FIGHT or flight

Britain, France, and their Roads from Empire

MARTIN THOMAS

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Preface

On the morning of 1 November 1954, an Algerian baker gathered his family together to share some important news. A little-known revolutionary movement calling itself the *Front de Libération Nationale*, or FLN, had mounted over fifty coordinated attacks against public buildings, police stations, and communications centres throughout the French colony. Writing almost half a century later, the baker's daughter, Louisette Ighilahriz, recalled her father's words. 'It's the end of humiliation,' he said.[1] Louisette soon proved her devotion to the FLN cause. Using the pseudonym 'Lila' she couriered weapons and scraps of intelligence to fellow militants, her secret cargo sometimes hidden inside bread baked by her father. But it was in the summer of 1957, during the final weeks of the notorious Battle of Algiers, that her life changed for ever. She and a group of fellow combatants were ambushed by French parachutists near Chebli, a town just south of the capital. She was shot and wounded, the prelude to years of imprisonment. A story of anti-colonial commitment, of bravery, of deprivation, Louisette Ighilahriz's Algerian war would come to the French public's attention for a different reason entirely. Writing in *Le Monde* on 20 July 2000, she revealed what her parachutist captors had done to her. A harrowing autobiographical account published ten months later went further still.

As summer turned to autumn 1957 Ighilahriz lay bandaged and in plaster in the Algiers Mustapha hospital. There, she was injected with the 'truth drug' Pentothal. She said nothing. Still bed-ridden, she was then transferred to one of the city's army interrogation centres. Frustrated by her defiance, a parachutist captain took charge of proceedings. He cut her bandages with a bayonet. He prodded at her wounds. Then he raped her 'with all sorts of objects'.[2] The torture continued over days, weeks, months. And, as the audible screams of her

1. Louisette Ighilahriz, *Algérienne* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 46; also cited in Allison Drew, *We are no longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester University Press, 2014), ch. 7.
2. Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 161, citing Ighilahriz, *Algérienne*, 98–104.

fellow detainees proved, it had become the army's way of doing things.[3] More than four decades later Ighilahriz explained that she was writing about her experiences to remind French society that, for Algerians like her, the road from empire was travelled via a war of immeasurable cruelty.[4] Her book sold well. But another, published almost simultaneously, sold better. Written by Paul Aussaresses, a senior army intelligence officer and a colleague of Ighilahriz's tormentor, it was a shockingly frank and apparently remorseless account of how torture, death squads, and summary killings were integral to the work of the security forces in Algeria.[5] The logic of Aussaresses's account was straightforward: if France wanted to keep its empire, activities like this were necessary.[6]

These histories of people disfigured by violence and violation, of minds warped by colonial conflict, are bound up with the ways in which a large colonial empire came to an end. Theirs are stories of fight and flight. Of fights between opposing ideas of authority and legitimacy, one imperial, the other rooted in local demands for greater freedom. Of eventual flight as colonial authorities either negotiated their way out or packed up and left in *de facto* surrender to their local opponents. The examples above relate to Algeria, a French-ruled territory. But equally troubling accounts have emerged from Britain's colonial record.[7] In some places—not just Algeria but, as we shall see, India, Palestine, Kenya, and Vietnam, among others—the societal disruption involved was immense. In others, violence between colonial authorities and presumptive national movements was less pronounced. Sometimes it was virtually absent. This book examines why. In narrative terms, it is a story of how the British and French empires ended. In analytical terms, it is a comparative account of why they ended in particular ways. Above all, it is an exploration of a kind of cognitive dissonance, a collective disconnect between attitudes and worldviews so different that, for some, empire was worth defending at all costs while, for others, it was either manifestly indefensible or increasingly irrelevant. Finally, the book examines an

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3. For discussion of rape as a weapon of war, see Raphaëlle Branche, Isabelle Delpha, John Horne, Pieter Lagrou, Daniel Palmieri, and Fabrice Virgili, 'Writing the history of rape in wartime', in Branche and Virgili, eds, *Rape in Wartime* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012), 1–16.
4. Ighilahriz, *Algérienne*, cover material.
5. Général Paul Aussaresses, *Services Spéciaux: Algérie, 1955–1957* (Paris: Perrin, 2001).
6. Lazreg, *Torture*, 1, 141.
7. From Kenya and Palestine especially: for very recent accounts, see Huw Bennett *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Matthew Hughes, 'From law and order to pacification: Britain's suppression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 39:2 (2010), 6–22.

accelerating rate of historical change, one that would see these once mighty empires brought down within two or three generations—in historical terms, the blink of an epochal eye.

By the end of the 1950s, only a few years after Louisette Ighilahriz began her struggle, the French and British empires were approaching dissolution. 1960. The year that marked John F. Kennedy's election, a widening Sino-Soviet split, and the first commercially available contraceptive pill, was also the 'year of Africa'. It was so called because seventeen African countries achieved independence from their European rulers. Some, including the vast tropical domains of the former Belgian Congo, descended into revolutionary turmoil. But most, including fourteen former French colonies below the Sahara, took their place on the world stage relatively peacefully.[8] Africa's newly independent states played an integral part in securing a landmark commitment from the United Nations later that same year. The UN General Assembly's Resolution on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, affirmed that self-determination—understood, in this case, as the freely declared will of the majority within a colonial territory—conferred the right to sovereign statehood.[9]

Passed on 14 December 1960, this Resolution 1514 rejected the proposition that inadequate political or economic preparations by a colonial power could justify any delays in conceding national independence. Having lost the arguments that the UN had no authority to interfere in 'internal' colonial affairs and that the colonial nationalist groups vying for power were either unrepresentative, dangerous, or both, the final weapon left to Britain and France as imperial powers—namely, that their remaining African possessions could not yet stand on their own feet—was kicked away.[10] Writing four years later in October 1964, Vivien Beamon, a member of America's National Council of Negro Women, captured the mood among her fellow activists: 'Independence in Africa . . . helped stimulate our civil rights movement, which in turn has helped stimulate civil rights movements in Southern Rhodesia, Mozambique, and South Africa. Everything ties together.'[11] The days of white colonial domination were numbered. Or so it seemed.

8. Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese, eds, *Francophone Africa at Fifty* (Manchester University Press, 2013).
9. Brad Simpson, 'The United States and the curious history of self-determination', *DH*, 36:4 (2012), 681.
10. DDF, 1960, vol. II, no. 308, 'Note de la Direction d'Afrique-Levant, fin décembre 1960'.
11. Quoted in Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 86.

One would be forgiven for thinking that the end of empire, the onward march of decolonization, the acclamation of civil rights, and the emergence of a fiercely independent 'Third World', were, by then, generally recognized phenomena. Yet, slant the historical lens differently and the picture is transformed. What the sociologist Julian Go has called the 'blurry continuum' between formal imperial rule and informal influence or control would remain a marker of relationships between numerous former colonies and their erstwhile European rulers.[12] In other places colonialism refused to die. Several of Africa's largest and most populous countries—Algeria, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Angola, and Mozambique—were still caught in the vice-like grip of racially discriminatory regimes. Some were close to rebellion, others already wracked by political violence.[13] In Washington, US State Department officials noted ominously that, across Africa, black majority populations confronted privileged white settler communities 'across a sea of developing hate'.[14]

The apparent disintegration of European empire into racially coloured violence was far from unique. In Southeast Asia, two conflicts whose recent ancestry was predominantly colonial were about to explode. The first, between Kennedy's America and Communist North Vietnam, was demographically and environmentally devastating for the victorious Vietnamese, internationally and culturally debilitating for the United States. The second, between formerly British-governed Malaysia and once Dutch-ruled Indonesia, became the prelude to the mass killing and ruthless authoritarianism of President Suharto's Indonesian military regime. France and Britain were, in different ways, instrumental to each of these conflicts. Yet the French presence in Vietnam formally ended in 1954 and Britain finally handed over power in Malaysia six years after that. France had fought and lost in Vietnam. Britain, ostensibly at least, had fought and won in Malaya. What did these contrasting trajectories signify?

Certainly by 1960 Britain and France, Europe's predominant imperial powers over the preceding two centuries, were in general, if not quite total, colonial retreat. The rulers of both countries still treated certain lines in the

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12. Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11.

13. The Zimbabwean case is especially instructive: see Heike L. Schmidt, *Colonialism and Violence in Zimbabwe: A History of Suffering* (Oxford: James Currey, 2013).

14. Ryan M. Irwin, 'A wind of change? White redoubt and the postcolonial moment, 1960–1963', *DH*, 33:5 (2009), 898, 907–8, quotation at 915.

sand or, more often, their garrison outposts in warmer seas, as sacrosanct. The French dismissed them as 'the confetti of empire', but some of these places—Hong Kong, Aden, Cyprus, Djibouti, New Caledonia—were anything but ephemeral to the global systems of imperial power that shaped them.[15] For all that, Europe's former colonial giants were picking fewer imperial fights than in previous decades. And their preference for flight, for negotiated pull-outs, became clearer as the 1960s wore on. Why had these global empires shrunk so quickly—over the course of a generation spanning the twenty years since the end of the Second World War? Or, to reverse the lens again, why did it take fully two decades (indeed, much longer) before the rulers of empire acknowledged that the game was up, that colonies and colonialism were becoming indefensible strategically, politically, ethically? Probing these questions a little further, perhaps the hardest problem to solve is why wars and violence erupted in some colonies in the throes of decolonization but not in others. What, in other words, configured the paths towards fight or flight? Why were some blocked and others cleared? The following chapters offer some answers.

15. Robert Aldrich, 'When did decolonization end? France and the ending of empire', in Alfred W. McCoy, Josep M. Fradera, and Stephen Jacobson, eds, *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 222.

Map 1. The British Empire.
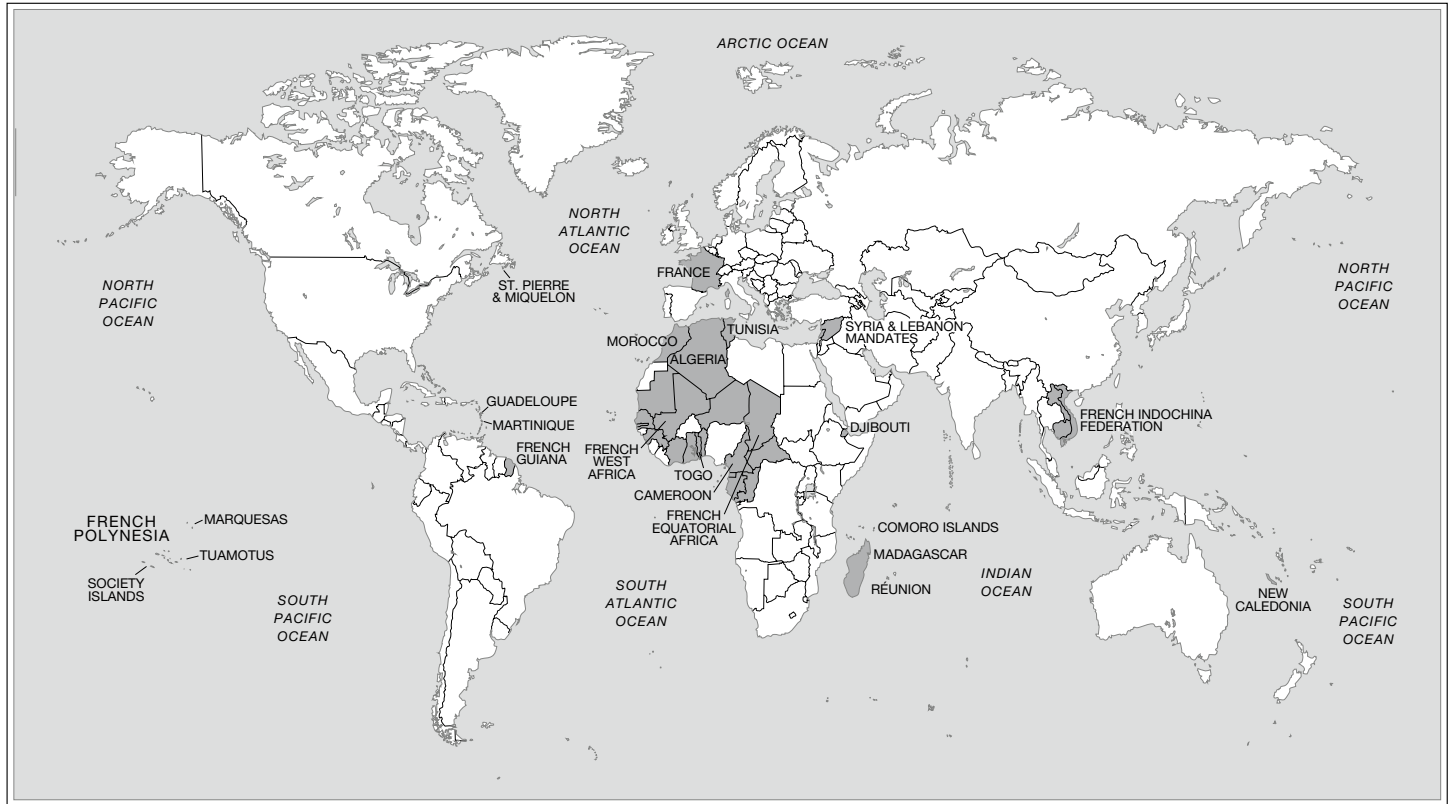
Map 2. The French Empire between the wars.

Introducing *Fight or Flight*

In May 2010 *Hors-la-loi (Outside the Law)*, a high-budget film about three Algerian brothers caught up in their country's violent struggle for colonial independence from France, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. Rachid Bouchareb, the film's director, was soon embroiled in a peculiarly French storm of media controversy, one that, while overtly intellectual, quickly became politicized and highly emotive. At issue was his depiction of a 1945 Algerian uprising which was used to justify the massacre of thousands of civilians by colonial security forces and French settler vigilantes.[1] French-born and of Algerian descent, Bouchareb in his previous film, *Indigènes (Days of Glory)*, had tackled the vital contribution made by North African soldiers to the French Army's campaigning in Europe during the final years of the Second World War. This was something that the authorities in Paris proved reluctant to acknowledge either at the time or since. But *Hors-la-loi* went further. Bouchareb turned post-war France from a country shaped by its wartime resistance to Nazi occupation into a colonialist regime whose viciousness provoked desperate—and legitimate—resistance by persecuted Algerians. So stark was this juxtaposition that the director was accused by the French Defence Ministry, by Gaullist parliamentarians, and by elements within the French press of playing fast and loose with history.[2] Others disagreed. *Hors-la-loi* figured among the nominees for 'Best foreign language film' at America's Academy Awards later in 2010.

Arguments over the depiction of an especially violent episode in France's recent colonial past offer an entry-point to the issues discussed in this book. For, if *Hors-la-loi* was anything, it was a study of why those living under colonialism took up arms against an imperial regime that refused to give ground. It was a cinematic depiction of the choices inherent in 'fight or flight'. What, then, does this seemingly simple phrase actually imply?

The search for answers might take us back to the early nineteenth century. Reflecting on the features of violence between states, Prussia's foremost

strategic theorist Carl von Clausewitz identified certain variables whose interaction determined the probability, intensity, and outcome of armed conflicts. One of these was the extent of popular support for war and the degree to which different sections of the public were personally engaged by it. Another was the clarity with which politicians defined what was being fought for. Clearly defined goals and commensurately higher levels of public support assisted the achievement of strategic objectives.[3] These objectives might be military victory or, telescoping forward to the cases examined in this book, the continuation or termination of colonial rule.

Clausewitz was writing well over a century before what is loosely identified as the era of decolonization between 1945 and 1975—during which Britain and France, along with fellow European imperialists the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal, lost or surrendered sovereign control over the bulk of their once-dependent territories. Nor was he discussing colonial conflict, although memories of Napoleonic colonization in German-speaking Europe were surely fresh in his memory.[4] Yet Clausewitz's insights provide a fitting starting point for discussion for two reasons. One is that wars of decolonization were generally characterized by massive mobilization of colonial populations against their European rulers (the 'stronger levels of support' that Clausewitz identified as critical) alongside only limited engagement—public or military—by the colonial power.[5] The other is that British and French colonial authorities professed the need, not just to defeat their armed opponents, but to address the grievances of their civilian backers. Although not always expressed with Clausewitz-like precision, the 'defined goals' of colonial officialdom in situations of armed revolt connected the achievement of military objectives to the subsequent implementation of socio-political reforms. This is where the challenge lay.

The more we unpick these two apparently basic points, the more the policies of colonial government reveal fundamental dichotomies. As we shall see, the form and extent of popular engagement in contested decolonization—whether for it or against it—was something to which politicians in Britain and France responded very differently in the two decades following the Second World War's end. Equally, while responses to violent colonial disorder supposedly combined the firm hand of military intervention with soothing promises of political concessions, only belatedly, if at all, did colonial authorities treat their opponents as credible negotiating partners, still less as legitimate ones.[6] More often than not, this reluctance proved to be a dreadful mistake.

This book, then, begins from the proposition that wars of decolonization were not somehow unavoidable. Most were deliberately chosen. What follows is a history of these paths to violence, of armed conflict, its incidence and its avoidance, in the end of the British and French Empires during the mid to late twentieth century. The story is told in three ways. First, in comparing French and British approaches to the challenges of anti-colonial opposition, I try to explain why conflict was prevented or promoted in particular times and places. If Britain is perceived to have escaped from empire without 'serious shock', France did not.[7] Are these presumptions correct? Second, the book compares experiences of decolonization region by region, albeit predominantly in Asia and Africa. The third comparison is between those whose opposition to colonial rule drove them to violence and those for whom it did not. Those individuals who decided to take up arms against colonial domination were typically resisting something they found intolerable. But relatively few burned the bridge to eventual dialogue. Their decisions about resistance or accommodation were also inter-connected. The outbreak of fighting or decisions to negotiate in one territory influenced other colonized peoples contemplating their own paths to freedom. Putting these comparisons together, the fundamental question that faces us is why violent politics predominated in some places and not in others. My suggestion is that, in most situations, this issue turned on the choices made by the imperial powers and their opponents about resisting the end of empire or negotiating it, about fight or flight.

Some might see antecedents to this story, whether in the classical period or in other, more recent historical times. In the late eighteenth century France and Britain had each surrendered the North American domains of their first empires after fighting ineffectually to keep them. French losses in Canada during the Seven Years War of 1756–63 and the American Revolution of the 1770s were portents of later decolonization. The first was bound up with the greater strategic resources of an imperial rival—Britain. The second was the consequence of a settler rebellion against imperious rule from London. And following each defeat, the geopolitical focus of empire shifted elsewhere—in Britain's case, initially to South Asia; rather later in the French case, to the African continent. This is where the sheer magnitude of modern colonialism begins to distinguish it. Over 450 million people in Asia and Africa fell under European colonial rule between the 1830s and the treaty settlements that carved up the Ottoman Middle East following the First World War.[8] After the end of the Second, the figure climbed to almost

a billion. This massive growth in numbers, as much the consequence of population increases and improving life expectancy as of geographical extensions to imperial power, was thrown into sharp reverse in the twenty years after 1945. By the end of the 1960s fewer than fifty million souls remained European colonial subjects and only Portugal clung on to the bulk of its overseas territories. The process involved is usually described as decolonization.[9] Although historians can agree on the terminology, they differ sharply about the principal causal factors as work.

Imperial historians, as their name implies, have tended to focus on empires' collapsing institutional structures, changes in administrative practice, shifting European public and political attitudes, and the consequent adoption of colonial reforms. Reinvigorated in recent years by closer attention to empire cultures and the networks of communication and migration that spread them, imperial history remains primarily European in focus, its foremost concern being to explain modern European empire as a historical phenomenon. Historians of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean pursue different approaches, although these, too, are grounded in the primacy of their regional interests. For them, studying the end of empire must begin with the people most affected by it—not so much European publics as populations in the developing world for whom decolonization was imminent, proximate, and visceral. This focus on the global 'south' as the source of revolutionary transformation echoes the 'Third Worldism' that dominated new left thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. But, as a historical methodology, it implies something else: not an ideological stance, but rather, as Mark Philip Bradley puts it, a pre-eminent concern with the experiences of the colonized, not the colonizers. 'In this view, independence was not so much given as taken, and anticolonial actors and their construction of post-colonial states and society become central elements of the story.'[10]

The distinction between these two approaches should not be overdrawn. Since the mid 1990s scholars of empire and area studies specialists have converged, for the most part accepting that imperialism cannot be reduced to one-way traffic, whether European or otherwise. Empire is now studied in more imaginative ways that reject the old binaries of European 'metropole' and colonial 'periphery' in favour of more complex interlocking relationships built on cultural transmission, economic inter-dependence, and shared—albeit opposing—histories of colonialism. One of the achievements of this more integrated new imperial history has been to explain how politicians and publics came to adopt 'imperialist' outlooks. The apparent oddity of an

avowedly liberal parliamentary democracy in Britain and a relatively egalitarian, liberal republic in France each possessing vast colonial empires was always more apparent than real. In Britain, certain strands of liberalism and imperialism walked hand in hand. In France, the republican commitment to liberty and the revolutionary values of 1789 was used to reframe colonial domination as culturally educative and socially beneficial, a civilizing process that would bring genuine emancipation to other, less fortunate societies.[11] Meanwhile, France's status as the 'eldest daughter' of the Catholic Church suggested that France was duty-bound to its self-proclaimed task 'of freeing the indigenous colonized peoples from savagery and ignorance'.[12]

For most of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, the one constant in British and French international politics was the exploitation of non-European ethnic groups through authoritarian systems of political control that denied equivalent civil rights, economic entitlements, and citizenship status to whites and non-whites. Reduced to their absolute essence, varieties of imperial rule invariably replicated these and other forms of discrimination.[13] Colonial dominion, whatever the official policy monikers applied to it—among them, indirect rule, diarchy (in India), and 'preparation for self-government' in the British case; assimilationism, associationism, or integrationism in the French case—was followed, eventually, by the struggle against decolonization.[14] The expansion and ultimate contraction of empire, as well as the strategic networks, economic relationships, and cultural affiliations that underpinned it framed the canvas on which the global presence of Britain and France was drawn. The colonial dimension of this picture may, at times, have been less vivid than other aspects of international affairs, from inter-state conflict to the construction of alliance systems, even the internal consolidation of the French Republic itself. But empire was always there.

It might appear self-evident that the history of empire cannot be either European or non-European—it has to be both. But the real point is this: interpretations of colonialism now concentrate on these conjunctures, on the intersections between European imperial ideas and practices and non-European responses to them. And in the generation after 1945 the practices and the responses changed more dramatically than ever before, bringing European colonial rule to its knees.

Trying to bring the methods of imperial history together with those of other historical fields, the following chapters look both beyond the purely political, 'high policy' decisions of British and French governments and

their colonial administrations, and beyond the nationalist parties, insurgent groups, and social movements that opposed them. Decolonization, as we shall see, was sometimes driven by other pressures. Economic change in post-war Europe and the wider world altered patterns of trade. Levels of industrialization increased. Colonial towns and cities mushroomed, often chaotically. And customary forms of agriculture struggled to survive. Each of these transformations bore directly on the relevance and viability of continuing imperial rule. Social changes were equally significant. To take only two examples, the emancipation of French women in 1944 and the increasing secularization of British and French society altered the terms in which the defence of empire was articulated and the constituencies to which imperialists and anti-imperialists appealed.

Finally, cultural change, too, impacted on decolonization. Between the book's starting point in the era of the First World War and its endpoint in the 1970s French and British families, communities, and civil society groups became less hierarchical and less deferential. The 'banal imperialism' characteristic of French and, even more so, of British society in the early twentieth century, an acceptance of empire so ingrained in everything from early-years education to media reportage, leisure, sport, and family connections that it passed almost unnoticed, became less reliable as a political indicator as the post-war decades rolled forward.[15] The end of deference—to political authority at least—was also implicit in the mounting pressure for decolonization within colonial societies. Meanwhile, in the imperial mother countries and their dependencies, improving living standards and the development of mass consumerism transformed basic ideas about wants and needs, duty, and sacrifice. An amalgam of these and other economic, social, and cultural factors refashioned political cultures in Britain, France, and their empires, shaping fight or flight choices and the ways they were understood by politicians and publics.

It is worth recalling that these choices, often amounting to the pursuit of war, were rarely articulated or understood in moral terms. Perhaps one reason why is that long-standing colonial problems, unlike particular episodes, especially those with a scandalous flavour, did not always register highly in the wider political cultures of Britain or France. A danger for anyone enthralled by the history of empire and processes of decolonization is that we assume the political actors and public audiences of the day shared the same fascination. How misguided this can be. One has only to recall Winston Churchill's disdainful, if disarming, comment as France's war in Indochina

entered its final stages in 1953: 'I have lived seventy-eight years without hearing of bloody places like Cambodia.'[16] Tragically, all too often such 'bloody places' appeared fleetingly on the radar of western commentators, and normally only in response to social crises that were read as affirmation of their benighted status beyond the pale of the normative standards of western civilization. If the history of empire has one justification above all, it is surely to remind us that those normative standards dripping with disapproval of colonial backwardness produced some of the most savage violence, gross iniquity, and chronic upheavals of our recent past.

The historian, trying to be true to source material and historical context, needs to bear these factors in mind. There is plenty in the chapters to come that one might be tempted to condemn. That is a judgement best left to the reader on the basis of the evidence presented. As David Anderson, a historian of Kenya, has suggested, there is little analytic purpose and no real scholarly value in trying to measure which colonial power was cruellest by counting the dead from colonial wars, repression, and other forms of violence. Wherever possible, we need to know who such victims were, and how many there were. But a comparative history of decolonization should not be some polemical 'league table' of barbarity.[17] It should, rather, try to explain why recourse to extreme violence seemed not only logical, but defensible, even ethically imperative, to those who authorized or performed it.[18] Colonial fights, as we will see, were never reducible to the crass simplicities of struggles for 'hearts and minds' in which imperial powers strove to win some sort of popularity contest against their anti-colonial opponents. For one thing, wars of decolonization, while never described in these terms at the time, were characterized by ruthless methods of population control, not by the kid-gloves treatment supposedly integral to 'hearts and minds' counter-insurgency.[19] For another thing, the fact that security forces' resort to violence was often meant to be exemplary did not imply that it was kept within narrow limits. At one extreme such 'exemplary' actions involved deliberate counter-terror designed to intimidate local populations; at another, the material affirmation of western technological supremacy through bombardment of recalcitrant 'rebel zones', often from the air.[20] Recourse to violence against civilian populations whose material improvement and cultural elevation was, in theory at least, a first principle of empire exposed the hollowness of colonial promises and affirmed the underlying weakness of imperial authority.[21]

It is worth pausing a moment to consider the nature of this weakness. The widespread assumption that colonial conflicts were highly 'asymmetric',

or heavily lop-sided, in the military and economic resources that imperial powers and their insurgent opponents could bring to bear is deeply misleading. Britain and France, it is true, had the means to divert professional military forces and advanced technologies to fight against decolonization. But they rarely did so. Colonial counter-insurgency, when fought over long periods, typically involved large numbers of police, paramilitaries, and locally-recruited 'loyalist' forces all of whom used fairly traditional weaponry to do their killing. Deployment of professional troops or young national servicemen to colonial wars certainly took place, but, with the notable exception of French Indochina and, even more so, French Algeria, it usually involved thousands, not tens of thousands of European soldiers. Again these two French conflicts give the lie to an otherwise general rule that wars of decolonization did not require 'total' mobilization of metropolitan political, economic, or cultural resources. For the populations of post-war Britain and France, violent disorder somewhere in their empire was perennial, a part of the imperial soundtrack, not an abrupt change of tune. The result was to normalize rebellion and violence as aspects of the wider process of holding or, eventually, losing an empire. Even colonial defeats were, in John Horne's words, 'partial' for British and French society insofar as they involved no fear of occupation, no surrender of domestic territory, no loss of basic rights.[22]

Even if the stakes were lower for Britain and France than the 'struggles for survival' of 1914–18 and 1939–45, empire defeats could still generate venomous politics and endless recrimination. And for the colonial populations directly involved, colonial warfare was neither remote nor 'low intensity'. It was threatening, divisive, devastating. Civilian casualties, whether relative to military losses or in terms of overall population, could be staggeringly high. Public engagement was greater too. The Vietnamese path to victory in 1954 was traceable in sustained popular mobilization. The triumph of Algeria's FLN was grounded in strict enforcement of popular compliance. Elsewhere the success of anti-colonial nationalists was built upon less violent forms of political action—outflanking rivals, repeating a clear message, winning over the young and taking control of the apparatus of local administration. In these non-violent cases, as in their violent counterparts, any asymmetry was reversed: it was the colonial power, not the colonial population that seemed poorly equipped to meet the challenge.

Another point to emphasize from the outset is that neither the British nor the French empires were unitary, coherent, or closed territorial polities.

Rather, they were multifarious systems that included formal colonial administration and control in some places, more informal (even invisible) networks of strategic, economic, and cultural predominance in others. Even territories that were clearly run as colonies—in the British case, Nigeria, Jamaica or Burma for instance; in the French case, Senegal, Guadeloupe, or Cochin-China (southern Vietnam)—on closer inspection defy such generic classification. Nigeria was the exemplar of 'indirect rule', yet its northern and southern provinces were administered very differently. Jamaica, a British colony to be sure, fell within a US sphere of Caribbean influence during and after the Second World War. Burma was ruled as an off-shoot of British India by the Raj administration in Delhi until 1937. It then came under Colonial Office control for only four years until the shock of foreign invasion made Burma the strategic epicentre of British efforts to halt Japan's advance through mainland Asia.

On the French side, Senegal, the departure point for French incursion into the Sene-Gambian Valley, retained a complex form of dual administration that reflected its past importance as the commercial centre of French slaving in West Africa. Thus, the so-called *originaires*, those born inside Senegal's original 'four communes' of Saint Louis, Dakar, Rufisque, and Gorée island, enjoyed French citizenship and, from 1916, voting rights that were denied to their fellow Senegalese in the colony's interior. Guadeloupe was another colony with origins in early modern slavery and the commercial attractions of sugar and rum. Like its near-neighbour Martinique, it was reinvented as an overseas *département* in 1946, a transition that, on paper at least, replaced the hierarchical architecture of colonial administration with the more horizontal bureaucracy of French local government. Finally, Cochin-China and its steamy capital, Saigon, was another hub for wider colonial penetration, this time north and westwards through Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Cochin-China was ruled colonially as part of a larger Indochina federation in which more mixed systems of 'royal protectorate' survived elsewhere. And the entire composite federation was redesigned immediately after the Second World War in a bid to conceal its imperial foundations. None of these territories, nor the changes in administrative status they underwent were anomalous. The more one looks beneath the veneer of colonial rule, the more idiosyncrasies appear.

So can any generalizations be made? In broad terms, economic considerations weighed more heavily in British than French decolonization. Conversely, domestic political division features more prominently in the

French case than the British. In this sense, the value attached to gradualism and compromise in British political culture was strikingly different to French traditions of protest and intolerance of low-performing coalition administrations. These traditions, although elusive and vaguely stereotypical, did surface in the contrasting official rhetoric that peppered the British and French roads from empire. If the traffic lights of British decolonization tended to oscillate between amber and green, their French equivalents sometimes stuck on red. Where British governmental statements were often placatory, understated and, it must be said, misleading, declarations of French governmental intent were usually framed in a more confrontational language of triumph or defeat.[23] It seems appropriate then to begin our story by investigating the colonial dimensions to a shared Franco–British victory. This takes us to the year 1918.

I

Imperial Zenith?
The Victors' Empires after
the First World War

'In no single theatre are we strong enough.' So lamented Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, the austere, thin-faced Ulsterman who, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in May 1920, held the ultimate responsibility for the strategic defence of the British Empire. The list of danger zones he identified was a long one. Ireland in the grip of civil war; Germany unbowed and resentful; Turkey determined to recover lost ground; Egypt seething in the aftermath of failed revolution; Palestine, its future in British hands uncertain; Iraq reeling from northern and southern rebellions; Persia, wavering between British and Soviet influence; India wracked by food riots and nationalist ferment; even the home waters of the British Isles less defensible than they once were.[1] Yet surely Britain, the old imperial lion, had just won a war with the help of its loyal overseas subjects.

Along with France, the other imperial giant, the British were only now dividing the war's colonial spoils in the Middle East and Africa. Why, then, was Wilson's imperial forecast so gloomy?

The basic reason was simple. Neither at this point, nor in the decades that followed, did British (or, as we shall see, French) political and military decision-makers match the pace of colonial change or predict its course. This was not some sort of collective lapse of judgement. Few on the eve of war in 1914 could have foreseen the scale of colonial problems immediately after it. Admittedly, some challenges were unsurprising. Rebellion in Ireland had been stewing for decades. Yet its eruption, first into an Anglo-Irish confrontation, then into civil war sent shock waves throughout the British Isles and the wider Empire. Wartime French governments also predicted—indeed
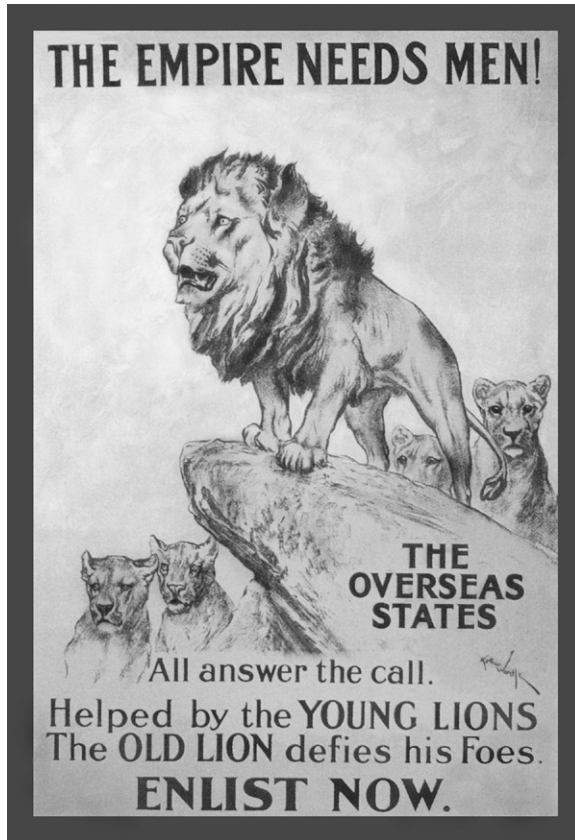
Figure 1. 'The Empire Needs Men!' The metaphor of imperial family—and British seniority—deployed in First World War recruitment.

exaggerated—the potential for wartime dissent in their turbulent North African territories, especially after Ottoman Turkey, a largely Muslim country, entered the war against the Allies in October 1914.[2] But disorders in other places—British-ruled Ceylon or the federation of French West Africa for instance—were unforeseen. Like their European overseers, colonial societies were rocked by the war's insatiable appetite for new blood.

Anti-conscription protests, expressions of desperation more than organized revolts, spread through French North and West Africa between 1915 and 1917. The call-up system assigned quotas to local notables or chiefs, whose job it became to ensure that sufficient draftees appeared before regimental recruiters. The cycle would then repeat itself a few months later. These recurrent call-ups disrupted agricultural production and sapped people's

respect for their customary rulers. Recruiters' methods seemed arbitrary. Often they were brutal too. Families confronted painful choices over which young family members could be spared.[3] Here the fight or flight dilemma took human form. Thousands of young Africans both in this World War and the next escaped 'paying the blood tax' by fleeing across colonial frontiers from French into British territory, or vice versa.[4] Politicians and generals who had expected that mobilization of colonial resources and, more particularly, manpower would help win the war were compelled, briefly, to pause.[5] The social destabilization caused by colonial conscription was not confined to French Africa. Even the most ardent enthusiasts for the employment of Indian, Canadian, Algerian, or West African troops on the Western Front did not expect that these men would die in their tens of thousands over four years of trench warfare. By 1917 imperial governors throughout both empires expressed mounting unease over the destabilization caused by such losses.[6]

A post-war crisis of empire

Still more unanticipated were the extraneous pressures that Europe's imperial masters would face after 1918, ironically, as direct costs of victory. Few predicted that two of the most dangerous challengers to British and French imperial power would be Japan and Italy. Both were erstwhile allies of '14–'18 dissatisfied with their limited share of the spoils.[7] Fewer still foretold the coming reorientation in American diplomacy, economics, and outlook. Veteran politicians and seasoned diplomats in London and Paris indulged the attachment of the US President Woodrow Wilson to open diplomacy, international conflict regulation, and ethnic self-determination as ways to prevent future war in Europe.[8] But none of them welcomed the extension of 'Wilsonian' ideas to the non-European world.[9]

As the new Mandate frontiers shown in Map 3 were imposed between the Arab territories formerly ruled by the Turks, favoured clients were selected among local elites to help consolidate the presence of the new imperial masters from Britain and France. In the process, older, more malleable conceptions of civic identity among the populations of former Ottoman provinces from Syria, through Palestine to Iraq, were supplanted by harsher, inflexible assertions of communal difference. Ethnic identities became reified and increasingly politicized, used as a marker of inclusion or exclusion by
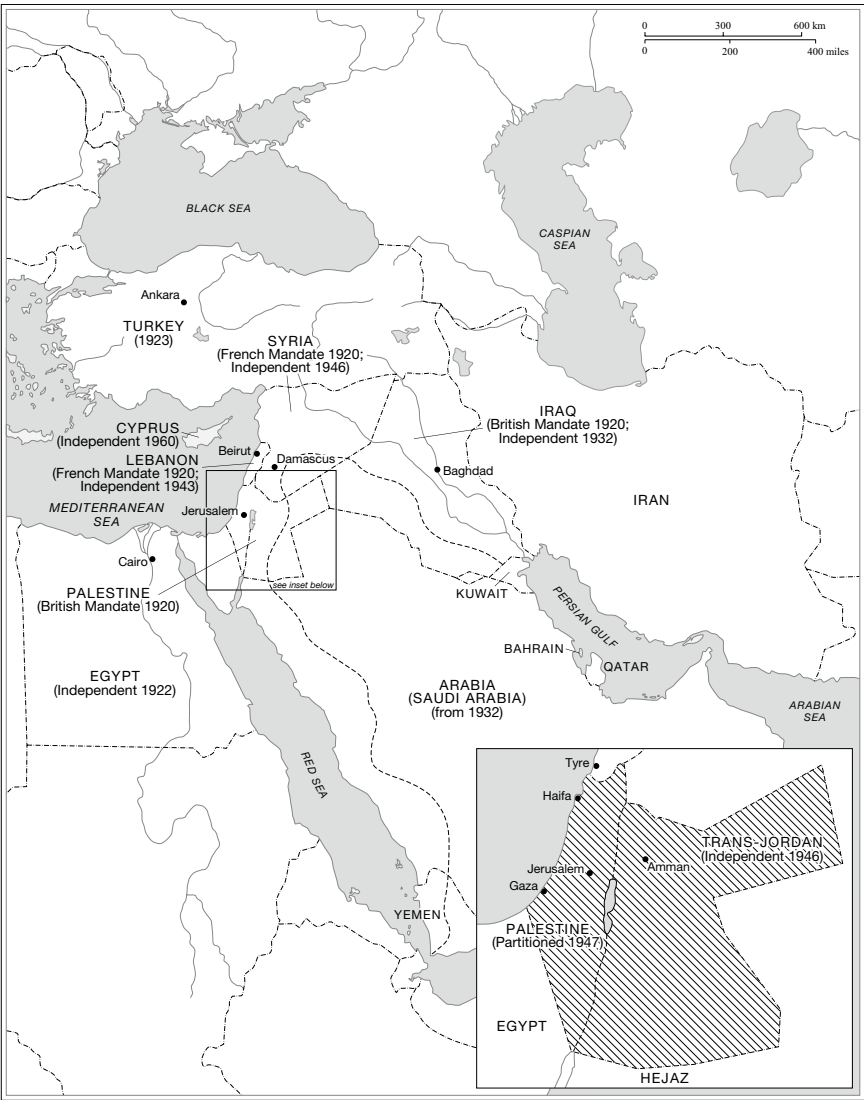
Map 3. Middle East Mandates.

hardliners on all sides of the Middle East's new ethno-politics. In Syria, for example, identifying oneself as Sunni, Druze, Alawite, or Christian acquired a stronger political significance.[10] The notion that, by the early 1920s, social identities would become ossified into fixed categories might have seemed outlandish to the subjects of erstwhile Ottoman dependencies only years

before. So, too, for British and French imperial administrators the idea that an international regulatory authority—the League of Nations—might set limits to planned territorial acquisitions and monitor their standards of colonial governance would have appeared ludicrous a decade earlier.[11]

Perhaps even more important, the full implications of British and French emergence from the war as financial dependents of the United States were barely understood after the conflict, let alone before it. Fateful post-war decisions were made in London and Paris that pegged sterling and the franc at high tradable values tied to a new 'gold standard'. The resultant inflated value of each currency created huge financial problems, not just domestically but imperially too.[12] As always, questions of money and empire remained interlocked. Few colonies were unaffected by the fortunes of the British and French economies. The ups and downs of metropolitan currencies, export industries, and employment markets reverberated through colonial territories in the decade between the end of World War I and the Wall Street Crash in October 1929. The depression then brought these connections into even starker relief.[13]

As Robert Boyce puts it, the inter-war period's most remarkable feature was the simultaneous disintegration of the international political system and the international economic system.[14] The consequences of this double-edged collapse would become clearer once the depression of 1929–35 brought its two constituent elements crashing together in the rise of economic nationalism, fascist militarism, and a new arms race with a terrifying impetus of its own.[15] Refracted within colonial territories, the 'deglobalizing' of international trade after 1930 was felt in calamitous falls in commodity prices, real-terms inflation, and declining purchasing power.[16] Hard lives got harder still. For colonial subjects the depression was primarily experienced in terms of the affordability of food. In pockets of colonial Africa and much of southern Asia poverty diets deteriorated into chronic malnourishment.[17]

The intersection between colonial food costs, deteriorating public health, and social disorder was evident before the depression of course. There were food riots in southern India in 1918.[18] In Dakar, in Senegal, French West Africa's federal capital, bubonic plague, the second outbreak in five years, killed over 700 in 1919. The spread of infection was facilitated by problems associated with chronic poverty, especially overcrowding and poor hygiene.[19] Well into the inter-war period particular lethal epidemics retained their association with specific colonial regions—cholera in India, sleeping sickness

in the Congo Basin, yellow fever in Indochina. Politically, the most salient feature of the crisis of empire in the decade prior to the 1929 crash was the emergence of organized opposition movements, often the forerunners of the nationalist groups against which British and French colonial security forces would struggle for years to come. In 1919 Britain's service chiefs, thrown off balance by the developing civil war in Ireland, fretted that the empire's expanded frontiers could not be held.[20] Post-war demobilization made matters worse. Colonial ex-servicemen, especially the hundreds of thousands from the Indian subcontinent, seemed a volatile constituency sure to be targeted by anti-British agitators inside and outside the empire.[21] During 1918 and 1919 former soldiers were central to economic protests and ugly race riots from Liverpool to Kingston, Jamaica, making a mockery of presumed imperial unity in Britain's victorious Empire.[22]

The allied coalition had often enunciated contradictory war aims. But their central message was that ethnic self-determination offered the best route to the long-term stabilization of states and the relations between them.[23] This was a message enthusiastically taken up by politicians, public intellectuals, and other elite actors in the colonial world. Sa'd Zaghlul, spokesman of Egyptian nationalism, Shakib Arslan, a Druze parliamentarian from Syria, India's Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and a boyish Nguyen Ai Quoc (later to adopt the *nomme de guerre* Ho Chi Minh) all petitioned the peace-makers in Paris for limited reforms that would concede greater equality to the elite social groups they represented.[24] Without exception, their claims were rejected. Independent 'nation-states' were not set to arise from the ashes of former colonies; the League of Nations was not about to protect the rights—national or individual—of colonial peoples.[25] British public pressure for it to do so, articulated through the League of Nations Union, was yet to register.[26] In several dependencies, not least British India, the disappointments of the so-called 'Wilsonian moment' were keenly felt.[27] This is a reference to President Woodrow Wilson, whose pressure for funda-mental changes in the way international relations were conducted had, briefly, promised some redistribution of wealth and power in colonial territories. In practice, the 'moment' in question proved fleeting. But the nationalist genie was out of the bottle.[28]

Egypt's administrative elite of *effendiyya*, Palestinian share-croppers, Saigon's silk-farmers, and Caribbean cane-cutters: all clashed with colonial security forces, turning workplace protests into acts of rebellion. Those driven to protest by poverty, discrimination, or both, found common cause with local

politicians, often from more elite backgrounds, who demanded basic rights and, ultimately, nationhood for their communities.[29] Uprisings, repression, and the devastating impact of severe economic crisis made large parts of the British and French Empires from Jamaica to Indochina virtually ungovernable by 1939.[30] In these locales, the advent of another world war did not catalyse pressure for withdrawal; it merely contained pre-existing opposition for a few more years. So this chapter's core argument is simple. Understanding the end of empire should not begin with the consequences of the Second World War but with the colonial crises that prefigured it. Fight or flight was a reality decades before 1945.

New territories and threats to Britain's Empire

Colonial representatives hopeful that the Great War might usher in fundamental changes in the way the British and French empires were run were quickly disillusioned, something that seems sadly predictable in hindsight. Particularly so when one considers the way territorial redistribution of former Ottoman territories in the Middle East was handled by the two victorious imperial powers. The acquisitive instincts of British and French post-war governments were nowhere more apparent than in their squabbling over the carcass of the Ottoman Empire. In a diary entry in October 1918 the Cabinet Secretary Maurice Hankey recorded the improvisation and mistrust in inter-allied discussions about the choicest morsels of territory. On the 3rd he noted the fury in the War Cabinet after it emerged that the Foreign Secretary A.J. Balfour had promised the French that the horse-trading embodied in the 1916 Sykes–Picot agreement would stand. France would 'get' an enlarged Syria, probably including the oil-bearing region of Iraqi Mosul. The Prime Minister Lloyd George would have none of it. He was determined to revoke the Sykes–Picot accords in order to secure an enlarged Palestine for Britain and the incorporation of the Mosul *vilayet* into a British-ruled Mesopotamia (Iraq). He even devised 'a subtle dodge' to invite the United States to govern Palestine and Syria. This, he thought, might scare the French into conceding a British-run Palestine in order to safeguard France's toehold in the Levant.[31]

With such convoluted scheming it was hardly surprising that in the unsettled Middle Eastern political climate after 1918 differing British and French calculations about the wisdom of supporting the Hashemite dynasty

poisoned relations between the two imperial powers.[32] The Hashemite King Feisal established an independent, populist regime in Syria in late 1918, and figured among those that lobbied the Versailles peacemakers a year later.[33] It was to no avail. After a brief military showdown outside Damascus Feisal's Syrian government was evicted by the French military administration that took charge of the country as a League of Nations 'mandate' territory in July 1920.[34] Britain, by contrast, stuck with monarchical figureheads, identifying loyalist communities that might serve them. Feisal seized the opportunity to relocate to Iraq. His brother Abdullah was installed as Emir of another British mandate—Transjordan.[35] As these arrangements suggest, Britain emerged with vastly increased Middle Eastern assets and commitments, next to which French acquisition of mandates over Syria and its splinter state, Lebanon, seemed almost modest.[36] Thus a paradox: the destabilization of the British and the French empires between 1914 and 1923 did not preclude their expansion. Both reached their largest physical extent in the early 1920s.

Home-grown opposition to empire struggled to make itself felt in interwar Britain. The anti-imperialist sympathies of liberal critics, missionary groups, members of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, or rank-and-file supporters of the Labour party and the TUC were narrowly circumscribed. For one thing, it was widely presumed that political reforms and material improvements to colonial life were best accomplished with British sponsorship, an assumption reinforced by the Colonial Office rhetoric of 'trusteeship', which recast imperial rule as being guided as much by ethical concerns as by profit or strategic advantage. For another thing, tough economic conditions at home sapped enthusiasm for any imperial spending or loosening of trade privileges liable to affect British prosperity or working-class pockets adversely.[37] Imperial loyalty remained an unspoken certainty among British Ministers of every political stripe between the wars, but the extent of ministerial enthusiasm for, and interest in, empire varied sharply. For the Colonial Secretary Leo Amery, child of the Raj and perhaps Britain's most fervently imperialist parliamentarian, his colleagues in Stanley Baldwin's second Conservative government were a shocking disappointment.[38] Reflecting on the past twelve months on New Year's Eve 1928, he confided his thoughts to his diary: 'I have felt myself very much estranged from most of my colleagues in the Cabinet. I cannot help feeling that they understand nothing about the Empire, and some of them are acquiring a definitely anti-Dominion complex.'[39]

As Amery discerned, an inter-war crisis of empire was real enough, its aftershocks linked to a wider global crisis triggered by the war's messy aftermath.[40] Europe's two imperial giants were bloated with colonial territory but perilously short of the ready money and powerful allies needed to digest it. Britain's imperial 'world system', as explained by John Darwin, required certain pre-conditions, first to facilitate its expansion in the nineteenth century, next to sustain it through the early twentieth, and, finally, to permit its recovery after the upheavals of the Second World War. Among these was a relatively passive East Asia. It is arguable whether this was ever achievable. It was certainly absent from the mid-1920s onwards. Closer to home, a balance of European continental forces proved equally unattainable until the Cold War imposed an artificial but enduring stasis on European boundaries after 1945. Elsewhere, the benevolent strength of North American partners—Canada and, above all, the United States—offered more constant assurance. Some French and British leaders—French premier Georges Clemenceau at the start of the inter-war period, Britain's Neville Chamberlain at the end of it—treated America disdainfully.[41] But US goodwill ebbed and flowed within a narrow tidal range, and helped keep British imperial power afloat most of the time. US anti-imperialism should not be overplayed. A cherished myth of America's history after 1776, it was belied by the facts. America remained a prominent Southeast Asian imperialist between the wars and a commercial rival for colonial markets elsewhere.[42] The Suez crisis of 1956 proved that Washington's whip-hand packed a killer punch, but anti-imperial US interventionism remained the exception and not the rule.

Unfriendly towards the western empires after the 1917 Revolution, Soviet Russia was also more quiescent towards capitalist imperialism than British and French doomsayers imagined.[43] During and after the Russian Civil War the more empire-minded of Britain's strategic planners identified Cold War-style Soviet threats to Britain's presence in Asia. The Conservative Foreign Secretary, and former Indian Viceroy, Lord Curzon took these anxieties furthest, but he was never alone.[44] In December 1924 the General Staff warned of Soviet pressure on a northern Asian tier of British imperial interests that traced an arc from the Shanghai international settlement through India's North-West frontier and Afghanistan to northern Iran and Kurdish Iraq.[45] It must have seemed oddly familiar to politicians and soldiers who built their careers in the age of Victorian high imperialism. But there was a new aspect. Fear of Communism introduced an ideological edge to the old Great Game of vying for imperial supremacy in central and eastern Asia. No

longer a straightforward competition for clients, markets, and territory, the Game was now dominated by intangible, transnational factors. The spectre of Tsarist bayonets was replaced by the spread of new ideologies and hostile propaganda that were harder to monitor and deter.[46] Among the strategic planners accustomed to this kind of global geo-politics, the Russian menace to colonial rule was no longer simply conceived in terms of military incursion but of Comintern-sponsored internal sedition as well.[47] Fears of a subversive anti-colonial 'enemy within' encouraged the creation of additional secret service and special branch agencies throughout the empire.[48] But for other grand strategists in government, British imperial defence policy retained its Oceanic flavour. Summarizing the problems of protecting the British Empire in June 1926, the chiefs of staff framed the problem in global maritime terms:

> Scattered over the globe in every continent and sea, peopled by races of every colour and in widely differing stages of civilisation, the component parts of the Empire have this much in common from the point of view of defence, that, with occasional and insignificant exceptions they are able to maintain order with their own resources supplemented in some cases by Imperial garrisons maintained for strategical reasons. But for any larger emergency requiring mutual support or co-operation they are dependent on the sea communications which unite them. If these communications are closed they become liable to defeat in detail. Moreover, the Mother Country, the central arsenal and reserve for the whole Empire, is dependent for the essentials of life on the maintenance of a network of sea communications extending not only to the territories of the Empire, but to every part of the world. The maintenance of these sea communications, therefore, is the first principle of our system of Imperial Defence.[49]

Imprinted with the Admiralty's dominance of Britain's inter-war military establishment, here were the essentials of 'empire-mindedness', 'blue water imperialism', defence of free trade, and the enduring myths of British plucky 'Island race' history rolled into one.[50]

The French Empire after 1918

To talk in similar terms of a French 'world system' would be misleading. France attached prime significance to European affairs—and dangers—not to global ones. Contrasting interests in oil provide some indication of this.

France, like Britain, devoted unprecedented attention to securing oil supplies during the 1920s. New interests were acquired in Iraq, Poland, and Romania, and oil exploration continued in its colonies of Algeria and Madagascar. Unlike Britain, however, French oil needs were comparatively small. French industry consumed 1.2 million tons in 1923 next to Britain's five million. The disparity was largely explained by the larger size of Britain's oil-fired merchant navy. With fewer oceanic commitments, French governments also opted for tighter regulation of the domestic oil market to maintain stocks and dampen fluctuations in fuel prices in preference to massive investment in overseas drilling.[51] The motor of French imperialism was not oil-driven.

Nor was it propelled by settlers. With no equivalents of Britain's Dominions, there were not enough French-born whites living in the empire to challenge the fixation on continental matters. As if to underline the point, one of the largest francophone migrant diasporas—the French Canadians of Quebec—were governed as part of a British Dominion, not a French one. Substantially self-governing, the Dominions' dominant Anglo-identities were shaped by nineteenth-century migration and complex networks of familial, cultural, and economic ties.[52] Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and, more problematically, South Africa and the Rhodesias were major political actors in their own right, as much making the British world system as being made by it.[53] On paper at least, from 1926 Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa enjoyed 'equal status' with Britain as associates in an emerging Commonwealth. In practice, it was years before these new arrangements were fully enacted. The scale of white settlement in these societies makes it difficult to see them as early models of a successful Anglophone 'flight' strategy, of a gradual and more or less amicable loosening of British imperial control.[54] Fiercely proud of their nation-building achievements, the white Dominions remained, to varying degrees, culturally deferential and economically and strategically tied to Britain until the 1950s. Although formally self-governing, the Dominions' enduring sense of Britishness signified not just a positive cultural choice but some degree of imperial attachment as well.[55]

France, of course, had its white enclaves overseas, from the Caribbean territories to the settler-dominated cities of North-West Africa. The administrative buildings and residential apartments of Tunis, Algiers, Oran, and—fastest growing of them all—Casablanca, put one more in mind of Marseilles than Marrakech.[56] But even Algeria, 'made French' to the extent that it was constitutionally subsumed into a metropolitan super-structure of regional *départements* and Interior Ministry oversight, remained stubbornly

foreign, exotic, and, on occasion, hostile. Fictional writing by French Alge-
rian settlers, which attracted a wide readership in inter-war France, played
on these traits. Algeria's settlers—or *colons*—were still looked upon, and
considered themselves to be, a race apart, a rugged, hybridized community
accustomed to adversity and contemptuous of the woolly idealism of met-
ropolitan imperialists.[57]

With no large, self-governing territories to accommodate, the French
Empire's rulers were, by inclination, centralizers aspiring to greater colo-
nial uniformity. To achieve this, they were keener than their British coun-
terparts to export metropolitan ideas, practices, and cultural norms to
dependent societies.[58] Overseas territories were, for them, integral to a
French 'empire nation-state'. Built on republican ideals and dedicated to
the closer integration between motherland and empire, this was more a
politico-cultural project than an economic reality sustained by domestic
financial investment and multi-continental white settlement. A world sys-
tem it was not, but a vehicle for the promotion of an idealized brand of
'Frenchness' it certainly was.

French colonial administration was elevated to the status of a doctrine
because of its cultural emphasis on changing the beliefs, habits, and associa-
tional life of subject peoples. The principal weapon in the colonial armoury
was the French language, command of which was an obvious marker of an
individual's successful 'assimilation' to French standards of probity and politics.
Potentially all-embracing, this doctrine of 'assimilationism' in fact remained
highly exclusive.[59] Advanced education, which required money, connections,
or both, was one route to citizenship—the official imprimatur of Frenchness.
Accidents of birth, especially a French-born father, were another.[60] For the
majority who secured it after 1918, citizenship came as a reward for sacrifice:
either a professional career in the military or active service in the Great War.
Assimilation, then, came with undeclared economic requirements, a heavy
gender bias, and a pronounced martial flavour. All three were at odds with the
egalitarian rhetoric used to justify it.[61]

We would thus be ill-advised to think of French colonialism as qualita-
tively unique insofar as its declared cultural objective of integrating—or
assimilating—dependent societies with France remained substantially unful-
filled. Equally, we should resist the temptation to be dismissive. To its many
supporters at home and, indeed, in the colonies, the French empire differed
from its British equivalent because its *raison d'être* was the betterment of
dependent peoples. The lives of colonial citizens, an elite minority, were

bound to be enhanced thanks to their complete immersion in French values. Meanwhile, the mass of colonial subjects, despite being confined to a lesser status, would still profit from seeing and hearing French administration, language, and cultural practices performed around them. France's imperial training grounds were the classroom, the magistrate's office, the midwifery clinic, and the colonial army recruitment centre. The African, Asian, and Afro-Caribbean peoples who passed through these places as schoolchildren, as property owners, as mothers, or as soldiers were stepping up the rungs of the assimilation ladder to the lofty heights of citizenship of the Republic.[62] In the two sub-Saharan federations that spanned West and Equatorial Africa as well as in the other great French imperial federation, Indochina, colonial rule was of sufficiently long standing to have produced thousands of young men (numbers of women were significantly smaller) who had reached the top of the ladder. Those who climbed up through military service could reasonably expect post-war civilian employment, perhaps as policemen, or postal employees. But the smaller numbers that had undergone French secondary or even higher education craved access to more sought-after positions: in the professions, in local or even national government. Most would be disappointed.[63]

The consequent alienation of these *évolués* (literally, 'the [culturally] evolved') in francophone black Africa and French Vietnam was critical to the emergence of two distinct strands of opposition to colonialism. The first was primarily cultural, a reassertion of the vitality of indigenous arts, linguistic forms, and associational life denigrated by French colonial educators and administrators. The second was more conventionally political: the rejection of assimilationist rhetoric as an elaborate sham and a turn towards integral anti-colonial nationalism. The former strand was exemplified by the negritude movement, which emerged among a select group of black African and Antillean students, writers, and political activists in inter-war Paris. Theirs was a predominantly literary, humanistic opposition, often militant in tone but never violent in practice. Writers like the Martiniquan poet Aimé Césaire stressed the distinctiveness and intrinsic value of African cultures and the specificity of black historical experience of European enslavement and persecution. Yet they also acknowledged the utility of a continued relationship with France.[64] The greater radicalism of the latter strand was personified by Ho Chi Minh. Along with several co-founders of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) between 1918 and 1930 he made the journey from Paris-based student *évolué* dressed in suit and tie to Marxist outlaw in peasant

attire.[65] Proponents of socialist modernization, these first-generation Vietnamese Communists lambasted colonialism's stultifying effects. Colonial citizens were condemned to be subordinate, ersatz copies of the real thing. And French administrators absolved themselves of responsibility for the poor majority of their colonial subjects by claiming that social inequalities were endemic and unchangeable.[66]

Ho and his colleagues had touched a nerve. Advocates of assimilation confronted two dilemmas between the wars. One was that its limited achievements became harder to conceal. The other was that the policy was no longer in vogue among bureaucrats or politicians. During and imme-diately after the First World War administrators in the French colonial federations proclaimed their conversion from assimilationist ideals to a more pragmatic and less disruptive style of governance, dubbed associa-tionism.[67] Closer to British ideas of indirect rule in its selective accom-modation with local customs and cultures, associationism was less republican and radical than politically and socially conservative. In a complete role reversal, during the inter-war years official colonial rhetoric venerated traditional hierarchy, customary law, and the authenticity of peasant life.[68] Where assimilationism sought to re-engineer colonial societies, association-ism preserved them as if in a museum. One of its more obvious by-products was to marginalize the *évolués* whose acquisition of French citizenship had been a key justification for 'assimilation'.[69] Traditional authority figures— Ivorian chiefs, Senegalese sufi brotherhoods, Vietnamese mandarins and village headmen, once derided as obstacles to the spread of republican civic virtues, were reinvented as guarantors of social stability and authentic representatives of local opinion.

French colonial 'fights' over the next thirty years typically began with efforts by *évolué* groups to challenge the consequent rigidities of associa-tionism. The techniques of these early opponents varied, although the issues at stake still centred on political rights—admission to citizenship, access to administrative posts, and a wider colonial franchise. Some *évolués*, like the leaders of Vietnam's early Communists, despaired of compromise and began organizing labour protests, army mutinies, and peasant rebellion.[70] But most chose other, peaceful routes of protest. A common tactic was to highlight the enduring cultural dynamism of colonized societies despite the stifling impact of French cultural dominance which silenced eloquent voices, denied economic opportunity, and withheld basic rights.[71] The negritude movement, in particular, disparaged combat, preferring to engage in cultural

warfare. Their core argument was simple. The colonial turn towards associationism was a lie. Far from respecting local culture, association presumed that African societies were inferior and inert. The doctrine encouraged venality among the privileged and demanded obedience from the rest.[72]

Supporters of associationism were undaunted. Their air of confidence mirrored the changes taking place in the training of the inter-war generation of colonial service appointees. A quiet revolution was occurring in the colonial academy. For almost four centuries between France's early colonial acquisitions in the sixteenth century and the consolidation of the 'second' French colonial empire with nineteenth-century conquests in Africa and Indochina, imperial bureaucracy was an adjunct to the administration of the French Navy (or 'Marine'). Notoriously hostile to republicanism, navy bureaucrats, often of aristocratic or *haut bourgeois* background, were staunch conservatives in colonial affairs.[73] The idea of a specialist colonial service was long resisted and a discrete Ministry of Colonies was only established in March 1894. For decades afterwards, this Ministry, often identified by its Paris location in the rue Oudinot, remained a backwater. On occasion, powerful Ministers, such as Théophile Delcassé (in the mid 1890s), Georges Leygues (1906 to 1909), and Marius Moutet (1936–38) injected vigour to the rue Oudinot. In general terms, though, the Ministry administered rather than governed.

French decision-making

For much of the early twentieth century, policy-making remained the preserve of a loose coalition of empire interest groups, misleadingly labelled the 'colonial party'. Headed by senior parliamentarians such as Eugène Étienne (before 1914) and Albert Sarraut (after 1918), the colonial party accommodated provincial chambers of commerce, Paris bankers, geographical societies, missionary groups, and senior civil servants. Some were animated by republican conviction, a few by religion; some by specialist academic interest, others by the strategic potential of imperial territories. Most of the bureaucrats and businessmen involved were modernizers. Most of the missionaries, servants of God's Empire, not of France's, were the opposite, equating 'modernity' with secularism and decadence.[74] Yet somehow they all advanced imperial interests. Commerce was especially well represented. Provincial businesses, traders, and shippers with ties to particular colonial markets lobbied

for their pet causes. Port cities had much to gain. Built on the Atlantic slave trade, Bordeaux still traded heavily with black Africa. Merchants in Marseilles favoured links with the Maghreb and Middle East. Silk magnates in Lyons relied on assured, cheap supplies from Lebanon and Vietnam much as the Lancashire textile industry depended on Indian cotton.[75]

High finance was less prominent within the colonial party, except in the lucrative field of French colonial banking, which expanded rapidly after the First World War. Other French speculators looked beyond colonial frontiers for better returns on capital invested abroad. Tsarist Russia was much favoured before 1914; the new states of Eastern Europe more so after the holders of Russian stock lost their shirts in October 1917. Some imperial projects did attract Paris money. The transport sector was a favoured recipient; so was southern Vietnam's rubber industry.[76] Rubber profits made Cochin-China the highest earning French colony per franc invested by the hugely influential Bank of Indochina in the 1920s.[77] Railway projects such as an arterial Vietnamese line and inter-city networks in North Africa were the subject of major inter-war loan issues.[78] So, too, were colonial air routes and their accompanying infrastructure, which often came with the promise of additional state subsidy. But the Paris Bourse was no City of London when it came to less glossy, day-to-day matters of empire investment and trade.[79]

With so many rival interests to accommodate, the colonial party could be cacophonous. It was, though, a supremely successful lobby group because its leading members understood the Third Republic's institutional dynamics. The colonial party set the course of long-term imperial expansion because its members could mobilize Paris bureaucracy, the Catholic orders, employers' groups, the major banks and, above all, the National Assembly to advance empire interests.[80] Rue Oudinot personnel and the short-lived coalition governments that were the Third Republic's trademark bent to its wishes.

Colonial party supporters were interested in results. They were less concerned with colonial doctrine. Nor were imperialist attachments identifiable with any particular political party of the late Third Republic. All professed loyalty to the Empire; even the Communists, who talked of colonial 'nations in formation' under French guidance. But none were sufficiently enthused by it to put imperial claims at the heart of their manifestos.[81] Inter-war associationism emerged instead from the confluence of three factors. First was the professionalization of the colonial service. Second was the growing popularity of the social sciences within French academia. And third was

the belief shared by bureaucrats and social scientists that ethnography was a uniquely colonial discipline with scientific precepts that would enable officials, not just to administer dependent peoples but to understand them.[82]

Those individuals who personified all three elements were best placed to put the new thinking into practice. Leading ethnographers boasted extensive colonial experience. Perhaps the most influential, Maurice Delafosse, was a former director of political affairs in the federal government of French West Africa. Another West Africa veteran, Henri Labouret, made ethnography integral to the curriculum of the École Coloniale, the college for trainee empire administrators on the avenue de l'Observatoire in Paris. Delafosse and Labouret persuaded other long-serving officials in French Africa that ethnology and its close cousin social anthropology were bedrocks of successful colonial government.[83] Their chief disciple was Georges Hardy, appointed to head the École Coloniale in 1926.[84] Hardy's innovation was to marry these 'colonial sciences' with practical courses of instruction—a programme of associationist ideas translatable into administrative practice. Officials trained in Hardy's methods venerated ethnographic 'fieldwork' as a prerequisite for sound policy choices. It was not that simple. Ethnography came loaded with presumptions and prejudices in regard to colonized societies and their limited ability to cope with economic modernization. Industrial diversification, urbanization, and the spread of waged labour were thus interpreted as socially destabilizing, even morally wrong. Puritanical, ascetic Islam was dangerous and 'un-African'; heterodox Sufism more malleable and tolerant.[85] Party politics and European-style jury trial, both predicated on adversarial argument, were, according to Hardy's graduates, too much for African minds to handle.[86] Needs and wants were better articulated through traditional means—customary law (although officials remained hazy about what this was), chiefly courts, and village elders.[87] Scientific colonialism, in other words, revealed as much about its practitioners' beliefs as about those of their colonial subjects.

The number of anthropologists roaming colonial Africa was much smaller than the ranks of agronomists, medical specialists, and engineers that filled the colonial administrations after the Second World War. But the anthropologists were perhaps more influential in determining the actions of governments.[88] Specialist officials pointed to ethnographic findings about 'tribal custom', local 'folklore', and 'authentic tradition' to justify colonial tutelage as a work of social conservation.[89] No matter that the sheen of academic objectivity legitimized policies that typecast Africans in particular ways,

consigning them to a pre-modern status in which industrialization, advanced education, and gender equality became foreign-borne ills to be avoided.[90] Others see baser motives in this 'politics of retraditionalization'.[91] Stripped of assimilation's cultural baggage about remaking colonial societies in the French image, associationism was a turn towards low-cost, high-extraction administration.[92] At its heart was the 'bargain of collaboration' with local elites—the chiefs, mandarins, and village elders who made the system work. The bargain preserved their titles and limited legal and tax-raising powers. They upheld rural order and furnished the authorities with revenue, labour, and military recruits in return.

It also stored up problems in the longer term. Just as the gap between what assimilation claimed and what it delivered frustrated *évolués'* groups, so the bargains with favoured conservative elites that made association work in practice stirred resentment among those who got nothing from the deal. The fault with both doctrines lay in their underlying selectivity more than the ways they were enacted. Imperial rule was neither dictatorial nor hegemonic; there was scope for contestation from the lowest levels of administrative interaction between officials and local peoples to the higher reaches of colonial policy-making. This basic truth applied in the British as in the French empire. Europeans set the tone for administrative, legal, commercial, and religious practice, but colonial bureaucrats, magistrates, traders, and missionaries were rarely able to impose their will without fear of contradiction. French African and Indochinese territories were governed with a more pronounced military presence than neighbouring British dependencies, but the same collaborative propositions applied.[93] Cooperation between imperial representatives, local elites, and other indigenous auxiliaries were everywhere to be found.[94] Stripped of its rhetorical justifications and doctrinal labels, empire was a system of endless reciprocal arrangements in which insiders, of all ethnicities and creeds, accrued substantial rewards at the expense of the excluded.

The system's long-term dangers were just as severe in the British Empire as they were in the French. Literacy opened doors to alternate political futures: the thoughts of Gandhi, Marcus Garvey, or Marx as well as new strains of pan-Islamist or pan-Africanist thought. In British-ruled Sudan, for instance, nationalist opposition coalesced among the educated young officials trained as staffers for regional government after the First World War. By 1919 Cairo was a pole of attraction for anti-Western opinion throughout the Arab world. Alarmed by this development, the British administration in

Khartoum embarked on a policy of 'Sudanization'. National dress became de rigueur. Arabic-speaking, Muslim Sudanese of high social rank displaced Egyptians and Lebanese within the *effendiyya* class that performed most clerical tasks from tax collection to property registration.[95] By selecting future Sudanese administrators at Khartoum's elite Gordon College along lines of language, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender, College staff reinforced the social structures of the pre-colonial period. It was these educated northerners who first articulated clear ideas of the Sudanese nation as a unitary whole with Khartoum as its capital, and colonial provinces plus the vast southern hinterland as its subordinate parts. In the words of Heather Sharkey, these young northern Sudanese became 'imperialism's most intimate enemies, making colonial rule a reality while hoping to see it undone'.[96] Educated southerners, the product of Christian missionary schools, were, by contrast, frozen out of what would be an Arab-dominated and Arabic-speaking post-colonial state.

Repression and violence in the French Empire

Sudan presents the clearest inter-war example of a short-term administrative expedient with unforeseen long-term consequences. In other places colonial violence played a bigger part in determining future political developments. The First World War peace settlements came less than a generation after the concentration camps of Spanish Cuba and the South African War or, more infamously still, General Lothar von Trotha's campaign of extermination against the Herero and Nama of German South West Africa. And there were few indications that the ultra-violence of 'pacification'—in Rudyard Kipling's formulation, the 'savage wars of peace'—was a thing of the past. During the First World War colonial uprisings in the British Empire (Ireland, Ceylon, Egypt, Waziristan, Iraq) and in the French (Algeria, Niger, Indochina, Morocco) were ruthlessly put down, often by troops acclimatized to exceptionally brutal methods and high casualty rates by their own wartime experiences.[97]

So it was in the three principal inter-war uprings in the French Empire: in Morocco and Syria during 1925, and in rural northern Vietnam between 1930 and 1932. Morocco's Rif War originated in a post-war challenge by Berber clan groups against Spanish and French occupation of the country's northern margins.[98] Fighting between Spanish colonial forces and

the foremost Riffian tribal confederations began in 1920. From 12 April 1925, what had been a Spanish–Riffian war became a predominantly French–Riffian one. Three *harkas* of Riffian forces, together close to 5,000 strong, traversed the boundary separating the Spanish and French Moroccan protectorates. Scores of French garrison blockhouses were overrun within days.[99] This was not improvised rebellion but, in Marshal Philippe Pétain's words, a war fought against 'the most powerful and best armed enemy we have ever encountered in colonial operations'.[100]

The French Premier Paul Painlevé told his fellow Senators on 2 July 1925 that the French in Morocco were victims of an unprovoked attack, poor reward for the benefits of modernization and political stability conferred elsewhere by protectorate government.[101] He overlooked a critical decision taken by Louis-Hubert Lyautey's French Moroccan administration a year earlier. French military advance into the Ouergha River Valley, centre of the Rif's wheat production, threatened to close off food and water supplies to the area's dominant clans.[102] The unprovoked 'invasion' of French territory was, in fact, a reoccupation of essential Riffian farmland recently seized by the Protectorate authorities.[103] With so much at stake, fighting intensified over the summer. By mid October French official casualty figures recorded 2,176 soldiers killed and 8,297 wounded. Many were North and West African colonial troops. These were the heaviest French military losses since the Armistice and the Rif War would remain the largest engagement by French colonial forces between the wars. With the campaign draining the French Treasury of almost a billion francs, Painlevé's ministers wanted the war won quickly. Lyautey's despairing efforts to salvage some measure of collaboration with the Riffians came to nothing.[104] Pétain replaced him in Rabat, bringing two additional army corps and the promise of quick victory. A metropolitan army General relatively unfamiliar with imperial soldiering, Pétain began his autumn offensive in late September. Almost 160,000 French troops took part, advancing along the northern Rif frontier.[105] That autumn Pétain's forces brought the tactics of the Western Front—artillery barrages, mustard gas, and infantry assaults—to bear against Riffian clansmen and women.[106] The resultant defeat and exile of Mohammed Ben Abdel Krim el-Khattabi was less of a turning point than the means chosen to achieve it. Misleadingly described by Painlevé's government as a 'police operation', the Rif War pointed the way towards the fight strategies adopted by successive French administrations over coming decades to crush anti-colonial opposition.

It was only weeks before the invocation of new leadership, the injection of extra resources, and unrestrained use of overwhelming firepower in Morocco was repeated in French Syria. There, too, the escalatory dynamics of asymmetric colonial repression were equally apparent.[107] By December 1925, what had started as a local rebellion among the Druze population of southern Syria against an overbearing French military governor had triggered urban uprisings in Syria's three largest provincial towns: Homs, Hama, and Aleppo.[108] Violence in the countryside was more arbitrary. French irregular forces, substantially composed of Circassian and Kurdish units, destroyed villages and executed men suspected of assisting the rebels. Reprisal killings and the display of corpses in acts of intimidation became commonplace.[109]

The capital, Damascus, also experienced the full ferocity of pacification after Druze insurgents infiltrated the city's southern districts. In August 1925 barbed wire and checkpoints went up around the city. These were intended both to keep rebel forces out and to assist security force dragnets against supporters of prominent Damascene families linked to a newly-established nationalist group, the Syrian People's Party.[110] Mass arrests disrupted the Party's networks but failed to contain the trickle of rebel fighters into the capital. In the pre-dawn hours of 18 October around forty Druze fighters led by Hasan al-Kharrat entered the city's Shaghur quarter. A police station was set ablaze; troops caught unawares in local brothels were killed. A larger Druze column, joined by scores of Damascene sympathizers, joined the rampage later in the day. The high commissioner's converted city residence, the ʿAzm Palace, was comprehensively looted. Although tanks and roving columns worked their way towards the rebel force, uncertainty persisted about its size. That evening, General Maurice Gamelin, who would lead the army into the battle for France in 1940, ordered the shelling of the city's most rebellious districts. Aircraft joined the assault. Civilians, including large numbers of European residents, fled in terror or hid in basements. Certain that rebels were hiding among the tenements but unwilling to send troops in to conduct house-by-house searches, Gamelin stepped up the pressure. The next morning, artillery fired high explosive shells across a wide arc that included the city centre.[111] Whole swathes of the capital were in ruins by the time city dignitaries negotiated a ceasefire. The Damascus municipality counted 1,416 dead, among them 336 women and children.[112]

Such indiscriminate shelling was shocking proof that the minimum force maxims identified with Lyautey's former Moroccan administration were discredited. France's premier imperial general returned to France to end his

Figure 2. Peace restored? Marshal Lyautey hosts the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York to the Paris Colonial Exhibition in Vincennes. (The Duke is on the Duchess's right.)

career in a largely honorific role, notably as titular organizer of the enormous Paris Colonial Exhibition that opened in Vincennes in May 1931.

Lyautey's military successors were never open to compromise. Faced with a powerful incursion, Gamelin in Syria, like Pétain in Morocco, chose devastating force, an option as recklessly inappropriate in the densely-populated inner suburbs of Damascus as it was in the Riffian highlands. Theirs was a policy of annihilation. By the time the much reinforced Levant army moved in to crush the remaining pockets of Syrian resistance in the Jabal Druze and elsewhere in August 1926, the revolt's original causes were overshadowed by the violence deployed to stamp it out.[113] Misguided French efforts to modernize the rural economy and restructure provincial administration

contrary to the wishes of local notables might have been remedied.[114] Instead, over 100,000 were left homeless, the agricultural economy thrown into recession, and any prospect of dialogue with emergent Syrian nationalism destroyed.[115] Perhaps most significantly, the 'Great Revolt' passed into popular memory as a heroic lost cause, providing a banner around which otherwise disparate Syrian nationalists could rally in defiance of the French Mandate for the next twenty years.

Nor was there any sign of security force restraint in Indochina, witness to some of the colonial world's most staggering political violence throughout a tempestuous century of French rule. The causes, costs, and consequences of these clashes have generated an impressive literature.[116] Connections have also been made between the flashpoints of inter-war dissent in French-ruled Vietnam during the early 1930s and the outbreak of the Indochina War in 1946. An army mutiny at Yen Bay, a garrison 160 kilometres northwest of Hanoi, and a more sustained peasant uprising between May 1930 and September 1931 in the central Vietnamese provinces of Nghe-An and Ha-Tinh, known retrospectively as the Nghe-Tinh soviet movement, have each been read as indicators of a militant nationalism partly inspired by Vietnamese cultural renovation, partly by Communist ideology.[117] The local severity of the Depression also played its part. Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and Phan Bội Châu, founder of the Duy Tân Hôi (Vietnam Reformation Society) and his country's leading nationalist exile, were each natives of Nghe-An.[118] Poverty nourished Nghe-An's radical tradition. Poor and densely populated, the provincial capital, Vinh, and its outlying farming districts were acutely susceptible to adverse changes in the region's agricultural market. A combination of low-yield land, drought conditions, and repeated harvest failure caused widespread peasant malnutrition.[119] But these economic factors were ignored by the colonial administration, which treated dissent almost as an environmental condition, something intrinsic to Vietnam and its people, rather than a phenomenon generated by the political economy of colonialism.[120] Depicting Vietnam as inherently lawless absolved the authorities of responsibility for social unrest and it normalized the resort to harsh repression within a society allegedly accustomed to the language of violence: legal distinctions between the killing of civilians and the eradication of insurgents collapsed.[121]

Guided by local militiamen, Foreign Legion units led the crackdown after Yen Bay.[122] Their prime targets were the supporters of two main groups: Vietnam's nationalist party, the Việt Nam Quôc Dân Dang (VNQDD) and

its new rival, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). In practice, army violence was arbitrary and judicial retribution severe. On 17 June 1930 thirteen VNQDD members, including party leader Nguyen Thai Hoc, were escorted to Yen Bay for execution by guillotine.[123] The event was concealed from public view to minimize the risk of creating martyrs to the nationalist cause.[124] But the French Communist Party newspaper, *L'Humanité*, broke ranks. It reproduced the statements made by the condemned and graphically recounted their struggling as Foreign Legionnaires forced the men onto the chopping block. Literally decapitated, the VNQDD declined as a political force, leaving the way open for Communist resurgence in the later 1930s. The executed VNQDD leaders did not figure within official casualty figures for the nine-month period, February to October 1930, which listed 345 rebels killed, 124 wounded, and 429 arrested. Government forces, by contrast, came away unscathed.[125]

On 10 April 1930, several weeks after the original mutiny at Yen Bay, the Chamber of Deputies finally debated the situation in Indochina. Socialist Deputy Marius Moutet dominated the proceedings. A Lyons lawyer and a committed pacifist, Moutet was an eloquent critic of judicial abuses in the empire. Outside Parliament he used his position within the League for the Rights of Man (*La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, LDH), the most influential human rights lobby in France, and its associated committee for the defence of political prisoners, to condemn French actions in northern Vietnam.[126] Moutet's preoccupation with colonial affairs was unusual among LDH members, whose journal described colonial subjects in pejorative, sometimes racist terms.[127] Queasy about colonial oppression, the League still defended republican imperialism as a force for good.[128]

So Moutet's was rather a lone voice. He railed against the mockery of French justice as the colonial authorities imposed control, pointing out that a specially-convened criminal commission in Tonkin (Vietnam's northernmost territory) passed fifty-two death sentences on Yen Bay mutineers. Another special criminal court in Saigon handed down an additional thirty-four death sentences in under twenty-four hours.[129] Only the poet Louis Aragon, a founder of the surrealist movement and an organizer of the militantly anti-colonial 'Red Front', was as vociferous in denouncing this fight strategy run wild.[130] For all their efforts, few beyond the margins of the extreme left and Paris Bohemia seemed to be listening.

Step forward five years to Fascist Italy's invasion of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia in late 1935. It was then that sixteen members of the *Académie Française*,

France's most prestigious academic body, issued an 'Intellectuals' manifesto for the defence of the West'. The signatories were all authoritarian right-wingers. Among them were Charles Maurras, father-figure of the ultra-rightist 'Leagues' like the *Croix de feu* (Cross of fire), whose members took to the streets in their thousands during in the 1930s, and Robert Brasillach, a future collaborationist executed for treason in 1945. Their 1935 manifesto was an unabashed defence of European colonial domination. It mocked 'a false legal universalism which sets the superior and the inferior, the civilized person and the barbarian, on the same equal footing'. The 'Intellectuals' manifesto' provoked outrage from French liberals, Moutet and his LDH colleagues among them. But the fact remained that less than five years before the Second World War the 'right' of European nations to rule 'lesser' societies remained dogmatically self-evident to other prominent French commentators.[131]

Repression and violence in the British Empire

To a degree, British inter-war techniques of repression mirrored those of France. General Reginald Dyer's decision to order imperial troops to fire on hundreds of civilian protesters at Amritsar on 13 April 1919 confirms that extreme state violence was by no means confined to French colonies.[132] General Dyer conceived his task in Amritsar as a military operation against a hostile population in 'enemy territory'.[133] It was a view that won him considerable support in Britain, where his defenders maintained that his unscrupulousness stamped out an incipient revolt.[134] A decade later in Burma a rural uprising, the Saya San rebellion, which was embraced by members of Burma's proto-nationalist movement during 1930–31, was suppressed with the same ruthless, exemplary violence as used against the Yen Bay mutineers in northern Vietnam.[135] Elsewhere, sources of British colonial dissent were rather different. Palestine stood out in this regard. Its disputes were written in Britain's conflicting wartime promises to Arab and Jewish leaders. Never during the mandate's sorry twenty-eight year history did Palestine's British rulers reconcile their contradictory commitments to a Jewish national home and protection of Palestinians' rights as charges of the League of Nations. By 1937, sub-dividing Palestine between Arabs and Jews, something dismissed by British politicians of all stripes in the 1920s as an admission of imperial failure, had acquired the

Map 4. The British Mandate in Palestine.

dismal respectability of the last resort solution. Partition became policy, its planned outlines evident in Map 4. Perhaps because Britain's Palestine problems were self-inflicted, its administrators excelled other British colonial bureaucrats in expressing their frustration.[136] Jerusalem High Commissioner

Sir Ronald Storrs was among those exasperated by the challenges of communal impartiality: 'Two hours of Arab grievances drive me into the synagogue, while after an intensive course of Zionist propaganda, I am prepared to embrace Islam.'[137]

Storrs' cynicism is easily explained. Neither he nor his successors could dampen Palestine's inter-communal friction. Indeed, the combination of early 1930s depression conditions, rising Jewish immigration from Europe, and intensified competition over land, property, and religious observance made it worse. Sickening outbursts of internecine violence proliferated.[138] From the early 1920s to the late 1930s riots along communal frontlines in Jaffa, Hebron, Nablus, and, above all, Jerusalem, culminated in orgies of killing.[139] Fearful about accusations of partiality and betrayal of trust, successive British Cabinets turned to the final expedient for a cornered government: a decorous Royal Commission to conduct a judicial investigation and offer advice on lessons learnt.[140] One such commission of inquiry into the worst of these clashes, the Wailing Wall riots of August 1929, recorded 133 Jews and 116 Arabs killed with a further 572 seriously injured.[141] The Mandate's security forces, reliant on local paramilitaries and targeted by rebel groups from both communities, became caught up in the cycle of killings and counter-killings. Increasingly brutal, Palestine's police and the British army garrison were a hated occupation force by the time full-scale Arab revolt erupted in early 1936.[142]

Even a temporary ceasefire in October 1936 only highlighted the limits to British influence. Negotiated in part to facilitate Palestine's all-important citrus harvest, in part to offset demands for martial law, the ceasefire underscored the ability of the Palestinian Arab leadership to orchestrate the violence. As General Sir John Dill, recently dispatched to suppress the revolt, commented, 'I regard the most disturbing side of the situation as being the demonstration of power which the Arab Higher Committee has given in calling off the rebellion so completely and so quickly—by a word.'[143] The cycle of killings and retribution would resume in 1937. British security forces began manipulating the law to justify a savage policy of counter-terror against Palestinian civilians.[144] This time it was the British public that did not seem to care.

Liberal leftists throughout Europe were drawn to the against-the-odds bravery of the anti-fascist international brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Left-leaning anti-colonial nationalists like Algeria's People's Party (*Parti du Peuple Algérien*) or the Indian National Congress also