‘ "The extraordinary successes which the Russians have achieved" - the Conquest of Central Asia in Callwell’s *Small Wars*.’

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Abstract: Charles Callwell’s *Small Wars* (1896, 1899, 1906) is widely considered both an *ur-text* for modern counter-insurgency studies, and a primer for the racialized late-Victorian approach to war against ‘savages’: either way it is usually only considered within a British context. Alongside the numerous examples Callwell used from British colonial campaigns, he frequently referred to those of other European powers – notably the Russian conquest of Central Asia. This article will seek to analyse Callwell’s views of Russian colonial warfare, establish the sources on which he relied, and evaluate his accuracy and the effect which the Russian example had on his thinking.

Keywords: Callwell; Colonialism; Counter-Insurgency; Central Asia

Charles Edward Callwell (1859-1928) is perhaps the best-known British military theorist of the 19th century, and his *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice* (1896, 1899 & 1906)[1] is by far his best-known text, echoed in the very title of this journal and described by Hew Strachan as a ‘minor classic of compression and sophistication’.[2] Widely regarded as the originator of the idea of ‘counter-insurgency’ as a distinct form of warfare (though he never used the term), Callwell is much cited by both military historians and security strategists today.[3] His work has recently undergone considerable scholarly reappraisal, much of which has focused on how far *Small Wars* is still useful and relevant for modern students and practitioners of counter-insurgency.[4] David Betz has suggested that Callwell still has a good deal to teach them, particularly in his focus on understanding the characteristics of the enemy, and his warnings against dogmatism.[5] Daniel Whittingham also argues for Callwell’s continued usefulness, while noting that his emphasis on what he called the ‘moral effect’ of short, sharp actions translated into brutality and forms of collective punishment that are very much at odds with modern counter-insurgency doctrine.[6] Sibylle Scheipers also considers that Callwell devised particular rules of engagement for ‘uncivilised’ opponents, though insists that the effects of this should not be overemphasised, as military laws of engagement were not wholly absent from colonial conflicts.[7] Dierk Walter notes how Callwell’s ‘evident obsession with the cult of the offensive’ and the practical recommendations he made for colonial warfare were perpetuated throughout much of the 20th century.[8] The most blistering critique has come from Kim Wagner, who focuses on Callwell’s racialised understanding of warfare, reflected in the unsuccessful British attempt to have soft-nosed ‘Dum Dum’ bullets recognised as legitimate under the laws of war when used exclusively against ‘savage’ opponents. Both he and Douglas Porch dismiss entirely the notion that *Small Wars* should be used as a guide to current doctrine or action.[9]

As Whittingham has argued, Callwell needs to be treated as a historical figure and understood in his contemporary context, rather than as a guru whose work can still be mined for tips.[10] This paper is not concerned with whether any of his recommendations for fighting 'Small Wars' against what he referred to as 'Savage Races' might still be useful – instead my interest is in understanding how the text of *Small Wars* was produced, and what it reveals about its author and the late Victorian military culture that he sprang from. Despite the extent to which Callwell's text has been treated as a practical guide to counter-insurgency, until recently there has been relatively little attention paid to the man himself. As Whittingham notes, this is partly because he did not leave behind a compact collection of private papers, while correspondence from him in those of other figures is sparse and mostly relates to the end of his career.[11] There has also been little exploration of how Callwell actually wrote and compiled *Small Wars* and his other theoretical texts, something which he studiously avoided referring to in his autobiographical writings.[12] Which sources did he use? How far was he working from personal experience and oral anecdote, and how far from published accounts? How and why did he choose particular examples to illustrate his points, and how accurate was his presentation of them? How reliable is he, in short, as a military historian?

Callwell is often understood as a primarily British figure, and the prize-winning essay which first made his name as a theorist of the 'Small War' only considered British colonial campaigns.[13] While overlooked by Michael Howard in favour of Julian Corbett, he is widely seen as the originator of a distinctively 'British way of warfare', and perhaps the only significant British military theorist of the 19th century.[14] However Callwell's range of reference in *Small Wars* is much wider and more cosmopolitan than this would suggest, reflecting a knowledge of French and German that was characteristic of military intellectuals of his day, and a healthy respect for the achievements and abilities of continental armies.[15] Thomas Bugeaud (1784-1849) and Mikhail Dmitr'evich Skobelev (1843-1882) feature at least as prominently in *Small Wars* as Garnet Wolseley (1833-1913) or William Lockhart (1841-1900), and rather more so than Herbert Kitchener, whose role in the Sudan campaign is overshadowed by that of Hector Macdonald (1853-1903) in Callwell's account. *Small Wars* contains examples from Mexico, the American West, Algeria, Tonkin, Madagascar and the Russo-Turkish War alongside numerous British colonial campaigns in India and Africa, but the foreign case-study Callwell returns to most consistently is that of the Russian conquest of Central Asia from the 1850s to the 1880s, which he supplements with occasional references to Russian campaigns against Shamil and the Caucasus mountaineers in earlier decades.[16] Though they have since sunk into relative obscurity in Anglophone scholarship, these conquests were the subject of lively interest in Britain at the time when Callwell was writing,

largely because of the widely-held but illusory belief that they were the prelude to a Russian invasion of British India, the so-called 'Great Game'.[17] To Callwell's credit, he does not appear to have shared this paranoia, which helped to generate a range of (often rather alarmist) publications about Russia's Central Asian campaigns. Although Callwell did not provide *Small Wars* with references or a bibliography, it is easy enough to establish which sources he used. As he did not read Russian he was reliant on a small body of writings translated into English, and often published in the *RUSI* journal. These usually derived from official military histories or *Voennyi Sbornik* and *Russkii Invalid*, the journals respectively of the Russian Main Staff and Ministry of War, though in some cases the material was a good deal more second-hand. Callwell's knowledge of Russian campaigns was inevitably fragmentary and partial, but this paper will argue that they played an important role in his work. I seek to establish the sources he used, the gaps in his knowledge and inaccuracies which resulted, but also to test whether he identified a distinctively 'Russian' approach to small wars which could be contrasted to a British way of war, or whether he instead advanced a more universal formula for warfare between 'civilized' and 'savage' peoples.

I – The Russians and their Opponents in *Small Wars*

Callwell's evident admiration for the Russian record in wars against 'savage peoples' was shared by many British contemporaries, who saw them as unconstrained by the liberal hand-wringing of Britain's parliamentary system and therefore more decisive – as G. N. Curzon put it: 'A greater contrast than this can scarcely be imagined to the British method, which is to strike gingerly a series of taps, rather than a downright blow; rigidly to prohibit all pillage or slaughter and to abstain not less wholly from subsequent fraternisation. But there can be no doubt that the Russian tactics, however deficient they may be from the moral, are exceedingly effective from the practical point of view'.[18] Curzon here was referring to Skobelev, who was an object of fascination for the British: becoming well-known internationally as a result of the dashing role he played in the Russo-Turkish War, his apotheosis came at the siege of the Akhal-Teke Turkmen fortress of Denghil-Tepe, whose storming in January 1881 was followed by the massacre of 14,000 Turkmen, women and children included. As he told the journalist Charles Marvin later that year, in a turn of phrase that became proverbial:

'I hold it as a principle that in Asia the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on the enemy. The harder you hit them, the longer they will be quiet afterwards.'[19]

By 1882 Skobelev was dead, expiring of a heart attack in the arms of a Moscow prostitute, but his celebrity was if anything enhanced by this, with the first English biography appearing in

1883,[20] while Russian accounts of his final campaigns continued to be published regularly over the next two decades.[21] Callwell quoted Skobelev directly and approvingly more often than any other foreign commander mentioned in *Small Wars*: "Do not forget that in Asia he is the master who seizes the people pitilessly by the throat and imposes upon their imagination" (51) – possibly a paraphrase of his words to Marvin quoted above. Callwell was able to draw upon contemporary publications of some of Skobelev's reports and orders,[22] and on the weighty official history of his final campaign against the Turkmen by General N. A. Grodekov (1843 – 1913), published in four volumes in 1883-4 and almost immediately translated into English for the Indian General Staff.[23] This campaign – the last major conquest undertaken by the Russians - provided the bulk of Callwell's Central Asian examples.

Russia's Central Asian campaigns accorded well with Callwell's general emphasis on the importance of 'moral force', i.e. of rapid blows to cow and overawe an inferior enemy:[24]

'In the Russian campaigns in Central Asia it has generally been the same. Energy and resolution have been the watchword. The procedure has been rather to overawe the enemy by a vigorous offensive than to bring against him a mighty force, and the result speaks for itself. Prestige is everything in such warfare. It is the commander who recognizes this, and who acts upon it, who conquers inferior races absolutely and for good' (58).

However Callwell's admiration for the Russians stemmed less from their speed and ruthlessness in crushing their enemies than from an appreciation of how those enemies had chosen to fight. To put it simply, the Russians had been lucky in their opponents in Central Asia, who while they often fought valiantly had generally preferred open confrontation on the battlefield or the defence of fortified points to guerrilla tactics, thus offering Russian regular forces a clear objective and enabling rapid decisive battles: 'The Russians in their gradual extension of territory beyond the Caspian have often had to deal with armies, ill armed and organized of course, but nevertheless armies' (6). This reflected Callwell's wider argument that the most pressing problem in fighting Small Wars was bringing the enemy to decisive battle, rather than allowing them to engage in attritional guerrilla warfare. While the Russians had suffered severely from the latter during their Caucasus campaigns, even here their enemy had eventually obliged them: 'The great Circassian [*sic*] leader Schamyl kept the Russians at bay for years with guerrilla tactics; his cause declined when he formed his followers into armies and weighed them down with guns' (76).[25] Thus, rather than despising 'irregulars', Callwell simply saw such tactics as a rational and effective response by 'savage' opponents to the superiority regular armies enjoyed in weapons and technology.[26] When a 'savage' opponent chose instead to fight Europeans on their terms, but with armies that were 'a travesty of regular organization' and encumbered with inferior artillery, it made the task of the conqueror far easier: 'The Russians in their campaigns against Khokand and

Bokhara had to deal with armies standing on a somewhat similar footing' (10). Callwell drew a parallel, not with the frontier campaigns which characterised Anglo-Indian warfare in his own day, but with the Anglo-Sikh Wars of the 1840s: 'Runjeet Singh was a respected ruler who could dispose of organized forces completely at his command; the Amir of Bokhara stood on a similar footing during the campaigns which ended in the annexation of his khanate to the Russian Empire' (14).[27] In other words, what made the Russian campaigns distinctive was not their willingness to use exemplary violence, even against civilians (of which Callwell clearly approved), but the fact that usually their opponents had obligingly preferred to stand and fight.

Callwell expanded on this theme further when discussing the battle of Irjar, fought between Russian and Bukharan forces at a crossing of the Syr-Darya south of Tashkent in 1866:

'The Russians in Central Asia have been very fortunate in finding their opponents inclined for decisive conflicts. At Yedshar [*sic*] in 1866, a very large army from Bokhara marching on Tashkend in the hope of recovering that city was confronted by a far inferior Russian force, and a severely contested action ensued in which the latter was completely victorious; two years later a decisive battle was fought under the walls of Samarcand; these two great battles decided the fate of Turkestan, the capture of Tashkend having given the Russians a firm footing in the country to start with. Minor engagements have been conspicuous by their absence in Central Asia, almost every episode in the campaigns which brought the Cossacks to Bokhara and the sources of the Sir Daria was an important operation of war, and to this may be attributed the extraordinary successes which the Russians have achieved' (79-80).

Callwell's source here was an 1873 account of this campaign by Friedrich von Hellwald, an Austrian military writer, whose book on the Russians in Central Asia was translated into English in 1874. It does not appear to have been based on any direct knowledge of the region or of Russian campaigns.[28] Contemporary accounts from both the Russian and the Bukharan side emphasise the Bukharan ruler Amir Muzaffar's foolishness and overconfidence in challenging the Russians directly at Irjar in 1866, though the 1868 engagement before Samarkand, fought on the Chupan-Ata heights, came after several attempts to make peace.[29] In both battles superior Russian artillery and small arms were the decisive factor in bringing about an easy victory. Callwell was at least partially aware of this:

'General Romanovski's decisive victory over the Uzbeg army at Yedshar is worthy of mention in this connection. The Emir of Bokhara had about 40,000 men, the Russian force consisted of only 3,000; but in spite of disparity of numbers General Romanovski attacked without hesitation. The enemy enveloped the Russian force and made desperate attacks upon the baggage which was guarded by only a few companies, and these were at times in great peril. But the Russians resolutely pressed on, the baggage escort meanwhile repulsing the hostile onslaughts as best it could and pushing on whenever it had a moment's respite. The enemy could not stand against the determined advance of General Romanovski and the fire of his guns, and at last became panic-stricken and fled' (163).

However the Russians were not as heavily outnumbered at Irjar as Callwell believed, nor were they the first to attack. In his own account of the battle D. I. Romanovskii (1825-1881) estimated that of the forces facing them only about 5,000 were regular *sarbaz* infantry, with the

remaining 35,000 made up of irregular cavalry, who suffered terribly as they attempted a frontal assault on the Russian position.[30] Another celebrated incident in which Russian forces were heavily outnumbered occurred in 1864, when a small force of Ural Cossacks was ambushed by a much larger contingent of Khoqandi cavalry at the village of Iqan between the towns of Turkestan and Chimkent. Callwell gives the following account:

'In 1864, in the early days of the Russian operations against Khokand, a detached sotnia of cavalry with a gun was surrounded by an immensely superior force of Khokandians at Ikan. For two days the Russians defended themselves against overwhelming odds, inflicting great loss upon the enemy. Finally, they managed to escape. The moral effect inspired by the fight made by this detachment was very great, and although it was almost the only conflict of the year it appears to have so gravely impressed the Khokandians as to have materially assisted the Russians next year in their successful attack upon Tashkend' (79).[31]

Callwell's admiring tone here is characteristic of his descriptions of the Russian campaigns – and the emphasis on the moral effect of this victory (which was of no strategic significance) also serves his broader argument well. In this case he may well have had a point – in the *Ta'rikh-i 'Aliquli,* a local history of the Russian campaigns, the author recalled the Khoqandi commander at Iqan, Alimqul, lamenting that 'the surprising thing is that such an army as ours cannot overpower two hundred Russians!'[32]

Callwell goes on to use the capture of Tashkent by General Mikhail Grigor'evich Cherniaev (1828 – 1898) in 1865 as a key illustration of the effects of 'moral force' and decisiveness in overawing a numerically superior Asiatic enemy:

'The capture of the great walled city of Tashkend by General Tchernaieff in 1865, is a case in point. The place contained more than 100,000 inhabitants and it was defended by 30,000 men. It was one of the great commercial centres of the east, its name was known from Stambul to the Yellow Sea. Its perimeter was about 16 miles. Its ramparts were of stout design, and its battlements sheltered a respectable artillery. The Russian General arrived before it with 2,000 men and 12 guns, and determined upon a *coup de main.* An entrance was surprised at dawn of day at two points by storming parties, and these thereupon opened the gates; the guns upon the battlements on one side were seized and spiked. So great was the effect produced within the city by this daring feat of arms that its notables surrendered at once, although in street fighting the Russian troops could not have successfully coped with the great numerical superiority of their adversaries. And Tashkent was incorporated in the Tsar's dominions from that time forward' (59).

This account, which like that of Irjar was taken from Hellwald, reflects the legend which Cherniaev himself sought to project about the capture of Tashkent (he would later compare it to the exploits of Cortez and Pizarro), but is deficient in many respects.[33] Tashkent did not have 30,000 defenders – that figure would have corresponded to the entire male population of fighting age, and the city was deeply divided between factions that favoured Khoqand, Bukhara and Russia. The city did not surrender at once, and Cherniaev and his men did in fact spend two days fighting through Tashkent's streets.[34] These facts are referred to in numerous contemporary English publications, but having found a version of events that accorded with his thesis Callwell does not

seem to have wanted to look any further.[35] This is characteristic of the rather partial and selective way in which he used Russian examples.

II – Russian Decisiveness and Clarity of Objectives

For Callwell another reflection of the obliging nature of their Central Asian opponents was that the Russians had always had a set of clearly-defined objectives for their campaigns, after the capture of which serious resistance ceased:

'…the advantage of having a well-defined objective even for a time can scarcely be over-rated, and the Central Asian campaigns of Russia illustrate this vividly. Turkestan was territory inhabited largely by nomads, but studded also with historic cities many of which had been for ages the marts of oriental commerce. The invaders went to work with marked deliberation. They compassed the downfall of the khanates by gradually absorbing these cities, in many cases by very brilliant feats of arms. The conquests were not achieved by any great display of mighty force. The objectives were always clear and determinate. The capture of one city was often held sufficient for a year; but it then became a Russian city. The troops had always an unmistakable goal in front of them, they went deliberately to work to attain that goal, and when it was attained they rested on their laurels till ready for another coup. Such is the military history of the conquest of Central Asia. Desultory operations were throughout conspicuous by their absence. But such conditions are very seldom found in small wars…' (16-17).

By contrast:

'The Russian failures in the Caucasus were mainly due to the objectless character of their campaigns. They would assemble a great force and march through the forest and over the hills to capture some stronghold. They would find this abandoned. Then they would march back again harassed all the way by the warlike Circassians, Georgians [*sic*][36] and Chechens, and would settled down into cantonments till the time came for undertaking some similar spasmodic enterprise' (76).

The lengthy resistance offered by Shamil and the Caucasus mountaineers to Russian imperial expansion was a celebrated theme in Russian romantic literature of the golden age – for instance the disastrous ambush of General Golosoyev's force by the Chechens on the river Valerik in 1840, which Callwell refers to (220), features in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. Meanwhile the slightly later accounts of the conquest of Central Asia tended to be written by military professionals and to exclude minor or unsuccessful engagements, focused instead on set-piece battles and the capture of cities, which is why they figured so prominently in Callwell's narrative. However in Central Asia too there was a long history of precisely the kind of desultory and purely punitive operations which Callwell deplored – an appropriate comparison with Goloseyev's ambush in 1840 would be the complete destruction of Colonel Rukin's patrol by the Kazakhs of the Adai tribe on the Mangishlaq peninsula in 1870 – but no account of this ever seems to have appeared in English at the time.[37]

Throughout the 18th century and into the 1850s the Russian fortified lines on the steppe were regularly raided by Kazakhs and Turkmen, who were then raided in turn by Cossack forces, the capture of livestock and people being the main aim in both cases.[38] Callwell was in fact aware

of this, writing that: 'Fighting the Kirghiz [Kazakhs] and other nomads of the steppes the Russians have always trusted largely to carrying off the camels and flocks of the enemy' (19). He expanded on this further by noting Russian imitation of nomadic tactics:

'On the steppes also the mobile columns are formed of mounted Cossacks and irregulars; The Kirghiz [Kazakh] freebooter Kutebar, in the days when Russia was preparing for the incorporation of Khokand, defied all efforts to effect his capture and his subjection for a decade, and while he was at large his meteoric appearances and his impudent hardihood made him at once a peril to Russian progress and a scourge to the clans which had welcomed the arrival of the Cossack. But, on the other hand, in the desultory warfare in Central Asia against the nomads whose sole wealth consists in flocks and herds, the Russians have themselves employed raids with conspicuous success' (110-111).

Callwell considered such raiding for livestock to be a legitimate tactic of war against a nomadic enemy, though it clearly contradicted his advocacy of decisive operations against a clear objective (116, 210). Referring to the Turkmen, he excused the decade of inconclusive operations which preceded Skobelev's final victory at Denghil-Tepe in 1881 by noting that 'The Russian expeditions against the Tekke Turkomans were partly punitive, but they were undertaken mainly to suppress this formidable fighting nomad race; and the final campaign became a campaign of conquest' (9).

Curiously enough, the first Russian attempt to mount a major military operation in Central Asia - the Khiva expedition of 1839-40 - is not referred to anywhere in *Small Wars* despite the availability of an account in English.[39] While this campaign certainly had a clear objective, it failed miserably owing to the death from winter cold of almost all the 10,000 camels needed to carry supplies. Callwell's failure to mention this is probably another sign of selectivity, since it was a campaign which obeyed all his principles: decisiveness, aggression, clarity of objective – but which nevertheless was unsuccessful owing to a failure to take account of local environmental conditions (and indeed to listen to the advice of the Kazakh camel-drivers, though Callwell could be forgiven for not knowing this).[40] Following this debacle the Russians spent almost twenty years, between 1845 and 1864, attempting to maintain a line of fortifications along the Syr-Darya as a new steppe frontier, which proved another costly failure. The victorious campaigns against Khoqand and Bukhara in the 1860s, Khiva in the 1870s and the Turkmen in the 1880s which Callwell so admired came in the aftermath of numerous disappointments, some of which he must have been aware of, given other examples from that period which he cites – such as an attack on Fort Perovskii, the former Khoqandi fortress of Aq Masjid on the Syr-Darya, which the Russians captured in 1853:

'A good example of the moral effect of capture of artillery is afforded by the following incident. In 1854 the Khokandians assembled in great force before Fort Perovski, the Russian advanced post on the Sir Daria, and were practically blockading it. The commandant resolved on a bold stroke, and sent out such troops as

he could spare to attach the enemy unexpectedly. This small force however soon found itself in a critical situation, threatened from all sides; the enemy in enveloping it left their artillery almost without protection of other troops. Perceiving this the officer in command delivered a vigorous attack upon the guns, and captured them. The effect was immediate. The Khokandians took fright and fled in wild disorder, leaving many trophies in the hands of the insignificant Russian force. Their rout was complete' (133).[41]

Far from being immediately decisive, Russia's war against Khoqand, which had begun in 1853 with the fall of Aq Masjid, only ended in 1876, when the khanate's last remaining territory in the Ferghana valley was annexed. Callwell only made one reference to this final campaign, noting Skobelev's use of carts to move two infantry companies across Ferghana at high speed, something made possibly by the relatively good roads of the region (209).[42] This was the campaign in which Skobelev first made his reputation as an independent commander. It was marked by indiscriminate brutality against the civilian population and prolonged guerrilla-style resistance, particularly in the Alai valley in the surrounding highlands.[43] It attracted less attention in Britain than other campaigns as it represented the annexation of an existing protectorate rather than a significant expansion of territory, which may be why Callwell largely overlooked it – certainly it complicated his vision of Russia's Central Asian campaigns as being free from desultory or purely punitive operations.

The only Russian failure that Callwell considers in any depth is that of General N.I. Lomakin's expedition against the Akhal-Teke Turkmen in 1879, which culminated in a humiliating reverse for Russian forces below the walls of the fortress of Denghil-Tepe.

'Denghil Tepe, for instance, became the stronghold in which practically the whole military power of the Tekke Turkomans concentrated itself in 1879 and 1880; the Russians failed in their first campaign through mismanagement, but the objective never was in doubt. In their second venture, the formidable nomad race, which might have taken years to subdue, was with the fall of the fortress crushed for good and all.' (17-18)

Callwell's account of this campaign was based largely on Charles Marvin's translations of the official reports in *Russkii Invalid*, and articles by the correspondent of *Novoe Vremya* who had accompanied the expedition.[44] Echoing contemporary Russian criticisms, Callwell noted that the preceding years had seen a damagingly indecisive approach against the Akhal-Teke which had emboldened the Turkmen:

'The small Russian columns sent against the Tekke Turkomans in 1876-77, afford illustration of the evil of desultory, indecisive operations, although their Asiatic wars have generally been conducted in a very different spirit. Detachments too weak to effect any good purpose were sent out with no very clear object in view and were driven back, the result being merely to damage Russian prestige and to confirm the Turkomans in their hostile attitude' (77).

The 1879 expedition was plagued with difficulties from the outset, not least the sudden death of its initial commander, General Lazarev, from carbunculum.[45] Lomakin only succeeded to command temporarily, and it was his haste to join battle before a replacement could be despatched

which proved his undoing: owing to a shortage of camels only 1,400 of the original force of 16,000 made it to Denghil-Tepe, and even they were desperately short of supplies. Callwell wrote that 'General Lomakin [*sic* – it was Lazarev who made this error] assembled his troops immediately at Chikishlar, and they ate up the supplies as fast as they were disembarked. As a consequence the large force was for months detained in an unhealthy locality' (45-6).[46] Callwell also noted Lomakin's foolishness in cutting off the Turkmen retreat at Denghil-Tepe, and thus rendering them determined to fight to the last: 'The Turkoman chiefs, it transpired afterwards, had contemplated surrender, but when they found themselves hemmed in and saw their families being thus driven back into the shell-swept encampment they concluded that extermination was in store for them, and they resolved to fight to the last. Then just at the wrong moment General Lomakin ordered the assault' (84-5). This echoed contemporary Russian judgements,[47] and broader Victorian assumptions about warfare against inferior or 'savage' races: as James Belich has argued in the case of the Maori, it was generally assumed they would not have the technical ability to construct effective fortifications, or the determination and moral fibre effectively to defend them. A successful defence thus necessarily indicated that they had been driven to desperation.[48] Callwell did however acknowledge that 'the developments to the enceinte of Denghil Tepe added by the Tekkes in anticipation of General Skobelef's campaign, give examples of earthworks of the modern type' (442), though these were added after Lomakin's repulse. Denghil Tepe finally served as a warning of what could happen when European forces forfeited their aura of invincibility by being seen to retreat in the face of a 'savage' enemy.

'At Denghil Tepe in 1875 [*sic*], the Turkomans who had been utterly disheartened by the Russian bombardment, and who had only manned the ramparts of their fortress in despair when they found themselves hemmed in, no sooner saw the assaulting columns falling back in confusion, than they charged out furiously after the Russian troops. Their counter-attack was delivered with tremendous force. Had it not been for the guns, Lomakin's little army might have been not only defeated but destroyed. And yet up to this moment the Turkomans had shown little inclination to meet their antagonists in battle' (185).

Callwell did thus make use of one Central Asian example to drive home lessons about what *not* to do in a colonial campaign, but this was partly in order to contrast Lomakin's haplessness with the genius of Skobelev whom he so admired.

III - Russian Tactics, Logistics and Supply

Callwell devoted considerable attention to Russian tactics and logistics in Central Asia, whether this was their order of march, of battle or of assault. His examples mostly came from the Turkmen campaigns of 1879-81, although his discussion of the technicalities of marching formations clearly comes from the translation of L. F. Kostenko's work on the subject.[49] Callwell

cited Skobelev approvingly when advocating the exclusive use of infantry in close formation – either columns or squares – when up against an 'uncivilised enemy':[50]

'It is a striking fact that so skilled and experienced a leader as General Skobelef should have been strongly opposed to anything like dispersed formations in Asiatic warfare. "We shall conquer," he wrote in his instructions prior to the attack on Yangi Kala […], "by means of close mobile and pliable formations by careful, well –aimed volley firing, and by the bayonet which is in the hands of men who by discipline and soldier-like feeling have been made into a united body – the column is always terrifying." And again, "The main principle of Asiatic tactics is to preserve close formations." These maxims are not quoted as conclusive – on the contrary, they appear to have been enunciated under a mistaken estimate of the Tekke powers of counter-attack and of the fighting qualities of the Turkoman horse; but they are none the less interesting and instructive as the views of a great leader who understood war and who never failed in what he undertook' (333).[51]

For the purposes of defence Callwell advocated the use of the square, noting in its support that 'The Russians have sometimes adopted it in Central Asia, notably during the suppression of the Turkomans in the Khanate of Khiva after the occupation of the oasis in 1874' (235), and that:

'This elastic square formation was employed largely by Prince Woronzoff in his operations against the Chechens amid the extensive forests on the northern slopes of the Caucasus, to cover the working parties which slowly hewed clearings through the woods. In such fighting the arrangement is advantageous at times even when the enemy's attacks are merely of a desultory kind' (310).

Such squares could also be supported by using camels as improvised fortifications, although the example Callwell gives is one where this was used against the Russians successfully by the Turkmen:

'It should be noted that very small parties cannot form a square of any defensive strength round their camels, in such a case the camels must be used as a parapet, the men inside – a plan which the Turkomans used very successfully on one occasion, shortly before General Lomakin started for Denghil Tepe in 1879. This incident gives a remarkable illustration of camelry operations…' (374-5).

He also noted and approved the fact that in the conquest of Central Asia the Russians made the company rather than the battalion the key infantry unit, remarking that 'General Skobelef laid particular stress on this' (334), and that it gave greater flexibility and reduced problems of supply.

Such small units in close formation would then require the closest possible artillery support. When the Turkmen counter-attacked after the Russian repulse at Denghil-Tepe, Lomakin's force escaped total disaster thanks to close support from its artillery:

'At Denghil Tepe in 1879, General Lomakin was obliged owing the smallness of his force to deliver the assault with practically no reserves. When the stormers found it impossible to penetrate into the defences and they fell away under the heavy fire poured into them by the Tekkes, there were no reserves to lean upon. Fortunately the guns afforded a refuge to the Russian infantry as this was swept back by the defenders, who charged out over their battlements in great force and with much determination. The retreating infantry masked the artillery for a while but cleared the front in time to allow the guns to deliver some rounds of case into the Turkoman swarms. These sufficed to drive the Tekkes back into their stronghold in confusion.' (158-9).

Here Marvin's account (and hence Callwell's) accords exactly with Lomakin's report of the action.[52] Callwell uses this as an illustration of the principle that artillery's primary role in small wars is to provide close infantry support, something he finds further evidence for in Skobelev's instructions on close artillery support in the successful Turkmen campaign the following year "The main principle of Asiatic tactics is to preserve close formations"; "The artillery must devote itself to closely supporting its comrades without the slightest regard for itself" (160).[53] This was also true of picquets and fortified positions: 'In the defence of isolated posts guns are of course most valuable. General Skobelef in forming the advanced depots on the line his troops were to follow towards Denghil Tepe told off several guns to each, the infantry garrisons being very small' (383).

When it came to cavalry tactics Callwell's preference here as elsewhere was for boldness and decision. He seems to have been in thrall to the romantic ideal of the Cossack as the perfect skirmisher and guerrilla horseman, harassing the enemy's lines of communication as they had done in the Napoleonic campaigns:

'The Cossacks, when they were purely irregulars in the Russian service, were wonderfully skilled in the art of luring on an enemy and they practised these manoeuvres with equal success upon the splendid cavalry of Napoleon and upon the Tartar horsemen of the steppes' (216-7).

'Moors, Tartars, and some Asiatics of the steppes fire from horseback, and the Cossacks adopted the plan of firing mounted in the days when their guerilla tactics made them so formidable' (361).

Given this Callwell found it hard to understand why Skobelev did not assign the cavalry a more active role in his instructions for the Turkmen campaign:

'…it is only right to notice that the views expressed above as to the desirability of cavalry acting with great boldness in warfare of this nature had an opponent of undoubted authority in the person of General Skobelef. His instructions to his cavalry in the Turkoman campaign throughout breathed the spirit of caution. "As long as the enemy's cavalry is unshaken and is not in an unfavourable position, *e.g.*, with an obstacle in rear, in a hollow, &c., our cavalry must not enter on a combat with it. Pursuit of a retreating Turkoman cavalry is useless, as it only breaks up the tactical formations – our one strong point and sheet anchor."[54] Such were his orders, and they sound strange enough; for in a word General Skobelef taught his cavalry to be afraid of the Turkoman horse. It must, however, be remembered that the Russian cavalry operating beyond the Caspian was not well adapted for shock tactics, and that with mounted troops of a different class at his disposal the general might have held other views' (363).

In fact the reasons for this were clear enough. As Mikhail Terent'ev, author of the standard history of the Russian conquest, put it 'The local Asiatics do not rate Cossacks at all, if they are not accompanied by rockets or cannon; they regard the infantry with great respect. A platoon of Russian sharpshooters is far more alarming to them than three *sotnia*s of Cossacks….'[55] This in turn was because the Cossacks came out of the same tradition of steppe raiding and nomadic warfare as the Turkmen and Kazakhs themselves (in Russian the word is the same – *Kazak*). As such they held few terrors for nomadic opponents, however formidable they might have been for

regular European forces. Frequently in Central Asia Cossacks fought most effectively when dismounted, as at Iqan in 1864. Callwell cites a further incident which demonstrates both this and their ultimate reliance on infantry to secure a position, although he does not seem to draw either of these inferences from it:

> The affair of "Petrusvitch's Garden," near Denghil-Tepe in 1880, is an admirable illustration of this sort of work and of its dangers. The enclosure was held by the Tekkes in some forces. At dawn the whole of the cavalry and some guns moved in this direction under General Petrusvitch in obedience to orders to that effect. When at about 180 yards from the enclosure the general ordered his men to dismount and attack, the horse-holders retiring some distance, while a mounted troop remained in reserve. The dismounted men cleared the enemy out with the bayonet (the cavalry had bayonets), but General Petrusvitch was mortally wounded at their head and there was some confusion in consequence. The Tekkes now issued out round the flank and threatened the horse-holders, but a portion of the reserve troops dismounted and assisted by the guns repulsed this offensive movement. Very severe fighting continued about the enclosure for some time, but the cavalry managed to hold their own till infantry reinforcements, which had been urgently asked for, hurried up and secured what had been won (369).[56]

Overall then Callwell had a tendency to exaggerate both the consistency and the success of Russian tactics, even when they did not accord with his own preconceptions about the continuing importance of cavalry in small wars.

On logistical questions Callwell noted at various points that small wars were as much about the conquest of nature as of indigenous enemies (38),[57] remarking that 'in the steppes Russian forces have similarly disappeared, victims of the enormous distances in which such a territory must be traversed to achieve a military object' (187). In Central Asia neither water transport nor railways (until the 1880s) were of any use to European armies. These might be equipped with the most modern breech-loading rifles and artillery, but were still wholly reliant on animals – principally camels – when it came to moving around.[58] While modern firearms provided an immediate tactical advantage, the consumption of ammunition demanded by modern weapons also worsened problems of supply: 'The Russian infantry during General Lomakin's disastrous attack on Denghil Tepe fired 246,000 rounds, or considerably over 100 rounds per man actually engaged' (347). This translated into a need for thousands of camels to sustain even a very small expeditionary force: 'When the Russians conquered Khiva in 1874 [*sic*], the column from Tashkend, consisting of 5,500 men, was accompanied by a supply column of 8,800 camels' (40).[59] Callwell also noted that Colonel Markozov's column from Krasnovodsk had been forced to turn back because of inadequate transport (27). He praised the use of four separate invading columns for the Khiva campaign as a means of maximising the chances of success, since it was unlikely that all of them would find their routes impracticable (90-91). In fact, this decision was partly dictated by logistical constraints (a single large column could not have moved over such barren country) and partly by the vanity of the Turkestan Governor-General, General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufman (1818

– 1882), who was determined to have a column under his personal command set out from Tashkent, rather than leaving the glory of the expedition to the columns from Orenburg and the Caspian. In the event the Tashkent column very nearly foundered in the Qizil-Qum desert, and was only saved by the skill of its Kazakh guides.[60]

When it came to logistics for Callwell Skobelev was once again the exemplar, both in his insistence on the need for a small, flexible attacking force, and in the balance he was able to achieve between the fighting force and those protecting his communications in his final campaign against the Turkmen in 1880-1:

> General Skobelef, when engaged upon his campaign against the Turkomans in 1880, which will be referred to later, was constantly in fear that the Russian government would take alarm at the slowness of his progress and would send reinforcements across the Caspian; weakness of force to him was under the circumstances a source of strength (41).

> General Skobelef made great efforts to get every available man up to the front for his operations against Denghil Tepe in 1880, the detachments on the communications being reduced to the lowest possible limits consistent with the safety of the various posts; and yet while the army at the front mustered only about 8,000 men, the troops on the communications mounted up to about 4,500, or over one third of the whole force (97).

What Callwell did not recognise was that this army of over 12,000 men, while small in absolute terms, was in fact the largest single force used in any of the Central Asian campaigns. Skobelev also insisted on the construction of the first railway in Central Asia (from the Caspian shore to the oasis of Qizil-Arvat), anticipating Kitchener's use of railways in the Sudan by fifteen years. This was reflected in the cost of the campaign, at 11 million roubles more than double that of Lomakin's failed attack the previous year.[61] In other words Skobelev was not quite the master of economy of force that Callwell imagined – he was given more men and funds than would usually have been available for such an operation precisely because of the need to wipe out the memory of Lomakin's previous failure.

Conclusion

Callwell's work is refreshingly free from the hypocrisy that attended many British accounts of the Russian campaigns in Central Asia, which accused them of waging war with a peculiar brutality, in implied contrast to the more humane approach of British forces in Asia.[62] Skobelev had come in for particular censure for the massacre at Denghil-Tepe, and in particular for the admission in his report that Turkmen 'of both sexes' (*oboego pola*) had been cut down by his men when fleeing the fortress.[63] Skobelev was in fact a particularly brutal and sadistic commander, and was seen as such by many of his Russian contemporaries,[64] but his actions at Denghil-Tepe and elsewhere were certainly not of a different order of violence to the British campaigns during the

Indian rebellion of 1857, on the North-West Frontier or at the Battle of Omdurman, and Callwell tacitly recognised this. For him as for many other British Indian soldiers and officials the British and the Russians were engaged in an entirely comparable and indeed complementary colonial enterprise in Asia – they were primarily colleagues rather than enemies, a fact which is often overlooked in the focus on 'Great Game' rivalry.[65] The Russian campaigns were a particularly successful example of colonial expansion through Small Wars which could be readily mined for tips, and Callwell cherry-picked suitable examples to support his overall thesis about the importance of decisiveness and the use of 'moral force' to intimidate a 'savage' enemy'.

For this reason it would be a mistake to view *Small Wars* as 'a reliable portrayal of all colonial war around 1900' in a handily compressed and synthesised form.[66] Looking at the Central Asian example we see that Callwell omitted a good many cases which did not fit his thesis, such as the 1839 Khiva expedition, and misrepresented others such as the fall of Tashkent. This was probably not deliberate, but an unconscious result of the single-minded pursuit of his argument. As he did not know Russian all his information was relayed at second hand, and he did not make full use even of all the sources that would have been available to him in English. *Small Wars* is in the end the work of a professional soldier seeking to produce a manual, not of a military historian, and it needs to be understood as such. Its value as a historical document is what it reveals about the late Victorian military mentality – it provides fascinating evidence of the constant flow of information between the elites of European empires in the 19th century, which amounted to a common imperial repertoire of techniques of rule and power which went well beyond military tactics.[67] Callwell was firmly embedded in that world, and *Small Wars* drew on the full range of European colonial experience. If, as Wagner suggests, Callwell's work has been used to argue for a form of British exceptionalism in the waging of colonial wars – a softer, 'hearts and minds' approach - then this is a misreading.[68] Callwell's evident approval, admiration and advocacy of the tactics employed by Russia's most notoriously violent general, Skobelev, and his clear acceptance of complete comparability between British, French and Russian colonial campaigns suggests that he was not claiming the existence of or advocating a peculiarly *British* way of war. Instead *Small Wars* is about the common experience of warfare between the armies of 'civilized' states (of which Russia's was one) and a range of more or less 'savage' opponents - conflicts in which the tactics, weapons and forms of violence used were different from those employed when these states fought each other.

References

[1] Callwell, *Small Wars,* 1st ed. 1896, 2nd ed. 1899, 3rd ed. 1906 – references throughout are to the 1899 edition.
[2] Strachan, "Colonial Warfare", 76.
[3] Laqueur, "Origins of Guerrilla Doctrine", 361-3; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 50-1.
[4] Gates, "Small Wars", 381-2; Beckett "Another British Way in Warfare"; Whittingham "Warrior-scholarship in the age of colonial warfare".
[5] Betz, "Counter-insurgency, Victorian Style".
[6] Whittingham, "Savage warfare".
[7] Scheipers, *Unlawful Combatants*, 177-183.
[8] Walter, *Colonial Violence,* 248-9.
[9] Wagner "Savage Warfare"; Porch, *Counterinsurgency*, 50-7, 76.
[10] Whittingham *Charles Callwell and the British Way in Warfare*.
[11] Whittingham *Charles Callwell and the British Way in Warfare*; Moreman "Callwell, Sir Charles Edward (1859–1928)". Letters from Callwell can be found in the Jellicoe Papers Vol.XLIX BL Add. MS 49037 f.130 (1919); Campbell-Bannerman Papers Vol.XLVII BL Add. MS 41252 f.173 (121); Callwell to Sir Eyre Crow 22/08/1914 TNA FO 800/102/77 ff.246 – 248; Callwell's letters to Lord Kitchener in 1915-1916 are in TNA WO159 & PRO30/57.
[12] Beckett, "Another British way in Warfare", 92.
[13] Callwell, "Lessons to be Learnt".
[14] Howard, "The British Way in Warfare"; Strachan, "Colonial Warfare"; Beckett, *Victorians at War,* 189; Beckett, "Another British way in Warfare"; Whittingham *Charles Callwell and the British Way in Warfare*.
[15] The first edition of *Small Wars* was translated into French in 1899, and Callwell drew upon some of the observations of his French translator when revising it for the second edition: Finch, *A Progressive Occupation?*, 29.
[16] The classic account of the Caucasus campaigns in English is Baddeley, *Russian Conquest of the Caucasus.* Published in 1908, the book cannot have been Callwell's source for his Caucasian examples, but Baddeley, the St Petersburg correspondent for the *London Standard*, also published articles on the subject which Callwell may have drawn upon.
[17] Morrison, "Killing the Cotton Canard"; Morrison, "Beyond the 'Great Game'".
[18] Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889,* 86.
[19] Marvin, *The Russian Advance Towards India,* 98-9.
[20] Novikova, *Skobeleff and the Slavonic Cause*.
[21] Maslov, "Rossiya v Srednei Azii"; Shakhovskoi "Ekspeditsiya protiv Akhal-Tekintsev"; V.N.G.: "Ocherk Ekspeditsii v Akhal-Teke" Kuropatkin *Zavoevaniya Turkmenii*. See further Rogger "The Skobelev Phenomenon".
[22] *Siege and Assault of Denghil-Tépé*; Dalton "General Skobeleff's Instructions".
[23] Grodekov, *Voina v Turkmenii* translated as Grodekoff, *The War in Turkumania* [*sic*].
[24] Strachan, "Colonial Warfare", 81-2.
[25] Shamil was an Avar from Daghestan, not a Cherkess (Circassian).
[26] Scheipers, *Unlawful Combatants*, 226-7.
[27] Strachan, "Colonial Warfare", 77.
[28] von Hellwald, *The Russians in Central Asia,* 157-9.
[29] Terent'ev, *Istoriya Zavoevaniya Srednei Azii* I, 345-349; Danish *Risala ya Mukhtasari*, 47-8; Donish *Istoriya Mangitskoi Dinastii,* 47-8.
[30] Romanovskii, *Zametki po Sredneaziatskomu voprosu,* 61 – translated as Romanovski *Notes on the Central Asiatic Question*, where the account of Irjar is on pp.lx – lxiv.
[31] Callwell's source here is probably Kostenko "Turkestan", 912, a partial translation of Kostenko *Turkestanskii Krai.*
[32] Beisembiev, *The Life of 'Alimqul*, 64.
[33] On this see Morrison, "The Turkestan Generals", 168-172.
[34] There is a vivid account in the report of Lt Soltanovskii, who led one of the storming parties: 'Zapiska o deistviyakh vzvoda strelkovoi roty 7 Zapadno-Sibirskago bataliona pri shturme gor. Tashkenta 15, 16 i 17 iiunya 1865g' 22/06/1865 in Serebrennikov, *Turkestanskii Krai*, 215 – 9.
[35] Hellwald, *The Russians in Central Asia*, 146-7. Much more complete accounts can be found in Romanovski *Notes on the Central Asiatic Question,* 13; Anon "Russian Advances in Central Asia", 408. Aberigh-Mackay *Notes on Western Turkistan,* 27; Schuyler, *Turkistan* I, 114-115. Callwell was clearly familiar with the latter text as he made use of it when writing of the 1875-6 campaign against Khoqand (see below).
[36] In fact Georgian officers and men fought on the *Russian* side in the Caucasian campaigns.
[37] See Potto, "Gibel otryada Rukina"; Terent'ev, *Istoriya Zavoevaniya* II, 62.
[38] See Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier.*
[39] *Russian Military Expedition to Khiva*, which is a translation of Ivanin/Golosov "Pokhod v Khivu v 1839 godu".
[40] On this see Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters".
[41] Callwell's source here and elsewhere when referring to the wars against Khoqand in the 1850s is almost certainly Michell *The Russians in Central Asia,* here 363-5.

[42] Callwell's source is Schuyler *Turkistan*, II, 292.
[43] Michell, "The Russian Expedition to the Alai and Pamir"; The standard account of the final Khoqand campaign in Russian was Serebrennikov "K istorii kokanskogo pokhoda".
[44] Marvin, *The Eye Witnesses' Account of the Disastrous Russian Campaign*; Callwell also seems to have used Delmar Morgan, "The Tekkeh Expedition of 1879".
[45] Terent'ev, *Istoriya Zavoevaniya* III, 14; O'Donovan *The Merv Oasis* I, 136-7.
[46] Marvin, *The Eye Witnesses' Account*, 77.
[47] Shakhovskoi "Ekspeditsiya protiv Akhal-Tekintsev" No.4, 171.
[48] Belich, *The New Zealand Wars,* 311-321.
[49] Kostenko "Turkestan".
[50] Strachan, "Colonial Warfare", 85-6.
[51] Dalton, "General Skobeleff's Instructions", 714-5.
[52] Marvin, *The Disastrous Russian Campaign*, 253-5; "Zhurnal zanyatii i voennykh deistvii Akhal-Tekinskogo ekspeditsionnogo otryada" 01/09/1879 Russian State Military-Historical Archive F.1300 Op.1 D.80 l.137*ob*; this also accords almost exactly with the account given by Demurov "Boi s tekintsami pri Denghil-Tepe" no.3, 620.
[53] Callwell's source is Dalton "General Skobeleff's Instructions", 714-5.
[54] A slight paraphrase of Dalton "General Skobeleff's Instructions", 716.
[55] Terent'ev, *Istoriya Zavoevaniya*,II, 177.
[56] Callwell takes this episode from Grodekoff *The War in Turkumania* III, 661-2.
[57] Beckett, *The Victorians at War,* 4.
[58] Morrison, "Camels and Colonial Armies".
[59] Khiva actually fell in 1873. Callwell's source here is Trench "The Russian Campaign against Khiva"; Trench in turn was relying on accounts in *Russkii Invalid* and on the articles about the campaign written for the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* by Lt. Hugo Stumm of the Prussian army, subsequently published as Stumm *Der russische Feldzug nach Chiwa* & translated as Stumm *The Russian Campaign against Khiva*.
[60] Terent'ev, *Istoriya Zavoevaniya,* II, 169-182
[61] Heiden to Miliutin 06/02/1881 in Il'yasov (ed.) *Prisoedinenie Turkmenii k Rossii,* 484.
[62] See for instance Curzon *Russia in Central Asia in 1889,* 84-6.
[63] Skobelev, "Osada i Shturm kreposti Dengil-Tepe (Geok-Tepe)", 52 translated as *Siege and Assault of Denghil-Tépé*; the phrase about 'both sexes' here occurs on p.54.
[64] Nalivkin "Moi Vospominaniya o Skobeleve", 535-8; Campbell "Violent acculturation".
[65] Campbell, "Our friendly rivals".
[66] Walter, *Colonial Violence*, 249; Gates "Small Wars", 381-2.
[67] See Mackenzie "European Imperialism", and other essays in the same volume.
[68] Wagner, "Savage Warfare", 218-220.

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