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AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENERAL SIR CHARLES GORDON'S COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN IN THE SUDAN

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JCSP 38

Master of Defence Studies

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By Maj Daryl W. Morrell
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ABSTRACT

The 19th Century in many respects was the high water mark of the British Empire. General Sir Charles Gordon became an iconic image of this Imperial age. When Gordon died in the Sudan at the siege of Khartoum on 26 January 1885, he thereafter became one of the most storied soldiers of his generation. His career in and out of British service was upheld as an example of all that was best in the British Empire. His defeat at Khartoum transformed him into a Christ like figure who died attempting to put down a counter-insurgency and civilize a backward nation.

For the purpose of this discussion, Gordon was more interesting for what he represented. He was seen by many contemporaries as embodying the virtues of Imperial Britain at the apogee of its power. His beliefs and ideals are reflective of those held by the British Army and Colonial Administrators who ran the Empire. Viewed from a broader sociological perspective, Gordon's defeat at Khartoum and the events leading up to it provide a lens through which to view 19th Century British Imperialism. *This paper will use institutional analysis to examine the role of the British military inside the institution of imperialism within the counter-insurgency context of the 19th Century Mahdist revolt in the Sudan.* This paper concludes that the larger interplay of institutional forces opposed each other to such a degree as to make successful counter-insurgency in the Sudan exceptionally difficult.

AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENERAL SIR CHARLES GORDON'S COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN IN THE SUDAN

INTRODUCTION

Take up the White Man's Burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child. – **Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden**¹

At one time or another every empire says that it is different. It points out that its circumstances are unique and that it has a mission to civilize, enlighten, and bring order and democracy to the world; and that force is used only as a last resort.² There have always been intellectuals willing to cast empire in a benign or altruistic light. Some have argued that the major component in European culture that made it particularly hegemonic was the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. This was a collective notion identifying Europeans as against all non-Europeans.³ Nineteenth century writers were well aware of the facts of Empire and had definite views on race and imperialism which can be easily found in their

¹ Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/kipling/kipling_ind.html (accessed March 16, 2012).

² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Toronto: Random House, 1979), xxi.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

writing as Kipling's poem so aptly demonstrates.⁴ The underlying cultural assumptions implicit in these writings were used to justify the institution of imperialism in general and 19th Century British Imperialism in particular.

The 19th Century in many respects was the high water mark of the British Empire. General Sir Charles Gordon became an iconic image of this Imperial age. When Gordon died in the Sudan at the siege of Khartoum on 26 January 1885, he thereafter became one of the most storied soldiers of his generation. His career in and out of British service was upheld as an example of all that was best in the British Empire. His defeat at Khartoum transformed him into a Christ like figure who died attempting to put down a counter-insurgency and civilize a backward nation.

For the purpose of this discussion, Gordon was more interesting for what he represented. He was seen by many contemporaries as embodying the virtues of Imperial Britain at the apogee of its power. His beliefs and ideals are reflective of those held by the British Army and Colonial Administrators who ran the Empire. Viewed from a broader sociological perspective, Gordon's defeat at Khartoum and the events leading up to it provide a lens through which to view 19th Century British Imperialism. *This paper will use institutional analysis to examine the role of the British military inside the institution of imperialism within the counter-insurgency context of the 19th Century Mahdist revolt in the Sudan.* This paper will demonstrate that the larger interplay of

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

institutional forces opposed each other to such a degree as to make successful counter-insurgency in the Sudan exceptionally difficult.

This case study concludes that the shared world view of British Imperialism itself caused the Mahdist revolution. The institutional changes that would have been necessary to create success in the Sudan would have undermined the shared cultural beliefs of the Empire. Institutional factors driving British Imperialism and present in the army of the time reinforced its self-appointed mission to civilize barbarian peoples and nations. It was these factors that created the circumstances leading to Gordon's death and failure in the Sudan.

To understand the institutional forces at work, this paper will use the institutional analysis framework derived from the sociological work of Richard Scott. These institutional forces constrained the capacity of conventional military forces to successfully adapt to the necessities of counter-insurgency warfare. Several previous studies of counter-insurgencies have used the institutional analysis model⁵ and

⁵ Eric Ouellet, *Institutional Analysis of Counterinsurgency: The Case of the IPKF in Sri Lanka (1987–1990)*, Vol. 11, 2011), 470-496.; Eric Ouellet, "Multinational Counterinsurgency: The Western Intervention in the Boxer Rebellion 1900-1901," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 3 (09, 2009): 507-527, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=45694312&site=ehost-live>.; Eric Ouellet and Pierre C. Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954–1960*, Vol. 34, 2011), 799-824.; Pierre C. Pahlavi and Eric Ouellet, "Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: Israel Defense Forces during the 33-Day War of 2006," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 1 (03, 2012): 32-55, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=70708155&site=ehost-live>.

demonstrated that the core values of conventional military forces can sometimes restrict their capacity to successfully adapt to the counter-insurgency environment.⁶

Counter-insurgency warfare requires considerable adaptation on the part of conventional forces to move from the conventional to the non-conventional operations. Success is significantly dependent on the ability of friendly forces to adapt to the new environment. Organizational adaptation entails more than simple reorganization of force structures, command and control relationships and doctrine. Successful adaptation requires a willingness to deal with deep and frequently subtle institutional forces that can prevent effective change from occurring. Sociological institutional analysis provides a methodology to uncover these institutional forces. This sociological prism, beyond revealing institutional forces that hinder transformation, is also useful in understanding how some institutional forces can lead to inappropriate or unwanted adaptation that can be equally problematic in a counter-insurgency context.⁷

While very few British military forces were involved in Gordon's campaign and fall at Khartoum, the cultural and societal forces that drove imperialism and shaped the British military of the day certainly affected Gordon and his decision making. To facilitate the discussion of these broad sociological forces, an expansive, sociological view of conflict will be taken to allow for meaningful comparison over time.

⁶ Ouellet, *Institutional Analysis of Counterinsurgency: The Case of the IPKF in Sri Lanka (1987–1990)*, 1-2.

⁷ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954–1960*, 799.

The study of armed conflicts that do not fit Western views of state-centric conventional warfare can create challenges with terminology.⁸ Terms describing non-conventional warfare sometimes overlap or are synonymous with each other. Terms such as small wars, insurgencies, partisan warfare, irregular warfare, asymmetric warfare, revolutionary warfare, fourth generation warfare, guerrilla warfare, peasant revolts and low intensity conflicts often lead to definitional confusion. The different terms tend to emphasize different aspects of non-conventional warfare, as well as being tied to country or era specific expressions of a particularly intellectual fashion. These terms are also often defined having in view specific policies of the government of the day, and thus are inherently politically and sometimes ideologically oriented.⁹

In this context, it is thus important to clarify key assumptions about the term used to describe the Sudan conflict. Gordon's ill-fated expedition to quell the revolt in the Sudan will be considered as a counterinsurgency operation. However, following Shafer's criticism of the overly prescriptive nature of the concept of counterinsurgency,¹⁰ the term is used broadly. The benefit of a broader application of the term is that it allows the

⁸ W. Safire, "On Language: Irregular Warfare," *New York Times Online* June 8, 2008, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/magazine/08wwln-safire-t.html> (accessed February 19, 2008).

⁹ D. M. Shafer, "The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 1 (Spring 88, 1988): 57, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=5043230&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

analysis of the Sudan counter-insurgency to be analyzed beyond the policy context of the day.¹¹

This paper, therefore, will define an insurgency as a large organized armed movement seeking to change an existing social order. Social order is defined here as a stable pattern of social interactions that establishes and legitimizes social roles, unfair access to resources, hierarch and other forms of power and status in a given community.¹² Similarly, a counterinsurgency is an organized armed movement seeking to maintain an existing social order, or at least trying to minimize any change the insurgents are trying to implement. It is recognized that these are broad definitions of important terms. However, the scope of these definitions allows for sociological comparisons across time without being constrained by the narrow and idiosyncratic nature of more prescriptive definitions aimed at serving the policies of the day.¹³

To conduct this sociological comparison, this case study will use the institutional analysis framework to examine several key decisions made by the British or their proxies such as Gordon up to the time of the fall of Khartoum. Sequentially, this paper will provide an overview of the institutional analysis framework, an overview of the conflict itself and then identify and analyse several decisions using the institutional analysis

¹¹ Ouellet, *Multinational Counterinsurgency: The Western Intervention in the Boxer Rebellion 1900-1901*, 508.

¹² *Ibid.*, 524.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 509.

framework with a view to determining if institutional forces were working at cross purposes to each other.

SECTION 1 - INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS MODEL

Take up the White Man's burden
The savage wars of peace
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
(The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen folly
Bring all your hope to nought.¹⁴

The sociological institutional analysis framework is central to the analysis presented in this case study. This section will outline the sociological institutional analysis framework in some detail, explaining its derivation from theories of social order, underpinnings, and how it can provide a useful tool to examine military institutions in their sociological context.

Michael Hechter argues that social order in societies can only arise and be maintained by solving two separate problems. First, society must be reasonably predictable in order to allow individuals to coordinate their activity. This requires stable expectations about others' behavior.¹⁵ Further, if people are to interact productively, they need to do things that help rather than hurt others. In other words, they need to learn how

¹⁴ Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*

¹⁵ Michael Hechter and Christine Horne, "The Problem of Social Order," in *Theories of Social Order*, eds. Michael Hechter and Christine Horne (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), 29.

to sustain cooperation.¹⁶ Predictability and cooperation are often described as the two pillars of social order.¹⁷ Institutions represent a formalization of these two pillars as they are composed of both rules and sanctions that govern behaviours, and ways of thinking and feeling that govern attitudes. Attitudes and behaviours reinforce each other in maintaining the internal integrity of the institution.¹⁸

Internal integrity must be protected as an institution is influenced by environmental factors. It is important to realize that an institution can only exist if it serves a legitimate social function. To this end, institutions expend a great deal of effort to protect their legitimacy in the face of environmental pressures. Further, institutions will only adapt if the threat from the environment to its legitimacy is perceived as presenting greater risks to its survival than the risks associated with fundamentally altering its core values and beliefs. Thus, in most cases, institutions only change when they have no other choice.¹⁹

Institutional analysis has been used by sociologists to study how both public and private institutions make managerial and economic decisions since the 1980s. The institutional analysis approach recognizes that there are non-rational, non-economic, and non-psychological factors that explain why firms and institutions organize the way they

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954–1960*, 800.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

do. With the exception of earlier cited studies, very few sociologists have applied the analytical tool of institutional analysis to the military institution.²⁰

In terms of institutions that control violence, Max Weber famously defined the state this way: “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”²¹ While this definition has been contested, it does mark the military as a component of the state. The military institution then has as its primary social function to maintain the legitimacy of the state by the use, actual or potential, of legitimate violence.²² How an institution like the military legitimizes its existence is closely linked to the social environment in which its parent state finds itself. What is less well known is how the military institution maintains its internal integrity when challenged by an enemy that does not conform to the usual definition of the state-centric conventional warfare. This can put the military institution in a dilemma: it may need to choose between successful adaptation to a non-conventional opponent or maintaining the core foundations of its institutional social legitimacy.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78.

²² Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

²³ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954–1960*, 801.

While there are many schools of thought in sociological institutional analysis, the most comprehensive framework is provided by Richard Scott.²⁴ Scott's framework is in consonance with the preceding discussion of the pillars of social order though he provides more details for one of them. In terms of social predictability, Scott defines this first pillar as regulative and sees it as being composed of both formal and informal rules, regulations, laws, and sanction systems. The second pillar of social order related to its cohesiveness is divided into two separate pillars of institutional analysis: normative and the cultural-cognitive. With the normative pillar, Scott argues that social cohesion is possible if a number of implicit values and norms are shared about what is desirable and legitimate. The cultural-cognitive third pillar in Scott's model refers to shared preconceived notions, thought patterns, and worldviews that contribute to maintaining social cohesiveness. Together, these three pillars of institutional analysis provide a framework for understanding the actions and decisions taken within institutions.²⁵

The central items analyzed by this three-pillar approach to institutional analysis are the key decisions made by important actors that lead to real actions or inaction. While this does require a degree of qualitative interpretation, it is on the whole quite similar to that done in the well-established field of organizational analysis.²⁶ The three pillars of institutional analysis form the main variables that determine why real actions or inaction take place. As an example, rules and regulations can limit what is thinkable (cultural-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 801.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

cognitive), while the rules themselves can also express underlying norms and values of the institution. To overcome these overlapping dynamics, institutional analysis divides the three pillars, and uses specific indicators for each.²⁷ For the regulative pillar, the indicators are not only the formal and informal rules, regulations, laws and sanction systems, but also how rules and sanctions are invoked when making decisions. The indicators for the normative pillar are related to social expectations of shared norms and standards of action. Invoking “appropriateness” and the “normal” way of doing business are typical indicators of this pillar. Finally, the typical indicators for the cultural-cognitive pillar are specific beliefs, worldviews, thought patterns and the invocation of what is “right,” “good” or “true.”²⁸

The preceding section has provided a description of the sociological institutional analysis model and demonstrated how it was derived from existing theories of social order. Institutional analysis provides a useful theoretical framework to use in examining counter-insurgencies. Before beginning an institutional analysis of the Sudan conflict, it is important to have a baseline of historical context with respect to the Mahdist revolt.

SECTION 2 – BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Take up the White Man’s burden,
And reap his old reward

²⁷ W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, Third ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 2008).

²⁸ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954–1960*, 801.

The blame of those ye better
 The hate of those ye guard
 The cry of hosts ye humour
 (Ah, slowly!) toward the light:
 “Why brought ye us from bondage,
 Our loved Egyptian night?”²⁹

It is difficult to understand the sociological factors at work without at least a rudimentary understanding of the historical context of the conflict. This section will provide some historical background to the conflict in the Sudan up to the point of Gordon’s death at Khartoum. The historical context provides the frame upon which later sociological observations can be hung. The purpose here is not to give a definitive history of the British Empire in the Sudan, but rather to hit the high points that will add clarity to later discussions. This historical account will begin by explaining how the British Empire became involved in the Sudan.

In the 1820s, Egypt conquered the Sudan with the intent of exploiting its natural resources to add to Egyptian coffers. The Sudan was a vast land of almost a million square miles, mostly swamp and jungle in the south and desert in the north. The south was the home to several primitive peoples and the haunt of Arab slave hunters from the North. Indeed, capturing, buying and selling slaves were the principal occupations of those inhabitants who were not themselves slaves. Even some slaves were involved in the business, as armed slaves were used to hunt potential slaves.³⁰

²⁹ Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*.

³⁰ Byron Farwell, *Eminent Victorian Soldiers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 116.

The British Empire would not have become involved at all in the Sudan except for its interests in Egypt. Even with its interests in Egypt, however, it had been long standing British policy to avoid entanglements in that country.³¹ Lord Palmerston, in 1857 stated the British position this way:

While it is very possible that many parts of the world would be better governed by France, England, and Sardinia than they are now ... we do not want to have Egypt ... We want to trade with Egypt and to travel through Egypt, but we do not want the burden of governing Egypt.³²

Gradually, however, Britain was to find itself drawn into Egyptian affairs. Egypt was nominally part of the Ottoman Empire. During the later part of the 19th Century, attempts were made to modernize the country. For example, in 1856 permission to construct the Suez Canal was granted to the French. Further, the British were given the right to establish the Bank of Egypt and the Telegraph Company. Khedive Ismail, Egypt's leader from 1863-79 encouraged this modernization.³³ In 1869 there were two events that led to dramatically increased British interest in Egypt: the opening of the Suez Canal and the dispatch of Baker's expedition to Equatoria.³⁴

³¹ Robert Giddings, *Imperial Echoes* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Great Britain: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 1996), 186.

³² *Ibid.*, 186.

³³ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁴ R. Mowafi, "Slavery, Slave Trade and Abolition Attempts in Egypt and the Sudan 1820-1882" (Lund Studies in International History,), 67, [https://digitalt.uib.no/bitstream/1956.2/2515/1/1013-mowafi%20\(slvery%20slave%20trade%20and%20abolition%20attempts%20in%20Egypt%20and%20Sudan\).pdf](https://digitalt.uib.no/bitstream/1956.2/2515/1/1013-mowafi%20(slvery%20slave%20trade%20and%20abolition%20attempts%20in%20Egypt%20and%20Sudan).pdf) (accessed March 15, 2012).

Maritime travel and trade was central to British interests and the Suez Canal provided a faster and safer route to the jewel in the British crown: India. Britain's grand strategy in the Near East was to safeguard the routes to India by keeping Russia out of the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor remained centred on maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Any change to the status quo in Egypt would therefore reopen the Eastern Question at the risk of Great Power conflict.³⁵ Also of note was Samuel Baker's expedition; one of the events that triggered the Scramble for Africa.³⁶

In 1869, Khedive Ismail appointed Samuel Baker to command the Upper Nile Expedition and as Governor-General of Equatoria for four years. His instructions were to:

1. To establish the authority of the Egyptian Government in the countries of the White Nile.
2. To suppress the slave trade.
3. To introduce a system of legitimate commerce.
4. To open to navigation the great lakes of the Equator which form the principal sources of the Nile.
5. To establish a chain of military stations and commercial depots, distant at intervals of three days march throughout central Africa. Gondokoro is the base of operations.
6. By the annexation of these countries (which comprise the Nile basin of Central Africa), the Egyptian Empire would extend from the sources of the Nile to the Mediterranean.³⁷

Thus one of Ismail's objectives was the suppression of the slave trade. In his account of the instructions Baker stresses the suppression of the slave trade but for Ismail the

³⁵ Dan Halvorson, "Prestige, Prudence and Public Opinion in the 1882 British Occupation of Egypt," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 56, no. 3 (09, 2010): 426, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=30h&AN=53042370&site=ehost-live>.

³⁶ Mowafi, *Slavery, Slave Trade and Abolition Attempts in Egypt and the Sudan 1820-1882*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

consolidation and extension of Egyptian rule over the regions of the Upper Nile was the more important mission.³⁸ Egypt's modernization efforts combined with the fiscal extravagance of its leadership brought the nation to the brink of bankruptcy. In November 1875, owing to Egypt's dire financial straits, a controlling proportion of the Suez Canal shares was bought by Prime Minister Disraeli for the British government with money he raised from the French bankers, Rothschild. Thus British and French interests were strongly focused on Egypt.³⁹

Completely bankrupt by 1876, the Egyptian Khedivate was placed under the financial supervision of Britain and France. Anglo-French 'Dual Control' over Egyptian finances was further strengthened in 1879 when Khedive Ismail was deposed in favour of his weaker son, Tawfiq (1879-92). This had an explicitly political, not economic rationale. It was grounded on the understanding that neither Power of the liberal *entente* would tolerate the establishment in Egypt of political influence on the part of any other European power in competition with that of England and France. Prior to 1882, the Control had served the main British interest of preventing any Power from gaining predominance on the Nile and threatening the Canal route to India. In practical terms, this meant ensuring sound financial governance at Cairo so that Egypt's international

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 187.

obligations under the Law of Liquidation (1880) would be met, thereby preventing any interference from other powers and thereby safeguarding the routes to India.⁴⁰

The Egyptian Khedive understood the importance of Egypt to the British Empire. The previously mentioned appointment of Baker, an Englishman, to the post of Governor of Equatoria was done in part to demonstrate the Khedive's commitment to ending the slave trade with a view to demonstrating his good faith and limiting the reasons the British might have to intervene in Egyptian affairs. By 1873 the Khedive was unwilling to renew Baker's contract, however, he wanted to show that even though he was dismissing Baker, he did not mean to stop the efforts to end the slave trade. To convince the British Government of his sincerity, he sought another Briton to fill Baker's post.⁴¹ It was at this point that Chinese Gordon enter the story.

Already a minor celebrity from his exploits during the defeat of the Taiping rebellion and actions in the Crimean War,⁴² newspaper articles appeared from time to time suggesting that more active employment could be found for an officer of Gordon's calibre. While there was not a year in Queen Victoria's long reign where her soldiers were not fighting somewhere, the Government paid these musings in the press not heed. In 1871 Gordon headed a commission studying ways of improving the mouth of the

⁴⁰ Halvorson, *Prestige, Prudence and Public Opinion in the 1882 British Occupation of Egypt*, 426.

⁴¹ Mowafi, *Slavery, Slave Trade and Abolition Attempts in Egypt and the Sudan 1820-1882*, 72.

⁴² John Pollock, *Gordon the Man Behind the Legend* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1993), 58-96.

Danube and was subsequently appointed to a committee to report on the condition of British cemeteries in the Crimea. Returning from the Crimea in the summer of 1871, Gordon met at Constantinople Nubar Pasha, a shrewd Egyptian diplomat and politician. Nubar asked Gordon to recommend someone to replace Baker as governor of the Equatorial Provinces of Sudan. With typical panache, Gordon immediately recommended himself. A year later the British government approved Gordon's appointment and in September 1873 the Khedive of Egypt formally offered him the post. On 28 January 1874, his forty-first birthday, Gordon started his journey to the Sudan.⁴³

Arriving in Khartoum on 13 March, 1874 Gordon issued his first decree as governor, proclaiming that the ivory trade was to be a government monopoly and that it was now forbidden to import gunpowder or to recruit organized armed bands, such as the ones slavers employed, in the Equatorial Provinces. He then made his way by paddle-steamer to his own provincial capital at Gondokoro⁴⁴ Gondokoro was in the heart of the slave hunters' territory. Gordon saw his primary mission as the suppression of the slave trade and soon found his work beset with difficulties. He had few trustworthy lieutenants as eight members of the European staff he brought with him died in the first year. By Gordon's estimation, the Egyptians he had brought with him proved to be cowardly, deceitful, incompetent, idle and corrupt. Gordon dashed futilely about his province freeing slaves, building forts, trying to create some useful public works, trying to correct

⁴³ Farwell, *Eminent Victorian Soldiers*, 115-116.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

long-standing abuses and trying to inculcate Christian morals in people to whom such notions were alien.⁴⁵

Gordon's actions managed to alienate many of the entrenched interests in southern Sudan – slave traders, tribal chiefs, Egyptian officials, and witch doctors. Unsurprisingly, these failures bore heavily on a man prone to severe depression. The most depressing thing to Gordon was his failure to suppress the slave trade. When he found gangs of slaves, he struck off their chains and freed them. However, many of the freed did not know the way back to their homes, spoke only their tribal dialect and were often in poor physical condition. It was difficult to know what to do with them. In many cases, the freed slaves became, in effect, slaves of Gordon's government. It was an annoying but indisputable fact that the ablest, most intelligent people in his province were the Arab slave traders. After imprisoning them for a suitable time, Gordon frequently tried to enlist them, consequently arousing the distrust of the local tribes whose confidence and trust he had been striving to cultivate.⁴⁶

In these difficult circumstances, Gordon quarrelled vociferously with those around him and by letter with his superiors in Khartoum, Cairo and London. He threatened to resign but did not; he resigned and then withdrew his resignation. He found it impossible to go on, and impossible to admit failure. After three years, he arrived at a solution that would free him from an impossible situation. It took three years for him to

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

arrive at the only solution that would both release him from an impossible situation and satisfy personal sensibilities. Gordon concluded that he could only succeed if he was promoted to governor-general of the entire Sudan. When the Khedive refused to consider such a thing, Gordon resigned and at the end of 1876 left for England. Behind him were meagre accomplishments: a bit more territory explored, a few forts built, several thousand bewildered, homeless, freed slaves, and a still the thriving slave trade.⁴⁷

Gordon's return to England shocked the British public. Anti-slavery sentiments in England were quite high and there was considerable pressure on politicians to end the slave trade wherever it existed. Gordon's attempts to end slavery in the Sudan had been much admired in his home country. In this climate, Gordon's accomplishments were exaggerated in the press and his failures went unreported. Shortly after his return to England, both the British government and the Khedive of Egypt were pressing him to return to the Sudan. Gordon flatly refused; he had made his terms quite clear: he would be governor-general of the entire Sudan or nothing. Gordon had been in England only about two months when the Khedive relented and he was offered the post he had demanded.⁴⁸

The Khedive gave Gordon wide autonomy in all administrative decision and went so far as to waive the traditional yearly tribute that the Sudan paid to Egypt. However, Egypt also stopped all new investments in the country. For the first time since the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 121.

conquest the Sudanese administration became financially independent and had to depend on local resources for its existence and development.⁴⁹ The new governor-general was given two main assignments that also differentiate this second period of governorship. First, he was to abolish the slave trade according to a convention that was signed by Egypt and Britain in the summer of 1877. This period in the Sudan was characterised by a prolonged struggle against the slave trade and traders and this had profound economic, political and social repercussions Sudanese society. Second, it was also a period of tense relations between Egypt and Ethiopia. There was the threat of Ethiopian attack or invasion on the territories under Gordon's administration. Both the Khedive Isma'il and his successor, Muhammad Tawfiq, tried to avoid conflict with Ethiopia and searched for ways to maintain peace between the two countries. The Ethiopian danger was constantly in the background and influenced political and administrative decisions of Gordon as governor-general.⁵⁰

Gordon's administration in the Sudan paralleled the domestic political turmoil in Egypt driven by weakening finances. Egypt's growing financial difficulties attracted the interest and interference of Great Britain in its internal affairs. This peaked in June 1879, with the deposition of the Khedive Isma'il by the Ottoman Emperor at the request of

⁴⁹ Alice Moore-Harell, *Gordon and the Sudan Prologue to the Mahdiyya 1877-1880* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Britain. Unsurprisingly, this period is also characterised by Egyptian opposition to European interference and growing resentment of the Khedive himself.⁵¹

The Ottoman Sultan deposed Ismail and replaced him with Tewfik, Ismail's son. The ruinous state of Egyptian finances led, in 1879, to the British and French securing dual control of Egypt. No financial decision could be made by the Khedive without the permission of British or French advisors.⁵² This further exacerbated the negative feelings towards Turkish, British and French interference in Egypt's affairs. By 1880, however, Gordon's term as Governor-General of the Sudan was at an end. An exhausted and frustrated Gordon departed for London in January of that year.⁵³ This was however, far from the end of Gordon's involvement in the Sudan.

“Khedive Tawfiq, young and experienced, found himself as constrained as his father Ismail had been by the French and British representatives on the Council of Ministers. England and France's priority was the satisfaction of the creditors and their method was to dictate Egypt's financial and political decisions. It was, from the western perspective, just business. However, because business decisions took no account of political, social or military factors, outside interference prompted internal upheaval. By

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 187.

⁵³ John Pollock, *Gordon The Man Behind the Legend* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1993), 164-168.

an extraordinary coincidence of timing, Egypt was forced to neglect revolution abroad because of revolution at home.⁵⁴

A revolt was concocted in Cairo among the Arab troops, led by Colonel Ahmed Arabi of the Egyptian army. There was a massacre of foreigners in Alexandria on 11 June, 1882. British and French naval squadrons arrived at Alexandria and on 11 July the British bombarded the port and 25,000 British troops were landed under Sir Garnet Wolseley. The revolt was ended by the Egyptian defeat at Tel-el-Kebir on 13 September, 1882. The British now controlled Egypt.⁵⁵

However, their troubles were not at an end. In the Sudan, a religious rebellion had broken out in 1881 led by Mohammed Achmet, who called himself the Mahdi, as foretold by Mohammed. He asserted he had a divine mission to reform Islam, to establish a universal equality, a universal law, a universal religion and a community of goods. All who did not believe in him should be destroyed, be they Christian, Mohammedan or Pagan.⁵⁶

Every official in the Sudanese administration must have asked himself during this time when help would come from Cairo. A single minded and financially solvent government in Cairo should have been able to quell the Mahdist rebellion. Egypt had a

⁵⁴ Fergus Nicoll, *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon* (Gloucestershire, Great Britain: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004).

⁵⁵ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 187.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

massive standing army and the routes south, via the Nile and the Red Sea, were tried and tested. But the Arabi revolt and foreign occupation in 1882 removed military options. Popular discontent in Egypt was widespread, the army was still on the verge of wholesale mutiny and the government coffers were bare. Consequently, increasingly urgent telegrams from Khartoum received ever more distracted and non-committal replies from the Khedive's office. Cairo had far greater and more immediate crises with which to wrestle with than the suppression of an insurrection by a motley gathering of disaffected tribes in the Sudan. The disastrous timing of the Mahdi's uprising was compounded by the fact that Sudan, where expenditure consistently continued to exceed revenue, had helped drive Egypt into its financial crisis.⁵⁷ (alt citation)

To deal with the insurrection in the Sudan, Colonel William Hicks, in command of an Egyptian army, was sent out with a force of 11,000 men. He was led by a treacherous guide into a trap at El-Obeid, 225 miles south-west of Khartoum. Here, on 3 November, 1883, at the battle of Kashgal, they were massacred to a man by the Mahdi's forces.⁵⁸ Another Anglo-Egyptian force was defeated at El Teb near Suakin on 4 February 1884. The annihilation of the Hicks mission not only destroyed the Khartoum government's last hope of retaking Kordofan, it also convinced the Gladstone administration in London that Sudan was not worth the outlay in blood or money and certainly not worth risking troops from the British Empire.⁵⁹ This led Gladstone's

⁵⁷ Nicoll, *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon*, 134-135.

⁵⁸ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 188.

⁵⁹ Nicoll, *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon*, 209.

government to decide to evacuate the Sudan. General Gordon, who was preparing for service to King Leopold of Belgium in the Congo, was picked as the ideal commander to supervise the British withdrawal.⁶⁰

Gordon's instructions from the Gladstone government seem quite clear:

Her Majesty's Government are desirous that you should proceed at once to Egypt, to report to them on the military situation in the Soudan, (*sic*) and on the measures it may be advisable to take for that country, and for the safety of the European population of Khartoum. You are also desired to consider and report on the best mode of effecting the evacuation of the interior of the Soudan. (*sic*)⁶¹

The surviving evidence, however, suggests that Gordon resolved quite early in his mission to attempt to establish settled government in the area, with a Governor-General appointed by the British.⁶² Gordon did use paddle steamers under his command to evacuate some of the civilian populace of Khartoum. He also, however, started to fortify the city for a siege. On 13 March, 1884, an hour after sunrise, the bitter 320 day siege of Khartoum began.⁶³

Gordon was a legend in the public mind before he returned to the Sudan in 1884. A collection of his letters from Africa and a small body of literature about his life in China and the Sudan had already been published. He was credited with putting down the

⁶⁰ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 189.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶³ Nicoll, *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon*, 229.

Taiping rebellion in China, with preventing insurrection in the Sudan by riding boldly into a rebellious slaver's camp, and with abolishing the slave-trade and establishing just administration in the Sudan before the Mahdist revolt. He had a reputation for taming the savage beast, and his unconventional piety was also thought to have enhanced the almost mystical hold he was supposed to have had over the native mind.⁶⁴

This legend led the British public to respond warmly to the suggestion that Gordon be sent to the Sudan. Gordon's own recorded underestimation of the rebellion in the Sudan as a mock-religious revolt put up by the slavers encouraged the public to believe that the whole affair could be solved by the moral superiority and strength of character that Britain, through Gordon, represented.⁶⁵ This delusion continued undeterred by reality when Gordon finally did arrive in Khartoum. *The Times* correspondent there cabled, "General Gordon is perfectly confident that he will accomplish the pacification of the Soudan without firing a shot, such is the effect of the almost incredible influence which he has hourly manifested."⁶⁶ A *Times* leader commented,

In that distant city on the Nile where a few days before all was misery, despondency, and confusion, the coming of one noble hearted Englishman, resolute, righteous, and fearless, had changed despair into hope, and turned mourning into joy. The people of Khartoum recognized at once that their protector and deliverer had once more come among them....⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Douglas H. Johnson, "The Death of Gordon: A Victorian Myth," in *The British Army 1815-1914*, ed. Harold E. Raugh Jr. (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 520.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

While Gordon's past achievements were quite impressive, his reputation was exaggerated. He was largely ignorant of the Arabic language, did not know or understand the customs of the Sudanese and had to rely on reading the faces of his Egyptian subordinates and Sudanese subjects alike to judge their characters. He relied on his instincts, and while after his death these instincts were popularized as premonitions of uncanny accuracy, it is clear from reading his telegrams and journals that these very instincts led him astray. (alt citation) He was unduly harsh to many an innocent man and generously lenient to many a proven traitor. Throughout his mission he underestimated the religious foundations of the Mahdia, the appeal of its anti-foreign message, and its military strength, weaving fantasies of how quickly and easily small numbers of troops, whether British, Turkish or Indian could defeat the Mahdist army which was then at the peak of its power. He could not even read the faces of his own Sudanese troops, for he declared that one black face looked like another to him.⁶⁸

Legends of old soldiers refuse either to die or to fade away. The strength of the old Gordon legend consoled the public. Gordon's failure was not attributed to Gordon himself, even though his own evaluation of the situation proved disastrously inaccurate. The public did not lose faith in itself for believing so naively in Gordon's mystical power. The public lost faith in its government. The government was condemned, not for bowing to public pressure in sending out Gordon when it distrusted him, but for failing to relieve him when his assurances were proven false. Gordon's death became one of the issues that

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 520-521.

led to the Liberal government's fall and the replacement of its reluctant imperial policy with a more aggressive one.⁶⁹

In this context Gordon became a symbol of the rightness and the righteousness of imperialism. He had been seen as an Englishman in foreign service injecting English justice and English values in foreign empires. His assertion that "It would be an iniquity to reconquer these people [the Sudanese] and then hand them back to the Egyptians without guarantees of future good government," seemed to imply that Britain must now actively direct the Egyptian empire along British lines. His qualification that "The Soudan is a useless possession, ever was so, and ever will be so," called the wisdom of this intervention into question, but it did not detract from the moral certainty that Britain would be right to intervene. To those of the British public who already believed in the moral superiority of Britain and were inclined to favour the new imperialism, Gordon's mythic moral purity both represented and justified Britain's imperialism.⁷⁰

As a soldier resisting enormous odds while waiting for relief, the British public could imagine him dying a soldier's death. While there was the possibility of a campaign to overcome the defeat at of Khartoum, the public could accept that Gordon died at his post doing his duty in defeat so that others could triumph. When the Gladstone government left Gordon's death unavenged, his soldier's death was transformed. Gordon was seen not only as a victim sacrificed by a callous government, but a martyr whose

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 521.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 521-522.

death was its own victory. This transformation began immediately and his life and death quickly became the stuff of legend.⁷¹ Most of the writing about Gordon is not important for the study of Sudanese history but rather as a springboard for the study of Western psychology and the psychology of British Imperialism.⁷² Gordon, in much of the literature, was used to embody the ideals of the imperial age. Viewed at the time as a man without imperfection, he justified the winning of an empire by men of more mortal stature.⁷³

This section has provided some of the historical context required to understand some of the sociological factors at play in the Sudan during Gordon's time. It is clear from this discussion, that there were geostrategic reasons for the British Empire to be interested in Egypt and the Sudan. What is also clear is that the moralistic imperatives of British Imperialism also played a substantial role and that these imperatives, such as the abhorrence of slavery in defiance of local norms cause significant grievance amongst the Egyptian and Sudanese populace. Further, after his death, Gordon is upheld as an example of all that is right and good in the British Empire and its civilizing mission. The next section will begin the examination of how institutional factors in British Imperialism were at odds with policies that could have led to success in the Sudan.

SECTION 3 - INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Take up the White Man's burden

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁷² R. L. Hill, "The Gordon Literature," *The Durham University Journal*, no. 47 (1955): 97.

⁷³ Johnson, *The Death of Gordon: A Victorian Myth*, 527.

Ye dare not stoop to less
 Nor call too loud on Freedom
 To cloak your weariness.
 By all ye will or whisper,
 By all ye leave or do,
 The silent sullen peoples
 Shall weigh your God and you.⁷⁴

The previous section, while lengthy, provides some necessary background required to begin the examination of sociological factors through the use of the institutional analysis model. In this section, some of the regulative, cognitive and normative factors that played a role in the conflict will be discussed. This section will demonstrate that the very factors that drove British Imperialism made it almost impossible for General Gordon to succeed in the Sudan. Indeed, some of these driving factors led directly to the insurgency. The regulative, cognitive and normative factors as they applied in the Sudan conflict will be discussed sequentially.

The Regulative Pillar

In terms of social predictability, Scott defines this first pillar as regulative and sees it as being composed of both formal and informal rules, regulations, laws, and sanction systems.⁷⁵ One of the most important elements of British Imperialism was its consistent opposition to slavery. From a regulative perspective, several artifacts, in the form of legislation, outline formal opposition to the institution of slavery. Anti-slavery legislation was one of the more important causes that led to the abolition of slavery in

⁷⁴ Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*.

⁷⁵ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 50-51.

Egypt and the Sudan. It was also a major dissatisfier among the Sudanese population and allowed the Mahdi to recruit armed bodies of men from amongst the slave traders for his rebellion. Remembering that Egypt and the Sudan were part of the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire had been taking steps since the 1840s to suppress the slave trade in Turkey.⁷⁶

In 1847, the Ottoman Empire prohibited its ships from taking part in the slave trade in the Persian Gulf and closed the slave markets in Constantinople. The white slave traffic was completely prohibited October 1854, and in January 1857 a firman⁷⁷ outlawed the trade in black slaves throughout the Ottoman Empire. This legislation made the buying and selling of slaves illegal, however, owning slaves was still permitted. A special firman, designed to bring Egypt into line with the rest of the Ottoman Empire, was sent to Khedive Sa'id (Ismail's predecessor) in 1857 demanding the immediate suppression of the slave trade.⁷⁸

Sa'id Pasha took his first measure against the slave trade in 1854. He instructed the governors of the southern Provinces to prevent the introduction of Sudanese slaves into Egypt across the southern border. Further, he directed that clandestinely introduced slaves were entitled to claim their freedom, and be returned home to their country. To

⁷⁶ Mowafi, *Slavery, Slave Trade and Abolition Attempts in Egypt and the Sudan 1820-1882*, 54.

⁷⁷ An edict or administrative order issued by or in the name of a Middle Eastern sovereign.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 54.

enforce this edict, a government post was established on the White Nile at Fashoda in 1855.⁷⁹

While Sa'id's measures discouraged Egyptian slave trade, the situation south of Khartoum was not really affected. As long as the source of the slave trade lay outside Egyptian control, it was likely to continue as vigorously as ever. Slavery in the Sudan was as deeply ingrained and its abolition involved a great deal of social upheaval. The reasons for the perpetuation of the slave trade included an agricultural economy largely based on slave labour, the social structure that was supported by traditional and religious attitudes of long standing, and the incomplete or lack of control by the central authority on the regions south of Khartoum.⁸⁰

On the eve of Ismail's accession to Khedive, the White Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal were visited by two explorers: Speke and Grant (1861-63). Speke described the atrocities committed by the slave traders on the Banyoro and other peoples of the Upper Nile. About the same time Sir Samuel Baker, in his attempt to explore the Nile sources, travelled in the eastern and southern Sudan illuminating the horrific conditions of slaves in the areas he visited.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

The appointment of Baker and later Gordon as governors of the Sudan by Ismail was made for political reasons. Britain was the nation with the greatest interest in suppressing slavery in Egypt and Sudan as demonstrated by numerous reports by her consuls and agents. Despite Ismail's efforts to combat the slave trade, accusations were made that the Egyptian administration was complicit with the slavers. To convince European public opinion differently, Britons were appointed as governors of the Sudan. Khedive Ismail had received support from the British to counter French and Ottoman influence and enhance his autonomy. This assistance also left him well disposed to support British interests when it came to the question of slavery.⁸²

Gordon came to the Sudan with military and administrative experience gained in the Crimean War, China and elsewhere that did not prepare him for the conditions in the Sudan. Gordon's ignorance of Islam and lack of appreciation of local conditions were not conducive to his promoting a realistic policy. This ignorance was shared by many Europeans serving in nineteenth-century Sudan, but Gordon's case was perhaps the most famous and definitely the most fatal. When he was appointed governor-general by the Khedive Ismail in 1877 following the Khedive's conclusion of the Slave Trade Convention with Great Britain, Gordon described his task this way:⁸³

I have no easy task before me, but I have resolved the difficulty.... You have little idea of the great difficulty and the many questions involved in it, viz. in domestic slavery.... Consider the effect of harsh measures among the essentially Musulman (*sic*) population carried out brusquely by

⁸² *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁸³ Moore-Harell, *Gordon and the Sudan Prologue to the Mahdiyya 1877-1880*, vii-viii.

a Nazarene, measures that touch the pocket of everyone. Who, that had not the almighty with him would dare to do that? I will do it, for I value my life as nought.... As Solomon asked, I ask Wisdom to govern this great people; and not only will he give it, but all else besides. And why? Because I value not the 'all besides'. I am quite as averse to slavery, and even more so, than most people. I show it by sacrificing myself in these lands, which are no paradise.... I do what I think is pleasing to my God.⁸⁴

Gordon's emphasis on combating slavery is not surprising as this was a central issued of concern for British colonial policy-makers.⁸⁵ Biographers of Gordon emphasized slaver and religion further highlighting the suppression of slave raids and the slave trade to the imperial powers. In the context of the Sudan, the appointment of Christian Europeans such as Gordon to powerful positions with a mandate to suppress slavery an unrealistic and gravely misguided step. It aroused the hostility of the slave-traders, their allies and their private armies, while simultaneously disrupting the fabric of Muslim Sudanese society that depended heavily on slavery for its existence. It also caused jealousy among the Egyptian officials, whose integrity and standing were undermined by these appointments. The realisation that this policy had to be reversed, and that a much more cautious and tactful way to end slavery had to be found, did not take place until the Mahdist revolt was well under way.⁸⁶

This realization came far too late. Na'um Shuqayr, a Lebanese serving as one of Reginald Wingate's chief assistants in the Egyptian Department of Intelligence during the

⁸⁴ G. B. Hill, *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa* (London: Thos. Delarue, 1885), 225-6.

⁸⁵ Moore-Harell, *Gordon and the Sudan Prologue to the Mahdiyya 1877-1880*, viii.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

conquest of Sudan in 1896-98, singled out the suppression of slavery as one of the main reasons for the success of the Mahdist revolt. He emphasised the importance of slavery in the socio-economic fabric of Sudan and stated that the suppression of slavery, an institution sanctioned by Islamic law, by European Christian officials serving under Khedive Ismail, was a grave mistake.⁸⁷

The Egyptian historian Muhammad Fu'ad Shukri listed the abolition of slavery as the first and most important cause of discontent that led to the Mahdi's revolt. He stated that, though Gordon had eliminated many of the leading slave traders, the calm prevailing in Sudan was unreal, since the slavers had not really given up and were simply waiting for the right moment to renew their trade. This moment came following Khedive Ismail being deposed and Gordon leaving the Sudan. Under the new weak government of Khedive Tawfiq and Ra'uf Pasha, the Sudan's new governor-general, the slave trade was soon in full swing, with the Sudanese officials appointed by Gordon actively involved. That slavery was permitted under Islamic law added to Egyptian and Sudanese resentment of formal British Imperial policy.⁸⁸

It has been demonstrated that the British anti-slavery policy was deeply problematic in Egypt and the Sudan. Anti-slavery efforts regularly conflicted or compromised other interests. For example, the available evidence suggests that anti-slavery obligations regularly involved substantial economic costs, political risks and/or

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

foregone opportunities. By taking measures against slavery, British Imperial agents often antagonizing key constituencies (to the point of armed rebellion in the case of the Sudan), undermined trade links and commercial networks, and generally created complications and tensions that would not have existed otherwise. Strategic calculations would largely revolve around minimizing potential losses, rather than maximizing gains. In most colonies, administrators were faced with the following dilemma: to please audiences at home, slavery had to be abolished. But to Keep colonies safe and profitable, slave owners could not be alienated. With limited resources available for compensation or intervention, most colonial agents favoured a long-term, incremental approach to ending or ameliorating slavery, but were sometimes compelled to endorse stronger measures by periodic scandals, external pressures and slave resistance.⁸⁹

This section has demonstrated that anti-slavery activities, particularly the foreign imposed legislation, were key drivers in the Mahdi's insurgency in the Sudan. Further, while the regulative framework was in place, and sanctions were applied as rigorously as men like Gordon could under the circumstances, it is clear that these steps were insufficient to suppress slaver in the Sudan. Getting rid of slavery remained a key part of the British Imperialist agenda despite the challenges it caused. In fact, the more the anti-slavery agenda was pushed, the greater the resistance on the part of the slavers themselves and Sudanese society at large. This conflict at the regulative level seemed intractable. The next section of this paper will examine the deeper cognitive elements to

⁸⁹ Joel Quirk, "Anti-Slavery Activism, Collective Honor and the Imperial 'Scramble' for Africa," *Conference Papers -- International Studies Association* (2008, 2008): 5, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=42973903&site=ehost-live>.

help explain why eliminating slavery was such a key element of British Imperial policy and why and accommodation could not be reached changed to permit a long standing and religiously supported custom in a region of great strategic importance to the British Empire.

The Cognitive Pillar

To explain the British Empire's insistence that slavery be eliminated, it is necessary to delve deeper into Scott's institutional analysis model. This section will discuss the cultural-cognitive pillar which refers to shared preconceived notions, thought patterns, and worldviews that contribute to maintaining social cohesiveness.⁹⁰ This discussion will demonstrate that the British Empire's anti-slavery policy served purposes other than the elimination of slavery.

British anti-slavery efforts served to legitimize other political and economic projects. The Scramble for Africa saw European Powers claim dominion over practically the entire African continent prior to the First World War. Ending slavery was regularly invoked as justification for meddling in the affairs of other states and even for unprovoked wars of conquest. While most notoriously associated with the Belgians in the Congo Free State it was also practiced by the British in the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1897-1903. This example demonstrates that anti-slavery activities were conducted across the globe by the British Empire and were not particular to the Sudan. While anti-slavery was not the sole cause of imperial expansion, it did offer a framework

⁹⁰ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954-1960*, 801.

that clearly legitimized decisions that were taken for other reasons. It remains an open question, however, whether this contribution was decisive. Since European colonialism pre-dates anti-slavery by many centuries, one could argue that other justifications would have been found if anti-slavery had not been an available option to justify interference. It is necessary at this point to examine the worldviews and preconceptions held by British Imperialists during this time.⁹¹

Both slavery and anti-slavery became important in Europe as key markers of collective identification and differentiation. Slavery and slave trading in Africa became emblematic of more general savagery or backwardness and offered confirmation of the superiority of European civilization. This in turn gave impetus to and widespread approval for the desirability and legitimacy of imperial tutelage of people and governments like those in Egypt and the Sudan. Anti-slavery, then can be viewed as part of a cognitive mindset that imbued the Scramble for Africa and imperialism more generally with a level of coherence and conviction that muted critics and inspired supporters.⁹²

There is a modern tendency to see Imperialism as bad and emancipation as gentle and good. This over-simplification obscures their ideological relationship. While the abolition of slavery was a positive development, it often came about through processes that caused severe consequences for the societies involved. While popular mobilization in

⁹¹ Quirk, *Anti-Slavery Activism, Collective Honor and the Imperial 'Scramble' for Africa*, 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

Great Britain played an essential role in placing emancipation on the political agenda, it was British Imperialism that translated this agenda into a global phenomenon.⁹³

That anti-slavery policies served purposes other than their stated objectives is buttressed by the realization that publically advocated abolition came at a time in the 19th Century when powerful essentialist models, based largely upon racial, technological and temporal difference, had ostensibly confirmed that the gulf between European and non-European peoples was deep, pervasive and all but insurmountable.⁹⁴ Among anti-slavery activists, individuals committed to human equality represented the exception, not the rule. British society in the 19th Century was deeply hierarchical and reflected entrenched social and institutional cleavages based upon sex, class, race, religion and civilization. Anti-slavery agitation was ultimately based upon a well-constructed claim for better treatment for a depressed category of persons, but this did not necessarily require human equality, simply a more qualified commitment to the idea of sufficient commonality.⁹⁵

The thesis of oriental backwardness was justified in the 19th Century by ideas about the biological basis of racial inequality. Thus the racial classifications found in Cuvier's *Le Regne animal*, Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inegalite des race humaines*, and Robert Knox's *The Races of Man* found a willing partner in latent Orientalism.

Orientalism is described by Edward Said as:

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁴ Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 3-10.

⁹⁵ Quirk, *Anti-Slavery Activism, Collective Honor and the Imperial 'Scramble' for Africa*, 9.

... a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient.⁹⁶

To these types of racial categorizations was added second-order Darwinism, which seemed to give scientific validity to the division of races into advanced and backward. Thus the whole debate about imperialism, as it was discussed in the nineteenth century by pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists alike, included cognitive assumptions about advanced and backward races, cultures and societies. Some, like John Westlake in *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (1894) argued that regions of the earth designated as uncivilized or backward should be annexed or occupied by advanced nations.⁹⁷ Thus Orientals (a term that includes the near as well as far east) were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism as well as moral and political admonishment. In the mind of 19th Century British Imperialists, since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjugated.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 1-5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

This cognitive mindset and assumption of Western superiority and Oriental inferiority is remarkably consistent across time. In 1910, Arthur Balfour spoke to the British House of Commons about difficulties in Egypt. His testimony was seen as particularly authoritative as he was well placed to observe the 1882 British occupation of Egypt and the death of General Gordon in the Sudan.⁹⁹

I take up no attitude of superiority. But I ask [Robertson and anyone else]... who has even the most superficial knowledge of history, if they will look in the face the facts with which a British statesman has to deal when he is put in a position of supremacy over great races like the inhabitants of Egypt and countries in the East. We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it. It goes far beyond the petty span of the history of our race, which is lost in the prehistoric period at a time when the Egyptian civilisation had already passed its prime. Look at all the Oriental countries. Do not talk about superiority or inferiority.¹⁰⁰

Taking British superiority and Egyptian inferiority for granted, Balfour then goes on to describe the consequences of that knowledge.

First of all, look at the facts of the case. Western nations as soon as they emerge into history show the beginnings of those capacities for self-government ... having merits of their own.... You may look through the whole history of the Orientals in what is called broadly speaking, the East, and you never find traces of self-government. All their great centuries – and they have been very great – have been passed under despotisms, under absolute government. All their great contributions to civilisation – and they have been great – have been made under that form of government. Conqueror has succeeded conqueror; one domination has followed another; but never in all the revolutions of fate and fortune have you seen one of those nations of its own motion establish what we, from a Western

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

point of view, call self-government. That is the fact. It is not a question of superiority and inferiority. I suppose a true Eastern sage would say that the working government which we have taken upon ourselves in Egypt and elsewhere is not a work worthy of a philosopher – that it is the dirty work, the inferior work, of carrying on the necessary labour.¹⁰¹

Treating his earlier assumptions as facts, Balfour moves to the next part of his argument.

It is a good thing for these great nations – I admit their greatness – that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing. I think that experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they every had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West.... We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large.¹⁰²

This statement made by Balfour drew from almost a century of Western Orientalism and presumed knowledge of Orientals, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities. To British Imperialists, this represented tested and unchanging knowledge, since Orientals for all practical purposes were a Platonic essence, that any Orientalist could examine, understand, and expose.¹⁰³ This mindset and the pseudo-science of the day led to attributes being ascribed to Westerners and Orientals. The former were rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, and without natural suspicion while the latter were none of these things.¹⁰⁴ If Balfour

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

represents the high water mark in terms of Western confidence about the Oriental mindset, it is Chateaubriand in 1810 who first mentions an idea that gained tremendous authority in European writing. Chateaubriand writes of Europe teaching the Orient the meaning of liberty. An idea that Chateaubriand, and everyone after him, believed that Orientals, and especially Muslims, knew nothing about.¹⁰⁵

Of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none; force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father.¹⁰⁶

Thus paradoxically a Western conquest of the Orient was no conquest after all, but was rather seen in Western eyes as liberty. Chateaubriand puts this idea in the redemptive terms of a Christian mission to revive a dead world and quicken in it a sense of its own potential. A potential that only a European can see under the degenerate Oriental surface.¹⁰⁷

As this mental construct moved forward in time it became formalized in the cognitive construct of what it meant to be a White Man. Being a White Man at the end of the 19th Century was both an idea and a reality. It involved cognitive assumptions about the white and non-white world. Particularly for those involved in Imperial administration,

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰⁶ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Oeuvres De Chateaubriand* (Paris: Dufour, Mulat et Boulanger, 1850), 1069.

¹⁰⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 172.

it meant speaking in a certain way, behaving according to a code of regulations, and even feeling certain things and not others as well as specific judgements, evaluations, and gestures. Being a White Man was a form of authority before which non-whites, and even whites themselves, were expected to bend. In terms of the institutional forms it took, it was an agency for the expression, diffusion, and implementation of policy towards the world, and within this agency, although a certain personal latitude was allowed, the impersonal communal idea of being a White Man ruled. Being a White Man, in short, was in a very concrete manner a cognitive construct for processing reality, language, and thought.¹⁰⁸

From Chateaubriand to Balfour a continuity of thought can be seen in terms of the White Man's duty to bring liberty and good government to the uncivilized portions of the world. This cognitive construct served to limit the British Empire's flexibility when it came to slavery in the Sudan. Slavery had, over time, become a key test of the civilized character of a nation. In the European setting, states would seek to advance and defend their international status as civilized powers by promoting anti-slavery measures. Outside of Europe, divisions were minimized by a common view of the civilizing mission of the West. This resulted in an ideology of benevolent paternalism where Europeans blessed with superior virtues were duty bound to assist lesser peoples. Non-European nations in Africa and elsewhere would also publically endorse anti-slavery measures (as was the case in 1877 with Khedive Ismail) in an effort to minimize Imperial interference in their

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

affairs and demonstrate their own civilized credentials.¹⁰⁹ In this type of setting, it was not required to be a committee abolitionist in order to take up the anti-slavery cause. The sense of national honour and the knowledge that anti-slavery measures were part of the yard-stick by which civilization was measured drove many European nations. This in turn led many non-European states to take action and explains why they took steps against slavery in the absence of popular anti-slavery sentiment at home. This also explains why many anti-slavery measures proved ineffective: the measures were taken for reasons other than the elimination of slavery. In many cases official pronouncements (as with the Ottoman Empire) went all but unchallenged for long periods of time, while others were co-opted for imperial purposes.¹¹⁰

To explain the British Empire's insistence that slavery be eliminated, it is necessary to delve deeper into Scott's institutional analysis model. This section will discuss the cultural-cognitive pillar which refers to shared preconceived notions, thought patterns, and worldviews that contribute to maintaining social cohesiveness.¹¹¹ This discussion will demonstrate that the British Empire's anti-slavery policy served purposes other than the elimination of slavery.

¹⁰⁹ Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1984), 587-590.

¹¹⁰ Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 69-86.

¹¹¹ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria 1954-1960*, 801.

This section has demonstrated that Europeans generally and the British Empire in particular had a cognitive model of the world that did not allow any leeway or exceptionalism when it came to slavery. A nation's views on slavery were closely linked to whether or not they were viewed as civilized or uncivilized by the Western world. Views on slavery coupled with Western perceptions of the Orient, the Oriental Mind, and the duty of the White Man formed a cognitive construct that justified British Imperialism in Egypt and the Sudan. It did, however, place the British Army and officers like Gordon in an untenable position. While these cognitive elements enhanced social cohesion, they severely restricted the ability of Gordon to adapt successfully to the situation on the ground in the Sudan. Cognitive factors, however, were not the only reason for British failure. Carefully and deliberately cultivated normative factors inside the British Army were also at work as will be demonstrated in the subsequent section.

The Normative Pillar

This section will demonstrate the degree to which norms and values held by the British Army, and inferred for Gordon himself, factored into the defeat in the Sudan. With reference to the normative pillar of the institutional analysis model, Scott argues that social cohesion is possible if a number of implicit values and norms are shared about what is desirable and legitimate.¹¹² As will be seen, there was a concerted effort over time to inculcate British societal norms and values into the Army. While this did serve to align the institution with British society, and arguably increased its effectiveness, it also inculcated a distinctly Christian and messianic element into the Army. This belief in the

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 801.

moral rightness of an Army imbued with Christian virtue reduced its ability to successfully adapt to the conditions in the Sudan.

According to Scott, normative rules introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life. Normative systems include both values and norms. Values are conceptions of the preferred or the desirable, together with the construction of standards to which existing structures or behaviors can be compared and assessed. Norms specify how things should be done and define legitimate means goals. Normative systems define goals or objectives and also delineate appropriate ways to pursue these ends.¹¹³ Norms encourage individuals to behave prosocially instead of merely for acting for themselves.¹¹⁴ Perhaps the most widely accepted view of norms is that they are statements that regulate behavior. For some they identify expectations. More frequently, these rules are seen as ‘ought’ statements that describe desirable courses of action. Norms may give permission, proscribe, prescribe, discourage and so forth.¹¹⁵

For norms to exist, the group must have the ability to enforce its rules. To the extent that normative rules are consistent with individual interests, little if any enforcement is necessary.¹¹⁶ The British Monarchy and Government learn through hard historical lessons how to ensure that the norms and values of the Army were in

¹¹³ Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, 54-55.

¹¹⁴ Christine Horne, "Explaining the Emergence of Norms," in *Theories of Social Order*, eds. Michael Hechter and Christine Horne (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 129.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

consonance with theirs. Experiences in the 17th Century demonstrated how easily the Army could be used in support of despotism; military despotism during the reign of the Lord Protector and monarchial despotism during the reigns of Charles I and James II are illustrative. These episodes produced an abiding fear of standing armies and an obsession with the subordination of the Army to the civil power.¹¹⁷

To this end, the social composition of the army officer corps was a matter of great political significance in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Parliament worked to ensure that the Army was officered by men of high social standing, holding large possessions and attached to the Protestant succession. It was thought that if the Army was commanded by men drawn from the propertied class, then there was little danger of the officers coming to constitute a political challenge to the *status quo*. It became axiomatic that the Army's officers should only be recruited from the ranks of the propertied classes.¹¹⁸

Consequently, until 1871 it was impossible to secure any kind of commission without first procuring a nomination. Candidates for commissions had to secure a nomination from the Commander-in-Chief. The nomination system was calculated to maintain the upper class' grip on the officer corps. The Army's commanders sought only

¹¹⁷ C. B. Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," in *The British Army 1815-1914*, ed. Harold E. Raugh Jr. (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 103.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

men who had some connection with the interests and fortunes of the country.¹¹⁹ From 1660 to 1871, commissions and promotions in the Army could be bought. While free commissions and promotions were available, the majority of officers depended on purchase both for entry and for advancement.¹²⁰ Further, in 1869 officers pay remained almost exactly what it had been in the reign of William II almost 800 years earlier. Given the expense of regimental life, an officer's salary was nearly impossible to live on. This deliberately contrived situation ensured that only men of means entered the officer corps. The Army did not want professional soldiers, but gentlemen amateurs whose principal loyalty lay with the social class from which they were recruited.¹²¹

In the 19th Century, the British Army started to draw officers from the rapidly expanding public school sector. This ensured that it received candidates who could meet the new educational standards and pass the social suitability test. Once this discovery was made the public schools were firmly bound to the Army in the two decades after 1855. The Army's connection to the public schools was so well established by 1871 that it had nothing to fear from the abolition of the practice of purchasing commissions and the introduction of a system of open competitive entry to Sandhurst and Woolwich. The public schools guaranteed a stream of suitably processed young gentlemen.¹²² The care with which officers were selected and trained ensured that the Army's leadership was in

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 106.

consonance with the norms and values guiding British Imperialism in which the Army played a central role. It is not surprising therefore that officers like Gordon fervently supported the anti-slavery policy of the Empire.

As was mentioned in the previous section, the issue of slavery was a key factor in the minds of British Imperialists not so much for the institution itself as for what it signified about the backward or uncivilized character of a particular community. This dynamic played an important role in the early history of organized anti-slavery activities in Britain, as activists successfully transformed the treatment of slaves into a symbolic referendum on prevailing conceptions of religious virtue and political exceptionalism.¹²³ In this formula, action against slavery came to be construed as a key means of redeeming and further reinforcing uniquely British and Christian virtues. The noble work of the British Navy to end the slave trade led to rounds of self-congratulation, as Britons contrasted their record with peoples who continued to sanction slavery.¹²⁴

In the Sudan, however, it was officers of the British Army, like Gordon, who had the lead, and a startling transformation had occurred in the norms and values of this institution. At the time of Waterloo, the British soldier was a social pariah. Enlisted men were stigmatized and officers at least suspected of brutality, drunkenness, criminality, and godlessness. By 1885, Gordon's death was seen as martyrdom and the ease with

¹²³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), 7-12.

¹²⁴ Quirk, *Anti-Slavery Activism, Collective Honor and the Imperial 'Scramble' for Africa*, 9.

which partisans easily cloaked him with that mantle demonstrated new public assumptions about military men.¹²⁵ The British public, in 1815, thought the Army to be a band of murderous thugs and drunkards whipped into shape only by the efforts of great men like Wellington. By 1885, Charles Gordon could immediately and easily slip into the robes of the Christian martyr and stand as a proxy for the moral force of the Army at large.¹²⁶

A pattern emerged between 1857 and 1885 for the national adulation of British status and power. Its basis was a martial Christian identity at first pinned upon a few heroic exemplars, then connected to the institutional Army at large. The chronology of this pattern derived from the careers of two of the greatest Christian hero figures: General Sir Henry Havelock and Major General Sir Charles George Gordon. By 1885, the year Gordon died, public belief in the Christian soldier-hero was deep and complete. The public did not require rigorous facts, and this explains the hero worship surrounding Gordon despite his quirky character. Appearances and assumptions were enough because the British public already accepted the seemingly common sense notion that Britain produced not just heroes, but morally superior Christian heroes.¹²⁷

The British Public's willingness to accept notions of the pious soldier, martyrdom in a combat death, and to exchange *raison d'état* for *raison de Dieu* all illustrate a

¹²⁵ Kenneth E. Hendrickson III, *Making Saints* (Mississauga, Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1998), 95.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

substantial change in the popular myth surrounding the Army.¹²⁸ The unique combination of ideas, personalities and events that made Havelock a national Christian hero did not remain attached solely to him. Instead, it became an institutionalized expression of the good that the Army and Imperial representatives of Britain carried forth to subject people. By Gordon's day, a veritable public machinery of Christian heroism could create a new idol from the roughest stone. The public saw in both Havelock and Gordon pious, courageous, and self-sacrificing soldiers. Both men advanced not only the British Empire, but the work of God. Both were attributed Christ like characteristics. That comparison was especially popular in Gordon's case, and appeared not only in pulp biographies but in newspapers and sermons from Anglican pulpits. The veneration accorded Gordon was so extravagant it had to emanate from some source beyond the man: a public predisposition to see a saint in the soldier.¹²⁹

The groundwork for the Christian hero mystique was laid earlier in the century. While careful selection processes ensured that only appropriate gentlemen became officers (and consequently possessed the approved Victorian norms and values) a groundswell of change had occurred amongst private British soldiers to change their normative character and bring them respectability in the eyes of the public. After the Crimean war, society started to see the Army not as a social pariah but as an honored and patriotic institution. This did not happen over night, but between 1860 and 1899 the army shed its 150-year-old reputation for oppression and debauchery, replaced it with the

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

twofold mantle of patriotic and Christian defender of Home and Empire. The development of the office of chaplain general, particularly after 1844, is a key component of this story.¹³⁰

In the 1860s missionaries and reformers began serious efforts to enlarge the role of Christianity in the definition and aims of the Army. Unsurprisingly, they did not find a ready-made army of saintly warriors. They did, however, find an army with strong traditions of denominational pluralism, with a precedent for activist religious leadership among the ranks, and with the basic facilities at its home stations for the religious education of soldiers. All of this was due to the fifty-year history preceding Crimea, and especially to the efforts of the Chaplain General George Robert Gleig. Gleig made it his purpose to bring dignity to military religious practice, and thereby make a better Army. The Chaplain General's work allowed missionaries to take advantage of a favourable official environment to minister to the army, and to expand the scope of religious practice.¹³¹

This was particularly true at the Army's Camp Aldershot. After the Crimean War, a large army camp was established at Aldershot in order to provide a training ground for large scale manoeuvres. The development of this camp and the work of the missionaries there were important for several reasons. First, the community of soldiers that evolved there, unsavory as it could be, nonetheless became the first such army endeavor to enter

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

into the mainstream of public consciousness and concern through the work of journalists like Charles Dickens covered the poor conditions. In earlier times, a local military post was seen as an imposition on a community that constituted a sanitary and moral hazard. The extensive reporting of the suffering of the soldiers in the Crimea and the 1857 Indian Mutiny with its explicit reception in Britain as a conflict between Christian civilization and heathen barbarism, both awakened public sentiments of empathy for common British soldiers.¹³² Further, by the 1850s the army had a two-decade-old process of successfully integrating the three major religious denominations of the kingdom into its ranks. That integration made possible a serious implementation of religious life among the soldiers in an effort to improve their condition and their quality. The death of the misanthropic (to the soldiers) Duke of Wellington in 1852 combined in the 1850s to ripen the Army for both missionary attention and public consideration as something other than the worst sort of British social scum.¹³³

As a consequence of this changing social mood, the British public's demand for heroes and the popularity of all things military reached new heights in the middle and late 1880s. While soldiering was a recurrent theme in the nineteenth century music hall, the 1880s and 1890s were the peak of music hall consideration of the army. Further, these sketches increasingly relied on sentimental portrayals of common-soldiers rather than on

¹³² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

traditional aristocratic heroes. The popularity of Kipling's writing emphasizing the humanity and rough-hewn virtue of the common soldier further illustrates this point.¹³⁴

At this time of positive perception of the military, Gordon was seen as closely aligned with the norms and values of British Imperialism and British public's view of the Army. These attitudes towards Gordon led to considerable pressure being placed on a reluctant Gladstone government to return him to the Sudan. In 1884 he accepted a lukewarm offer by the British government to return to the Sudan and oversee the evacuation of the collapsing Egyptian administration there. The cabinet did not want him and the British consul in Cairo feared his instability. When he returned to the Sudan, it was ostensibly to conduct a withdrawal. In actuality he attempted to hold the territory against the Mahdist rising of the Sudanese Muslims. The story of Gordon's last trip to Sudan is just that complex. Debates persist over why he went, who actually sent him, what he was supposed to do there, and why, after he became trapped in a siege at Khartoum, nobody in government appeared in a hurry to extricate him. As Gordon's situation deteriorated, the image of the Christian hero began to emerge as an irrefutable argument with which pro-imperialists hoped to coerce an anti-imperialist liberal government into action.¹³⁵ While the Gladstone government was eventually forced into reluctant action, relief came too late. Gordon died in combat when Khartoum fell to the Mahdi in January 1885, after a siege of nearly a year.¹³⁶ As was made clear in an earlier section, Gordon's mission was

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

to evacuate the Sudan, not to defend it. But Gordon was a man whose reading was confined almost exclusively to the Bible, where he believed all truth to be found. But in the words of Sir Evelyn Baring, the British Consul in Cairo, “A man who habitually consults the prophet Isaiah when he is in difficulty is not apt to obey the orders of anyone.”¹³⁷

By the time of Gordon’s death, the British public recognized that the Army had changed. These changes integrated the Army into civil society to such a degree that the canonization of Gordon was done with the ease of mass production. The Saint Gordon figure was the product of five decades of Army reform that ensured that the norms and values of the British Empire were reflected in the institution. The superiority of Christian beliefs and values were used to explain why Britain had an Empire and why British citizens interfered in events around the world. This was seen as something that good British governments understood and bad ones did not. It also explain how the high and mighty could let a good man like Gordon down (the relief mission that came too late), and how that fact meant that the empire had to be for everyone, not just the elite.¹³⁸ The British Army was seen as a force for good, with honorable goals and dedicated servants. The public viewed the institution as encouraging fine qualities like loyalty and piety in its soldiers. It protected what was best in British civilization and carried those gifts abroad through the medium of Imperialism. A Christian Army, it fought fairly, and killed only

¹³⁷ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 186.

¹³⁸ Hendrickson III, *Making Saints*, 141.

with justice.¹³⁹ No nation was prouder of its military heroes than Victorian Britain, and no military hero was so admired, so loved, as General Gordon. He seemed to embody the very qualities of the Christian hero, the saint in arms, the soldier of Christ and the pious servant of Empire.¹⁴⁰

This section has demonstrated demonstrate the degree to which norms and values held by the British Army, and inferred for Gordon himself, factored into the defeat in the Sudan. Gordon was clearly instructed to evacuate the Sudan yet his fervent beliefs in the rightness of his cause made abandoning the Sudanese people to his perception of a barbaric Mahdi impossible. The concerted effort to align the British Army's norms and values with British society at large and the British Imperial mission specifically was tremendously successful. This success, however, made the institution of slavery anathema to the British Empire and thus ruled out any possibility of compromise that could have avoided the insurgency altogether. Further, Gordon's deeply held religious beliefs made withdrawal and unacceptable alternative and thus consigned him to defeat and death.

CONCLUSION

Take up the White Man's burden!
 Have done with childish days
 The lightly-proffered laurel,
 The easy ungrudged praise:
 Comes now, to search your manhood
 Through all the thankless years,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁴⁰ Giddings, *Imperial Echoes*, 186.

Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgement of your peers.¹⁴¹

For the purposes of the broad sociological discussion undertaken in this paper, Gordon was of interest for what he represented about his times. The institutional analysis methodology was used as the principal means of digging into the sociological issues of 19th Century British Imperialism and how these factors impacted the events that led to Gordon's death in the Sudan.. Sequentially, this paper provided an overview of the institutional analysis framework, an overview of the conflict itself and then used the institutional analysis model to examine and explain the broad institutional forces that made success in the Sudan extremely unlikely and problematic.

Sociological institutional analysis has demonstrated its utility when examining complex military problems such as counter-insurgency. This case study validates the assumption that organizations serve a core purpose in society and that this purpose will only be modified or changed as the result of substantial internal or external pressure. Indeed, organizations will accept a degree of failure, as with Gordon, in order to remain consistent with their guiding principals.

Understanding some of the historical context of the conflict proved important to later discussions using institutional analysis. This paper has demonstrated that there were clear geostrategic reasons for the British Empire to be interested in Egypt and the Sudan. What is also clear is that the moralistic imperatives of British Imperialism played a

¹⁴¹ Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*.

substantial role and that these imperatives, such as the abhorrence of slavery in defiance of local norms, cause significant grievance amongst the Egyptian and Sudanese populace. Indeed, anti-slavery efforts were a key driver of late Victorian moralistic Imperialism and these efforts ignited the insurgency in the Sudan. Thus the very factors that drove British Imperialism made it almost impossible for Gordon to succeed in the Sudan.

Looking particularly at the institutional analysis model, it is clear from the regulative perspective that foreign imposed anti-slavery legislation cause widespread discontent in Egypt and the Sudan and ultimately led to the Mahdi's uprising. With the regulative framework firmly in place, men like Gordon applied sanctions as rigorously as they could under the circumstances. These steps, however, were insufficient to suppress slaver in the Sudan. While ending slavery remained a key part of the British Imperialist agenda, it caused great resistance amongst the slavers, Sudanese society and Egyptian officials who all benefited from the trade.

The cognitive pillar of institutional analysis explains part of the reason that no compromise on slavery could be reached in a region of vital strategic importance to the British Empire. The cognitive model of the British Empire did not allow any leeway or exceptionalism when it came to slavery. In this model, a nation's views on slavery were closely linked to whether or not they were viewed as civilized or uncivilized by the Western world. Views on slavery coupled with Western perceptions of the Orient, the Oriental Mind, and the duty of the White Man formed a cognitive construct that justified British Imperialism in Egypt and the Sudan and dictated that no accommodation could be

reached with respect to the slave trade. This placed officers like Gordon in an untenable position. Yet it was perhaps in the normative pillar of institutional analysis that the seed of Gordon's defeat and death can be found.

Gordon was clearly instructed to evacuate the Sudan yet his fervent belief in the rightness of his cause made abandoning the Sudanese people to a barbaric Mahdi (his perception) impossible. The concerted effort to align the British Army's norms and values with British society at large and the British Imperial mission specifically was tremendously successful. This success, however, made the institution of slavery anathema to the British Empire and thus ruled out any possibility of compromise that could have avoided the insurgency altogether. Further, Gordon's deeply held religious beliefs made withdrawal an unacceptable alternative and thus consigned him to defeat and death.

For the purpose of this discussion, Gordon was more interesting for what he represented. He was seen by many contemporaries as embodying the virtues of Imperial Britain at the apogee of its power. His beliefs and ideals are reflective of those held by the British Army and Colonial Administrators who ran the Empire. Viewed from a broader sociological perspective, Gordon's defeat at Khartoum and the events leading up to it provided a lens through which to view 19th Century British Imperialism. Institutional analysis of Gordon in the Sudan has made it clear that in the regulative, cognitive and normative pillars, there were conflicts that prevented successful adaptation to conditions

on the ground. The larger interplay of institutional forces opposed each other to such a degree as to make Gordon's tasks in the Sudan exceptionally difficult.

The news of Gordon's death reached London on February 11, 1885.¹⁴² Gordon was a dreamer, a religious fanatic and an eccentric¹⁴³ yet seldom in British history has the death of one of her sons called forth so emotional a public reaction. The gallantry of his stand against overwhelming odds, combined with the high religious principles which guided his life, evoked from Parliament and Press plaudits containing every superlative in the English language. Decades later, writers would begin to chip away at the Gordon myth and mystique, yet he remains today an iconic image of 19th Century British Imperialism.

¹⁴² Anthony Nutting, *Gordon of Khartoum: Martyr and Misfit* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1966), 1.

¹⁴³ Farwell, *Eminent Victorian Soldiers*, 121-122.

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