

PRISONERS OF WAR
A NEGOTIABLE CURRENCY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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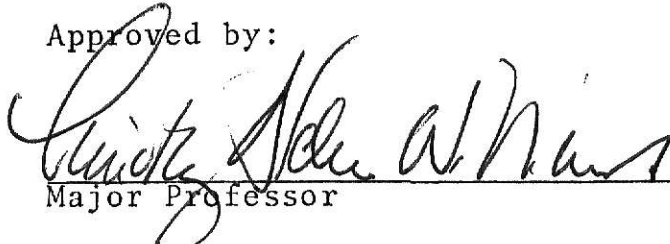
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INTRODUCTION

Prisoners of war have been a prominent phenomenon of limited war in the nuclear age since 1945. This conspicuous position has been especially evident in two United States wars in Korea and Vietnam, and also in smaller conflicts between India and Pakistan and the Arab states and Israel. The relative prominence of prisoners in these wars seems largely due to their centrality to negotiation, bargaining, and conflict resolution. This thesis therefore builds on the implication that (a) one of the inherent limitations of a limited war is the restrictions on "currencies" which can be used to bargain for conflict resolution, and (b) when limited war excludes some of the more conventional currencies, the remaining currencies, such as prisoners of war, gain far more attention and use. As such, this implicit hypothesis cannot be completely validated due to the limitations of a comparative data base in the twentieth century. However, the assumption of a relationship between POWs and bargaining in limited war is plausible enough to support an investigation of how and whether the parties to limited conflict resolution discover the negotiable currency and value of prisoners of war. The purpose of this study therefore is to examine the general hypothesis that in limited wars, in the era of total war, POWs represent a specific means for establishing and exercising bargaining power.

The term prisoner of war, often abbreviated PW or POW, has commonly been used to denote any person captured or interned by a belligerent power during war. In a strict sense, it refers only to members of an organized armed force. However, the Geneva Convention of 1949 expanded this definition to include civilians who have openly taken up arms against an enemy, or noncombatants associated with a military force.¹ For the purpose of this study, the above definition will be broadened to encompass all persons, civilian or military, held hostage by an alien power in the furtherance of political objectives.²

In contrast to this study, which will view prisoners of war collectively as a political issue, most contemporary literature deals with war captives in a very personal or individual manner. Historians, for example, have generally considered prisoners as unfortunate by-products of war, and most of their work has been devoted to descriptions of the treatment accorded war prisoners during various periods of history.³ Psychologists and sociologists on the other hand, have viewed POWs from the standpoint of human reactions under periods of stress and their abilities to cope with captivity situations. Numerous works on the use and effect of political indoctrination or "brainwashing" in the Korean War are included in this category.⁴ Much of the recent literature concerning prisoners has been devoted to the legalistic interpretation of their rights and protections under international law.⁵ There are also many autobiographical and fictional accounts of

individual exploits while imprisoned, including successful and unsuccessful escape attempts. World War II, with its large numbers of war captives, is the background for most of these accounts.⁶ The political aspects of the prisoner of war issue had been largely ignored by writers on war until the Korean conflict. The prominence of POWs reached an unprecedented high in that war and much has been written about their behavior while in captivity, their use for propaganda purposes, and their importance as an issue in the negotiations for peace.⁷ Similarly, the prominence of the POW issue in the recent war in Vietnam has stimulated the publishing of an assortment of articles in various journals and magazines regarding the plight of prisoners in this particular conflict. While the most common approach concerns the legal position of a captive in an undeclared war, several articles discuss the political use of the prisoners as hostages to gain concessions at the negotiating table. These articles charge that the POWs in Vietnam became a central issue in the bargaining for peace and that both sides of the conflict exploited the issue for political gain.⁸

This study will be concerned primarily with the last of these categorical treatments of the prisoner of war issue. Its central focus will be on the perception of POWs as a bargaining currency and their use as a negotiable asset in a limited war environment.

In order to view the current prisoner of war issue in its proper perspective, it is important to understand the role of