Abstract

The forces of imperialism and colonialism have been transcendent through recorded history. Where these forces have risen there have often been reactionary movements to fight against the ruling powers. Two such instances include the work of Tiridates I of Armenia in the First Century AD, and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam who gained prominence in the Twentieth Century. By comparing these two leaders a model is suggested revolving around a specific set of variables that have remain consistent through time. This macrohistorical comparison seeks to analyze what specific characteristics made the two men successful in their endeavors to rid their country of a ruling power.
Introduction

Macrohistory is a relatively uncommon branch in modern academia. Comparisons of power politics and people are often left to the political scientists, sociologists, and psychologists. Plutarch was the first to engage in this comparative type of work, when he wrote his parallel lives, but in modern scholarship, macrohistorical comparisons are not yet prevalent. Other writers who have engaged in similar explorations include Victor Davis Hanson, who wrote *Carnage and Culture* which examines a wide range of cultural values that explain how western culture has become predominant in the world. Peter Fibiger Bang, from the University of Copenhagen, has worked to show the lasting influences of classical societies. Despite these works, there is still very little work on macrohistorical comparisons, but there are topics where history provides depth and breadth to otherwise superficial comparisons. With this in mind, an argument can be made to compare Tiridates I of Armenia, who started his rule in 53 AD, but was formally crowned in 66, and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam who struggled to establish Vietnam as a nation. This comparison is aided by the similarity between the geopolitics of the time, as well as the struggles within Armenia and Vietnam. Given the analogous nature of the states, Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh can be compared in regard to their person, how they were depicted in opposing societies, education level, leadership qualities, military experience, and their lasting impact. Within this framework a model is suggested for future comparisons of leaders under imperialism or colonialism, because these factors have persisted through time.

A model such as this is important because it provides a useful construction through which leaders can be compared when placed in a situation under imperialism or colonialism. Models such as this are common in the social sciences, but they are useful when applied to the historical field. Comparative history relies on sets of variables to see how two wide ranging sets of facts
match. Also, because colonialism and imperialism are persistent forces in modern day politics there is predictive power that lies in this construct. Part of the purpose of choosing leaders from such a wide diversity of time is to demonstrate the staying power of the characteristics mentioned, indicating a transcendence through time that is indicative of an underlying pattern. The model provides an interpretive framework for viewing political figures, in a specific point in time.

One of the chief components that must be recognized for this comparison is that twentieth century colonialism is analogous to ancient imperialism. Indeed, even modern countries have been accused of imperialistic tendencies; with the potential for imperial overstretch. These concepts can be compared because the aims of the powers involved are similar. The more powerful nation tries to exploit a specific area for economic, conceptual or strategic reasons. In ancient times the concept of a suzerain was prominent. A suzerain is a sovereign or state having some control over another state that is internally autonomous. This idea has not faded, as exploitation colonialism defined European expansionism. Within this paradigm the colonizing nation is responsible for the administration of an area, but the locals work for the benefit of the colonizer. Roman interest in Armenia was based in the strategic and economic benefits the region provided. Strategically it offered military access to the powerful Parthian Empire. The Parthians was the singular regional hegemon that could challenge Rome for control of the eastern Mediterranean. Armenia provided a crucial buffer zone between the two empires, and it was a highly contested client kingdom of both powers.¹ The Vietnamese conflict had similar motives. Strategically, Vietnam offers access to all of Southeast Asia, which during World War II centered on the threat posed by the Japanese invasion. Vietnam is centrally located to China, the

¹ Appendix A
Philippines, and Indonesia, all locations that played significant roles in World War II. It was natural then for the United States to seek to establish intelligence networks in the region. From these networks the US was able to gain vital information, as well as launch several successful missions to rescue downed airmen from the Japanese. As World War II ended, the struggle for Vietnam became less strategic and more conceptual. It became a microcosm of the anti-colonial sentiment of the time period, but also the desire for western European powers to reestablish control over their wayward possessions. Because the situations of the nations are analogous, the situations of the leaders of the beleaguered areas can likewise be compared.

To approach a subject matter such as this, the source material needs to be wide ranging, yet specific to the individual leaders. The primary sources for the ancient aspects are understandably restricted to what is available. Unfortunately, there are no surviving records from the Near East about the rule of Tiridates. As such, this work relies on Roman sources for descriptions of physical appearance, lifestyle, and accomplishments. These sources include the works of Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Seutonius. Source material for modern component of the comparison is more readily available. Western and eastern writers focused extensively on Ho Chi Minh. His work for Vietnam drew attention from multiple arenas of nations and people. One of the main works considered are The Pentagon Papers. These reports highlight the attitudes and implications found in various policies in Southeast Asia. In addition, public documents such as the Declaration of Independence of Vietnam and the Geneva Accords of 1954 are evidence of the long transition that Vietnam experienced in its quest for independence. These documents substantiate that a comparison is present.

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2 Appendix B
3 This is an extremely important comparison to develop, but the comparison in and of itself is beyond the scope of this paper.
4 These reports, completed by the Department of Defense Task Force for Vietnam, sought to detail and explain the wide ranging issues at hand with Vietnam. These reports were leaked to the New York Times by Daniel Ellsberg, an analyst for RAND Corporation, in 1971.
Background: Rome-Parthia

The comparison between the Roman Empire and the modern United States has become ubiquitous, but there are interesting similarities outside of the common arguments. The Roman Empire stretched around the Mediterranean world, to the extent that the Romans called it, “our lake”. Within the reaches of the empire there were very few powers that could hope to rival the Romans. Imperialism led them to campaign into Europe as well as the ancient Near East. Within this latter area the Romans were rebuffed, when they met a power that could rival theirs, the Parthian Empire. Parthia emerged in the ancient Near East and the degree of centralization brought them to a size and power level that could rival the Romans. Parthia proved most adept at competing with Rome on a military level. The most important victory for the Parthians occurred at the Battle of Carrhae, in which they defeated a larger Roman force under Marcus Licinius Crassus. Crassus was killed in this battle, and more importantly the Parthians captured the Roman standards. This was considered a grave insult to the Roman military and represents the degree to which the Romans were defeated: a psychological blow to the Romans, one that impugned the honor of the Roman military. After the defeat of Crassus at Carrhae, Parthia became Rome’s main enemy, however, after Julius Caesar was assassinated, and Rome fell into civil war, the bipolar conflict was not a priority.⁵

After Augustus Caesar took the throne of Rome, a new relationship with Parthia started, one of diplomacy. King Phraates IV of Parthia even sent four of his sons to Rome. In addition, Augustus was able to arrange for the return of the Roman standards that had been lost at Carrhae. Both of these events were propaganda victories for Rome and they were certainly portrayed as such in Roman reliefs. Rome and Parthia also signed a security agreement in which the nations established the limitations for military action in Armenia.

The relationship did not stay peaceful, however, as during the reign of Nero a new series of conflicts erupted. This series generally focused on the client and buffer kingdom of Armenia. King Vologases I of Parthia, sensing Roman weakness in the region, invaded Armenia and established his younger brother Tiridates I on the throne in 53 AD. Tiridates, however was forcefully removed when Tigranes, a Roman supported foreign prince, initiated a series of raids into the outlying areas of Armenia. These were met with patience by the Parthian protectors of the region, as King Vologases was unwilling to let the great powers enter into conflict. Corbulo, the Roman general of Syria, and other commanders in the region, sent envoys to Vologases to avoid war. Indeed, Vologases surrendered members of the royal family in order to appease the Romans. The situation changed, however, when Tigranes destroyed the Adiabeni, a Parthian supported kingdom. At this change, Vologases could no longer sustain such infringements upon areas of projected power. Vologases called a council and he stated, “And I thought to myself that I had duly arranged our family and home so as to guard against the old feuds and rivalries of brothers. The Romans thwart me, and though they have never with success to themselves disturbed the peace between us, they are now again breaking it to their own destruction.”

Having committed the Parthians to rid Armenia of Tigranes, he proceeded to send Tiridates I and Moneses to Armenia, while Vologases brought his forces against the Roman province of Syria, so as to threaten Roman interests there. Corbulo was not ignorant of the movements of his Parthian foe so to counter their movements he sent two legions to support Tigranes. Similar to Vologases, Corbulo was loath to commit his forces into open war with Parthia so he gave his forces orders to stall and try to sustain rather than engage in battle. Corbulo then wheeled his forces for the defense of Syria. The two empires descended into war,

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7 Tacitus, *The Annals* 15.2.4-6.
and a series of defensive posts were made across the near east, where Corbulo was relatively successful against the incursions of his enemies.

At this point a new general, Caessennius Paetus, arrived solely for the defense of Armenia. This proved to be a greater detriment to the Roman forces, as Paetus was much less conservative than Corbulo. He was more anxious to destroy and pillage than Corbulo. He also seemed to be more anxious for war and conflict. Paetus engaged in a strategy of suedo-scorched earth in areas that Corbulo left untouched. Vologases moved his forces away from Syria in order to counter the new threat of Paetus. Despite all of the impending signs and signals Paetus remained ignorant of Vologases’ advance, until the forces met and Paetus was surprised with the numerical advantage of the Parthians. Paetus suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of Rhandeia against the Parthian and Armenian forces of Tiridates. The Roman legions under Paetus were returned to Corbulo, but the damage had already been done. Paetus attempted to convince Corbulo to invade Armenia to regain the offensive, but Corbulo refused. At this point communications were opened between Vologases and Corbulo, and it was decided that both sides would withdraw and leave Armenia unoccupied. This, in effect, left Armenia under Parthian control, but the control was not established until a Parthian delegation could travel to Rome. It was during the preliminary negotiations that Tiridates placed his crown at the feet of Corbulo and stated that he would gain it once more in Rome. The delegation provides one of the most fascinating episodes in the history of the fight for Armenia, that of Tiridates journey to Rome to receive his crown from Nero.

The journey from the battlefield to Rome took nine months, but it was undertaken with extravagance. Tiridates “presented himself in Rome, bringing with him not only his own children but those of Vologases, of Pacorus, and of Monobazus...Tiridates himself was in the
prime of life, a notable figure by reason of his youth, beauty, family, and intelligence: and his whole train of servants together with the entourage of a royal court accompanied the advance. Three thousand Parthian horsemen and besides them numerous Romans followed his train.” Cassius Dio described the episode, and the rule of Tiridates was legitimized when Nero set the diadem on his head. Tiridates supplicates him saying “Master, I am the descendant of Arsaces, brother of the princes Vologaesus and Pacorus, and thy slave. And I have come to thee, my deity, to worship thee as I do Mithra. The destiny thou spinnest for me shall be mine: for thou art my Fortune and my Fate.” Nero responds to this by saying “Well hast thou done to come hither in person, that present in my presence thou mayest enjoy my benefits. For what neither thy father left thee nor thy brothers gave and preserved for thee, this do I grant thee. King of Armenia I now declare thee, that both thou and they may understand that I have power to take away kingdoms and to bestow them”. So while Armenia was yielded as a client kingdom to Parthia, the Romans ensured that they still were able to project power and influence in the region.

Background US-Vietnam

The interaction between bipolar great powers was also manifest in the modern world between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War. The establishment of these nations as bipolar regional great powers has its roots in World War II. The United States, during the early half of the twentieth century, espoused a philosophy of non-intervention, despite the eventual involvement in the First World War. Isolation took hold again during the interwar years, so the United States was ill prepared to fully accept the role of hegemony until World War II. It was at this time that the war machine established its predominance and the advent of nuclear capabilities made it the most powerful state in the international community. The Soviet Union arose out of the Russian revolution of 1917 where a communist government was installed.

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8 Cassius Dio, Roman History 63.2.1-63.6.1.
The USSR reached the zenith of its power under Joseph Stalin, which included the development of nuclear capabilities that were used to threaten the United States. This led to the Cold War, in which both nations were at the brink of nuclear war, and diplomacy was often ineffective. Before this conflict, the two nations did cooperate against the common foe of Nazi Germany.

At the end of World War II the US and USSR became the prime enemies in the international system. As the Cold War label suggests, the two never came directly into military confrontations, although a series of proxy wars were fought to try to establish predominance in the international system. In the United States these proxy wars were fought under the guise of the Truman Doctrine, which stated that the spread of communism would not be accepted. The US fought the Vietnam War under this rhetoric. Vietnam had a long history of conflict, and the United States had previous military relations with the communists against whom they were fighting a war. During World War II the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), established intelligence networks to fight the Japanese in Vietnam, where one of their main contacts was Ho Chi Minh, who became the centerpiece in the Vietnamese struggle for independence. Ho Chi Minh worked to legitimize his struggle with the United States, particularly during Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s policy against European imperialistic powers.

The relationship between the OSS and Ho Chi Minh proved quite fruitful as several successful missions were run to rescue downed airmen and gather intelligence. One of the primary reasons that the relationship developed successfully was the alignment in policy between the two countries. During World War II the United States adopted a soft anti-colonial policy, which did not support the French presence in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh was much more a nationalist than a communist, and his designs for the future of Vietnam revolved around

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9 The North Korean communists invaded the South, which prompted military response from the United Nations. This conflict was inconclusive, as the nations remained divided, but it was not the only instance of proxy war between the two nations.
independence from European powers. As such, the two had a mutually constructed understanding that allowed significant cooperation. However, much of the later conflict in Vietnam developed because of misunderstanding of US policy. Because the anti-colonialism policy was subtle, the Vietnamese as a whole did not know how to react to US presence. The Pentagon Papers cover Vietnam during this time and analyze the policy decisions that led to war. As noted in the report Bernard Fall commented that “President Roosevelt was determined ‘to eliminate the French from Indochina at all costs and had pressured the Allies to establish an international trusteeship to administer Indochina until the nations there were ready to assume full independence’.”\(^{10}\) Despite this assertion by Fall, the report disagrees with this finding, as it states that the policy towards Vietnam was not clearly defined, and instead was ambivalent towards Indochina. Indeed, the United States reassured the French that their colonial possessions would not be disrupted, and would be returned after the war. At the same time the policy espoused in the Atlantic Charter, and later the UN Charter was one of national self-determination, and Franklin Roosevelt fiercely defended the right of Indochina to be independent. Because of this, the national stance of the United States was difficult to properly discern by the Indochinese allies. The United States was in a difficult position in Southeast Asia during World War II. On the one hand, the French were the more natural western allies, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt seemed to feel that the French had “abused their stay in Southeast Asia”.\(^{11}\) This was coupled with the fact that the French in Vietnam were unwilling to cooperate with the OSS to establish intelligence networks in the region against Japan. Because of this the OSS and the United States turned to the ally that presented itself, that in Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. The official


foreign policy of the United States towards Vietnam technically never existed, but it was suggested to the officers on the ground that they were not to assist the French in recapturing any of the territory. The fact that the policy did not formally exist made it difficult for Ho Chi Minh to foresee what he would gain from working with the US, but he sensed that their motives mostly overlapped, insofar as they both worked for the expulsion of the Japanese, and to a lesser degree, the French. As such, his strategy for the war revolved around this cooperative atmosphere that was fostered.

Context: Legitimizing Rule

In a similar fashion to the conflict in Vietnam, the war in Armenia originated as a proxy conflict between the two great empires. Tiridates I was trying to reclaim what he believed was rightfully his, and had been taken from him by the Roman supported Tigranes. The Cappadocian had deposed Tiridates with the support of Rome, making the conflict origin proxy in nature.

Mason Hammond consulted the works of B.W. Henderson and W. Schur in determining what Rome was trying to accomplish in Armenia. He finds that Nero could have had four possible courses of action in his near eastern policy; that they could seek the total surrender of Armenia, completely annex the region, have a Roman suzerain on the throne, or have a Parthian suzerain on the throne with extensive Roman influence. Militarily the first two options were not feasible because they would involve an extensive presence of force. Roman interest in the near east were much more focused on Syria, and the Syro-Palestine region, as Armenia extended farther north than most of Roman areas of control. Despite that, Rome still wished to retain Armenia, and deployed extensive military forces under Corbulo and Paetus for expressly that reason. Because surrender and annexation were beyond feasible limits, as asserted by Henderson, establishing a suzerain under Roman control became the best option. This was tried
by supporting Tigranes, a king of Cappadocia, in his incursions into Armenia. The military campaigns in the region did not facilitate this kind of relationship with Armenia however, so a Parthian suzerain with Roman control was established with Tiridates on the throne. Schur disagrees with this assessment, as he sees Nero trying to channel the spirit of Alexander the Great and set in motion a grand campaign for which Armenia was a prelude. Whichever option is correct, the spirit of imperialism still reigned, and greater areas of control were sought by Nero. Like many great power wars, both Vologases and Corbulo were hesitant to engage in outright warfare. Diplomacy was attempted, but the actions of Paetus and Tiridates made the conflict inevitable. Tiridates proved himself willing to go to great lengths to legitimize his rule, as seen by his journey to Rome, and supplicate himself before the Roman Emperor in order to gain the crown.

This episode of seeking to legitimize rule by going to a western power was not unique to the situation in Armenia. Ho Chi Minh had similar experiences as he sought to gain legitimacy for a nation state after World War II before the French became firmly entrenched once more. At the end of World War II, however, the US view against the French colonialism died with Franklin Roosevelt. The government became preoccupied with the surrender and occupation of Germany, and the surrender of Japan. Based largely on Winston Churchill’s advice, Southeast Asia did not emerge as independent nations, as the British returned to their colonial possessions, along with the French and Dutch. The British had been sensitive on the issue of self-determination in Asia such that “(at) the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944, at which the blueprint for the postwar international system was negotiated, skirted the colonial issue, and avoided

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trusteeships altogether”. After the war, the territories that had been recaptured would be returned to their owners, and only those territories wrested from the enemy would be placed under trusteeship. Because of this, at the end of the war, Indochina was then returned to the French, and military forces returned to South Vietnam in September 1945. Because this was not the result that Ho Chi Minh desired, he naturally resisted this turn of events, and there was an outbreak of guerrilla warfare that resulted. The United States response to this type of warfare was to not assist the French in regaining any of the territory. More importantly, Ho Chi Minh turned to the United States for intervention, requests that were never officially answered. On March 6, 1946 the French signed an accord with Ho Chi Minh in which the French were allowed reentry into North Vietnam in exchange for the DRV as a free state in the French Union. As such, by April allied occupation of Vietnam ended, and the French formally regained control of all of Vietnam. Because of this, the United States policy toward Vietnam was relayed through its relationship with France. Indeed the US Ambassador in Paris relayed to Premier Ramadier that “In spite (of) any misunderstanding which might have arisen in (the) minds (of the) French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France’s sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring (to) undermine that position, and (the) French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready (to) assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for (the) Indochinese problem”.

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issues in Southeast Asia were far from over. In late 1946 the Franco-Viet Minh war began, a war in which the United States regarded it as a matter of French determinism, but even so the US was not in favor of an extended conflict in Vietnam. Because of this, the US wanted the French to concede to the Vietnamese demands, but they always stopped shy of pledging formal support to the Viet Minh, primarily because of their Communist affiliation. Despite the fact that the Truman Doctrine was not formally delivered until March 17, 1947 the feelings of the western powers of Europe were turning to face the growing threat of the Soviets, and the United States was not willing to push a potentially divisive issue against their allies. The United States did not consider the overall plight of the Vietnamese to be as important as the recovery of Europe economically and the overall prevention of the spread of Communism. Because of this, Ho Chi Minh was forced to turn away from the United States that he had aided previously, in favor of more willing allies. It is a great tragedy of American foreign policy that the Viet Minh’s actions were not recognized as a nationalistic sentiment, rather than a desire for Communism.

Comparison: Armenia and Vietnam

Before examining the leaders Ho Chi Minh and Tiridates, the similarity between Vietnam and Armenia as a whole must be recognized. A.E. Redgate describes the situation of Armenia, the qualities of which can also be seen in Vietnam; “The Armenians have had important links with a series of powerful neighbours to east and west. They have often been an object of rivalry between these neighbours. They have retained, in adversity, a sense of national identity. They have striven for national independence”.16 In Armenia the powerful neighbors were the Roman Empire in the west and the Parthian Kingdom in the east. Rome and Parthia consistently fought for Armenia because of the strategic value in its location. Vietnam also labored under the same constraints, be it the Chinese from the east, the Japanese from the west, or the French, and later

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the US from across the world. All tried to exercise their might at the expense of the Vietnamese people. Ho Chi Minh worked to establish the sense of national identity and create the nation of Vietnam that had long been denied to them. Despite the 1900 years spanning the struggles, the nature of the political situation remains similar. The nature of power politics transcends nations and times, from when Thucydides wrote on the origins of the Peloponnesian Wars, to the commentaries of John Mearsheimer on the Cold War. In this regard, Armenia and Vietnam were both subject to realist lines of thought; where small nations caught between great powers struggle to eke out their own independent existence.

The nations both have long traditions of abuses of the people. Because of its strategic location between Europe and Asia it was subject to invasion by numerous people, from the Persians, to the Greeks, to the Romans, consistently making the Armenians victims in external quests for power. Its conversion to Christianity before the Roman Empire brought it further anguish from external powers, until its fall to the Sassanians after the Parthians no longer ruled. Vietnam has a similar history of occupation and warfare. From medieval times Vietnam was occupied by the Chinese, until the French started colonizing Southeast Asia in the 19th century. From there it fell to Japanese control during the Second World War, returned to France after the war, and then occupied by the United States for a decade before finally gaining independence. In both nations, the long struggle for existence helped to foster the quest for national identity and independence.

People: Tiridates

It is necessary to turn to the leaders for a comparison. Like many ancient topics, source material is rather limited on Tiridates himself, as no Parthian records exist on the topic.
Therefore, it is necessary to rely on Roman sources for his description and character.\textsuperscript{17} Nothing is known of his formative years other than that he was born of Vonones II of Parthia and a Greek concubine. Vonones II was a Parthian prince who briefly acted as king. The royal family in which he was born consisted of Vologases I, the king of Parthia, and Pacorus, who controlled the Media Atropatene region.\textsuperscript{18} Because he was not the legitimate heir to the Parthian throne he was relegated to control of a client kingdom. In this regard, Vologases was attempting to solidify his control over the near east. Cassius Dio describes Tiridates during his journey to Rome in 66 CE as being “in the prime of life, a notable figure by reason of his youth, beauty, family, and intelligence”.\textsuperscript{19} The events that prompted Tiridates expedition to Rome occurred during the peace meeting with Corbulo. Tiridates removed his crown, placing it at the feet of the Roman general, saying that he would receive it again from the emperor of Rome. Dio then goes on to describe a series of events that took place when Tiridates met Nero. A few things to note during the meeting include that Tiridates refused to put down his dagger when approaching Nero, and yet he still made the proper supplications that behest emperor of Rome. In addition, Nero and Tiridates went to a series of gladiatorial games where it was stated that Tiridates shot at some of the animals from his seat and supposedly killed two bulls with one arrow. So while this event was probably staged, it is important because it reveals the portrayal of Tiridates as a great man in Roman sources. When Tiridates prepared to accept his crown from Nero, he first had to pass through rows of armed men to get to the emperor. As part of the process the guards made their obeisance to the emperor known. Dio relates that the noise frightened Tiridates and he was rendered speechless, and feared for his life. When he sufficiently recovered his faculties he put aside his pride and knelt before Nero to ask for the crown. Despite his words, Tiridates did not

\textsuperscript{17} Appendix C
\textsuperscript{18} Neilson Debevoise, \textit{A Political History of Parthia} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 176.
\textsuperscript{19} Cassius Dio, \textit{Roman History} 63.2.1.
approve of Nero as an emperor. After the ceremony a banquet was held to formalize the relations and Nero, driving a chariot, and wearing the garb of the charioteer singing publicly of his deeds. Tiridates did not enjoy this display, but his disdain for the emperor was based on character and not on Romans in general. It was stated that he praised Corbulo, the general with whom he fought, and said his only faults was to deign to follow the orders of an emperor such as Nero. Tiridates did not withhold his feelings from the emperor as he openly stated to Nero “Master, you have in Corbulo a good slave”. More importantly Tiridates in “other matters he flattered the emperor and ingratiated himself most skillfully, with the result that he received all kinds of gifts...Moreover, he took with him from Rome many artisans, some of whom he got from Nero”.²⁰

From these episodes, many traits attributed to Tiridates nature can be discerned. It is clear that Tiridates was the epitome of an ancient ruler, given his appearance, intellect, and more importantly his skill in battle. While not to the extent of Greek culture, Rome can still be considered an agonistic society, in which a certain skill set is prized, mainly focusing around deeds in battle or rhetoric. His actions at the gladiatorial games proved his skills in the hunt, and his unwillingness to disarm portray a certain militaristic attitude. This assertion stands to reason based on the warring nature of the near eastern territories, including the Armenian and Cappadocian regions in which Tiridates was raised. The entire journey to Rome can be seen as an honorable and courageous act. Travel during such times, especially in enemy territory, was a dangerous proposition, and while Tiridates was accompanied by a large force of Parthians there was still great risk involved. Further, he displayed fortitude of character walking between rows of armed men to reach Nero. His reaction to the noise from the men is quite understandable given the propensity of the Romans for public displays of violence. Tiridates also displayed an

²⁰ Cassius Dio, Roman History 63.6.8-9.
honorific and ideological driven state of mind by placing his crown at the feet of Corbulo. He was aware of the ramifications of such an action, but was well prepared to undertake the necessary risks to reap the rewards as Armenian king.

People: Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh, born Nguyen Tat Thanh, but also referred to as Nguyen Ai Quoc, was born in the village of Hoang Tru, under the oppressive hands of the French colonialists. His father, Nguyen Sinh Sac, was well educated for a person of Vietnamese identity in Indochina, as he was trained to speak and write French. This would have allowed him to find a position within the French bureaucracy, but he was content to remain a teacher. Ho Chi Minh studied extensively with his father during his formative years, and had extensively studied Confucian classical writings as well as the nationalistic intellectuals of the period. By the age of sixteen he had begun to study French. This study led him to act as a translator between the peasants and the French troops after an uprising in 1908. The peasants’ demands failed, and Ho Chi Minh was dismissed from school for his actions. After leaving school Ho Chi Minh started his travels abroad, taking odd jobs along the way, including work as a kitchen helper on a French steamer. He continued his work on ships that traveled around the world, and he was exposed to many different philosophies and schools of thought. Through his studies he found that communism provided the best arguments against the colonial rule of the French, and so he started to become actively involved in party organizations. Ho Chi Minh spent extensive amounts of time in France, the Soviet Union, and China working to further his cause, and to spread the teachings of Lenin of self-determinism. After spending time in a Chinese jail, and a bout with tuberculosis, he returned to Vietnam to lead the independence movement, the Viet Minh. It was during this

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time that he worked against the Vichy French regime and the Japanese masters that were taking over the peninsula. After another stint in Chinese prison, he worked extensively with the American intelligence forces. After the war, Ho Chi Minh worked with a host of foreign powers in the promise of return aid or recognition, including the Chinese and the United States, but Vietnam was returned to the French despite his overtures. It was during this period that Ho Chi Minh wrote the Declaration of Independence for Vietnam, but in 1946 open war erupted again with the colonial power. He still negotiated extensively with outside powers, and was able to secure the recognition of his government with both Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin. \(^{22}\) During the conference at which this occurred, the powers decided that the military training and support of the Viet Minh would come from China. In 1954, after the defeat of French forces at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam and France signed the Geneva Accords, which ended French occupation.

Comparison: Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh

The most strikingly common aspect between Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh is most succinctly stated by Truong Chinh, the general secretary for the Indochinese Communist Party when he stated that “in our struggle for national liberation, we must obviously seek allies-even if they are temporary, vacillating, or conditional-but the struggle must no less be the fruit of our own efforts”. \(^{23}\) While it is impossible to discern Tiridates motives for seeking to gain the throne of Armenia, the willingness to cooperate with forces that are not steadfast in their support is a common theme for leaders seeking to gain a new identity. While Ho Chi Minh’s actions displayed nationalistic intentions, he still followed the same philosophy on alliances. This was one of the driving factors behind his actions of alliance with the OSS during WWII. It is imperative to note that both leaders were struggling under the rule of an outside entity. Tiridates

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worked under the rule of the several foreign princes in Armenia, as the region changed hands multiple times. Tigranes prompted the intervention of the Parthians, however, when he directly seized the territories supported by Parthia. The struggles of Ho Chi Minh are well documented; the brutality of the French rule, the incursions of the Japanese, and the presumptions of the Chinese all contributed to his deep desire to see Vietnam free from outside interference.

Comparison: Depictions in Opposing Society

Another important aspect of comparison is found in how the leaders were depicted in the warring countries. During World War II, little information was propagated to the American public about Ho Chi Minh, and his actions with the United States. It was often questioned by the men on the ground what the end game was for Ho Chi Minh, whether it was the creation of the state of Vietnam, or if it was for the creation of communist satellite for the Soviet Union. The latter view was supported by the amount of time that Ho Chi Minh spent in the USSR, and indeed he took direction from them for his assignments in the interwar period. It was the USSR who directed him to go to China to foster the communist party there. From there, by extension, he also worked to foster the communist party in Vietnam. As such, the fears over the spreading influence of the Soviet Union were clearly justified in dictating the foreign policy of the United States. As such, when Ho Chi Minh came to the United States for aid in fighting the French during the 1950s he was turned down. However, it must be conceded that his affiliations were not clear. Indeed in 1945 when Ho Chi Minh was writing the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republican of Vietnam, he paraphrased from the United States Declaration of Independence. He starts his Declaration stating “All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness…that all the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to
live, to be happy and free”. Further, much in the same manner of the American founding
fathers, Ho Chi Minh then goes on to describe a list of grievances and to end with a declaration
of independence away from the French. When the situation started to escalate for the United
States in the region during the early 1960s Ho Chi Minh started to receive more attention from
American news sources. However, in the press media, the depictions of Ho Chi Minh were
remarkably mixed. His obituary in the New York Times reveals fascinating details of how he
was viewed, “To the 19 Million people north of the 17th parallel and to other millions below it,
the small, frail, ivorylike figure of Ho, with its long ascetic face, straggly goatee, sunken cheeks
and luminous eyes, was that of a patriarch, the George Washington of his nation”. A popular
nickname for Ho Chi Minh was Uncle Ho, the man who cared for the people, as he never
indulged in any outward appearance of wealth. He was incredibly popular all throughout
Vietnam, greatly aided by the relationships he fostered by traveling to small villages and hamlets
all throughout the country. Personally, it was said he was intelligent, and resourceful, but
ruthless. Harry Ashmore and William C. Baggs were two of the last Americans to speak with
Ho Chi Minh, in 1967; they described him as “courtly, urbane, highly sophisticated man with a
gentle manner and without personal venom”.  

It is clear that Tiridates, despite being a foreigner from distant lands, was still held in high
esteem by the Roman power structure. Nero specially constructed a stage for the ceremony of
placing the crown upon Tiridates head, removing his turban in the process. Once Tiridates made
the necessary supplications and received the crown, he and Nero travelled to the theatre where
they sat together, Tiridates on the right hand side. This in itself is a significant gesture by the

Roman emperor. It ensures the populace of the esteem that should be afforded to the visiting king. Suetonius reflects on the extravagance that was afforded to Tiridates during his stay, “He (Nero) spent upon Tiridates eight hundred thousand sesterces a day, a sum almost incredible; and at his departure, presented him with upwards of a million”. Some of this pomp and circumstance can be attributed to Roman extravagance, but this cannot be considered a trifling occurrence. This is in part because Parthia was held up to be the great enemy of the Roman Empire and Tiridates was Parthian born, so making him bow before the emperor to get the kingship appealed to their warrior sensibility. The Parthians, as the antithesis, of Rome started to appear in literature sources during the time of Julius Caesar. Suetonius stated that Julius stated that war with Parthia for the protection and expansion of the empire. Further, it is explicitly stated that the avenue for attack would be through lower Armenia. When Crassus was defeated, and the standards were captured, the view of Parthia as the anti-Rome was certainly reinforced. When Octavian took the throne, and became Augustus, he continued his uncle’s quest against the Parthian threat. Augustus dealt extensively with Phraates IV of Parthia, and he negotiated for the return of the standards. Augustus clearly held this as a victory of paramount importance, which is clearly demonstrated in the Res Gestae of Augustus, as well as the cuirass of the prima porta of Augustus. Rome, as a whole, was culturally swayed to hold the Parthians as the epitome of an enemy, which is demonstrated through many of the works of the poets of the day. Horace, in particular, was extremely pro-Augustus in his leanings against the Parthians, and his poetry reveals such “he (Augustus) restored the standards, having been stripped from the

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27 Suetonius De Vita Caesarum: Nero 30.7-8.
28 Suetonius De Vita Caesarum: Julius 44.11.
arrogant doorposts of the Parthians, to our Jove”. In the ancient context, Rome held Parthia in the same regard as the Greeks held the Persians, during the time of Xerxes.

The point of comparison within these depictions is that of a paramount enemy, even if that enemy poses no real threat to the security of the nation. The nations at hand were merely gateways to a bigger state. Armenia was a gateway to the Parthian Empire, while Vietnam provided access to China, as well as the Soviet Union, and Japan. Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh, as the leaders of the gateway nations are then depicted as being an essential cog in the conflict. Tiridates, by extension of his Parthian birth, fit into the Roman construct of what a Parthian enemy was. He wanted the kingship of Armenia, and he was willing to humble himself before the emperor of Rome to achieve that end. So within the Roman view of Parthia as a powerful people, as he humbles himself before the emperor they can claim victory over their eastern foe. Likewise, Ho Chi Minh fulfilled the vision of the communist foe that the US sought in its Cold War fight against the Soviet Union. The frail old man, with real or imagined ties to Moscow, spread the red menace to the emerging state of Vietnam, and the United States could not allow such things to happen. It is also important to note the similarity between the Cold War and the way in which Rome dealt with Parthia. In this regard, the poetry of the Romans, the cuirass of the prima porta of Augustus, and the Julian family seeking revenge against the Parthians play a similar role to the foreign policy of the state as the Truman Doctrine did to the US. In both cases the nation sought to epitomize an enemy, as to shift the locust of the nation upon a specific state.\[...

The images that the opposing societies created of the leaders is important in understanding the perception of the status of the country. These perceptions are important, but the reality is also intrinsic to the argument of comparison. These men were stereotyped and mythicized in their actions which drove the depictions, but they were very real men that operated

\[30\] Horace, *Carmina* 4.15.6-8.
in trying circumstances. The realities are important because they were successful in their end goal, that of an independent state. Further, the success that they achieved can largely be attributed to the actions of these men. The depictions are also important in consideration of the model framework for imperialism and colonialism. Because they reached pre-eminent status in their society, the opposition was able to validate their claims of conflict. This was seen in the Roman times when the Parthians are displayed as a great and powerful empire. By showing Tiridates submission, Rome was able to claim a great victory, even if it was not a monumental military conflict, further it can be argued that Rome lost because Armenia became a satellite of Parthia. Despite this, Rome was able to use Tiridates journey, and the return of the standards earlier, as a propaganda victory, to justify its wayward expansionism, and to demonstrate its prowess and success. The United States had similar reasonings for their portrayals of Ho Chi Minh. His image is more dual faceted, that of the communist and that of the patriarch of Vietnam. The communist picture allowed the United States to justify its refusal to support Ho Chi Minh. The US was not willing to compromise its relationship with the European powers, and so hid behind this diplomatic shield of communism. Further, after the United States became entangled in the 1960s communism provided a useful justification for which military force could be used. The tradition of Ho Chi Minh as the patriarch of Vietnam was common after his death, and the US withdrawal from Vietnam. This shift in image allows the United States to soften its loss, and instead look at the self-determinist aspects that came out of the conflict. The founding father image allows the United States to hearken back to its primordial traditions of liberty and freedom to self-govern, thereby lessening the sting of its foreign policy failure.

Comparison: Education
Another point of comparison between Tiridates of Armenia and Ho Chi Minh was their relatively high level of education given the context of the society in which they were raised. In ancient societies education was reserved for a specific class of people, as well as for the royalty of the nation. Because of this, while it is not expressly stated in ancient sources, Tiridates would have been one of the more educated people in the Parthian Empire. There is no evidence to suggest that he was ideologically driven for the independence of Armenia, so it is only natural then that his intentions would have been geared towards the improvement of the standing of the Parthian areas of control. The views of Tiridates expressed in Rome towards the quality of rule of Nero, as well as his appreciation for the skills of Corbulo, suggest that he was not concerned with politics, but more-so the qualities of a man. With the esteem of social status behind him, Tiridates was able to gather the Parthian forces, and compete against the Roman military machine with marginal degree of success. Greater evidence for education lies in the documentation of Tiridates as a Zoroastrian priest. He was a magus, and he brought several magi with him on his journey to Rome. Further, upon his arrival in Rome he performed Zoroastrian rituals. The priesthood was reserved for those of influence and power, for extensive education was needed to become a priest.

Ho Chi Minh had a similar degree of education within the context of the society in which he was raised. In any society the bureaucratic class was always one of education, as reading and writing are instrumental for any kind of record keeping or regulation. By virtue of his father’s standing in Vietnamese society as a leading scholar and judge amongst the villages, Ho Chi Minh’s education was secure. He grew up learning many different philosophies and languages, but it is beyond a doubt that his education level was higher than that of an average member of the population. Further, Ho Chi Minh traveled extensively abroad studying in France, the USSR,
and China. Armed with a greater knowledge base, Ho Chi Minh was able to persuade many to his cause for the independence of Vietnam. It is natural that many turned to his leadership and guidance because of the education that he received. Therefore, based on the education levels of both individuals, it is natural that the populations of both nations would look to the more educated for guidance during times of war.

Comparison: Strong Leadership

The situations of both Armenia and Vietnam being tenuous and fragile, both nations looked to a strong leader in the hope of resolving the situation, which both Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh accomplished. While it was King Vologases I of Parthia that commanded the Parthian forces against the Romans in both Armenia and Syro-Palestine, Tiridates played a significant military role in the Parthian army. One of the prime examples of his military contributions occurred at the Battle of Rhandeia. The Romans under Paetus, because Corbulo was still in Syria, advanced with two legions towards Tigranocerta, but he stretched his supply lines too far and was forced to withdraw for the winter. The Parthians have shifted their forces away from Syria, a fact of which Paetus remained ignorant. Paetus, even pleading ignorance, did not disperse his troops well, overstretching their lines and ill-equipping them for battle. When his troops abandoned the Taurus Mountain passes for an encampment at Rhandeia, discontent and disorder spread throughout the Roman army severely weakening its fighting resolve. Corbulo was not able to arrive in time to help, and by the time he did arrive, Paetus had already surrendered. Despite Paetus’ entreaties Corbulo would not invade Armenia further, so negotiations were held to set a framework moving forward. It was Tiridates that headed this commission, and he met with Corbulo to establish peace moving forward. Further, there was cause for concern on both sides, as there was a long history of treachery with negotiations
between the two powers. Both Rome and Parthia withdrew from Armenia, leaving it free of control momentarily, but it was agreed that upon travel to Rome Tiridates would receive his crown. It was due to Tiridates leadership skills that this truce was arranged.

Ho Chi Minh’s leadership skills were well documented in his struggle for independence for Vietnam. When he returned to Vietnam in 1943 after being imprisoned by the Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, he helped to command the Viet Minh, a guerrilla force that was comprised of roughly 10,000 men at the time. He also dealt extensively with members of the OSS on the ground. The primary force on the ground was Deer Team. On July 16, 1945 Major Allison Thomas parachuted into Vietnam with his team, radio operator 1st Sergeant William Zielski and translator Private First Class Henry Prunier, and met immediately with guerrilla fighters and Ho Chi Minh. After dispelling fears over the Communist politics of the Vietnamese the rest of Deer Team parachuted in, consisting of assistant team leader Lieutenant Rene Defourneaux, weapons instructor Staff Sergeant Lawrence R. Vogt, photographer Aaron Squires, and their medic Private First Class Paul Hoagland.31 These team members dealt extensively with Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap. These members worked to aid the Vietnamese in their independence, and commented on the nationalistic element of their movement, rather than on the spread of communism. The Vietnamese in return “began to supply Gordon and other Allied sources with invaluable intelligence, and aided in the rescue of downed pilots from Chennault’s Fourteenth Air Force”.32 Ho Chi Minh also worked extensively with Archimedes Patti, the OSS agent in charge of Vietnam. After World War II concluded, Ho Chi Minh was still extensively relied on for the government of Vietnam, and indeed it was he who wrote the Declaration of Independence of Vietnam. The French colonialists, however, had a

32 Richard Harris Smith, OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 1972), 300.
different vision for the future of Vietnam, and it was once again Ho Chi Minh that was looked to as the leader. He led them through some of the most trying times in Vietnamese history, and he remained the figurehead and leader until his death in 1969.

Comparison: Military Experience

Both Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh also experienced military control in their quest to gain independence for their states. One of the most obvious comparisons in strategy involve the avoidance of open conflict with the enemy. Tiridates, with his allotment of forces in 59 AD, did not have the numerical capability of withstanding Roman attacks for any period of time. He tried to induce Corbulo to break up his forces subsequently leaving open the avenue for a cavalry attack. Corbulo did not fall for this ruse however, in contrast with Paetus later in the war, and his troops did not break up and separate. Because of this, Tiridates was forced to withdraw, and the city of Artaxata was ceded to Roman control and razed, although Tiridates did rebuild Artaxata after receiving the throne. With this ended the campaigning season, but in 60 AD, Tiridates once again attempted to wrest control of Armenia back by invading through Media Atropatene, but he was beaten back by Severus Verulanus, a legate. With this defeat, the entirety of Armenia was under Roman control. It was at this time that Tigranes started his overtures against the broader Parthian kingdom that prompted Vologases intervention in the war. So while Tiridates did not meet with immediate military success he was able to secure his throne by acquiescing to Roman demands.

Ho Chi Minh had a similar military background. While he was more of a political figure, he did work extensively in World War II to help the OSS in their mission in Vietnam. William Donovan, the head of the OSS received Ho Chi Minh’s intelligence reports directly, and Donovan stated that “he might have remained loyal to the West if mossbacked reactionaries had
not refused to listen to OSS intelligence on the area concerning the aspirations of the people of the Asian countries”. After WWII ended, and the French colonialists reasserted control Ho Chi Minh knew that the Vietnamese could not confront the French in open war. Instead he relied upon guerrilla and attrition style tactics to confront the better trained and equipped French forces.

Both Ho Chi Minh and Tiridates achieved one crucial victory to force the dominant power in the region to eventually yield and withdraw their forces. For Tiridates the victory came at the Battle of Rhandeia, and for the Vietnamese at Dien Bien Phu. In both cases the victory was a result of command incompetence by the enemy general. The Battle of Rhandeia experienced the crippling inexperience and incompetence of Paetus, whose tactical errors allowed the Parthian forces to achieve victory.

Christian De Castries was the Brigadier General in charge of French forces at the disastrous battle of Dien Bien Phu. In this engagement, his forces were surrounded and the Vietnamese were able to shell their positions with impunity. Unaware of the anti-aircraft gun emplacements Castries was unable to obtain the supplies needed to keep up a defense. The fighting reduced to World War I style trench warfare, with the French repelling several line charges by the Vietnamese before succumbing. This was a humiliating defeat for the French colonial forces, as seen by the fact that Castries was captured and held prisoner, and the French artillery commander committed suicide for his lack of preparation. For the Vietnamese this victory was significant, as it was the first time that a guerrilla force defeated a western colonial power. This exhibited to the western world that there were other forces able to contend with the military might of the traditional European power basins. The lack of preparation and failures can largely be attributed to Castries, as well as the lack of intelligence. Dien Bien Phu is another classic case of what happens when assumptions fail when fighting an enemy. The ethnocentrism

of the French is clear, as they thought the Vietnamese sub-par, without the equipment necessary to defeat a well-trained and equipped expeditionary force. Nguyen Giap was able to exploit his enemy’s assumptions by not falling into the trap of a large scale invasion. He exhibited the same strategies later in the US-Vietnamese War. By adjusting his tactics he forced the French into a bad position from which they could not recover.

Comparison: Lasting Impact

When the struggle for Vietnam and Armenia concluded, with the capture of Saigon, and the reception of the crown respectively, both Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh left a broad impact that is widely felt long after the conflict ended. Tiridates is relatively unknown in modern scholarship but “there is a case for saying that Tiridates’ state (to Rome) visit is commemorated every year even now...It was about the same time that St. Matthew’s Gospel recorded a journey of wise men from the east to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem. Tiridates’ journey seems to have contributed some elements to Iranian legend, and it may also lie behind the later Christian legend of the three Magi. There may be a faint reminiscence of Tiridates’ visit in the activities of hundreds of tiny children each year in Nativity plays”. While many of these are legendary events that cannot be traced beyond a doubt to any one person, there is significant overlap between the events of Tiridates life and overall Iranian and Christian tradition. In addition to the lasting tradition Tiridates also secured the border of his new kingdom of Armenia, which remained relatively stable, despite a persistent Roman presence on the border. The Sassanian Empire which succeeded the Parthians actively sought to destroy the historical record of the preceding empire, and it is for this reason that the rule of Tiridates is widely overlooked.

Ho Chi Minh’s legacy of his presidency has far reaching consequences. One of the most prevalent testimonies to his importance is the renaming of Saigon to Ho Chi Minh City after it

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fell to North Vietnamese forces in 1975. It stands as a commemoration to the leader and for his work to create an independent Vietnam. Other remnants of his presence include the Ho Chi Minh trail, one of the main highways of Vietnam as well as the original constitution that he wrote in 1945. Ho Chi Minh is seen as a founding father of Vietnam and his persona has become immortal in Vietnamese culture. He is seen as a George Washington figure, and indeed his face is even present on Vietnamese currency. Monuments depicting him are present throughout the country, his tomb is a national landmark, and “the Politburo formally approved plans to erect a mausoleum to display Ho Chi Minh’s embalmed body for the edification of future generations”. Granted the victory in the war ensured his position as a hero of the Communist Vietnam, but his life and possessions are omnipresent in modern day Vietnam.

Conclusion

While these two leaders are limited to the arenas and times in which they ruled, there are remarkable similarities in their road to success. Ho Chi Minh and Tiridates both exhibited the qualities necessary to succeed against the powers that ruled over them. The variables used: their person, how they were depicted in opposing societies, education level, leadership qualities, military experience, and their lasting impact, suggest a broader model that can be applied to any given leader within a similar set of circumstances. It helps to limit research to a specific set of information, and much like in political science there is an aspect of predictive power to it. Political science seeks to quantify patterns and demonstrate consistencies through time. The historical specificity lends credence to the idea that there are underlying characteristics that lead to success, as demonstrated by the comparison between Tiridates and Ho Chi Minh. Imperialism and colonialism are still forces present in the modern day political arena, and there are leaders

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35 Appendix D
who seek to break free of those restrictions. Instances of this are found in places as predominant as the Ukraine, and in the little known reaches of Africa. Within this construct the predictive powers of the variables selected could prove invaluable when determining the likelihood of success under imperialistic powers.

Leaders have had to contend with the forces of imperialism through centuries of conflict. By selecting leaders spanning 2,000 years of history, it is clear that the motivations and actions of the leaders have not been significantly altered by time. The anti-colonial sentiment following World War II still resonates in the geopolitical system, as artificially drawn borders continue to breed conflict and discontent within nations. The fall of the Soviet Union has only increased the nationalistic thoughts of many small nations, and ethnic groups that wish to gain independence. These forces have demonstrated the persistence of imperialism. Because this imperialism is such a prevalent force in modern day politics, the motives of self-determinism should be recognized for their potential to generate a great man that can lead a group to independence. From this situation, more leaders like Tiridates I or Ho Chi Minh may be found.
Appendix A

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Appendix B
Appendix C

Appendix D

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39 André, *Tiridates I*, 1687, Parc et jardins du château de Versailles.
Bibliography


