

Political Capital and Personal Interest Understanding the Economy of Power in Defeated Countries

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However, the outcome of stability operations is not determined by decisive battle. The main actors compete with each other in an economy of power where popular support plays the role of currency. Therefore, the main question is how Western stability operations will fit with other actors' plans and actions. One should not assume potential adversaries are disorganized or somehow incapable of carrying out complex operations. Subdued populations, diaspora groups, political extremists, or religious fundamentalists may consider the rupture of the existing social contract as a long-awaited opportunity to realize their vision or further their interests. Two basic strategies are open to indigenous actors confronted with the presence of stabilization forces after regime failure—collaboration or insurgency. The former strategy is no less dangerous than the latter, and a combination of the two in one conflict area is a potential nightmare.

PHOTO: A U.S. Soldier takes a knee next to a billboard depicting anti-U.S. Shi'ite clerics, in Jamilla, Iraq, 16 June 2008. (U.S. Army, SPC Daniel Herrera)

An Enigma

Stability operations have always presented an enigma. Western military involvement can range from a hundred to several hundred thousand soldiers. Methods vary from bombing cities to distributing baby food. Some operations drag on for decades, claiming thousands of casualties, while others end abruptly after the media gives attention to the loss of a small number of soldiers. Few human endeavors differ so much in scope, size, and duration. Even more surprisingly, their outcome seems to be totally independent of these three variables. An American force numbering not more than 100 Soldiers was sufficient to end a deeply entrenched Marxist-Leninist insurgency in El Salvador. Conversely, 500,000 Soldiers and Marines were unsuccessful against a similar enemy in Vietnam. Understanding stability operations requires a thorough analysis of the objectives of troop-contributing nations on the one hand, and those of the indigenous actors-the collaborator and the insurgent-on the other.

Stabilization requires military involvement in an area plagued by conflict, disaster, or internal strifethis is all but self-evident. In virtually all cases, this involvement is preceded by intense political debates. Perceptions and expectations dominate these debates. Sometimes, they correspond with reality, but often they do not. Jon Western holds that "because rhetorical campaigns are such an integral part of mobilizing public and political support, there is a tendency to oversell the message. The constant temptation to manipulate and distort information frequently leads the public to develop unrealistic expectations about the nature or likely cost or efficacy of military intervention."² In practice, the debate results in a tacit contract between the armed forces, the government, the opposition, the media, pressure groups, and the electorate. The most important terms of the contract are justification, cost, casualties, duration, and conduct. Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations, concisely describes what happens when this contract is breached. "During stability operations, culmination may result from the erosion of national will, decline of popular support, questions concerning legitimacy or restraint, or lapses in protection leading to excessive casualties."3 Because of political considerations, stabilization forces are severely hamstrung in their use of defeat mechanisms.⁴ Applying defeat mechanisms implies the use of lethal combat power. However, "political considerations guide stabilization efforts. Military forces and development agencies must remain constantly aware of the political environment and be prepared to change tactics accordingly."⁵ Recent history shows that sociopolitical tolerance concerning the use of defeat mechanisms is highest at the outset of military operations, quickly decreases after stabilization forces firmly establish their presence in the area.

Upsetting the Balance of Power

The arrival of stabilization forces completely upsets the balance of power in the conflict area. Active enemy forces either comply with the resolutions that constitute the basis of the operation's legitimacy—by withdrawing, disarming, or disbanding—or face destruction. The existing elite lose their privileges, while others see opportunities to claim their rightful place. Everyone has the choice to collaborate with the stabilization forces or not. Often, it is not the strongest party in the conflict that chooses to do so, nor the party with the largest constituency. The smaller the powerbase of an actor is, the greater the benefit—and therefore the incentive—to collaborate.

Generally, the collaborator cannot fend for himself. His emergence requires the presence of stabilization forces. He leverages defeat mechanisms used by these forces to establish his powerbase. Because he does not have to recruit or pay the military power he relies on, he can expand his power far beyond the level warranted by his constituency and tax base. Collaboration allows him to do business without paying the cost of doing business. One can easily imagine that this is an attractive situation. The American-backed South Vietnamese regime during the 1960s is a typical example. President Diem ruled "by favoring fellow Catholics, who made up only 10% of the population."⁶

Collaboration allows [the collaborator] to do business without paying the cost of doing business. Since the stabilization forces are the best guarantee for the collaborator's hold on power, he tries to perpetuate their presence. If he thinks he can succeed in this, there is no need for him to expand his constituency. An increased constituency simply dilutes power and wealth because scarce positions of influence in politics and the economy have to be shared with more people. Additionally, because the collaborator counts on the stabilization forces for military backup, he seems to strike from behind their cover, thus creating the perception that the former is a coward and the latter an accomplice. This is not a sound base for gaining popular support.

Insurgent as Self-starter

Unlike the collaborator, the insurgent is a selfstarter. Galula holds that an insurgent emerges "by finding supporters among the population, people whose support will range from active participation in the struggle to passive approval."⁷ Potential popular support is a prerequisite for the creation of an insurgent. Therefore, the party with the largest potential constituency is the most likely to start an insurgency. Yet, this is only half the answer to the question of how an insurgent comes into being. What prevents stabilization forces from defeating or destroying the emerging insurgent?

The insurgent escapes defeat mechanisms by complying with conditions that preclude their use. Joint Publication 3-0 introduced "restraint" as the 12th principle of Joint operations because, during stability operations, "restraints on weaponry, tactics, and levels of violence characterize the environment."8 In practice, defeat mechanisms can only be used against active, enemy forces. Generally, the insurgent protects himself by splitting his organization into an unarmed, sociopolitical wing that complies with conditions triggering restraint and an armed, militant wing that hides amongst the population.⁹ To do this, the insurgent creates a constituency large enough to conceal and support a significant number of terrorist or guerrilla units. The insurgent's unarmed wing is made up of organizations such as ideological newspapers, militant universities, trade unions, religious charities, and the like. Although these organizations trigger restraints on the use of force, they are far from harmless. Their activities range from organizing strikes and mass demonstrations to the recruiting of terrorists and suicide bombers. Their infrastructure can conceal command centers, safe houses, and weapons caches. However, their main purpose is not to contribute to guerrilla or terrorist operations but to organize activities that generate popular support.

Since the stabilization forces are the strongest military party in the conflict, the insurgent tries to terminate their presence by making it impossible for them to abide by the terms of the sociopolitical contract that governs their commitment. Insurgents will do whatever it takes to erode national will, diminish popular support, raise doubts about an operation's legitimacy, and maximize casualties, while simultaneously taking maximum advantage of restraints that hamstring stabilization forces.¹⁰

Militarily, the insurgent is the weakest actor. Therefore, he can use his military weakness as an excuse for not restraining his own use of force. Stabilization forces and the collaborator must cope with being accountable to higher moral standards than the insurgent. To increase his military reach and impact, the insurgent tries to expand his constituency. The larger his constituency, the more fighters and terrorists he can conceal within the population. Exploiting the possibilities the revolution in communication technology offers, the insurgent even works to increase support for his cause outside of the conflict area. The omnipresence of the news media, the possibilities of the Internet, the abundance of political pressure groups, and especially the proliferation of diasporas in most Western capitals have greatly enhanced his possibilities to do so.

Huntington observes that "in controversies involving the homeland country or homeland groups in conflict with other states or groups over the control of territory, diasporas have often, but not always, supported the more extremist of their homeland colleagues."11 Because diasporas often support the more extreme party in the conflict, the insurgent has the best chance to benefit from its wealth and influence. Increasingly, diaspora groups influence conflicts by raising funds for insurgents and by acting as political pressure groups in their host nation. A good example is the Irish-American pressure group, the Irish Northern Aid Committee. Cochran says that "the political capital of migrant communities is often overlooked by commentators who focus simply on the coercive potential

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of diaspora groups and their capacity to fund violence through financial capital. The case of Irish-Americans is illustrative in this regard, as the Irish Northern Aid Committee's political capital was at least as important to militant Republicans in Northern Ireland as their fund-raising power."¹²

In summary, the collaborator's actions and goals are diametrically opposed to those of the insurgent, and partially opposed to those of the stabilization forces. Conversely, although the insurgent opposes the stabilization forces, many of his actions foster popular support. This undercuts the rationale of stability operations: that military intervention is necessary to help the people. The long-term effect is increasing popularity for the insurgent, declining popularity for the collaborator, and decreasing resolve of the stabilization forces. The resulting conundrum is the primary reason why stability mechanisms have to supplement defeat mechanisms.

Goals of Stability Operations and Insurgent Viability

Field Manual 3-07 outlines the goals of stability operations. "The immediate goal . . . is to provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. Long-term goals . . . include developing host-nation capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, legitimate and effective institutions, and a robust civil society."13 These goals are unachievable without using stability mechanisms. However, the stabilization forces are not the only ones aware of this. In 2005, Timothy Haugh observed that while "U.S. tanks dashed across Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr and his vanguard of like-minded clerics reactivated mosques, deployed a militia, assumed control of regional Ba'ath Party institutions, and prepared social services."14 In short, this movement combined all four stability mechanisms-compel, control, influence, and support-and did so without hesitation to take maximum advantage of the malleable situation the coalition offensive created.¹⁵

Al-Sadr's reaction to the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime was so innovative that his "rise to prominence within the Shi'a community largely went unnoticed by the United States government."¹⁶ His actions illustrate his firm belief that he could take control of the situation despite the presence of coalition forces. The ability of insurgents to exist and act inside an area that they share with stabilization forces and collaborators is a Palestinian invention dating back to the 1980s. Under Israeli occupation, the Palestinians developed a comprehensive approach based on "out-administrating, not out-fighting the enemy."¹⁷

Thomas Hammes describes this phenomenon in his case study of the 1987 Palestinian uprising. After the 1967 Six-Day War, the Israelis "provided a minimalist government to keep the territories quiet."18 As a result, Palestinian resistance leaders created their own structures. Local service organizations "provided trash and sewer services, established sports leagues, provided medical care, drove out pimps and thieves, and expelled suspected Israeli collaborators."¹⁹ In so doing, they created a popular support base from which they could launch armed attacks inside an area controlled by one of the most capable military forces in the world. The Palestinians started violent campaigns in 1987. Initially, they "forced the Israelis to the negotiating table and won concessions."20 Later, continued combinations of the provision of essential services to the population and terrorist violence enabled Hamas²¹ and Hezbollah²² to force the Israelis out of the Gaza Strip and Southern Lebanon respectively. These were the first occasions the Israelis gave up land and Jewish settlements without concessions from their opponents.

To appreciate the novelty of the Palestinian approach, one has to consider the sacrifices earlier insurgents were willing to make to avoid coexistence with their enemy in the same area. When his base area in Jiangxhi was threatened during the Chinese Civil War, Mao Tse-Tung shifted his base to Shaanxhi. This feat is known as the Long March.²³ In other words, Mao chose to walk 6,000 miles rather than share an area with his enemies. In a similar vein, the Vietcong mobilized thousands of people to push heavily loaded bicycles up and down the Ho Chi Minh Trail because they could not sustain their resistance without a secure base area in North Vietnam.²⁴ Conversely, Hamas and Hezbollah were at their best when they defied the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip and Southern Lebanon.

Logically, one can expect that insurgents around the world will try to copy the Hamas and Hezbollah approach. Younes and Rosen remark that "through a 'Hezbollah-like' scheme, the Shi'ite Sadrist movement has established itself as the main service provider in the country...Not only do these militias now have a quasi-monopoly in the large-scale provision of assistance in Iraq, they are also recruiting an increasing number of civilians."²⁵ The implication for stability operations is that stability mechanisms



Palestinian demonstrators hurl rocks at Israeli troops at the entrance of the Nuseirat Refugee Camp in the Israel occupied portion of the Gaza Strip, 14 December 1987.

have to be used in competition with the insurgent and that the insurgent is sometimes better at this. One must understand the conditions that enable the insurgent to gain popular support and conduct terrorist or guerrilla attacks in defiance of stabilization forces. Recent examples show that three main conditions must exist before the insurgent can adopt this approach:

• **Restraints on the use of force**. When the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—a movement similar to Hamas—started an uprising, Syria's president ordered the destruction of the city of Hama and the murder of thousands of its inhabitants.²⁶ This convincingly proved that attempting an approach like Hamas or Hezbollah against a ruthless dictatorship was doomed to fail. Restraints are rather new in military history. However, the increased political awareness of Western electorates, the abundance of anti-war pressure groups, morality, and the omnipresence of the media now make it impossible for democracies to ignore them.

• A large, undisturbed flow of foreign funds. Insurgents used to finance their activities with the means available in the areas under their control. Revolutionary taxes, racketeering, and confiscation of crops were but three techniques used by 20th century guerrilla movements. It was impossible to implement vast social programs with such limited means. However, the fast development of international money transfer systems and the increasing number of people living in diasporas all over the world have made it possible to generate finances on a global scale. This enables insurgencies to spend more money on humanitarian policies than on terrorist attacks.

• A period during which the insurgent can establish a dominant position in humanitarian assistance without hindrance by stabilization forces. Western forces tend to underestimate the dangers of a movement that combines an extremist political agenda with large-scale humanitarian activities. Such a combination can create a nearly inexhaustible recruiting pool for an insurgency. A dominant role in humanitarian assistance also brings international respectability, the right to speak on behalf of the needy, and the ability to grant or withhold regular jobs in hospitals, schools, and charitable organizations. In short, dominating humanitarian assistance in a destitute area generates real power.

Trading Political Capital for Personal Interest

As early as possible, stabilization forces need to recognize movements that provide essential services and humanitarian assistance as a steppingstone to violent resistance. Western intelligence now neglects them, as it did Al-Sadr's organization. Stability operations must ensure that no movement-and certainly no extremist movementdominates humanitarian operations. Stabilization forces should focus their intelligence efforts on money flows, market shares, and strategic aims of movements involved in humanitarian assistance. A system of registration and licensing should level the playing field for all peaceful humanitarian assistance organizations and exclude potentially violent ones. Because insurgents can now raise funds worldwide, measures to monitor and inhibit the transfer of money are indispensable. Matthew Levitt emphasizes that "the Achilles heel of terrorism financiers is not at the fundraising end, but at those key chokepoints critical to laundering and transferring funds. It is impossible to 'dry the swamp' of funds available for illicit purposes, but, by targeting key nodes in the financing network, we can constrict the operating environment to the point that terrorists will not be able to get funds where and when they need them."27

The above measures aim to diversify the humanitarian assistance landscape. They prevent extremist movements from capitalizing on such root causes of conflict as repression or social inequalities by establishing a dominant position in humanitarian assistance. However, they are insufficient because they do not eliminate those root causes. In the end, stability mechanisms have to convince the local population that stabilization forces are no longer needed. This means that the collaborator must step up efforts to include all segments of the population in his constituency. This is not something the collaborator does spontaneously. Involving all

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segments of society in the public affairs of a country comes at the cost of opening key political and economic positions to people not closely linked to the collaborators's family, entourage, clan, or ethnic group. While the insurgent aggressively strives to increase popular support, the collaborator shows little to no initiative to do so. On the contrary, a collaborator sometimes seems to trade political capital for personal interest. In the power economy, such a collaborator behaves like a company that relies on state subsidies and an enforced monopoly to stay in business. Events following the 1993 Oslo Agreements illustrate this.

In the agreements, Israel agreed to the creation of the Palestinian Authority and a partial withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Western governments seized this opportunity. They decided to contribute to the peace process by supporting the party that accepted the Accords—the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat—and by weakening the party that opposed them—the terrorist movement, Hamas. Donor contributions to the PLO-controlled Palestinian Authority even surpassed the amounts pledged.²⁸

Because the international community put them in control of large volumes of financial aid, the PLO had to rely less on popular support to secure their hold on power. A small, corrupt, but extremely loyal elite took advantage of this situation. According to Ben Yishay, "There is general consensus that the Palestinian Authority's heavy handed involvement in the market—including important commodity monopolies, corruption, and tight control over foreign investment, credit sources, and protected areas of the economy—essentially constituted a transfer of income from poorer groups to the political elite."²⁹

The net result was that "the Oslo Accords initiated a new period of both centralization of political power and cooperation between the old elite social class and top Palastinian Authority officers, creating a conservative and anti-democratic ruling alliance."³⁰ Consequently, Palestinian confidence in Yasser Arafat plummeted from 87.1 percent in 1996 to about 25 percent in 2002.³¹ This laid the foundation for Hamas's victory in the 2006 elections, the opposite of the intended results.

To ensure unity of effort, stability operations must compel the collaborator to co-opt people outside his family, clan, religion, or ethnic group. Stabilization forces must not let the collaborator cajole them into



Yitzhak Rabin, Bill Clinton, and Yasser Arafat at the Oslo Accords signing ceremony on 13 September 1993.

becoming a praetorian guard for a privileged elite. To pressure the collaborator, stabilization forces have to convey two clear messages to him:

• We will not do the fighting for you.

• We will stop supporting you, unless you secure popular support from all segments of society.

However, pressuring the collaborator is not without risk. Once the collaborator understands both messages and decides to expand his constituency, he faces a difficult period during which the most dangerous threat to his survival is not the insurgency, but his own entourage. On the one hand, individuals or factions within this entourage will dislike the idea of sharing power and wealth with representatives of other population groups. On the other hand, the population will be skeptical about the honesty of the collaborator's intentions to share power. In such circumstances, a coup d'état is not unlikely. Therefore, stabilization operations include measures to convince not only the collaborator, but his large entourage as well.

The Example of El Salvador

The U.S. stability operation in El Salvador illustrates all dynamics described above. From 1979 until 1992, an armed conflict between a military junta and a communist insurgent group ravaged El Salvador. The United States committed six billion dollars, hundreds of humanitarian aid workers, and

...stabilization operations need to include measures to convince not only the collaborator, but his large entourage as well. a military advisory group of between 55 and 100 soldiers for more than a decade to stabilize this smallest and most densely populated Central American country. Jones and Libicki hold that the country's economic reliance on the export of coffee was one of the root causes that led to civil war. "Central to the evolution of El Salvador's political economy was a class structure based on the coercion of agrarian labor. State political elites enforced repressive labor conditions and highly concentrated property rights on behalf of a small economic elite."³² At their high water mark, the "[insurgent movement] included more than 12,000 combatants, operated in all 14 provinces of the country."³³

Because of the threat of communist expansion, the U.S. government decided to intervene. "When President Reagan was sworn into office, his Administration began explaining to the American public the significance of the threat posed by the communist insurgency in El Salvador against United States national interests."34 Deane Hinton, the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador from 1982 until 1983, concisely stated the American objective: "to make sure that the guerrillas and Communists didn't take over El Salvador."35 The junta was more than willing to collaborate to reach this objective. However, it was unclear whether this collaboration would help or hinder stability operations. "The Salvadoran armed forces had been their own worst enemy. Their continual abusive treatment and blatant human rights abuses of the citizens were seen as business as usual."36

Consequently, the regime soon was on the brink of collapse. "During the mid-1980s, public support was not in the hands of the civilian or military leadership. Without their support, the [Salvadoran] government remained in power only as long as the U.S. stayed involved."37 American pressure on the junta was crucial to the operation's success. "In October 1981, the U.S. Senate established conditions for continued U.S. aid to El Salvador. President Reagan had to certify twice a year that the Salvadoran government was making marked progress toward controlling the Salvadoran armed forces and their known death squad activity and other human rights violations."38 While American politicians clearly conveyed the message that continued aid depended on democratization and respect for human rights, the military adversary

group focused on influencing the junta's large entourage. "Military Group advisors recognized that victory required the Salvadoran armed forces and the government to address the grievances of the Salvadoran people. A National Campaign Plan, written by advisors and passed to the Salvadoran armed forces in early 1983, was the first effort to move from chasing guerrillas to winning the support of the people."39 This "national campaign plan" (NCP) was "a plan for victory, not just survival. The NCP was designed to fully integrate all elements of national power in order to achieve security in conjunction with development."40 Implementing the plan required patience and



A voter casts his ballot during UN observed elections in San Miguel, El Salvador, 20 March 1994.

determination. "Non-glamorous techniques were difficult to set in motion and even more difficult for the Salvadoran armed forces to maintain. But those types of techniques worked best when defeating insurgent force was the goal . . . Steps were taken in the right direction such as having the Salvadoran armed forces participate in local civic action projects. Those projects showed the people that the Salvadoran government was attempting to backup their promises of supporting the masses."⁴¹

The U.S. was equally adamant that the Salvadorans had to do all the fighting themselves. The advisors "were restricted from accompanying them on actual combat patrols."⁴² Therefore, the Salvadoran government was never able to hide behind a cover of American combat power. This created and sustained a Salvadoran resolve to win the conflict.

Results were impressive. The Salvadoran armed forces evolved from an instrument of violent oppression to a force that operated among and for the people. The junta transformed to a democratically elected government. The best proof that stability operations in El Salvador were a success was the electoral victory of the governing party—the Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA)—in the UN-monitored 1994 elections in which both the collaborator and the insurgent participated. "ARENA received 49 percent of the vote and 39 seats in the legislative assembly, the [insurgent] coalition received 25 percent and 22 seats."⁴³

Collaborator Dynamics

FM 3-07 rightfully emphasizes that stability requires the development of a self-sustaining host-nation capacity to provide security, rule of law, and economic recovery. The basic problem of stability operations is that spontaneous indigenous responses to the arrival of stabilization forces are not conducive to the development of this capacity. The indigenous actor most willing to cooperate is often the least suited to fulfill this role. This collaborator generally has a limited constituency and no intention to expand it. For him and his elite entourage, continued reliance on Western military support is but a small price to pay for a position of power and wealth that otherwise would be unattainable. Conversely, the actor with the largest political constituency often prefers to gain power through an insurgency rather than to rely on an external power that demands him to give up his political agenda. The stabilization forces' main challenge is to compel the collaborator to increase his political capital and to deny the insurgent the means to gain broad popular support for his cause. Therefore, stability operations have to include a series of measures aimed at the insurgent as well as the collaborator. The most important measure regarding the latter is to change the attitude and opinions of his large entourage through a sustained campaign of education and training of cadres. This measure allows western governments to increase

The stabilization forces' main challenge is to compel the collaborator to increase his political capital...

political pressure on the collaborator without the risk of causing his entourage to oust him.

Stabilization force measures that focus on the insurgent relate to the fact that many insurgents start as movements that combine an extremist or fundamentalist agenda with large-scale humanitarian assistance. Therefore, stabilization forces have to focus intelligence efforts on money flows, market shares, and strategic aims of movements involved in humanitarian assistance to recognize such movements in an early phase. Subjecting humanitarian assistance activities to a process of registration and licensing, denying these licenses to extremist movements, and constricting the transfer of funds raised for them by diaspora groups are possible measures to prevent the insurgent groups from gaining a dominant position in the field of humanitarian aid.

If the stability operation is to be successful, stabilization forces must change the collaborator's propensity to concentrate power in the hands of a small elite and deny the insurgent the means to generate popular support for his cause by exploiting the humanitarian needs of the populace. **MR**

NOTES

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7. David Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice (St. Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 18

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- 20. Hammes, 110.

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22. "Established in 1982 by Lebanese Shi'ite clerics and ideologically inspired by the Iranian revolution, Hizbollah was formed in response to the Israeli invasion

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24. "In May 1959, the North Vietnamese leadership created a logistics unit, called Group 559, for the purpose of expanding the traditional infiltration route to the south-the Ho Chi Minh trail." The Vietnamese used this trail during the rest of the War to bring supplies from North Vietnam to the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Marian E. Vlasak, "The Paradox of Logistics in Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies," Military Review (January-February 2007).

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^{18.} Ibid., 95.

^{29.} Ibid.

^{30.} Ibid 31. Ibid

^{35.} Ibid., 9.

^{37.} Ibid., 23. 38. Ibid., 16.

^{39.} Ibid., 24.

^{41.} Cale, 25 42 Ibid 34