

The Frontiers of American Grand Strategy: Controlled Expansion in Principle and Practice

Abstract: Much work on U.S. grand strategy focuses on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is often assumed that until 1898 or perhaps even later, the United States simply did not have a grand strategy—or if it did have one, scholars often characterize it in extreme terms as either prudently isolationist or rampantly expansionist. I intervene in this literature by arguing that the grand strategy of this period can best be described as one of controlled expansion. That is, political elites generally wanted to expand the territorial reach of the United States and its relative power in world affairs. However, political elites sought to acquire territory opportunistically while avoiding war with European powers and Native nations alike. I focus on U.S. wars with Native nations to show how domestic conditions, especially the political power of settlers, complicated the practice of this grand strategy and ensured that political elites ultimately exercised less control over the process of expansion than they would have liked. I support this argument with a case study of the Northwest Indian War (1785-92) and with shorter discussions of the later Second Seminole War (1835-42) and Utah's Black Hawk War (1865-72). I conclude with implications for ongoing debates on U.S. grand strategy.

I. Introduction

There is a large and growing literature on U.S. grand strategy—on its sources and content, on variation therein, and on plausible grand strategies for the United States.¹ Much of this literature, however, focuses primarily on grand strategy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While this makes some sense given the country’s rise to superpower status during the twentieth century, this perspective omits a significant portion U.S. history to our detriment. In this article, I argue that bringing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the study of U.S. grand strategy can help us to better understand how political elites have enacted grand strategy across time and why elite plans have not always worked in practice. Specifically, I use the history of U.S. wars with Native American groups to demonstrate how divergences between the general public and political elites can affect the implementation of grand strategy.

Studies of grand strategy—American or otherwise—often begin by providing an overview of definitional debates. What is “grand strategy” exactly? Should the scope of the term encompass tools of statecraft beyond the military? Is strategy only “grand” when great powers are formulating it?² I follow Silove (2018, 29) in taking an approach that allows for multiple meanings of the term; more precisely, she argues, “grand strategy” now has “three distinct meanings. First, scholars use grand strategy to refer to a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals. Second, they employ it to refer to an organizing principle that is consciously held and used by individuals to guide their decisions. Third, scholars use the term to refer to a pattern in state behavior” (2018, 29). For the purposes of this piece, which focuses on a time period

¹ See, e.g., Rosencrance and Stein (1993), Posen and Ross (1996/97), Lobell, Taliaferro, and Ripsman (2013), MacDonald and Parent (2018), and Norrlof and Wohlforth (2019).

² See, e.g., Lissner (2018), and Briffa (2020).

when explicit foreign policy planning was less standardized than it now is in National Security Strategies and similar documents, I will focus on the second and third meanings of grand strategy—principles and practice.

In an independent United States, expansion across the North American continent often involved settlers attempting to capture the state for their own purposes. In many of America's so-called Indian Wars, for example, U.S. settlers were the ones to initiate conflict, and they eventually brought federal officials into wars that the elites would have preferred to avoid. In this article, I argue that two settler *faits accomplis*—both the act of settling on disputed territory without authorization and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations—affected federal decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for military intervention, by making non-intervention more costly for federal officials, and by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. These *faits accomplis*, moreover, were made possible by an important permissive condition—the lack of a large standing military. While these dynamics pushed policy-makers to intervene in conflicts they sought to avoid, two additional factors sometimes cut against U.S. intervention—the perceived distribution of power (which was not always in the government's favor) and identity-based cleavages that sometimes separated settlers from elites.

II. Settlers, U.S. Foreign Policy, and Conflict Initiation

Westward expansion was a defining feature of early U.S. foreign policy. Previous studies on U.S. grand strategy and foreign policy, however, have often ignored this process. Most

studies omit this portion of U.S. history entirely and begin in 1898 or 1914 (Layne 2006; Dombrowski and Reich 2019). Even those studies that do address this period generally give only a brief overview of roughly a century of U.S. history, and they tend to downplay the role of settlers and Native nations. This may in part be because International Relations (IR) scholars have typically assumed that Native nations do not constitute sovereign polities or because the making of U.S. foreign policy is believed to be insulated from public pressures.

To the limited extent that IR scholars have considered this period in depth, early U.S. foreign policy is often portrayed as either prudently isolationist or rampantly expansionist. For Kupchan (2020, 31), for example, early U.S. foreign policy was isolationist insofar as it did not “take on enduring strategic commitments beyond its immediate neighborhood,” and he portrays this as something to which the United States should not return even if that grand strategy once served the United States well. This “old paradigm,” as Restad (2012, 68) characterizes narratives of early American “aloofness,” remains influential in much IR scholarship. On the other hand, some IR scholars have argued that offensive realism best explains a rampant expansionism in early U.S. foreign policy. For Mearsheimer (2001, 238), the United States “was bent on establishing regional hegemony, and it was an expansionist power of the first order in the Americas,” and it succeeded in doing so despite countervailing efforts by European states. Elman (2004, 563) concurs with Mearsheimer’s premise but modifies the explanation in arguing that the United States did indeed seek regional hegemony and succeeded in doing so not because of “failures of states that tried to stop it” but “because there were no indigenous balancers, and because the anarchic international system provided only weak cues for European great powers to block its bid”.

The puzzling phenomenon that I examine—the process by which settlers brought elites into wars they wanted to avoid—reconciles these narratives of early U.S. isolationism and expansionism by focusing both on the expansionist goals of policy-makers as well as the constraints they faced in seeking to acquire more territory at a cost deemed acceptable. Moreover, this article draws our attention to the ways in which civilians can shape the practice of grand strategy beyond simply voting for or against leaders.

One might still question whether this is properly considered an issue of U.S. foreign policy—or whether anyone at the time thought of it as foreign policy. Indeed, to the extent that political scientists in the United States have studied U.S. relations with Native nations, this work has largely been confined to studies of American Politics and Political Theory (Ferguson 2016).³ From the early colonial period until well into the nineteenth century, however, private citizens and the American government alike often treated Native nations as distinct (if not always genuinely independent) peoples (Schultz 1972; Saler 2015). The federal government signed treaties with Native nations until 1871 and made frequent use of military force in interactions with them both before and after its own independence (Prucha 1994).⁴ Congress delegated

³ For recent examples, see, Evans (2011) and Orr (2017). For helpful work in IR on Indigenous Politics, see Crawford (1994) Beier (2005); Lightfoot (2016); more narrowly, on U.S. foreign policy, see Cha (2015) and Szarejko (2020).

⁴ See also: Drake (1999) and Deloria, Jr. and Wilkins (1999). Regarding militarized disputes, as Grynawski (2018, 48) argues, “wars against Native Americans were the most common kind of conflict involving the United States. These were costly affairs...and were a primary American security concern”. Roughly 50 conflicts between 1783 and 1890 were considered serious enough to become widely known as “wars,” and these conflicts—not to mention civil administration of Indian Affairs and veterans’ benefits—were costly. As reported in the 1890 U.S. Census, military spending between March 1789 and June 1890 totaled \$4,725,521,495; the Census Bureau attributed about 17% (or \$807,073,658) to the Indian Wars (Census Bureau 1890, 644). I draw the estimate of 50 wars from government and secondary sources, including the following: Census Bureau (1890), Keenan (1997), McDermott (1998), and Treuer (2016). I am not concerned with casualty thresholds; I believe it is sufficient for the belligerents involved to have understood themselves to be taking part in wars. A recent dataset on “Native American Conflict History,” however, adjusts for the typically small populations involved in these conflicts by setting the threshold for war at “20 combat-

relations with Native nations to the Department of War in 1789, and this became a more formal arrangement when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was created and placed in the same department in 1824.⁵ Finally, until 1924, Native individuals as a class were not eligible for U.S. citizenship, and the federal government still characterizes relations with federally recognized tribes as government-to-government relationships (Deloria, Jr. and Wilkins 1999). Such relations, I argue, can and should be studied as international relations. Indeed, the field’s “new hierarchy studies” (McConaughey, Musgrave, and Nexon 2018, 184) has offered a glimpse of what IR can look like when focusing on relations between settler states or empires and Indigenous populations (MacDonald 2014; Grynaviski 2018; Maass 2020). I contribute to this turn by using patterns of settler-Native conflicts to intervene in ongoing debates over grand strategy.

III. The Argument

Principles of U.S. Grand Strategy

My argument begins with two principles that I argue defined early U.S. grand strategy. First, settlers and political elites alike generally saw territorial expansion as the proper course of action for the United States. In hindsight, this may appear obvious, but to briefly survey expansionist sentiments among elites, Benjamin Franklin authored a 1751 pamphlet,

related deaths in a single year” (Urlacher 2021, 3). In some cases, as in the Black Hawk War of 1832, policy-makers debated whether a given conflict should be called a war. See, e.g., Calhoun (1835, 476). Note that this is not the same conflict as Utah’s later Black Hawk War of 1865-72.

⁵ Moreover, both Secretary of War J. M. Schofield and the Indian Peace Commission, a small group established by Congress to negotiate peace treaties with western tribes, issued public reports in 1868 to recommend that the Bureau of Indian Affairs be returned to the War Department (Prucha 2000, 72).

“Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind,” in which he predicted that U.S. population growth would naturally lead to westward expansion—a good thing in Franklin’s estimation (Dahl 2018, 26-27). Similarly, George Washington believed that a well-managed process of Western settlement could be lucrative so long as the government worked to join Western and Eastern markets. On October 4, 1784, at the end of a trip that took him through Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, Washington wrote in his diary that, “[In order] to fix the trade of the Western country to our markets...the way is plain. ...It is to open a wide door, and make smooth a way for the produce of that country to pass to our markets” (1784, 67). A contemporary of his, Thomas Jefferson, was even more explicit when writing to then-Virginia Governor James Monroe in November 1801. Still in the first year of his presidency, Jefferson wrote that, “It is impossible not to look forward to distant times when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent” (1801, 420). As one recent history summarizes the elite consensus of the day, “Expansion was central to America’s political identity as a unique experiment in republican liberty” (Ostler 2019, 85).

Sentiments such as those articulated by the elites described above spurred settlers westward as well. Both before and after U.S. independence, Anglo-American settlers saw the lands to the west as theirs for the taking.⁶ This settlement became sufficiently problematic that in 1763, eager to avoid territorial disputes that might trigger a repeat of the French and Indian War, the British Crown banned settlers from squatting on or purchasing Native lands west of the Appalachian Mountains (Frymer 2017, 43). Likewise, the Crown increased taxes on the colonists and sought to more reliably enforce its tax laws in order to make the fur trade and smuggling—

⁶ Ideas of who “deserved” land were bound up with mutually reinforcing discourses of race, civilization, law, and religion (Limerick 1987, 36; Saler 2015, 47).

the core of the frontier economy—less profitable (Andreas 2013, 29-44). Such actions gave Anglo-American settlers all the more reason to support a rebellion, and once the United States had won its independence, population growth and immigration rebounded from war-time declines, which yielded a dramatic acceleration in westward settlement that would be sustained for decades.

As for the second principle of early U.S. grand strategy, despite their desire for territorial expansion, political elites generally wanted to avoid war. Whether with European powers or Native nations, such conflicts were understood to be costly. These two principles may seem contradictory, but private and public statements alike support this interpretation of elite intentions.⁷ Policy-makers differed in their justifications for this approach, but regardless of their reasons, it was indeed the case that political elites often saw themselves as trying to manage a process of controlled expansion, a term that I find to be a fitting description of early U.S. grand strategy. Indeed, George Washington structured much of early U.S. “Indian affairs” policy by articulating a mandate to expand without initiating violent conflicts. In a letter that Washington (1783) wrote to Congressman James Duane, he summarized his position as follows: “In a word there is nothing to be obtained by an Indian War but the Soil they live on and this can be had by purchase at less expence, and without that bloodshed, and those distresses which helpless Women and Children are made partakers of in all kinds of disputes with them.” Duane, a New York delegate to the Confederation Congress and the Chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, presented the Congress with a report based largely on Washington’s lengthy letter, and this report would be the Congress’s primary statement of its position on Indian Affairs for decades. Again,

⁷ For general sources on the balance between elite desires to expand and to avoid militarized conflict with Native Nations, see, e.g., Banner (2005, 26-29, 114-115), Rockwell (2010, 23-25), and Guyatt (2016, 48-60).

Ostler (2019, 86) succinctly summarizes the conundrum: “While all Americans agreed they were entitled to Indian lands, they differed about how these lands should be acquired.” Washington himself would struggle and ultimately fail to achieve expansion without war, a process that I will explore in a case study of the Northwest Indian War (1790-95).

Elites had their own theories as to what—short of military force—would best ensure peace amid expansion. They tried financial incentives such as inducements through a federal licensing system for trade between U.S. persons and Native nations as well as a “depredation claims” process that sought to disincentivize reprisals by reimbursing settlers and Native individuals who were harmed or whose property was damaged by those on the other side (Skogen 1996).⁸ They also tried in various ways to “civilize” Native nations in an effort to foster a shared identity that could dampen conflict and encourage cooperation Prucha (2000, 29, 59, 81). This civilizing effort often manifested in treaty clauses that guaranteed U.S. agricultural assistance to Native nations; from the perspective of U.S. elites, turning these populations into farmers would civilize them in a way that would make friendlier coexistence possible, but it would also—not coincidentally—allow Native nations to live on much smaller parcels of land (Lee 2019, 213-215). Such programs and policies, however, all proved costly and ineffective while settlers poured into the West.

The Practice of Early U.S. Grand Strategy

⁸ See also: Prucha (2000, 3, 7, 13). Because Prucha (2000) is a reader, I cite document numbers rather than page numbers.

Despite the principles of early U.S. grand strategy emphasizing a desire for expansion while avoiding wars with Native nations, the U.S. nonetheless found itself in such wars quite frequently—as noted above, it fought in 50 such wars in roughly the first 100 years of its independence. This article focuses on federal intervention in settler conflicts with Native nations. That is, I am interested in cases in which settlers initiated violent conflicts with Native nations and in which the federal government had to choose whether to intervene. What is it in these cases that affected federal intervention decisions? Studying this outcome and the process leading to such decisions entails focusing on multiple sets of actors, including settlers themselves, local and state officials, federal elites such as presidents and secretaries of war, and Native nations that often had relatively decentralized political structures. That is, the outcome was shaped by a complex concatenation of factors that led to a divergence between the principles and practice of early U.S. grand strategy.

The decision of whether to authorize federal intervention into settler-led conflicts with Native Nations was the product of the interaction between a number of factors, but the most consequential way for settlers to garner federal assistance was for them to simply initiate conflict in the process of seizing territory. This two-fold *fait accompli* of settling on land and initiating violent conflict with Native nations who claimed that same land as their own had multiple effects that combined to push federal officials toward military intervention.

First, settlers put pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for military intervention. Regarding speculators, settlers helped to establish that there was widespread demand for territory that the U.S. had not yet claimed or that the U.S. still held as the

public domain. The speculator is an important figure in the history of U.S. expansion, but speculation would not have been a very profitable venture if not for settlers, real and anticipated. Speculators, as one historian puts it, “were attempting to anticipate settlers’ needs,” (Gates 1942, 321), though others caution that the financial rewards varied widely: “the speculative losses of some real-estate plungers were canceled by the speculative gains of others” (Bogue and Bogue 1957, 24). Regardless of actual profitability, the belief that land speculation could be lucrative due sufficed to encourage the practice (Murtazashvili 2013, 67, n.6). This actual and presumed settler demand helped to create an additional class of people beyond the settlers—that is, speculators, many of whom were relatively wealthy and well-connected—who had an interest in rapid U.S. expansion. When Native nations resisted settler expansion, speculators often felt that lobbying for federal military intervention was the best way to protect their investments (Shannon 1991, 407).

Settlers similarly put pressure on local elites to lobby federal officials for intervention by settling on disputed territory and initiating conflicts with Native nations intervention. Settlers typically believed that they had perfectly fair claims to the lands they occupied, but the federal government was often skeptical of such claims. As noted above, federal officials generally sought a more controlled process of expansion. Settlers thus relied on intermediaries to make the case for federal intervention in the militarized disputes that settlers started (Wilm 2017). While the pressure on speculators was more often indirect, settlers often directly appealed to these local officials, whether administrators of city, county, state, or territorial offices, most of whom had good reason to support settler requests for federal military intervention. Supporting such requests was a good way for local office-holders to retain popular support given the widespread view that

settlers were appropriately serving to advance U.S. expansion, as was calling for federal intervention instead of pressing local militia men into service.

Second, settler *faits accomplis* made federal officials perceive non-intervention as increasingly costly. In short, as low-level conflict between settlers and Native nations dragged on, political elites came to fear that settlers might want to pursue independence or alliance with a foreign power if the federal government did not intervene. In such cases, federal officials sometimes saw military intervention as a useful way to signal to those on the frontier that elites did indeed want them to remain Americans and that elites could offer settlers reason to remain in the Union.

Third, settler *faits accomplis* pushed federal officials toward war by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. That is, settler land seizures and violence gave Native nations good reason to doubt the federal government's ability to keep the promises it made in treaty negotiations. In so doing, settlers made some Native nations—or groups within such nations—less likely to agree to bargains or to come to the bargaining table in the first place. Once confronted with apparently untrusting peoples, the federal and territorial (civilian and military) officials that U.S. decision-makers sent to treaty talks interpreted well-founded Native distrust as a determination on their part to make war. Upon learning from such interlocutors that Native nations were reportedly disinclined toward peace, federal elites frequently determined that the proper way to protect settlers and deter further conflict was with a show of military force.

A Permissive Condition

One significant permissive condition that gave settlers outsized influence in the initiation of conflicts with Native nations, I argue, was political elites' long-time refusal to create a large standing army. As just noted, the civilian policy-maker often assumed a display of sufficient military force (without the actual use of violence) would suffice to impress upon Native nations that a settlement was preferable to war. Many early political elites, however, thought that the lack of a large standing army was only appropriate for a (relatively) liberal democracy (Schwoerer 1974; Shalhope 1982). I argue that this absence—whatever its salutary effects on U.S. civic life—also gave settlers outsized power vis-à-vis the federal government in relations with Native nations. Specifically, the lack of a large standing army gave settlers more opportunity to provoke conflict in up to four different ways. First, political elites lacked the ability to prevent widespread settlement in disputed territory (Richter 2001, 224-228). Second, political elites also lacked the ability to deter settler attacks on Native nations and vice versa. Third, political elites often lacked the ability to reliably and accurately assess the intentions and capabilities of Native nations groups. Fourth, the lack of a large standing army meant that settlers often relied on local militias as a first line of defense. Individuals in these militias—often drawn from settler communities—would have more personal interest in initiating conflict and seizing land than professionalized soldiers would have had.

For the entirety of the time the United States was expanding across the continent and making new territorial claims, U.S. political elites empowered militias while keeping the standing army relatively small (Whisker 1999, 12-14). The ratio of U.S. military personnel to

total population, for example, remained quite low throughout the period from 1783 to 1890; brief surges in military personnel during major wars quickly gave way to the traditionally small standing army.⁹ Absent a larger military that could enforce federal directives designed to keep settlers and Native nations apart, “Presidential policies of restraint carried only so much weight. ...State militias and citizen-soldiers acted with substantial autonomy, even to the extent of ignoring presidential proclamations on Indian Policy” (Fisher 2013, 20).

Inhibiting Factors

I conclude this section by discussing factors that, unlike the *faits accomplis* of settlers, discouraged federal intervention in settler-driven conflicts with Native nations. I identify two factors that often gave federal officials pause when considering using military force to aid settlers. First, federal officials generally tried to determine whether the distribution of power would be in the government’s favor based on assessments of Native nations’ fighting forces compared to potential combinations of militia men and federal troops. Although such assessments were often skewed by racialized conceptions of purportedly primitive Native military techniques, some federal officials learned not to underestimate Native nations.

Second, intervention decisions accounted for settler identities. It was typically the case that federal officials saw frontier settlers as less civilized than Eastern city folk (Saler 2015, 22). But settlers and intermediary officials often explicitly made the case to federal officials that

⁹ This ratio stood at .031% in 1790; conflicts such as the War of 1812 helped boost this number to .093% by 1835, but it was only at .089% in 1875. Momentary spikes for the Mexican-American War and, more notably, the Civil War, were followed by drastic reductions in military personnel (Singer 1987).

military assistance was warranted given that settlers were regular, even ideal Protestant Americans dedicated to improving the land and expanding the boundaries of the state—something that they often claimed was in line with God’s clear intention for Americans to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth (Wilm 2017). On rare occasions, however, settlers could not so credibly claim a shared identity with elites, and such cleavages cut against federal intervention. For example, both of these factors—the distribution of power and identity cleavages—cut against federal intervention in Utah’s Black Hawk War, in which greatly belated federal intervention aimed less at assisting settlers than it did at asserting U.S. control over the territory’s Latter-day Saints.¹⁰

IV. Methods

I frame this article with the puzzle noted above—what explains the ability of settlers to get federal officials to intervene in militarized disputes with Native nations that the elites preferred to avoid? The question I seek to answer thus takes the form, “What *Xs* explain *Y* for one or more specific cases,” and this “causes-of-effects” approach leads me to the method of process tracing (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 43). I thus trace the process by which such wars occurred in order to adjudicate between rival explanations. This article focuses primarily on the

¹⁰ Leaders and members of the Church had long used the “Mormon” label, but President Russell M. Nelson released guidelines in mid-2018 stating that it would be more appropriate to refer to adherents as “members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” or “Latter-day Saints”). On the other hand, Church guidelines allow for the use of the term “Mormon” “in proper names such as the Book of Mormon or when used as an adjective. In such historical expressions as ‘Mormon trail’. When describing the religion itself, the guidelines discourage the use of the term “Mormonism” and instead encourage the phrase, “the restored gospel of Jesus Christ”. However, there are some smaller denominations that still accept “Mormon” and “Mormonism” as appropriate terminology, and many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continue to use this identifier despite the leadership’s recent change (Riess 2019). As I do in discussing Native nations, I aim for clarity of expression while remaining sensitive to terminological preferences, even as those differ within communities.

case of the Northwest Indian War (1790-95). I offer brief comparative cases of the Second Seminole War (1835-42) and Utah's aforementioned Black Hawk War of 1865-72 (which is not to be confused with an earlier, unrelated conflict involving different Native and settler populations known as the Black Hawk War that took place in 1832).¹¹ Examining cases that vary across time, space, state capacity, casualties, tribes involved, and political leadership—that is, using a “least similar” case design (George and Bennett 2005, 82-83)—will allow me to better compare my argument with plausible alternative explanations.¹² I outline some of the key aspects of the cases below in Table 1.

In studying the origins of the Northwest Indian War, process tracing entails identifying “a configuration of densely linked causal factors,” factors that I have already outlined above (Blatter and Blume 2008, 29). I collect data on relevant sequences of events and focus on within-case analysis to identify plausibly causal factors and the ways in which they interact (Waldner 2012). In assessing the case, I rely in part on secondary sources, but I put a premium on primary sources, including archival documents.¹³

¹¹ These dates come with the caveat that, “Only some of the Indian wars involved pitched battles, ascribable combatants, identifiable outcomes, and obvious start and finish dates” (Spirling 2012, 91). Some, for example, put the starting date of the Northwest Indian War as early as 1785 or 1786. I opt for 1790 as this is when Washington orders the first major U.S. military offensive after years of low-intensity conflict involving settlers.

¹² For facts such as casualty numbers, I rely on secondary sources, including Sword (1985), Mahon (1991 [1967]), and Census Bureau (1890, 638).

¹³ I use the following secondary sources for historical data on settlements, military postings, and Native nation populations: Lavin et al. (2011), Waldman (2009), Bradford (2003), Carnes et al. (1996), and Fernald et al. (1992).

Table 1. Case Summaries

	Years	U.S. President at War Initiation	Native Nations Involved ¹⁴	U.S. Real GDP per capita in year of Initiation ¹⁵	Ratio of U.S. Military Population to U.S. Total Population in year of Initiation ¹⁶	U.S. Deaths ¹⁷	Native Deaths (approximations)
Northwest Indian War	1790-95	Washington	Shawnee, Miami, Delaware, Ottawa, Ojibwa, Kickapoo, Wyandot, Cherokee, Mingo, Wabash, Illini, Lenape, Six Nations (Iroquois), Chippewa, and Potawatomi	\$1107.32	.031%	814	120
Second Seminole War	1835-42	Jackson	Seminole	\$2,047.65	.093%	1,590	540
Black Hawk War	1865-72	Johnson ¹⁸	Ute, Paiute, Navajo, Apache	\$3,394.00	2.98% ¹⁹	75 ²⁰	300

¹⁴ Groups listed in each box had some segment of their population involved in hostilities, but this proportion varied across groups. Lists of groups as well as numbers of casualties are drawn from secondary sources, including Sword (1985), Mahon (1991 [1967]), and Peterson (1999).

¹⁵ In FY 2012 dollars (Johnston and Williamson 2018).

¹⁶ For the year 1790, which the Correlates of War national capabilities dataset (Singer 1987) does not include, I substitute census data (Census Bureau, 2017) on total population (3,929,214), and I put the number of military personnel at 1,216 following McDermott (1998, 9).

¹⁷ I include deaths of combatants even if they died of, e.g., disease rather than being killed in action. I include U.S. Army and militia soldiers alike, but I do not include civilian deaths, about which historical records offer little certainty. For similar reasons, I do not list the number of wounded combatants.

¹⁸ Here I list Johnson as the U.S. President at war initiation because the federal government did not take any military action until 1868. The initial incident that set off this long-running conflict between settlers and Utes (though other tribes became involved as well) occurred on April 8, 1865, a week before Johnson's predecessor, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated. It was not until the Grant presidency, however, that federal officials became more directly involved in this conflict.

¹⁹ This especially high number is due to the Civil War. A rapid draw-down, however, would see the military-to-total-population ratio reduced to about 0.2% by 1866.

²⁰ Many Native raids were aimed at seizing or driving off livestock rather than killing settlers.

Alternative Explanations and Observable Implications

I consider two alternative explanations here. First, one might claim that where settlers succeeded in drawing federal officials into militarized disputes, it was the lack of the early U.S. republic's state capacity that prevented elites from more robustly deterring conflict and enforcing agreements that they made with Native nations. Second, one might suggest that this phenomenon is not actually as puzzling as I suggest—despite public hand-wringing, U.S. presidents were not truly hesitant to use military force against Native nations and instead saw settler provocations as useful opportunities to seize land. (One might push this further and suggest that elites incentivized settler provocations). That is, elites were at best ambivalent about whether expansion proceeded violently. To adjudicate between my proposed explanation and the two plausible alternatives, I identify several observable implications across which the explanations can be compared. As Musgrave and Nexon (2018, 15) put it, “In its Bayesian reformulation, process tracing focuses on evaluating the likelihood that given evidence would be observed if one theoretical explanation were true compared to others.”

If the effects of settler *faits accomplis* outlined above best explain settlers' ability to bring political elites into militarized disputes with Native nations, we would expect to see the following: (1) costly, protracted elite attempts at non-violent territorial acquisition; (2) costly elite punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with strict instructions and rules of engagement designed to avoid conflict initiation; (4) elites not providing incentives for settlement on disputed territory (and/or actively disincentivizing such settlement); (5) settlers initiating violent conflict with Native nations prior

to U.S military intervention; (6) elite support for only a small standing army based on stated concerns about a larger army's potential effects on the nation's politics.

If low state capacity offers the best explanation for this phenomenon, we would expect to see the following: (1) less costly, protracted elite attempts at non-violent territorial acquisition; (2) limited punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with strict instructions and rules of engagement designed to avoid conflict initiation; (4) elites not providing incentives for settlement on disputed territory; (5) settlers initiating violent conflict with Native nations prior to U.S. military intervention; (6) elite support for only a small standing army based on concerns about the financial burden of maintaining a larger military.

If, however, the best explanation is that U.S. political elites had a comparatively weak preference for non-violent territorial acquisition, we would expect to see the following: (1) little if any elite attempts at non-violent territorial expansion (e.g., they are quick to resort to violence if initially denied in their non-violent attempts at expansion); (2) little if any elite punishment of settlers on disputed territory; (3) elites providing relevant military and civilian officials with loose instructions and rules of engagement designed to encourage or at least allow for conflict initiation; (4) elites providing recognized incentives for settlement on disputed territory and not actively disincentivizing such settlement; (5) the military initiating violent conflict with Native nations prior to settlers and/or the military rapidly joining conflicts initiated by settlers; (6) no particular pattern with respect to statements for or against a small standing army.

Terms

By “Native nations,” I mean the Indigenous peoples of North America who settled there well before the European “discovery” of the continent. Because my focus is on early U.S. foreign policy, however, I am generally not referring to peoples outside the U.S. such as Canada’s First Nations or Indigenous peoples of Central and South America. Similarly, because the timing and patterns of territorial expansion that affected Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians differed substantially from those in the contiguous United States, I do not address the experiences of those peoples here. That is, the scope of my inquiry only extends to those groups that live(d) in what is now the contiguous United States. When speaking generally of such peoples, I refer to them as Native nations (NAJA 2018). I generally refer to distinct nations as a group, nation, or tribes, with the latter being used especially in the context of federal policy, which recognizes tribes through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. All that said, I use specific tribe names as frequently as possible, and individuals differ in the terminology they prefer.

By “settlers,” I mean non-governmental, non-military U.S. persons who emigrated from one place in what is now the continental United States to another, generally from existing states to more sparsely populated territories to claim land for themselves with the goal of establishing legal permanent residence.²¹ Some were explicitly sanctioned by the government, but many were not, especially in the antebellum period. Political elites repeatedly passed and approved laws that would ban, for example, settlers from living on certain disputed lands or from trading with

²¹ Settlers by this definition are neither agents of the government nor are they necessarily intermediaries in Grynaviski’s sense of the word, for whom an intermediary “bridges a structural hole through the use of her weak ties” (2018, 27). See also: Veracini (2013).

certain groups absent federal authorization. Nonetheless, “in those instances where [the government] tried to restrict settlement, it almost uniformly failed” under relentless pressure from settlers that thought it better to ask forgiveness than permission (Edwards et al. 2017, 7-9).

I refer to the militarized disputes between Native nations and the U.S. as the “Indian Wars” in keeping with the historiography on the subject. This, however, prompts the important question as to whether an IR scholar should categorize these conflicts as wars. Indeed, I contend that it is sufficient for the purposes of this piece to examine militarized disputes that the participants thought of as wars, and even if one would prefer to recast these conflicts as counterinsurgency campaigns or acts of genocide, none of these concepts are mutually exclusive.²²

V. Case Study: The Northwest Indian War

In this section, I trace the process by which the Northwest Indian War began. I structure the case study in line with the theoretical framework outlined above, though I order it slightly differently. I first introduce my case study by making the case that policy-makers in particular wanted to expand into the “Old Northwest” while avoiding war. These lands, acquired from Britain after U.S. victory in the Revolutionary War, cover what today is Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota, though Ohio and Indiana saw the bulk of the early settlement simply by virtue of being closer to extant U.S. territories. I then examine the

²² By Urlacher’s (2021) standard—“Warfare is defined as a 1) systematic mobilized campaign by one actor against another actor resulting in a minimum of 20 combat related deaths in a single year; 2) the targeted actor must be able to militarily resist; and 3) the goal of the initiating actor must be...achieving political ends”—all the conflicts I discuss here and many of the other Indian Wars would indeed count as wars.

permissive condition—the lack of a large standing army—that would help enable settler-driven conflict in this region. I then examine the three ways in which settlers nudged political elites toward war in this case.

The Desire for Expansion—without War

In 1783, as noted above, George Washington communicated in a letter to Congressman James Duane of New York that the newly independent United States would do well to avoid any wars with the Native nations that inhabited the territory England had just ceded in the Treaty of Paris. “To suffer a wide extended Country to be over run with Land Jobbers, Speculators, and Monopolisers or even with scatter’d settlers,” he wrote, “...is pregnant of disputes both with the Savages and among ourselves” (Prucha 2000, 1). He argued in this same letter for the purchase rather than the conquest of Native nations and—until such lands could be purchased—federal restraint of settlers. “We will...establish a boundary line between them and us beyond which we will *endeavor* to restrain our People from Hunting or Settling. ...I am clear in my opinion, that policy and oeconomy point very strongly to the expediency of being upon good terms with the Indians, and the propriety of purchasing their Lands in preference to attempting to drive them by force of arms out of their Country.”²³ The principle was expansion, to be sure, but elites wanted “to regulate the pace of expansion” (Ostler 2019, 93).

As in his private correspondence, Washington pressed for a pacific Indian policy in relations with Congress. He spoke of his desire “that all need of coercion in future [sic] may

²³ Italics in original.

cease and that an intimate intercourse may succeed...to advance the happiness of the Indians and to attach them firmly to the United States” and “for the improvement of harmony with all the Indians within our limits by the fixing and conducting of trading houses upon the principles then expressed”.²⁴ By June of 1790, however, just a year into Washington’s first term as President, he had decided that the U.S. would need to use military force against “certain banditti of Indians from the northwest side of the Ohio” (quoted in Sword 1985, 82). He, like many of his successors, tried and failed to promote U.S. expansion without going to war with Native nations.

To elaborate on the steps early political elites took in trying to avoid war in this case, Congress—both under the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution—authorized multiple rounds of treaty negotiations. This would result in, for example, the Treaty of Fort McIntosh, a treaty signed with Ohio-region Wyandots and Delawares in January of 1785, attempts to hold treaties in 1787, 1788, and 1790, and early Congressional revisions to the Northwest Ordinance designed to make explicit the U.S. desire to acquire Native land by purchase rather than conquest (Sword 1985, 28, 50, 62).²⁵

Once the Northwest Territory was organized as such, these negotiations came under the purview of its first governor, Arthur St. Clair, a major general in the Continental Army and later President of the Continental Congress. St. Clair had routine communications with Henry Knox and John Jay, Secretaries of War and Foreign Affairs, respectively, during the late Confederation period (Saler 2015). Knox and Jay stayed in their posts once Washington entered office in early

²⁴ The respective quotes come from his third and sixth annual addresses to Congress (Washington 1791; Washington 1794).

²⁵ For more detail on one such Congressional authorization of expenditures related to the “promoting a friendly intercourse, and preserving peace with the Indian tribes,” see U.S. Congress (1790, 2241).

1789 (though Jay only stayed in an acting capacity through March of 1790; his successor, Thomas Jefferson, would be the Secretary of State through 1793. Regardless of which policy-makers St. Clair was receiving orders from, they were consistently oriented toward expansion without war. Indeed, the federal government took steps to ensure that settlers could not scuttle treaty negotiations, even going so far as to drive settlers off the land from time to time, especially ahead of treaty negotiations (Sword 1985, 56; Tate 1999, 238-39). The ultimate goal, however, remained expansion—at the same time that the military was being tasked with driving off illegal settlers, policy-makers were authorizing land surveys, making plans to pay off U.S. debt with land sales, and so on.

Over the course of multiple treaty negotiations, U.S. political elites came to believe that they were successfully balancing their desire for expansion with their desire to avoid war. As late as January 1789, it seemed to these decision-makers that a non-violent resolution was soon forthcoming. But they often misunderstood who they were bargaining with and what their counterparts were able to authorize—some tribes signed away land without soliciting the agreement of other tribes that properly should have had a say in negotiations, for example, and the parties involved in negotiations sometimes did not represent all relevant decision-makers within their own tribe (Sugden 2000, 7-9).

A Permissive Condition

Before continuing to the argument that settler *faits accomplis* in the Old Northwest led elites to reluctantly intervene, I discuss the permissive condition that I have argued is conducive

to such patterns of behavior. The United States began its political existence with an exceptionally small standing army—deliberations of the Continental Congress yielded a 700-man military drawn from state militias for the purpose of protecting “the northwestern frontiers of the United States, and their Indian friends and allies, and for garrisoning the posts soon to be evacuated by the troops of his britannic Majesty” (Dalton 1784, n. 2).²⁶

The primary consideration in these deliberations—a point most forcefully made by New Englanders—does not appear to have been whether the U.S. could afford a large standing army but whether “the principles of republican governments...[and] the liberties of a free people” could be maintained if the state relied on a larger standing army (Ibid). That is, this permissive condition came about due to ideas about the role of a military in a democracy, not because of limited state capacity. Indeed, those in the federal government tended to assume that opposition to a large standing army was a given. During Virginia’s state convention on the ratification of the new U.S. Constitution, for example, then-Governor Edmund Randolph noted that, “With respect to a standing army, I believe there was not a member in the federal Convention, who did not feel indignation at such an institution” (Randolph 1788, 401). The military would grow incrementally for the next two decades—spurred in part by conflict with Native Nations as well as domestic uprisings such as Shay’s Rebellion—but a more substantial change in military personnel and organization would not come until the War of 1812 (Katznelson 2002, 95-96).

Despite this opposition to a large standing army, political elites still needed some way to enforce prohibitions on settlement in certain areas. The Confederation Congress left this task to

²⁶ See also: Millett and Maslowski (1984, 85-87).

Josiah Harmar, Lieutenant Colonel Commandant of the First American Regiment, the nation's 700-man force. His task, at least when he was first sent to the Northwest Territory in 1784, was to keep the peace in the Northwest, and Harmar understood a prominent part of this to be the prevention of settlement in disputed territory (Sword 1985, 89). As he wrote about two-and-a-half years into his assignment, "I humbly conceive that the great objects I have to attend to, will be, to prevent illegal encroachments on the public lands, to secure happiness to the inhabitants, and to protect private property from arbitrary invasion, and to remove, if possible, diffidence, fear, & jealousy from the minds of the Indians; to these points I shall lend my attention" (Harmar 1787, 120).²⁷ Harmar was at the same time being urged to avoid any actions that would produce a general war—that is, a war between the U.S. and the various tribes of the Old Northwest. Immediately prior to a 1788 treaty council, Knox relayed to St. Clair that he must avoid provoking a war; to Harmar, Knox noted that a war "would at present be embarrassing beyond conception" (quoted in Sword 1985, 67). Harmar and his hundreds of soldiers were ill-equipped to deal with thousands of settlers and Native individuals.

Settler Faits Accomplis

While political elites debated the virtues of the standing army, settlers were moving in droves to the territory that England had ceded to the United States in 1783. The United States claimed to exercise sovereignty over the ceded territory (east of the Mississippi and south of Canada, excluding Spanish Florida) by virtue of conquest, though Americans had been moving in fewer numbers onto the land of what is now Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana for decades before

²⁷ Here "the public lands" refers to those lands claimed by both the United States and Native nations.

the war (Hurt 1996, 76-80). Indeed, Britain encouraged much of the earliest violence between settlers and Native nations of the area, and it continued to do so even after the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War (Ibid.; Sword 1985, 98-99). But the end of the war would see a rush of new settlers, including military veterans who sought (and sometimes received) land grants as a reward for their service (McGlinchey 2006, 129). These were mostly relatively poor individuals who left the more populous original colonies for the prospect of abundant farmland (Saler 2015, 47).

Much of the United States' small military was stationed in the Ohio region at that time in an effort to keep the peace between settlers and Native nations, but the hundreds of soldiers posted to a few frontier forts were not well-equipped to confront tens of thousands of much more diffuse settlers (Ostler 2019, 85).²⁸ Given that the military could deter neither settlement nor Native attacks against settlers, locals often responded to violence with violence of their own (Wooster 2009, 6-8). Brigadier General George Rogers Clark, for example, led an unauthorized force of mostly volunteer Kentucky militia members in a series of attacks on Shawnee towns (Prucha 1969, 8-11). As Secretary of War Henry Knox reported shortly thereafter, "The injuries & murders have been so reciprocal, that it would be a point of critical investigation to know on which side they have been the greatest" (1789, 3). Is it, however, fair to say that settlers brought political elites into wars that the elites would have preferred to avoid? I make the case below that the three mechanisms outlined above did indeed help settlers push political elites into the Northwest Indian War against their better judgment.

²⁸ Ostler notes that the settler population of Kentucky grew from 12,000 in 1783 to 74,000 in 1790, and other frontier territories saw similar growth in the same time period.

Settlers, Speculators, and Local Elites

For much of the latter half of the eighteenth century, American colonists and political elites dreamed of expansion westward across the Appalachians, beyond which the British Crown had sought to restrict American settlement. Even before the U.S. sought and gained independence, political elites and land speculation corporations occasionally sent surveyors into the Ohio region to assess the viability of the land for settlement (Johnston 1898, 106-107, n. 2). Demand for this land was real, but it was also assumed. For the federal government's part, independence came with a heavy burden of debt, which it believed it would be able to minimize with sales of newly acquired territory, including grants to members of the Continental Army who might be compensated with land. In other words, political and business interests alike had an interest in making the territory of the Ohio region ready for sale and settlement, but it was settler demand that preceded these interests and made land speculation a (sometimes) profitable venture.

Land speculation has been defined as “an economic activity which included, at one extreme, land purchases which involved great risk and the possibility of large profit and, at the other extreme, land purchases of limited risk and smaller but more certain profits” (Haeger 1981, 75). That is, the precise approach of different speculators varied, but it always involved the purchase of land with the goal of resale at a profit. What made land valuable to speculators was demand for the land, which indeed there was. At times, there was even too much. “The attraction of choice locations led regularly to settlement in advance of purchase-squatting. ... Thousands of

such petty *faits accomplis* all over the Northwest frontier could hardly be reversed, no matter how powerful the petitioners” (Elkins and McKittrick 1954, 337).

The relationship between settlers and speculators in the Northwest Territory was thus not always mutually beneficial, but there does appear to have been a degree of positive feedback. There was settler demand for land, which made land speculation a potentially profitable pursuit, but competition among speculators meant that they sometimes had to improve their lands to maintain and spark further settler demand (Hurt 1996, 171). It was often the case that “improving” lands meant taking steps to remove Native populations or secure it from potential Native attack. For speculators, the ideal means of securing their lands was to secure federal military intervention, something that speculators operating in the Northwest Territory were doing with increasing frequency as the 1780s progressed. From Samuel H. Parsons, a one-time Indian Commissioner, to Cleves Symmes, a New Jersey Chief Justice, wealthy elites used their fortunes to buy and sell lands in the Northwest Territory, and they used their political connections to push for federal military intervention to quell the violence being directed at settlers (Sword 1985, 45-49).

While this settler pressure on speculators was indirect—it was not typically the case that settlers had any direct connections to wealthy speculators—settlers could more directly bring pressure to bear on local elites who could, in turn, lobby federal policy-makers. In the case of the Northwest Indian War, these were often county, city, or state officials—or the relevant equivalent in territories that were not yet states. Settlers could pressure such officials both through elections and through petitions. Kentucky District settlers, for example, brought enough

such complaints to their district administrators that these local elites eventually compiled a list of “grievances” to present settler concerns to the Virginia state legislature (to which the Kentucky District was beholden before Kentucky became a separate state). Among other complaints, the inability of Kentucky officials “to call out the militia” without approval from Virginia officials was the first item (Clark 1993, 58-62).

In the course of our enquiries, we find that several laws have passed the legislature of Virginia, which, although of a general nature, yet in their operation are particularly oppressive to the people of this district; and we also find, that from our local situation, we are deprived of many benefits of government, which every citizen therein has a right to expect; as a few facts will sufficiently demonstrate. We have no power to call out the militia, our sure and only defence to oppose the wicked machinations of the savages, unless in cases of actual invasion.

Likewise, after an especially costly Native attack on Kentucky settlers (probably by Shawnees or Miamis), settlers pressed their concerns with local officials, who in turn expressed their complaints to the federal government. As one such official wrote to the governor of Virginia, “It is inexplicable to some why the Indians attack our frontiers with such fury, destroying all where they come, when at the same time we are told the Governor of the Western Territory made peace with the Northern Indians last winter. ... Will not Congress adapt some effectual measures before long respecting Indian affairs” (Campbell 1789, 631).

For as long as the “Kentucky District” remained under the jurisdiction of the Virginia state legislature, its state militia could operate within its own jurisdiction (i.e., nearly the entirety of modern Kentucky). By July 1786, however, Kentucky settlers had resolved to attack Ohio region Native nations with whom the settlers had long been engaged in low-level violent conflict. Kentucky District militia leaders asked the Virginia state legislature for permission to

attack beyond its borders, and once it became clear that such permission would not be forthcoming, these same Kentuckians—more specifically, settlers in Jefferson Country—distributed a call for military aid from other Kentucky settlers. Although framed in terms of defending settler populations, the appeal was clearly oriented toward actively seeking out and attacking Native nations. Then-Virginia Governor Patrick Henry felt that he had little choice but to authorize the creation of “some system for their own defense” (Sword 1985, 33).

Federal officials evinced increasing awareness of settler pressure. While the young Washington administration sought to give Ohio tensions time for negotiations, St. Clair pushed the administration for clear decisions in the summer of 1789. At an in-person meeting with Washington, St. Clair told him that the pace of negotiations was allowing for retributive violence to occur. “It is not to be expected, sir, that the Kentucky people will, or can, submit patiently to the cruelties and depredations of those savages; they are in the habit of retaliation” (quoted in Sword 1985, 83). All the while, federal officials struggled to remove illegal squatters to minimize violence. At times, the most that military contingents based in the Northwest Territory could do was refuse assistance to settler raiding parties (Anson 1970, 107). As early as the summer of 1787, Knox had warned Congress that the number of settlers was making it increasingly difficult to remove them (Sword 1985, 45).

It would have been possible for state and federal officials to resist settler pressure. Indeed, the federal government sought for years to avoid war with the Ohio Valley tribes before ultimately deciding to intervene. The next mechanism I discuss, however, often made elites feel

compelled to enter settler-driven conflicts that they would have otherwise ignored or downplayed.

Costs of Non-Intervention

Once settlers conducted the *faits accomplis* of settling on land and initiating violent conflict—and especially once settlers asked for federal intervention on their behalf—they created a situation in which political elites had to decide whether to intervene. The costs of intervention—the various resources a government needed to conduct a military campaign in the 1780s and ‘90s, which all told would be a steep price for any government, let alone a recently independent one—are fairly straightforward. We thus see federal policy-makers especially cite the likely costs of military intervention as a reason to give time for negotiations to play out. Less immediately obvious, however, are the potential costs of non-intervention that elites believed they could face. More specifically, these potential costs included the loss of territory that would come with secession and/or, perhaps even worse, with settler alliances with foreign powers.

As early as 1781, political elites expressed concern that settlers, once they had moved West and established communities of their own, would want independence. It was in that year that an American military commander at Fort Pitt argued to his political superiors that a settler-led “invasion” of the Ohio territory would be the best way of dealing with the “Indian problem,” but civilian officials rejected the idea for fear that these settlers might seek independence or come under British sway (Sword 1985, 55). Given ongoing hostilities, it was an unnecessary risk. But this remained a concern well past U.S. independence. Knox, for example, expressed his

concern in July of 1787 that the “whole western territory is liable to be wrested out of the hands of the Union by lawless adventurers, or by the savages” (quoted in Sword 1985, 47).

Contemporaries from George Washington to James Monroe echoed such concerns about the rise of “rival settler nations” (Saler 2015, 14; Frymer 2017, 46). Ultimately, federal elites often interpreted the question of intervention on behalf of settlers as a question as to whether they should side with the “lawless adventurers” or the “savages,” and although they believed any such wars would likely be costly, they suspected that a victory for Native nations could be even more costly in the long term (Ostler 2019, 119).

Settlers and Credible Commitments

The notion that an inability to credibly commit to uphold international agreements—most importantly, the commitment not to attack another—can be a cause of war is a well-known argument in IR scholarship (Fearon 1995). One thing that the Northwest Indian War helps to illustrate is that the credibility of one’s commitment may not be entirely up to oneself. In this case, the federal government repeatedly sought treaty negotiations with Ohio region tribes while simultaneously being undermined by the settlers for whom it was trying to peacefully acquire land. After decades of violence, divisions had emerged among and within tribes of the Ohio River Valley. Most appear to have believed by the late 1780s that the United States would continue trying to expand at their expense, but different groups disagreed as to what they should do about that. Some believed their respective tribes should seek peace and content themselves with relatively small reservations that were at least on or near their traditional homes. Some however, believed that the United States could not credibly commit to leave them alone even

after making any such concessions—among the Ohio region tribes, these were the groups that ultimately decided for war, which included substantial numbers of the Shawnee and Miami nations.²⁹

By April 23, 1790, the Northwest Indian War was close to breaking out. St. Clair and Harmar dispatched two final messengers with a mandate to seek peace—one of British lineage, the other French. Antoine Gamelin, the French messenger, eventually made it to a Miami town at which he met Blue Jacket, a principal warrior of the Shawnee. Blue Jacket's response indicates the distrust that had formed after repeated U.S. promises and settler-initiated episodes of violence: "From all quarters we receive speeches from the Americans, and not one is alike. We suppose that they intend to deceive us" (Sword 1985, 85; Sugden 2000, 96). Some among the Shawnee would no longer listen to American promises, especially when they came from St. Clair, who possessed little understanding of Native cultures and who often took a harder line in negotiations than his superiors requested (Ostler 2019, 95).

Conflict Initiation and Contemporaneous Explanations

After years of unfruitful negotiations and increasing violence between Northwest Territory settlers and Native nations, President Washington came to the conclusion that only a decisive but narrowly targeted military victory could stop the mutual depredations (Owens 2007,

²⁹ The Miami nation played a significant role in the Northwest Indian War—to the extent that the war is sometimes referred to as "Little Turtle's War" after a Miami leader, Mishikinakwa, or Little Turtle. While the Shawnee appear to have been the most significant Native nation involved in the war as far as the fighting forces go, some of the early Native victories are indeed attributable to Mishikinakwa (Carter 1987, 38). When Native nations went to war, however, it was not usually the case that all members of a given nation or tribe went to war (Sugden 2000, 9).

16). In consultation with Henry Knox, Washington authorized Harmar to use whatever force necessary to attack those groups believed to be responsible for depredations on settlers. By this point, the size of the military had increased slightly to 1,216 men (McDermott 1998, 9). U.S. civilian leaders sought to avoid a broader war by ordering Harmar to punish only specific groups that had been involved in violence against settlers and by communicating their intentions to British officials still in the region to avoid unnecessary escalation (Sword 1985, 94). Knox, who remained skeptical of the virtues of settlers, nonetheless explained to Washington that their decision to intervene would not only “strike terror into the minds of the Indians” but also would be “highly satisfactory to the people of the frontiers” (Quoted in Sword 1985, 87).

From Harmar’s inaugural defeat through the deciding battle at Fallen Timbers and the signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, the United States eagerly sought an end to hostilities and a negotiated settlement (Owens 2007, 19).³⁰ The most sustained period of negotiations came between the fall of 1792 and the spring of 1793, but the Shawnees in particular insisted that treaty boundaries be redrawn—to accord with the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix as opposed to the more circumscribed 1785 Treaty of Fort McIntosh—and that the U.S. government remove settlers north of the Ohio River. Neither was a winning proposition to U.S. representatives given the steadily increasing settler presence, nor were U.S. demands that the Ohio tribes simply sell the land that settlers were encroaching on (Calloway 2007, 98-101).

Secretary of War Henry Knox’s letters and reports to Washington offer glimpses of the roles that settlers played in decision-making. In December of 1790, Knox wrote to Washington

³⁰ One exchange of speeches between U.S. and Native officials is recorded in George Washington’s papers. See: Putnam et al. (1792).

to inveigh against a proposal by Arthur St. Clair. “It will be our true wisdom to condense our population instead of dispersing it. Besides the expense of protecting such distant settlements greatly exceeds the value of them, whether considered as purchases of the land, as consumers of articles contributing to the revenue, or as constituting a strength of any real use to the empire.” After making the case that the United States could not afford to protect even more expansive settlements, Knox asserted in the same letter that to turn the war into a land grab would sully the virtue of those involved: “To grasp an additional territory will give the expedition an avaricious aspect. ... The motives of the expedition ought to appear as they really are—A clear and uncompromised dictate of Justice to punish a banditti of robbers, and murderers, who have refused to listen to the voice of peace and humanity” (Knox 1790).

Two years after the war began, Knox (1792) provided his view of how the war started (italics are my own):

It appears, that the unprovoked aggressions of the Miami and Wabash Indians upon Kentucky and other parts of the frontiers; together with their associates, a banditti, formed of Shawanese and outcast Cherokees, amounting in all to about one thousand two hundred men, are solely the causes of the war. ... The frontier settlements were disquieted by frequent depredations and murders; and the complaints of their inhabitants, (as might be expected) of the pacific forbearance of the government, were loud, repeated, and distressing—their calls for protection incessant—till at length they appeared determined by their own efforts to endeavor to retaliate the injuries they were continually receiving, and which had become intolerable. ... But notwithstanding the ill success of former experiments, and the invincible spirit of animosity which had appeared in certain tribes, and which was of a nature to justify a persuasion that no impression could be made upon them by pacific expedients, *it was still deemed advisable to make one more essay.* [Between 1783 and 1790, Native nations] on the Ohio, and the frontiers on the south side thereof...killed, wounded and took prisoners, about *one thousand five hundred men, women and children; besides carrying off upwards of two thousand horses, and other property to the amount of fifty thousand dollars.* A frontier citizen possesses as strong claims to protection as any other citizen. The frontiers are the vulnerable parts of every country; and the obligation of the government of the United States, to afford the requisite protection, cannot be less

sacred in reference to the inhabitants of their Western, than to those of their Atlantic Frontier.³¹

While Knox maintained that aggression by the Ohio region's Native nations was the sole cause of the conflict, he acknowledged several important things. The purported aggressions in question were directed at settlers, he said, and settlers sought to respond with violence of their own, apparently without any direct federal assistance or encouragement. Furthermore, he reported that 1,500 men, women, and children were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner in a seven-year period, which speaks to the volume of settlement and the related violence in what was clearly disputed territory. Knox also mentions that settlers actively sought federal intervention on their behalf, that the federal government was aware of these requests and still sought to negotiate for peace, and that in his view settlers were ultimately Americans with a legitimate claim to federal aid.

By the time he wrote a similarly lengthy letter to Washington in 1794, Knox was more explicit about the role of settlers in pulling the government into militarized disputes. "The desires of too many frontier white people to seize by force or fraud upon the neighbouring Indian lands has been and still continues to be an unceasing cause of jealousy and hatred on the part of the Indians," he wrote, "and it would appear upon a calm investigation that until the Indians can be quieted upon this point and rely with confidence upon the protection of their lands by the United States no well grounded hope of tranquility can be entertained" (Knox 1794).

³¹ As noted in the report itself, Knox wrote this report in response to a January 16th, 1792 request by President Washington that he "prepare and publish, from authentic documents, a statement of those circumstances [that led to the war], as well as of the measures which have been taken, from time to time, for the re-establishment of peace and friendship."

VI. Comparing Cases and Assessing Alternative Explanations

The Second Seminole War, 1835-1842

The Second Seminole War, as the name suggests, was preceded by another dispute between the U.S. and the Seminoles of Florida. For most of the eighteenth century and through at least 1810, Florida was an “under-funded and over-hyped afterthought” to Spain and England, and it remained mostly “Indian country” until U.S. settlers took up residence and the federal government followed (Frank 2005: 26-27). By 1816, having made a name for himself in the War of 1812, then-General Andrew Jackson decided to pursue a group of escaped slaves and Seminoles living in an abandoned British fort in the Florida panhandle.³² Both settlers and elites alike, once they heard of this so-called “negro fort,” feared that it would inspire more slaves to attempt escape or even to revolt against slave-holders. Jackson’s destruction of this fort was the single most deadly event in the First Seminole War, though violence between settlers and Seminoles continued, as did Jackson’s sporadic, one-sided attacks on Seminoles, escaped slaves, and Spaniards (Mahon 1991 [1967], 23).

Anglo-American settlers recognized the receding Spanish influence and took advantage of the situation. William Duval, Governor of Florida from 1822 to 1834, would later complain that, “Citizens have purchased property from the Indians shortly before the surrender of Florida, by allarming [sic] the Indians by telling them that the americans were coming immedeately to

³² The extent to which Jackson was free-lancing is debated; see Mahon (1991 [1967]): 24-28.

take possession of the country and that they would take from the Indians their slaves, Horses, and cattle, and urging them to sell, in order to save some part of their property.”³³ Spain would ultimately cede the territory to the United States after a short period of negotiations, and Jackson would serve as its first military governor. All of this was part of an ongoing pattern—“growing federal representation of frontier constituencies and attitudes, coupled with an enduring lack of tribal representation,” a combination that would make settler requests for federal assistance all the more powerful (Maass 2020, 82).

The Second Seminole War would begin in late 1835 as Andrew Jackson, who was first elected President in 1828, pushed for the removal of American Indians to the west of the Mississippi River. Jackson believed that Native groups would be best served by emigrating west—he did not believe that American Indian groups living in U.S.-claimed territories possessed valid claims to sovereignty, and he did not believe that settlers would abide the nearby presence of rival self-governing groups. As he put it while advocating for the removal bill, “It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites,” which he saw as a necessary condition for both the continued existence of American Indian groups as distinct peoples and the end of settler-driven violence (1830).

Among the groups that Jackson wanted to remove was the Seminole tribe of Florida, something for which settlers had petitioned (Monaco 2012). The War Department authorized the use of a special agent to negotiate with the Seminoles on January 30, 1832; James Gadsden would be the negotiator, and his mandate was to convince the Seminoles to move west (Mahon

³³ Governor William Pope Duval, “Letter to Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas L. McKenney,” (March 17, 1826) in Carter (1958): 473.

1991 [1967], 74). In the course of Gadsden's meetings with Seminole leaders, seven chiefs eventually signed the Treaty of Payne's Landing on May 9, 1832, but it was not submitted to the Senate for ratification until December of 1833 (Prucha 1994, 175-176). The Senate took until April 8, 1834 to approve it, and Jackson announced four days later that the treaty would henceforth come into effect. The treaty stipulated that the Seminoles were to move west within three years, but the language was contested—it was not clear whether that was to be three years from the date of the chiefs' signing or from the date of its approval by the Senate and the President (Mahon 1991 [1967], 75-79). American officials, including Indian Agent Wiley Thompson (appointed to the position in August 1833) and Attorney General Benjamin Franklin Butler, made the case for the former, giving the Seminoles until May of 1835 to begin their emigration.³⁴ The Seminoles, even those who still accepted the treaty by that point, believed that they should have until 1837.

When Thompson's report of these frustrated meetings made it to the president, Jackson wrote, "Let a sufficient military fore [sic] be forthwith ordered to protect our citizens and remove and protect the Indians agreeable to the Stipulations of the Treaty" (Ibid., 93). The War Department sent ten companies to Florida, but neither the Secretary of War nor President Jackson himself seem to have given the officers on the ground a hard deadline for the removal of the Seminoles. Indeed, they allowed the deadline (the one that they believed to be in accordance with the treaty) to pass without forcibly removing anyone. The officers in command in Florida were urged to carry out the Seminoles' removal as quickly as practicable, but they were also

³⁴ Attorney General Benjamin Franklin Butler, "Letter to Secretary of War Lewis Cass," (March 26, 1835) in Carter (1960): 122-123.

authorized to delay any action until the spring of 1836 (Ibid., 94). All the while, settlers did what they could to press for decisive federal intervention.³⁵

In April of 1835, sixteen chiefs would sign a document accepting the validity of the Treaty of Payne's Landing.³⁶ Meetings between Thompson and the remaining, reluctant Seminole leaders continued, and these meetings became increasingly volatile over time. As civilian leaders came to believe that further negotiations would not convince the Seminoles to leave Florida, they issued a demand that the Seminoles report for removal. Military officials were still being told to avoid violence that could create a wider war, but "[when] ordered by the U.S. Army to gather at Tampa Bay in early January 1836, the Seminoles and their black allies chose instead to strike first, attacking sugar plantations along the St. Johns River and annihilating an army command of a hundred men, initiating what has come to be called the Second Seminole War" (Hahn 2016, 35). By 1842, many of the Seminoles had indeed moved to a reservation, whereas others had retreated farther south onto less desirable land. This was sufficient for

³⁵ Joshua Stafford, Daniel Simmons, et al., "Memorial to the Secretary of War by Inhabitants of Hillsborough County" (Nov. 1834) in Carter (1960, 69-70). The "memorial" or petition attracted 26 signatories and reads, in part, as follows: "We the undersigned Inhabitants of Hillsborough County Tampa Bay view our situation in a very perilous light in consequence of the non compliance of the Indians with the wishes of Government to remove from the Territory...[and] therefore deem it a necessary measure to ourselves and our families to present you this memorial praying that a sufficient number of Troops may be stationed at Tampa Cantonment Brook in order to keep the Indians in check and to protect the lives and property of the now helpless settlers." Wilm (2017) offers an overview of this sort of petition and the frequency with which settlers used them.

³⁶ Shortly thereafter, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Alexander C. W. Fanning (temporarily replacing Gen. Clinch during a 2-month leave of absence) wrote to Adjutant General Roger Jones, "The General [Clinch], before his departure, and in conjunction with Gen Thompson, the Indian Agent, effected an arrangement with at least one half of the Seminole Chiefs, by which they and their followers and their negroes are to leave Florida for their new homes on the 1st of December next. ...I much fear that the harmony of this arrangement...will be destroyed by the cupidity of our own citizens. Under an impression that the Indian negroes can be bought for little or nothing, speculators will shortly be flocking in the Country. ...Under the circumstances, Gen Thompson has particularly requested me to write and obtain, if possible, orders to turn back every white man who shall attempt to cross the Indian boundary, and whose business is not immediately with the troops or public agents here." Alexander Fanning, "Letter to Roger Jones," (April 29, 1835) in Carter (1960, 132-133). (Alexander Macomb, Commanding General of the U.S. Army from 1828 to 1841, granted this request.)

President John Tyler to conclude that, “Further pursuit of these miserable beings by a large military force seems as injudicious as it is unavailing.”³⁷

Here we have a president who appears more negatively predisposed to Native Americans than his predecessors (or successors) were. Nonetheless, we also have a relatively lengthy period of negotiation in which it remains unclear where the government continued to postpone the use of kinetic military operations. Moreover, military officials were given permission to evict settlers in disputed territory and to prevent any new ones from entering, and until the outbreak of violence in December 1835, settlers and Seminoles were the ones attacking each other.

While many Americans—public officials and otherwise—attributed the war to the Seminoles’ refusal to move, there were some at the time who believed that the small military was making it difficult to “awe” the Seminoles into emigrating. As Brevet Lt. Col. Alexander C. W. Fanning wrote to Gen. Duncan L. Clinch on Nov. 27, 1835, “We have fallen into the error committed at the Commencement of every Indian War: The display of too little force—The attempt to do too much with inadequate means.”³⁸ Not long thereafter, Florida’s Acting Governor G.K. Walker complained to Secretary of War Lewis Cass, “The regular troops stationed in the nation, consisting entirely of infantry and very limited in number, I regard as incompetent to protect so extensive a line of contry [sic].”³⁹ Indeed, Cass himself agreed and had

³⁷ Quoted in Knetsch (2011, 151). Although most Seminoles were ultimately forced to emigrate, a small minority escaped farther south into the Everglades. A Third Seminole War began in 1855, and Seminoles now have reservations in both Florida and Oklahoma.

³⁸ Alexander Fanning, “Letter to Duncan Clinch,” (Nov. 27, 1835) in Carter (1960, 200-201).

³⁹ G.K. Walker, “Letter to Lewis Cass,” (Dec. 8, 1835) in Carter (1960, 205-207).

pushed Congress to increase the size of the standing army before the war had started; Congress would only belatedly and incrementally do so in 1838 (Wooster 2009, 84-93).

Utah's Black Hawk War

In Utah's Black Hawk War, by contrast, there were similar patterns of settler behavior, including their movement westward on to lands to which they had dubious claims, but elite behavior differed substantially. Specifically, federal officials allowed the conflict to fester for seven years before intervening, and the government did not make any attempt to negotiate or otherwise put an end to hostilities before that. There was little federal presence in the Great Basin region that federal officials could call upon at the time, especially given that the military draw-down in the wake of the Civil War; the closest military fort was in present-day Idaho on the Oregon Trail (Farmer 2008, 71). But just as importantly, there was little interest—among elites and the public alike—for intervention on behalf of the Latter-day Saints that most considered heterodox if not heretical (Peterson 1998).

Despite increasing resistance to settler encroachment in the West, political elites sought to return after the Civil War to the relatively small military to which the United States was accustomed. Even Ulysses S. Grant, as described by an unspecified author in *The New York Times*, “does not desire a large standing army. ...He shows how few are the purposes for which troops are really needed in this country as a permanent thing, and how simple are their duties. They are needed to protect the settlers and travelers on the Western Plains from the savages, and they are needed to preserve order in the South. ...He therefore endorses emphatically the Senate

bill...which will give us a military force of all arms somewhere in the vicinity of fifty thousand men” (1866). This would surely be a larger standing army than the 700-man force the U.S. first employed, but as a percentage of the total population, little had changed in decades.

Amid this military draw-down, tensions between Native nations and Latter-day Saints in what is now the state of Utah were accelerating. These disputes can be traced to the late 1840s when Brigham Young guided the Latter-day Saints from Illinois to the Great Basin region due to the persecution they had endured (Park 2020). The state of Deseret, as their group of settlements became known, expanded outward from Utah and overlapped with the homelands of various Great Basin tribes, most notably the Utes and Paiutes (Peterson 1998). As in many other places in North America, competition for scarce resources—especially for land that the settler and Native communities tended to use, respectively, for hunting and agriculture—exacerbated tensions (Metcalf 1989).

There were some initial skirmishes between Native groups and Latter-day Saints in the 1850s, but casualties were generally in the single- or low double-digits. The often-cited dictum of Brigham Young was that it was “cheaper to feed the Indians than fight them,” and this appeared to work for a time (Coates 1978, 428). The incident that is recognized as starting the Black Hawk War, however, would not come until 1865. A Ute leader, Antonga (or Black Hawk), sought a meeting with leaders of the Latter-day Saints in the town of Manti (Peterson 1998, 16-19).⁴⁰ This meeting was apparently premised on a misunderstanding—Antonga’s father, among

⁴⁰ Black Hawk’s Ute name was Antonga, but Brigham Young dubbed him “Black Hawk” after the famous Sauk leader who unsuccessfully fought against U.S. expansion in Illinois and Wisconsin in the early 1830s. Black Hawk is the name by which Antonga has come to be referred in much of the historiography, but I opt to use his Ute name.

other community members, had recently died of smallpox, and Antonga believed that the settlers were spreading the disease supernaturally. In the argument that followed, a settler interpreter, John Lowry, escalated the situation and came to blows with Antonga, though no one was killed that night. Two days later, however, a group of Utes killed a settler, and the spiral of retributive violence produced the Black Hawk War.

The next seven years would see scores of intermittent raids by settlers and Native groups. Antonga officially made peace with the settlers in 1868 and promised he would seek to persuade other Utes to cease hostilities, but he failed to do so. Other Ute, Paiute, and Navajo bands continued their raids into the early 1870s (Wells 2016, 288). It may be the case that perceptions of the Native groups had changed such that they had come to see the settlers as an existential threat; the written record offers little with which to speculate.

Some among the Latter-day Saints—chiefly Brigham Young—feared that requests for federal intervention would harm their own cause; others made such requests only for military officers based at western forts to decline to intercede (Peterson 1998, 250-251). It took years for the federal government to intervene, and even then, it did so primarily to assert federal authority over the Latter-day Saints. Federal authorities disbanded the community's militia (the Nauvoo Legion), arrested Brigham Young, and installed a non-Mormon territorial governor. Several months later, the new territorial governor ordered troops to disperse a growing gathering of Native peoples, and they returned to their reservations without further incident. "The army's 1872 success in quelling the Ghost Dance crisis," a term that referred to a spiritual, anti-colonial movement among Native communities, "brought a new commitment to employ troops against

the Indians in Utah, if for no other reason than to keep the Nauvoo Legion from having an excuse to function” (Peterson 1998, 374).

The waning days of this war—and the federal assertion of power in Utah—took place amid an effort by the Ulysses S. Grant administration to implement what has come to be called an “Indian peace policy”.⁴¹ The widespread antipathy toward Latter-day Saints, however, complicated the Black Hawk War for the Grant administration, in which most political appointees working on Indian affairs shared the view that the settlement of the West was the priority and that the U.S. could “civilize” Native groups without starting wars (Levine 1985, 349). When it finally appeared that there might be a serious, existential threat to the settlers, Grant decided to intervene in such a way that would deter a major Native offensive while also depriving the settlers of their means to resist federal control.

All of this stands in stark contrast to the earlier cases I have discussed as well as contemporary cases that the Grant administration faced. For example, when prospectors accompanying General George Armstrong Custer on an 1874 expedition into South Dakota discovered gold, “The lure of gold started a rush to the Black Hills. Brig. Gen. George Crook, acting by direction of the president, attempted to keep the gold seekers out of the Black Hills by use of an armed force, but public opinion did not condone such drastic action.”⁴² While the U.S.

⁴¹ Grant (1869) made his first significant statement on this policy in his first annual message to Congress: “From the foundation of the Government to the present the management of the original inhabitants of this continent—the Indians—has been a subject of embarrassment and expense, and has been attended with continuous robberies, murders, and wars. From my own experience upon the frontiers and in Indian countries, I do not hold either legislation or the conduct of the whites who come most in contact with the Indian blameless for these hostilities.”

⁴² National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior, “Custer Battlefield National Monument,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954). Scanned copy provided by the McCracken Research Library at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, George Armstrong Custer Collection, 1876-1963: Series 2, Box 2, Folder 4.

government authorized the military to remove squatters and prevent further settlement on disputed territory, it was again the case that the relatively small Army contingent in the Dakotas could not prevent violence perpetrated by and against settlers (Hedren 2011, 53-54).⁴³ Given easier military access to that area and no salient ideological cleavages between the settlers and elites, the U.S. government intensified its efforts to purchase the Black Hills and surrounding areas from the tribes that had been reserved this land in previous treaties. In reaction to attacks on gold-mining parties, the Grant administration ordered Lakota to stay within the bounds of the Great Sioux Reservation, and within two years of prospectors finding gold, Grant had authorized offensive military operations to push the offending bands on to the reservation (Greene 1993, xv). Custer's disastrous defeat speaks to the limited resources the U.S. dedicated to such frontier expeditions, but as in the Northwest Indian War, the U.S. military would eventually prevail in making the land safe for settlers.

Alternative Explanations

Although I have explored these latter two cases in less depth than the Northwest Indian War, we can now compare my explanation with the alternatives. Alternative Explanation 1—that low state capacity prevented the U.S. from restraining settlers—receives less support from the available evidence than my own argument. It seems clear given earlier and subsequent military expansions that the U.S. could have afforded a larger standing army had political elites felt such a thing appropriate for a liberal democracy; their objections to such a thing were more

⁴³ Hedren (2011, 54) notes that, "The army's most astute Indian fighting general [George Crook] wanted more troops and quietly confessed to [General] Sheridan that he did not know what to do." It should also be noted that Hedren makes the case that the military men deployed in the Dakotas were experienced and well-equipped. The size of the military, however, was still lacking.

ideological than practical. Indeed, Ostler (2019, 97) notes that U.S. political elites were often quite willing and able to raise larger armies to suppress what they considered “domestic” insurrections such as Shays’ Rebellion. These, however, were perceived to be temporary exigencies; relations with Native nations were presumed to be a constant in early American political life, which meant that any military force dedicated to the management of the frontier would effectively be a standing army. This would have entailed material costs, but the more ideological concerns about standing armies appear to have been more salient for political elites.

Alternative Explanation 2—that elites were ambivalent as to whether expansion led to violent conflict with Native nations—also falls short. The Northwest Indian War was preceded by lengthy, partially successful attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement, and political elites did manage to negotiate land cession treaties elsewhere around this same time. Moreover, political elites actively sought to punish and deter illegal settlement in the Northwest Territory to discourage settler-initiated violence and to try to enhance its credibility in negotiations. Furthermore, civilian elites generally provided military officials with very direct instructions to avoid conflict initiation. Much the same pattern of behavior held true even under Andrew Jackson’s administration, and in the case of Utah’s Black Hawk War, federal officials were ambivalent about the well-being of the Latter-day Saints.

VII. Conclusions & Implications

I have examined the process by which settlers brought federal officials into the Northwest Indian War even though elites preferred to avoid this conflict, and I have compared this case with

the Second Seminole War and Utah's Black Hawk War. I have argued that the settlers' two *faits accomplis* of settling on disputed territory and the act of initiating violent conflict with Native nations affected federal decision-making by putting pressure on speculators and local elites to lobby federal officials for intervention, by making non-intervention more costly for federal officials, and by eroding the credibility of U.S. commitments to Native nations. The lack of a large standing military, which was primarily an ideological commitment on the part of political elites, constituted an important permissive condition for settler-led conflict, and political elites were not especially concerned about either the distribution of power or settler heterodoxy in this case. Comparison with the Second Seminole War and Utah's Black Hawk War support my argument about the principles of early U.S. grand strategy and the ways that settlers complicated the practice thereof by bringing the federal government into unwanted disputes with Native nations. Settlers sometimes failed, however, due to the confluence of an unfavorable local distribution of power and identity-based cleavages between settlers and elites.

The case studies here suggest that it is not the case that U.S. foreign policy has forever been uniquely isolated from public pressures. Indeed, it may be that early U.S. foreign policy was overly responsive to such pressures. If it seems that today's foreign policy is excessively insulated from the public, we ought not to attribute that to immutable characteristics of the U.S. system of government but to institutional and political changes that have taken place over time. If scholars of U.S. grand strategy, especially advocates of "restraint" or "retrenchment," now believe that American foreign policy is insufficiently responsive to a public that would prefer a less militarized grand strategy, the question is not whether but how a more balanced approach can be found (Porter 2018; Walldorf and Yeo 2019).

This research also has an implication for long-running debates about the character of U.S. grand strategy and, in particular, whether U.S. grand strategy has ever been oriented toward a set of policies that could plausibly be described as isolationist. The interwar period of the twentieth century is sometimes described as an isolationist moment in U.S. foreign policy, though the case for this is dubious (Braumoeller 2010). Similarly, in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars and policy professionals sometimes portray U.S. foreign policy as having been isolationist by pointing to George Washington's farewell address or John Quincy Adams' statement that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy" (1821). Bringing Native nations more fully into the narrative of early U.S. grand strategy, however, makes it difficult to sustain the claim that the United States was ever truly isolationist. I have argued that controlled expansion better characterizes the preferred grand strategy of early U.S. political elites. Moreover, regardless of the principles that animate U.S. grand strategy, the practice thereof will always be more improvisational than political elites would prefer because they cannot fully control the preferences and actions of U.S. citizens, to say nothing of other states with conflicting interests.

Finally, U.S. grand strategy in the context of its own rise may provide some counsel on how the United States ought to react to the rise of China. Holding all else constant, newly available surveillance technologies and the authoritarianism of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may mean that Chinese political elites will have greater capacity to control the ways that Chinese citizens influence the state's foreign policy-making than U.S. elites did during its expansion, although vastly different population sizes may cut against this. Either way, U.S.

political elites should be aware that although Chinese citizens and companies may sometimes do things harmful to U.S. national interests at the direction of the government, such actions will not always be undertaken at the behest of the government.⁴⁴ Political elites should thus be cautious in attributing blame to the CCP when private individuals may have plausibly undertaken particular efforts themselves. This is all the more reason to invest in the collection of high-quality human and signals intelligence and to avoid politicizing the U.S. Intelligence Community so as to ensure public confidence in high-level intelligence assessments.

⁴⁴ The same general note of caution applies to action in the cyber domain given the extent to which the rules of engagement there remain unsettled (Raymond 2021).

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