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Brian Drohan. *Brutality in an Age of Human Rights: Activism and Counterinsurgency at the End of the British Empire.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. 256 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-1465-8.

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Counterinsurgency wars seem be proliferating while innovations in media and communications technology allow for the massive expansion of scrutiny of the conduct of all sides in such conflicts. In this context, historian and serving US Army officer Brian Drohan has capably provided historical context to the dynamic these developments have created. ***Brutality in the Age of Human Rights*** explores the operation of counterinsurgency and counterterrorist measures in parts of the post-1945 British Empire, with special attention to how those operations adjusted and responded to critics from an emerging international human rights movement. Drohan demonstrates that both state and nonstate actors could effectively pressure governments to acknowledge, and at times even change, practices that violated human dignity and an emerging international consensus on basic human rights. However, this study also argues convincingly that such pressure may not have achieved real reform, but rather that governments practiced what Drohan terms "cooperative manipulation" (p. 4) in which they publicly seemed to implement new practices, while in reality continued them as part of their counterinsurgency strategy. It is a stark reminder of the limited impact that nonstate actors especially can have on state actions, though it also implicitly suggests that the rise of new and accessible media technologies may make it harder for states to feign their compliance with international human rights norms.

Drohan does not focus on British methods in Kenya or Malaya (now Malaysia), perhaps the most well-known examples of counterinsurgency and colonial violence in the postwar period. Instead he looks to events in Cyprus, Aden, and Northern Ireland, places where human rights activists took advantage of certain conditions that allowed them to confront British officials in ways that they could not in the Kenya or Malaya. The purpose of such an approach is twofold: Drohan argues cogently that events in these three territories demonstrate the "myth" of a British facility for counterinsurgency that won hearts and minds by upholding a "rule of law" while minimizing violence (p. 7), while he also makes the case that historians of human rights and military affairs ought to look more closely at how practices in one area affected those in the other. In the cases of Malaya and Kenya, historians have already demonstrated the reality behind this myth of a British way in counterinsurgency, one that nevertheless remains pervasive. One part of the historical deconstruction of this narrative has been the exposure of thousands of colonial documents that were neither destroyed nor properly moved to Britain's National Archives, but were instead hid-

den by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for years until historians and lawyers forced the government to disclose the existence of this archive in 2011 as part of a court case brought by Kenyans seeking compensation for their mistreatment at the hands of colonial authorities in the 1950s. Using these papers (now archived for historians' use), Drohan has plenty of evidence at his disposal, especially regarding the ways in which colonial officials sought to defuse human rights protests through legalistic and rhetorical devices.

Rather than rehearsing the events in these three territories (something that Drohan does very capably), it might be more useful to place them in juxtaposition, for each one ties into his larger argument. In Cyprus, Aden, and Northern Ireland, British authorities faced both political protests and violence, from Greek Cypriots (EOKA) seeking union with Greece, Yemeni nationalists, and armed groups on both sides of the Nationalist/Unionist divide in Northern Ireland. Security forces, operating in declared states of emergency, relied heavily on various types of coercion in response. Collective punishment and torture during interrogations were two major parts of this approach. Whereas in recent years, American authorities have insisted that torture is simply "enhanced interrogation," the colonial secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd preferred to call it "questioning of unusual rigour" (p. 23). Drohan, in his conclusion, notes that such practices did not provide "some sort of decisive advantage" in countering violence (p. 190). The use of torture, internment without trial, and even hostage-taking did, however, provoke a significant response by activists inside and outside these areas under British control.

The rise of organized legal and political challenges to British actions owed much to the specific conditions and characteristics of these three locations. In Cyprus there was a long-established Greek Cypriot legal community, some of whose members had trained in London itself. These were active and influential lawyers whose respectability and previous cooperation with the colonial state made it hard for colonial authorities to dismiss lightly their concerns for the treatment of prisoners during questioning. Since Greek Cypriots sought "enosis" (union) with Greece, the Greek state also sought to act on their behalf. As a European state, Greece filed two applications for investigation with the European Commission on Human Rights (ECHR), further publicizing the accusations of abuse and forcing British officials to respond on an even more public stage. In Aden, where military action and the use of scorched-earth tactics created a refugee crisis, Britain faced criticism at the United Nations and from the Arab League, but also from nonstate actors like the International Committee of the Red Cross and the recently created Amnesty International, a group found in the United Kingdom in 1961 which soon gathered important political support that included members of Parliament from the Labour Party. The Northern Irish case attracted a great deal of attention from international groups like Amnesty International, as well as from states like the Republic of Ireland, but also differed from Cyprus and Aden in that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, subject to direct parliamentary scrutiny and not classified as a colonial territory where authorities might introduce emergency measures more easily. Legislation like the Prevention of Terrorism Act resulted from parliamentary action, but this also meant a much more public debate about security measures in Northern Ireland than was the case for either Cyprus or Aden. There was also much greater media attention inevitably for events occurring within the UK. One further element separating the Northern Irish case from the others that Drohan notes is the fact that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) expanded the conflict throughout the British Isles, creating a climate of both greater awareness of government measures to counter the IRA and at times more domestic support for harsher methods there.

Drohan acknowledges that increased pressure from all of these actors and constituencies forced officials in these territories, and at home, to respond with pledges of reform, inspections by outside groups, and admissions of wrongdoing. The European Court on Human Rights sent a team to investigate allegations in Cyprus in 1958, and while it concluded that Britain had acted with justification, the simple fact that a team made Britain answer questions in an internationally recognized forum set an important precedent in international law. In Aden, the Red Cross, with significant help from Amnesty International, managed to establish a consistent practice of reviewing prisoners' complaints and conditions, while Amnesty International forced a formal governmental investigation in 1968 of detention and interrogation in Aden. Public scrutiny from multiple directions, including the European Court of Human Rights and Amnesty International, did lead to changes in Northern Ireland, as governments did away with internment, fostered bodies like the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights, and ultimately committed after 1976 to a policy of "Ulsterization" in which policing approaches predominated over military intelligence-gathering and counterinsurgency tactics.

These changes produced by human rights activism were, nevertheless, more apparent than real, in Drohan's estimation. Using what he terms "manipulative cooperation," British authorities were able to counter some charges and persist in many of these challenged practices. The government in Cyprus did renounce some tactics, but only those that had already proved fairly worthless, like collective punishment. It also created a Special Investigation Group, avowedly to police British actions, but really designed to bury or discredit any allegations of misconduct, and colonial officials used narrow definitions of "torture" and controlled inquests in suspicious deaths. Officials in Aden were less intentional and more improvisational in their efforts at obfuscation, but the results were the same: they allowed Red Cross inspections in 1965 after most detainees had been released and they kept Red Cross personnel from visiting areas hardest hit by the bombing campaigns of the previous year. In both Aden and London, politicians and administrators publicly challenged the credibility of Amnesty International and limited the changes made after Amnesty had forced an investigation. The colonial government was allowed to continue to investigate itself and remained solely responsible for its own compliance. The colonial state in Cyprus and Aden, in the end, was able to continue violent interrogations and arbitrary searches and seizures in ways that were hardly different in practice than before.

In Northern Ireland, despite the transfer of more authority from the military to the police and the Ulster Defence Regiment, interrogation practices, especially the notorious "five techniques" (which were wall-standing, hooding, subjection to noise, deprivation of sleep, and deprivation of food and drink), escaped real scrutiny thanks to the government's evasions while appearing to cooperate with European investigations. The use of special courts for terrorism trials, and limitations on defendants' abilities to challenge evidence, remained. Drohan ends his study of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, when the shift occurred away from military counterinsurgent practices to a police-led counterterrorism orientation. This is in keeping with his declared interest in the relationship between military approaches and human rights activism, but also weakens the case for including Northern Ireland in this study. It seems that Northern Ireland is its own special case. In Cyprus and Aden Drohan looks at discrete periods, ending with British withdrawal, during which administrators and military officials worked within a similar colonial context, while in Northern Ireland, on British soil, these actors and others faced greater political and legal scrutiny, as well as intense media attention. And the transition from military operations to policing in the 1970s was not necessarily so neat, as Drohan acknowledges. The army remained involved not just

on the border, but in intelligence work after 1976. Soldiers remained targets, and units like the Special Air Service carried out operations against IRA operatives into the 1980s. Moreover, military cooperation with the Royal Ulster Constabulary had been part of army practice since it arrived there in 1969. “Ulsterization” was partially about the removal of the military from police activities and partially about the militarization of the police themselves. Human rights activists and lawyers remained focused on Northern Ireland through 1998, and even beyond, especially during the 1981 hunger strikes and the overturning of the convictions of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six. It does not seem possible to argue for the period 1969-76 in Northern Ireland as discrete in the ways that Drohan does so well for other limited periods in Cyprus and Aden.[1] This is not to say that his conclusions about the ways in which the military sought to operate in Northern Ireland, and about the larger pattern of obstruction pursued to obscure these methods, are at all tenuous. Rather it is to suggest that these three areas are not so analogous as to allow him to make a singular argument for all. The political and legal contexts were different, as was the relationship between military authorities and the police. At times in his analysis of Northern Ireland, Drohan also alludes to one further difference there, one which again needs a little more attention: the management of Northern Ireland was not about preserving Britain’s strategic interests in the wider world. It was about security at home, with justifications for certain practices based in a different language and actions defended more explicitly in the expectation that even critics from outside Britain might understand the tension between morality and the visceral desire for self-preservation. There seems an analogy here with American framing since 2001 of what the United States does abroad and what it does at home.

If there is one element in his book that Drohan might have explored in greater detail, it is this: the motivations for the efforts by political, colonial, and military actors to counter and evade public criticism of counterinsurgency techniques and practices. As he notes in the introduction, Britons were eager to perpetuate the notion that they were “protectors of rights” and that this desire to “maintain Britain’s reputation as a guardian of human rights” prompted actions to hide various practices (p. 4). What specific factors or contexts drove the desire to preserve such a reputation though? Was it perhaps a result of the Cold War or of earlier critiques of British actions in Malaya or Kenya? Or could it have been part of the effort to reconfigure British power in the new bipolar world, recasting Britain’s image in opposition to French actions in Asia and Africa? The most likely explanation seems to be that officials were caught up in the more traditional British conundrum (since passed on to the Americans) of reconciling a desire for power with a desire to appear as a paragon of morality and liberty, at a time when an international commitment to human rights had emerged more powerfully than ever before. Fitting this book’s narrative of the 1950s and 1960s into that larger context would be helpful in discussing continuities between these events and earlier developments within the British Empire. Even without that context, however, Drohan’s book provides an excellent understanding of the rhetoric and practice of counterinsurgency and a firm foundation for understanding the universe of euphemism and defensiveness that surrounds such efforts even today.

Note

[1]. For a good understanding of the ways in which Northern Ireland was not analogous to other colonial situations, see Paul Dixon, ed., *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

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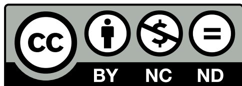

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