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Introduction by James McAllister

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Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

Voltaire famously observed that “God is always on the side of the big battalions” (5). International relations theorists and diplomatic historians have tended to find Voltaire’s explanation persuasive but, as Paul MacDonald shows in his provocative new book, peripheral conquest during the nineteenth century was a far more complicated endeavor than conventional warfare on the European continent. In his view, the scholarly focus on aggregate military power and relative advantage “ignores the role of social factors in shaping conquest, especially in the periphery of the international system” (6). In *Networks of Domination*, MacDonald argues that two social factors are crucial in determining the effectiveness of military force in cases of peripheral conquest. The first factor is the extent to which potential conquerors have pre-existing social ties with local elites. Dense ties with local elites, MacDonald argues, makes it much more likely that potential conquerors will be able to identify and fruitfully work with local collaborators. The second factor that facilitates peripheral conquest is patterns of local resistance. When local elites are less connected to each other, MacDonald argues, it is much harder for local resistance forces to confront potential conquerors. The book’s richly detailed chapters include cases of British conquest in India, Southern Africa, and Nigeria, as well as an application of the framework to explain the failed American occupation of Iraq.

All three reviewers find much to praise in *Networks of Domination*. Adria Lawrence notes that “International relations scholars who study empire, great-power politics, and foreign occupation are sure to find this study fascinating and thought-provoking.” Peter Liberman argues that “MacDonald puts on a virtuoso display of how to conduct archive-based, historical case studies to advance social science.” According to Michael Neiberg, MacDonald “makes a powerful, if often understated case for rejecting the assumption that people in the peripheries were inanimate objects playing little to no role in their own fates.”

Not surprisingly, the reviewers do have some concerns about certain aspects of MacDonald’s argument. Lawrence raises the question of whether or not dense ties with local collaborators need to be formed prior to conquest since MacDonald’s case studies of South Africa and Nigeria suggest that alliances can also be formed during the process of conquest. Liberman finds *Networks of Domination* to be “less persuasive ... in demonstrating the importance of the informational effects emphasized by social network theory and by MacDonald’s theoretical chapter.” While impressed with the overall argument, Neiberg is concerned that the book “essentially replaces one monocausal explanation with another. His case studies argue that the key variable in each case was the strength of the social networks developed by the aspiring conqueror. In his diagrams and models, he identifies each relationship with solid arrows that link key individuals to one another. In other words, a relationship either exists or it does not.” In his thoughtful response, MacDonald acknowledges “there are many political, social, and cultural factors that shape patterns of colonial conquest, but the one that matters most is patterns of pre-colonial ties between potential conquerors and elites in targeted societies.”

H-Diplo/ISSF thanks Professor MacDonald and all of the reviewers for contributing to important theoretical and historical debates about the social foundations of peripheral conquest in world politics.

Participants:

Paul K. MacDonald is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College. He has held positions at Williams College, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Center for International Security and

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Adria Lawrence is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University and a Research Fellow at Yale's Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies. She is a scholar of nationalism, collective action, and Middle Eastern and North African politics. Her research focuses on violent and non-violent opposition to imperial and authoritarian rule. Her book, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire*, won the 2014 Jervis-Schroeder Best Book Award, given by the American Political Science Association's Organized Section on International History and Politics, and was named one of the best books of 2013 on Foreign Policy's Middle East Channel. She is currently working on a project that investigates the use of direct and indirect rule in the French Empire.

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Review by Adria Lawrence, Yale University

Paul MacDonald's rich and insightful new book, *Networks of Domination*, provides a compelling analysis of Europe's conquest over the peripheral states of Africa and Asia. The rapid expansion of imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the European great powers 'scrambled' to seize and hold territory outside Europe, resulted in unprecedented global domination. By the First World War, European powers controlled 40 percent of the world's territory (4). Yet this outcome does not reflect uniform experiences of conquest and resistance. The ability of the powerful to impose their rule on other societies varies, and it is this variation that MacDonald addresses: "Why did some states manage to subjugate non-European societies at minimal costs in lives and treasure and why did others find their military adventures ending in ruin?" (5).

MacDonald argues persuasively that the ease of conquest did not depend on the power and political will of European imperialists. In Chapter 1, he takes on the conventional wisdom that European military superiority led to the successful conquest of the periphery. He demonstrates the limits of this claim by pointing to two major obstacles to conquest: the difficulty of projecting power across vast distances and the problem of local resistance. Transporting soldiers, supplies, and equipment to Africa and Asia was no easy matter in the nineteenth century. Colonial armies were often not very well-outfitted; the best regiments and equipment remained in Europe. Fighting on unfamiliar and often inhospitable terrain further limited the ability of European conquerors to exploit their military advantage. Local populations were often able to use insurgent tactics and knowledge of the terrain to fight back effectively. The playing field was not as uneven as the literature suggests. Moreover, the military superiority thesis uniformly predicts success; it has little to say about the conditions under which conquest is lengthy and difficult and thus is poorly suited to answering the question at the heart of this book.

An explanation for why success varies may lie in the motivations of the European powers. Powerful actors can conquer weaker societies only if they have both the will and the capacity to do so. The insight that political will matters for conquest is highly intuitive, but will is notoriously difficult to measure. It changes according to circumstance and it varies by actor – British politicians, missionaries, generals, soldiers, and business interests differed in their commitment to expansion. It is difficult to envision how one could amalgamate these views into an overall estimate of political will that could be used to explain cross-case variation in experiences of conquest. MacDonald convincingly points out that political will is not a pre-existing resource that conquering powers either have or do not have at the outset of a campaign. It is endogenous to success – the difficulty of conquest can itself sap political will, while success may generate enthusiasm (75). Further, it is hard to attribute defeat to the absence of political will; we might instead predict that without any preexisting political will, there would be no attempt at conquest.

Against accounts that focus on the power of conquering states, MacDonald proposes that conquest has social foundations. He argues that configurations of social ties can either facilitate or impede the ability of powerful actors to conquer far-flung lands. Specifically, the ease of conquest depends first upon the social ties between the conqueror and the elites in the targeted societies. Where foreign conquerors already have dense social ties connecting them to the local population, they will be better able to recruit reliable local collaborators who can help them overcome the difficulties of power projection in distant lands. Conquest also depends upon ties among local elites. Where local elites lack social ties among themselves, where they are fragmented, they will be unable to effectively resist conquest. Conquest is thus easiest when local elites have ties to conquerors but

not with one another; it is most difficult when local elites have few ties with conquering powers but many ties among themselves.

This argument provides a simple, plausible way to account for heterogeneous experiences of conquest. It stresses the importance of collaboration for foreign conquest, a point that has wide empirical support, but which can easily be overlooked in accounts that privilege the power and resources of the conqueror. MacDonald argues that collaboration must be built on pre-existing ties; collaborators cannot simply be bought at the moment of conquest because a conqueror who lacks social ties will not be able to distinguish between reliable and opportunistic collaborators.

From this argument, MacDonald generates predictions not only for the ease of conquest, but also for the type of strategies that conquerors employ (61). His theory produces observable implications for the use of selective repression, collective punishment, divide-and-rule tactics, and diplomacy, among others. He tests these hypotheses by looking at nineteenth century cases of British conquest in India, South Africa, and Nigeria. His empirical analysis is thorough and sophisticated. He does not simply compare across cases, he also examines within-case variation, studying British successes and failures in three Indian states and in different African chiefdoms. MacDonald makes extensive use of primary sources from the British archives. His case analysis is exemplary; he is able to distill and illuminate a good deal of detailed historical information.

MacDonald's focus on the social environment within the targeted states - and particularly his attention to the agency of indigenous actors who assisted and resisted British expansion - offers a valuable contribution to the literature on foreign conquest and occupation. In this response, I focus on MacDonald's theory of social ties. I raise several questions about how the two kinds of social ties that he identifies interact to make conquest easier or more difficult to carry out.

My first set of questions concern the determinants of resistance to conquest. How do the social arrangements MacDonald discusses affect resistance? Might an understanding of how power is distributed among local elites contribute to our understanding of when and where to expect resistance? The potential for resistance lies at the heart of MacDonald's account. Collaborators, he tells us, "are not important in and of themselves, of course. Rather, collaborators provide critical assistance to potential conquerors" (55). This assistance largely takes the form of helping to quell resistance. But how is resistance overcome? Some of the ways that collaborators can help conquerors crush resistance are straightforward: they can provide information about who the resisters are, they can offer military support in the form of supplies and men, and they can serve as guides to the terrain. These are helpful forms of support for conquerors facing resistance, but they do not foreclose resistance or imply that only a few will resist.

MacDonald argues further that dense ties to collaborators can minimize the level of resistance at the outset by helping conquerors legitimate their rule. Their ability to do so, however, is questionable for two reasons. First, MacDonald notes that "few societies want to be dominated by external powers" (56), which, if true, makes it difficult to see how collaborators could possibly legitimate conquest. Second, MacDonald suggests that collaborators are often somewhat marginal figures; "peripheral elites that are vulnerable or isolated within their own societies seem more amenable to close relations with external powers than do their more entrenched or established colleagues" (74). It is not clear how vulnerable, isolated elites can legitimate conquest. Moreover, if the elites themselves are aspirants to power, rather than significant power-holders themselves, they may not be able to provide the resources and information that would decisively help the conquering power. MacDonald is well aware that those who most want to collaborate may have the least to offer, and he

sees prior social ties as a way that conquerors can select useful collaborators. Yet if he is right about the incentive structure, the most effective potential collaborators will have little need to collaborate. Perhaps powerful local actors are not as averse to collaboration or as prone to resistance as he suggests. Even the most powerful peripheral actors may wish to avoid clashing with European military might, or they may see an opportunity to ally with the occupying power to crush aspiring power-seekers. It would be useful to know if the power of local elites affects who collaborates, and how effective those elites are at assisting conquerors.

An investigation of the power of local elites can also inform our understanding of how their social ties affect resistance. In MacDonald's account, conquest is facilitated by elite fragmentation. Fragmentation renders resistance difficult and provides opportunities for conquerors to employ strategies of divide-and-rule. Fragmentation may, however, take a number of different forms. The kind of fragmentation described here appears to be one in which local leaders are generally powerless: resources are scarce, patrimonial structures are in place, and local elites lack the ties to one another that would allow them to successfully organize collective action. But power may be unevenly distributed across a fragmented society, such that there are one or more strong groups with military capabilities who lack dense ties to others but who are nevertheless capable of fomenting rebellion. These two different situations – one in which there are many small, disconnected groups, and one in which there are multiple territorial power-holders – present different challenges to conquerors. The former may indeed be easy to subdue, but the latter may be quite difficult to dominate. Parts of the territory may remain outside the conqueror's control and require costly, long-term "pacification" efforts. Fragmentation thus may not be uniformly associated with less resistance; it may instead depend upon the number of groups and the resources at their disposal.

Unity may likewise pose fewer problems than anticipated here. When peripheral elites have already created dense ties among themselves, these ties could be employed to solve collective action problems and resist conquest, but they could also serve to coordinate surrender. A society that has overcome internal fragmentation may, in some instances, be easier to control. The case of France in World War II, which is admittedly far afield from the cases of peripheral conquest that are the focus here, comes to mind – a nation-state unified under a powerful leader accepted defeat and collaborated with German occupiers. When actors are unified, negotiations and coordination between the conquering power and the targeted population may be easier than where elites are dispersed and fragmented. Unity may thus facilitate either resistance or a collective decision not to fight.

MacDonald does not find support for these alternative hypotheses in his cases, but they suggest that further theorizing and testing may refine and extend the argument. Unity may, on average, be more likely to result in resistance than surrender, or unity may be quite rare in cases of conquest, and its effects difficult to discern. Fragmentation may also, on average, make resistance more difficult, but resistance may also be driven by other factors, one of which is the coercive power of local elites. Further consideration of the determinants of resistance to foreign control is a useful future step toward understanding the obstacles confronting conquerors.

A second set of questions concerns the actions of the conquerors. First, why do some conquering powers have dense ties to local elites, while others do not? Does the process of conquest itself affect the availability of collaborators? MacDonald stresses the dense ties that precede conquest, demonstrating that these ties are not deliberately fostered with the aim of conquest in mind. Still, I wondered why the social ties that precede conquest were superior to those that are created instrumentally for the purposes of conquest. Is there a point at which it is too late to construct social ties with local elites? Is a lengthy period of time necessary to develop

effective alliances? The case studies of South Africa and Nigeria suggest that these alliances can indeed be constructed during conquest. If Europeans and some local elites can mutually benefit, collaboration ought not to be difficult to arrange even immediately before conquest occurs. Expediency may drive new forms of collaboration.

MacDonald argues that a prior history of collaboration, which the British had in parts of India, is preferable for several reasons (74). One is that conquerors simply know the place and its people better, which certainly offers an important advantage. Another is that prior interactions demonstrate the reliability of Europeans. The reputation they develop through exchanges with locals makes their promises of rewards and protection more credible when conquest begins. But conquest itself alters this context; it marks a rupture with prior exchanges. The initiation of conquest itself can be a reason for distrust; we might expect that conquest would undermine the reputations that had been established before it began.

Douglas Porch's *Conquest of Morocco* illustrates how expansionist aims can alter local perceptions of Europeans.¹ As France got closer to staking its claim to Morocco, the French began to act against Moroccan interests rather than cultivating their pre-existing social ties through fair and reputable acts. The French surreptitiously occupied an eastern town by transporting troops from Algeria, and they loaned money to the ruling Sultan on unfavorable terms, pressuring him into giving up vital customs rights. These actions served to raise suspicions about French intentions and undermine the Sultan's authority. Despite a prior history of cooperation, Moroccan elites increasingly came view the French as untrustworthy. The onset of conquest itself thus had an effect on the social ties among Europeans and target populations. Prior collaboration may not, when conquest occurs, deepen social ties but may instead be a source of disappointment and distrust.

Porch's study illustrates an additional point. MacDonald's two main explanatory variables are the social ties between Europeans and local elites, and fragmentation among local elites. These are presented as separate structural characteristics that constrain conquest, but they may be interdependent. Specifically, social ties with Europeans may affect local fragmentation. Returning to the Moroccan example, in 1904, a bandit named Raisuni kidnapped a group of Europeans. In return for their release, he demanded control of the city of Tangier and the departure of the Sultan's troops from the area around the city. The Sultan argued correctly that these demands would fragment the territory, empower a violent actor, and increase instability, but the French insisted that he accede to Raisuni's demands. In the years leading up to the conquest, French pressure on the Sultan empowered his political rivals. The French thus affected the level of fragmentation in the country, not always because it suited their long-term aims but also because they had immediate goals, such as the release of prisoners. The French ultimately benefited from the fragmentation that followed, arguing that Morocco had become ungovernable and needed a great power protector.²

This brief example points to the possibility that fragmentation may not be a preexisting feature of the targeted society, but may be altered by European states engaged in forming alliances. It may be fruitful to explore the ways that the explanatory variables here shape one another. Another possibility is that social ties between Europeans and local actors affect *perceptions* of the degree of fragmentation. Where social ties are sparse,

¹ Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco: A Savage Colonial War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), see 133, 143-144, 150-151,

² Porch, *Conquest of Morocco*, 113-121.

Europeans may not know the social structure very well. They risk overestimating fragmentation, when, in fact, it is their knowledge of elite ties that is fragmented. In the cases where the conqueror's social ties are sparse, it may be difficult to obtain reliable information about the local social structure, even for researchers working in the present.

The best works in social science are those that address important questions and raise new ones. *Networks of Domination* does both. International relations scholars who study empire, great power politics, and foreign occupation are sure to find this study fascinating and thought-provoking. It will also appeal to readers interested in colonialism, conquest, and resistance. *Networks of Domination* makes an important contribution to understanding how and why conquering powers are able to project power across great distances.

Review by Peter Liberman, Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York

In governing their imperial domains, conquerors throughout history have almost always relied upon ‘divide and rule’ strategies and native collaborators. Less well understood, though, is the importance of these factors to initial imperial conquest. The superior wealth, organization, and technology of imperial powers have often been counter-balanced by the difficulty of projecting power over vast distances, disease, poor intelligence, limited available military manpower, and the proliferation of advanced weaponry to the periphery. In this fascinating book, Paul K. MacDonald shows that indigenous elites’ internal fragmentation, and the willingness of some to defect to the enemy, also affected their vulnerability to foreign conquest.

MacDonald also seeks to identify the root causes of indigenous fragmentation and collaboration. Why were some indigenous elites more cohesive than others in resisting alien invaders? And what explains differences in their readiness to work with conquerors? Drawing theoretical inspiration from social network theory, MacDonald argues that the answer lies in the “social ties” already developed through economic, political, social, or cultural exchanges.

According to MacDonald, the *strength* of social ties, i.e., how large in magnitude, reciprocal, and frequent or sustained over time they are, and their *density*, i.e., how many actors they involve that matter, increase communication and trust. These in turn drive social cohesion within, and collaboration across, societal boundaries: “[W]hen elites in peripheral societies are bound together through repeated social interactions, they will have an easier time formulating collective narratives... and sharing the burdens of resistance” (47). Across the periphery-metropolitan divide, social ties enable conquerors to identify potentially useful collaborators. In addition, “it is much easier for external powers to promise not to exploit local allies when previous exchanges have been mutually beneficial and durable over time” (53-54). Previous exchanges also promote a “cultural familiarity” that facilitates collaboration and sometimes even generates “emotive connections” that bind collaborators to their imperial patrons (54).

MacDonald explores these propositions through detailed historical case studies of three nineteenth-century British imperial conquests: India 1798-1805, South Africa 1842-1854, and Nigeria 1884-1897. In a fourth case study, of the U.S. experience in Iraq following its destruction of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003, the social-ties framework is applied to foreign-imposed regime change, rather than to conquest per se.

Distilling a vast amount of original archival research and historical literature on the British cases, MacDonald puts on a virtuoso display of how to conduct rich, archive-based, historical case studies to advance social science. He convincingly demonstrates how important local collaborators and fragmentation were to the efficiency of conquest in the British cases, if not in Iraq in 2003. Fragmentation seems more important; limited prior ties, for example, did not save the fragmented tribes of the Niger Delta from British domination.

The book is less persuasive, however, in demonstrating the importance of the informational effects emphasized by social network theory and by MacDonald’s theoretical chapter. In MacDonald’s India chapter, for example, social information seems to have mattered little to elite fragmentation in the state of Awadh following the death of its ruler in 1797. Members of the royal family presumably were intimately familiar with each other, but this did not prevent them from battling amongst themselves for succession to the throne and vying for British help in this competition. Indeed, the decline of the Mughal Empire during the eighteenth century turned much of India, as MacDonald puts it, into “an uncertain and dynamic

environment in which various actors competed to consolidate political power and monopolize sources of wealth” (82). In such contexts, competition among local elites may have been as much a cause of weak social ties as a byproduct of them. The political, economic, and social bargains underlying indigenous political structures, as well as the existence of rulers powerful enough to punish those who would cut profitable side-deals with an alien power, thus may have mattered more than the trust and collective narratives fostered by dense and strong ties.

It also remains unclear how effectively previous interactions reassured indigenous elites about the invader’s promises to provide protection, patronage, and other benefits to collaborators. The lack of direct evidence for such effects in the case studies, to be sure, could be due to the inherent limitations of the historical record of indigenous elites’ perceptions and motivations. Moreover, indigenous elites had good reason to wonder whether foreigners’ past actions would predict their future ones after they had seized military control. Many collaborators might have been seeking to make quick buck, rather than promises of future patronage.

When turning to the Iraq case, MacDonald focuses not on U.S. military victory, in which social ties played no role, but on post-conflict governance and reconstruction. He argues that a lack of prior relationships with in-country Iraqi elites impeded intelligence collection and the recruitment of reliable collaborators into new Iraqi security forces, political institutions, and economic reconstruction efforts. Banning former Ba’ath Party members from holding government jobs and disbanding the Iraqi Army further compounded this problem, as did the general lack of planning, resources, and expertise dedicated to reconstructing Iraq.

However useful to imperial conquest and ‘divide and rule’ policy, social fragmentation clearly hinders nation-building.¹ MacDonald does not try to contest the point, but rather argues that the United States could at least have more shrewdly managed Iraq’s internal divisions. Noting that violence dropped after the United States began funding Sunni tribal leaders in Anbar province in September 2006, MacDonald argues that avoiding policies that disenfranchised the formerly dominant Sunni minority and instead providing earlier support to Sunni leaders would have diminished Sunni violence and compelled greater Shiite accommodation to fundamental Sunni interests. This makes a lot of sense, although Shiites might have reacted more violently to this course of action. Alternatively, they might have simply waited for the United States to withdraw before trying to restrict Sunni power, as in fact happened in 2014, resulting in a renewed civil war. That said, MacDonald’s analysis usefully highlights social fragmentation’s obstacles to foreign-imposed democratization, in contrast to the opportunities it presents to imperial conquest and rule.

The easy initial U.S. military victory over Iraq in 2003 provides further grist for the military superiority thesis, which is MacDonald’s main theoretical foil in the British cases. Although the three British cases are varied in location and time period, it is not clear how characteristic they were of Western peripheral conquests. Nearly half of all peripheral conquests since 1815 occurred in the 1880s and 1890s (p. 21), an imperial boom driven

¹ Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, “Forced to Be Free?: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013); Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4, no. 4 (2008).

by Western advances in modern rifle technology that did not quickly proliferate to the periphery.² It is hard to imagine what simultaneous seismic transformation in the social foundations of conquest might better explain this dramatic expansion of European imperial domination of the globe. Ethiopia's victory over Italy at Adowa in 1896, which MacDonald provides in his introduction as evidence against the military superiority thesis, is actually an exception that proves the rule, because Emperor Menelik II had amassed an unusually large stockpile of modern rifles.³

That said, this book is a very valuable reminder that military supremacy does not necessarily confer the ability to dominate foreign nations and peoples, and especially to impose political change from outside. States planning to attempt such political engineering, moreover, would be well advised to develop a close understanding of the societies they want to reshape.

² Daniel R. Headrick, *Power over Peoples: Technology, Environments, and Western Imperialism, 1400 to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2010), chap. 7.

³ *Ibid.* At roughly the same time that the "Scramble for Africa" was taking place, Headrick points out, the firearm revolution also facilitated efforts by European settlers or their descendants to expand their domination over natives throughout the hinterlands of the United States, Argentina, and Chile.

Review by Michael S. Neiberg, U.S. Army War College

The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have tarnished the arguments of those who had assumed that changes in technology had revolutionized warfare. Beliefs that a new Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) could remove the fog and friction of war and open the way for full-spectrum dominance have yielded to much more realistic appraisals of the astonishing complexity and unpredictability of war. Although any careful reading of history might have accomplished the same end, the last decade and a half of war seem finally to have killed the idea of technological change as the key to victory in modern war.

Paul MacDonald's *Networks of Domination* aims to put the final nail into the coffins of the RMA and technological determinism more generally. For this, we should praise him. He rightly recognizes that the success of western (in his analysis, mostly British) states in conquering the peripheral regions of Asia and Africa did not depend on technology. Although modern and highly sophisticated, much of that western technology proved to be of limited utility at great distance, and local adversaries frequently found ways to counter it. As one Sioux chief said in a similar kind of peripheral war about the artillery of American forces: "Nobody with any brains would sit on his pony in front of it."¹

MacDonald offers an alternative thesis based on social networks. Rather than dominating through superior weaponry and doctrine, he argues, forces from the core dominated the periphery through the exploitation of local allies who could provide intelligence, soldiers who knew the terrain, and resources to reduce the cost of conquest. Such strategies to overcome what he terms "the tyranny of distance" succeeded most often when the political and social environments of the regions in question suffered from fragmentation (28).

This argument has much to recommend it, especially the insight about fragmentation. Rising groups willing to challenge the dominant power structure or anxious to profit from the introduction of new economic links often proved to be the most willing partners. When such groups did not exist or proved unwilling to help, conquest became much more difficult.

MacDonald is surely correct to reject technological determinism. He also makes a powerful, if often understated, case for rejecting the assumption that people in the peripheries were inanimate objects playing little to no role in their own fates. As MacDonald correctly argues, they often proved quite capable of reading the political landscape and using western power for their own ends. Rather than standing in front of cannon on their ponies, they exploited the west's desires for conquest to remove local enemies or to improve their own economic and political situations.

MacDonald makes a persuasive and convincing case for the rejection of the conventional views of the history of the 'rise of the west.' Yet his book essentially replaces one monocausal explanation with another. His case studies argue that the key variable in each case was the strength of the social networks developed by the aspiring conqueror. In his diagrams and models, he identifies each relationship with solid arrows that link key individuals to one another. In other words, a relationship either exists or it does not.

¹ Quoted in Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 55.

Perhaps my bias as a historian is showing here, but the establishment of a more or less independent variable like the presence of social links seems to weaken a powerful and important argument. The key takeaway of MacDonald's book ought not to be that we have now found the new single cause to explain western dominance in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, but that *Networks of Domination* has identified a way to understand this phenomenon in greater complexity. Instead of bifurcating and separating technology from social networking, we ought to be looking for the ways that they reinforced one another, as MacDonald does occasionally admit. More often, however, he seems to use technological determinism as a kind of straw man, which his new thesis then proceeds to demolish.

Three historical case studies – India, Southern Africa, and Niger – all make the point by rejecting technology and emphasizing social networks. Where the latter existed, the British triumphed, often without having to engage in prolonged military campaigns. In the case of India, probably the one most studied by scholars, the fragmentation that replaced the declining Mughal Empire left the British with plenty of political discord that they could exploit. In Southern Africa, the migrations of people (both European and African) and the concomitant creation of new communities essentially created the same kinds of conditions. In both cases, the British could pick and choose from among potential allies.

MacDonald might not consider the eighteenth-century United States a 'periphery,' but it does present a countervailing case. The British had strong social networks in place to help crush the American rebellion, especially in Canada, the southern colonies, and the western Indian nations. People in all three groups were eager and willing to work with the British. Yet the British still failed. One might argue that the Americans were not politically fragmented, but the existence of significant royalist sentiment, notably in the south, would suggest otherwise. This case study might have been a better test of his thesis than the much more obscure case of the Niger delta.

The Opium Wars in China provide a different case that works against the argument. In both wars (1829-1842 and 1856-1860) the British owed their triumph largely to technological and organizational superiority. They had minimal networks of domination, although they certainly benefited from fragmentation and internal problems inside the collapsing Qing dynasty. Still, the Opium Wars stand out as an example of the continued importance of understanding technology and military doctrine, at least as one part of a wider explanatory scheme.

The British case studies, however, really exist to set up the meat of the argument, MacDonald's analysis of American failure in Iraq. Contrary to the pronouncements of the RMA advocates, the massive American dominance in technology did not produce victory. Not surprisingly, MacDonald finds the answer in the failure of the United States to develop and exploit social networks. In essence, the Americans went into two Middle Eastern wars blind, unable to work with locals or exploit the cleavages in the region with any dexterity. This failure assured American defeat regardless of the overwhelming strengths that the United States possessed on the battlefield.

Lacking these 'networks of domination,' he argues, the Americans made a series of catastrophic mistakes. They disbanded the Iraqi Army rather than co-opt large parts of it; they leaned on out-of-touch Iraqi exiles for intelligence and multi-national corporations (rather than Iraqis themselves) for economic assistance; and they intervened too often in Shia-Sunni power struggles. These mistakes, and many others, led to American failures despite the overmatch in military capability.

Indeed, MacDonald argues that the American position in Iraq was more favorable than many observers today realize, and it should have produced success. Most notably, Iraqi society possessed just the kinds of fragmentation that the British had so successfully exploited in Asia and Africa. The few American successes, such as the Anbar awakening, resulted from this kind of social networking. Tragically, such successes were too few and too far between. The analysis of Iraq is the book's strongest chapter and underscores the central thesis that technological dominance does not produce either military or political success.

In the end, though, what we need is less a new silver-bullet explanation but a more sophisticated analysis of the ways in which social, technological, and political patterns work together. These three patterns (and many, many more) do not work independently. They work together in the same way that the elements of Carl von Clausewitz's trinity of war do. They are inseparable from one another, and any changes in one inevitably produce changes in the others. I hope that scholars will take up the challenge MacDonald offers to reject explanations based on machines and place more emphasis on the roles played by people in both the core and the periphery. If the enemy gets a vote, so, too, do local allies and potential allies. But we must see these relationships as dynamic, complex, and interdependent.

Author's Response by Paul K. MacDonald, Wellesley College

I would like to thank H-Diplo/ISSF for inviting me to participate in a roundtable on my book and to Adria Lawrence, Peter Liberman, and Michael Neiberg for writing such kind and thoughtful reviews. I am grateful that scholars whose work I have long admired have taken the time to engage with the claims I advance in *Networks of Domination*, and for the opportunity to respond to some, but certainly not all, of the potential criticisms and possible extensions of my argument.

The basic puzzle that I examine in the book is how European powers were able to conquer large swaths of the periphery of the international system during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When I embarked on this project, I was surprised at just how little had been written on the military dimension of European overseas expansion. Imperial historians pay a great deal of attention to the motives of European conquerors, and to the structures of governance that were established in conquest's wake, but less to the forces or strategies used during conquest itself. Military historians, with some notable exceptions, tend to focus on wars between states with organized militaries, rather than on messier small wars or colonial rebellions. Political scientists, for their part, do not seem to have much time for empire at all: most of our theories are designed to explain war and peace between states in the core of the international system, not complex struggles among societies in the periphery.

To the extent that the literature does present a common interpretation of peripheral conquest, it tends to advance a version of what William Thompson calls the "military superiority thesis."¹ The essential claim here is that Europeans succeeded because they employed military forces that were better armed and better organized than their rivals. A military technological revolution, centered on advances in firearms and fortifications, allowed Europeans to quickly and cheaply overwhelm distant societies. Neiberg is correct when he observes that contemporary military historians are suspicious of technological determinism. But while social and political factors feature prominently in studies of European wars, there remains a tendency to characterize imperial conquest as an unequal fight between technologically advanced Europeans and backward locals, whose outcome was more or less inevitable.² Yet in practice, European conquerors struggled to project their military capabilities into the periphery, and encountered fierce and creative resistance once they arrived.

In *Networks of Domination*, I develop an alternative account of imperial conquest that is centered on the concept of the social tie. Neiberg rightly worries that this approach might replace "one monocausal explanation with another," but this was not my intent. Rather, my theory is based on a simple analytical bet:

¹ William R. Thompson, "The Military Superiority Thesis and the Ascendancy of Western Eurasia in the World System," *Journal of World History*, 10, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 169-170.

² For general histories that characterize peripheral warfare in these terms, see Bernard Brodie and Fawn M. Brodie, *From Crossbow to H-Bomb* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 147; William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 144; Paul Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1988), 150; Robert L. O'Connell, *Of Arms and Men: A History of War, Weapons, and Aggression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 234; Geoffrey Parker, "Introduction: The Western Way of War," in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9; and Max Boot, *War Made New: Weapons, Warriors, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Penguin, 2006), chap. 5.

there are many political, social, and cultural factors that shape patterns of colonial conquest, but the one that matters most is pre-colonial ties between potential conquerors and elites in targeted societies. These ties matter because they influence the availability of local collaborators, and thus the local resources European states can mobilize in support of conquest. They likewise matter because they shape the capacity of peripheral societies to organize and sustain resistance to external challenges. A social ties approach, in other words, sees imperial conquest as a process of competitive collective mobilization. Conquerors attempt to leverage social exchanges to generate and enhance their military power, while local rulers seek to do the same to mobilize opposition to alien rule. This approach does not privilege any single factor; it acknowledges that social ties can be comprised of economic, political, or cultural exchanges. But it does assume that pre-colonial patterns of interaction are critical because they shape the constraints and opportunities that present themselves to both conquerors and their targets.

Lawrence finds this general argument convincing, but raises some important questions about the specific explanatory variables: ties between potential conquerors and local elites, and fragmentation among local elites. First, Lawrence wonders whether these two categories could be unpacked in greater detail. Rather than treating all collaborators as equivalent, perhaps we should distinguish between collaborators that are insiders versus those that are outsiders, those that are rising in strength versus those that are declining in power. This is a reasonable suggestion, and we see versions of these collaborators in each of the case studies. My sense is that all collaborators are potentially helpful, but collaborators vary in the degree and type of support they can provide. Outsiders may be less able to provide accurate information or legitimacy, for example, but may be more inclined to lend valuable material assistance. Lawrence likewise suggests that there may be different types of fragmentation: some societies may be fragmented into many small groups, others into two distinct blocs. My suspicion is that fragmentation tends to help conquerors regardless of its form, but different forms produce distinct strategic incentives. Small groups might be more susceptible to punitive expeditions, for example, while rivalrous blocs more vulnerable to divide and rule techniques.

Second, Lawrence raises the possibility that the process of conquest itself may alter patterns of social ties. If an external power appears close to victory, for example, this might encourage elites to defect to the winning side and become collaborators. We do see some examples of this in the cases, but in practice, most collaborators had ties to potential conquerors long before conquest was contemplated or attempted. And as Lawrence notes, conquest is just as likely to alienate elites as to attract them. This point highlights one of the main benefits of having access to reliable pre-existing collaborators: they can serve as intermediaries that can help persuade dissatisfied fence sitters to remain neutral or convince reluctant opponents to surrender. Lawrence likewise wonders whether the process of Europeans encroaching into local societies might exacerbate fragmentation. Robinson and Gallagher identified this dynamic long ago, and we definitely see evidence of this in the cases.³ Yet the variables might interact in contradictory ways as well. Crafty rulers might use ties to outside powers to help consolidate their rule, thus reducing fragmentation. Conversely, the discord and unrest caused by fragmentation can inhibit the cultivation of ties. The upshot here is that social ties are not something that actors can develop quickly or that evolve in predictable ways; they are significant precisely because they are so difficult to engineer.

³ Ronald Edward Robinson and John Gallagher, "The Partition of Africa," in Ronald Edward Robinson and John Gallagher, eds., *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 70-72.

Liberman proposes an important, but somewhat different, critique about how social ties shape the dynamics of conquest. In particular, he questions whether the informational dynamics implied by social network theory are really at work in the cases. Perhaps fragmented societies have a hard time organizing resistance because elites possess competing interests, not because they cannot share information about external threats. Here it is important to note that the exchange of information is only part of my causal story: social ties can involve material and cultural exchanges as well, not just informational ones. As a consequence, rulers in fragmented societies are hamstrung for all sorts of reasons, not just their own ignorance. They lack material levers they can use to reward or threaten their followers. They lack the authority afforded by cultural and kinship ties that can help them legitimate collective resistance. Plus, social ties and interests are not inseparable: dense interactions over time can produce common interests and shared understandings that make collective mobilization easier. As for information, there is indirect evidence that rulers in divided societies were less informed about their own dominions. The nawab-wazir of Awadh, for example, routinely complained to the British resident about his lack of knowledge of events outside his capital (although this claim may have been in part strategic on his part).

Liberman also wonders about whether potential conquerors and local elites are bound together primarily due to long-term relations of trust or short-term calculations of expedience. Again, it is important to emphasize that information is just one way in which dense ties can increase the likelihood of collaboration. Repeated interactions with external powers can create material dependencies that local elites may be reluctant to sacrifice, or cultural connections whose prestige local elites consider essential to their survival. Yet there is compelling indirect evidence that information played at least some role in elite decisions to collaborate. Inexperienced new frontier agents on the Eastern Cape frontier, for example, often struggled to develop the same rapport with local chiefs as their predecessors. This suggests that decisions to collaborate were based as much on built-up trust as narrow self-interest. It is also important to emphasize the information is a two-way street: the more that European officials interacted with local elites, the more accurate their assessments of the reliability of potential partners.

A final point, articulated most forcefully by Neiberg, concerns the generalizability of the social ties approach. When considering such a large topic as European military conquest in the periphery, there are bound to be some cases that fit the theory better than others. Neiberg is correct to highlight the important role European military power played in the Opium Wars, for example, but even here we see elements of the social ties explanation. The capacity of the Qing dynasty to resist was certainly hampered by internal divisions and domestic rebellion, most notably the Taiping Rebellion. Meanwhile, the emergence of closer ties between Europeans and a “new breed of mercantile officials” at Canton and Shanghai created pressures and incentives for the Qing court to compromise. “Beneath the eye-catching manoeuvres of gunboats, soldiers and diplomats,” John Fairbanks observes, “was the build-up of the Sino-foreign trading community.”⁴ These ties helped shape the scale and scope of Chinese concessions, but also the limits of European encroachments.

⁴ John K. Fairbank, “The Creation of the Treaty System,” in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 10, Late Ch’ing, 1800-1911, Part I (New York: Cambridge University Press 1978), 259.

Dependent on local intermediaries for access to the Chinese market, European firms would struggle to extend their reach beyond the treaty ports.⁵

Neiberg points to the American Revolutionary War as another case that might work against the theory. Designed to explain wars of imperial conquest between culturally dissimilar societies, a social ties approach may be assumed to have little to add here. But I see some familiar features in this case as well, which I will explain by way of an anecdote. For the past five summers, I have had the pleasure of taking a group of Williams College students on a staff ride at the Saratoga National Battlefield. I am consistently surprised at how General Burgoyne's doomed 1777 campaign, for all its idiosyncratic elements, highlights the limits of military power and the importance of social context. We see good evidence of the tyranny of distance: logistical problems slowed the British advance, gave the Americans time to react, and encouraged Burgoyne to fritter away his forces in foraging parties and supply raids. We see evidence of resistance: Burgoyne consistently underestimated the capacity of local militias to mobilize quickly against him, and harassment along his overextended supply lines exacerbated his already difficult logistical dilemma. We also see the problems created by a paucity of reliable collaborators: Burgoyne never received the assistance from loyalist forces he anticipated, while his Native American auxiliaries proved to be hard to control and abandoned him at the first sign of trouble. Burgoyne's army was both well armed and well trained, but, marching far from home, in unfamiliar terrain, surrounded by a hostile population, and lacking dependable local allies, it met a crushing defeat.⁶

Perhaps the most difficult place to apply the social ties explanation is not the past, but the present. Because the economic and normative foundations of contemporary international politics are so different from those in the nineteenth century, we might assume that theories of peripheral conquest have little to say about contemporary politics. Here I am delighted that the reviewers have found value in my attempt to apply the social ties approach to contemporary cases, such as the United States' occupation of Iraq from 2003-2011. Liberman is right to note that the findings are somewhat paradoxical: social fragmentation both limited the spread of the Iraqi insurgency in the early years of the occupation, but also hampered the American coalition's long-term goal of building a unified and democratic Iraq. But this fits with my suspicion that what has changed in contemporary international politics is not the willingness of powerful states to use force to remake distant societies, but circumstances and expectations surrounding such interventions. Rather than conquer societies with which they have longstanding social ties, contemporary powers are called to intervene in places with which they have only a passing familiarity. Instead of using divide and rule strategies to establish some modicum of control, contemporary powers are expected to rebuild strong democratic states that can flourish in the broader liberal international system. Confident in the superiority of their arms and in the righteousness

⁵ See John Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion," *English Historical Review*, 112, no. 447 (June 1997), 632-633.

⁶ A social ties approach would see the Revolutionary War less as a clash of armies than "a peoples' war for political independence," to borrow Don Higginbotham's famous formulation. See *The War of American Independence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1971), 1. My two favorite accounts of the Saratoga campaign are Richard Ketchum, *Saratoga: The Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: Holt, 1999); and John F. Luzader, *Saratoga: A Military History of the Decisive Campaign of the American Revolution* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2008).

of their mission, contemporary powers fail to appreciate—as did many of their historical counterparts—that successful conquest requires more than just military might.