

# Introduction

## GERONIMO EKIA

On May 2, 2011, President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and other members of the United States national security team sat in the White House situation room (Figure 1). In tense silence they listened as CIA Director Leon Panetta narrated the unfolding of Operation Neptune Spear, a mission targeted at Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.<sup>1</sup> When the Special Forces operatives reached the target Panetta reported, “We have a visual on Geronimo,” and after a few minutes he proclaimed, “Geronimo EKIA.” Geronimo, the name given to Chiricahua Apache leader Goyahkla by his Mexican enemies, was code for bin Laden, and the coded message that reported a successful mission was “Geronimo—EKIA,” or “enemy killed in action,” a comparison that Fort Sill Apache Tribe chairman Jeff Houser would later call “painful and offensive.”<sup>2</sup> The ensuing debate over the code name controversy, which was taken up in newspapers, blogs, and the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, pointed to the enduring legacy of the so-called “Indian Wars,” those conflicts fought during the period of US continental expansion.<sup>3</sup> Geronimo has been held up as one of the most intractable resisters of American colonialism, the last Native leader to surrender. He has been represented as incurably savage, impossibly elusive, and unwaveringly cruel. In short, Goyahkla the person has been overshadowed by a representation, “Geronimo,” which has been appropriated to serve a variety of interests.<sup>4</sup>



FIGURE 1. President Barack Obama and members of the national security team monitor the mission targeted at Osama bin Laden. National Archives photo no. 118817935 by Pete Souza.

So why Geronimo, and why bin Laden? Regardless of the code name's intentionality, the comparison is embedded with historical weight. The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, led to the War on Terror, a global military campaign so broad that definitions of the "terrorist" became increasingly fluid, applied to revolutionaries, militias, religious fundamentalists, and a host of enemies in a range of countries. The war was everywhere, the war was endless, and the enemy was invisible.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the War on Terror made apparent that the conflicts of the United States are still understood, in part, in racial terms, as a variety of ethnic and religious groups were coded as "terrorist" and subjected, at home and abroad, to a range of disciplinary practices justified through wartime necessity.<sup>6</sup> After 9/11, terrorism was often understood as "Islamic," boiling complex political histories down to cultural and racial essences. Even as terrorist networks remained hidden, "we" knew who "they" were, and the vagueness with which terrorism was defined drove an expansion of the national security apparatus while enabling domestic surveillance, repression, and other forms of state power.<sup>7</sup>

The War on Terror, like almost every war the United States has engaged in, also saw numerous references to conflicts with Indians. These

representations still relied on race to make sense of the United States' enemies but did so through comparisons to the era of US continental expansion.<sup>8</sup> Policy makers argued that "if the government of Iraq collapses . . . you've got Fort Apache in the middle of Indian country, but the Indians have mortars now." Journalists reported that "welcome to 'Injun Country' was the refrain . . . heard from troops from Colombia to the Philippines, including Afghanistan and Iraq. . . . The War on Terrorism was really about taming the frontier." A Marine Corps veteran noted that "the common thread between Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq to the Indian Wars is counterinsurgency."<sup>9</sup> More than one hundred years had passed since Goyahkla surrendered to the US Army, but it seemed as if the United States was still fighting the Indian Wars.

#### INDIAN/FIGHTING PAST AND PRESENT

These connections between the Indian Wars and the War on Terror did not come out of nowhere, and it is precisely this history that *Indian Wars Everywhere* interrogates. The violence of US continental expansion continually circulates throughout the history of US militarism, influencing everything from helicopter names to military violence.<sup>10</sup> For much of the twentieth century it was commonplace for Americans to refer to enemy territory as "Indian country." They did so in the Philippines, during the World Wars, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War, and they continue to do it today.<sup>11</sup> References to "Indian country" could be interpreted as casual comparisons born of the proliferation of "cowboys and Indians"—style violence in American popular culture.<sup>12</sup> On some level these connections are unsurprising coming from people raised on Old West novels, John Wayne films, and the *Red Dead Redemption* videogames. Even so, a number of scholars have helped paint a more complicated picture, charting the ways in which the United States' colonial *history* is also its perpetual colonial *present*.<sup>13</sup> Foremost among these studies are the works of Richard Slotkin and Richard Drinnon, which demonstrated how the "frontier" and similar concepts acted as organizing metaphors for American violence.<sup>14</sup> Other works, notably Jodi Byrd's *The Transit of Empire*, show how the history of US empire begins with the colonization of Indigenous peoples in North America. US empire emerges from, and is built on, the conquest of Indian country. Further, Indian country is not solely a *place*, but also a category, "Indian," that can be applied to those upon whom US imperial power descends to justify the imposition of that authority.<sup>15</sup>

*Indian Wars Everywhere* will fill in the blanks where other scholars made assumptions about *whether* and *how* the Indian Wars continue to resonate into the present.<sup>16</sup> It is partly motivated by how often US military violence is compared to the Indian Wars without fully excavating that history. Previous studies have paid less attention to US military doctrine, strategy, and tactics, or assumed a consistent transfer of Indian warfare across time and space. Excellent critical work on the history of counterinsurgency and other forms of irregular warfare sometimes makes assumptions about the coherence of “Indian fighting” doctrine and how it influenced later conflicts.<sup>17</sup> A careful examination of whether and how the Indian Wars persist has proved more elusive. To be sure, ideologies such as “manifest destiny,” “the frontier,” and the “savage” have shaped how later generations of Americans view the world. But there is more to this story, particularly the ways in which colonial violence has (and has not) been institutionalized in the US military, or in the broader American culture. Telling this story will help historicize the violent continuities embedded in US history.

This book is an attempt to more fully understand why the Indian Wars seem to be *everywhere*. It moves from the violence of US continental expansion all the way through the War on Terror, examining why Indian/fighting has remained such a consistent aspect of US imperial power. The slash (/) in Indian/fighting is intentional and will be used throughout this book to denote the competing discourses that have rendered US military violence as both “fighting against Indians” and “fighting *like* Indians.”<sup>18</sup> The chapters that follow explore the persistence of the Indian Wars not just as an imaginative structure that shapes how people view conflict, but also as a “shadow doctrine” that informs the practice of US military violence. I use the term *shadow doctrines* to describe those military practices that emerge from the traces of colonialism embedded in American culture, as opposed to the military’s official doctrine as compiled in manuals, training, and education. Where doctrine for the US Army constitutes the “principles the Army uses to guide its actions in support of national objectives,” shadow doctrines are the resonances of ongoing US colonialism that intrude on those principles.<sup>19</sup> Shadow doctrines should not be taken to imply a sharp divide between the US military and the broader culture in which it is embedded. Military institutions exist within national cultures, shaping (and being shaped by) that broader culture.<sup>20</sup> There is not an explicit continuity of Indian/fighting doctrine in US history, but there is a *shadow* of one.

The concept of shadow doctrines is particularly useful when exploring moments in US history where violence intersects with race and colonialism, as these conflicts are often viewed as “savage” or outside the mainstream of military action. There is a persistent tension between “savage” and “civilized” warfare throughout US history, and that tension has often been negotiated through references to the Indian Wars. The ongoing colonialism that results in “savage wars” is perpetually at odds with the desire for a *finished* colonialism, a *civilized* war, and the friction between these two poles forms an important part of the history of American violence. Stated plainly, ideas about race have always been present in the contours of US militarism, and Indian/fighting has been a mechanism for transmitting some of those ideas across time and space.

*Indian Wars Everywhere* concludes with the War on Terror because the shadow doctrines of US empire have been increasingly visible since the attacks on 9/11. Those waging the War on Terror did more than reference the frontier when drawing connections between the Indian Wars and the War on Terror. They articulated the United States’ history of colonial violence as a template, tutor, and validator of twenty-first-century warfare. The clearest examples are found in the institutions of US military training, education, and strategy, which published materials that analyzed the Indian Wars as a blueprint for contemporary conflicts. Returning to the comparisons of Geronimo and bin Laden, we can find a similar example from 2003 written by an officer at the United States Army War College (USAWC):

Both the Apaches and the Islamists possess a charismatic group of leaders. The Apaches were led by Cochise, Natchez, Victorio, Geronimo and others, names that still echo throughout the world. Today the leaders include Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar and dozens of others unknown to most American citizens but important in their regions stretching throughout the Middle East, Asia, Europe and pockets of the United States. All these historical and current leaders preach a fantasy ideology that seek[s] to have the US depart from “their” territories and for “the people” to return to an imagined life that is forever gone.<sup>21</sup>

This officer at the USAWC constructs Indigenous sovereignty as the original “fantasy ideology” in a long line of attempts to resist the power of the United States. In doing so, the writer conflates Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism with the atrocities carried out by Al-Qaeda, stating explicitly the implicit logic behind the bin Laden/Geronimo code name controversy. This is one example of the many connections traced throughout this book that collectively constitute the shadow doctrine

of Indian/fighting. The United States' formative acts of colonial violence persist in the actions, imaginations, and stories that have facilitated the spread of American empire.<sup>22</sup>

## SHADOW DOCTRINES AND THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

References to Geronimo or Indian country draw on a long history of representations of Native people found in literature, media, and art. These images act as a fog, obscuring the concerns of Indigenous peoples who continuously assert their sovereignty amid the pressures of ongoing colonialism.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the US military has a long history of using words and images referring to Indians to represent itself, from Apache helicopters to the paratroopers that shout “Geronimo” as they jump from airplanes.<sup>24</sup> Native people have also served in the US armed forces in large numbers, particularly since World War I.<sup>25</sup> Indianness is deeply coded into the imagination of American culture, and that includes the military. Goyahkla's resonance as the ultimate elusive enemy made him a likely candidate for symbolic deployment in the most significant mission of the War on Terror. However, the use of *Geronimo* as a code word was also a reminder that some of the earliest experiences of the US military with what is now referred to as *irregular warfare* (which includes unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, stability operations, counterterrorism, and more) were in conflicts with Native people resisting the imposition of US sovereignty (see Figure 2).<sup>26</sup> The image of the Indian casts a long shadow that solidifies whenever the words *savage*, *guerilla* or *insurgent* are deployed in the service of empire.

But what does it mean for an image or idea to *solidify*? What are these things we call “culture” and “discourse,” and how do they relate to the fingers on the triggers of guns, the hands that grasp the controls of airplanes? Cultural history, as a field of inquiry that focuses on language, representation, and the production of meaning, has much to offer the analysis of violence.<sup>27</sup> Culture functions in a myriad of ways: as the symbolic structures within a given society, as the glue that ties members of a group together, as the “commonsense” ideologies that shape the beliefs of individuals, and as a *process*, a set of meanings that continually shift over time, giving shape to social relationships and the material world.<sup>28</sup> Culture is both the symbolic terrain on which meaning is made and the expression of cultural ideas in physical actions, objects, and events.<sup>29</sup> When cultural ideas resonate, they do so not only through language, but



FIGURE 2. Crew of the Martin B-26 “Geronimo” of the 552nd Bomb Squadron, 386th Bomb Group, Essex, England, September 1, 1943. National Archives photo no. 204859027.

through bodies, through actions. These cultural ideas often take shape as a discourse, a historically specific set of beliefs, terms, and statements. For example, we might think of “manifest destiny,” the belief that the United States’ continental expansion was divinely ordained, as a particular kind of colonial discourse.<sup>30</sup> The shadow doctrines examined in this book are another such discourse. *Indian Wars Everywhere* is both a cultural history attentive to the materiality of warfare, and a history of violence attuned to the ways culture shapes that violence.

Shadow doctrines reframe the mythologies of colonial violence into more concrete prescriptions for military action. These resonances of US continental expansion function as powerful discursive structures, making meaning out of violence and conscripting military action into a familiar narrative and form. They draw on the legacy of US colonialism to produce a potent justification for the projection of US empire on a global scale. We must account for interactions like the following, which occurred during the congressional hearings into the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War:



*Captain Robert B. Johnson:* Where I was operating I didn't hear anyone personally use that term ["turkey shoots"]. We used the term "Indian Country."

*Congressman John Seiberling:* What did "Indian Country" refer to?

*Johnson:* I guess it means different things to different people. It is like there are savages out there, there are gooks out there. In the same way we slaughtered the Indian's buffalo, we would slaughter the water buffalo in Vietnam.<sup>31</sup>

When Captain Johnson says "the same way we slaughtered the Indian's buffalo, we would slaughter the water buffalo in Vietnam," you can hear the unspoken subtext: in the same way we fought Indians, we fight the Vietnamese. Remember, this was in the context of congressional hearings on the most visible, but hardly unique, massacre of the Vietnam War, a massacre that recalled the killing of Native people at Bear River, Sand Creek, and Wounded Knee.<sup>32</sup> Captain Johnson was not only talking about how he imagined the Vietnamese; he was talking about how he *fought* them.

#### SAVAGE WAR AND IRREGULAR WAR

The United States has nearly always been at war, and for much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has seemingly been at war *everywhere*.<sup>33</sup> Despite an understandable preoccupation with large battles and global wars in the narrative of US history, the country has spent just as much time (if not more) engaged in smaller-scale conflicts—interventions, occupations, punitive expeditions, small wars, police actions, peacekeeping operations, and counterinsurgencies. These struggles tend to garner less attention, and are often united in their extension beyond defeating opposing armies on the battlefield.<sup>34</sup> Most are conflicts with complex objectives: influencing local politics, legitimating allied governments, protecting US economic interests, or eliminating nonstate actors deemed to be threats to national security.<sup>35</sup> Rudyard Kipling famously called a version of these struggles the "savage wars of peace" in his 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," written to encourage the United States' occupation of the Philippines. Kipling's poem emphasized that ideas about race were inextricably linked to the expansion of US power at the turn of the century. This imperial paternalism often argued that the colonized were incapable of self-government, and it was the duty of white men to assume the "civilizing" burden.<sup>36</sup>