Draconian counterinsurgency campaigns: why do authoritarian regimes use mass killings when countering insurgencies?

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Abstract

In this dissertation, an integrated theory is proposed in order to test why authoritarian regimes engage in mass killings during counterinsurgency operations. The current state of research is limited, scholars who studied the phenomenon either stuck to explaining parts or lacked the necessary overview of factors that can lead to mass killings in counterinsurgency operations. Within this research, three strands of literature that relate to either mass killings, authoritarian counterinsurgency or counterinsurgency in general are proposed that provide competing answers to the research objective. Subsequently, this integrated body of literature is applied to three cases: Iraq, Guatemala and the Soviet Union. The findings show that the threats stemming from the insurgents, and in this conceptualization more specifically the nature of the insurgency, the regime crisis as a result of the insurgency and the dysfunctionality of previous conventional measures provide the most feasible explanations for why authoritarian regimes engage in mass killings. Additional value is attributed to both veto player interests and elite ideology in determining authoritarian decision-making in the light of draconian counterinsurgency measures. The research moreover shows that the respective reasons to engage in mass killings influence and sometimes enforce each other.

1 Introduction

Using mass atrocities to control populations is an ancient practice. Roman emperors used this strategy to consolidate conquered territories and to counter rebellions (Fein 88). It is therefore not surprising that in recent history and contemporary times, mass killings are still used in the same fashion, most notably by authoritarian regimes. Authoritarian counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies are often highly contested from a western point of view. Authoritarian states tend to rely on excessive use of violence in the form of mass killings, mass internment or mass deportation when countering non-state adversaries. In this tradition, Russia shelled civilians with mortars during both the Chechyen wars. The Guatemalan military Junta killed roughly 35,000 civilians during their counterinsurgency operations against the socialist movements. Chinese government forces killed approximately 3000 Uighurs as a response to riots in the Xinjiang province. These examples are only a fraction of cases of mass killings committed by authoritarian regimes during counterinsurgency operations.

Critics of such excessive measures and academics studying the phenomenon almost exclusively try to understand the relative comparative advantages/disadvantages of authoritarian counterinsurgency measures in relation to their democratic counterparts. Although much attempted, it is analytically difficult to make general claims on the nature of authoritarian counterinsurgency and attach value to their respective effectiveness vis-a-vis democracies (Ucko 35). Computational models and other quantitative methods, used to understand the phenomenon, often lack the understanding of the influence of the process of policy making on the outcome (Ucko 34). Qualitative analysis of effectivity leads to conclusions that are not generalisable since the cases differ extremely in regard to their political and societal context (Ucko 34). Ucko (30) moreover argues that a number of scholars concluded that authoritarian counterinsurgency is more effective than democratic counterinsurgency, whereas others argue the exact opposite (a.o. Byman 2015 and Zhukov 2007).

The lack of uniformity in recent studies does not render the scientific field of counterinsurgency in authoritarian states worthless. A refocus is necessary, shifting from assessing effectiveness and comparative advantages/disadvantages towards an approach that

seeks to understand why authoritarian regimes use mass killings when addressing the threat of an insurgency (Ucko 35).

The research question this thesis seeks to answer is therefore: *"Why do authoritarian regimes deploy mass violence in counterinsurgency operations?"*. This research contributes to both the academic fields of authoritarian counterinsurgency as the literature on mass killings. Mass killings are a recurring theme in authoritarian counterinsurgency, research on this specific element provides greater insight in how authoritarian regimes react to domestic threats. The research moreover builds upon the existing field of study on mass killings and genocide by investigating the influence of authoritarian counterinsurgency on the decision to engage in mass violence.

2 Theoretical framework

In this thesis insurgents are defined as armed group(s) of non-state actors that consist of irregular forces, which are organized in small units and operate with light weaponry (Valentino et al. 383). Terrorists, insurgents, rebels and guerrillas all share the distinguishing factors proposed by Valentino and the distinction between these groups is highly subjective. For the purpose of consistency, I will use the term insurgents when referring to the group of actors mentioned.

Insurgents are irregular units that are ill-equipped to engage in all-out battles that – in historical conventional wars – decide victory or defeat, they therefore seek to avoid such battle arenas and prefer small scale destabilizing operations (Valentino et al. 383). Additionally, insurgents make use of violent actions to achieve a political goal and gain legitimacy from the target audience (Pratt 3). The difference in allocation of aforementioned classifications between these groups of non-state actors is, moreover, often a result of the interests the given regime has vis-a-vis this group of combatants and therewith not a subjective classification. A broader discussion on the differences between insurgents and terrorists falls outside the scope of this paper.[1]

2.1 Authoritarian counterinsurgency strategies

Insurgents are undesirable to any state. Their violent nature makes that insurgents cause destabilization in the host state and undermine the state's monopoly on violence. The objective of achieving political change inherently contradicts with the political order in place as it seeks to establish a new political order. To counter insurgents, authoritarian regimes can deploy roughly seven different measures. The seven measures concern: prohibition on dissent, mass mobilization, mass violence, spatial practices, winning the hearts and minds, intelligence penetration and information operations and the implementation of limited reforms. These measures are defined distinctly but can be used in coexistence. Consequently, a counterinsurgency strategy can consist of more than one measure.

[1] The concepts of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency are often used interchangeably since they deal with phenomena that are closely related and therefore sometimes considered as synonyms. Some argue that terrorism is the violent strategy used by insurgents (see Pratt 3). Others argue that countering domestic terrorism requires counterinsurgency operation abroad (see Boyle 334). Kilcullen additionally argues that terrorism and insurgency is used interchangeably since 1970s when international terrorism became more influential (Kilcullen 604).

The most intriguing and criticized measure is without doubt the use of mass killings. Scholars have been struggling to come to a comprehensive answer to the question what instigates mass killings in authoritarian counterinsurgency operations. Valentino et al. (378) define mass killing as the 'intentional killing of a massive number of non-combatants'. This conceptualization has two consequences, accidental killings are not taken into account and the killing of soldiers is excluded. Straus (2012b: 345) moreover conceptualizes mass killings as: "large-scale, organized, group-destructive violence (...)". Indicating that unorganized, low-scale and individually aimed violence does not constitute to the definition of mass killings.

Another crucial distinction to be made is that mass violence concerns indiscriminate killing of citizens. Indiscriminate killing excludes targeted killing of members of the opposition. The victims can (and often do) belong to the same group (ethnic, economic or otherwise), but there is no in-group differentiation in the form of a determination of guilt or innocence (Downes 421). Elites often create institutions to engage in acts of violence, most notably in the form of paramilitary groups that are not incorporated in the government directly, but which do support the existing regime (Staub 1999, 308).[2]

Regarding the question why authoritarian regimes engage in mass killings, attention is required to the aspect why they do *not* engage in other counterinsurgency measures but choose to deploy mass violence. The use of spatial practices is an alternative measure that does harm to civilians in a non-lethal way. Authoritarian responses to insurgency often aim at taking away both geographical and human space from insurgents through the penetration of communities and military patrols (Lewis et al. 495). Space is in this sense seen as a resource for rebellion to recruit, organize and create its own distinctive normative order (Lewis et al. 495). Prohibition on dissent should be regarded in the same non-lethal fashion, but like spatial practices relies on coercion. Authoritarian governments control media in their respective countries, which creates the opportunity to prohibit dissent (Ucko 36). These regimes are not, or in a limited way, restrained by the opinion of the electorate, since they control the means of

[2] Byman (70) moreover argues that paramilitary organisations are a central element in internal security services for authoritarian regimes, it is therefore not surprising that these groups are deployed to perpetrate mass violence. Paramilitary organisations often consist of low-status individuals that gain status from the act of violence. Although including the existence of paramilitary units as a predictive factor to predict the occurrence of mass killings as proposed by Koren (461) goes one bridge too far, its existence does signal a reduction in political and economic costs for a regime to engage in mass atrocities

the spread of information. A third measure in this fashion is the use of intelligence penetration and information operations. Information operations consist of blackmailing and so-called 'false flag' operations. 'False flag' operations constitute the penetration of insurgent groups to make their behaviour more extreme, thereby scaring possible recruits and creating opposition within the local population (Byman 77).

Community-based but less coercive measures are equally present. Mass mobilization is partly incited by the government's monopoly on information (and the ability this creates to raise masses in its favor) and partly because of the 'intensive popular participation' that characterizes the behaviour of the masses when authoritarian regimes are in crisis (Ucko 38). Similarly, 'Hearts and Minds' campaigns rely on the establishment of popular consent. The authoritarian practice aligns with the western conceptualization of 'Hearts and Minds' that seeks co-optation of the local population in the subject area in which the insurgents need to be addressed (Ucko 50). Another practice that seeks to incorporate nonconformist communities in the status quo is the implementation of limited reforms. Characterized by Byman (80) as: 'giving a little to avoid giving a lot', limited reforms are used to tackle insurgencies.

2.2 Three explanations

While the authoritarian counterinsurgency toolkit consists of many non-lethal measures, mass killings are an extensively used tool when countering insurgencies. The question remains why mass killings are chosen over the other alternatives available. There are three rival explanations to this question: 1) mass killings are used not to counter the insurgencies per se, it is rather the result of elite dynamics, 2) mass killings are used as a response to the threats stemming from the insurgents, and 3) an elite ideology dictates that mass killings have to be used to promote the ideology. Within each category, multiple theories are discussed. These theories are not necessarily competing with the other theories belonging to the same category, more than one can have had an influence on the decision-making process.

2.2.1 Elite dynamics

The first possible answer to why authoritarian regimes engage in mass killings for counterinsurgency purposes is found in the elite dynamics in the subject state. When discussing the effect of elite dynamics on why mass killings are deployed during counterinsurgency operations, the reason for such killings is sought outside of the inherent functioning of the particular counterinsurgency strategy – it is rather political. Within the field

of elite dynamics, two distinct categories of the phenomenon can explain authoritarian behaviour: elite rivalry and veto player interests.

2.2.1.1 Elite rivalry

Elites have a crucial role in conflict initiation and conflict resolution (Caspersen 7). Although authoritarian elites are very powerful, even ruling elites in authoritarian regimes are not in a position to act completely unrestrained (Caspersen 7). Elite rivalry is best seen as a competition for power performed by the two competing elites to consolidate or gain control over their state (Sochrica and Veiga 2). It is in such a situation that authoritarian states find themselves in a fragile position, since political elite competition signals a certain degree of political instability (Brownlee 2). Although competition not necessarily signals negative consequences in an economic sense, when political elite rivalry occurs, the ruling power acts out of self-interest – maintaining its political power – and thereby fails to serve the public interests as it should (Sochrica and Veiga 2).

Whereas insurgencies more often than not consist of marginalized elements within society as these groups thrive on marginalization, in a situation of elite rivalry the opposing party consists of other elites (Sochrica and Veiga 2). Within the conceptualization of elite rivalry, there is a distinction between intra- and inter-elite rivalry. Inter-elite rivalry indicates that the rivalling elite comes from an out-of-power group whereas in cases of intra-elite rivalry there is a division within the ruling elite. For example, for president Akayev in Kyrgyzstan, his second period of ruling was marked by a split in his elite support base leading to intra-elite rivalry (Morozova 64). This new faction in the in-power group accumulated wealth and consolidated its ties with other presidential allies, thereby contesting the power of Akayev (Morozova 64). Inter-elite rivalry occurred in Kenya, where competing elites from two different communities (respective the Samburu and Turkana communities) engaged in inter-elite rivalry by financing raids on the livestock of the other community (Okumu et al 479).

As van der Maat (13) argues: "(...) authoritarian leaders faced with elite rivalry may adopt mass indiscriminate violence to strengthen their support coalitions and weaken those of rivals to ensure survival". Mass killings as a response to elite rivalry serves two purposes. First, through mass indiscriminate killings, authoritarian regimes seek the support of and cooperation with various constituencies that in some way benefit from the violence against outgroups (van der Maat 11). Second, this type of killings shows the incapability of rival

elites to live up to their responsibility to protect their supporters, thereby disturbing the rival elites' claim to the formal monopoly on violence (van der Maat 11). This type of killing is beneficial to authoritarian leaders since the rival group is not targeted directly, violence is rather aimed at an outgroup, which gives the rival group the choice to either switch sides or to remain neutral (van der Maat 16). The violence is therefore not so much about gaining support, but more about instigating inaction (van der Maat 15).

The first indicator to signal whether the previously outlined situation provides an explanation to mass killings during counterinsurgency operations is the existence of a situation of elite rivalry. Secondly, the killings are aimed at an outgroup and not directly at the rival elite. Moreover, the rivalling elite must be responsible for some type of security vis-à-vis the targeted population, this can be either economically, socially or physically. The violence is intended to weaken the rival elite, and consequently benefits the regime and its constituencies. When mass atrocities occur in a situation as described in this paragraph and are explained as a counterinsurgency strategy, we identify elite rivalry as contributing to the decision to engage in mass killings during a counterinsurgency operation.

2.2.1.2 Veto players interests

Whereas elite rivalry provides explanations for specific behaviour in terms of competition and opposition, veto player interests indicate that elite veto players influence decision-making because the ruling elite is dependent on their support. The veto player elites enjoy significant influence in the agenda-setting and decision-making process and consequently enjoy significant power over a political system (Brownlee 12). Authoritarian leaders need the support of elites to survive, also referred to as the selectorate (Byman 70). The selectorate, as opposed to elites in times of elite rivalry, constitutes of insiders that enjoy access to the ruling elite (Brownlee 12). Opposition parties, although they might claim legitimacy, are made up out of outsiders that have no direct or privileged access to the ruling elite (Brownlee 12). One is conceptualized as a veto player when it has the capacity to incite or prevent change in a given political status quo, without this quality the actor is not influential enough to be attributed as a veto player (LeVan 217).

The mechanism in which veto player interest works is based on (limited) coercion, the elite support coalition threatens to oppose the regime when its interest is not taken into account during the decision-making process (Frantz and Ezrow 86). In a sense, the elites threaten to

create a situation of elite rivalry when their demands are not met. Therefore, it is necessary to retain the support of this coalition in order to be able to change (or prevent the change of) policy in authoritarian regimes.

When discussing veto player interests as a determining factor for authoritarian states to engage in mass killings during counterinsurgency operations, several elements can be observed. Firstly, it is necessary that the ruling elite has (and needs) the support from a support coalition of one or more supporting elites. These elites need to have the capacity and power to incite change or prevent change from happening through a mechanism of limited coercion: if you do(not) do this, we will not support you. For mass killings to be incited by veto player interest, one of the supporting elites will convince the ruling elite to perpetrate mass killings against a given insurgency because this supporting elite benefits from this action.

2.2.2 Threats stemming from the insurgents

The second strand of theories that can explain mass killings in the context of counterinsurgency operations relates to the imminent threat resulting from the insurgents or terrorist organization. Mass killing, in this regard, is a tool purposely used in the framework of the counterinsurgency operation. In a sense, deploying mass killings in such fashion is part of the toolbox rather than a symptom. The purpose and utility of using this tool is to 'drain the sea' of adversaries and terminate the insurgency. The explanation of mass killings in counterinsurgency operations resulting from the threat stemming from the insurgent can be divided into three subcategories: dysfunctionality of conventional countermeasures, the nature of the insurgency requiring a 'draining the sea' strategy and a situation of crises.

2.2.2.1 Dysfunctionality of conventional countermeasures

Valentino et al. (377) argue that mass killing in anti-guerrilla warfare often emerges when the state is frustrated that conventional tactics do not work. Mass violence in this sense is rather seen as a 'last resort' than a favoured strategy, essentially to be used when conventional tactics render useless in addressing the threat stemming from the insurgents. The last assumption is that mass violence is deployed when the insurgents pose a serious military threat to the regime (Valentino et al. 377). Esteban et al. (6) characterize this tool as having the goal to eliminate the opposition. The Soviet Union, for example, deployed heavy military artillery on rebel strongholds to annihilate the guerrillas in numbers during the second

Chechyen war (Ucko 42). This decision was in part fuelled by the lack of success during the first Chechyen war (Ucko 39).

Within the characterization of the lack of effect of conventional tools, the discussion on the difference between ideological/political opponents of a regime versus ethnic differences arises. Differences in group identities make cross-identity appeals to the cause of the other difficult (Valentino et al. 381). Consequently, when ethnic differences are the basis of conflict, it is very difficult to come to a peaceful solution. For ideological/political conflicts, the ideology or political belief can be more easily adapted, whereas this is difficult for identity and especially ethnicity (Valentino et al. 381). It is therefore more likely that conventional tactics will not work in case of ethnic differences, and as a result mass killing is more likely to occur. States are additionally more likely to engage in mass violence when the insurgents enjoy broad popular support from the population (Valentino et al. 377). This was exactly one of the reasons why the Hutu's engaged in the mass killing of Tutsi's. Mass killings were deployed since the Hutu's believed the previous measures – killing some and displacing others – were insufficient in ending the struggle (Des Forges 46).

To identify dysfunctionality of conventional measures as an incentive to engage in mass killings during counterinsurgency operations, an alternative effort has to be visible. There either has to be a counterinsurgency strategy in place, or one that has expired but had been in place for a given time and which did not render the results desired by the regime. The strategy deployed prior to the mass killing must correspond with one or more of the alternative counterinsurgency options available to authoritarian regimes, as has been discussed in the chapter on conceptualization. Furthermore, there are three conditions that can be observed which explain the choice to escalate violence. It is not necessary that these conditions are met, and they can occur both complementary to each other or separate. The first condition is the existence of considerable military strength on behalf of the insurgents, making them a greater threat. Secondly, the insurgents have a broad support base, making them more flexible and resilient. And lastly, the existence of ethnic differences can explain the use of excessive force.

2.2.2.2 Draining the sea due to nature of insurgency

In addition to mass killings as a response to the dysfunctionality of previous measures, mass killings can also be seen as a calculated military strategy that seeks to 'drain the sea' of insurgents (Valentino et al. 376). In the 'draining the sea' strategy, the supportive

communities are seen as the 'sea' in which the insurgents are the 'fish' (Valentino et al. 385). This strategy is built upon the notion that popular support of their host communities is the greatest strength of terrorists, insurgents and guerrillas, without which they would have no – or limited – supportive infrastructure (Valentino et al. 384). Using this strategy is the explicit result of the nature of the insurgents, not the motivation but the physical dispersion of the insurgents throughout communities.

When 'draining the sea', governmental forces engage in mass killings of the supportive population to make them oppose the rebels which they previously supported materially, or to make sure that there is no supportive community left after the cleansing (Valentino et al. 385). With this objective in mind, Guatemalan security forces killed nearly one third of the local population in the Ixil triangle to accomplish both a denial of material support and a rejection of popular support from the population (Byman 78).

As Valentino (94) argues, the 'draining the sea' strategy is best seen in light of von Clausewitz' trinity of war. In his theorem, von Clausewitz argues that war is an extension of politics. Thus, war is seen as politics by other means. Valentino (94) reframes this notion by arguing that "sometimes mass killing is simply war by other means". Inherent to this notion is the categorization of civilians as a resource of war, as they provide the adversary in material, financial and human sense (Valentino 94). Draining the sea is thus a 'war by other means' aimed at denying the adversary these resources. The Soviet strategy during its Afghanistan campaign shows 'draining the sea' at work. By indiscriminately shelling villages in Herat in which the mujahideen lived among the general population, the Soviet generals attempted – and to a certain degree succeeded – to decrease both the supportive base and the guerrillas in numbers (Ucko 41).

To identify a 'draining the sea' scenario, several conditions have to be observed. Firstly, the engagement in mass killing is a calculated military strategy, meaning that the regular military has some sort of role in its execution. Even when perpetrated by paramilitaries, there has to be some sort of government infrastructure in place to facilitate the killings. This can be either material, logistical and intelligence support, or simply withdrawing regular troops from areas that will later be attacked by the paramilitaries. The killings are indiscriminate and aimed at civilians that live in the areas in which the insurgents reside. There is no attribution of guilt when selecting those to be killed.

2.2.2.3 Regime security/crisis

As Byman (71) argues, counterinsurgency responses from authoritarian regimes are often determined by the effect the insurgency has on regime security. Insurgencies lead to instability and can ultimately lead to a regime crisis. It is therefore in the self-interest of the authoritarian rulers to counter crises that are caused by an insurgency. Authoritarian states, according to the Authoritarian conflict management theory, react to domestic violence with state violence rather than addressing underlying structural causes for grievances (Lewis et al. 491). In doing so, authoritarian regimes rely heavily on both state coercion and structures of powers derived from the hierarchical system in place (Lewis et al. 491).

As is the case in democratic countries, acts of aggression by rebels make a crisis visible to both the regime and the public. According to Birkland's theory on agenda setting, such acts of aggression are categorized as focusing events that instigate change in government policy (22). Birkland (22) defines a focusing event as amongst other things "an event that is sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms (...)'. A crisis or focusing event that is caused by the opposing rebels provides propaganda material to support the classification of these rebels as 'evil'. In response to the Baren riots in China in 1990, for example, Chinese government forces killed approximately 2000 to 3000 Uighurs while arguing that it was a legitimate response to the threat the government perceived (Ucko 42).

Inherent to this reliance on coercion in times of crisis is the denial of authoritarian regimes that rebellion is caused and fuelled by grievances. The logic of why rebellion exists rests on the assumption that either political opponents or adversaries are economically greedy or that the opportunity to rebel is a result from the weakness of the given state (Lewis et al. 491). Such framing in times of crisis often results in scapegoating.

In order to identify a crisis situation as the source of mass killings in counterinsurgency campaigns, several conditions have to be met. Firstly, the crisis has to be visible to the regime, most notably in the form of a focusing event caused by the rebels or used by the regime to blame the rebels. Additionally, the regime will exploit the event for propaganda purposes and to counter the narrative of the rebels. There is no attention for grievances or underlying causes of the conflict, the propaganda aims at blaming the rebels for the crisis

situation thereby deploying a scapegoat strategy. The regime makes use of structures of power that are in place due to the hierarchical system.

2.2.3 Elite ideology

The theoretical explanations derived from the broader categorization of elite rivalry sees mass killing as a result of some sort of competition. When looking at the threats stemming from the insurgents, the threat perception of the adversary is seen as a determining element. The third category of explanations looks at the influence of elite ideology. Although the dominant elite is seen as a determining factor and the consolidation of power is an important element – corresponding with elite rivalry – the dynamic for elite ideology is different. Whereas elite rivalry looks at interacting elites, elite ideology looks only at the ruling elite and how it promotes its ideology by making use of mass killings.

According to Putnam (651), elite ideology is "(...) the set of politically relevant beliefs, values, and habits of the most highly involved and influential participants in a political system". Ideology can moreover explain the analytical problem why civilians are targeted during a conflict, since they do not pose a direct threat (Straus 2012a: 549). When adapting and promoting an ideology, a distinction is made between legitimate in-groups and illegitimate out-groups that lead to exclusion of the latter (Straus 2012a: 549). When an exclusivist ideology is apparent, the exclusivist vision on society can lead to the glorifying of violence against the out-group – on grounds of the ideal of a pure national community (Straus 2012a: 549)

Elite ideology refers to a political ideology and the functionality of that ideology that can lead to mass killings. Ideology functions as a determinant of the behaviour of a regime, an observable implication is that the mass atrocities are perpetrated to promote the ideology. When ideology is used to legitimize mass atrocities, it cannot be seen as an explanation for mass killings but rather as a symptom that occurs simultaneously. This element is therefore not incorporated into this research.

2.2.3.1 Elite ideology as determinant for behaviour

Although there is ample evidence of ideology leading to killings, its influence is often neglected in research on indiscriminate violence against civilians (Valentino 97). Violence against civilians in the Soviet Union, China and Cambodia was largely the result of the

implementation of communist ideas that did not necessarily benefit the elite materially (Valentino 97). The incentive to engage in mass killing can therefore hardly be attributed to the consolidation of power, but is best seen as a consequence of the implementation of ideology.

Moreover, when discussing the relation between ideology and coercion, Sim (145) argues that ideology is often ignored and overshadowed by coercion. Coercion is seen as the determining mechanism at place and ideology as a mere tool to legitimize state behaviour. This relation does not hold for many cases in which ideology was the determining element in mass killings. The intentional instigation of the Ukrainian famine in 1932 and other cases of 'class genocide' to promote communism perpetrated by the Soviet regime were primarily motivation by communist ideals (Mälksoo 758).

To identify ideology as determinant for escalation into mass killings, several conditions need to be observed. Firstly, and most prominently, is it necessary that there is state ideology in place in which the interest of the ruling elite is inferior to the implementation of the ideologically motivated policies. This ideology must be exclusivist, it excludes certain parts of the population that do not correspond with the state ideology. These differences can be ethnic, religious or class based – depending on the ideology.

3 Method

Theories on why authoritarian regimes engage in mass killings during counterinsurgency operations focus on three generalized rival explanations: 1) elite dynamics, 2) threats stemming from the insurgents or 3) elite ideology. The validity of these explanations relies on four implications relating to the scope of the paper. First, since the occurrence of mass killings is almost exclusively reserved for authoritarian or other non-democratic types of government, the scope of this paper is limited to authoritarian regimes. Second, this research does not take into consideration third party authoritarian counterinsurgency intervention. The addition of an outside actor to a conflict can ignite different dynamics, such as externally incited hyper nationalism, when facing a foreign enemy (Byman 65). Such responses alter the case specifications and are fundamentally different from a situation in which an authoritarian state counters its own people (Byman 65). Third, the act of mass killing has to be perpetrated in a counterinsurgency framework. This guards the results from being influenced by other motivations for engaging in mass killings – not related to counterinsurgency. Fourth, since the paper focuses on the government as the actor that engages in mass killings, only acts of mass killings by government forces or state sponsored irregular military units (paramilitaries and militias) are taken into account. Thereby excluding mass killings perpetrated by non-state related actors.

To test the feasibility of the proposed combined framework, and to assess whether it proves useful in explaining the occurrence of mass killings in counterinsurgency operations, an instrumental, multiple case-study design is used. Within this analysis, three cases will be qualitatively analysed in light of the observable implications drawn from the three strands of theory proposed in the theoretical framework. For 1) elite dynamics, elite rivalry can be an explanation for authoritarian behaviour. In this case, a situation of elite rivalry needs to be observed during which outgroup civilians are killed despite the monopoly on security that should be provided for by the rivalling elite. In a situation of veto player interests however, an in-group elite exercises power over the ruling elite to promote its own agenda. For 2) threats stemming from the insurgents, the dysfunctionality of conventional measures influences the engagement in mass killings when a previous counterinsurgency strategy failed. The observable implications for a “draining the sea”-motivation dictate that mass killings are part of a deliberate strategy. When a regime crisis influences decision making, a visible focusing event should be observed according to which propaganda is created and scapegoats are

blamed. In the case of 3) elite ideology, a state ideology is the determining factor for the engagement in mass killings. The ideology to be observed is exclusivist and creates a vulnerable outgroup. Figure 1 provides an overview of the observable implications.

Figure 1

Theory	Observable implications
Elite dynamics	
Elite rivalry	• Case of elite rivalry • Killings aimed at outgroup, not rival elite directly • Rivalling elite provides some type of security (economically, socially or physically). • Mass killings occur that seek to weaken the rival, supporting constituencies benefit from the violence.
Veto player interests	• Support coalition in place • Supporting elites have the capacity to alter policy decisions • Mass killings occur against a rival of one of the supporting elites
Threats stemming from the insurgents	
Dysfunctionality of conventional measures	• Counterinsurgency strategy in place or been in place that failed (before mass killings occurred) • The strategy has to correspond with one or more strategies from the authoritarian counterinsurgency toolbox Possible conditions to be observed: ○ Insurgents enjoy considerable military strength ○ Insurgents have a broad support base ○ Ethnic differences exist between regime and insurgents
Draining the sea	• Mass killing as calculated military strategy • Government actors play a role (direct or indirect) • Killings occur in areas in which the insurgents live
(Regime) crisis	• A crisis or focusing event occurs that is visible (or perceived by) the regime. • Propaganda created to counter the rebel narrative • Scapegoat found, no attention for grievances or underlying causes
Elite ideology	
Ideology as determinant	• State ideology in place, the interest of the ruling elite is inferior to the ideology. I.e. it does not profit from the implementation of policies that are in accordance with the ideology • The ideology is exclusivist.

Another point of consideration is where the numerical threshold for mass killings is put. Krcmaric (28) looks at events that cause 1,000 civilian deaths, whereas Valentino et al. (376) use a threshold of 50,000 deaths over a period of five years. Straus (2012b: 344) moreover uses the threshold of 10,000 civilians in the context of an armed conflict to define mass violence. As Krcmaric (29) points out, this differentiation can provide different outcomes when quantitatively testing hypotheses on the likelihood of mass killings. Since this research is qualitative, and coding therefore is less of an issue regarding the outcome of the research, the minimal value encountered in the literature (1,000 civilians in one event) is set as a threshold.

Following the outlined scope of the paper, three cases were selected. The case requirements dictate that all cases need to be *authoritarian regimes, that counter an insurgency, within its own borders, by using military or paramilitary forces, who engage in mass atrocities by engaging in mass killings* (defined as 1,000 casualties per event or series of events). Since the research is qualitative by nature and the researcher is restricted in time and ability to gather first-hand data, hence being dependent on secondary data, the availability of extensive secondary sources is an additional requirement. In order to guarantee generalizability, as far as is possible with a qualitative case study, all three cases are chosen from a different continent. This prevents regional circumstances or 'spill overs' from neighbouring countries to have an effect on the outcome of the research.

Following these case selection criteria, the first case study concerns mass atrocities committed in Guatemala in 1981-1983 during the rule of the military triumvirate, first led by General Romeo Lucas García who was overthrown by General Efraín Ríos Montt in 1982. The mass killings in this period were perpetrated against the Maya population in the counterinsurgency campaign addressing Indian subversives. The second case study concerns the mass killings with chemical gasses and other means perpetrated under the regime of Saddam Hussein, personalistic leader of Iraq with his Baath party. It concerns the Anfal counterinsurgency campaign in 1987-1989 led by Al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam Hussein. The third case study investigated the atrocities committed by the Bolshevik Communist regime in the Soviet Union in an attempt to counter the Tambov revolt in 1920-1921.

4 Case studies

4.1 Guatemala 1981-1983

"We instituted civil affairs which provides development for 70 percent of the population, while we kill 30 percent. Before, the strategy was to kill 100 percent."
- General Héctor Alejandro Gramajo Morales on the 'scorched earth' strategy (Drouin 82).

In Guatemala, the civil war (1960 to 1996) cost over 200,000 Guatemalan lives (Drouin 88). The atrocities this case study focuses on concern the genocide committed specifically in 1981-1983. Killings in this period of time were perpetrated in a counterinsurgency framework in which the military government claimed to address the subversive 'Indian populations' (Drouin 91). The atrocities continued over the course of the civil war, although the most brutal episode of violence occurred in 1981-1983. In this period, the Guatemalan security forces and government-sponsored militias killed approximately 100,000-150,000 unarmed civilians, primarily Mayas (Jonas 359). Additionally, the combination of armed forces destroyed approximately 440 villages in the high lands and internally (and externally to Mexico) displaced in total one million persons (Jonas 359).

4.1.1 Background of the conflict

To come to a comprehensive argument, it is necessary to briefly discuss the origins of the civil war and the possible historical causes for the broader civil war in which the atrocities took place. For this purpose, the Guatemalan government authorized the foundation of 'La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico' (CEH) in 1994 to investigate the atrocities during the civil war, in particular those taking place from 1981-1983. The CEH was limited in its mandate, since the commission had no judicial powers it could only investigate the history of the atrocities. The CEH followed a Latin American tradition of truth-seeking commissions that seek to reunite countries that experienced traumatic episodes of political violence.

The CEH concluded that there were three main historical causes for the civil war: economic exploitation by the ruling elites, racism towards indigenous populations and political exclusion of both the indigenous and poor Guatemalans (Grandin 397). Despite these strong claims, the commission rejected the notion that the repression, or rather mass violence, imposed by the government on the rural Mayas was a result of political polarization (Grandin

397). In addition to the root causes underlined by the CEH, revolutionary movements were very much apparent in Latin America, including Guatemala. Additionally, the left-wing revolutionary elements started to cooperate with the Indigenous population since their objectives (better working conditions, higher wages, land reform) were overlapping. The mass atrocities perpetrated occurred when both movements merged.

4.1.2 Elite dynamics

One of the incentives for the Guatemalan military to engage in mass atrocities relates to economic exploitation. This variable is best seen in the light of veto player interests. In 1980, the Campesino Unity Committee (CUC), a Maya peasant labour organisation, organized a nationwide strike for agricultural workers to raise the 40 cents per day wage Mayans received for hard labour (Tyroler 1). The strike was a response to the unfair working conditions and minimal salary paid to the Mayan labourers, and mainly took place on the sugar and cotton plantations (Jonas 357). The strike resulted in a raise of wages to approximately $1.12 per day, therewith being a successful movement against the exploitation of Mayan workers (Tyroler 1).

In a response to the strike and to the existence of the CUC in general, as it was seen as a subversive element, the military, in conjunction with the business elite, launched the counterinsurgency operations that later became extremely violent (Grandin 357). This was however not the first instance of aggression from the business elite (consisting mainly of landowners) against the Mayas. In the end of May 1978, landowners with support of the military killed 50 Maya civilians in the Panzos area (Drouin 85). Landowners set up rural militias, units that were previously prohibited but now tolerated, that support regular troops in their efforts to counter the insurgency (Drouin 86).

The joint response from both the military as well as the economic elite to the strike shows the influence of the elite on the behaviour of the military government. This leaves no doubt as to the influence the business elite has on policy decisions made by the regime. In addition to the example of how the strike – that hit the supporting elite – influenced decision making, there is more evidence that shows the power the veto players in Guatemala enjoyed over the military regime. In 1980, Guatemala was on the verge of crisis, with international sanctions, drastically low foreign exchange rates and loans that were not extended (Drouin 89).

In this context, the then military president General Romeo Lucas Garcia lost faith and support from the private sector that previously supported his regime (Drouin 89). The economic crisis and the subsequent loss of support from his support coalition led to a coup d'état in 1982 in which General Jose Efrain Rios Montt took power (Drouin 89). The shift in power resulted in even harsher operations against the insurgents, General Rios Montt suspended the constitution, ruled by decree and implemented a National Security Development plan in which counterinsurgency became priority number one (Drouin 89). Consequently, the death toll in counterinsurgency operations rose from 800 per month during the rule of General Garcia to 6,000 under General Rios Montt (Drouin 92).

Elite rivalry is signalled by rivalling ingroup elites that use mass killing to consolidate their power and weaken that of the rivalling elite. The increase in killings after the purge in which President Garcia was ousted from office by General Rioss Montt, tentatively shows that elite rivalry influenced the decision to make counterinsurgency a national priority. When taking a closer look at the political situation in Guatemala at the time of the purge, it shows that General Rios Montt was the first Evangelical born president in the dominantly Catholic country. As Scott (38) argues, the division this created between the Rios Montt regime and the Catholic leaders threatened the institutional legitimacy of the regime.

During the newly implemented counterinsurgency campaigns in the Ixil region, being an Evangelist signalled either neutrality or alliance with the regime (Scott 45). Those being Catholic, on the contrary, risked being considered an insurgent even when there would be no clear links with the rebel factions (Scott 45). In the act of seeking strategic partnerships with the Evangelists, the regime sought and found constituencies that benefited from the mass violence that weakened their rival. Consequently, the survivors from the killings and imprisonments converted to the Evangelical belief to reduce the chance of being seen as a threat to the regime (Scott 41). This cycle follows the path of elite rivalry where an outgroup (the Ixil Mayas) is being targeted to weaken the support base of the rival (the Catholic Church).

When eventually the Catholic church denounced the political and economic order, the government chose to further weaken and replace the traditions and culture in the Ixil region and impose the Evangelical faith as legitimization for their violent actions (Scott 46). Legitimization was highly necessary since the civil patrols (led by Evangelicals) that were set

up in Ixil engaged in mass atrocities, killing and torturing civilians (Scott 46). Additionally, the Catholic Church in Quiché was labelled a subversive institution (Scott 44). Although action in the name of a religion is often portrayed as an ideological trait, being Evangelist in the Guatemalan case signalled belonging to the ingroup and had little, if nothing, to do with the religion itself.

The veto player coalition, consisting of the business elite, influenced the policy decision to counter the labour organisations. Additionally, when the regime could not solve the country's problems, the business elite backed a coup d'état to replace General Garcia. His successor, supported by the veto player coalition, made counterinsurgency first priority. This clearly portrays the influence of the business elite in shaping policy priorities, emphasizing on counterinsurgency – since the insurgency affected the elite. In addition to the influence from the veto player coalition, the (inter)elite rivalry between the Evangelists and the Catholics that came into existence after the purge is another explanation for the violence that occurred in the Ixil region. The Mayas were an outgroup that was used to weaken the Catholics.

4.1.3 Threat stemming from the insurgents

As Grandin (398) puts forward, the insurgency was militarily powerful, although not powerful enough to defeat the military, but sufficiently so to scare the military leadership. Additionally, given that the insurgents consisted of both Mayas and ladinos gave the insurgency a strong outlook (Grandin 398).

After the rebels had been strategically defeated during military operations in 1966-1968, and the FAR leadership realised it could not defeat the regular military forces, several factions within the leadership split off. Two large split-off factions, the Ejército Guerrillera de los Pobres (EGP) and Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA), realized that a change in strategy was required, a new strategy in which the indigenous population (that was before largely ignored by the socialist insurgents) should be incorporated into the rebellion (Jonas 358). Accordingly, the EGP and ORPA militants spent several years living with the Mayas, while learning their language and culture. During this period, they won over parts of the Maya population for their cause, thereby consolidating a political support base in the Guatemalan high lands (Jonas 358). These efforts rendered the anticipated effect, the capacity of the EGP and ORPA peaked in 1980-1981 when they had between 6,000 and 8,000 armed fighters and 250,000-500,000 active collaborators (Jonas 358).

In light of the capacity built-up through alliance forming conducted by the socialist insurgents, the Mayas were both seen as a real threat and a potential support base for the insurgents (Grandin 399). The military 'scorched earth' campaign was accordingly designed to cut-off the indigenous support base from the socialists that drove the insurgency (Grandin 399). By breaking down the communal structures, the military attempted to take away the seedbeds of support for the insurgents (Grandin 399). In addition, by burning villages, committing massacres in the local communities and perpetrating large-scale reallocations, the military attempted to eradicate civilian support (Jonas 359). The military leadership openly acknowledged that the goal of the counterinsurgency operations was to 'drain the sea' of insurgents (Jonas 359). The CEH moreover concluded that the 'scorched earth' strategy and the mass killings both were carried out as a state policy, taking away doubts as to how far the military leadership was involved (Grandin 400).

Although it is hard to attribute specific value to the coup d'état, in which General Garcia was ousted and General Rios Montt took power, the change in policy priorities afterwards signals some sort of relation. As previously stated, General Rios Montt implemented strict policies regarding the insurgency going through Guatemala directly after taking power. The regime crisis that led to the fall of General Garcia, therefore, although perhaps indirectly, resulted in an escalation in violence. Dysfunctionality of previous measures did not play a role in the decision-making process leading to the execution of a strategy of mass killings since the previous counterinsurgency operation (1966-1968) without mass killings was highly successful. For the case of Guatemala, the strength of the insurgents, and more specifically the deliberate choice to 'drain the sea' provides an explanation for the deliberate choice to engage in mass killings.

4.1.4 Elite ideology

The Guatemalan insurgency in 1980-1983 was multi-ethnic, consisting of Mayas and ladinos. In this sense, ethnicity is difficult to put forward as a determining factor for the mass killings (Grandin 397). Although ideology played a role, this did not concern elite ideology. The argument is twofold, and firstly relates to the history of socialist movements in Latin America and the consequent promotion of the Guatemalan identity along Christian values. Secondly, it concerns the consolidation of the Mayan culture and the refusal to adapt to this Christian identity.

The Guatemalan insurgency was one of many socialist movements in Latin America (e.g. the Cuban revolution, the socialist president Allende in Chile and the Sandinista National Liberation Front gaining power in Nicaragua) and therefore a scary prospective for the military regime. The reaction of the Guatemalan military regime is therefore best seen as a counterrevolutionary response. Due to the perceived threat, the regime designed a counternarrative to de-legitimize the insurgency and to legitimize government violence. The Guatemalan military regime strongly promoted 'the nature and values' of the Guatemalan nation as being Christian (Torres 181). In doing so, they dispersed anti-left and anti-Indian propaganda in state sponsored media, portraying the insurgents as the actors that incited the violence (Torres 182). Ideology was therefore merely used to delegitimize the insurgents, not out of pure intentions.

4.1.5 Conclusion

As the Guatemalan case shows, there is not one clear explanation for the occurrence of mass killings in their counterinsurgency campaign. It becomes evident that it is rather a collection of factors that led to the brutal intervention, a combination of all three explanations proves to have had an effect in the decision-making process.

Elite dynamics are clearly visible, the military regime helped the business elite by solving the problems stemming from the strike. Additionally, the fact that the CUC gained power and the inability of the landowners to respond to this movement created the necessity from the government perspective to help the veto player coalition. The influence of the business elite becomes moreover visible in the coup d'état during which the non-complying General Garcia was ousted. The elite rivalry between the Evangelists under the new President Rios Montt and the Catholic Church sparked increased violence in the Ixil area. The Mayas were used as an outgroup to weaken Catholic influence in the area, which benefited the regime and the Evangelist constituencies.

Threats stemming from the insurgents played a significant role in the choice to engage in mass killings. In addition to the increase in military capacity on the side of the insurgents, the multi-ethnic component of the rebels posed a threatening perspective for the military regime. The location of the insurgency, rugged rural areas, created the necessity for a 'draining the sea' strategy to drive the insurgents out in the open. There is no case to make for the influence

of the dysfunctionality of previous measures, these were highly successful. Regime crisis could have played a limited role, although there is no obvious correlation visible between the regime crisis resulting in the coup d'état and the mass killings being a response to this specific (rather economic) crisis.
Ideology has been used to legitimize state violence and to de-legitimize the insurgent's cause. Propaganda was formulated in line of the newly designed ideology, which has no roots in pure ideological motivations.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to attribute value to the respective motivations for the regime to engage in mass atrocities. The conclusion of the Guatemalan case is therefore that all three broad strands had an influence on the decision to engage in mass killings. In Figure 2, the factors that influenced the decision to engage in mass killings during the Guatemalan counterinsurgency campaign are summarized schematically.

Figure 2

Factors influencing the decision to engage in mass killings in the Guatemalan counterinsurgency campaign against the Socialist insurgents	
Elite dynamics	
- Elite rivalry	Yes
- Veto player coalition	Yes
Threats stemming from the insurgents	
- Dysfunctionality conventional measures	No
- Draining the Sea	Yes
- Regime crisis	Yes
Elite ideology	
- As determinant	No

4.2 The Anfal campaign in Iraq 1987-1989

"Taking care of them means burying them with bulldozers. That's what taking care of them means."

- Ali Hassan al-Majid on the issue of the Kurdish insurgency (Romano 200)

In the period between 29 March 1987 and 23 April 1989, Iraqi forces launched the Anfal counterinsurgency campaign against Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan (Montgomery 73). Anfal, translated as 'the spoils', is the name of the eighth Sura of the Koran, after which the operation was named (Black 3). Operation Anfal was designed to solve the Kurdish issue, the Kurds being an ethnic minority that prevented Saddam Hussein's Baath party from fully implementing their Arabization program. Within operation Anfal, air raids, chemical attacks and the raiding of villages were conducted to target the civilian population. During the total span of the operation (1987-1989), approximately 180,000 people disappeared and were never seen again.

4.2.1 Background of the conflict

In 1920, the League of Nations (predecessor of the United Nations) granted the Kurds territory and declared the Kurdish region independent in the Treaty of Sevres in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War (Montgomery 73). In 1925 however, this status of independence was withdrawn by the same League of Nations under pressure from Great Britain, granting the oil rich areas of Kirkuk and Mosul to Iraq (Montgomery 73). Since then, numerous rebellions have been initiated by the Kurds in attempts to (re-)obtain sovereign status and a territory. The Baath party led by President Saddam Hussein implemented the 'Arabization programme' in which they expelled Kurds from their territory and came close to the annihilation of the Kurdish population in Iraq since many of the survivors fled to Iran (Kirmanj and Rafaat 2).

In 1980, however, the Iraq-Iran war broke out, which required the Iraqi security forces to engage in military operations along the Iranian border and while loosening their grip on Kurdistan (Montgomery 74). Despite a reallocation of forces to the Iranian border, in 1983 an important precedent for the mass killings under operation Anfal occurred. After cooperation with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, between 5,000 and 8,000 male members of the

Barzani clan (belonging to Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) that were rebelling) disappeared after being captured by Iraqi troops (Black 6).

When the Iraq-Iran war came to an end in 1988, Saddam Hussein ordered his troops to annihilate the Kurds through air raids, chemical weapons and the raiding of villages and towns (Montgomery 74). These operations were dubbed operation Anfal, during which approximately 180,000 people disappeared, and between 50,000 and 100,000 civilians died between February and September 1988 (Montgomery 77).

4.2.2 Elite dynamics

Elite dynamics did not play a role in the process leading up to the mass killings conducted during the Anfal counterinsurgency operations. As Kirmanj and Rafaat (7) argue, Saddam Hussein enjoyed nearly absolute power after he ousted Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr and became President of both Iraq and the Revolutionary Command Council (the most influential institution in Iraq). Decrees, directives, instructions and later even speeches held by Saddam Hussein were seen as equivalents of the law (Kirmanj and Rafaat 7). In light of this nearly absolute power, veto player coalitions or rivalling elites had no significant influence in decision-making.

4.2.3 Threats stemming from the insurgents

Threats stemming from the insurgents influenced the decision-making process of the Anfal campaign in two ways. Firstly, it affected the inability to solve the Kurdish issue in the past and the failure of conventional policies. Secondly, it influenced the war with Iran and the threat stemming from the Kurdish insurgents during this conflict.

As Black (5) argues, the measures implemented under operation Anfal were explained in terms of “collective measures”, a “return to national ranks” and “resettlement in the south”. These understatements made by the Iraqi government in relation to the brutal counterinsurgency operation have everything to do with the two main incentives to engage in a military campaign that were openly stated by Al-Majid. Al-Majid wanted to achieve two main goals during operation Anfal, to solve the Kurdish problem and to ‘slaughter’ the saboteurs, notably the. insurgents (Kirmanj and Rafaat 7). The first objective relates broadly to the failed efforts to solve the Kurdish issue, exemplary is the unilateral (by the Iraqi government) grant of autonomy for specific areas in the Kurdish region in 1970 – excluding

resource rich places (Kirmanj and Rafaat 8). The autonomy was denied by the Kurds and the rebellion continued.
Additionally, several other attempts to 'Arabize' the Kurds by military means or otherwise failed.

In addition to the dysfunctionality of conventional measures, the strength and broad support base the Kurds could rely on were seen as legitimate security threats by the Iraqi regime. In 1987, during the loose period of coercion due to occupation of the Iraqi military forces in the war with Iran, the Kurds effectively liberated the countryside from government control (Black 7). In this light, and due to the occasional collaboration of the Kurds with Iran, Kurdistan was seen as the Achilles heel in the conflict with Iran (Hiltermann 3). Both the KDP, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the latter previously perceived as less threatening, were conducting joint operations with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in 1987 (Black 49). The enhanced cooperation between the Kurdish forces and Iran was solidified in the unity accord brokered by Iran. In this accord, the KDP and PUK agreed to cooperate and therewith end their long-term rivalry (Black 50).

Whereas the cooperation between the KDP, PUK and Iran could be seen as a legitimate threat, the Iraqi government accused the Kurdish militias of being agents of foreign powers (Kirmanj and Rafaat 7). In addition to their friendly stand against Iran, the Baath party created propaganda in state sponsored media outlets that portrayed the Kurds as supporters of imperialism and Zionism (Kirmanj and Rafaat 7). In some instances, they went as far as to argue that the Kurds and Kurdistan were 'the second Israel' (Kirmanj and Rafaat 7).

Threats stemming from the insurgents influenced the decision-making process on behalf of the Iraqi regime in several ways. The dysfunctionality of previous policies (limited reforms) to address the Kurdish question paved the way for more draconian measures. The objective was to 'drain the sea' as the insurgents lived among the local population in the villages and enjoyed broad support from these local clans. Draining the sea was necessary to break down popular support granted to the Kurdish insurgents. Regime crisis had a significant effect on the escalation of violence, the war with Iran resulted in the shifting of attention and the building-up of capabilities on behalf of the insurgents.

4.2.4 Elite ideology

Kirmanj and Rafaat (5) strongly emphasize the distinction between the security dimension and identity dimension of operation Anfal. This argument is best discussed in light of the role of elite ideology. The perceived threat stemming from the Kurdish insurgency was not solely military, the Kurdish identity was seen as a threat to the national Arab identity, that was promoted by Saddam Hussein (Kirmanj and Rafaat 5). To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to firstly discuss the Arabization process, after which the nature of the threat stemming from the Kurds will be discussed further.

The Arabization ideology of Saddam Hussein lies at the basis of the perception of the Kurds as a threat to the national Arab identity of Iraq. In the constitution of the Baath that was established in 1947, emphasis was put on the claim that the Iraqi homeland is for Arabs, the Kurdish territory was therefore claimed by the Baath ideology as belonging to the Arab identity (Kirmanj and Rafaat 5). Accordingly, anyone resisting the Arab culture should be evicted from the territory. Although this element of the Baath ideology does not necessarily mean that the Kurds should be annihilated, the objective of the creation of an Arab state proves impossible to achieve without engaging in mass violence and mass killings. Elite ideology thus contributed significantly to the decision to engage in mass killings.

Accordingly, the representation of Kurdish nationalism as a security issue was used to legitimize state violence (Kirmanj and Rafaat 8). The Baath party did not hide operation Anfal from the public, quite the opposite. Anfal was glorified by state media as a noble and successful counterinsurgency program (Black 11). The Kurds were portrayed as villains and traitors to the national cause, the regime made full use of its propaganda capabilities during the duration of the campaign to minimize internal and international objections to the methods deployed (Black 11).

It is difficult to assess whether Saddam Hussein truly believed in the ideology of Arabization or that he merely used the ideology that was already in place, exclusively to masque his brutal approach to the long-lasting Kurdish problem. Nonetheless, the case analysis clearly shows the role ideology played in the decision-making process.

4.2.5 Conclusion

For the case of the Anfal campaign in Iraq, the threats stemming from the insurgents and elite ideology played a significant role in the choice of the regime to engage in mass killings. Elite dynamics had no significant influence over the events that occurred during operation Anfal. The personalistic nature of the regime, which granted Saddam Hussein nearly absolute power, limited the role of elites in the decision-making process leading up to the execution of mass killings.

The threat stemming from the insurgents influenced the implementation of mass killings due to the dysfunctionality of conventional measures. Previous, less violent, attempts to solve the Kurdish issue failed. The nature of the insurgents, enjoying broad local support, required a 'draining the sea' approach. In addition to the military threat stemming from the insurgents, the regime saw the Kurds as an ethnic threat to the survival of the Arab national identity. Although this is a subjective threat, it becomes clear that it was perceived as a real threat by Saddam Hussein. Additionally, the war with Iran resulted in the perception of the Kurdish insurgents as the 'Achilles heel' of Iraqi state survival. It was therefore necessary to solve the insurgency by all means.

Elite ideology equally played an important role leading up to the events. The Arabization scheme implemented by Saddam Hussein was an important precedent to approach the Kurdish issue in a violent manner. It is however difficult to determine whether this ideology functioned as a determinant for the chosen strategy or whether Saddam used the framework to pursue his own goals. It is however interesting to take into account that at the time of operation Anfal the Kurds posed a great (perceived) military threat. Therewith raising the question whether this provides an explanation for the increased attention for the Arabization policies. In Figure 3, the factors that influenced the decision to engage in mass killings during operation Anfal are summarized schematically.

Figure 3

Factors influencing the decision to engage in mass killings in Iraq's counterinsurgency campaign against the Kurds	
Elite dynamics	
- Elite rivalry	No
- Veto player coalition	No

Threats stemming from the insurgents	
- Dysfunctionality conventional measures	Yes
- Draining the Sea	Yes
- Regime crisis	Yes
Elite ideology	
- As determinant	Yes

4.3 Soviet response to the Tambov revolt 1920-1921

"The struggle must be waged not primarily with the rebel bands, but with the entire local population"

- Tukhachevsky on his solution to the Tambov revolt (Zhukov 2012: 8).

In 1921, General Michail Tukhachevsky (who previously sorted the insurgency that took place in Kronstadt) was assigned, together with approximately 100,000 regular troops, to counter the insurgency in Tambov (Zhukov 2012: 7). During this campaign, villages were entirely destroyed by artillery shelling causing civilian deaths. In addition to civilians being executed by firing squads, this strategy resulted in the imprisonment or deportation of around 100,000 civilians and the killing of approximately 15,000 civilians (Figes 726).

4.3.1 Background

To understand the occurrence of the Tambov insurgency and the motivation for the choice in counterinsurgency strategy, it is necessary to discuss the source of the revolt. The Bolshevik (Soviet) leaders realized in 1918 that regime survival depended on whether the party could supply enough grain to the population (Singleton 498). This grain had to come from the grain rich peasantry living in rural Russia, and the peasants had no interest in complying with the Soviets' collectivist projects since they were largely unaware of the Soviet cause (Singleton 498). Concession to the peasant would moreover lead to a reduction of political power after which the Bolsheviks resorted to coercion. The limited coercion deployed in 1919 and 1920 led to a counter reaction from the peasants, forming the STK (Soiuz trudovogo krest'ianstva) Union of the Working Peasantry (Singleton 501). The STK was mainly founded due to the mistreatment of the peasant population by local commissars from the Bolshevik party that acted out of self-interest (not party interest) and confiscated the food from the peasant population.

4.3.2 Elite dynamics

Although elite rivalry has shaped many episodes of violence in the Soviet Union, there is no case to make for its role during the violent response to the Tambov uprising. The Bolshevik regime was all but stable in 1919 and 1920 due to the persistence of Menshevik generals Kolchack, Denikin and Wrangel, who seriously destabilized the ruling Bolshevik regime (Avrich 226). With the defeat of Wrangel's army in 1920, the 'Whites' or Mensheviks no

longer posed any serious threat to the Bolshevik regime (Avrich 226). After the expulsion of the White threat, the Bolshevik no longer faced contestants for power. Although resistance throughout the Soviet Union remained, these were fragmented groups which related to resistance to food levies and state farms (Avrich 226). It is therefore safe to argue that, similarly to the position Saddam Hussein enjoyed in Iraq, the Bolshevik rule was not contested by domestic elites at the time of the Tambov revolt.

4.3.3 Threats stemming from insurgents

One of the determining features influencing the decision to engage mass atrocities was the dysfunctionality of conventional measures. In 1920, the central and local Soviet leaders made several attempts to persuade the peasantry to stop rebelling. The regime introduced a two-week amnesty during which rebels could hand in their weapons and return to their villages without punishment (Singleton 507). This effort failed, mainly because the insurgents did not believe in the promise that surrender would go unpunished, despite the 6,000 who surrendered, nearly no weapons were seized (Singleton 507). Sowing detachments to promote the grain production rendered useless and efforts of the New Economic Policy (NEP) to persuade the population that economic prosperity would soon come was seen as mere propaganda (Singleton 507).

In addition to the failure of these previous policies, from 1920 to1921 the insurgents under the lead of Antonov raided Soviet military camps and set up ambushes that led to high Soviet casualties as the regular troops were not trained in guerrilla warfare (Zhukov 2012: 9). Limited coercion in the form of the occupation of small villages failed equally, insurgent commander Antonov raided the occupied villages successfully forcing the Soviet troops to retreat to the cities (Singleton 507). The last event that led to a draconian change in strategy was the deployment of the First International Punitive Brigade in a mission to capture the rebel leader Antonov. When they departed the city of Tambov to travel to a village seventy miles away, they were continuously ambushed and harassed by insurgent guerrillas (Singleton 504-505). Upon their arrival, the insurgents under the command of Antonov massacred the First International Punitive Brigade in cold blood.

In this light, the previously deployed strategies of winning the hearts and minds (sowing detachments), the NEP (limited reforms) and the amnesty failed to address the insurgency sufficiently. Limited coercive action proved useless and even increased the morale of the

insurgents because of incidental victories over the Soviet army. Due to these failing strategies, Tukhachevsky was deployed to the area, together with 100,000 troops, to once and for all end the revolt (Zhukov 2012: 7). The indiscriminate use of firepower on both the insurgents and the local population shall therefore best be seen as a last resort where other policies failed. Zhukov (2010: 8) moreover argues that the urge for draconian violence was partly the result of the inability of the Soviet military to execute ground operations in rugged rural areas where the insurgents enjoyed broad support amongst the population.

Where the dysfunctionality of previous measures offers a valuable insight into the decision-making process, the nature of the insurgency called for a 'draining the sea' strategy. Tukhachevsky argued that not only the insurgents must be targeted, but that war must rather be waged with the entire local population (Zhukov 2012: 7). The choice for such a strategy resulted from the Soviet observation that the insurgents enjoyed broad support from the civilian population, as many insurgents lived among civilians in the villages (Singleton 504). Additionally, many peasant civilians functioned as eyes and ears for the STK, the insurgents were therefore very soon aware of Bolshevik military movements. The goal of the counterinsurgency campaign was therefore to split the insurgents from the regular population and to drive the armed bandits in the open to face battle (Singleton 504). This aim was also officially formulated in the Bolshevik strategy to counter the insurgency in 1921 after Lenin underscored the danger stemming from the insurgency (Singleton 506).

In addition to the 'draining the sea' strategy to counter the specific nature of the insurgency, a looming regime crisis instigated by the revolt may be considered another motive for the engagement in mass killings. The food shortages that occurred in 1920-1921, as a result from the non-compliance of rural areas to supply grain to the urban areas, created the prospect of mutinies in the cities (Figes 719). The Bolshevik communist party realized in 1918 that the consequences of not being able to support the population with food became a real threat to the survival of the regime (Singleton 498). Additionally, it became clear that the revolt in Tambov could create a precedent for other rural areas to revolt against the Bolsheviks (Figes 719). In this light, it was deemed necessary to tackle the insurgency in Tambov by all necessary means to prevent the regime from falling. This occurred while framing the insurgents as being the source of the famine (which was to a certain extent true). The notion of the critical nature of the revolt is clearly visible in Lenin's anger at local Bolshevik commanders and the daily repetition of his demands that the revolt should be suppressed by

'whatever means' (Figes 717). After several victories on behalf of the insurgents related to the STK fighting against Bolshevik irregulars, Lenin told the Tenth Party Congress on 8 March 1921 that the (Tambov) insurgents were 'far more dangerous than all the Denikins, Yudeniches and Kolchaks (Menshevik generals) put together' (Figes 718).

Threats stemming from the insurgents proved to be a determining factor for the Soviet leadership to use draconian measures to tackle the insurgency. Before engaging in mass atrocities, several other, less violent, policies were implemented to counter the insurgency. Limited reforms, hearts and minds - and limited coercion campaigns failed to address the threat stemming from the insurgents, calling for more oppressive measures. The nature of the insurgency, being rooted in the local population in areas hard to reach for conventional military power, required a 'draining the sea' strategy without which the insurgents could endlessly harass government forces with guerrilla tactics. In addition to these factors, the looming regime crisis that was waiting around the corner when the government was failing to end the insurgency offered an additional explanation for the draconian measures implemented.

4.3.4 Elite ideology

The ideological element, which is very much present in the history of the Soviet Union, explains the response to the Tambov revolt only to a certain extent. As Singleton (498) and Figes (719) pointed out, the revolt itself resulted largely from opposition to the communist ideology, a form of governance that required state farms and collectivization of goods. The situation in which rural revolts (that were later countered with mass violence) occurred can therefore be attributed to the elite ideology of the Bolsheviks. The participants in the revolt were, as Avrich (226) puts it, "(...) poor peasants and prosperous peasants (...) augmented by a scattering of liberals and anarchists along with many who had no political affiliation but were united in their opposition to Communist rule". In this sense the revolt itself can be seen as counterrevolutionary. The threat resulting from the revolt and the capability of shaping a precedent for other rural areas, posed, as discussed previously, a regime crisis (Singleton 498). A regime crisis, or regime collapse, would not only decrease state legitimacy or even end Lenin's rule, it would also mean a failure of the Communist project. It is in this light that the harsh response to the Tambov revolt, just after the last Menshevik armies were defeated and stability assured, can be considered as a result of elite ideology.

4.3.5 Conclusion

The Bolsheviks did not face any elite rivalling factions in 1920 after they defeated the Menshevik army. The Soviet era is moreover known for its promotion of the Communist ideology. Although the mass violence deployed in Tambov cannot be linked to the promotion of Communist ideology, there is a case to make that the counterinsurgency strategy was sparked by the fear of the failure of the ideologically sparked Communist project. In this sense elite ideology did play a role in the mass atrocities that took place in Tambov.

Threats stemming from the insurgents offer major insights into why the Soviets engaged in mass killing to counter the Tambov insurgency. Most notably, the Soviet regime attempted to minimize the revolt through the implementation of several conventional measures. Limited reforms, winning the hearts and minds of the population, spatial practices and coercion rendered useless. As a consequence, mass killings were used as a last resort. The urgency of solving the insurgency, which led to the adaptation of a draconian strategy, was based amongst other reasons on the looming regime crisis. If the government failed to respond to famine in the cities, mutinies would occur that would destabilize the regime. The Tambov uprising could moreover be seen as an example for other regions to revolt, highlighting the cruciality of countering the insurgency. The nature of the insurgency, living among the population and hiding in harsh rural areas, resulted in the perceived necessity to engage in a 'drain the sea' strategy. In Figure 4, the factors that influenced the decision to engage in mass killings during the Tambov revolt are summarized schematically.

Figure 4

Factors influencing the decision to engage in mass killings in the Soviet Union's campaign in Tambov	
Elite dynamics	
- Elite rivalry	No
- Veto player coalition	No
Threats stemming from the insurgents	
- Dysfunctionality conventional measures	Yes
- Draining the Sea	Yes
- Regime crisis	Yes
Elite ideology	
- As determinant	Yes

5 Conclusion

The role of elite dynamics in the decision-making process leading up to the mass killing of civilians is only visible in the Guatemalan case. Both veto player interests and elite rivalry have had a significant influence. The influence of the veto players in Guatemala is undisputed, it is however difficult to assess to what extent they shaped the choice to engage in mass killings. Elite rivalry appeared to have instigated the need for an out-group to target in order to weaken the rivalling Catholics.

All cases showed a certain degree of threat stemming from the insurgents, the government response always had to do with some sort of perceived threat. It is nonetheless apparent that the insurgents in all three cases posed a significant threat that required a response, deploying a counterinsurgency framework in which mass killings occurred was (for the selected cases) not used with the sole purpose to dispose of a marginalized group that posed no threat. The degree of threat the respective insurgents posed is disputable, engaging in such a discussion is useless since threat perceptions are highly subjective. Dysfunctionality of conventional measures, and mass killings accordingly functioning as a last resort, was a phenomenon visible in two cases. This specific element of threats stemming from the insurgents is therefore a valuable determinant for the occurrence of mass killings in the cases discussed.

Convincingly, a ‘draining the sea’-strategy as a response to the nature of the insurgents is present in all cases. Within all cases, the insurgents lived among and enjoyed broad support from the local population. Engaging in mass killing of civilians was steered by the inability to draw out the insurgents to the open, an objective that was sought to be reached by ‘draining the sea’. This specific element of a given insurgency consequently appears to have a great influence on the choice of authoritarian regimes to engage in mass killings. The frequency of the occurrence of ‘draining the sea’ in a later stage (after previous measures have been attempted) shows that for the cases selected, the strength of the insurgents and the inability of the government forces to tackle the insurgents, always contributed to the decision to engage in mass killings.

In addition to the nature of the insurgents, a looming or present regime crisis influenced the decision-making process in favour of the use of mass killings. All cases showed some sort of (potential) regime crisis that drove the regime’s decision to alter the counterinsurgency

campaign. The dynamic is twofold, either a regime crisis already happened (Guatemala) and excessive violence was used to solve the situation, or the threat of a regime crisis was very real to the regime, hence, tackling the insurgency required more than conventional measures. For Iraq and the Soviet Union, the latter was the case, conventional measures to counter the insurgency failed after which the respective regimes deployed a 'by all means' tactic, since countering the insurgency was the only way to prevent the regime crisis from occurring. This last dynamic should be researched more in-depth, since it can have predictive value to signal where authoritarian regimes are likely to engage in mass atrocities.

The role of elite ideology as determinant is visible in two cases. Whereas in Guatemala ideology was used to legitimize violence (and therefore does not fall within the definition of elite ideology), in Iraq the state ideology of Arabization appeared to have had pure ideological motives. For the Soviet Union the survival of the communist project was one of the reasons to tackle the revolt with harsh violence. It is therefore hard to make a conclusive argument on the significance of ideology as a determent, although it is clear that ideology is often used to legitimize state behaviour.

Figure 5

Factors influencing the decision to engage in mass killings			
	Guatemala	Iraq	Soviet Union
Elite dynamics			
- **Elite rivalry**	Yes	No	No
- **Veto player coalition**	Yes	No	No
Threats stemming from the insurgents			
- **Dysfunctionality conventional measures**	No	Yes	Yes
- **Draining the Sea**	Yes	Yes	Yes
- **Regime crisis**	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elite ideology			
- **As determinant**	No	Yes	Yes

Figure 5 provides a schematic overview of the discussed factors and their appearance in the case studies. As the table shows, all cases show a mix of reasons for the use of mass violence – not one can be explained from a single explanation. It is therefore not possible to answer the research question in a 'one theory fits all'-manner. This observation is equally valuable, it shows that states do not engage in mass violence for one reason, it is rather a combination of different factors that lead to the decision to use mass lethal force. Within the threats stemming from the insurgent's explanations, the three theories influence each other. Dysfunctionality of conventional measures increase the chance of the occurrence of a regime crisis and thereafter require a harsher approach. This is observed in both the Iraq and Soviet case.

In addition to the influence the theories within the 'threats stemming from the insurgency' group of explanation had on each other, inter- 'group of explanations' influence is also visible. For the Soviet case, it is visible that the looming regime crisis triggered ideological reasons to engage in mass killings. One explanation seemed to fuel the occurrence of another, which gives room to think about the interplay between the different dynamics that influence such policy decisions. In Guatemala, the veto player coalition incited a regime crisis that influenced the decision to engage in mass killings. And in Iraq, the increase in perceived threats from the Kurds can offer insights into the increased emphasis on Arabization. This would mean that threats stemming from the insurgents accelerated elite ideology as determent for the use of mass killings.

So not only did the theories that belong to the same 'group' of explanations enforce each other, the explanations also cross-influenced each other. I would therefore argue that not only does it require more than one reason to engage in mass killings, but the separate motivations to do so accelerate each other. If one explanation is to be observed in an authoritarian rules country, it is possible that 1) the present situation does not trigger another motivation, or 2) the present situation that can lead to mass killings fuels another incentive to do so. In situation 1, it is possible that mass killings occur but not likely (the results show that more than one incentive needs to be present). In situation 2 it is more likely that the regime decides to use mass killings during the counterinsurgency campaign.

6 Future research directions

An interesting observation is the fact that there are only a few examples of single-party regimes engaging in mass killings in a counterinsurgency framework. Does this say something about single-party regimes, especially since there is ample empiric evidence for both military authoritarian regimes and personalistic authoritarian regimes committing mass killings? Is there a pattern visible in which single-party authoritarian regimes are less likely to engage in mass atrocities for other reasons than the threat stemming from the insurgents?

Additionally, it seems that single-party authoritarian regimes in some cases start with conventional counterinsurgency measures, then shift to mass killings to later adopt a more moderate approach. Contemporary CCP Single-party China for example in their struggle versus the Uyghurs shifted from moderate measures to mass killings. It seems that they now embraced coerced social incorporation but still in conjunction with repression and killings. The Soviets changed their strategy in Afghanistan from shelling villages to winning the hearts and minds. Future research should accordingly aim at explaining deviations in mass killings during counterinsurgency operations between the respective authoritarian regime types. Also, the dynamics and the correlations between the separate theories could provide a solid base to further research the topic. Most obviously, this research would become stronger if the number of cases discussed would be extended, since a higher number of cases would increase the generalizability of the findings and can help establish a more solidified theoretical body to explain mass killings in counterinsurgency campaigns.

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