

Chapter 2

The Clone Wars

Our galaxy has been split by three major conflicts within—at least for some species—living memory. Previously the Clone Wars and the Galactic Civil War had been considered two different events. However, given what we have since learned about Palpatine’s involvement with both conflicts and the more recent First Order-Resistance War, perhaps it is better to think of them as key markers within a longer period of galactic warfare. It seems that many of the worst things that have happened to the galaxy across most of the last century can be attributed to Palpatine and the empire he wished to create.

Like many of the events of recent history, the Clone Wars have been taught and understood in very different ways since the conclusion of the conflict. The Empire went to great lengths to frame the war in a manner that fully justified Palpatine’s decision to dispense with the Republic and usher in the new regime. The Empire was positioned not just as the natural outcome of the issues and problems inherent within the Republic but also as a necessary intervention from the one man capable of saving the galaxy. For years, a very carefully constructed version of the Clone Wars was delivered to the galaxy by the Empire with the aim of justifying the totalitarian government that now ruled. More recently, the New Republic found itself caught between a desire to learn lessons from the past and the urge to move forward and leave the darkness

behind them. So, while the fall of the Republic remained an important moment for both lawmakers and teachers, both aiming to solidify the new government in different ways, the actual nature of the conflict itself became less relevant after the more recent civil war that had taken place.

However, understandings of the past change. The details that have been retrieved from within the archives of both the Empire and the records of the First Order can, when combined with the new material being uncovered on Exegol, help tell a different story about the Clone Wars.

It is not possible to fully understand the Empire, the Galactic Civil War, and all that Palpatine hoped to achieve without also knowing a great deal about the conflict that preceded it.

A Galaxy in Flames

It is never easy to deconstruct accepted facts about momentous events of the past. As time goes on, the rough edges of memory are worn away until what remains is an easy to accept and understand recollection. But the past is rarely easy and, certainly for historians, when we encounter versions of it that appear to be widely shared across the population the reaction is generally one of concern or suspicion. This is true of how the Clone Wars has come to be understood and, of greater importance, how alternative views of the conflict have been effectively suppressed to maintain the dominant one. It is time for us to begin the process of re-examining the war by beginning with accepting a simple truth: there is no single unified history or memory of the Clone Wars because it was written by the only side that actually won—the Empire—at the expense of the experiences of Republic and Separatist participants. While the purpose of this study is not to build a new and fully rounded understanding of the Clone Wars, I hope it can serve as a starting place for such an endeavor in the future.

The basic facts of the Clone Wars are well-established but, given the length of time since the conflict's conclusion, still bear repeating.

It is largely accepted that the origins of the war can be found in the Trade Federation's blockade of Naboo that was, ostensibly, over taxation in the Outer Rim. Though that blockade would eventually fail, following the involvement of the Jedi Order, it helped lay the seeds of the coming conflict, the fall of the Republic, and the rise of the Empire. The Trade Federation had previously achieved a great deal of power within the Republic Senate but, following their failure at Naboo, their fortunes dramatically fell. While enduring a form of political exile they found like-minded allies among other super-conglomerate corporations and worlds across the Outer Rim. While these companies feigned neutrality within the Republic, in reality they made clear their potential allegiance to the emerging Separatist Alliance, planets who had long believed that the Republic scarcely functioned as a governing body and certainly was not serving their planetary or commercial interests. While it would be these worlds who would provide much of the political momentum for the forthcoming secession, their industrial backers prepared for war and—cynically—profit. What this movement lacked was a leader and soon enough one emerged in the form of Count Dooku. A former Jedi, Dooku had left the Order citing grave concerns with how the Jedi and the Republic were failing the galaxy. He provided the charisma and political leadership that the Separatist movement required. Following a series of attempted, but failed, negotiations between the two sides, warfare broke out at the planet Geonosis and spread across the galaxy. The conflict would rage for years, and see whole star systems ravaged, before finally ending in defeat for the Separatists.

While these details sketch out the broadest strokes of the Clone Wars, they do not fully explain the underlying tensions and machinations of the conflict and nor do they really explain why it ended in the manner it did and what it meant for the dawn of the Galactic Empire. Wars are complicated things. In order to understand the Clone Wars it is necessary to accept one fact that seems contradictory but is also incredibly simple:

despite seeming to be one and the same, the Republic and Palpatine were fighting very different wars with very different objectives. That is why Palpatine won and the Republic lost. The Trade Federation did not just pick Naboo at random to stage their initial blockade. They did so because they were urged to by a Sith Lord named Darth Sidious.¹ After that blockade failed, they and the rest of the Separatist movement were led down a path to war by the same individual. What they—and the Republic along with them—failed to realize was that Sidious and Palpatine were the same person. While the supreme chancellor led the Republic, his Sith Lord persona—with his apprentice Count Dooku—orchestrated the Separatists. And beneath it all Palpatine made his own plans to achieve his goals. None of them included the success of the Separatist movement or the long-term survival and stability of the Republic.

As a result, the various military campaigns and battles of the Clone Wars—while of definite interest to military historians in seeing how the commanders and soldiers of both sides waged the war—are effectively irrelevant to this study. Though there was very real danger to those involved in fighting the war, there was no real jeopardy involved for Palpatine himself, as he was going to win regardless. Instead, we should focus our attentions on the moves and decisions that were taken to herald the age of Empire that Palpatine had always intended. Within these plans and schemes we can see the actual lasting impact of the Clone Wars on both sides that were supposedly fighting it.

Preparing the Way

The underlying tensions and issues that had beset the Republic in the lead up to war must have been of great interest to Palpatine. They proved

¹ Imperial Archives, Section: Seized Trade Federation Records, File: Naboo Blockade* *This material was heavily censored and sealed during the era of the Empire and was only recovered in the years after the war.

that there was already significant demand for a change in the way the galaxy was governed. Beyond this, even if just in localized factions, there was also significant willingness to fight for that change. With both the Republic and the Separatists effectively viewing the war as a necessary one to preserve their very existence, Palpatine and Dooku would just have to ensure that neither side won it too quickly nor felt motivated to sue for peace. The war-weariness of the galactic population would be a crucial factor in its acceptance of the new regime, and Palpatine himself had to be welcomed, eventually, as a savior. Which is why it was so important that most of the political controls that he planned on keeping had to, publicly at least, appear forced upon him. Palpatine had to play the role of a reluctant figure grappling to end a conflict that was constantly spiraling out of control.²

For one of the primary purposes of this war was to brutalize the population of the galaxy. Palpatine knew that desire for change was not enough on its own. Peaceful movements might lead to an election or a change in the organization of the Republic, but neither of these things would upend the system, effectively leaving Palpatine in a position at the top. To achieve this the population, both of the Republic and the Confederacy of Independent Systems, had to be made to suffer the realities of a war raging around them. This war had to be more destructive, more chaotic, more disruptive, and more horrifying than they could have believed. It had to have effects and impacts that were keenly felt both in the Core and in the Outer Rim. Civilians had to die in huge numbers on besieged worlds. Property had to be destroyed. Economies had to collapse. Planets had to starve. The people of the Republic had to fully invest in Palpatine as a hope for peace, while the civilians on Separatist worlds had to question whether independence was worth the

² This can be seen in recordings of Palpatine's speech upon being granted emergency powers shortly before the Battle of Geonosis, available at: Imperial Archives, Section: Emperor Palpatine, File T271 and New Republic Archives, Section: Galactic Republic, File XS409.

horror.³ Because when Palpatine was ready to bring about the end of the conflict, both populations had to be so desperate for that moment that they would gratefully embrace peace. They must be so grateful that they would not care about the price it came at or what was traded away to achieve it. And Palpatine intended to charge a very high price for the end of his war.

In many ways this was the true target of the Clone Wars. It was not clone troopers against droid armies, or loyalists against separatists. It was the use of weapons of war against the spirit and the morale of ordinary civilians. People needed to be led right up to the edge of disaster so that they would give anything to go back the way they had come, without noticing that the landscape had changed around them in the interim. In this sense it was important that the war should, at least on the surface, end with a Republic victory. Most of the population involved with the war had continued to operate under the Republic. Palpatine was already installed as leader of that faction. In the earliest years of stabilizing the Empire, at the period when it was most vulnerable, it was important that people accepted it as the natural evolution of the war's end. In short, many civilians did not object to the changes going on around them because the Empire arrived wearing—initially at least—similar clothes to the Republic that had existed before. This level of acceptance was invaluable in securing the Empire's control across the galaxy.

What was equally important was the presence of a beaten enemy. Palpatine and those he installed to run his new Empire knew that there would be resistance to the new order of things.⁴ The Separatists had proven themselves useful as a willing participant in the recently concluded conflict but given they had rebelled against the Republic they

³ New Republic Archives, Section: Luke Skywalker, File: *The Horrors and Spiritual Impact of War* *This appears to be a lengthy message provided to Luke Skywalker by Lor San Tekka, a companion of his whom I met on several occasions.

⁴ Imperial Archives, Section: Occupation of former Separatist Systems, File: Plans for Preventative Measures

posed a liability to the Empire that replaced it. Planets with a history of armed resistance could not be left to their own devices for long. Key systems such as Raxus Secundus, the capital of the Separatists, and Serenno, Count Dooku's homeworld, were the targets of early and brutal Imperial occupation in order to stamp out any last surviving flames of insurrection. Palpatine needed the spirit that had driven the Separatists into open warfare to be crushed as quickly as possible. But having the specter of secession linger in the galaxy was also useful. The Empire was able to justify many of its early expansions and actions in the name of eliminating surviving holdouts from the Clone Wars, whether the targets actually had any relationship with the Separatists or not. The wider population was happy to accept such military endeavors in the name of safeguarding the seemingly hard-won peace.

There were other benefits for the Empire arising from activities and actions undertaken during the previous war. Early in the conflict the Republic had come to an arrangement with the Hutt Cartel regarding access to hyperlanes and trade routes into the Outer Rim. These were hugely useful to Republic fleets during the conflict as it granted them new pathways into contested territory that circumvented Separatist blockades. The true value of these new routes, however, was not to the Republic but to the Empire. Along the Outer Rim there were any number of worlds and systems who had remained untouched or inaccessible to the Republic and fiercely guarded their independent status. Now they were within reach of an Empire that cared little for—and respected less—the desires of star systems to maintain their own sovereignty. Following the conclusion of the Clone Wars, as will be discussed in a forthcoming chapter, the first waves of Imperial expansion focused on those worlds who had remained neutral in the previous conflict but now found themselves living alongside the borders of a beligerent neighbor.⁵

⁵ See Chapter Seven

Former Separatist worlds that had been converted into industrial hubs in order to fight the war were also welcome prizes for the Empire. The droid factories of the Trade Federation, Baktoid Industries, and the Techno Union all now fell under Imperial control. The leadership of these companies was purged but the machinery and the industrial opportunities they provided were swiftly nationalized in service to the Empire in a process called Imperialization. Similarly, the huge stashes and collections of weaponry abandoned by the Separatists at the end of the war would swiftly be claimed by the Empire, who would later find inventive uses for it.

Beyond the material benefits of the war, and the damage it did to the wider galactic population, there was an extra important and overarching objective for Palpatine in the way he waged it. The events of the Great Jedi Purge have become confused and complicated over time. Imperial propaganda pushed very clear messages about the Jedi while at the same time making clear to the average citizen how important it was for them to forget about the Order and leave the topic very well alone. It should therefore not be surprising that the actual details of the events that saw the extermination of the Jedi and the conclusion of the Clone Wars remain largely uncertain. Hopefully we can start to illuminate some of the events from here.

Destruction and Legacies

The roots of the Jedi's downfall lay in the creation of the clone army itself. In the lead up to the beginning of the war the Republic Senate had been paralyzed with debates over the creation of a military force through which to defend itself against the emerging threat of the Separatists. Seemingly from nowhere such an armed force was discovered in the form of a clone army created under contract by the Kaminoans. The exact series of events behind the creation of this army remains unclear and records relating to it are scarce. The popularly accepted version at

the time was that a rogue Jedi by the name of Sifo-Dyas had independently contacted the Kaminoans, 10 years before the war, to place the order for the clone troops.⁶ Given what we now know, and what shall be shortly discussed, it seems highly unlikely that Sifo-Dyas did this without at least some form of involvement or manipulation by Palpatine or his agents. The arrival of the clones at the exact moment they were required is far too convenient for there not to have been a long-running plan behind their creation.

As part of the training and creation of these clone soldiers, each one was inserted with a piece of organic technology generally referred to as an inhibitor chip. These chips were ostensibly designed to ensure that the clones would only follow legitimate orders but, within their programming, also lay various contingency plans for the clones to react to, should various disasters befall the Republic war effort. Only the supreme chancellor could issue these select orders and, as we know, Palpatine was assumed to be working in the Republic's best interests and therefore would not do anything to damage the state.⁷ A very dangerous and misplaced assumption. Because within these set directives was one titled "Order 66." It was to be issued should the Jedi turn against the Republic and need to be eliminated.⁸

Ever since the clone army had arrived to "rescue" the Jedi on Geonosis at the outbreak of the war, much of the Republic's propaganda efforts had been designed to elevate and venerate the actions of these

⁶ Information regarding some of this background was provided to the Rebel Alliance by the former Jedi Ahsoka Tano while serving in her role of "Fulcrum," a rebel coordinating agent. Rebel Alliance Archives, Section: Ahsoka Tano, File H23—Reflections on the Clone Army

⁷ For a full list of these various codes and their corresponding orders, see: Imperial Archives, Section: Galactic Republic Military Operations, File PG004—Executive Order Codes for the Grand Army of the Republic

⁸ Details of the inhibitor chips and their functions for the clone army have survived in selected Imperial archives. Additional information is drawn from testimonies by the clone captain known as "Rex" within Rebel Alliance records. Rebel Alliance Archives, Section: Clone Army, File XD461—Rex

soldiers. Images such as “Support the Boys in White” and “Buy Republic War Bonds” placed the image of the clone trooper right at the forefront of the public’s mind. A monument enshrining the identifying numbers of clone soldiers who had died on Geonosis was unveiled on Coruscant to commemorate their sacrifice to the Republic. The Jedi were, despite serving as generals and commanders in the war, relegated to the sidelines. During the war the Republic instituted a program of Population Observation, where ordinary civilians would be regularly surveyed for their opinions on a range of aspects regarding the war effort.⁹ A recurring trend as the war dragged on and became more destructive was the extent to which the Jedi were viewed as either a part of the problem or culpable for the conflict.

As the war continued and suffering spread throughout the Republic many, especially on Coruscant, came to look at the Jedi Temple and its occupants with resentment. If the Jedi were so powerful, how had they failed to win the war? If they were so wise, how had they not foreseen the coming dangers? If they were so important to the Republic, why were so many new clones required? With no obvious forthcoming answers to these questions, anger and distrust continued to blossom. Palpatine must have been delighted. His planned eradication of the Jedi would only be truly successful if the population either already hated them or did not care about their fate. The Separatists had spent much of the war creating their own propaganda warning about the “Jedi Menace,” so that side of things was already taken care of. Palpatine just had to ensure that the population of the Republic was prepared to do without the Jedi Order.

Following the failed attack on Coruscant by the Separatist fleet that cost Count Dooku his life, Palpatine—who almost certainly orchestrated the whole thing, including his own staged abduction—appears to

⁹ Some of the records for this are still available at: Imperial Archives, Section: Galactic Republic—Population Observation File: Directives and Responses.

have decided that the end of the war was now approaching. The Jedi Order had, supposedly, been hunting for the Sith Lord Darth Sidious who was orchestrating the war from behind the scenes. It seems logical that, given the attempt to arrest Palpatine in his offices, the Jedi had discovered his true identity. The failure to arrest him triggered the final stages of the war. From his offices Palpatine must have transmitted a short statement to the clone army: “Execute Order 66.” On countless worlds, clone soldiers who had spent years living and fighting alongside the Jedi instantly turned on them. On Coruscant itself a battalion of clones led by Anakin Skywalker—newly dubbed as Darth Vader—stormed the Jedi Temple and executed the occupants. From masters to younglings, none were spared. By the time the clones stopped firing, the Jedi had effectively been exterminated. The extinction of the Jedi removed a serious obstacle to Palpatine’s plans. He must have known that if an organized Jedi Order remained that they would continuously oppose him. Their deaths became a necessity for his Empire to live.¹⁰

It would not take long for the symbols of the Clone Wars and the Republic to be actively dismantled by the Empire. Imperial forces soon destroyed Tipoca City—the center for the Republic’s cloning facilities—on Kamino. Imperial involvement in this act was only later exposed by a senator, with the blame being ascribed to a rogue vice admiral named Edmon Rampart, though it is hard to believe he had truly gone rogue and was not acting under the orders of senior officials. Regardless of his motivations, Rampart’s actions helped bring about dramatic changes in the Empire’s military. The end of the war had also brought about an effective end to the long-term viability of the clone army. As will be discussed in a forthcoming chapter, various figures within the Imperial military, including Grand Moff Tarkin, came to view the clones as an expensive and unnecessary undertaking for the Empire. Growing and

¹⁰ See Chapter Ten for more details on the ongoing Imperial efforts to eliminate the Jedi.

training them took time and resources that could potentially be put to better use elsewhere. Furthermore, there were lingering concerns regarding the true loyalties of the clones. While many continued to serve in the armed forces of the Empire much as they had with the Republic, there were others who appeared changed by their time spent with the Jedi. The Empire had no interest in maintaining an army that may have been corrupted by exposure to the Order. They would shortly be phased out in favor of the new Stormtrooper Program.

One curiosity that did continue into the Empire was the emergence of amateur historical reenactments of key Clone Wars battles, complete with costumed “clone troopers” and de-militarized droids. There were groups across the Core Worlds who indulged in the practice and, strangely given their reputation for pacifism, a particularly strong presence for it existed on Alderaan. Why the Empire tolerated such overt harking back to the Republic and its obsolete symbols is perhaps on the surface unclear. There were some Imperial officials who believed that the Clone Wars reenactment movement “provided young persons with the military skills and training that would be invaluable for service in the Empire.”¹¹ Though whether this viewpoint was widely held is uncertain. It is noticeable that this was one of the few ways in which imagery and uniforms from the Republic were permitted within civilian life. Again, this might seem unusual, but when you remember that the Republic that gave way to the new regime had already been through a period of militarization, it becomes a much more understandable evolution. The Republic that existed in the latter stages of the Clone Wars was not the example of peace and prosperity that had once existed. It was not a great leap to go from the Republic venerating the military during the Clone Wars to the Empire using it as cover to expand its armed forces while celebrating them at the same time. The annual

¹¹ Colonel Toln Yurak, Imperial Army, in an interview with the periodical publication *Clone Wars Quarterly*

Empire Day parades, which were a feature on many worlds, celebrated the end of the Clone Wars as well as the dawn of the Imperial state. The major difference between how the Republic and the Empire viewed the Clone Wars was the removal of all references to the Jedi, often in favor of a greater acknowledgement of Palpatine. That many of the participants of the reenacted scenes were from the upper classes of the Core Worlds may also provide an explanation as to why it was permitted. The Empire would often allow the wealthy to create their own diversions and entertainment as long as they were not using their resources for things that actively undermined the Empire.

There was, however, one significant holdover from the transition between Republic and Empire that continued to hold a deal of power and significance. While the Empire wished to sweep away many of the trappings and systems of the failed Republic, the aftermath of a war—even one that had served its purpose—was difficult. For the Empire to have a long-term future it needed to solidify its hold over the galaxy, shore up its power, and survive the tumultuous aftermath of the conflict. To achieve this, the Empire maintained the existence of the most obvious relic of the Republic: the Senate. In order to understand how the Empire intended to organize and rule the galaxy, we must also understand the ways in which it accepted or circumvented limits on its political power.