whereas the German *Freikorps*, the Italian *arditi*, and the Russian White militias contained a disproportionate number of ex-officers and aristocrats, the militias of Lithuania, the Baltics, and Ireland tended to be made up of peasants and middle-class intellectuals.[39]

In contrast to the army, members of paramilitary organizations often had political ambitions and defined themselves as political soldiers. Although they did not promote clearly defined political programs, they fought against socialists, communists, the newly emerging political systems, and the alleged petty bourgeois mentality of security and respectability. Their worldview was defined mainly by its destructive actions against "Reds" and ethnic minorities. At a more local level, such abstract ideas were given a more concrete purpose in the form of suppressing localized incidents of social upheaval and rural labor revolts. In the largely agrarian areas of Pomerania, Lombardy, and elsewhere, for example, estate owners during the "Red Scare" years after 1918 organized their own paramilitary groups to crush the emancipatory revolts of their laborers.[40]

Political and economic upheaval alone, however, do not explain why some paramilitary movements were more violent than others. Much of the literature

[38] James Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron: The Extraordinary Story of the Russian Nobleman Who Became the Last Khan of Mongolia* (London, 2008).

[39] On the Baltic states, see Tomas Balkelis, "Turning Citizens into Soldiers: Paramilitary Movements and Nation-Making in the Baltic States, 1918–1941," *Journal of Baltic Studies* (forthcoming). On the *arditi*, see Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde: Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienschen Squadrismus und in der deutschen SA* (Cologne, 2002).

[40] See, e.g., Bernd Kölling, *Familienwirtschaft und Klassenbildung: Landarbeiter im Arbeitskonflikt; Das ostelbische Pommern und die norditalienische Lomellina 1901–1921* (Vierow, 1996).

on revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements over the past twenty years has watered down the centrality of ideological dynamics and emphasized instead the importance of what we might term the "psycho-underground" of masculinities and group dynamics. Some thirty years ago, Klaus Theweleit's seminal book *Male Fantasies* offered a psychoanalytical account of German protofascist "soldier males." He drew on Freud, Reich, Deleuze, and Guattari in order to explain *Freikorps* violence, particularly against women, who constituted one of the key target groups for right-wing paramilitaries. Theweleit emphasized the dichotomous perception of women by the "soldier males," who distinguished categorically between the desexualized and depersonalized nurse or wife, on the one hand, and the threatening and sexually evocative "rifle women," or female Bolshevik partisans (*Flintenweiber*), on the other. The hard and "disciplined" body of the warrior is contrasted with the soft, "fluid" female body, which the warrior violently rejects and ultimately aims to tame or destroy. While Theweleit's arguments have stimulated a whole generation of cultural historians of violence, they were too narrowly focused on the German case; paramilitarism clearly was a pan-European phenomenon and did not necessarily lead to fascist dictatorships. Yet Theweleit was right in emphasizing male group dynamics as a driver of paramilitary violence. Within the paramilitary units, violence against broadly defined enemy groups was perceived not as deviant behavior but as a "legitimate" response intended to restore "order" and to "discipline" those whom they considered to be a threat to state and society.[41]

Discipline and obedience to the leader were achieved through a form of comradeship that was generated through the voluntary recruitment of members. The clear exception was the Russian civil war, during which both sides forcibly enlisted huge numbers of peasants. Paramilitary leaders claimed that violence could cleanse, purify, or regenerate the people and the national mentality. Despite their only vaguely defined political aims, they viewed themselves as the idealistic avant-garde who fought for the moral rejuvenation of the nation. It was mainly the violence itself that functioned as a performative act and created meaning for the activists. The experience of violence mobilized passions and resoluteness and was aestheticized by some intellectuals—Marinetti, D'Annunzio, Jünger, von Salomon—as the beauty of surgical cleansing or the efficacy of will and strength. It was the emotional energy produced by acting violently that held paramilitary groups together.

The political logic of such groups was twofold—not only to resist Bolshevism (and, more broadly, the "Reds") as the real and imagined opponent but also to establish a new legitimacy for the counterrevolutionary cause and,

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[41] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*. For more recent studies on gender and war, see Karen Hagemann and Stephanie Schüler Springorum, eds., *The Military, War, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York, 2002).

eventually, for the states that might be founded on that basis. In many cases, this ideological violence supercharged ethnic and national conflicts (the Baltic states, Silesia), giving paramilitary violence a central role compared to other forms of violence.[42] However, in the case of Italy, where paramilitary counter-revolutionary mobilization went furthest, ethnic conflicts were to be found only on the margins. True, in the case of D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume for fifteen months in 1919–20, the margin provided a potent foretaste of the central Fascist project, and the "mutilated victory" that left some irredentist claims unsatisfied remained an important rallying cry.[43] But in the heartlands of northern and central Italy, the dissolution of prior state legitimacy, a clash over landownership and redistribution in the countryside, and the violence of class conflict in the cities supplied the main cause for Fascist paramilitaries. Their violence laid the foundations of Mussolini's "militia state."[44]

Ideological conflict gave rise to some of the most powerful expressions of paramilitary violence in the context of the dissolved legitimacy of the prior state. The counterrevolution against Bolshevism was also a search for a restoration that had become impossible, with the result that paramilitarism supplied one source of a new political authority. It is here that paramilitarism was most likely to assume a symbolic and political role and to provide myths and legitimacy beyond the end of the cycle of violence in 1923. Where such counterrevolutionary violence redoubled bitter ethnic and national quarrels—as it did in the Baltic states, Ukraine, Upper Silesia, and elsewhere—it was likely to be especially violent. In other parts of Eastern Europe, however, the violence was less ideological, remaining more concerned with interethnic rivalries or the territorial borders of new nation-states. Although bitter, the paramilitary violence in such cases had a different tenor and was more easily absorbed by the project of building the new nation-state.

Paramilitarism, Ethnicities, and Imperial Collapse

If the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent civil war had spread fears of a European class war, the idea of creating ethnically homogeneous nation-states proved to be just as revolutionary a principle and an important source of paramilitary violence in much of Europe at the end of the Great War, especially where its realization was opposed by empire and dynasty or disputed by other nationalities. While revolutionary violence after 1917 followed the nineteenth-century clarity of the barricades, of two sides confronting each

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[42] Gerwarth, "Central European Counter-Revolution," 175–209.

[43] John Woodhouse, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Defiant Archangel* (Oxford, 1998).

[44] Emilio Gentile, *The Origins of Fascist Ideology, 1918–1925* (New York, 2005), and "Il Fascismo: Una definizione orientativa," in *Fascismo: Storia e interpretazione* (Bari, 2002), 54–73.

other in the name of opposing ideologies, ethnic violence was more compli-
cated and much more messy. Much of what appeared to be ideologically
driven or of what was indeed claimed to be political by actors at the time was
motivated by preexisting social tensions or was a by-product of the more
immediate stimuli of envy, greed, or lust.[45]

In post-1917 Europe, national projects were often intertwined with social
movements, and in parts of Eastern Europe claiming the nation went hand in
hand with demanding the land, so that peasant nationalism emerged as a
powerful radical force in the postwar years, notably in Bulgaria, western
Ukraine, and the Baltic states (but not Ireland, where the British had conceded
the land to tenant farmers). Nor were labor and socialist movements only
internationalist; on the contrary, they often assumed a national form. Fighting
to establish or defend the nation entailed multiple kinds of violence. Ethnic
and national claims—what Dirk Schumann has termed "secessionist nation-
alism"—were predominant in the imperial shatter zones of the Ottoman and
Romanov empires (as well as in Ireland), though Bolshevism or anti-
Bolshevik counterrevolution played a variable role as well.[46]

Often enough, the politics of ethnic cleansing were inspired by older
Darwinian metaphors of social struggle, the perils of racial or national de-
generation, and the ideal of a purified and healthy community. But the logic
of imposing new frontiers to define national communities could generate the
same effects even where such an ideological heritage was little in evidence, as
in countries such as Ireland or Poland, where nationalism was associated with
democratic traditions and religion. The need to purge communities of their
"alien" elements and to root out those who were harmful to the balance of the
community was also a practical one that required the use of violence, as the
decades after 1917 powerfully illustrate. The ways in which purges were carried
through owed much to the context within which they operated, and more espe-
cially to the crises of state authority and the exacerbation of intercommunity
tensions by military conflicts and economic change. But they also reflected how
certain revolutionary movements developed an internal culture that predisposed
them to paramilitarism. The origins of such a culture were complex. In cases such
as the counterrevolutionary bands that acted with such savagery across Central
and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, they owed much to
the adoption of a simplified and highly gendered military culture in which the
willingness to give and enact violent orders subordinated the "normal" value
structures of civilian society to unquestioning service for the cause.

Intercommunal violence between opposed national groups (Poles and Ger-
mans in Silesia, Unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, Ukrainians and

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[45] Stathus Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge, 2006), 365–87.
[46] Bloxham, *The Final Solution*, 70–91; Schumann, "Europa, der Erste Weltkrieg," 31.

Poles in the western Ukraine) was no less important a source of paramilitary hostility, since each side sought a combination of militia and terrorist force in order to take or protect national terrain. In some cases, notably during the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–22, paramilitary forces were used as an adjunct to warfare between conventional armies, while in others an asymmetrical contest between guerrilla forces and regular forces could lead the latter to use auxiliaries to deal with a covert enemy in violation of the conventions of war. This was the case with the British use of the Black and Tans and police auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence.[47] But it was also true after 1920 in trans-Caucasia, where the Bolsheviks faced extreme difficulties in "pacifying" local populations that fought among themselves over border territories and engaged in ethnic cleansing, with Armenian paramilitaries being particularly active and violent.[48] In yet other cases, the struggle to frame the nation and achieve independence incorporated a strong ideological component (most notably in the Finnish civil war and in the Baltic states). Indeed, in the case of Finland a civil war between two sides (reformist socialists and moderate democrats) whose differences were relatively small saw a brief but intense incidence of brutality as two versions of the newly independent state were polarized and magnified in their opposition to each other by the proxy influence of Russian Communist and counterrevolutionary German forces.[49]

The question in each of these instances is not only the type, scale, and ferocity of paramilitary violence but also its impact on the causes in whose name it was deployed. There was nothing intrinsic in the "nation" (variously defined) that made self-constituted paramilitaries a source of legitimacy, though they may have generated potent memories and or even provided founding myths. However, where a putative or actual nation-state found itself separated by postwar frontiers from communities deemed to belong to it or invested by remnants of the former state or social elites that were now held to have no place in the new state, irredentist violence was possible, whether in "defense" of vulnerable members or in the interest of communal violence against the perceived anti-bodies so as to assert the new national community. Both dynamics were in evidence in the wars between Poland and the Ukraine and between Poland and Lithuania in 1918–19, when paramilitary forces sought to mark out and intimidate or expel the perceived enemy ethnicity in

[47] Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919–1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (Oxford, 1975).

[48] Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich, 2003).

[49] On Finland, see Heikki Ylikangas, *Der Weg nach Tampere: Die Niederlage der Roten im finnischen Bürgerkrieg 1918* (Berlin, 2002).

broad swaths of the contested frontier territories of eastern Poland.[50] Likewise, the violence in Ireland was at its most bitter where the logic of exclusion resulted in paramiliary brutality being used against civilians of the perceived enemy community (as in mixed areas of Ulster or on the part of the Irish Republican Army [IRA] in some regions of Munster).[51]

Where national aspirations continued to be threatened or unsatisfied in the longer term, there remained the potential for paramilitary violence (e.g., terror) to short-circuit revolutionary or democratic self-affirmation and supply a legitimating claim to act for the nation in a more durable manner. This is precisely what the IRA did during the Irish civil war of 1922–23 and subsequently when it repudiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty establishing the Irish Free State (despite this treaty's having been approved by the Dáil Éireann, the underground Irish parliament) in the name of the integral but unrealized thirty-two-county Republic. Likewise, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) asserted without any popular endorsement the indefeasible right to independence or association with Bulgaria of those parts of Thrace and Macedonia held by Bulgaria briefly in 1912–13 and during the Great War. The very act of terror and paramilitary activity became a surrogate act of national sovereignty.[52]

The contrasting fates of Balkan national projects during this time (victory for the Little Entente States—Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia—and especially for Serbian maximalism in the latter case, compared to a "national catastrophe" for Bulgaria) provided the geopolitical setting in which the defeated could stake their claim to sovereignty or to an irredentist version of the nation through paramilitary violence and terror over the longer term. Conversely, the victors also used paramilitary violence to entrench the "new order," as with the Serbian and pro-Yugoslav paramilitary groups in Macedonia and Kosovo, where settlers protected by paramilitary forces sought to create ethnically and culturally homogeneous zones via a program of national consolidation that was supported in principle (if not always in execution) by the government and described euphemistically as "pacification." This in turn encouraged the IMRO and the pro-Albanian Kačak movement to forge links with other revisionist paramilitary groups active in Croatia, Italy, Austria, and Hungary between 1918 and 1923—links that were sometimes dormant but

[50] Julia Eichenberg, "The Dark Side of Independence: Paramilitary Violence in Ireland and Poland after the First World War," *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010): 231–48.

[51] Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003); Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922* (Oxford, 2010).

[52] Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893–1903* (Durham, NC, 1988).

always present in the interwar period. While the ebbing away of paramilitary activity and violence in the region after 1923 was linked to the stabilization taking place throughout Europe, the people and networks involved in violent interethnic conflict became absorbed into postwar political culture throughout the Balkans. Their paramilitary violence has to be understood as part of nation building in southeastern Europe and, more immediately, as a response to the Wilsonian program of self-determination throughout the region.[53]

Legacies

By late 1923, paramilitary violence seemed to have largely disappeared from European politics, even if some of the most intractable disputes continued to provide fertile soil for paramilitary and terrorist organizations such as the IMRO and the IRA.[54] After the end of the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, the termination of the Russian and Irish civil wars, and the conclusion of the Lausanne Treaty (establishing the new Turkish Republic), which specifically aimed "to bring to a final close the state of war which has existed in the East since 1914," Europe experienced a period of tentative political and economic stability that would last until the Great Depression.[55]

Yet three qualifications must be made to this general truth. First, certain areas of Europe had remained virtually exempt from domestic paramilitary violence since the war ended. By and large, these were the territories of the victorious powers for whom the integrity of national frontiers, the authority of the state, and the power and prestige of the army had all been enhanced. Britain, France, Belgium, and even the newly established Czechoslovakia experienced little or no paramilitarism on their own soil. Since they had all been centrally involved in the war, they act as counterexamples that highlight what determined paramilitarism elsewhere. The French case makes the point.

As we have already observed, the reaction to the general strike in 1920 in France and to the fear of international Bolshevism took the form of a civic mobilization of largely professional and middle-class individuals in the cities, many of whom had fought in the war, in order to break the strike and keep essential services running. The movement had the ethos of a peacetime *Union sacrée*, and it was dubbed by the prime minister, Alexandre Millerand, a "civic battle of the Marne." But when the government toyed with the idea of

[53] John Paul Newman, "Post-imperial and Post-war Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917–1923," *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010): 249–65.

[54] Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926–1936* (Dublin, 2002); Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, NY, 1984); Perry, *The Politics of Terror.*

[55] Treaty of Lausanne, in *The Major International Treaties of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John A. S. Grenville and Bernard Wasserstein, 3rd ed. (London, 2001), 123.

giving the Unions Civiques a policing role, this was firmly rejected. As the executive committee of the Paris Civique Union explained in a wall poster: "France is not Russia. She has taken a century and a half to acquire one after another all the freedoms that are the condition of social and political progress. . . . Against the forces that seek the violent overthrow [of the regime] and against retrograde reactionaries, France will maintain the sacred gains of our glorious revolutions."[56]

The cohesion of the state, the prestige of victory, and the solidity of the forces of order left no space for a paramilitary countermobilization. Even where a potentially dissident population existed, as were the German settlers in Alsace-Lorraine, the strength of the French army and administration in the newly reacquired territory made paramilitary resistance out the question. Ironically, paramilitarism first made an appearance in France just as it was fading elsewhere in Europe, with the ending of the occupation of the Ruhr and the election of a center-left government in 1924 that promised to engage in the politics of cultural demobilization and tentative reconciliation with Germany. This development triggered the emergence of a distinctive paramilitary politics, with the founding by Pierre Taittinger of the Jeunesses Patriotes and by Georges Valois of the Faisceau, the latter a direct imitation of the corporatist politics of Fascist Italy. Both organizations experienced a brief surge of support and notoriety in 1924–26, both adopted uniforms and paramilitary organization, and both sought to bring the pressure of street violence to the staid but well-established forms of French parliamentary democracy. In effect, they were a response to the perceived undermining of the culture of victory in postwar France. Yet both organizations remained marginal in their impact on French politics and declined with the end of the center-left government in 1926. Overall, they point to the continued importance of victory and social and political stability in limiting the brutalizing effect of the war on domestic politics and in curtailing the possibilities for paramilitarism.[57]

The British case also supports the argument. Where the British state found its authority contested, it did not hesitate to employ paramilitary violence in support of regular police and military units. But that was in Ireland, where the Union was rejected by the bulk of the Catholic and nationalist population and where different rules had always applied to the maintenance of order. As far as domestic British politics were concerned, the spirit of the strikebreaking in 1919 remained (as in France in 1920) civilian rather than military. Precisely

[56] Alexandre Millerand, quoted in *Journal Officiel, Chambre des Députés, Débats*, May 20, 1920, 1579; executive committee of the Paris Union Civique, quoted in *Le Temps*, May 22, 1920.

[57] See John Horne, "Defending Victory: Paramilitary Politics in France, 1918–26; A Counter-example?" (paper presented at the conference "Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War, 1917–1923," Trinity College Dublin, May 28–29, 2010).

because the state was strong domestically (and reinforced by the 1920 Emergency Powers Act, which allowed for the renewal of exceptional wartime powers), paramilitarism was not really needed. Furthermore, a wave of hostility to the excesses of British power abroad (including the use of paramilitaries, notably in Ireland) fostered a climate of opinion in which the potentially brutalizing legacy of the Great War was explicitly repudiated in domestic politics.[58]

The second qualification to the argument that paramilitary violence declined in Europe after 1923 is that the wider culture of violent rhetoric, uniformed politics, and street fighting that had characterized so much of Central and Eastern Europe took root beneath apparent quiescence and a return to the norms of peaceful politics. Paramilitarism remained a central feature of interwar European political cultures, and it included movements as diverse as the German storm troopers, the Italian *squadristi*, the legionaries of the Romanian Iron Guard, the Hungarian Arrow Cross, the Croatian Ustasha, Leon Degrelle's Rexist movement in Belgium, and the Croix de Feu in France (founded at the end of the 1920s). While new developments, notably the Great Depression, contributed powerfully to many of these movements, their roots frequently lay in the upheavals of the immediate postwar period. Where those upheavals had been the most subject to the ideological counterrevolution, the raw violence of the paramilitaries was most likely to be translated into symbolic and organizational principles that helped structure mass movements and even new state forms. In the case of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, the culture of paramilitarism played a crucial role in enabling such movements to come to power. For although in both Italy and Germany electoral politics were also important, paramilitary intimidation influenced them—if only by display. Furthermore, the postwar experience supplied the cultural basis (whether directly experienced or not) for a form of paramilitary organization that could be applied internally in class warfare and against the liberal state or externally in irredentist struggles in ethnic "shatter-zones."

Even in the case of the French Third Republic, which had emerged reinforced from its military victory in World War I, the paramilitary response by the extreme right to both democratic politics and the Communist Party in 1924–26 has been labeled by one historian as the "first wave" of French Fascism, which was succeeded by a much more substantial "second wave" under the impact of the economic crisis and faltering democratic politics in the

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[58] Wrigley, "The State and the Challenge of Labour in Britain," 239–88; Lawrence, "Forging a Peaceable Kingdom," 557–89.

1930s.[59] A small-scale organization of British Fascists emerged in the same years (1923–26) in reaction against the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the loss of what the British thought of as "Southern Ireland" and in response to the industrial tension that culminated in the General Strike of 1926. While the later and more successful British Union of Fascists, led by Oswald Mosley, was a direct response to the political crisis of Labour and the social dislocation caused by the Depression, its paramilitarism also drew on the idealized experience and sacrifice of the Great War.[60]

A third durable legacy of this period was the perceived need to cleanse communities of their alien elements before a utopian "new order" could emerge—to root out those who were perceived to be harmful to the balance of the community. This belief constituted a powerful component of the common currency of radical politics and action in Europe between 1917 and the later 1940s.[61] Whatever its manifold political expressions, this politics of the purified community was a prominent element of peasant dreams, workers' ambitions, and bureaucratic models of a "People's Community." As such, it provides an important key for understanding the cycles of violence that characterized so many revolutionary upheavals in Europe after 1917. In Spain, for example, the dynamics of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence during the 1930s were driven forward by the way in which both sides, Nationalist and Republican, saw themselves as engaged in campaigns of purification: they were seeking to rid the body politic, through actual or symbolic violence, of those who, as a consequence of their ideological views, their social origins, or their individual character, were prejudicial to the wider health of the community.[62] It was, however, indisputably in the ethnically diverse states of Central and Eastern Europe in the decades between the collapse of the pre–First World War empires and the enforced pacification of the early Cold War that these notions of the health of the community reached their fullest expression.[63] The ways in which these programs of purification

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[59] Robert J. Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924–1933* (New Haven, CT, 1986), and *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933–1939* (New Haven, CT, 1995). See also Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley, 1986).

[60] Although in Mosley's case, as with many Fascists, preserving the victory of the Great War meant avoiding future war with ideologically sympathetic regimes such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy; see Martin Pugh, *"Hurrah for the Blackshirts!" Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London, 2005), 126–55.

[61] Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*; Bloxham, *The Final Solution*; Conway and Gerwarth, "Revolution and Counter-revolution."

[62] Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936–1945* (Cambridge, 1998).

[63] Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

and purging were carried out by paramilitary movements owed much to the context within which they operated—and, more especially, to the crises of state authority and the exacerbation of intercommunity relations by military conflicts and economic change.

CONCLUSIONS

We have argued here that four decisive and often overlapping and mutually reinforcing factors contributed to the manifold paramilitary conflicts after 1917–18 that Winston Churchill famously referred to as the "quarrels of the pygmies": the legacy of mass armed combat in the First World War; the Russian Revolution (and subsequent civil war) and the ideological counter-revolution that it generated internationally; the military collapse and dissolu-tion of the multinational dynastic Ottoman, Habsburg, and Romanov empires, along with the often-violent attempts to create ethnically homogenous nation-states under the banner of "self-determination" (including many contested nation-states that obviously contained sizable ethnic minorities); and, finally, the experiences of defeat that accelerated violence in those countries that had been on the losing side in the war.[64] Typically, though not inevitably, those involved in the large-scale acts of violence after 1917–18 drew on the experience and weaponry of the Great War, and in many cases they perceived their struggle as a continuation of the war or of the issues that it had raised or catalyzed but not settled.

Yet, although paramilitarism became a common feature of postwar Conti-nental political cultures, it reached very different levels of violence throughout Europe. Violence remained a variable that depended largely on the circum-stances in which it occurred. If many paramilitaries of the left and the right shared fantasies of violently imposing a "new order," they differed markedly in their ability to act independently and to succeed in implementing their aims. In the largely stateless borderlands of postrevolutionary Russia, Ukraine, and Lithuania, the fantasies turned into reality on a large scale, while in the former territories of pre-1918 Hungary, "Red" and "White" paramilitary groups were able to enact large-scale terror campaigns against real or perceived enemies. Further west, however, the opportunities for independent political action were more limited. In Germany and Austria, the state quickly regained control over the monopoly on violence, and the new militants of the nationalist or pan-German right had to confine themselves either to the violent suppression of Communist uprisings (in Berlin, Bremen, and Munich in 1919; in the Ruhr in 1920) or to individual acts of terrorism against representatives of their target groups: "internationalist" (Communist or capitalist) Jews or "politicized"

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[64] Winston Churchill, quoted in Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 21.

women as "natural" enemies of a war-induced militant masculinity. In the case of Ireland, the waning authority of the British state generated mutual paramilitary conflict in the twenty-six counties of the future Free State during the War of Independence but reinforced the communitarian repression of the Catholic minority in the six northern counties dominated by Protestant Unionists. Despite the ensuing civil war in "Southern Ireland" the scale of violence remained limited by Eastern European standards; yet, as elsewhere, paramilitarism left a powerful legacy as a source of political legitimacy and a surrogate for sovereignty in both parts of the island.

Finally, paramilitary violence had ramifications in the colonial world as well, not least because it, too, was subject to the force field of ideological conflict. Whereas nascent anticolonial movements took inspiration from the Wilsonian discourse on democratic national self-determination at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919–20, the Communist (Third) International at its second congress in August 1920 sought to link colonial struggles against imperialism to class war against the capitalist world.[65] The fear of nationalist and communist revolt in the colonies began to reshape the relations of the British and the French with their empires. While this led to reform as well as repression, the immediate result was violence against new colonial demands that often entailed the use of paramilitary forces. In Egypt, India, and Iraq as well as in Afghanistan and Burma, Britain responded to demands and unrest by the colonized with armed police and paramilitary units as well as the military.[66] The Black and Tans traveled from Ireland to other colonial trouble spots, including Palestine.[67] Comparable use of paramilitary violence by the French occurred in Algeria, Syria, and Indo-China. These conflicts and their long-term impact on the wars of decolonization after 1945 are remarkably understudied and lie beyond the scope of this essay. But colonial paramilitarism may prove to be an equally significant dimension of the continuing violence after the Great War and one whose legacy after 1945 offers important comparisons with European paramilitary violence after that war.

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[65] Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

[66] Important studies on these conflicts include David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism, and the Police, 1917–1965* (Manchester, 1992); Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919–1960* (Basingstoke, 1990); Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926* (London, 2005); Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, 2nd rev. ed. (London, 2007), 61 and 91; and Derek Sayer, "British Reaction to the Amritsar Massacre, 1919–1920," *Past and Present* 131 (May 1991): 130–64.

[67] Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars: Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1986), 191–92; Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: The Mandatory Government and the Arab-Jewish Conflict* (London, 1978).