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Supporting Rebellion: Liberal Democracy and the American Way of Proxy War

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SUPPORTING REBELLION:
LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE AMERICAN WAY OF PROXY WAR

John-Michael B. Arnold

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses two questions: (1) What factors have influenced whether the United States has provided military support to armed rebellions? (2) What factors have determined how effective American support to rebel movements has been in achieving the United States' foreign policy objectives?

The dissertation elaborates a theory—"liberal-democratic proxy war"—which predicts that the United States is only likely to provide sustained support to a rebellion if the following conditions hold: (i) the president assesses that aiding the rebels is likely to serve American interests and can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals; and (ii) there is also a high degree of consensus in Congress that supporting the rebels is consistent with American interests and ideals. Unless those conditions are met, American support to rebels is liable to be too brittle to achieve American political objectives.

Even on those occasions when supporting a rebellion does allow the United States to achieve its declared political objectives, the long-term results are liable to be disappointing when viewed from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power. That is because victorious armed rebellions tend not to produce democratic governance and externally supported wars of attrition are liable to leave societies confronting considerable devastation. Additionally, the United States is liable to reduce its engagement in the country in question swiftly in the aftermath of a conflict.

The case study chapters use the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war to explain the United States' policy responses—and to evaluate the effectiveness of them—to six armed rebellions: those in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, and Mozambique during the 1980s, as well as those in Libya and Syria that began in 2011.

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Finally, notwithstanding all of the people who have helped me with this project, and who have provided feedback on it, the arguments and conclusions presented here are mine alone, as are any errors.

Chapter 1

Introduction

THE UNITED STATES' SUPPORT FOR ARMED REBELLION: TWO PUZZLES

What factors have influenced whether the United States has provided military support to armed rebellions? What factors have determined how effective American support to rebel movements has been in achieving the United States' foreign policy objectives?

The puzzling nature of these questions was evident from the United States' responses to the armed rebellions that erupted in Libya and Syria during 2011. In the former case, confronting widespread worries that Muammar Qaddafi's forces would brutally attack the rebellion's epicenter—Benghazi—the United States, together with NATO allies and Arab partners, launched a military intervention in March 2011. It was authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 and justified as an effort to protect civilian lives. Nevertheless, as former Obama administration official Derek Chollet has written, "the military campaign evolved into more than preventing Qaddafi from threatening civilians" and "became about helping the opposition win."[1] The coalition's campaign served, in effect, as air support for the Libyan rebels. They captured Tripoli in August 2011 and two months later rebel fighters executed Qaddafi in the city of Sirte.

Just prior to the fall of Tripoli, President Obama pronounced his view on the appropriate fate of another Middle Eastern leader. Witnessing an escalating cycle of

[1] Derek H. Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 104.

violence between the opposition and the regime in Syria, on August 18, 2011 Obama stated that, "for the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside."[2] Over the next year, the situation in that country grew increasingly worse. By the summer of 2012, the conflict had claimed over 20,000 lives and that toll was rising by more than 100 people every day.[3] In September of 2012, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, David Petraeus, reportedly presented a plan to President Obama for the United States to arm vetted anti-Assad rebel groups.[4] President Obama rejected the proposal, which had been supported by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey.[5] Among the president's concerns was whether—based on historical experience—arming the Syrian rebels was likely to work. As Obama later recounted to journalist David Remnick:

> Very early in this process, I actually asked the C.I.A. to analyze examples of America financing and supplying arms to an insurgency in a country that actually worked out well. And they couldn't come up with much.[6]

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[2] Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East*, Kindle Edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 113–14.
[3] "Estimated 100 Daily Deaths as U.N. Monitors Leaves Syria," August 23, 2012, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/estimated-100-daily-deaths-as-unmonitors-leaves-syria/.
[4] Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle over American Power*, First Edition. (New York: Random House, 2016), 218–20.
[5] Hillary Clinton confirmed that she had supported the plan in her memoir, see Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 1st Paperback Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 391–92; Michael R. Gordon and Mark Landler, "White House Tensions Over Syria Exposed in Hearing," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2013, sec. Politics, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/08/us/politics/panetta-speaks-to-senate-panel-on-benghazi-attack.html.
[6] David Remnick, "Going the Distance: On and Off the Road with Barack Obama," *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/going-the-distance-david-remnick.

Despite President Obama's decision in September 2012, he subsequently authorized, in the spring of 2013, American military assistance to the anti-Assad opposition in Syria. That was confirmed by the White House in June 2013—nine months after David Petraeus had first briefed a plan to Obama—when Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes released a press statement confirming that the United States was providing "direct support to the SMC [the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army]." Rhodes added that "these efforts will increase going forward." The White House's confirmation that the United States was providing military support to the Free Syrian Army followed, in the words of Rhodes' press statement, "the [Syrian] regime's escalation of horrific violence against its citizens" and a "high confidence assessment" by the United States' intelligence community that "chemical weapons have been used on a small scale by the Assad regime in Syria."[7]

In the months that followed, the publicly-available evidence suggests that the scale of American assistance to the anti-Assad rebellion was fairly limited. Robert Ford, who had been the American ambassador in Damascus at the time the rebellion began, resigned from the State Department in February 2014 because he no longer felt able to defend the Obama administration's policy towards Syria. He later described how ineffectual American military support to the anti-regime rebels had been, expressing his view that "dribbling in little bits of aid wasn't helping them or helping efforts to find a political solution through negotiation."[8] In an op-ed in the *New York Times* in June 2014,

[7] "Statement by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syrian Chemical Weapons Use," whitehouse.gov, June 13, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/13/statement-deputy-national-security-advisor-strategic-communications-ben-.
[8] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 225.

Ford made the case for greater military support to the armed opposition in Syria, arguing that it could help create the "conditions for a genuine negotiation toward a new government."[9]

In his penultimate press conference as president, given in December 2016, President Obama explained that he viewed the United States' support to the anti-Assad rebels as a program with limited objectives, stating that:

> It has been our view that the best thing to do has been to provide some support to the moderate opposition so that they could sustain themselves, and that we wouldn't see anti-Assad regime sentiments just pouring into al Nusra and al Qaeda or ISIL [three jihadist militant groups]; that we engaged our international partners in order to put pressure on all the parties involved, and to try to resolve this through diplomatic and political means.[10]

Reflecting on the Obama administration's actions with respect to armed rebellion in the Middle East illuminates the two puzzles addressed in this dissertation. Why exactly did a commander-in-chief who was deeply skeptical of the efficacy of military support to the rebellion in Syria nevertheless authorize some limited aid for the anti-Assad rebels during 2013? Having approved the operation, why did President Obama refrain from giving the rebels more substantial support, sufficient to help them secure a political or military victory and akin to how the United States and its partners had tipped the military scales in Libya? Regarding previous American efforts to support armed rebellion, have they really been as disastrous as the CIA, according to President Obama, concluded?

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[9] Robert S. Ford, "Arm Syria's Opposition," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2014, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/opinion/ford-arm-syrias-opposition.html.
[10] "Press Conference by the President: Transcript" (The White House, December 16, 2016), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/16/press-conference-president.

Some proponents of backing the anti-Assad opposition in Syria disputed that the record was that poor. Robert Kagan, a historian of American foreign policy who served as an adviser to Secretary of State George Shultz in the 1980s, argued that the "Reagan Doctrine"—American support for a range of anti-communist insurgencies during the 1980s—was successful. In an October 2014 column, Kagan wrote that:

> Whatever individual successes the support for anticommunist insurgencies in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua may have achieved, collectively they played a role in Mikhail Gorbachev's recalculation of Soviet strategy in the mid-1980s.[11]

Of all the American programs to support anti-communist rebellions in the 1980s, the United States' support to the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan—the mujahedin—produced the most dramatic success. Between 1979 and 1989, the United States provided the mujahedin with over $2 billion in military support—equivalent to over $4.5 billion in 2017 dollars—which helped drive the Soviet Union out of the country.[12] Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst, emphasizes that it was "the most successful covert intelligence operation in U.S. history."[13] Even so, the operation proved to be a catastrophic success.[14] As Marc Lynch argued in the midst of the 2013 policy debate over Syria:

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[11] Robert Kagan, "Obama Should Take Another Look at Some U.S. Foreign Policy 'Failures,'" *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/robert-kagan-obama-should-take-another-look-at-some-us-foreign-policy-failures/2014/10/31/ebecd42c-611b-11e4-91f7-5d89b5e8c251_story.html.

[12] James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 34–35; "CPI Inflation Calculator," accessed January 29, 2018, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.

[13] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), x; "Bruce Riedel, Biography," n.d., https://www.brookings.edu/experts/bruce-riedel/.

[14] The term "catastrophic success" was used by President George W. Bush in October 2004 to describe the United States' invasion of Iraq—the success of the military

> It's difficult to produce a single example in modern history of a strategy of arming rebels actually succeeding. Please, please, don't offer the example of U.S. support for the Afghan jihad in the 1980s—because I'll just see that and raise you a collapsed state, warlordism, rise of the Taliban, and al Qaeda.[15]

Support to the Afghan mujahedin is a crucial case for any analysis of the consequences and effectiveness of American backing for rebellions precisely because it represents the most successful example of such an operation, albeit one that was followed by huge strategic problems for the United States.

Another program that occurred contemporaneously with the support to the mujahedin—the United States' support to the Nicaraguan contra rebels—ended with the achievement of what had been the Reagan's administration ultimate goal: getting rid of the Sandinista regime. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas did not leave as a result of being overthrown militarily. The civil war in Nicaragua finished with a political agreement that saw the Sandinistas commit to holding elections, which they ended up losing in February 1990. Alexander George, in his study of American coercive diplomacy, assessed that the United States had wound up achieving "partial success" in its coercive campaign against the Nicaraguan regime. Even so, George emphasized that the price of achieving that outcome was very high.[16] The civil war that raged in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s

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campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime was followed by the catastrophe of the insurgency. The same term is a fitting description of the United States' proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during the 1980s. See Michael R. Gordon, "'Catastrophic Success': The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a 2nd War," *The New York Times*, accessed December 14, 2017, http://global.nytimes.com/2004/10/19/international/19war.html?8bl.

[15] "Shopping Option C for Syria," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed September 13, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/02/14/shopping-option-c-for-syria/.

[16] Alexander L. George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991), 51.

caused thirty thousand deaths.[17] That represented close to one percent of Nicaragua's total population at the beginning of that decade. If the United States had suffered proportionally-equivalent fatalities in a conflict during the 1980s, the American death toll would have been approximately two million people.[18]

The Reagan administration's support to the contra rebels precipitated a bitter political fight in Washington D.C. Spearheaded by some members of the Democratic Party, in 1982 Congress imposed restrictions, through the first "Boland Amendment," on the purposes for which American aid to the contras could be used. In 1984, Congress voted to prohibit any type of military support for the Nicaraguan rebels whatsoever. As was later revealed, some members of the Reagan White House—most notably Oliver North—continued to play a direct role in funneling aid to the contras, in violation of the express will of Congress. What became the most infamous of North's gambits was a "diversion" of some of the proceeds from secret arms sales to Iran to the Nicaraguan rebels. The resulting "Iran-contra" scandal was sufficiently serious that some of Reagan's top aides feared his impeachment and, as Robert Kagan notes, the scandal "all but crippled the Reagan presidency in 1987."[19] The context for the scandal was a profound policy disagreement over whether supporting the contra rebels was consistent with American interests and the nation's ideals. A sufficient number of members of Congress deemed the

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[17] Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2007), 387.

[18] Nicaragua's population was approximately 3.25 million in 1980 and 4.14 million in 1990. The United States population in 1980 was 227.23 million in 1980 and 249.62 million in 1990. Figures from: "World Bank Open Data, Population (Total)," accessed January 22, 2018, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.

[19] Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), xiii & xv.

provision of American military support to the contras to be inappropriate—for both strategic and moral reasons—that they prohibited it. Meanwhile, some officials in the administration considered American backing for the contras to be so eminently justifiable, not to mention necessary, that they were prepared to flout congressional will to continue aiding the armed opposition to the Sandinistas. As Peter Rodman wrote, the Iran-contra scandal was the "bastard child of the Reagan Doctrine."[20]

Why exactly did the Reagan administration's support to the Nicaraguan contras prove so politically-contested and why did Congress prohibit aid in 1984? It was not the case that all covert action during the 1980s was subject to bitter political contestation in Washington. American support to the Afghan mujahedin was provided on a bipartisan basis. Military assistance to the Afghan rebels began under President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, only days after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. It continued under his two Republican successors, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. On Capitol Hill, the mujahedin were vocally-backed by Democrats such as Representative Charlie Wilson of Texas and Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, as well as Republicans such as Representative Don Ritter of Pennsylvania and Senator Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire.[21]

The difference in political support for the program to aid the Afghan mujahedin and that to aid the Nicaraguan contras reflected a broader characteristic of American support for rebellion in the 1980s. As James M. Scott observed, the Reagan Doctrine strategy "was

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[20] Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994), 419.
[21] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 353.

unevenly applied."[22] The variation in American support for different armed rebellions was also apparent in southern Africa. The Reagan administration tried in 1981 to obtain from Congress the authority to provide military aid to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).[23] Congress was unwilling to grant that request at that time and consequently, despite President Reagan's stated preference, the United States provided no military support to UNITA during the first half of the 1980s. It was only in 1985 that the Reagan administration attained the requisite authority to provide support to the Angolan rebels and President Reagan subsequently authorized such support in November 1985.[24] Like Angola, Mozambique was a former Portuguese colony governed by a Marxist government that received aid from Cuba and the Soviet Union. Some members of the Reagan administration, as well as some elected representatives in Congress, urged American support for the anti-communist Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) rebels. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration never provided American aid to that anti-communist insurgency.

This dissertation argues that understanding why the United States has supported some armed rebellions against American adversaries and not others—as well as why the United States has fluctuated between supporting a given rebellion and then withdrawing such support, and vice-versa—requires comprehending how the United States' character as a liberal-democratic great power has influenced the debates and decisions of American

[22] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 5.
[23] As discussed in detail in Chapter 6, the Reagan administration required congressional action before it could provide support to the UNITA rebels because in 1976 Congress had passed a measure, known as the Clark Amendment, to prohibit any American covert action in Angola. See Scott, 112–20.
[24] Scott, 135.

policymakers. This dissertation also addresses the big question that President Obama grappled with as he tried to formulate a response to the carnage in Syria; how effective can providing military support to an armed rebellion ever be as an instrument of American statecraft?

Defining Key Terms and the Dependent Variables

In this dissertation, the term *rebels* refers to non-state groups engaged in organized violence against a state for political ends.[25] Within the scope of that definition, this dissertation includes both non-state groups that wage an insurgency, as well as non-state groups that undertake conventional operations.[26] The theoretical argument elaborated by this dissertation is intended to cover both situations. This work does not include coups within the scope of its enquiry.[27]

Military assistance (and the terms *military support*, *lethal assistance*, *lethal aid* and *lethal support*, which are used interchangeably) is defined as the provision of assistance to rebel groups that directly facilitates the employment of lethal force by those recipients.

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[25] This definition is based upon Idean Salehyan's definition of rebels in his 2009 book *Rebels without Borders*. He writes that "civil wars, rebellions, and insurgencies all refer to organized violence against the state by nongovernmental actors for political ends." See Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2009), 11.

[26] An insurgency involves "small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare." See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003). Not all rebel groups wage an insurgency; some will conduct conventional operations. See Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (August 2010).

[27] Coups are a distinct phenomenon since they involve one part of a state's apparatus engaging in organized violence against another part. On that point, see Salehyan, page 11.

Most notably, it includes the United States' provision of some, or all, of the following to rebel groups:

- Weapons and equipment;
- Military advice and training;
- Combat support (air support, intelligence, maintenance of military equipment and logistics).[28]

This definition reflects the distinction between lethal and non-lethal supplies found in U.S. law.[29] The definition also reflects how United States government officials typically use the term "lethal aid."[30] For American assistance to a rebel group to constitute lethal assistance, it is sufficient for the United States to have provided at least one of the categories of aid described above, rather than all of them.

First Dependent Variable: Military Assistance

This dissertation's first dependent variable is a binary measure of whether the United States provides military assistance to a particular rebellion or not. If the United States provides to a rebellion one or more of the categories of aid described above, then that constitutes military assistance. As indicated by some of the empirical examples cited above, the value of this variable can change over the course of the same conflict. If the

[28] I am grateful to Travis Sharp for his help with the formulation of this definition.
[29] The U.S. code states that the term "non-lethal" refers to material that is "not a weapon, ammunition, or other equipment or material that is designed to inflict serious bodily harm or death." See "U.S. Code: Title 10 - Armed Forces," Legal Information Institute, accessed November 23, 2015, https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10.
[30] For specific examples of how American officials have used the term "lethal aid" during the Reagan and Obama administrations, see James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 172; Peter Baker, "U.S. to Give Ukraine's Military an Additional $75 Million in Nonlethal Aid," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/us/us-imposes-sanctions-on-pro-russian-separatists-in-ukraine.html.

United States refrains from providing military assistance to a rebellion at one point in a conflict, it can obviously begin providing military assistance to the rebellion at some future point in the conflict. Similarly, even if the United States provides military assistance to a rebellion at some point in time, it can obviously cease that assistance at a later point in time, even if the conflict in question has not ended.

Second Dependent Variable: Effectiveness

The second dependent variable is the effectiveness, from the United States' perspective, achieved by a program to provide military assistance to rebels. Success will be measured relative to the political objectives, set by the president, that the United States seeks to achieve through its provision of military assistance to a particular rebellion.[31]

EXISTING EXPLANATIONS FOR THE PUZZLES

Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of previous literature on the central topics addressed by this dissertation. This dissertation offers an alternative argument to three major existing explanations: realist accounts; ideological competition accounts; and principal-agent accounts. Realist accounts suggest that American support to rebellions should be understood simply as one of the myriad ways the United States has pursued security and power in the international system. From the realist perspective, the United States is construed as little different to any other great power and is expected to support

[31] For an example of another work that uses success as a dependent variable see Patricia L. Sullivan, *Who Wins? Predicting Strategic Success and Failure in Armed Conflict* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Sullivan defines her dependent variable as the "strategic success" of military intervention, which she measures relative to the political objectives of the intervening state.

rebels whenever it is in the United States' strategic interest to do so. Realist thinkers would expect the United States to have few qualms about which particular rebel movements it backs, as long as they can give the United States competitive benefits in the international system by balancing or reducing the power of rivals. A realist framework assumes that the United States will act according to the logic that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," with little compunction about supporting rebel groups who do not share American values, so long as doing so serves to promote American security, national power, and strategic interests.[32]

Arguments grounded in ideological competition hold that, as part of their security competition with others, great powers will try to foster an increase in the number of ideological allies in the international system, including by supporting such allies in struggles for political control of other states. These arguments suggest that it is the ideological character of rebel movements that should determine whether the United States supports them or not.

Principal-agent frameworks argue that states are most likely to support rebel movements with which they share at least some interests and objectives in common. On a principal-agent account, American support to armed rebellion is more likely to be effective when there is significant convergence between the objectives of the United States and the rebels it backs. In cases characterized by significant divergences in goals, principal-agent accounts predict that supporting rebels is only likely to be effective if the United States can

[32] The phrase "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" originated in a treatise on statecraft written in India during the 4th century BC. See Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Apollo Books, 2012), 2.

monitor how rebels use American assistance and can condition the supply of that aid so that it is contingent upon the rebels' using it in ways that promote American objectives.

SUMMARY OF THIS DISSERTATION'S ARGUMENT

This dissertation does not suggest that the realist, ideological competition, and principal-agent accounts are incorrect, just that they are incomplete. This dissertation argues that a large part of the solution to the two puzzles described above is grounded in the fact that the United States is not simply a great power in the international system, but that it is a liberal-democratic great power.

This dissertation elaborates a theory—"liberal-democratic proxy war"—which argues that the United States' character as a liberal-democratic great power influences whether it supports armed rebellions and also has significant implications for whether doing so is an effective instrument of American statecraft.[33] American policymakers, as leaders of a major power in the international system, generally believe that the United States has myriad strategic interests that they are responsible for promoting. As realist theories argue, providing support to armed rebellions has been one of the instruments American policymakers have turned to in order to further American interests.

Nevertheless, realism is not the entire story. Precisely because the United States is a liberal democracy, when deciding whether or not to support an armed rebellion in another country, an American president is unlikely to consider merely whether doing so can serve

[33] When I describe the United States as a liberal-democratic great power, I use the word "liberal" in its classical sense to refer to beliefs about the importance of protecting individual liberty. On that point, see Thomas J. Wright, *All Measures Short Of War: The Contest For The Twenty-First Century And The Future Of American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 155.

the nation's interests. The president will also consider whether doing so can be defended in terms of the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. That is because American presidents, having been elected to the senior executive position in a liberal-democratic political system, are likely to believe sincerely in the nation's liberal-democratic ideals; even if they do not, they know that they might be called upon to justify, publicly, their decision to provide American support to a rebellion in another country. A justification that fails to address how aiding the rebellion is consistent with liberal-democratic ideals is less likely to prove publicly compelling that a justification that makes such a case.

Notwithstanding that, and contrary to theories grounded in ideological competition, the United States' liberal-democratic ideology is not the whole story either. The United States does not support armed rebellions against other governments, even if they are illiberal and undemocratic, when doing so would undermine its strategic interests, for example because the government is an ally of the United States. In short, the United States is likely to support armed rebellions only when a president assesses that doing so both can serve the nation's strategic interests and can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals.

The United States' liberal-democratic character influences American support for armed rebellion in an additional way. As a result of the fragmentation of decision-making power over foreign policy between the president and Congress, the president is not the sole arbiter of whether backing a rebellion is likely to further the United States' interests and its ideals. After the president makes a decision about whether or not to support a particular rebellion, Congress has the opportunity to render a verdict on whether the president has made the appropriate decision. If the president decides to aid a rebellion, but significant

numbers in the legislature deem that doing so is inconsistent with either the nation's interests or ideals—or both—then opponents in Congress will attempt to place restrictions on the president's ability to support the rebels. By contrast, if the president chooses not to aid a rebellion, but significant numbers in Congress judge that there is a strong argument for doing so in order to promote the nation's interests and ideals, then proponents of assisting the rebels will likely apply political pressure to the president to try to change the president's decision.

Whether or not the United States supports armed rebellion in another country, therefore, is influenced by the requirements of the nation's interests and its ideals, as they are assessed by the president and by Congress. The United States' liberal-democratic character means that there are limits to which rebellions receive American support. Those limits are less stringent than many would wish, but they are real. The United States is unlikely to support just any rebel movement that happens to be an "enemy of my enemy." Additionally, the United States may aid some rebel movements less robustly than a realist framework might expect. At the same time, the United States is less ideological than the pure version of a theory grounded in ideological competition would expect; the United States will be prepared to support illiberal rebel movements, such as the Afghan mujahedin, provided sufficiently important strategic interests are at stake and provided a defense can be offered in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, notwithstanding the ideological character of the rebels themselves. As shown in chapter 4, in the case of the Afghan mujahedin, the fact that they were fighting an occupation force that was waging a brutal counterinsurgency campaign meant that American policymakers defended support to the mujahedin in terms

of the ideal of self-determination, regardless of the fact that the mujahedin were not liberal democrats.

In contrast to principal-agent accounts, this dissertation argues that the effectiveness of American efforts to support rebellions is challenged by more than just the often poorly-aligned interests between the United States and the rebel movements it has backed. Achieving the United States' policy objectives typically requires providing sustained support to rebels to allow them to fight a war of attrition over an extended period of time. When it aids a rebel movement, the United States is likely to find itself helping the rebels in a protracted war of attrition for two reasons. First, rebels typically are at a relative disadvantage in military power compared to the regime or occupying power they are fighting. Thus, they must wage war by attrition rather than by trying to inflict a swift military defeat upon their opponents. Second, in response to American aid to the rebels, the regime they are fighting is likely to seek more aid from its own patrons or the occupying power the rebels are fighting is likely to put more resources into the conflict, at least initially.

The major insight of the theory of "liberal-democratic proxy war" is that the United States is only likely to provide sustained support over an extended period of time if the president assesses that supporting the rebels is likely to serve American interests, that it can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, and if there is also a high degree of consensus in Congress that aiding the rebels is consistent with American interests and ideals. Unless all of those conditions are met, American support to the rebels is liable to be too brittle to enable the rebels to make sufficient gains in a war of attrition, thereby

impeding the effectiveness of backing them as a means of achieving American policy objectives.

Even in cases in which American aid to rebels is sufficiently sustained to meet the United States' political objectives, the long-term consequences of supporting a rebellion in another country are liable to be poor when judged against the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. That is for three major reasons. First, in general, victorious armed rebellions tend to be followed by poor outcomes in terms of democratic governance.[34] Second, as noted above, when the United States supports an armed rebellion, the result is liable to be a war of attrition in which both sides on the ground are backed by external patrons. In such cases, the conflict tends to escalate beyond the level that would have been reached had it remained a purely domestic affair and was waged solely using the military resources of the society itself. Such externally supported wars are liable to cause considerable devastation, likely exacerbating the poor outcomes, judged in terms of liberal democracy, that follow the end of a conflict. Third, once the United States has met its political objectives by aiding a rebellion, it is liable to reduce its policy involvement in the country in question, thereby doing little to mitigate the potentially poor outcomes that follow armed rebellion. In sum, even on those occasions when aiding a rebellion allows the United States to achieve its political objectives, the long-term results are likely to be disappointing when viewed from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power such as the United States.

[34] On this point, see Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 205–18.

THE OTHER SIDE OF COIN

Since 2001, driven by the challenges the United States experienced in its occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, there was a resurgence of interest among security studies scholars in analyzing counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine and practice.[35] Among the work undertaken, numerous studies presented recommendations for developing the Iraqi and Afghan security forces by drawing lessons from historical efforts to build partner militaries.[36]

This study focuses on the other side of COIN. Rather than examining the policy challenges associated with supporting partner governments in efforts to defeat insurgencies, this study analyzes whether, and if so under what conditions, American support to rebellions—whether waged by insurgency or by conventional warfare—can be an effective instrument of American statecraft.

The United States was, of course, born through armed rebellion. During its Revolutionary War, the United States received various types of assistance from France, including arms, ammunition, and naval support. Subsequently, the early years of the

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[35] For examples of this work, see John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, Paperback Edition (The University of Chicago Press, 2005); David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Walter C. Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[36] Kendall D. Gott (ed.) and Michael G. Brooks (ed.), *Security Assistance: U.S. and International Historical Perspectives* (Defense Technical Information Center, August 2006); Department of Defense Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation Simulation and Analysis Center, *Security Force Assistance Skills and Capabilities Study* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2010); Olga Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime* (RAND, 2011), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1078.html.

republic saw a vigorous debate between Republicans and Federalists over the appropriate policy to adopt towards the French Revolution.[37]

During the nineteenth century, there were several examples of private American citizens—with varying degrees of backing from the United States government—attempting to either foment or support insurgencies in the Americas against other powers.[38] During the twentieth century, the United States supported various armed opposition movements in other countries as part of its statecraft. During World War Two, for example, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) armed and trained resistance movements to conduct operations against the Axis powers in Europe.[39] During the Cold War, the CIA provided aid to various resistance and rebel movements, including in Eastern Europe during the late 1940s and early 1950s, to Cuban exiles in the 1961 Bay of Pigs operation, and in Laos during the 1960s and early 1970s.[40] Among this dissertation's case studies are the United States' support to armed rebellions in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Angola during the final chapter of the Cold War struggle.

Support to rebellion is one of the American ways of war and statecraft. Jan Gleiman describes the United States' support to insurgencies as an "American counterculture of

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[37] Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2006), 109–11.
[38] Jan K. Gleiman, "The American Counterculture of War: Supporting Foreign Insurgencies and the American Discourse of War," *Special Operations Journal* 1, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 26–29.
[39] Nathan C. Hill, "Sowing Dragon's Teeth: OSS Operational Groups of World War II," *Military Review*, August 2013.
[40] Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "Secrecy and Security: U.S.-Orchestrated Regime Change during the Cold War" (The University of Chicago, 2013); James G. Blight and Peter Kornbluh, *Politics of Illusion: The Bay of Pigs Invasion Reexamined*, Studies in Cuban History (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub, 1998); Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

war."[41] Gleiman describes it as a "counterculture" to distinguish it from the dominant American culture of war—a preference for conventional wars waged in pursuit of decisive victory—as well as from the "alternative culture of war," which involves helping other governments to wage counter-insurgency campaigns.[42] Since it is a policy option that American policymakers have turned to on various occasions in the past, and will likely consider on future occasions, there is considerable merit to considering how effective American support to rebellion can be and under what conditions. Among its goals, this dissertation takes up that task.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature, including describing the existing major theoretical explanations for the two puzzles and their shortcomings. Chapter 3 elaborates the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. The same chapter also describes the research methodology and case selection adopted in this dissertation. In explaining the conditions under which the United States supports armed rebellion, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war will be assessed against realist and ideological competition accounts. In explaining the effectiveness of American military support for armed rebellion, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is considered against the major implications of principal-agent frameworks.

Chapter 4 provides a case study of the United States' military support to the Afghan mujahedin between 1979 and 1991. As a result of widespread agreement within the United

[41] Gleiman, "The American Counterculture of War."
[42] Gleiman, 21.

States, both in the executive branch and in Congress, that assisting the mujahedin could promote U.S. interests and was defensible in terms of the nation's ideals—because the mujahedin were fighting an occupation force that committed egregious human rights abuses—there was little reticence about helping the mujahedin over the course of a protracted war of attrition with the Soviet Union. The United States' willingness to enhance its support to the mujahedin on every occasion that the Soviet Union intensified its own military efforts in Afghanistan helped the mujahedin to win its war of attrition. That externally supported conflict left Afghanistan a devastated land from which new strategic challenges for the United States grew. The United States' support to the mujahedin proved to be a catastrophic success.

Chapter 5 offers a case study of American support to the Nicaraguan contras. Contrary to the bipartisan support for aiding the Afghan mujahedin, the Reagan administration's support to the contras bred a major political contest over whether aiding the rebels' struggle would actually promote U.S. interests and over whether it was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. Unlike the case of Afghanistan, there was no communist invasion of Nicaragua. The Sandinista regime, although it relied upon communist bloc support, had come to power with a fair amount of domestic support as well. Unlike the case of Afghanistan, to many American policymakers it did not appear that assisting the contra rebels was consistent with the ideal of self-determination. Additionally, while American policymakers and politicians widely agreed that the United States had an interest in reducing Soviet and Cuban influence in Nicaragua, there was a debate about whether aiding the contras would address that problem or would, instead, exacerbate it. Further, there was evidence that both sides were guilty of human rights

abuses; many American politicians saw the contras as no better than the Sandinistas on that score. The justifiability of backing the rebels appeared, consequently, much less clear-cut in Nicaragua than it was in Afghanistan. The political contest in Washington D.C. rendered American support to the contras inconsistent and brittle. That had an appreciable impact on the battlefield in Nicaragua. On occasions when American aid to the contras was reduced the rebels were thrown onto the back foot in their war of attrition with the Sandinistas, who were aided by the Soviet Union and Cuba. On occasions when the Reagan administration was able to garner sufficient domestic support for increasing aid to the contras, the rebels were able to make gains on the ground. The contras failed to win a military victory in Nicaragua. Nevertheless, in this war of attrition, both the United States and the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua opted to give up the contest at around the same time; the result was a political settlement that led to elections in February 1990. The Sandinistas ended up losing at the ballot box, having managed to survive on the battlefield.

Chapter 6 provides a paired comparison of the United States' support to the UNITA rebels in Angola and the absence of American military support to the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, during the 1980s. The chapter shows how American support to UNITA generated a similar, but less heated and protracted, debate to that over Nicaragua. There were differing opinions between the Reagan administration and many in Congress about what American interests and ideals demanded when it came to the United States' relationship with UNITA. That debate meant that, in spite of President Reagan's clear wishes, the United States did not aid the rebels during the first half of the 1980s due to a congressional restriction on such aid. In mid-1985, however, Congress reversed course, driven in part by changed perceptions regarding the dynamics in Angola and what they

implied for American interests and ideals. After Congress lifted the restriction on aid to UNITA, the United States joined the war of attrition in that country through military support to the rebels. That aid bolstered UNITA's military capacity, marginally contributing to the departure of Cuban troops from Angola and, more significantly, helping the rebels to survive to allow them to attain a political settlement with the MPLA government in Angola. That settlement, as in Nicaragua, led to elections. America's rebel partner, UNITA, refused to accept the result of those elections and went back to war. It turned out that UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, was not as committed to democracy as he had professed to be when seeking American aid during the 1980s. By contrast, with regards to Mozambique, there was fairly widespread agreement among American policymakers that the United States' interests and ideals were best served by refraining from supporting the RENAMO rebels, notably because the Mozambican regime showed itself willing to move towards the west and because of RENAMO's abysmal human rights record. Despite the calls from some in the Reagan administration and in Congress for the United States to provide military aid to RENAMO, the United States never took that course of action. Instead, the United States pursued its interests in Mozambique through engagement with the Marxist government in that country rather than through confrontation.

Chapter 7 provides a paired comparison of the Obama administration's support to the Libyan rebels and to the anti-Assad rebels in Syria. In both cases, advocates of backing the rebels made the case that doing so was consistent with the United States' interests and its liberal-democratic ideals because the rebel movements in question were fighting authoritarian regimes responsible for large-scale human rights abuses against civilians. The chapter shows how the different military challenges faced by the rebels in the two cases,

notably including because the Libyan regime lacked an external patron whereas the Syrian regime had strong external backers, influenced the United States' policy towards the two rebellions. In Libya, the military weaknesses of the regime and the fact that Qaddafi was bereft of a major power patron meant that the United States, together with European and Arab allies, could shift the military balance in the country towards the rebels and help them to remove Qaddafi from office. The Libyan leader's removal from power was a central American political objective in 2011, informed by a view that Qaddafi himself posed the most significant threat to civilian lives in the context of the country's uprising. In Syria, President Obama similarly stated that Bashar al-Assad's removal from power was a major American political objective. Nevertheless, the Syrian regime's military was more capable than Qaddafi's and the Assad regime benefitted from staunch outside support from Iran and Russia. Consequently, President Obama assessed that American military support to the rebels could not achieve a decisive change in the balance of military power on the ground. President Obama concluded that efforts to help the anti-Assad rebels as a way to coerce Assad into political negotiations were destined to fail.

Chapter 8 offers theoretical conclusions based on the empirical analysis and makes a series of recommendations to inform the decisions of future American policymakers when they grapple with how to respond to armed rebellions in other countries.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review is organized as follows. The next section describes the two academic studies, one by James M. Scott and the other by Abigail Linnington, that are the most similar to this dissertation in the questions they address and the cases they examine. Next, I examine three broad sets of explanations within the international relations and security studies literature that offer answers to this dissertation's puzzles: realist accounts; theories focused upon ideological competition in the international system; and principal-agent analyses of providing military support to partner forces. For each of these three types of account, I describe how those interpretations would answer this dissertation's research questions and show why the existing explanations fail to answer the puzzles completely. I demonstrate that the existing explanations do not fully explain important facets regarding the history of American efforts to support armed rebellions. This dissertation's theory, which I call the theory of "liberal-democratic proxy war" and which will be elaborated in chapter 3, represents an alternative explanation to those offered by realist and ideological competition accounts regarding the conditions under which the United States supports armed rebellion. It offers an alternative to principal-agent accounts regarding the effectiveness of such efforts. The final section of this chapter describes four other bodies of literature that address topics related to this dissertation's foci. The four bodies of literature are: (i) rationales for covert military action; (ii) third-party intervention in civil wars and proxy warfare; (iii) the effectiveness of military assistance to others; and (iv)

existing analyses of the case studies. These four bodies of literature offer insights that helped to inform the theoretical and empirical work in the chapters that follow.

SIMILAR STUDIES TO THIS DISSERTATION

The two scholarly works that most directly address questions and cases examined in this dissertation are James M. Scott's book about the Reagan Doctrine and Abigail Linnington's dissertation about American support for insurgency.[1]

Scott's book examines the processes by which the Reagan Doctrine was formulated and implemented. His central argument is that the strategy "emerged from the interaction of policy makers from the White House, foreign policy bureaucracy, Congress, and the public, who created it through a messy and complex process."[2] Scott argues that understanding how the various "Reagan Doctrine" programs were implemented is best achieved by tracing how these various actors influenced policy-making and how their influence fluctuated over time in each of the Reagan Doctrine cases.[3] Scott's work demonstrates the variation in the nature of American support to different insurgencies during the 1980s and proved to be very helpful to my formulation of the research questions addressed by this dissertation. Scott offers particular—rather than general—explanations for the amount of support provided to different anti-communist rebellions during the 1980s.

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[1] James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Abigail T. Linnington, "Unconventional Warfare in U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S. Support of Insurgencies in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Iraq from 1979-2001" (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University), 2013).
[2] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, ix.
[3] Scott, 233–34.

Scott's purpose in writing his book was not, however, to set out an overarching theory about when the United States supports armed rebellion and how effective such efforts are likely to be. This dissertation takes up that task.

In her dissertation, Abigail Linnington addressed the following question: "what factors best explain the success and failure of U.S. campaigns in support of insurgencies?"[4] She examined the strategic effectiveness of the United States' support to the rebellions in Afghanistan and Nicaragua during the 1980s, as well as of American support to Iraqi opposition groups between 1991 and 2001. Linnington argues that support to insurgencies is more likely to achieve the United States' strategic goals when the following four conditions pertain: objectives are clearly defined; goals are matched to a feasible and suitable strategy; there is unity of effort among U.S. government agencies; and the effort is embedded within a grand strategy.[5] Linnington's study helpfully identifies some of the proximate conditions influencing whether American policymakers achieve the goals they intend when supporting insurgencies. This dissertation argues that there is another major factor that influences the effectiveness of American support to insurgencies: the United States' liberal-democratic character.

Beyond the works by Scott and Linnington, there are three broader explanations within the international relations and security studies literature for this dissertation's puzzles: realist accounts; theories focused upon ideological competition in the international system; and principal-agent analyses of providing military support to partner forces. I

[4] Linnington, "Unconventional Warfare in U.S. Foreign Policy," v.
[5] Linnington, 49–53.

describe each of these accounts in turn and demonstrate why the existing explanations fail to answer the two puzzles satisfactorily.

REALIST ACCOUNTS

Realism is a broad school of thinking about international relations. Common to all theories considered realist, however, is the idea that international politics is a realm characterized by the pursuit of—and competition for—power. Hans Morgenthau, among the progenitors of modern realism, emphasized that realists "assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power."[6] In a variant of realism known as "structural" or "neorealism," Kenneth Waltz argued that states will seek to maximize their own security and they will pursue that task by balancing against the power of other states.[7] John Mearsheimer elaborated another modern version of realism, which he termed "offensive realism," which assumes that states do not strive to maximize their security, as Waltz argued, but instead they strive to maximize their power. As Mearsheimer puts it, "a state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system," which means that states will "look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals, and to take advantage of those situations when the benefits outweigh the costs."[8]

For realist thinkers, supporting armed rebellions is simply one of the various means that states adopt in order to pursue either their national security or their power. Supporting

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[6] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 5.
[7] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 126.
[8] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 1st ed. (New York ; London: WWNorton & Company, 2001), 21.

a rebellion against a major power competitor—or against an ally of that major power competitor—is consistent with the external balancing that Waltz predicts as a key stratagem of states, where such external balancing is understood as "moves to strengthen and enlarge one's own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one."[9] If one accepts a Waltzian view of international politics, providing military aid to rebels is an example of strengthening allies as a means of balancing against competing powers. For Mearsheimer, supporting a rebellion against an adversary represents a way to reduce the power of that enemy, thereby helping to increase the chances that a state can itself emerge as a hegemon. Mearsheimer explicitly cites American support to the Afghan mujahedin during the 1980s as a preeminent example of what he terms "bloodletting" as a means of gaining power in the international system.[10]

Harris Mylonas argues that a realist logic explains many historical instances in which external states have supported "non-core groups" in other states. Mylonas defines "non-core groups" as aggregations of individuals perceived as unassimilated ethnic groups by the ruling political elite of a county. Mylonas writes that:

> Great Powers and states around the world strategically select which non-core groups to support. Non-core groups in geopolitically important areas—that is, economically or militarily important regions and regions with valuable resources—have a higher probability of receiving external support from interested powers.[11]

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[9] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118.
[10] Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 154–55.
[11] Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities*, Problems of International Politics. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33; Mylonas, xx.

In a separate working paper, Mylonas and Erin Jenne examine great power intervention into "regime conflicts," understood as conflicts over a state's political system. Mylonas and Jenne hypothesize that concerns about global competition have likely been the "dominant motive" driving great powers' decisions about whether to take sides in regime conflicts and also the major determinant of which side to take in any given conflict.[12]

The authors of a 2001 RAND corporation study of external support for insurgencies likewise concluded that *realpolitik* was the most common motivation of states adopting that strategy. Their study was not focused on American support to insurgencies, but the phenomenon of outside support to insurgents in general. The authors' review of empirical cases from the period between 1991 and 2000 found that "states are primarily motivated by geopolitics rather than ideology, ethnic affinity, or religious sentiment." They elaborated that:

> Although these less strategic rationales sometimes play an important role in regimes' decisions to back insurgencies, they are far-less-frequent motivators than those involving considerations of regional influence and strategic competition. Indeed, when ethnic kin or religious brethren do receive support, it is often done to further realpolitik ambitions as opposed to being an end itself. Ethnic and religious justifications are often mere window dressing.[13]

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[12] Harris Mylonas and Erin Jenne, "Taking Sides in Revolutionary Times: Explaining Major Power Interventions in Regime Conflicts. APSA 2013 Annual Meeting Paper; American Political Science Association 2013 Annual Meeting," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2013), 4, http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2299865.

[13] Daniel Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 23, https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1405.html.

From a realist perspective, American support to rebellions could be understood simply as one of the myriad ways the United States has pursued security and power in the international system. Realists would likely see nothing distinctive about American support for rebellions compared to other states' support for rebellions—it is just one of the ways that the United States, like all major powers, pursues its strategic interests.

There are three additional implications of a realist view. First, realists would assume that the United States would probably have few qualms about which particular rebel movements it backs, as long as they can give the United States competitive benefits in the international system by balancing or reducing the power of rivals. A realist framework assumes that the United States will act according to the logic that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," with little compunction about supporting unsavory rebel groups if doing so serves to promote American security, national power, and strategic interests. A realist interpretation of world politics assumes that states act, in Raymond Aron's phrase, as "cold-blooded monsters."[14]

Second, a realist account would argue that the greater the strategic interests the United States has at stake in a particular country or region, the fewer the qualms the United States will have about partnering with rebel movements that do not share its values. As Waltz expressed this aspect of the realist view, "if pressures are strong enough, a state will deal with almost anyone."[15] Additionally, the greater the strategic interest that the United States has in seeing the success of a particular rebellion, the more support the United States

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[14] Aron, cited in Gary Jonathan Bass, *Stay the Hand of Vengeance: The Politics of War Crimes Tribunals*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.
[15] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 166.

is likely to provide to that rebellion, according to the realist view. After all, again as Waltz emphasized, a *realpolitik* approach to international politics assumes that national interest "provides the spring of action."[16]

Shortcomings of Realist Explanations

A realist account of American military support to armed rebellion is not wholly persuasive because at least two of its implications are not clearly observed in the historical record. The 1980s was, unquestionably, a period of vigorous great power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. It should, therefore, represent an era readily understandable within a realist framework. American support to the Afghan mujahedin served to weaken the United States' major power rival and thereby helped to further the geostrategic interests of the United States. While granting that point, how can a realist account explain the much greater level of domestic opposition in the United States to supporting the Nicaraguan contras, compared to the mujahedin, and how would a realist account explain the congressional prohibition on aid to the contras? A realist would, presumably, argue that the strategic stakes in Central America were much lower than what was at stake in Afghanistan because the Soviet Union had moved its own military forces into Afghanistan, thereby expanding its military reach towards the Persian Gulf. The problem with that argument is that Nicaragua's proximity to the United States itself meant that a strategic case could be—and was—made for countering the Soviet-aligned Sandinista regime in that country. In an April 1983 address to Congress about Central

[16] Waltz, 117.

America, President Reagan emphasized the strategic interests that the United States had in countering states aligned with the Soviet Union in the United States' own hemisphere. He argued that:

> Nearness on the map doesn't even begin to tell the strategic importance of Central America, bordering as it does on the Caribbean—our lifeline to the outside world. Two-thirds of all our foreign trade and petroleum pass through the Panama Canal and the Caribbean. In a European crisis at least half of our supplies for NATO would go through these areas by sea.[17]

Similarly, in its January 1984 report, the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America—which was chaired by arch-realist Henry Kissinger and had been established by Congress and the administration to try to reach some common ground—emphasized the strategic stakes associated with the spread of Soviet-aligned governments in the region. The report expressed how the spread of such regimes potentially impeded the United States' ability to project military power around the world, arguing that:

> The ability of the United States to sustain a tolerable balance of power on the global scene at a manageable cost depends on the inherent security of its land borders. This advantage is of crucial importance. It offsets an otherwise serious liability: our distance from Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, which are also of strategic concern to the United States……To the extent that a further Marxist-Leninist advance in Central America leading to progressive deterioration and a further projection of Soviet and Cuban power in the region required us to defend against security threats near our borders, we would face a difficult choice between unpalatable alternatives. We would either have to assume a permanently increased defense burden, or see our capacity to defend distant trouble-spots reduced, and as a result have to reduce important commitments elsewhere in the world.[18]

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[17] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America, April 27, 1983, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project," http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41245.

[18] Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, 1984, Quoted in Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994), 230.

This type of strategic argument had a compelling logic to it. Nevertheless, as we shall see in chapter 5, it utterly failed to secure resounding political backing for the Nicaraguan contras as an instrument to challenge the Soviet-aligned Sandinista regime. Contrary to the realist view that states will adopt the position that "an enemy of my enemy is my friend," plenty of American policymakers deemed that the Nicaraguan contras were unacceptable partners for the United States. Plenty of American politicians were of the view that strategic interests did not justify backing just anyone.

The nature of the Obama administration's support to the rebellions in Libya and Syria also poses a theoretical difficulty for explanations rooted in realist logic. The Obama administration helped the Libyan opposition overthrow the Qaddafi regime by tilting the battlefield decisively in the rebels' favor through the use of air power. In Syria, the anti-Assad rebels never received sufficient support from the United States to allow them to achieve such a decisive outcome. Any account rooted in strategic interest as the locus of foreign policy behavior has difficultly explaining that difference. Few realist-minded thinkers saw a significant American national interest at stake in the outcome of the armed rebellion in Libya in 2011. The secretary of defense at the time, Robert Gates, opposed the intervention because he did not consider the United States' vital national interests to be affected by events in Libya.[19] In the pages of the *Washington Post*, after the intervention had begun, Henry Kissinger and another realist-minded former secretary of state, James Baker, also argued that "the United States did not have a vital interest at stake in Libya."[20]

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[19] Robert Michael Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, Kindle Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 518–21.
[20] Henry A. Kissinger and James A. Baker III, "Grounds for U.S. Military Intervention," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2011, sec. Opinions,

Meanwhile, the United States' strategic interests in Syria were almost certainly no less than in Libya. Proponents of helping the armed opposition in the early phases of the anti-Assad rebellion could argue that, in addition to the humanitarian rationale, the United States had a strategic interest in seeing Assad fall because of his alignment with Iran. In a February 2012 statement that called for the United States to do more to help the anti-Assad opposition, Senators Lindsay Graham, John McCain, and Joe Lieberman argued that doing so was justifiable for both humanitarian and strategic reasons, explaining that:

> The end of Assad's rule would not only be a moral and humanitarian victory for the Syrian people; it would be a strategic defeat for the Iranian regime. The time has come when all options must be on the table to force Assad to leave power.[21]

The fact that the United States helped the Libyan rebels to overthrow the Qaddafi regime, but refrained from providing equally decisive support to the anti-Assad rebellion is difficult to explain within a realist framework that emphasizes the pursuit of strategic interest. The strategic interests at stake in Syria were arguably no less, and probably greater, than those at stake in Libya.

EXPLANATIONS BASED UPON IDEOLOGICAL COMPETITION

Geopolitical competition and ideological competition have, throughout history, been intertwined. As Mark Haas demonstrates, the greater the ideological differences between states, the more likely leaders of those states will be to view each other as security

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/grounds-for-us-military-intervention/2011/04/07/AFDqX03C_story.html.

[21] "Senators Graham, McCain, and Lieberman Statement on Syria," February 8, 2012, https://www.lgraham.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/2/post-625f19d1-802a-23ad-48a1-1b1e29ced80c.

threats.[22] As part of their security competition with others, great powers will try to foster an increase in the number of ideological allies in the international system, including by supporting such allies in struggles for political control of other states. There is nothing new about such proxy contests. Thucydides, in his history of the Peloponnesian War, describes how civil conflicts across the Greek world became struggles between the two major powers of the age, Athens and Sparta, and their respective ideologies. As Thucydides described, "practically the whole of the Hellenic world was convulsed, with rival parties in every state—democratic leaders trying to bring in the Athenians, and oligarchs trying to bring in the Spartans."[23] Thucydides lamented the brutality that characterized the various civil wars, which exhibited "extravagances of revolutionary zeal" and "unheard-of atrocities."[24]

As John Owen shows, the phenomenon of overt, forcible regime change is most frequently observed in eras and regions characterized by what he calls "transnational ideological polarization," in which elites across societies are divided about the best form of government.[25] In such contexts, governments have incentives to use force to promote their own regime type for reasons of both external and internal security.[26]

The Cold War era was, of course, a period of protracted ideological competition between the democratic-capitalist world, led by the Untied States, and the Marxist-Leninist

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[22] Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
[23] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Rev. ed., Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 1972), 242.
[24] Thucydides, Rev. ed.:242.
[25] John M. Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.
[26] Owen, 4.

world, led by the Soviet Union. During that era, as Martha Finnemore puts it, "the USSR and the United States viewed capitalist and communist governments, respectively, as threats to their preferred stable order and openly intervened to install governments that each viewed as orderly and legitimate."[27] Finnemore also stresses that, by the Cold War era, both superpowers claimed to respect the international norm of self-determination. Finnemore argues that this created "incentives for covert intervention, intervention by proxy or client states, and indirect intervention of many kinds (such as training and equipping indigenous troops in the target state rather than sending one's own troops) that would allow both interveners and their allies in target states to publicly deny the intervention when necessary to protect legitimacy claims."[28] On this logic, aiding rebels who profess beliefs in one's own ideology represents a way to compete ideologically, without having to violate the norm of self-determination overtly by installing ideologically-friendly regimes with one's own military forces.

Shortcomings of an Ideological Competition Account

The logic of ideological competition was, in a broad sense, at the heart of American efforts to support armed rebellion during the Cold War. As journalist Charles Krauthammer wrote in the article in which he coined the term "Reagan Doctrine," he viewed the strategy as representing "overt and unashamed American support for anti-Communist revolution."[29]

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[27] Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 86.
[28] Finnemore, 128.
[29] Charles Krauthammer, "The Reagan Doctrine," *Time* 125, no. 13 (April 1, 1985): 54.

Nevertheless, simply viewing support for rebellion as a broad weapon in an ideological contest does not allow us to make complete sense of the United States' past behavior towards rebellions in other countries.

If aiding armed rebellion is an instrument of ideological competition, why did support to the contras precipitate such a political fight in Washington D.C.? After all, the Nicaraguan contras were waging war against a regime, the Sandinistas, who identified with Marxism-Leninism and aligned themselves with Cuba and the Soviet Union. As Humberto Ortega, among the Sandinistas' most senior leaders, told some of the regime's military officers in August 1981, "we are guided by the scientific doctrine of the revolution, by Marxism-Leninism."[30] Additionally, any account of American support for rebellion that is grounded in ideological competition also has to make sense of why the Reagan administration never backed the RENAMO rebels, who were also waging an insurgency against a Marxist regime.

This dissertation argues that the United States' liberal-democratic ideals have shaped how it has supported armed rebellions. To understand why some rebel movements have received greater American support than others requires thinking about which particular ideals influence U.S. policymakers' deliberations in this regard. It also means appreciating how political debates can arise over what is required by the nation's liberal-democratic ideals when dealing with a complex world. The theory presented in chapter 3 addresses these considerations.

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[30] Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 196–97.

Principal-Agent Analyses

Principal-agent frameworks have been used to understand both the provision of military assistance to rebel movements—and to other types of military partners—as well as to understand the effectiveness of exercising military power in that manner. The essence of a principal-agent framework is that one actor—the principal—contracts another actor—the agent—to perform certain tasks on the principal's behalf. For a principal, hiring an agent to undertake tasks on one's behalf can obviously have advantages, notably including saving the principal time, allowing the principal to focus on tasks other than those that have been assigned to the agent, and, in the case of military intervention, avoiding risks intrinsic to taking action directly. At the same time, principal-agent relationships bring with them inherent challenges for the principal. Most notably, the principal and the agent will typically have different interests, as well as different information about what work the agent is actually performing. Consequently, the principal faces the challenge of ensuring the agent is, in fact, working on behalf of the principal's interests and not simply in furtherance of the agent's interests.

Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David Cunningham use a principal-agent framework to explain the provision of armed assistance by third parties to insurgent groups. They focus on the decision-making of both state sponsors of insurgents and the rebels themselves, since both must agree to enter into a relationship for it to be established. Among the advantages to a state from providing assistance to a rebel group, Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham describe the following:

> For the state, supporting a rebel group in one's enemy country is less costly than going directly to war in terms of casualties and resource expenditures. Principal-agent theory tells us that delegation is a useful tool that principals use when they wish to avoid the costs—including time, resources, developing knowledge, etc. associated with particular tasks. Empowering the domestic adversaries of a rival regime is typically less costly than international war and can offer certain strategic advantages.[31]

At the same time, states will be reluctant to provide assistance to rebels who are pursuing different goals to those desired by the state itself because that represents an inefficient—and potentially damaging—use of the state's resources. Thus, the "degree of preference congruence" is likely to be an important factor in a state's decision-making about whether or not to back a particular rebel group.[32] Additionally, states will want to support rebels who are able to demonstrate some capability in fighting a government, otherwise the state will "risk expending resources for little benefit."[33] In general, then, states will tend to prefer backing stronger rebel groups than weaker ones. Rebel groups also face tradeoffs when accepting aid from an outside sponsor. Although they can bolster their resources by accepting outside support, a consequence of accepting such aid is that "they can become subject to the whims of their external backers."[34]

Among the findings of Salehyan et. al., based upon empirical analysis of external intervention in civil wars since 1945, states tend to support moderately-strong rebel groups who share ideological, religious or ethnic characteristics with those states. States also tend

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[31] Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David E. Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups," *International Organization* 65, no. 04 (October 2011): 713.
[32] Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, 715.
[33] Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, 715.
[34] Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, 711.

to support rebel groups whose target is a state involved in an international rivalry with the provider of assistance.[35] States tend to support moderately-strong groups because they want to avoid backing weak proxies, while especially strong groups have no need to accept outside support and the strings that come with it. When states and rebel movements share an ideological or religious affinity, or when rebels are fighting a target aligned with an international rival of the sponsoring state, their preference congruence is likely to be fairly high.

Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker employ a principal-agent framework to examine the effectiveness of security force assistance, which they define as the "training, advising and equipping" of other militaries. In their model, the United States is construed as the principal and the recipient of aid is the agent; the United States' aim is to tackle a security threat more cheaply or at lower risk than by deploying large U.S. ground forces to do the job directly.[36] A misalignment of interests between the principal and the agent—such as occurs when a partner government is especially concerned about the threat of a coup from its military, whereas the United States is concerned about other threats—reduces the likelihood that the United States' objectives will be fulfilled.[37] Among the implications of Biddle et. al.'s analysis is that successful outcomes from security force assistance are more likely when there is close interest alignment between the United States and its partner, or when mechanisms—notably including intrusive monitoring of the

[35] Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups."
[36] Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, April 12, 2017, 9.
[37] Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, 11–12.

partner's behavior and conditionality in the provision of aid—are employed to overcome the problems posed by interest asymmetry.[38] Although the case studies they analyzed were all instances in which the United States provided assistance to a state government, the logic of their argument also applies to the provision of assistance to rebels.

Walter Ladwig also uses a principal-agent framework to explain the effectiveness of American attempts to assist partner governments in counter-insurgency campaigns. As he notes, in such cases the United States and the partner government will share the objective of defeating the insurgents, but the partner government "typically has competing priorities, such as maintaining power and continuing the domestic social and economic arrangements that benefit its core supporters."[39] These competing priorities can undermine the cultivation of widespread popular support for a government that is often a crucial ingredient of defeating an insurgency against it. Through his case studies of the United States' support to the governments of the Philippines, South Vietnam and El Salvador during the Cold War, Ladwig finds that when the United States explicitly placed conditions on its aid it was able to get partner governments to take steps that the United States deemed beneficial for its partners' counter-insurgency efforts.[40]

In her dissertation, Erica Borghard illuminates why states sometimes fail to control the behavior of their proxies in ways that principal-agent analyses suggest might be necessary. Borghard argues that, in order to preserve "plausible deniability" about the relationship with a proxy, as well as to insulate policymakers from domestic political

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[38] Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, 40–41.
[39] Walter C. Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 30.
[40] Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front*.

opposition, decision-makers look to put as much distance as possible between themselves and a proxy force and will delegate control over those proxies to covert intelligence agencies. By delegating control to bureaucratic organizations that might possess preferences that are different to those of their political leaders, the potential for political leaders to control the behavior of their nation's proxies is reduced.[41]

Shortcomings of Principal-Agent Frameworks

Principal-agent frameworks capture some of the major dynamics associated with—and challenges to—providing military assistance to others as a means of exercising military power. Nevertheless, a principal-agent framework cannot, at least by itself, adequately identify the factors that have determined the effectiveness of American support to rebel movements in achieving the nation's foreign policy objectives. That becomes very clear from considering the Obama administration's policies towards the rebellions in Libya and Syria. In both cases, President Obama established as a political objective of the United States the exit of the regime's leader—Qaddafi and Assad respectively—from power. In both cases, the armed opposition shared that objective with the United States. Given that interest alignment between the United States and the rebels, if we only adopt a principal-agent perspective, there should have been little impediment in either case to the United States helping the rebels to achieve the departure of the regime's leader. Of course, the challenges faced by the United States in helping the Syrian rebels remove Assad proved much more pronounced than helping the Libyan rebels remove Qaddafi. Among the

[41] Erica Dreyfus Borghard, "Friends with Benefits? Power and Influence in Proxy Warfare" (Columbia University, 2014).

reasons that was the case, of course, was because the Assad regime was stronger militarily than the Libyan regime and it also had two major power patrons, Iran and Russia, whereas Qaddafi did not have a major external supporter. Consequently, regardless of the fact that the United States and the armed opposition shared the objective of Assad's removal from power, the amount of American resources needed to bring that about would have been extensive. The United States would have needed to give the opposition enough military support to overcome the military aid that Iran and Russia were willing to provide to the Assad regime. In the view of President Obama, that represented a level of military engagement by the United States that was unwise. When trying to understand the effectiveness of American support for rebels, and relatedly, American decision-making about whether to support them in the first place, it is necessary to consider not only the relationship between the United States and the rebel movement in question, but also the implications for effectiveness that follow from the other side of the conflict—the regime the rebels are fighting and that regime's outside patrons.

In this dissertation, I will put forward a theoretical framework that helps to provide additional insights, beyond those conveyed by principal-agent analyses, regarding the two puzzles. In particular, the theory will pay attention to the implications for effectiveness that follow from thinking about the other side in a conflict and, especially, from the fact that American support to rebellions tends to involve the United States in helping the rebels fight a war of attrition.

OTHER RELEVANT LITERATURE

In addition to the works already described, there is a range of other academic literature on topics related to this dissertation. Four bodies of literature are especially important: (i) rationales for covert military action; (ii) third-party intervention in civil wars and proxy warfare; (iii) the effectiveness of military assistance to others; and (iv) existing analyses of the case studies. I describe each of these bodies of literature in turn.

Rationales for Covert, Rather than Overt, Action

Among recent academic work, several studies have explored reasons why states resort to covert action and secrecy in foreign policy. Lindsey O'Rourke's dissertation examines the motivations for states to attempt regime changes in other countries, why states sometimes conduct such operations covertly rather than overtly, and how successful such operations have been in achieving foreign policy goals.[42] O'Rourke argues that, when deciding whether to attempt regime change against another state, policymakers consider three major things: the operation's political benefits, its potential costs, and its likelihood of success. She also shows that covert efforts at regime change are appealing to policymakers because they have lower costs than overt efforts—covert operations typically take lower resources to launch, incur less risk of retaliation from the target, and typically incur lower reputational costs.[43] At the same time, covert regime change efforts tend to be

[42] Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "Secrecy and Security: U.S.-Orchestrated Regime Change during the Cold War" (The University of Chicago, 2013), 2.
[43] O'Rourke, 5.

less likely to succeed than overt efforts because of the limits upon the scale of resources that can be committed to them while allowing them to remain covert.[44]

Austin Carson elucidates how a desire to control the risks of escalation informs states' decisions to intervene by covert means. Through case studies of the Spanish Civil War, the Korean War, and the 1980s war in Afghanistan, Carson shows how the decision to intervene covertly has appealed to states because, in contrast to overt intervention, it "creates ambiguity about their role which can give the political space to responding states to ignore covert meddling and respond with restraint."[45] In a separate article, Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo demonstrate how covert action can serve as a credible way to signal resolve to local allies and strategic adversaries.[46] Michael Poznansky argues that in cases in which a state does not have a justification for military intervention that is clearly-recognized as consistent with international norms, covert intervention potentially offers that state a way to intervene while still being able to maintain publicly that the state abides by such norms.[47]

The literature on why states chose covert intervention rather than overt intervention addresses a different puzzle to this dissertation. Rather than explaining why some military interventions are covert while others are overt, this dissertation needs to explain why the United States has supported some rebellions and not others.

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[44] O'Rourke, 5–6.
[45] Austin Matthews Carson, "Secrecy, Acknowledgement, and War Escalation: A Study in Covert Competition" (The Ohio State University, 2013), iii.
[46] Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 124–56.
[47] Austin Carson and Michael Poznansky, "The Logic for (Shoddy) U.S. Covert Action in Syria," War on the Rocks, July 21, 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/07/the-logic-for-shoddy-u-s-covert-action-in-syria/.

Proxy Warfare and Third-Party Intervention in Civil Wars

There is also a body of literature examining the phenomenon of "proxy war," typically understood as situations in which "belligerents use third parties as either supplementary means of waging war or as a substitute for the direct employment of their own armed forces."[48] Geraint Hughes's study on proxy wars elaborates how political constraints on direct military action, as well as "casualty sensitivity" and "ideological solidarity," drive states to engage in such conflicts.[49] Andrew Mumford notes that, generally, states decide to provide assistance to others and thereby enter a proxy war when they have some stake in the outcome of a particular conflict, but deem that direct intervention should be avoided because it is unjustifiable, too costly, illegitimate or unfeasible.[50]

In his dissertation, Tyrone Groh elucidates the costs and benefits to states of becoming involved in proxy wars. Among the benefits to states of exercising military power in this way, Groh shows how the use of proxies can allow a state to conserve its own resources, as well as increase the chances of international and domestic toleration for its military intervention, which would be more controversial if undertaken directly.[51]

There is also a body of literature on what has become known as "third-party intervention into civil wars." Patrick Regan adopts a framework that assumes states might

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[48] Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Apollo Books, 2012), 2.
[49] Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy*.
[50] Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, War and Conflict in the Modern World (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 30.
[51] Tyrone L. Groh, "War on the Cheap? Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Proxy War" (Georgetown University, 2010).

have a range of reasons for intervention in civil wars, including territorial acquisition, regional stability, protection of diplomatic, economic and military interests, ideology, and the upholding of human rights.[52] Notwithstanding those myriad motivations, his framework adopts the position that often the first step in achieving those goals is to secure a cessation of hostilities; interveners, under this model, seek to end the fighting on terms favorable to themselves and thereby achieve their specific goals for becoming involved.[53]

The literature on third-party intervention in civil wars has explored the effect that such interventions can have upon the dynamics of a conflict itself, notably including how external involvement tends to prolong conflict duration, increase the deadliness of conflicts, and how external intervention complicates the bargaining processes associated with efforts to bring civil conflicts to a close. As Aydin and Regan show, when external parties intervene on opposing sides of a civil war, those competing interventions prolong the fighting.[54] Meanwhile, Matthew Moore finds that the transfer of major conventional weapons to rebel groups tends to produce deadlier conflicts, while the transfer of major conventional arms to governments tends to increase the duration of conflicts.[55] In his book *Rebels Without Borders,* Idean Salehyan examines transnational rebellions, which are those

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[52] Patrick M. Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers: Outside Intervention in Intrastate Conflict* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 12.
[53] Regan, 12.
[54] Aysegul Aydin and Patrick M. Regan, "Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 586.
[55] Matthew Moore, "Selling to Both Sides: The Effects of Major Conventional Weapons Transfers on Civil War Severity and Duration," *International Interactions* 38, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 325–47.

that span national boundaries.[56] Salehyan notes that, since 1945, more than half of rebel organizations have made use of external sanctuaries.[57] The possession of such sanctuaries can give rebel organizations tactical advantages by raising the costs of counter-insurgency—such as requiring government forces to violate international borders—as well as impeding its effectiveness by, for example, reducing the intelligence available to counter-insurgents.[58] Salehyan also shows how the involvement of transnational rebels in a civil war can complicate the bargaining processes associated with conflict termination, including because it introduces new actors into that process.[59] When rebels are transnational, the new actors introduced into the bargaining process are those states on whose territory the rebels have sanctuaries. This is a specific example of a more general point demonstrated by David Cunningham. He shows that the greater the number of veto players in a conflict—actors who must approve a settlement—the more resistant a conflict will be to resolution.[60] In a separate article, Cunningham shows that when external states intervene in a civil war with divergent objectives to internal combatants, that serves to make conflicts longer because external states emerge as veto players with distinct objectives to the internal parties to the conflict.[61]

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[56] Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2009), 4.
[57] Salehyan, 10.
[58] Salehyan, 6 & 48.
[59] Salehyan, 20.
[60] David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 875–92.
[61] David E. Cunningham, "Blocking Resolution: How External States Can Prolong Civil Wars," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 115–27.

Another theoretical claim within the existing literature on third-party interventions into civil wars is that rebel groups whose power is created through outside sponsorship are more prone to fragmentation and to achieving limited levels of social support.[62] As Jeremy Weinstein shows, rebel groups that emerge through the external support of an outside patron, or in environments rich in natural resources, tend to commit higher levels of indiscriminate violence than groups who do not have external support or access to natural resources.[63] When rebellions emerge as the result of external support they tend to attract opportunistic fighters, with the result that "a constant demand for short-term rewards also drives combatants to loot, destroy property, and attack indiscriminately."[64]

Of course, whether external support actually results in a rebellion perpetrating indiscriminate violence is likely to depend upon the source of external support. Again reflecting the idea that external sponsorship of a rebellion represents a principal-agent relationship, the extent to which external support to a rebellion translates into indiscriminate violence perpetrated by the rebels will likely depend on the efforts of the sponsoring state to prevent such violence. Using data from conflicts between 1989 and 2009, Idean Salehyan, David Siroky, and Reed Wood find evidence that "democratically sponsored rebel groups engage in roughly half as much one-sided violence [i.e. violence

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[62] On this point, see Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 4.
[63] Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.
[64] Weinstein, 10.

against noncombatants] as their non-democratically sponsored counterparts."[65] This evidence suggests that democratic backers of rebellions are more likely to screen recipients of aid based upon the recipients' treatment of civilians and to condition aid to try to avoid harm to civilians. As Jessica Stanton shows, if a rebel group wishes to obtain diplomatic and military backing from Western governments, there is likely to be a cost from using violence against civilians since such behavior tends to make it more difficult for the group to garner such support.[66]

In this dissertation, I draw insights from these various works on proxy warfare and third-party intervention in civil war. This dissertation concentrates upon the consequences of providing support to rebels from the perspective of the provider and relative to its objectives. Therefore, the insights from these works regarding the consequences of external involvement on conflict dynamics need to be viewed from the perspective of the United States' concerns and what its policymakers have tried to achieve through supporting armed rebellions in other countries.

Other Literature on the Effectiveness of Military Assistance

In addition to the principal-agent analyses already described, there are a variety of other works that have examined when supporting military partners is likely to be successful. Much of this work has focused upon the challenge of improving the military

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[65] Idean Salehyan, David Siroky, and Reed M. Wood, "External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities," *International Organization; Cambridge* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 651.
[66] Jessica A. Stanton, *Violence and Restraint in Civil War: Civilian Targeting in the Shadow of International Law* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 37–42 & 101–4.

forces of other governments rather than rebels. Existing work has examined a variety of impediments to achieving policy goals, including: deficiencies in the effort, capacity and organizational practices of the United States government for purposes of training partners[67]; the challenges of training partners in appropriate doctrine[68]; the challenge of enhancing partner force cohesion[69]; and sub-optimal organizational patterns in partner forces, often driven by concerns over coups.[70]

While much of the literature has focused on the characteristics of the United States, its partners, and the relationship between them, the actions of other external actors—especially on the opposite side of a conflict—will have an impact on the effectiveness of American efforts. That is clear from Mara Karlin's work, which analyses United States' efforts to build partner militaries for the task of internal defense. Through case studies of American efforts to build militaries in Greece, South Vietnam, and Lebanon, Karlin shows that primary factors accounting for the success of such efforts have included the United States' getting "deeply involved in the partner state's sensitive military affairs"—for example, by involving itself in the selection of the partner force's senior leadership—and whether "antagonistic external actors play a diminishing role." Regarding the latter, Karlin shows that if another external power continues to sustain an insurgency through external

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[67] Peter Miller Dawkins, "The United States Army and the 'Other' War in Vietnam: A Study of the Complexity of Implementing Organizational Change" (Princeton University, 1979); Linnington, "Unconventional Warfare in U.S. Foreign Policy."
[68] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
[69] Stephen Peter Rosen, "Brown Soldiers, White Officers," *The Washington Quarterly* 5:2 (1982): 117–30.
[70] Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 308–12.

support then that is liable to undermine American efforts to build a partner military that is capable of combatting the insurgency.[71]

Karlin's work is a reminder that the impact of the United States' efforts to assist partner forces will depend upon the amount of support other external actors provide to competing forces on the ground. That same insight also applies to American efforts to provide military assistance to rebel movements and this dissertation incorporates that insight into its analysis. Whenever the United States supports one combatant in a conflict—such as a rebel movement—the opposing combatant has strong incentives to obtain new, or increased, military aid from its own external patron. A common result is that the United States, having backed a rebel movement, finds itself in a war of attrition with another regional or great power. Consequently, the likelihood that the United States proves able to help its rebel partner win a political or military victory depends upon the willingness of the United States to continue participating in a war of attrition. In turn, the willingness of the United States to continue taking part in a war of attrition is likely to depend upon both the president's and Congress' assessments of whether American support to a rebellion can promote American interests and whether such support is defensible in terms of the nation's ideals.

Existing Works on the Case Studies

In addition to the above works that present causal explanations for when the United States provides military assistance to others and when such efforts are effective, there are

[71] Mara E. Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

numerous historical and analytical accounts of the individual cases examined in this dissertation. Mark Lagon provides an explanation for the origins of U.S. foreign policy doctrines by examining the origins of the "Reagan Doctrine." He argues that the doctrine arose as the result of both the international environment and the worldviews of a coalition of conservatives in the United States.[72] While Lagon's book focuses on the origins of the intellectual doctrine underpinning American support to anti-communist insurgencies in the 1980s, other works provide detailed accounts of the implementation of the various programs to assist rebellions during that decade. Steve Coll's book *Ghost Wars* provides a history of the CIA's support to the Afghan mujahedin during the 1980s, while Bruce Riedel offers an analytical study of that policy.[73] Detailed histories of the United States' policies towards Nicaragua and Central America during the 1980s include those written by William LeoGrande, Stephen Kinzer, and Robert Kagan.[74] Piero Gleijeses presents a detailed history of the interactions among the United States, Cuba, and South Africa in the regional maelstrom of southern Africa during the final decade of the Cold War, which includes considerable detail regarding the United States' policies towards both Angola and

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[72] Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994).
[73] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014).
[74] William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2007); Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*.

Mozambique.[75] Finally, with regards to the Obama administration's approaches to Libya and Syria, detailed accounts of the United States' policies are provided by Christopher Chivvis, Marc Lynch, and Mark Landler.[76]

There are other accounts of the various case studies upon which I relied for my research and they are cited in the relevant case study chapters. Additionally, various participants in each of the case studies have written memoirs of their experiences and these are also cited in the relevant case study chapters.

Having reviewed the existing literature related to the topics addressed by this dissertation, I now turn to the task of elaborating my own theory to explain the conditions determining whether and how effectively the United States has provided military support to armed rebellions.

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[75] Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
[76] Christopher S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East*, Kindle Edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016); Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle over American Power*, First Edition. (New York: Random House, 2016).

Chapter 3

A Theory of Liberal-Democratic Proxy War and Research Methodology

Overview of the Theory

This chapter elaborates a theory—"liberal-democratic proxy war"—which argues that the United States' character as a liberal-democratic great power influences both whether it supports armed rebellions and the effectiveness of doing so.[1] The theory predicts that whether or not the United States supports armed rebellion in another country is influenced by the nation's interests and its ideals, as they are assessed by the president and by Congress. Achieving the United States' policy objectives by supporting rebellion typically requires providing sustained support to rebels to allow them to fight a war of attrition over an extended period of time. A major insight of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is that the United States is only likely to provide sustained support if the president assesses that backing the rebels is likely to serve American interests, that it can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, and if there is also a high degree of consensus in Congress that aiding the rebels is consistent with American interests and ideals. Unless all of those conditions are met, American support to the rebels is liable to be

[1] When I describe the United States as a liberal-democratic great power, I use the word "liberal" in its classical sense to refer to beliefs about the importance of protecting individual liberty. On that point, see Thomas J. Wright, *All Measures Short Of War: The Contest For The Twenty-First Century And The Future Of American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 155.

too brittle to enable the rebels to sustain themselves in a war of attrition, thereby limiting the effectiveness of supporting them as a means to achieve American political objectives.

Even on those occasions when the United States does achieve its political objectives through aiding a rebellion, the long-term results are liable to be disappointing when viewed from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power. That is because victorious armed rebellions tend not to produce democratic governance and externally supported wars of attrition are liable to leave societies confronting considerable devastation. In addition, the United States is liable to reduce its engagement swiftly in the aftermath of a conflict.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. The next section elaborates the theoretical argument about the conditions under which the United States provides military support to armed rebellion. After that, we consider the implications of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war for the effectiveness of American efforts to aid armed rebellions. Next, I present some preliminary evidence that American policymakers think in terms of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. The final section discusses the case selection and methodology employed in the empirical chapters that follow.

THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE UNITED STATES SUPPORTS ARMED REBELLION

Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic overview of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. Since the president, as commander-in-chief, must authorize any military support for an armed rebellion, this dissertation models the relevant policy process in the following way: the president decides whether or not to support an armed rebellion and then Congress renders a judgment on whether or not the president has made the appropriate decision.

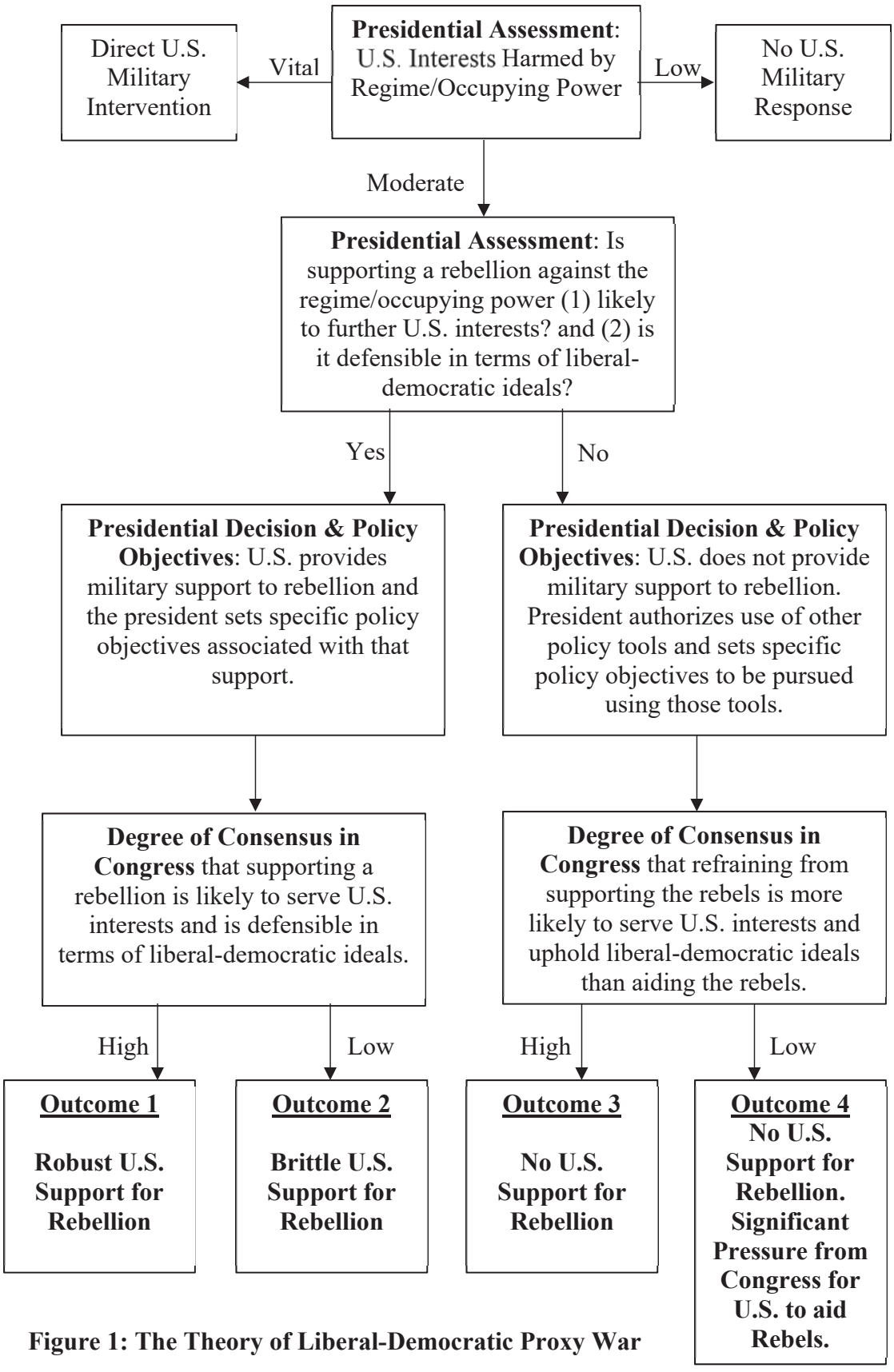


Figure 1: The Theory of Liberal-Democratic Proxy War

We now elaborate the various steps that constitute the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war.

Presidential Assessment of the United States' Interests

The theory of liberal-democratic proxy war builds upon an assumption that much of what is required by the United States' "national interests" is a matter of assessment and will be open to debate. As Mark Lagon writes, "the national interest is obviously a slippery concept, requiring leaders to interpret it in practice."[2] Based on that assumption, the theory models the policy process as beginning with the president's assessment of national interests. For scenarios in which the president judges the United States to have some, but not vital, interests at stake the president will consider whether supporting a rebellion can promote those interests. Later in the policy process, members of Congress render their own verdict on the nature of the United States' interests and whether aiding a rebellion can serve those interests.

The theory posits that a president is only likely to consider providing military support to a rebellion when the president assesses that moderate strategic interests of the United States are harmed by a regime or occupying force that could be challenged by a rebellion. If the president assesses that vital interests are at stake, the president is unlikely to leave promoting and protecting those interests in the hands of a proxy force. In such scenarios, a president will likely reason that it is appropriate to consider assuming the costs

[2] Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994), 84.

and risks associated with deploying American ground forces in order to protect U.S. vital interests.[3]

In scenarios in which a president deems the United States to have only low national security interests at stake, the president is likely to refrain from any sort of military intervention at all. The president will eschew intervention because the insignificant interests at stake do not justify assuming the costs and risks associated with recourse to military action.

In scenarios in which the president assesses the United States to have moderate interests at stake, the president will seek ways to promote those interests while limiting the costs and risks to the United States. One way to do so is to shift a substantial portion of those costs and risks onto a rebel movement by providing military support to them.

Presidential Assessment: Is Supporting a Rebellion against the Regime or Occupying Power (1) Likely to further U.S. Interests? and (2) Is it Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals?

Consequently, in scenarios in which the president assesses that a regime or occupying power harms U.S. interests to a moderate degree, the president is likely to consider American support to a rebellion as one potential policy option. In deciding whether to provide military support to a rebellion, the theory posits that the president

[3] Costs are understood as those resources that one knows must be expended to undertake a given endeavor such as a military operation. Meanwhile, risks are understood as possible future states of the world that—should they actually occur—would entail costs for the United States. For a helpful discussion of the concept of risk, see Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk, (Translated by Ciaran Cronin).* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 9.

considers two questions: is supporting a rebellion likely to further U.S. interests; and is it defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals?

In asking the first question, the president evaluates the likely efficacy of aiding rebels. At least three major considerations are pertinent in making that determination. First, the president will assess whether the rebels possess a level of military capability that is sufficient, with U.S. support, to be able to undertake military operations against the regime or occupying power that is harmful to U.S. interests. Second, the president will assess whether the interests of the rebels are aligned with those of the United States. As principal-agent frameworks emphasize, if military support to a proxy force is to further a principal's interests, there must be some alignment between the interests of the principal and those of the agent so that the latter uses the resources provided by the former in ways that are consistent with the principal's interests. Third, the president must assess how the regime or occupying power confronted by the rebels is likely to respond to American aid to the rebellion. The anticipated reaction of the rebels' opponent should be a significant part of the president's evaluation; if the regime or occupying power is anticipated to be willing, and able, to respond in ways that do even greater damage to U.S. interests than is already the case, that would represent a major reason not to support the rebels.

Contrary to realist theories, however, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war argues that the president does not simply assess whether aiding the rebels can promote the United States' strategic interests. Presidents will focus on more than just the efficacy of aiding rebellions. Instead, presidents will also consider whether aiding a rebellion can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. That is for two major reasons.

First, the theory assumes that many U.S. presidents, having been raised in a liberal-democratic political context, sincerely believe in those ideals. Second, even if a president does not sincerely believe in those ideals, the liberal-democratic character of the United States means that the commander-in-chief may have to justify decisions publicly. Even if support to a rebellion is provided through a covert action program—as many efforts to aid rebellions have been, notably including because of international legal considerations—it might still become public knowledge. For example, the United States began providing covert military assistance to the Nicaraguan contra rebels in December 1981.[4] Less than a year later, on November 8, 1982, *Newsweek's* cover was emblazoned with a dramatic headline: "America's Secret War: Target Nicaragua."[5]

As Ronald Krebs emphasizes, "legitimation—the articulation before key publics of publicly acceptable reasons for concrete actions and policy positions—is typically an imperative, not a mere nicety, of politics, both domestic and foreign."[6] In the United States, for a policy justification to be publicly-acceptable it must often be couched in terms of the nation's liberal-democratic ideals. Since the United States' founding, as various scholars have demonstrated, many American leaders have viewed themselves as trying to change

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[4] Military assistance to the contras was authorized by a Covert Action Finding that President Reagan signed on December 1, 1981. "Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, As Amended, Concerning the Operations in Foreign Countries Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection, December 1, 1981, Signed by President Ronald Reagan," https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/documents/d-all-45.pdf.

[5] John Brecher et al., "A Secret War For Nicaragua," *Newsweek; New York*, November 8, 1982, 43.

[6] Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

the world so that it is more consistent with the tenets of classical liberalism.[7] That is not to imply that the United States has always acted in ways that actually further liberalism and democracy in the world. What Samuel Huntington called the "central agony of American politics" is that the nation has been unable to live up to its ideals perfectly—in part because those ideals are so demanding—and some of the fiercest debates within American politics have occurred over whether the nation is meeting its own high standards.[8] Instead, the important point for present purposes is that many American leaders have repeatedly professed the conviction that the nation should work to promote liberalism and democracy in its foreign policy. As Colin Dueck demonstrates, the nation's classically liberal beliefs have served as a "filter" on foreign policy options. American policymakers have tended to rule out options that they are unable to justify in terms of liberal ideals, both because American decision-makers generally believe in those ideals and because they have to be able to justify their policies in the "predominantly liberal discourse characteristic of American foreign policy debates."[9]

How exactly would a president assess whether aiding a particular rebellion can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals? It is hypothesized that they will focus on

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[7] Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2006); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1997); Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy*, Expanded ed., Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[8] Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1981), 39.

[9] Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 4.

the behavior and characteristics of the regime or occupying power confronted by a rebellion and compare those facets with the behavior and characteristics of the rebel movement itself. The adherence of the existing regime, or occupying power, to three ideals in particular—compared to the rebels' adherence to the same ideals—are likely to constitute a major basis of this assessment. The three ideals are: self-determination; protection of individual rights; and democratic rule.

Self-determination is the belief that peoples have the right to choose their own system of government free of outside intervention.[10] That idea has been central to American thinking about the international system. As Lars-Erik Cederman notes, the American revolution helped to create "the doctrine of national self-determination."[11] We would expect that the greater the degree to which a governing regime is sustained in power by external support, against the apparent wishes of its domestic populace, the greater the liberal rationale for helping a rebel movement to change that government.

That a commitment to self-determination is likely to influence the view of those with a liberal outlook about whether support for a rebellion is justified is evident from considering the arguments of the British philosopher John Stuart Mill. He presented the conditions under which it would be legitimate, in his view, to intervene in other peoples' conflicts in his 1859 essay *A Few Words on Non-Intervention.* As Michael Doyle

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[10] Michael Doyle defines self-determination as the idea that "people have a right beyond their individual rights to express, defend, and have respected their collective identity against foreign interference." Michael W. Doyle, *The Question of Intervention: John Stuart Mill and the Responsibility to Protect*, Castle Lectures in Ethics, Politics, and Economics (New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015, 2015), 12.
[11] Lars-Erik Cederman, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A Simmons (SAGE Publications, 2002), 421.

emphasizes, Mill valued the importance of national self-determination.[12] In cases in which armed conflict was solely between contending domestic groups, Mill argued that intervention by a third-party would be inappropriate. Nevertheless, Mill argued that liberal states had a moral justification for assisting other peoples who were "struggling against a foreign yoke or against a native tyranny upheld by foreign arms."[13] Elsewhere in the same essay, Mill argued that, "a government which needs foreign support to enforce obedience from its own citizens, is one which ought not to exist."[14] In practice, of course, the degree to which existing governments rely upon external support for their continuation in power is variable. We would expect that American policymakers will consider it easier to defend support to a rebellion in terms of promoting the ideal of self-determination the greater the extent to which the opposing regime relies upon outside assistance to maintain its rule.

The second foundational liberal belief that a president might appeal to in order to defend support to a rebellion is the importance of protecting individual rights. A core belief underpinning classical liberal thought—admittedly not one consistently honored in the behavior of those who profess liberal beliefs—is that all individuals, wherever they are in the world, possess equal basic rights. As Gary Bass puts it in his study of the historical origins of humanitarian intervention, one of the distinguishing features of liberal states is that "their state ideology has no natural end point," but instead it "encompasses the entire human race."[15] If a rebellion is being waged against a regime or occupation force that

[12] Doyle, *The Question of Intervention*, 12.
[13] John Stuart Mill, "A Few Words on Non-Intervention (Originally Published in Fraser's Magazine, December 1859)," *New England Review (1990-)* 27, no. 3 (2006): 263.
[14] Mill, 261.
[15] Gary Jonathan Bass, *Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred AKnopf, 2008), 23.

appears, to American policymakers, to violate individual rights egregiously that would provide another justification in classically liberal terms for helping a rebellion. Mill argued in his 1859 essay that it would be morally justifiable to intervene in another country's civil war if the conflict was such that "the victorious side cannot hope to keep down the vanquished but by severities repugnant to humanity, and injurious to the permanent welfare of the country."[16]

The third ideal that might be used by American policymakers to defend American support to an armed rebellion is democratic rule. As Tony Smith writes, since 1898 "no theme has figured more prominently in the annals of American foreign policy than the repeated presidential calls to promote the creation of democratic government abroad."[17] Regardless of how many resources and how much policy attention individual administrations have actually put into promoting democracy, it has been a stated objective of the United States across different presidential administrations. American policymakers have repeatedly suggested that it should be one of the yardsticks against which American foreign policy is judged. Given this, we would expect that when deciding whether to support an armed rebellion, American presidents will consider whether doing so can be defended because the regime targeted by a rebellion appears to violate the precepts of democratic rule.

Whether a president feels it possible to appeal to these ideals in order to defend support for armed rebellion is likely to depend upon the president's assessment of the relative degree to which a regime, or occupying power, and the rebels opposed to it adhere

[16] Mill, "A Few Words on Non-Intervention," 261.
[17] Smith, *America's Mission*, xvii.

to these ideals. If a president feels that a persuasive case can be made that a particular rebel movement adheres to these liberal-democratic ideals more than the regime or occupying power they are fighting, the president will feel that aiding the rebels can be defended in terms of American ideals.

Of course, whether a particular rebel movement is a better adherent of liberal-democratic ideals than its opponent will, in many cases, be a contested point. As we will see below, once the president has reached an assessment of whether support to a rebellion can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, members of Congress will also express a verdict on that matter.

Presidential Decision and Policy Objectives

Only if a president judges that support to a rebellion can promote U.S. interests and be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals will the president decide to provide support. In that case, the president will also set specific policy objectives to be pursued through that support, based on the president's judgment of what is required to promote U.S. interests and the nation's ideals. In broad terms, American support to a rebellion could be aimed at achieving three distinct objectives, listed in increasing order of ambition: (A) Imposing costs on the regime or occupying power, or "making them bleed"; (B) Imposing sufficient costs on the regime or occupying power that they are willing to reach a negotiated settlement that is consistent with U.S. interests and ideals, or "making them concede"; and (C) Overthrowing the regime or evicting an occupying power, or "making them leave." Whether all, or only some, of these possible aims are compatible with U.S. interests and ideals will be weighed by the president in setting policy objectives for the United States.

If the president decides that support to a rebellion would fail to promote U.S. interests and—or—would not be defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, the president will decide not to provide military support to the rebellion. Instead, the president authorizes the use of other policy tools and sets specific policy objectives to be pursued using those tools.

Degree of Consensus in Congress regarding the President's Decision

After the president decides whether or not to support an armed rebellion, members of Congress will render a verdict on whether the president has reached the appropriate conclusions about what will best serve U.S. interests and ideals. The ability of Congress to play a role in deciding whether or not the United States should provide military support to a rebellion arises from the fragmentation of power over foreign policy decision-making in the United States. It reflects the fact that the United States' constitution is, in Edwin Corwin's felicitous phrase, "an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy."[18] Congress has the ability to deny American military support to an armed rebellion overseas through its power of the purse. As James Lindsay emphasizes in his detailed examination of Congress' role in the making of American foreign policy, the "appropriations power" has emerged as the legislature's "primary tool for shaping foreign policy."[19] If a president decides to aid an armed rebellion but a majority in Congress

[18] Edward S. (Edward Samuel) Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers, 1787-1957*, 4th rev. ed., Legal Classics Library (Buffalo, N.Y.) (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 171.
[19] James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 30–31.

disagrees with that decision, the legislature has the ability to refuse to appropriate the funds required to support the rebellion in question.

Congress' ability to play a role in deciding whether or not to assist particular armed rebellions grew stronger during the 1970s as a result of the advent of greater congressional oversight over covert action, which is the most common way in which the United States has provided military support for armed rebellions. Attempting to overthrow sovereign governments contradicts the international norm of non-intervention in other states. As Michael Poznansky explains, the United States has, consequently, typically undertaken such actions covertly as a way to reconcile its foreign policy behavior with its desire to uphold its reputation as a follower of international norms.[20]

In late 1974, Congress passed the "Hughes-Ryan Amendment," which prohibited the expenditure of funds for CIA covert action programs unless the president issued a "finding" that the operation was important to the national security of the United States and reported that finding in a timely way to appropriate committees in Congress.[21] In the years immediately following the Hughes-Ryan amendment, it came to be understood that there were eight "appropriate committees" to which covert actions had to be reported, but in 1980 Congress passed additional legislation that stipulated that covert actions had to be reported only to the House and Senate intelligence committees.[22] The Senate Select

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[20] See Austin Carson and Michael Poznansky, "The Logic for (Shoddy) U.S. Covert Action in Syria," War on the Rocks, July 21, 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/07/the-logic-for-shoddy-u-s-covert-action-in-syria/.
[21] Abram N. Shulsky and Gary J. Schmitt, *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002), 93; "Report by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, December 17, 1982, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, Report No. 97-973" (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 4.
[22] "Report by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, December 17, 1982, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, Report No. 97-973," 5.

Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) had been established in 1976 and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) was established in 1977. A 1982 public report by the HPSCI explained that the law provided a potential way for Congress to place restrictions on covert actions, emphasizing that:

> It is important to note that the law does not provide that the President seek Committee approval of each covert action. It only requires him to report those actions to the Committee. The reporting requirement, however, does open up a dialogue between the Director of Central Intelligence, who usually briefs the Committee on each Presidential finding, and Committee members, who provide their reactions, supportive or negative to such findings. As a last resort, if a majority of the members object to a specific covert action, they can vote to cut off or limit the authorization of funds for it.[23]

All of the case studies examined in this dissertation occurred after the enactment of the Hughes-Ryan amendment and the subsequent establishment of the House and Senate intelligence committees.[24] They occurred, therefore, in a context in which Congress had considerable oversight of covert actions. Robert Gates—who joined the CIA in the 1960s and rose to become the Agency's director in the early 1990s—wrote the following in his 1996 memoirs about the change in the relationships between the CIA, the presidency, and Congress that occurred during the 1970s:

> Steadily, during and after 1975, CIA would move from its exclusive relationship with the President to a position roughly equidistant between the Congress and the President—responsible and accountable to both, unwilling to act at presidential request without clearance from Congress.[25]

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[23] "Report by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, December 17, 1982, House of Representatives, 97th Congress, Report No. 97-973," 5.

[24] Further legislation was passed in 1991. The Intelligence Authorization Act broadened the requirements related to presidential findings on covert actions by including covert actions by all U.S. government agencies, rather than just those undertaken by the CIA. Shulsky and Schmitt, *Silent Warfare*, 3rd ed.:213.

[25] Robert Michael Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, vol. 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 61.

This change in the oversight of covert actions created the modern context in which debates over American support for armed rebellion have occurred. If a president decides to support a particular rebellion as a covert action, then through the congressional intelligence committees, a select group of elected representatives becomes privy to details about the United States' provision of such support.

If sufficient members of Congress dispute that supporting a rebellion will both promote the United States' interests and is defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, they can place restrictions on the ability of the United States to support the rebels. Most notably, Congress can prohibit funding for aid to a particular rebellion. For example, as will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, in 1976 Congress enacted the Clark Amendment, which prohibited military support to rebel groups in Angola. Similarly, as will be discussed in chapter 5, in 1984 Congress prohibited all military assistance to the Nicaraguan contras through the Boland Amendment.

Alternatively, of course, if the president has decided not to support a particular rebellion, but a significant number of members of the legislature deem that aiding the rebels would in fact promote U.S. interests and ideals, then those members of Congress can argue for the United States to aid the rebels. In this scenario, proponents of aiding the rebels cannot force the president to do so; any military support to the rebels would have to be authorized by the president. Hence, proponents of the rebels cannot compel the president to provide such support. Nevertheless, they can apply political pressure on the president and, in the face of that pressure, the president may opt to provide some support to the rebels. As Elizabeth Saunders argues, one reason that presidents are likely to be concerned about high levels of opposition among the policy elite, notably including legislators, towards the

president's policies is that such opposition can "cue" the broader public—even if it is generally not highly-focused on foreign policy—to pay attention to the issues on which there is division. Thus, presidents have a political incentive to try to bargain with and accommodate those within the elite who are opposed to a particular policy, especially if there are significant blocs of dissent and if the issue becomes salient enough.[26]

Consequently, if the president refrains from providing support to a rebellion but there is a low degree of consensus in Congress that the president has made the appropriate decision, members of Congress who believe the United States should in fact assist the rebellion are likely to advocate for that action. One way to do so is to argue publicly that the president has failed to act in a way that would promote American interests and the nation's ideals. After all, as James Lindsay emphasizes, "members of Congress recognize that one of their most powerful instruments for shaping foreign policy is their ability to change the climate of opinion that gave rise to it" and "a simple, well-framed charge that anyone can understand puts the burden of proof on the administration to justify its policies."[27] Whether or not the president actually reverses an initial decision not to support a rebellion will depend upon the intensity of the president's original assessment that aiding the rebels is not likely to promote U.S. interests, or is not defensible in terms of American ideals, and the intensity of political pressure that members of Congress are able to generate for aiding the rebellion in question.

Why would a president and legislators reach different assessments of whether aiding a rebellion is likely to promote U.S. interests and whether it is defensible in terms

[26] Elizabeth N. Saunders, "War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force," *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 466–501.
[27] Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy*, 132 & 135.

of liberal-democratic ideals? Different policymakers are liable to reach divergent assessments of these factors for two principal reasons. First, in many conflicts, information about developments on the ground will be limited and hazy. The implications of such limited information for the best way to promote U.S. interests, and uphold the nation's ideals, will consequently be a matter for debate. Second, even when presented with the same information, how different policymakers process information will be conditioned by factors such as their pre-existing beliefs and formative experiences.[28] As Samuel Huntington wrote regarding the possibility for intense debates over what U.S. ideals actually require in terms of real world policies:

> Conflict is the child of consensus, and the most passionate and traumatic controversies among Americans derive from the liberal-democratic values on which they so overwhelmingly agree.[29]

In a similar vein, different policymakers are liable to reach distinct views on the most appropriate ways to promote U.S. interests in the world. Consequently, we have four possible outcomes for whether or not the United States supports an armed rebellion in another country, as shown in Figure 1. The four possible outcomes are:

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[28] Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1973); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999); Bruce W. Jentleson, "Discrepant Responses to Falling Dictators: Presidential Belief Systems and the Mediating Effects of the Senior Advisory Process," *Political Psychology* 11, no. 2 (1990): 353–84.

[29] Huntington, *American Politics*, 33.

- **Outcome 1: Robust U.S. Support for Rebellion.** This results when the president assesses that aiding the rebels will promote U.S. interests and can be defended in terms of U.S. ideals, and there is also a high degree of consensus in Congress regarding those conclusions.
- **Outcome 2: Brittle U.S. Support for Rebellion.** This is the result when the president decides to support a rebellion, but there is only a low degree of consensus in Congress that this is the appropriate course of action. Congressional opponents of backing the rebels will endeavor to prohibit U.S. support to the rebellion. American support to the rebellion will be brittle; it will be subject to cessation by congressional vote if opponents of aiding the rebels prove able to garner a congressional majority for ending American support to the rebellion.
- **Outcome 3: No U.S. Support for Rebellion.** This occurs when the president decides not to aid a rebellion—judging that doing so would fail to promote the United States' interests and, or, be indefensible in terms of U.S. ideals—and there is also a high degree of consensus in Congress that that is the appropriate decision.
- **Outcome 4: No U.S. Support for Rebellion, but with Significant Pressure from Congress for the United States to Aid the Rebels.** In this outcome, the president decides not to support a rebellion—again judging that doing so would fail to promote the United States' interests and, or, be indefensible in terms of U.S. ideals—but, in this case, there is a low degree of consensus in Congress that the president has reached the appropriate decision. Those members of Congress who judge that U.S. interests and ideals would be better served by

aiding the rebels apply political pressure upon the president in an effort to reverse the president's initial decision. If the political pressures become strong enough, the president may reverse the initial decision and provide support to the rebellion in order to dampen the political pressure.

We now use the theoretical explanation elaborated above to derive insights for the likely effectiveness of American support to armed rebellion.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPORT TO ARMED REBELLION

Wars of Attrition and their Implications

In cases in which the United States aids a rebellion, it is liable to find itself engaged in helping the rebels in a war of attrition, understood as a conflict in which the rebels attempt to erode the power and will of the regime, or occupying power, over a prolonged period of time, rather than trying to shatter its opponent's military power in a swift blow.[30] When the United States backs a rebellion, it is likely to find itself aiding the rebels in a war of attrition for two reasons.

First, in general, rebels begin at a military disadvantage relative to the regime or occupying power they are fighting and so they generally cannot hope to defeat their

[30] Military historian Russell Weigley, drawing on work by fellow historian Hans Delbrück, characterizes a "strategy of attrition" as a strategy of "exhaustion" or "erosion" that is usually employed by a military force "whose means are not great enough to permit pursuit of the direct overthrow of the enemy." By contrast, a "strategy of annihilation" is one that "seeks the overthrow of the enemy's military power." See Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Indiana University Press paperback ed., Wars of the United States (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), xxii.

opponent in a swift blow. Instead, rebellions typically must spend time building up their own military power if they are to have a chance of victory.

Second, when the United States supports a rebellion, the opposing regime has a strategic incentive to acquire new, or increased, military assistance from an outside power to counteract the shift in power towards the rebels. In cases where the rebels are directly fighting an occupying power, that power has a strategic incentive, at least initially, to devote more military resources to its occupation to counteract the effect of American aid to the rebels. The literature on third-party intervention into civil wars has consistently found that when external parties intervene on opposing sides of a civil war, those armed conflicts are likely to last longer than would otherwise be the case.[31] Whenever one of the outside powers increases aid to its partner in the hope of winning a military victory, the opposing power can respond by strengthening its own proxy. This represents what Marc Lynch calls the "iron logic of external intervention into civil wars."[32] The result is that neither party on the ground can gain a decisive military edge, so that we are likely to see "ratcheted stalemates," where the conflict settles into a series of stalemates displaying increasing levels of conflict intensity. Not only is such a conflict likely to be a war of attrition between the rebels and the opposing regime, it is also liable to become a protracted war of attrition between the two sides' outside backers.

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[31] See Aydin and Regan, "Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration," 586 and Matthew Moore, "Selling to Both Sides: The Effects of Major Conventional Weapons Transfers on Civil War Severity and Duration," *International Interactions* 38, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 325–47.

[32] Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East*, Kindle Edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), Kindle Location 174.

For the United States to achieve its political objective—whether it is to bleed an opponent, get an opponent to concede, or achieve regime change—it must help the rebels to sustain themselves over the course of a protracted war of attrition. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the United States is only likely to provide sustained military aid to a rebellion in the case of Outcome 1, where the president assesses that aiding the rebels is likely to promote U.S. interests and is defensible in terms of U.S. liberal-democratic ideals, and there is a high degree of consensus in Congress regarding those conclusions. In Outcome 2, American support is liable to be too brittle and inconsistent to sustain the rebels during a protracted war of attrition. In Outcome 3, the U.S. provides no support to armed rebellion and uses other policy tools to pursue its policy objectives. In Outcome 4, if there is American support to armed rebellion, it is liable to be too limited to sustain the rebels during a protracted war of attrition.

Expectations Regarding the Long-Term Consequences of Supporting Armed Rebellion

The primary focus of this dissertation's analysis regarding the effectiveness of American support to rebellion is upon the determinants of whether such aid is likely to achieve a president's declared political objectives. As described, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts that there is a link between the determinants of whether the United States supports a rebellion and the likely effectiveness of such support for achieving stated political objectives. It is also expected that, even if aid to a rebellion allows the United States to achieve its declared objectives, the long-term consequences of support for armed rebellion are liable to be poor when judged from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power. That is for three significant reasons.

First, victorious armed rebellions are, in general, unlikely to be followed by democratic governance.[33] As Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan argue, the violent methods used during an armed rebellion are liable to be continued by victorious rebels if they eventually form a government and armed rebellions are liable to exclude many citizens from participation because of the physical and moral barriers to violence; the exclusionary nature of armed rebellions and the violent methods at their core typically impede the development of democratic governance in the aftermath of successful rebellion.[34]

Second, the fact that American support to rebellions is liable to precipitate a war of attrition between the United States and its rebel partner, on the one hand, and the regime and its own external patrons—or an occupying power—on the other, increases the risk that the conflict becomes especially devastating. When external powers support opposing sides of a conflict, that tends to increase both the duration and lethality of conflicts.[35] This dynamic carries the risk that considerable devastation will be inflicted upon the country in question, potentially planting the seeds of future security threats.

Third, in the aftermath of devastating wars of attrition, the United States is liable to reduce its involvement in the country swiftly. One strand of American thinking about war is what Dominic Tierney calls the "quagmire tradition," which describes an aversion to "nation-building," understood as constructing friendly, functioning states in other

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[33] See the empirical analysis regarding this issue undertaken by Chenoweth and Stephan. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 215–17.
[34] Chenoweth and Stephan, 32–39 & 207–9.
[35] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 130; Aydin and Regan, "Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration"; Moore, "Selling to Both Sides."

countries.[36] As Tierney emphasizes, the American reluctance to engage in "nation-building" overseas is, in part, a reflection of the United States' classically liberal ideals because such efforts are in tension with the ideals of anti-imperialism and a commitment to limited government.[37] As Brendan Gallagher shows, a major contributory factor to the deficiencies in recent American efforts at postwar planning has been the recurring desire of the United States, after initial battlefield aims are achieved, to withdraw quickly.[38] Consequently, even if the United States provides military support to a rebel movement and they prove able to achieve a political settlement or to take power, the United States is liable to cease its involvement in the country in short order. That risks undermining the processes of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction, thereby imperiling any gains that were achieved through supporting the rebels in the first place.

Overall, therefore, even in cases in which American support to rebel movements is sustained sufficiently to achieve the United States' political objectives, the long-term consequences of such support to rebellions are liable to be disappointing, especially when judged against the United States' liberal-democratic ideals.

EVIDENCE THAT AMERICAN POLICYMAKERS THINK IN TERMS OF THE THEORY OF LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC PROXY WAR

American policymakers have formulated criteria for whether or not to support armed rebellions in ways that accord with the predictions of the theory of liberal-

[36] Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2010), 34–35.
[37] Tierney, 1st ed.:46–47.
[38] Brendan Robert Gallagher, "The Day After: Lessons in U.S. Postwar Planning" (Princeton University, 2017).

democratic proxy war. For example, during the policy debates regarding how the "Reagan Doctrine"—which called for American support to anti-communist insurgencies—should be implemented, at least two policymakers attempted to set out criteria in that regard. The first was Richard Armitage, the Reagan administration's Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. In May 1985, during testimony to a Senate hearing, Armitage elaborated general principles that he said guided the Reagan administration in its policies towards anti-communist insurgencies. Several of the guidelines presented by Armitage pertained to how aid would be provided to insurgencies; the United States would, for example, try to determine the specific needs of particular rebellions and would try to work alongside partners and allies in providing aid.[39] The first of Armitage's guidelines, however, went directly to an issue that this dissertation's theory expects to be of particular importance to American policymakers—whether particular rebel movements are worthy of support. Armitage described the issue in the following way to the Senate hearing:

> We have to consider and, indeed, determine who is worthy of our support. The enemy of our enemy will be assured of our friendship if he shares our values in his opposition to an enemy. A resistance group to have our support must, indeed, be preferable to the regime that is in power.[40]

Armitage made clear that, in order to defend American support to an anti-communist rebellion, the administration would have to make a case that assistance to the rebels could be defended in terms of American ideals. The administration could not simply make a realist case that the rebels were merely an "enemy of our enemy."

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[39] "Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, May 8, 1985, U.S. Policy Toward Anti-Communist Insurgencies" (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 35.
[40] "Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, May 8, 1985, U.S. Policy Toward Anti-Communist Insurgencies," 34.

Seven months after Armitage's testimony, Congressman Stephen Solarz, a Democrat from New York, published an article in *The New Republic* that elaborated what he saw as the appropriate criteria to use in determining whether an insurgency should be provided with U.S. support. Solarz published the article in the context of debates about whether the UNITA rebels in Angola should receive American assistance, but his argument grappled with the broader question of how the United States should decide which rebellions to support and which ones should not benefit from American assistance. Solarz argued that the United States should not back every insurgency being waged against communist regimes in the so-called "Third World." Instead, he argued, the United States had to ask at least six questions about a particular rebellion before reaching a decision on whether or not to support it. The key questions, he said, were as follows: "(1) What are the central policy objectives of the United States in the area in question? (2) What is the best way to achieve our objectives? (3) How do our friends in the region view U.S. support for the insurgency? (4) How closely tied to the Soviet Union is the regime that the insurgency is challenging? (5) What are the prospects that the insurgency will achieve its goals, with or without American aid? And (6) Would achievement of the insurgency's objectives result in a major improvement in the condition of the Angolan people [or the people of the county in question]?"[41]

[41] Stephen J. Solarz, "Next Stop, Angola," *The New Republic*, December 2, 1985, https://newrepublic.com/article/79546/next-stop-angola-reagan-doctrine-communism-intervention.

Solarz's criteria clearly required asking whether aid to an insurgency would actually serve U.S. policy objectives and whether the insurgency's goals promised an improvement in the condition of the people in the country in question. Solarz argued that the United States should consider both efficacy and morality when deciding which rebellions to support. These statements by Armitage and Solarz show that American policymakers have thought in terms expected by the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. The case study chapters will elaborate the evidence for the theory in much greater detail and the next section describes the research methodology and case selection criteria on which the empirical chapters are based.

Research Methodology and Case Selection

The case study chapters investigate whether the policy process modelled in the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war can explain whether the United States provided military support to armed rebellions in six cases. The empirical chapters also examine whether the policy process model that lies at the heart of the theory can indeed explain the effectiveness of American support to armed rebellion. Immediately below, I elaborate the major observable implications of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war and compare them with the observable implications of the alternative theories, in order to allow an assessment of whether there was evidence for those implications in the empirical record.[42] Having done that, I outline the set of questions asked as part of each case study in order to

[42] Regarding the importance of elaborating the observable implications of a theory, see Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

conduct what Alexander George termed the "structured focused comparison of cases."[43] Finally, I describe the criteria used to choose case studies for analysis.

Liberal-Democratic Proxy War: Observable Implications

In explaining the conditions under which the United States supports armed rebellion, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war will be assessed against realist and ideological competition accounts. In explaining the effectiveness of American military support for armed rebellion, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is considered against the major implications of principal-agent frameworks.

Figure 2 elaborates the major observable implications of realist theories, ideological competition theories, and liberal-democratic proxy war regarding the conditions under which the United States supports armed rebellion.

[43] Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in *Paul Lauren, Ed., Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 43–68.

Key Question	Realism	Ideological Competition	Liberal-Democratic Proxy War
What factors influence whether the United States provides support to rebel movements?	The United States' strategic interests.	Whether the United States is engaged in an ideological competition with other international actors.	The United States' strategic interests and its liberal-democratic ideals, where both the president and Congress assess those factors.
Which rebel movements will receive support from the United States?	Any rebels who are an "enemy of my enemy."	Rebel movements who are ideological allies of the United States.	Rebel movements whose interests are aligned with the United States and for which it is the case that aid to the rebels can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals.

Figure 2: Observable implications of Realist theories, Ideological Competition theories, and the theory of Liberal-Democratic Proxy War regarding whether the United States supports armed rebellion.

To assess the explanation offered by the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war regarding effectiveness, compared to that provided by principal-agent analyses, it is also helpful to elaborate the distinct implications of both. The major implication of principal-agent analyses is that the effectiveness of military support to rebellions is likely to be greater the more aligned American interests are with the rebel movement in question or, in cases of divergent interests, when the U.S. is able to monitor rebel behavior and condition aid upon the fulfilment of U.S. aims. By contrast, the major implication of liberal-democratic proxy war is that American military support to rebellion is likely to be effective in achieving U.S. policy objectives when the United States provides sustained support to the rebels to enable them to participate in a war of attrition. In turn, the theory of liberal-

democratic proxy war predicts that the United States will only provide such sustained support in cases in which the president judges that supporting a rebellion can promote U.S. interests and is defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals and there is a high degree of consensus in Congress that those assessments are correct. Additionally, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war expects that the long-term consequences of American aid to rebellions are liable to be disappointing, especially when judged relative to liberal-democratic ideals.

Questions Asked in each Case Study in a Structured, Focused Comparison

In order to ascertain whether the observable implications of this dissertation's theory were actually exhibited in specific cases—and whether there was greater evidence for the implications of this theory than the alternatives—I asked the same questions during the research of each case as part of a structured, focused comparison. The questions were:

1. What was the president's assessment of the degree to which U.S. interests were harmed by the regime or occupying power in question?

2. What was the president's assessment of whether supporting a rebellion against the regime/occupying power would be (1) likely to further U.S. interests? and (2) defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals?

3. What was the president's decision about whether to provide American military support to a rebellion and what specific policy objectives did the president establish towards the regime or occupying power in question?

4. What was the degree of consensus in Congress regarding the president's decision? What was the spectrum of views articulated in Congress regarding whether American support to a rebellion would be likely to further U.S. interests and whether American support to a rebellion was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals?

5. Were American political objectives achieved? What were the long-term consequences of American support to armed rebellion if aid was provided to the rebels?

6. To test realism: what were the range of strategic interests articulated by officials in the executive branch, members of Congress, and non-governmental analysts?

7. To test theories of ideological competition: Was the United States in an ideological competition? What were the ideological beliefs of the regime/occupying power, on the one hand, and the rebel movement on the other hand?

8. To test principal-agent frameworks: what were the interests and objectives of the rebels? What impact did the degree of interest alignment have upon the effectiveness of American support to the rebels?

Evidence Regarding Assessments of Whether aid to a Rebellion is Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals: Sincere versus Instrumental Arguments

One major aspect of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is that whether the United States provides military support to an armed rebellion will depend upon whether a president assesses that such support can be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. Additionally, it will also depend on whether there is a high degree of consensus in Congress that the president has made the correct assessment of that issue. That raises the question of whether, and if so how, we can distinguish sincere arguments made by policymakers that aiding a rebellion is consistent with liberal-democratic ideals from instrumental arguments that that is the case. For example, if a president argues publicly that the United States should support a rebellion because the rebels are fighting a rights-abusing and undemocratic regime, whereas the rebels are model democrats, how would we know if the president in question is sincere or not? The president may, of course, merely be claiming that the rebels adhere to liberal-democratic values because the president wishes to galvanize public support for a policy that the president has decided to pursue for other reasons. After all, as Gary Bass emphasizes, realist thinkers will argue that "ugly motives are all too commonly

masked with pretty rhetoric."[44] If an American president argues that the United States is aiding a rebellion in order to promote democracy, for example, realists would suspect that U.S. support for the rebellion represents nothing more than the cold-blooded pursuit of American interests couched in flourishing rhetoric.

How can we distinguish between instances when policymakers sincerely believe that aid to a rebellion is consistent with liberal-democratic ideals and occasions when they merely say that while thinking otherwise? One way to do so is to examine what policymakers say and write in private—as recorded in archival documents for instance—and compare that to what they say in public. During the case study chapters, I will highlight instances at which there is evidence that allows us to adjudicate between sincere arguments couched in terms of liberal-democratic ideals and instrumental arguments. Notwithstanding that, however, the theory does not depend on presidents, or members of Congress, sincerely believing what they say about whether or not aiding a rebellion is defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. Rather, the theory depends simply on the argument that the United States' liberal-democratic character means that for policy justifications to be most compelling, policymakers need to be able to make a case—whether they believe it or not—that a particular action is consistent with the nation's ideals. As Ronald Krebs writes in his book examining how and when dominant narratives regarding U.S. national security emerge and decline:

[44] Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 15.

> While much escapes public scrutiny in large-scale, bureaucratic nation-states, policies must be, at least, *capable* of public legitimation. This is not to deny that political actors deploy language strategically. Of course they do. They carefully construct arguments to persuade or compel. They frame their preferred policies in what they believe to be the most attractive light. But whether actors actually mean what they saw is not crucial to effective legitimation.[45]

What matters to the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is whether a president is able to make a convincing case to others, especially in Congress, that aid to a particular rebellion is consistent with liberal-democratic ideals. In some instances, that argument will be easier to make than others, depending on the character and behavior of the rebels and their opponent respectively. However, in instances in which the argument is not especially easy to make, opponents of aiding the rebels can make a case for prohibiting American aid to them based on liberal-democratic ideals. What matters for this dissertation's analysis is not whether policymakers actually believe what they say—which they may or they may not—but rather that an appeal to liberal-democratic ideals is one aspect of a potential domestic contest over whether or not to aid a rebellion in another country.

Case Selection

The empirical chapters of this dissertation present analysis of a series of case studies, informed by answers to the questions that guided the structured, focused comparison. The case studies that are presented in the following chapters were chosen based on two principal considerations:

[45] Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*, 15.

1. Cases that included variation in both of the major determinants of outcomes specified by the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war: (1) Presidential assessments of whether aiding a rebellion was likely to promote U.S. interests and be defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals; and (2) The degree of consensus in Congress regarding the president's assessment of those factors.
2. Cases that held constant other factors that might influence the propensity to support rebellions and affect the prospects for success. It was helpful to study comparative cases from within the same presidential administrations. Doing so meant that various factors that might affect the scale of support offered to rebellions and that might impact the effectiveness of backing rebels were held relatively constant across cases that were compared with each other. By comparing some cases from within the same presidential administrations, the following factors—among others—were held constant across those cases: the United States' share of global power, as well as presidential beliefs and presidential experience.

Based on these criteria, I selected the following six cases for detailed study:

1. Military support to the Afghan Mujahedin, 1979-1991.
2. Military support to the Nicaraguan Contras, 1981-1990.
3. The absence of military support to the UNITA rebels in Angola, 1981-1985, followed by military support to UNITA from late 1985 until 1991.
4. The absence of military support to the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique during the 1980s.
5. Military support to the Libyan rebels, 2011.
6. No military support to the anti-Assad rebels in Syria in 2012, followed by military support from 2013 onwards.

Figure 3 summarizes the six cases and gives the average amount of military support in dollar terms, per year, actually provided by the United States to each of the rebellions. In the case study chapters, I will examine how well the theorized policy model can explain whether or not the United States provided military support to the rebellion in question. Additionally, for each of the case studies, I process-trace whether the policy process model elaborated above can explain the effectiveness of American military support to the rebels in those instances in which the United States did in fact support the rebellion. Four of the case studies occurred during the final phase of the Cold War. Since the United States was engaged in a period of great power ideological competition during that period, those cases should be readily amenable to explanation in terms of the alternative theories considered—realist theories and theories grounded in ideological competition. If, however, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war contributes significantly to our understanding of them, that would constitute significant evidence for the theory's utility. The other two cases occurred after the end of the Cold War. The logic of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war is grounded in the United States character as a liberal democracy—both its ideals and its institutions—and we would therefore expect that the theory can explain cases in both the Cold War and post-Cold War context. It is expected that a similar set of dynamics will recur in the United States' policy debates and decisions about whether to provide military support to rebellions, regardless of the particular time period and structure of the international system in which those debates occur.

Case **(U.S. President when initial decision on supporting rebels was made)**	**Presidential Assessment of whether Aiding the Rebellion was likely to promote U.S. Interests and was Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals**	**Degree of Consensus in Congress that the President reached the Correct Assessments**	**Predicted Outcome: U.S. Support to Rebellion**	**Average Scale of American Military Support to Rebels** **Per Year in 2017 Dollars, Calculated Using CPI**
Afghanistan, 1979-Dec. 1991 (Carter)	Yes	High	Robust U.S. Support for Rebellion	$640 million
Nicaragua, December 1981 – February 1990 (Reagan)	Yes	Low	Brittle U.S. Support for Rebellion	$33 million
Angola, 1981- May 1991 (Reagan)	Yes	Low	Brittle U.S. Support for Rebellion	1981-1985: None 1985-1991: $73 million
Mozambique, 1985 (Reagan)	No	High	No U.S. Support for Rebellion	None
Libya, 2011 (Obama)	Yes	Low	Brittle U.S. Support for Rebellion	$2 billion[46]
Syria, 2012-2017 (Obama)	No	Low	No U.S. Support. Pressure from Congress to aid rebels.	2012: None 2013-2017: $250 million[47]

Figure 3: Summary of the key values for each of the case studies

[46] Pro-rated annual cost, in 2017 dollars, of U.S. participation in 7-month air campaign.
[47] Estimate based on public reporting. See Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman, and Michael S. Schmidt, "Behind the Sudden Death of a $1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria," *New York Times*, August 2, 2017.

Each of the case study chapters was based upon research using both primary and secondary sources. The research for those chapters presenting case studies from the 1980s included archival research at the Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush presidential libraries, as well as at the Library of Congress, the National Security Archive at the George Washington University, and the Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University. Additionally, the primary research for all of the case study chapters included interviews with former government officials who served in the relevant presidential administrations.

We now turn to the case studies and an examination of whether the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war can explain American support to armed rebellion in each of them and the effectiveness of such support.

Chapter 4

A Bipartisan War:

American Support to the Afghan Mujahedin, 1979-1991

This chapter examines the United States' provision of military support to the mujahedin—the rebel movement opposed to the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan—between 1979 and 1991.[1] Over that period, the United States gave approximately $3 billion of military assistance, in nominal dollars, to the mujahedin, making the operation one of the largest ever undertaken in the CIA's history.[2] In 2017 dollars, the mujahedin received the equivalent of over $6.5 billion in American support.[3] That support was notable for its quality as well as its quantity—the United States provided the Afghan rebels with sophisticated weapons, including the Stinger anti-aircraft missile.

Realist frameworks of international relations accurately identify one major reason why the United States provided the mujahedin with so much support: aiding the Afghan resistance was a way to promote the United States' strategic interests by hurting the United

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[1] There are many accepted spellings of the term "mujahedin" to describe the anti-Soviet resistance movement in Afghanistan. Throughout this chapter, I render all uses of the term as "mujahedin," even if alternative spellings were used in sources from which I quote. Additionally, I consistently use "Osama bin Laden" and "al Qaeda," again even if alternative spellings were used in sources from which I quote. Finally, as Peter Tomsen explains, Mohammad Najib—who was head of Afghanistan's secret police organization until he became leader of the country in 1986—"added the spiritual suffix 'ullah' to his name" in 1987. Some sources refer to him as "Najib" whereas others refer to him as "Najibullah." I use whatever version was used in a particular source. On this point, see Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 227.

[2] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), xi & 136.

[3] "CPI Inflation Calculator," accessed January 29, 2018, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.

States' great power rival, the Soviet Union, as well as checking the potential for any additional Soviet expansionism beyond Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, that was far from the whole story. There was widespread agreement among American policymakers, in both the executive branch and in Congress, that U.S. support to the mujahedin could be defended in terms of American ideals. That was definitely not because of the character of the mujahedin, who were neither liberal nor democratic. Rather, American policymakers deemed support to the mujahedin justifiable because they viewed the mujahedin's war as a struggle for self-determination against an occupying army that was committing egregious human rights abuses.

Due to the high degree of consensus that aiding the mujahedin would promote American interests and was defensible in terms of U.S. ideals, there was robust, bipartisan American support for the rebels during the 1980s, just as the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts. Lethal assistance to the "muj"—as they were often referred to in the United States—began under President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, only days after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. It continued under his two Republican successors, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. On Capitol Hill, the mujahedin were vocally backed by Democrats such as Representative Charlie Wilson of Texas and Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts, as well as Republicans such as Representative Don Ritter of Pennsylvania and Senator Gordon Humphrey of New Hampshire.[4] There were no congressional efforts to restrict or prohibit American military aid to the mujahedin during the rebels' struggle against the Soviet Union, in contrast to

[4] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 353.

congressional efforts to prohibit American aid to the Nicaraguan and Angolan rebels that will be examined in chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

Robust American support helped the mujahedin to sustain themselves, and ultimately prevail, in what became a protracted war of attrition between the Soviet Union and its Afghan client regime on the one hand, and the mujahedin and its external supporters on the other. Confronted with continued military stalemate and rising costs, the Soviet Union began a withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988; it was completed in February 1989. The rebels prevailed not by smashing the Red Army's military power, but by sapping the USSR's will to continue the fight. To help the rebels achieve that, the United States provided them with military resources to counteract what the Soviets poured into Afghanistan over a decade. That great power proxy war left behind a brutalized land awash in huge amounts of arms. After the Soviet Union withdrew, the George H.W. Bush administration pursued a political settlement in Afghanistan, but it foundered due to the competing interests of the various parties involved in the conflict. The United States, having to focus on the transformations then unfolding in Eastern Europe and due to its aversion to nation-building in foreign lands, increasingly turned its attention away from Afghanistan. While the United States focused on other parts of the world, new strategic threats grew in the midst of the chaos that afflicted Afghanistan during the 1990s.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The next section provides the background to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Then, I apply the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war to explain why the United States supported the mujahedin. I evaluate the various steps that constitute the policy model that is central to that theory: presidential assessment of U.S. interests; presidential assessments of whether supporting a rebellion was likely to further

U.S. interests and whether doing so was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals; the presidential decision reached and policy objectives set; and the degree of consensus in Congress that supporting a rebellion would promote U.S. interests and was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. The model provides a clear explanation of why there was robust American support for the mujahedin's rebellion. Subsequently, I examine how American support to the mujahedin evolved between 1979 and December 1991 and analyze its effectiveness. That section explains how American support to the mujahedin helped the rebels to drive the USSR out of Afghanistan, but also why that success was followed by serious insecurity and chaos in the country. Finally, I evaluate the major explanations that realist theories and ideological competition theories would offer to explain American support for the mujahedin and how a principal-agent framework would explain the effectiveness of that support. By doing so, the final section demonstrates what the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war adds to our understanding of this case beyond the insights provided by the other theories.

BACKGROUND TO THE SOVIET OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN

For the first several decades of the Cold War, although Afghanistan enjoyed closer relations with the Soviet Union than it did with the United States, the country was "nonaligned" in the Cold War struggle.[5] In 1973, Mohammad Daoud seized power in a coup against his cousin, King Zahir Shah, putting an end to the dynasty that had ruled

[5] James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 41; Riedel, *What We Won*, 13.

Afghanistan since 1930.[6] On April 27, 1978, several thousand military officers ousted President Daoud in another coup, orchestrated by the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).[7] Two days later, the U.S. State Department informed Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, that "some elements of the Afghan Communist party are associated with coup leaders," but added that "there are no indications, however, of Soviet complicity in the coup."[8] President Carter subsequently instructed the State Department that "we should build a good relationship with the new Government of Afghanistan."[9]

In the months following the coup, however, the new Afghan government—led by Nur Mohammad Taraki—increasingly moved into the Soviet camp. In early December 1978, the U.S. ambassador in Kabul wrote in a cable to Washington that "the pro-Soviet views of the Afghan leadership have become increasingly apparent recently."[10] That month, the PDPA regime signed a new bilateral cooperation agreement with the USSR, under which thousands of Soviet military and civilian advisers were deployed to

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[6] David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 27–29.
[7] Edwards, 27; Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?: The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996*, BCSIA Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1999), 194.
[8] Briefing Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from the Department of State, April 29, 1978, 'Afghanistan Coup,' in Folder 'Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[9] Memorandum for the Secretary of State from Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 8, 1978, 'US Policy Toward Afghanistan,' in Folder 'Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[10] Cable to the Secretary of State from American Embassy Kabul (Amb. Dubs), 6 December 1978, 0435Z, in Folder 'Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

Afghanistan.[11] In February 1979, Brzezinski wrote in a memo to Vice President Walter Mondale that the Afghan leadership was "enthusiastically devoted to the Soviet cause" and that Afghanistan had become an "imitation of Cuba."[12] Shortly after Brzezinski wrote that memo, on February 14, 1979, the American ambassador in Kabul, Adolph Dubs, was kidnapped by radicals and he was killed during an Afghan-led rescue mission.[13] The incident led to a further deterioration in the United States' relations with the PDPA regime.

Despite the potential geostrategic gains to be reaped from a new ally, Soviet leaders had their own concerns regarding the PDPA, which were bred by two challenges to the PDPA's consolidation of power. First, the PDPA's attempts to transform Afghan society swiftly in line with socialist thinking—which included establishment of equal rights for women and a program of land reform—provoked significant political opposition.[14] A CIA analysis from July 1978 reported that "a large number of political parties and at least two broad coalitions are reported to be plotting the overthrow of the Taraki government in Afghanistan."[15] By March 1979, the PDPA was facing armed opposition to its rule. An uprising broke out in Herat, during which Afghan army forces defected and Soviet advisers were killed.[16] In order to exacerbate the difficulties faced by the Soviet-aligned PDPA, on

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[11] Riedel, *What We Won*, 18.
[12] Memorandum for the Vice President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 12, 1979, 'Soviet-Afghan Relations,' in Folder 'Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 1–2.
[13] Joseph J. Collins, *Understanding War in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011), 26.
[14] Edwards, *Before Taliban*, 67–70.
[15] Intelligence Paper from CIA's National Foreign Assessment Center, Middle East and South Asia Weekly Review, Supplement 14 July 1978, in Folder 'Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 1.
[16] Riedel, *What We Won*, 18–19.

July 3, 1979 President Carter signed a covert action "finding" that authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to provide non-military support to "Afghan insurgents."[17] The CIA began to provide items such as medical equipment and radios to the Pakistani intelligence service—the ISI—which transferred the supplies to those insurgents.[18]

The second challenge to the consolidation of communist control in Afghanistan was the PDPA's internal divisions. After the Herat uprising, senior official Hafizullah Amin moved to exercise greater power over the regime, thereby sidelining Taraki.[19] In the fall of 1979, the Soviet general secretary, Leonid Brezhnev, gave Taraki approval to move against Amin.[20] However, Amin beat Taraki to the punch—in mid-September 1979, Amin deposed Taraki from power and then had him killed in October.[21] Having backed Taraki over Amin, Soviet leaders were understandably concerned about Amin's reliability as an ally.

On December 1, 1979, Soviet KGB chief Yuri Andropov wrote a memorandum to Brezhnev in which he emphasized the "danger of losing the gains made by the April [1978] revolution," because "the scale of insurgent attacks will increase by spring," while additionally "there is no guarantee that Amin, in order to protect his personal power, will not shift to the West."[22] Soviet leaders decided upon a large-scale invasion to replace Amin

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[17] Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, July 3, 1979, Folder 'Central Intelligence Agency Charter, 2/9 - 29/80,' Box 57, Lloyd N. Cutler's Files, Records of the White House Office of Counsel to the President, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[18] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 46.
[19] Riedel, *What We Won*, 19.
[20] Riedel, 19; Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 20.
[21] Riedel, *What We Won*, 19.
[22] Personal Memorandum from Andropov to Brezhnev Regarding the Situation in Afghanistan Following Amin's Coup, December 1, 1979, Available from the Wilson Center, Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113254.

as PDPA leader in an effort to shore up the Afghan regime. On December 24, 1979, Soviet forces began moving into Afghanistan. Three days later, Soviet special forces—Spetsnaz—killed Amin and installed Babrak Karmal as leader of Afghanistan. Shortly afterwards, two Red Army divisions invaded the country.[23] Soviet troops would spend the next decade there.

EXPLAINING AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE MUJAHEDIN

Presidential Assessment of American Interests

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan came at the end of a decade during which the United States had suffered a string of setbacks. In 1973, America had completed its withdrawal from Vietnam. Two years later, North Vietnam would seize all of South Vietnam, while communist governments took power in neighboring Laos and Cambodia. By the mid-1970s, the USSR had vastly improved its capacity to project military power compared with only a decade earlier.[24] At home, the United States suffered through energy crises, inflation, and the Watergate scandal. The year 1979 proved to be an especially bad one for the United States. In January, the Vietnamese Army had invaded Cambodia. The same month, Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution sent the American-aligned Shah of Iran into exile, thereby heralding the loss of a major country in the Middle East from the U.S.-aligned camp. In July, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) deposed another staunchly pro-American dictator, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, in Nicaragua. In early November, a group of hardline supporters of the Islamic revolution took 52 American

[23] Riedel, *What We Won*, 22–23.
[24] Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994), 155.

citizens hostage at the American embassy in Tehran. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan occurred 51 days later. After all of this, some analysts felt that the Soviet Union might be moving ahead in the Cold War competition.[25]

As well as exacerbating the prevailing sense that the United States was on the back foot globally, the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan moved Soviet military power closer to the Persian Gulf. That region contained vast oil supplies that were vital resources for the United States and the western world. In a memo written to President Carter one day after the Soviet invasion, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor, wrote that "we are now facing a regional crisis," underlining the phrase for emphasis. He elaborated that:

> Both Iran and Afghanistan are in turmoil, and Pakistan is both unstable internally and extremely apprehensive externally. If the Soviets succeed in Afghanistan, and if Pakistan acquiesces, the age-long dream of Moscow to have direct access to the Indian Ocean will have been fulfilled. Historically, the British provided the barrier to that drive and Afghanistan was their buffer state. We assumed that role in 1945, but the Iranian crisis has led to the collapse of the balance of power in Southwest Asia, and it could produce Soviet presence right down on the edge of the Arabian and Oman Gulfs.[26]

Brzezinski emphasized that "Pakistan, unless we somehow manage to project both confidence and power into the region, is likely to be intimidated, and it could eventually even acquiesce to some form of external Soviet domination."[27] At a National Security Council meeting on December 28, 1979, Vice President Mondale commented that the Soviet Union had turned "a traditional buffer state into a satellite," to which Brzezinski

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[25] Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (Harper Collins, 2009), 106.
[26] Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, December 26, 1979, 'Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,' in folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf - Afghanistan (12/26/79-1/4/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 17, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 1.
[27] Ibid., 2.

concurred and emphasized that Afghanistan had been "a buffer state that protected a tier of three states along the Indian Ocean" and that the Soviet move was therefore "a very dangerous step strategically."[28]

On January 2, 1980, Fritz Ermarth, who was part of the NSC team working on defense issues, wrote to Brzezinski with his assessment of how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan raised the risks of Soviet influence spreading across the Middle East, arguing that:

> Because it so illuminates the weight of Soviet land combat power in the north and Soviet willingness to use it in the most cynical way, the invasion sharply increases the prospect of eventual Soviet military domination of the greater Middle East and US exclusion from the region, except perhaps from Israel.[29]

President Carter agreed that the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan impinged upon the United States' strategic interests. In a television interview on December 31, 1979, President Carter described the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan as "one of the most serious actions that have been taken by the Soviet Union since the Second World War."[30] Among the issues raised by the Soviet action, Carter pointed to the threat it posed to the Persian Gulf region, stating that:

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[28] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, 'Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan,' in Folder "NSC-025, 12/28/79, Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan," Container 57, NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 4.
[29] Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Fritz Ermarth, January 2, 1980, in Raymond Garthoff Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan Collection, Box 1, Folder 'Soviet Reevaluation of 1979 Intervention Decision,' National Security Archive, Washington D.C.
[30] "Internal Transcript by Office of the White House Press Secretary, December 31, 1979, 'Interview with the President by Frank Reynolds, ABC News, The Oval Office, The White House,' in Folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf – Afghanistan (12/26/79-1/4/80), Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 17, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library," 7.

> The Soviets have long had their eyes on access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, and of course the two nations that stand in their way now, between Afghanistan and those warm waters, are Iran and Pakistan. Iran is a very troubled country. I think they have seen clearly now the threat that might be exerted against them by the Soviet Union, and of course Pakistan has the same awareness of the threat to them.[31]

The view of senior-level officials in the U.S. government was, in essence, that Afghanistan's strategic importance was not so much intrinsic to the country itself, but rather followed from its proximity to the Persian Gulf, in which the United States had vital interests. At the December 28, 1979 NSC meeting, General Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commented that "Afghanistan itself is a loss and of no particular help to the Soviets strategically," but added his view that the Soviets had entered Afghanistan because "they were obviously looking beyond it and to cause perceptions of their willingness to use power and are seeking a stepping stone."[32] A paper prepared for a Special Coordinating Committee meeting in February 1980 explicitly emphasized that the United States' strategic interests in Afghanistan were derived from its interests in the Persian Gulf. As the paper put it:

> The U.S. has specific vital interests in the Persian Gulf region around Afghanistan, and from these flow our interests in Afghanistan itself. These interests now, as in the past, make it important that Afghanistan be a neutral buffer state—limiting the extension of Soviet military and political force elsewhere in the area.[33]

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[31] Ibid., 6–7.

[32] Nevertheless, Secretaries Brown and Vance noted, in response, that the Soviet Union's motivations might have been more defensive than General Jones maintained. Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, 'Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan,' in Folder "NSC-025, 12/28/79, Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan," Container 57, NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 4.

[33] Paper on Neutralization of Afghanistan, Prepared for February 22, 1980 SCC Meeting, in Folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf (2/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Materials), Geographic Files, Container 15, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 4.

In his 1980 State of the Union speech, delivered one month after the Soviet invasion, President Carter emphasized the potential danger to the Persian Gulf region, exclaiming that:

> The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil.[34]

Carter went on to proclaim what became known as the Carter Doctrine, stating that:

> An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[35]

The United States had, in Carter's formulation, vital interests in the Persian Gulf and he had stated that he was willing to use military force to protect those interests. In light of that, in February 1980, President Carter announced that he was renewing draft registration in the United States, in order to enhance the nation's ability to undertake a rapid military mobilization in the event of a crisis.[36] Additionally, in March 1980 the United States' Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) became fully operational; it

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[34] Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project., January 23, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Jimmy Carter, "Selective Service Revitalization Statement on the Registration of Americans for the Draft," February 8, 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32906.

provided a means for the United States to project military power into the Persian Gulf, if needed, and was the forerunner to Central Command (CENTCOM).[37]

For President Carter, the United States had vital interests in the Persian Gulf. The United States' interests in Afghanistan were important, but they were not vital; they derived from Afghanistan's proximity to the Persian Gulf. President Carter looked for ways to promote those moderate interests and the obvious way to do so was to assist the Afghan resistance, which had existed prior to the Soviet invasion and for whom Carter had authorized non-lethal American aid in July 1979.

Presidential Assessment: Would Supporting the Afghan Mujahedin be (1) Likely to further U.S. Interests and (2) Was it Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals?

The day after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Zbigniew Brzezinski sent President Carter a memo in which he alluded to the potential opportunity to inflict a major defeat on the USSR, giving one section of his memo a striking title: "A Soviet Vietnam?" Nevertheless, he emphasized that "we should not be too sanguine about Afghanistan becoming a Soviet Vietnam," not least because "the guerrillas are badly organized and poorly led." In spite of that, Brzezinski argued that:

> It is essential that Afghanistani resistance continues. This means more money as well as arms shipments to the rebels, and some technical advice.[38]

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[37] Henrik Bliddal, *Reforming Military Command Arrangements: The Case of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force:* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011).

[38] All the quotes are from Memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter, December 26, 1979, 'Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,' in Folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf - Afghanistan (12/26/79-1/4/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 17, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library," 2–3.

The minutes of the December 28, 1979 meeting indicate that President Carter questioned his national security team about whether American support to the Afghan rebels was necessary to cause difficulties for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Brzezinski indicated that it was. As the minutes of that meeting state:

> The President noted that news analyses said the Soviets would have little hope of putting down the rebellion even if they moved in the 50,000 troops on the Soviet border. Dr. Brzezinski said he had a different view. If we do nothing to help the rebels, then the psychological impact—both on the Pakistanis and on the Afghans—of isolation could be quite adverse and dry up support for their insurgency.[39]

Admiral Turner, the CIA director, told the meeting that American aid to the insurgents would be important to ensure they had the weapons to fight the Soviet troops and the Afghan regime; Turner reported that they might not be able to count on continuing desertions from Afghan regime forces to provide them with weaponry. The secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, emphasized that the rebels, while outmatched militarily, could "make it costly for the Soviet Union."[40] That was an important consideration for Carter's national security team. Even if the Afghan rebels could not win—and as Secretary of Defense Harold Brown stressed at the NSC meeting it looked as though "they would not have any prospect of being able to take over the government"—they could impose costs on the Soviet Union. That could serve U.S. interests by helping to deter any further military expansion by the USSR towards the Persian Gulf, in the event that the Soviet leadership

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[39] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, 'Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan,' in Folder "NSC-025, 12/28/79, Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan," Container 57, NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 3.
[40] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, 'Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan,' in Folder "NSC-025, 12/28/79, Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan," Container 57, NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 3.

ever considered that. As Brzezinski wrote to Carter in early January 1980, American military assistance to the Afghan rebels would help "to keep the Soviets bogged down."[41]

President Carter was also of the view that the Soviet Union's actions violated a cardinal ideal—that of self-determination. Shortly after the invasion, President Carter sent a message to Soviet leader Brezhnev in which he castigated the USSR and stated that:

> My government can in no way accept the Soviet Government's explanation, conveyed to Ambassador Watson [U.S. Ambassador in Moscow] on December 27, that Soviet military forces were sent into Afghanistan at the request of the leadership of that country. The facts of the matter clearly show that these same Soviet forces were employed to overthrow the established Government of Afghanistan and to impose a new government, which has brutally executed the former President and, reportedly, his family.[42]

The Soviet leader replied to Carter the same day. Towards the end of his message, Brezhnev said that "the American side could make its contribution toward ending the armed incursion from without into Afghanistan territory." Next to this point, Carter handwrote a retort in the margin, which stated that "the only incursion is from the SU [Soviet Union]."[43]

In a televised address on January 4, 1980, Carter described Afghanistan as having become "an occupied satellite of the Soviet Union" and characterized the Soviet invasion

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[41] Memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski to The President, January 3, 1980, 'Strategic Reaction to the Afghanistan Problem,' in Folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf - Afghanistan (12/26/79-1/4/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 17, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 2.

[42] Hotline Message from President Jimmy Carter to Soviet General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev, December 29 1979, Text Available in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume VI, Soviet Union, Document 248, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v06/d248.

[43] Letter from Chairman Leonid Brezhnev to President Carter, 29 December 1979 [with President Carter's Annotations], in Folder 'U.S.S.R. - Carter/Brezhnev Correspondence (9/79-2/80),' Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 18, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 4.

as a "deliberate effort of a powerful atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic people."[44] In his State of the Union address in January 1980, Carter emphasized that "massive Soviet troops are attempting to subjugate the fiercely independent and deeply religious people of Afghanistan" and spoke of the occupation as the "latest Soviet attempt to extend its colonial domination of others."[45]

It was not just the American president who viewed the Soviet invasion as a clear violation of Afghan self-determination. Soviet claims that they had been invited into Afghanistan were received incredulously at the United Nations. The General Assembly passed a resolution to condemn the Soviet action by 104 votes to 18 against, with a further 18 abstentions.[46] American diplomat Peter Tomsen later described the scene at the UN that day:

> The Soviet delegation was repeatedly asked why the legitimate, internationally recognized president of Afghanistan would invite Soviet forces into the country in order to kill himself, murder the head of the Afghan Army, and shoot or arrest most of the Afghan cabinet members.[47]

Presidential Decision and Policy Objectives

President Carter quickly concluded that American military support to the Afghan resistance could serve U.S. interests. Since the Soviet Union had violated Afghan self-determination, the president could also defend the decision in terms of an important

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[44] Jimmy Carter, "Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, January 4, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32911.
[45] Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project., January 23, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079.
[46] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 55.
[47] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:204.

American ideal. Only days after Soviet troops entered Afghanistan, Carter signed a covert action finding, which authorized the CIA to:

> Provide lethal military equipment either directly or through third countries to the Afghan opponents of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Provide selective training, conducted outside of Afghanistan, in the use of such equipment either directly or via third country intermediaries.[48]

The initial tranche of American-provided weaponry to reach the mujahedin arrived in Pakistan during January 1980.[49] Over the course of the following year, the CIA provided between $20 and $30 million in support.[50] Initially, the weaponry furnished to the rebels was non-U.S. made and basic—it included the Lee Enfield rifle, which was an out-of-date British weapon, and Soviet-designed RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers, which the CIA sourced from Egypt and China.[51] The United States provided non-U.S. weapons because doing so offered "plausible deniability" regarding the United States' role in supporting the mujahedin.[52]

When President Carter's National Security Council had met on December 28, 1979, the following exchange took place regarding the United States' policy objectives, according to the meeting's minutes:

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[48] 'Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, As Amended, Concerning the Operations in Foreign Countries Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection,' in Folder 'Meetings - SCC 240, 12/28/79,' Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Subject Files, Container 31, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[49] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 45.
[50] Scott, 34.
[51] Martin Pegler, *The Lee-Enfield Rifle* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 4; Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 58.
[52] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), 103.

> Mr. [Jody] Powell [White House Press Secretary] asked what our ultimate aim was in the Afghan situation. The President replied to get the Soviets to withdraw. The Secretaries of State and Defense and Dr. Brzezinski said it was to make it as costly as possible for the Soviets. Secretary Brown [the Secretary of Defense] added that we want to use the issue as a rallying point for our policies in the area. The President concluded that our maximum goal, however, was to get the Soviets out. Mr. Powell noted that this, however, was not likely to be successful.[53]

President Carter had indicated that the United States' ultimate goal was a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The intermediate goal, however, would be to help the mujahedin make the Soviet occupation as costly as possible. Howard Hart, who became the CIA's chief of station in Pakistan in May 1981—from where he would run the program—later recounted to Steve Coll how he understood his operational orders regarding aid to the mujahedin. Hart said he understood the mission was to "go raise hell" for the Soviets.[54]

The Carter Administration's Establishment of the CIA Program to Aid the Mujahedin

Following President Carter's authorization, the United States quickly established a partnership with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) to provide aid to the mujahedin fighters. The United States cooperated closely with Pakistan to aid the rebels for a simple reason: geography. There were only 3 major land routes into Afghanistan: from the Soviet Union, from Iran, and from Pakistan.[55] Obviously, the CIA could not reach

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[53] Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, 'Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan,' in Folder "NSC-025, 12/28/79, Iran/Afghanistan, Pakistan," Container 57, NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library."
[54] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 53–55.
[55] Charles G. Cogan, "Partners in Time: The CIA and Afghanistan since 1979," *World Policy Journal* 10, no. 2 (1993): 79.

Afghanistan through the USSR. Iran was also not a viable option because the 1979 Islamic Revolution had made it an adversary of the United States. The only viable land option was Pakistan. That country had a huge geopolitical interest in countering the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan's mortal enemy, India, was aligned with the Soviet Union. Pakistan thus faced hostile forces to both its north and south. Bruce Riedel recounts that President Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan and his intelligence chief, Akhtar Abdur Rahman, insisted on the following arrangement for how Pakistan and the United States would work together to assist the mujahedin:

> All training of the insurgents was done by Pakistani soldiers. If the CIA provided equipment that required special training (like the Stinger missiles), CIA personnel trained Pakistanis, who in turn trained the mujahedin.[56]

Riedel emphasizes that, throughout the 1980s, the United States did not deploy American personnel into Afghanistan to train, advise, or liaise with the mujahedin.[57] In addition to Pakistan, the United States also worked with a coalition of other states to help the mujahedin, notably including Saudi Arabia—which provided considerable funds to assist the rebellion—the United Kingdom, and China.[58]

By March 1980, the United States' Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimated that there were approximately 80,000 Soviet troops deployed in Afghanistan.[59] The initial Soviet military strategy retained Soviet troops in garrison and required the Afghan army to

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[56] Riedel, *What We Won*, 63.
[57] Riedel, xiii.
[58] For details on the support given to the mujahedin by these other states, see Riedel, 48–49, 56–73, 74–89, and 107.
[59] Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from The Situation Room, March 17, 1980, 'Noon Notes,' in Folder '3/11/80-3/20/80,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, President's Daily Report Files (NSA 1), Container 14, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

go on the offensive; nevertheless, the USSR found that it could not rely upon its Afghan partners.[60] By March 1980, Soviet forces were undertaking "full-scale operations" against the mujahedin.[61] The Soviet army also tried to close the Afghan-Pakistan border in order to stop materiel flowing to the resistance, but that proved to be an unachievable aim given the border's length and the rugged terrain.[62]

The United States' provision of arms to the mujahedin was reported in the media in February 1980, when the *Washington Post* published details about the effort.[63] In public, President Carter talked about the Afghan resistance in a way designed to emphasize that they were fighting for self-determination. In June 1980, Brzezinski made what he dubbed a "terminological suggestion" to the president. Brzezinski wrote to Carter that:

> You have rightly been very sensitive to the symbolic choice of words……Let me suggest that in the case of Afghanistan you make it a point to refer always to 'freedom fighters' and more generally to the 'national liberation struggle' of the Afghan people. The latter phrase will have special resonance in the Third World and it will be particularly awkward for the Soviets.[64]

Carter took Brzezinski's suggestion on board. Ten days later, Carter spoke of "our admiration for those freedom-fighters in Afghanistan who are seeking to liberate their country from the occupying forces."[65] President Carter also criticized the Soviet Union for

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[60] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 228.
[61] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 27.
[62] Kalinovsky, 38.
[63] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), 106.
[64] Memorandum for The President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, June 13, 1980, 'NSC Weekly Report #145,' in Folder "Weekly Reports (to the President), 136-150 (4/80-8/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Subject Files, Container 42, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[65] Jimmy Carter, "Venice Economic Summit Conference Exchange With Reporters Following the First Two Sessions." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The

the misery it inflicted on Afghanistan's population through its military occupation. By early February 1980, the United States government estimated that 20,000 Afghan refugees were flowing into Pakistan every day.[66] In a proclamation issued in June 1980, President Carter stated that:

> Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been forced to flee their country. They have fled because their homes have been bombed, their crops and flocks have been destroyed, and their villages have been attacked with rockets, napalm, and other modern weaponry.[67]

Although President Carter could characterize the mujahedin's rebellion as one for self-determination, and one being waged against an occupying army employing brutal tactics, the mujahedin were clearly not ideological allies of the United States. In February 1980, Tom Thornton, who served on the NSC staff, wrote to Brzezinski with what would turn out to be a very prescient warning:

> We should be careful in implying blank endorsement to the Muslim forces in Afghanistan. First off, some of the groups are obscurantist at best; most of them are quite literally reactionary. They have some noble aspects and nobody who hates Russians can be all bad; nonetheless, they tend to be a pretty ugly bunch. I shudder to think of the human rights problems we would face if they came to power.[68]

American Presidency Project, June 22, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44644.

[66] Memorandum for David Aaron from the Situation Room, Additional Information Items, February 4, 1980, in Folder '2/1/80-2/10/80,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, President's Daily Report Files (NSA 1), Container 14, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

[67] Jimmy Carter, "Proclamation 4765—Afghanistan Relief Week." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project., June 19, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44615.

[68] Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Tom Thornton, February 26, 1980, 'Afghan Muslims,' in Folder 'Afghanistan, 2/80,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

At the bottom of the memo, Brzezinski scrawled a reply. It read: "That's hardly the issue right now. The pr. [priority] is to mobilize Moslem forces there & elsewhere."[69] Brzezinski, like many other American policymakers during the 1980s, thought it was worth working with the mujahedin movement, in spite of their ideological center of gravity, because of their usefulness in fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. There was an ideological defense that could be offered by American policymakers in support of aiding the mujahedin, but it was grounded in self-determination rather than the ideological character of the rebels.

The overarching political leadership of the mujahedin was based in Peshawar, Pakistan. It was organized into seven parties. As Scott describes, the exile parties included two broad factions: (1) the "traditionalist group," which sought to return to the pre-1973 Afghan system of "local autonomy" and "weak central government"; and (2) the Islamist parties, who were "committed to a state based on Islamic law and institutions."[70] The seven parties, their leaders, and their ideological orientation are provided in Figure 4.

[69] Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Tom Thornton, February 26, 1980, 'Afghan Muslims,' in Folder 'Afghanistan, 2/80,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Container 1, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library."
[70] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 42.

Party Name	Leader	Ideological Beliefs
Hezb-i Islami Gulbuddin	Gulbuddin Hekmatyar	Islamist
Hezb-i Islami Khalis	Yunus Khalis	Islamist
Ittehad	Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf	Islamist
Jamiat Islami	Burhanuddin Rabbani	Islamist
Mahaz	Sayyid Gailani	Traditionalist
Jebha	Sibghatullah Mojaddedi	Traditionalist
Harakat	Nabi Mohammadi	Traditionalist

Figure 4: The 7 Exile Political Parties of the Mujahedin Movement
Sources: Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan,* page 304, and James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene,* page 42.

The CIA provided aid destined for the mujahedin to Pakistan's ISI, which in turn provided it to members of the exile alliance. The seven parties acted as intermediaries, passing materiel onto the commanders on the ground, but in many cases mujahedin field commanders acted with considerable autonomy.[71] For example, one of the most effective and famous commanders in Afghanistan was Ahmad Shah Massoud, a Tajik, who earned the sobriquet "Lion of the Panjsher" for his success in making the strategically-critical Panjsher Valley dangerous terrain for Soviet forces. During the Soviet occupation, Massoud received only small-scale support from the CIA and ISI. The Pakistani intelligence agency preferred to provide aid to Pashtun leaders with more radical Islamist beliefs; their favorite was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.[72]

[71] Scott, 41–42.
[72] Riedel explains that Massoud did receive assistance from the United Kingdom. All of the details about Massoud are from Bruce Riedel, *What We Won*, 46–48.

President Reagan's Assessments that Aiding the Mujahedin Could Serve U.S. Interests and be Defended in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals

Following his defeat to Ronald Reagan in the November 1980 presidential election, President Carter left office only a little over a year after having authorized support to the mujahedin. Upon entering office, the Reagan administration decided to continue operating under the same covert action finding that had been signed by President Carter.[73] President Reagan, like Carter, assessed that aid to the mujahedin could promote American interests and was defensible in terms of American ideals. The Reagan administration came to office with serious concerns about the international gains that the Soviet Union had made during the 1970s. The administration's first national security strategy, which was written in April 1982 and was not released publicly, stated that it would be an American objective to "contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world."[74] It also stressed that among the "most severe dangers" to American interests in the Middle East was the possibility that "Iran might succumb to increased Soviet influence and large-scale military intervention."[75] Of course, the USSR's potential ability to wield influence in Iran was enhanced by its large-scale presence in neighboring Afghanistan. Later, the document emphasized that Soviet control of the Persian Gulf's oil supplies would give the Soviets a "strangle hold over the West."[76]

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[73] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 47.
[74] U.S. National Security Strategy, April 1982, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, i.
[75] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, iii.
[76] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 3 & 17.

President Reagan would also emphasize the legitimacy of the mujahedin's war by emphasizing that they were fighting for self-determination. In a television interview on March 9, 1981, Reagan was asked by the interviewer about American support for the Afghan "rebels." The president objected to the use of that term, saying that:

> You've used the term 'Afghan rebels' and sometimes I think the Soviet Union has been successful in their propaganda with getting us to use terms that semantically are incorrect. Those are freedom fighters. Those are people fighting for their own country and not wanting to become a satellite state of the Soviet Union, which came in and established a government of its choosing there, without regard to the feelings of the Afghans.[77]

As Carter had done, Reagan also excoriated the Soviet Union for the misery it was causing in Afghanistan. In a speech in April 1982, President Reagan exclaimed that:

> We will not remain silent when, in Afghanistan, yellow rain is dropped on innocent people, solemn agreements are flagrantly broken, and Soviet helicopters drop thousands of 'butterfly' mines which maim and blind Afghan children who pick them up thinking they're toys.[78]

By early 1982, the CIA reported that Soviet officials recognized that "the USSR faces major problems in Afghanistan."[79] In the summer of that year, the Reagan administration launched an interagency review of American policy towards the Soviet Union. The resulting study argued that American policy toward the Soviet Union must

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[77] Howell Raines, "Reagan Hinting at Arms for Afghan Rebels," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1981, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/10/world/reagan-hinting-at-arms-for-afghan-rebels.html.

[78] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the National Legislative Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO." Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project., April 5, 1982, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42368.

[79] Special National Intelligence Estimate, 5 January 1982, CIA, 'Soviet Short-Term Options in South Asia,' Available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 37, Folder 'CIA: End of USSR Estimates,' The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., 4.

include "an ideological thrust."[80] Among the elements of this, the study stressed the importance of promoting self-determination, arguing that "the U.S. must insist as a matter of principle that every country in the world, Communist and non-Communist alike, be free to change its system at any time in accord with the desires of its people."[81] The same study described Afghanistan as "a significant vulnerability in the Soviet empire" and described the global stakes associated with the conflict:

> Moscow's imperial reach has bogged Soviet forces down in a stalemated struggle to suppress the Afghan resistance. A real exercise of self-determination by the Afghan people and a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan would be perceived as a major foreign policy defeat for the Soviet Union and thus might well increase the likelihood that other Third World countries would resist Soviet pressures.[82]

During the early 1980s, however, the Reagan administration, similar to the Carter administration, construed the immediate aim associated with aiding the mujahedin to be imposing costs on the USSR, while actually achieving a Soviet withdrawal was the longer-term goal.[83]

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[80] Response to NSSD 11-82, U.S. Relations with the USSR, December 6, 1982, Folder 'NSDD 75 [2 of 4], U.S. Relations with the USSR' Box OA 91287, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 30.
[81] Response to NSSD 11-82, U.S. Relations with the USSR, December 6, 1982, Folder 'NSDD 75 [2 of 4], U.S. Relations with the USSR' Box OA 91287, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 31.
[82] Response to NSSD 11-82, U.S. Relations with the USSR, December 6, 1982, Folder 'NSDD 75 [2 of 4], U.S. Relations with the USSR' Box OA 91287, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 35.
[83] This is clear from NSDD-75. See National Security Decision Directive 75, U.S. Relations With The USSR, January 17, 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4, https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD75.pdf.

Degree of Consensus in Congress that Supporting the Mujahedin was Likely to Serve U.S. Interests and was Defensible in terms of American Ideals

There was a high degree of consensus in Congress that aiding the mujahedin could serve U.S. interests and that the rebellion could be defended in terms of the ideal of self-determination. On March 4, 1982, the House of Representatives passed a resolution to request that the president issue a proclamation to designate March 21—the Afghan new year—as "Afghanistan Day," in order to "commemorate the struggle of the people of Afghanistan against the occupation of their country by Soviet forces."[84] The resolution passed by 346 votes to 0, with 88 abstentions.[85]

Among the members who spoke on the House resolution of March 4, 1982 were two prominent critics of the Reagan administration's aid to the Nicaraguan contras—Representative Stephen Solarz, a Democrat from New York, and Representative Clement Zablocki, a Democrat from Wisconsin and the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Solarz exclaimed that, "what you have in Afghanistan is a nation in arms which has risen up as if it were one against a colonial oppressor." Solarz was echoing John Stuart Mill's language about the justifiability of supporting a "people in arms for liberty" if they were "struggling against a foreign yoke."[86] Solarz also emphasized the United States' strategic interest in supporting the Afghan insurgency, arguing that:

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[84] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), March 4, 1982, 3240, Statement by Mr. Garcia.
[85] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3249.
[86] John Stuart Mill, "A Few Words on Non-Intervention (Originally Published in Fraser's Magazine, December 1859)," *New England Review (1990-)* 27, no. 3 (2006): 252–64.

> The fact of the matter is that the fight of the mujahedin in the most profound sense of the term is our fight as well, because if the Soviet Union ever comes to the conclusion that they can gobble up sovereign nations without paying a significant political and military price for it, then any country will be fair game for the Red army. And so long as the mujahedin, the freedom fighters, the people of Afghanistan, continue to resist, we have a fundamental interest in lending them at the very least our moral support. I think the viability of this resistance, the effectiveness of this insurgency, can be significantly aided by the moral support which we are prepared to give it.[87]

Zablocki stressed the mujahedin's legitimacy by saying that the Afghan people were "living and suffering under the oppression of their homeland, but the spark of independence and freedom has not been extinguished."[88] Democratic Congressman Tom Lantos—who would co-found the Congressional Human Rights Caucus the following year[89]—also excoriated the Soviets for their actions in Afghanistan and described "Soviet imperialism" as "the principal threat to peace on this tiny planet."[90] Representative Jim Leach of Iowa, a Republican member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, argued that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was "a fundamental attack upon the humanitarian principles valued by all civilized nations" and he cited a litany of abuses committed by Soviet forces.[91] Leach was another opponent of the Reagan administration's backing for

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[87] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3247, Statement by Rep. Solarz.
[88] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3248, Statement of Rep. Zablocki.
[89] David M. Herszenhorn, "Tom Lantos, 80, Is Dead; Longtime Congressman," *The New York Times*, February 12, 2008, sec. Washington, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/12/washington/12lantos.html; "History," Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, December 19, 2013, https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/about/history.
[90] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3247, Statement of Rep. Lantos.
[91] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3242, Statement by Rep. Leach.

the contra rebels in Nicaragua. Representative Edward Derwinski, a Republican from Illinois, entered a written statement into the Congressional Record for the same debate, stressing that "no element of Afghan society has been spared the effects of Soviet barbarism and ruthlessness."[92]

Later that year, Democratic Senator Paul Tsongas, a liberal from Massachusetts, introduced a resolution that called for U.S. policy to "provide the people of Afghanistan, if they so request, with material assistance, as the U.S. considers appropriate, to help them fight effectively for their freedom."[93] The text of Tsongas's resolution stressed the strategic challenge posed by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, noting that "the Soviet airbases in southwest Afghanistan present an unacceptable threat to the Hormuz oil passage lanes which are so vital to the free world's economies."[94] Additionally, Tsongas argued that American support for the mujahedin was justifiable because of the popular support enjoyed by the movement. He exclaimed that:

> The puppet government of Babrak Karmal is isolated in Kabul from its own people. The Afghan Army is little more than a training program for future defectors to the mujahedin. By all accounts, 95 percent of the Afghans support the resistance. By all standards of morality and international law, the Soviets are clearly in the wrong and the Afghan resistance is clearly in the right.[95]

By this point in time, Tsongas was an opponent of American support to the rebels

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[92] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 3 (March 2, 1982 to March 11, 1982), 3248, Statement by Rep. Derwinski.
[93] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 19 (September 28, 1982 to September 30, 1982), September 30, 1982, 26665, Statement by Senator Tsongas.
[94] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 19 (September 28, 1982 to September 30, 1982), 26665.
[95] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 19 (September 28, 1982 to September 30, 1982), 26666, Statement by Senator Tsongas.

in Nicaragua.[96] Nevertheless, he was willing to back the Afghan rebels because they were defenders of their homeland enjoying popular support from their compatriots. The overwhelming and bipartisan support for aiding the mujahedin was reflected in the fact that Tsongas's resolution was co-sponsored by 98 members of the Senate.[97]

In contrast to what occurred regarding Nicaragua—as will be explored in the next chapter—there was virtually no opposition in Congress to the United States' support to the mujahedin. That reflected both the nation's strategic interests and the fact that American policymakers could justify support to the Afghan rebels as helping a movement fight for self-determination against an occupying army. Rather than acting as a check on the executive branch's provision of aid to the mujahedin, Congress was pushing the administration to do more to aid the rebels. Both the Carter administration, and the Reagan administration during the first half of the 1980s, were cautious about how quickly they increased American support to the mujahedin. That was not because of a Congressional constraint—as the Tsongas resolution demonstrated, congressional pressures were pushing in the other direction. Instead, it was because of a prudential constraint; the United States was wary of provoking a severe Soviet response against Pakistan, which was providing sanctuary to the mujahedin and was the conduit for American aid to the rebels.

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[96] Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 217.
[97] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 19 (September 28, 1982 to September 30, 1982), 26666.

The Early 1980s: No Congressional Constraint, but a Prudential Constraint

In weighing the risks of supporting the mujahedin, American officials were not seriously concerned that the USSR would respond with military action against the United States. After all, that would have represented a huge escalation, which would have imposed costs on both sides far greater than the costs the Soviet Union was suffering in Afghanistan. As Austin Carson describes in detail, the principal risk foreseen by American policymakers was that the USSR would escalate against Pakistan in an effort to end that country's support for the insurgency.[98] Days after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the State Department put together a paper to review various American policy options. Under the option to "supply insurgents" it listed one pro and one con:

> Pro: Increase casualties, costs to Soviets of occupation of Afghanistan. Con: Risk of Soviet retaliation against Pakistan.[99]

A January 1980 intelligence assessment stated that "if Moscow thought President Zia was about to decide to increase support for the rebels, the Soviets might undertake a military action against Afghan targets in Pakistan to indicate the danger of such a course."[100] At a meeting the same month, reflecting these concerns, Brzezinski commented

[98] Austin Matthews Carson, "Secrecy, Acknowledgement, and War Escalation: A Study in Covert Competition" (The Ohio State University, 2013), 339–49.
[99] Department of State Paper, December 31, 1979, 'U.S. Soviet Relations and Afghanistan, Possible U.S. Actions,' Pages 19-20, in Folder "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf - Afghanistan (12/26/79-1/4/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Material), Geographic Files, Container 17, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[100] Intelligence Memorandum, January 1980, 'The Afghan Insurgents and Pakistan: Problems for Islamabad and Moscow,' Produced by the CIA's National Foreign Assessment Center," 3, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000600140008-6.pdf.

that "a massive insurgency at present is probably not in our best interest."[101] Any large-scale Soviet military action against Pakistan risked embroiling the United States in a serious conflict because the United States had publicly indicated its commitment to defending Pakistan against Soviet aggression.[102]

A CIA analysis produced in July 1980 noted that Soviet helicopters had launched air strikes at insurgents on Pakistani territory and cited reports that there had been "at least three Soviet-Afghan ground incursions into Pakistan."[103] The assessment warned that the "introduction of new weapons in insurgent hands" might lead the Soviets to "escalate covert actions and subversive action against Pakistan and engage in more cross border air or ground operations."[104] By the summer of 1980, with the Soviet Union finding its occupation of Afghanistan tougher than expected, senior levels of the U.S. intelligence community did not assign a high probability to the USSR launching a major ground attack against Pakistan. Nevertheless, the risk of lesser Soviet measures against Pakistan was real. As Stansfield Turner, the CIA Director, reported to a policy meeting in July 1980, "the

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[101] Summary of Conclusions, Special Coordination Committee Meeting, Thursday January 17, 1980, in Folder 'Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf (1/80),' Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Materials), Geographic Files, Container 15, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 8.

[102] On December 30, 1979, Zbigniew Brzezinski said in a television interview that the U.S. was committed to defending Pakistan from Soviet aggression. When Brzezinski and Secretary of State Warren Christopher traveled to Pakistan in early 1980 they reiterated that commitment. See Riedel, *What We Won*, 106.

[103] Intelligence Community Paper, 14 July 1980, 'Soviet Intentions Vis-a-Vis Pakistan,' in Folder 'PRC 144 - Pakistan, 7/17/80,' NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Box 80, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

[104] Intelligence Community Paper, 14 July 1980, 'Soviet Intentions Vis-a-Vis Pakistan,' in Folder 'PRC 144 - Pakistan, 7/17/80,' NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Box 80, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library."

likelihood of intense Soviet pressure on Pakistan is very high; a major ground force attack is not a very likely case."[105]

That possibility bred caution in the Carter administration, and subsequently in the Reagan administration, about how quickly to intensify support for the mujahedin. There was no congressional constraint on expanding aid to the mujahedin, but the executive branch wanted to tread more carefully than some in Congress advocated. Neither the Carter nor Reagan administrations were opposed to upping the ante in principle. The Carter administration managed the risks by limiting the scale of American support and designing it in order to provide "plausible deniability." By only supplying non-American-made weapons, U.S. policymakers could officially deny that the United States had a hand in backing the Afghan insurgents.[106] As Austin Carson writes:

> Even though the general program was an "open secret" to all, American leaders believed a veneer of deniability kept political space for Soviet leaders to tolerate rather than retaliate.[107]

In January 1982, one year into the Reagan administration, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) warned that the Soviets were "likely to intensify pressure on Pakistan during the next year, stepping up cross-border operations and, possibly, increasing assistance to internal Pakistani groups opposed to President Zia."[108] Similar to the Carter administration, the Reagan administration judged that the United States could provide

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[105] Policy Review Committee meeting, July 17, 1980, Minutes -- PRC Meeting on Pakistan, Folder 'PRC 144 - Pakistan, 7/17/80,' NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Container 80, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[106] Riedel, *What We Won*, 103.
[107] Carson, "Secrecy, Acknowledgement, and War Escalation," 348.
[108] Special National Intelligence Estimate, 5 January 1982, CIA, 'Soviet Short-Term Options in South Asia,' Available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 37, Folder 'CIA: End of USSR Estimates,' The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., 2.

military assistance to the mujahedin while managing the risks of Soviet action against Pakistan. Managing that risk was one reason why, during its early years, the Reagan administration continued providing only limited levels of assistance to the mujahedin.[109] Reagan's CIA Director, Bill Casey, traveled to Pakistan to meet with Pakistan's president, Zia ul-Haq, in April 1982. Casey concluded that the program of support to the mujahedin was going well and did not require any significant changes at that time.[110] From then on, Casey periodically visited Zia to discuss the mujahedin's war. In late 1982, Zia used an expression in his conversation with Casey that the Pakistani leader would repeat frequently over the following years—the aim was "to keep the pot boiling, but not boil over."[111] As Alan Kuperman recounts, in August 1983 the mujahedin first requested sophisticated air defense weapons to help them counter Soviet airpower, but at that time Zia ul-Haq did not want the mujahedin to receive American-made weaponry because of his concern about a Soviet response against Pakistan.[112]

The prudential constraint meant that American support to the mujahedin began as a limited program and grew gradually in a series of incremental shifts; all of the weaponry provided before 1985 was non-American-made. Nevertheless, there was a high degree of consensus in Congress that aiding the mujahedin would serve U.S. interests and was defensible in terms of a fundamental American ideal: self-determination. Consequently,

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[109] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 47.
[110] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), 113; Bruce Riedel, Conservation with Author, November 21, 2017.
[111] Robert Michael Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, vol. 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 252.
[112] Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 2 (1999): 222.

while managing the risks of an unwanted escalation, the Reagan administration had the domestic latitude to support the mujahedin in a patient and sustained war of attrition against the Soviet Union. We now turn to an examination of how that war of attrition unfolded and to an evaluation of the effectiveness of American support to the mujahedin.

The Evolution of American Assistance to the Mujahedin and an Evaluation of its Effectiveness

The United States provided military assistance to the mujahedin from shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan until December 1991. The nature of American assistance evolved across three major periods. Between 1979 and 1984, the United States provided increasingly greater amounts of light weaponry and associated supplies, none of them American-made. Between 1985 and February 1989, the United States provided very large quantities of assistance, including American-manufactured, high-technology arms such as the Stinger anti-aircraft missile. Finally, between February 1989 and December 1991, after Soviet ground forces had withdrawn, the United States continued to provide military assistance to the mujahedin but in decreasing quantities until it ceased all support on December 31, 1991. These evolutions are summarized in Figure 5.

Period	Year	Total Military Assistance (In Nominal Dollars)	Types of Weaponry Provided and American Objectives
Period 1	**1980**	$20-30 million	Basic weapons, e.g. Lee Enfield Rifles. Short-term goal was to impose costs on the USSR. Long-term goal was a Soviet withdrawal.
	1981	$30 million.	
	1982	$40 million.	Heavier weapons provided, including mortars, grenade launchers, and recoilless rifles.
	1983	$80 million	
	1984	$130 million	
Period 2	**1985**	$450 million	Explicit goal set to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan.
	1986	$500 million	
	1987	$500 million.	
	1988	$350 million	
Period 3	**1989**	$350 million	Goal was to remove Najibullah from power and reach a settlement to the war.
	1990	$300 million	
	1991	$250 million Under the terms of a U.S.-Soviet agreement, all American military support to the mujahedin ended by December 31, 1991	

Figure 5: The evolution of American military assistance to the mujahedin, 1979-1991

Sources: James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene,* Pages 34-35 and 76, Bruce Riedel, *What We Won, and* Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars.*

The remainder of this section analyzes three issues. First, it examines how the United States was able to achieve its overarching aim of securing a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by helping the mujahedin to wage a war of attrition. Second, it considers the broader impact of the defeat in Afghanistan upon the Soviet Union. By adding to the USSR's burdens in the 1980s, the war in Afghanistan likely contributed to the Soviet Union's ultimate collapse, although it was not—by itself—decisive in that regard. Third, we examine the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which included Afghanistan's descent into a failed state and the emergence of new security threats for the United States.

Achieving a Soviet Withdrawal Through a War of Attrition

The war exhibited the cycle of action and counteraction by competing external powers that is a recurring dynamic in many civil wars. In this case, President Carter's decision to authorize military assistance to the mujahedin in late December 1979 was a counteraction to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Over the next decade, whenever the Soviet Union ratcheted up its military efforts in Afghanistan, or seemed to be making progress, the United States and its partners responded with greater aid to the mujahedin. Driven by a significant level of domestic consensus that aiding the mujahedin was in both the nation's interests, and defensible in terms of the ideal of self-determination, the United States helped the mujahedin to wage a war of attrition. The mujahedin's ability to sustain its struggle ultimately produced a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, thereby achieving the ultimate political objective that President Carter had articulated at the NSC meeting on December 28, 1979.

There were myriad reasons why the Soviet Union lost in Afghanistan. The Soviet army that invaded the country had been designed to fight a conventional war, rather than a counter-insurgency.[113] The mujahedin had a variety of advantages: extensive knowledge of the ground on which they fought; cover provided by mountainous terrain; and a decentralized structure that inhibited the ability of Soviet forces to deliver shattering blows by targeting particular commanders.[114] The mujahedin also enjoyed wide-ranging support from the Afghan population, a major advantage for an insurgency.

Even so, American support to the mujahedin contributed significantly to their military efforts. Four occasions, in particular, exemplify the dynamic of action and counteraction. First, in September 1981, with the war proving more difficult than anticipated, the Soviets sent a senior-level delegation to Kabul to assess the situation. As a result of that analysis, in November 1981 they began deploying some additional forces to the country.[115] As the Soviets bolstered their forces, some policymakers in the United States, notably in Congress, voiced concern that the United States and its partners were not doing enough to help the resistance. For example, in September 1982, when introducing his bill to increase American assistance to the mujahedin, Democratic Senator Paul Tsongas, argued that current American efforts were "not enough to tip the military scale in

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[113] Lester W. Grau, "Editor's Conclusion," in *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan (10th Anniversary Edition)*, ed. Lester W. Grau (Translator & Editor) (Foreign Military Studies Office, National Defense University Press, 2005), 198–99.

[114] For a good discussion of these various factors, see Lester W. Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali, "Conclusion," in *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War, 10th Anniversary Edition* (Quantico, Va.: U.S. Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division, 2005), 399–406.

[115] Special National Intelligence Estimate, 5 January 1982, CIA, "Soviet Short-Term Options in South Asia," available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 37, in folder 'CIA: End of USSR Estimates,' The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., 1.

the Afghans' favor."[116] When Senator Tsongas introduced his resolution, and most of the Senate co-sponsored it, that signaled substantial congressional support for furnishing additional American aid to the mujahedin. Several months later, in December 1982, President Reagan approved the provision of heavier weapons to the rebels.[117]

Second, Yuri Andropov, who became Soviet general secretary in November 1982 following the death of Leonid Brezhnev, emphasized to a Politburo meeting in March 1983 that the Soviet Union could not back down in Afghanistan precisely because the conflict had become a proxy contest with the United States. As Andropov told his colleagues:

> We are fighting against American imperialism which well understands that in this part of international politics it has lost its positions. That is why we cannot back off.[118]

In the latter half of 1983 Andropov would preside over an intensification of Soviet military efforts.[119] During that same period, Representative Charlie Wilson, inspired by the mujahedin's willingness to fight, leveraged his spot on the House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee to double CIA aid for the mujahedin—from $40 million to $80 million.[120] As Ivan Arreguín-Toft emphasizes, it was in 1983 that the Soviet Union fully adopted a counter-insurgency strategy that relied upon "barbarism," understood as the targeting of "an adversary's will by murdering, torturing, or incarcerating

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[116] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 50.
[117] Scott, 50.
[118] Minutes of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee Politburo Meeting, March 10, 1983, Available from Wilson Center, Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111597.
[119] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 239.
[120] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 52.

noncombatants."[121] In the mid-1980s, Jeri Laber and Barnett Rubin wrote in a report for the Helsinki Watch Committee—a non-governmental organization founded in 1979 to promote human rights—that the Soviet strategy in Afghanistan was "to spread terror in the countryside" so that Afghan villagers were either "afraid to assist the resistance fighters" or were "forced to leave."[122] Alex Bellamy later wrote that the Soviet Union unleashed "indiscriminate air power and artillery to terrorize the civilian population and drive them from their homes."[123] Bellamy estimates that, over the course of the entire occupation, "at least 500,000 Afghan civilians were killed by indiscriminate bombardment, shelling, booby traps, summary executions, and massacres perpetrated by the Soviet Union and that the actual number might be closer to 1 million."[124] As we will see below, the Soviet Union's scorched-earth counterinsurgency tactics reinforced the consensus in the United States that it was justifiable to assist the mujahedin.

Third, after Andropov's death in February 1984, Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko oversaw further escalations in military effort, including offensives involving up to 10,000 Soviet troops as well as the first uses of "carpet bombing."[125] Congressman Charlie Wilson used his position on the appropriations committee to increase aid to the mujahedin by another $50 million, bringing the budget for 1984 to approximately $130

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[121] Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations ; 99 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34 & 197–98.
[122] "Tears, Blood and Cries: Human Rights in Afghanistan Since the Invasion, 1979-1984," December 1984, A Helsinki Watch Report, Prepared by Jeri Laber (Helsinki Watch) and Barnett Rubin (Yale University), 7.
[123] Alex J. Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality: Mass Atrocities in an Age of Civilian Immunity*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 277.
[124] Bellamy, 278.
[125] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 243.

million.[126] A 1985 American Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) described the result on the ground:

> In 1984, the Soviets augmented their forces by a few thousand men and made other tactical and force adjustments designed to regain the military initiative. But the resistance, increasingly armed and trained from the outside, also continued to improve. The net result by the end of the year was that Soviet losses had increased and there had been no measurable improvement in the Afghan Government's position.[127]

Fourth, during 1985 and 1986 both the United States and the Soviet military intensified their military engagement in Afghanistan. By 1985, the Soviet Union's campaign against the mujahedin was stalemated. An American Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) stated that "many in the Soviet elite harbor doubts about the prospect of ultimate victory and the wisdom of the initial Soviet commitment."[128] Pakistan and the United States decided to exacerbate the Soviet Union's difficulties.[129] At the end of March 1985, the Reagan administration issued a new strategy document for Afghanistan, National Security Decision Directive-166, which stated that "the ultimate goal of our policy is the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of its independent status."[130] Although that was the ultimate aim, the document also stated that:

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[126] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 53.
[127] Special National Intelligence Estimate, March 1, 1985, CIA, 'Soviet Problems, Prospects, and Options in Afghanistan in the Next Year,' Available from CIA CREST Database, 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005564717.pdf.
[128] Special National Intelligence Estimate, March 1, 1985, CIA, 'Soviet Problems, Prospects, and Options in Afghanistan in the Next Year,' Available from CIA CREST Database, 1.
[129] Bruce Riedel stresses that the President of Pakistan, Zia ul-Haq, made the decision to escalate and the United States followed his lead. See Riedel, *What We Won*, xiii & 118.
[130] National Security Decision Directive 166, March 27, 1985, U.S. Policy, Programs and Strategy in Afghanistan, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.

> In the mid term (1985-1990), the U.S. will pursue interim objectives which will, if achieved, bring us closer to our ultimate goal. Achieving these interim objectives will be in the U.S. national interest, regardless of the ultimate outcome of the struggle in Afghanistan.[131]

That choice of language made clear that the Reagan administration did not, in March 1985, envisage that a Soviet withdrawal before the end of the decade was a likely scenario. In conjunction with the new strategy document, the administration dramatically expanded American military support to the mujahedin. It requested authorization from Congress for over $450 million in support to the rebels for the next fiscal year and provided myriad new capabilities to them, including secure communications equipment.[132] The CIA also began providing " satellite imagery of Soviet targets" to the mujahedin and other intelligence on Soviet forces.[133]

Also in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union following the death of Chernenko. Shortly afterwards, Gorbachev told the communist leader of Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal, that "Soviet troops cannot stay in Afghanistan forever."[134] During the summer of 1985, it was apparent to Soviet officials who discussed Afghanistan with Gorbachev that he wanted to chart a path to withdrawal.[135] In October

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[131] National Security Decision Directive 166, March 27, 1985, U.S. Policy, Programs and Strategy in Afghanistan, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.
[132] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 59.
[133] Abigail T. Linnington, "Unconventional Warfare in U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S. Support of Insurgencies in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Iraq from 1979-2001" (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University), 2013), 112–13.
[134] Memorandum of Mikhail Gorbachev's Conversation with Babrak Karmal, March 14, 1985, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB272/.
[135] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 83.

1985, Gorbachev told the Politburo that the Soviet Union had to take actions that would "in a very brief time lead to our withdrawal from Afghanistan."[136]

Although Gorbachev wanted to extricate the USSR from Afghanistan, he was not prepared to simply cut-and-run. He was understandably anxious to leave behind a situation that represented the best possible outcome still attainable and was concerned about Soviet credibility in the eyes of his country's other allies, such as India. As Gorbachev described the matter to the Politburo as late as February 1987:

> We could leave quickly, not thinking about anything and making reference to everything which the previous leadership started. But we can't act that way. India would be concerned, and they would be concerned in Africa. They think this would be a blow to the authority of the Soviet Union in the national liberation movement. And they tell us that imperialism will go on the offensive if you flee from Afghanistan.[137]

Artemy Kalinovsky describes how Gorbachev wanted to achieve at least three major things as part of a Soviet withdrawal: to secure an agreement to end outside support to the mujahedin; to achieve some type of "international recognition" of Afghanistan's regime; and to leave the PDPA government strong enough that it could survive without Soviet troops.[138] Gorbachev attempted to bolster the Kabul regime by deposing Karmal and making Mohammad Najib the new president of Afghanistan.[139] He implored Najib—who later added the suffix "ullah" to his name in order to convey religiosity—to undertake a program of "National Reconciliation," which involved trying to turn some opponents of

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[136] Kalinovsky, 84.
[137] Notes from Politburo Meeting, 23 February 1987 (Excerpt), Available from Wilson Center Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117235.
[138] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 93.
[139] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:224–25.

the regime into supporters.[140] In pursuit of a diplomatic agreement that would grant some international recognition to the PDPA and might secure an end to outside aid to the mujahedin, during 1986 the Soviet Union re-engaged with a UN negotiating process related to Afghanistan.[141]

Additionally, during the initial two years of Gorbachev's leadership—1985 and 1986—the Red Army intensified its combat operations against the mujahedin.[142] Odd Arne Westad describes how thousands of Soviet troops were deployed in the vicinity of the Afghan-Pakistan border to try to interdict the movement of mujahedin supplies across it and to try to ambush resistance fighters as they traversed the frontier.[143] Kalinovsky explains that there is no evidence that Gorbachev ordered a "surge" in this period. Instead, the changes probably reflected the Soviet military's operational "adjustments to the demands of war."[144] Even so, the effect of this military intensification combined with Gorbachev's political efforts produced an approach that was aptly summarized by Andrew Bennett: "Much as the United States did in the final phase of the Vietnam War, Mikhail Gorbachev pursued a 'bomb and negotiate' strategy in Afghanistan."[145] If the intensified military efforts against the mujahedin could inflict sufficient damage on the rebels' fighting capacity, it might serve as leverage in two sets of negotiations—the Kabul regime's attempts to bring some opponents into the fold and Gorbachev's desire to achieve an international agreement that would end outside support to the resistance.

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[140] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 100–101.
[141] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 67.
[142] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 247.
[143] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 368.
[144] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 87–88.
[145] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 247.

Of course, at the same time as the Soviet Union upped the ante, so did the United States. Among the aims it specified, NSDD-166 stated that American policy should seek to:

> Demonstrate to the Soviet Union that its long-term strategy for subjugating Afghanistan is not working. If the war in Afghanistan grows steadily worse, from the Soviet perspective, the Soviet leadership can have little confidence that it will finally achieve its purposes, no matter how long term the Soviet perspective. Achieving this objective is the best way to build pressure on the Soviet Union to adjust its policies in ways favorable to us and to the Afghan people.[146]

This was a clear recognition that the United States was backing a war of attrition against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan—the mujahedin were never going to be in a position to shatter the Soviet army militarily, but they could sap the Soviet leadership's willingness to continue.

With the Soviet Union confronting serious difficulties in Afghanistan, Pakistani and American policymakers were, by this point, comfortable that they could up the ante by supplying American-made weaponry to the mujahedin without risking a dramatic Soviet escalation against Pakistan. According to Kuperman, there is evidence that Zia told a congressional delegation visiting Pakistan in November 1984 that he wanted the United States to supply the mujahedin with Stinger missiles.[147] During 1985, administration officials travelled to Pakistan and heard from the ISI that the mujahedin needed Stingers.[148]

Notwithstanding the low risks of a major Soviet escalation against Pakistan by this time, there remained other objections within parts of the executive branch to providing

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[146] National Security Decision Directive 166, March 27, 1985, U.S. Policy, Programs and Strategy in Afghanistan, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.
[147] Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 225.
[148] Kuperman, 228–30.

Stingers to the mujahedin.[149] Former Secretary of State George Shultz later explained that within the State Department "some people worried that any American weapons system that could turn the tide would so antagonize the Soviets that it would sour our overall effort to improve relations."[150] When asked by this author in 2016 to explain why he supported providing the mujahedin with Stingers in spite of that objection, Shultz said:

> Our forward motion with the Soviets was based on our strength. We deliberately challenged the Soviets, not just in Afghanistan, but everywhere. That was the Central America issue. Nicaragua. That was in Angola. Our whole strategy was, we're strong and determined. And here's our agenda, we have a clear agenda, you know. We were not going to go easy on one place, in the hope they would come our way on somewhere else. That was not the way we negotiated.[151]

For Shultz, and many other senior members of the administration, by 1986 the risks of giving the mujahedin Stingers and other American-made weaponry were deemed manageable and acceptable. Following the initial expansion of military support to the resistance immediately after NSDD-166, in February 1986 the Reagan administration approved the provision of Stinger missiles to the mujahedin.[152] By the end of that summer the first delivery of the missiles were sent to the rebels and on September 25, 1986 a group of mujahedin shot down three Soviet MI-24 Hind helicopters.[153] In 1986, the United States also began to provide other sophisticated weaponry to the mujahedin, including satellite-targetable mortars and helicopter detectors.[154]

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[149] For the most detailed overview of the contours of the debate, see Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan."
[150] George Pratt Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's ; Toronto, 1993), 692.
[151] George P. Shultz, Interview with Author, May 20, 2016.
[152] Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 234.
[153] Kuperman, 235.
[154] Kuperman, 234.

The enhanced flow of assistance to the mujahedin in the wake of NSDD-166 nullified any meaningful on-the-ground progress by the Soviet Union despite their enhanced efforts during 1985 and 1986. In a May 1986 hearing before Congress, State Department official Robert Peck noted that "the level of fighting in Afghanistan through the winter of 1985-86 has been at an unprecedented level of intensity," but that "the rough stalemate of the past 6 years continues."[155] It was a result typical of proxy conflicts between major powers—as both sides pour more military aid into the conflict, the fighting is characterized by ratcheted stalemates of increasing conflict intensity.

Senior officials in the Soviet Union agreed with Robert Peck's assessment that they were struggling to move beyond a stalemate. At a Politburo meeting of November 13, 1986, Sergey Akhromeyev, the Chief of the Soviet General Staff, stated that:

> The [Afghan] government is supported by a minority of the population. Our army has fought for five years. It is now in a position to maintain the situation on the level that it exists now. But under such conditions the war will continue for a long time. 50 thousand Soviet soldiers are stationed to close off the border, but they are not in the position to close off all passages where cargo is transferred across the border.[156]

Unable to move beyond a military stalemate, including because of the "cargo" that kept flowing across the Afghan-Pakistan border to the mujahedin, the Soviet leadership settled upon withdrawal at that November 1986 Politburo meeting. Gorbachev expressed exasperation, stating that "we have been fighting in Afghanistan for already six years. If

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[155] Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 1 May 1986, The Situation in Afghanistan, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), 20–21.
[156] Minutes of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee Politburo Meeting, November 13, 1986 (Excerpt), Available from the Wilson Center, Digital Archive.

the approach is not changed, we will continue to fight for another 20-30 years."[157] Soviet leaders altered their political goal; rather than seeking a "friendly" Afghanistan, henceforth they would settle for a "neutral" Afghanistan.[158] Gorbachev also emphasized "the importance of ending the war in the course of one year—at maximum two years."[159] The Soviet Union was now definitively committed to getting out of Afghanistan.

The Road to Soviet Withdrawal

In January 1987, Soviet Politburo member Yegov Ligachev argued that a decent settlement remained possible for the USSR; he remarked to his Politburo colleagues that, "to leave like the Americans did from Vietnam—no, we still have not come to this, as they say."[160] In fact, the Soviet Union would end up leaving without securing decent exit terms. By mid-1987, it was clear that the policy of "National Reconciliation" had, like the military effort, produced little. Najibullah and others in the PDPA did not want to share power and neither did the mujahedin.[161] In September 1987, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze told George Shultz privately that the Soviet Union had decided to withdraw from Afghanistan.[162] Nevertheless, when Gorbachev met with Ronald Reagan at the Washington Summit in December 1987, according to the American record of the

[157] Minutes of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee Politburo Meeting, November 13, 1986 (Excerpt), Available from the Wilson Center, Digital Archive."
[158] Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," 241.
[159] Minutes of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee Politburo Meeting, November 13, 1986 (Excerpt), Available from the Wilson Center, Digital Archive."
[160] Notes from Politburo Meeting, 21-22 January 1987 (Excerpt), Available from Wilson Center Digital Archive, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117230.
[161] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 116–17.
[162] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 987.

conversation, the Soviet leader told Reagan that "two events should coincide: the onset of [Soviet] withdrawals; and the end to "your" transfer of arms and financing of the opposition."[163] Reagan responded that Gorbachev's proposal was unacceptable to the United States because "one side should not have a monopoly of force."[164] The American president and the Soviet leader agreed that the issue should be discussed further by their respective officials.

In early January 1988, Shevardnadze claimed in a press interview that the United States had committed "to end its assistance to armed groups that are engaged in military operations in Afghanistan against the people's regime," in the event of a diplomatic settlement.[165] Secretary Shultz publicly countered that claim at a press conference on January 7, 1988, saying that even after a Soviet withdrawal, "if the Soviets continued military supplies to the Najibullah regime, we would do likewise for the mujahedin."[166] In February, Gorbachev publicly announced his intention to withdraw from Afghanistan, but again stated an expectation that external support to the mujahedin would cease as part of an agreement to be concluded through the UN process.[167] The Soviet leader announced that the Soviet withdrawal would begin in May if a diplomatic settlement was reached beforehand.[168]

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[163] Memorandum of Conversation, Reagan– Gorbachev, Fourth Meeting, Washington Summit, December 9, 1987, 10:55 a.m. – 12:35 p.m. Document No. 49, in *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush: Conversations That Ended the Cold War*, National Security Archive Cold War Readers. (New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 338.
[164] Memorandum of Conversation, Reagan– Gorbachev, Fourth Meeting, Washington Summit, December 9, 1987, 10:55 a.m. – 12:35 p.m. Document No. 49, 338.
[165] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 131.
[166] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1087.
[167] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 68.
[168] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1089–90.

The Reagan administration was unwilling to cease support to the mujahedin unless the USSR stopped all military support to the PDPA. The administration had the support of both sides of the aisle in Congress for this position. On February 29, 1988, Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, a Democrat, introduced a resolution arguing that the United States should not reduce its assistance to the mujahedin "until it is absolutely clear that the Soviets have terminated their military occupation, that they are not redeploying their forces to be inserted again, and that the mujahedin is well enough equipped to maintain its integrity during the delicate period of a transition government leading up to new elections."[169] The resolution passed the Senate by a vote of 77 to 0.[170]

Over the next month, Soviet and American diplomats wrangled over the terms of a diplomatic agreement under which the USSR would withdraw. The idea was that the Soviet Union and the United States would act as "guarantors" of an agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan.[171] After protracted discussions, an artful way to bridge the Soviet and American positions was found—Pakistan agreed to prevent support to the mujahedin from its territory, but the United States would also publicly assert its right to continue aiding the mujahedin.[172] President Zia of Pakistan assured President Reagan in a telephone call that, in spite of the agreement, Pakistan would continue to enable aid to flow to the mujahedin.[173] As Kalinovsky explains, Gorbachev opted for the agreement, despite the terms falling short of what he had wanted, because "he did not want to drag out the

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[169] 134 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 134, Part 2 (February 17, 1988 to March 2, 1988), February 29, 1988, 2644, Senate Resolution 386.
[170] 134 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 134, Part 2 (February 17, 1988 to March 2, 1988), 2664.
[171] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1087.
[172] Shultz, 1091–92.
[173] Shultz, 1091.

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan any longer" and because he wished to "achieve a broader improvement in relations with the United States."[174] In reaching this decision, Gorbachev overrode concerns from the Soviet military, and from other senior officials—notably including Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and KGB chief Vladimir Kriuchkov—that the agreement was highly-flawed.[175]

The diplomatic agreement was finalized on April 14, 1988 in Geneva. As Andrew Bennett notes, the accords "provided no guarantee of the Afghanistan government's survival, no political resolution of the conflict inside Afghanistan, and no reliable assurance that the United States would end its aid to the Afghan rebels."[176] Although he had not managed to secure an end to American aid to the mujahedin, Gorbachev promised Najibullah shortly before the accords were finalized that "in any situation, we will provide you with arms."[177] The Geneva Accords required the Soviet Union to begin withdrawing from Afghanistan on May 15, 1988 and to conclude that process by February 15, 1989.[178] After the signing, Secretary Shultz publicly asserted "our right to provide military aid to the resistance. We are ready to exercise that right, but we are prepared to meet restraint with restraint."[179]

Even after the agreement, some American officials were skeptical that the USSR would actually leave Afghanistan. John Negroponte recounted to this author that:

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[174] Kalinovsky, 144.
[175] Kalinovsky, 138–45.
[176] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 247.
[177] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 144.
[178] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 70–71.
[179] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1093.

> Around the time the Geneva Accords were agreed, I remember having a conversation with Colin Powell, who was then the National Security Advisor and I was his deputy. I told him I was skeptical that the Soviet Union would withdraw from Afghanistan. Colin replied that, based on his discussions with Soviet military officers, he was certain that the Soviet military wanted out of that war.[180]

Colin Powell was proved correct. In May 1988 Soviet troops began their withdrawal. In the midst of it, on November 8, 1988, Reagan's vice-president, George Herbert Walker Bush, was elected to the presidency. Just two days later, Bush met in Washington D.C. with the head of the mujahedin's political movement and assured him of continued support in order to ensure the full withdrawal of Soviet troops.[181] Bush took the presidential oath of office on January 20, 1989 and it would fall to his administration to craft American policy towards a post-Soviet Afghanistan; the Bush administration's approach to Afghanistan is analyzed below, when we consider the aftermath of the mujahedin's war of attrition against the Soviet Union.

Why American Support to the Mujahedin was Sufficiently Sustained to Achieve a Soviet Withdrawal

Gorbachev ultimately settled for terms in the Geneva Accords that were much less than what he had hoped to achieve. Andrew Bennett notes that, "it is hard to imagine the Soviet Union withdrawing at all, much less withdrawing unconditionally, if the rebels had lacked the military strength that foreign aid helped provide."[182] Odd Arne Westad also

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[180] John Negroponte, Interview with Author, October 31, 2016.
[181] Talking Points for VP Bush for His Meeting with Chairman of the Afghan Alliance, Rabbani, November 10, 1988, in Folder 'Meetings with Foreigners - November 1988: Chairman of the Afghan Alliance, Rabbani [Afghanistan], November 10, 1988,' OA/ID 19868-008, Donald P. Gregg Files, Office of National Security Affairs, Bush Vice Presidential Records, George Bush Library.
[182] Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?*, 360.

identifies the role that American aid to the mujahedin played in creating the stalemate that ultimately led the Soviet Union to give up the effort to find a decent settlement. He writes that:

> By late 1986 it became clear both to Gorbachev and to many of his key advisers that the invigorated Soviet strategy in Afghanistan was not working. American willingness to supply an almost unlimited quantity of arms to the mujahedin, the improved organization of the guerrillas, and the participation of foreign fighters—mostly Pakistanis and Arabs—on the side of the resistance had upped the ante to a level where fighting for a better position prior to withdrawal seemed impossible.[183]

Not only did further military efforts appear unlikely, to Soviet leaders, to produce a better outcome, but Soviet costs in Afghanistan were moving in the wrong direction. Based on documentary evidence from the Soviet Union's State Planning Committee—Gosplan—Artemy Kalinovsky states that the war's costs to the USSR were "1.58 billion rubles in 1984, 2.62 billion rubles in 1985, 3.20 billion rubles in 1986, and 4.12 billion rubles in 1987."[184] Those costs were, admittedly, small when compared to the Soviet Union's overall spending on its military. In a February 1987 assessment, the CIA estimated that the Soviet Union's annual spending on the military campaign in Afghanistan, even by that time, still only amounted to between 2 to 2.5 percent of the Soviet Union's total defense spending.[185] That was because the Soviet Union had made a deliberate decision to wage the Afghanistan campaign on the cheap; the USSR limited its troop presence in Afghanistan to 120,000 and, in Bruce Riedel's words, "instead of the necessary resources,

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[183] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 372.
[184] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 42.
[185] CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Assessment, The Costs of Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan, February 1987, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP08S01350R000300950001-0.pdf, iii–iv.

it used terror to try to win."[186] Although the costs of the war remained low as a proportion of overall Soviet defense spending, by late 1986 they had been moving in the wrong direction for several years. During the occupation, the Soviet military also saw over 13,000 of its troops killed and more than 35,000 wounded in Afghanistan.[187]

Notwithstanding the several major efforts to increase the intensity of its military operations in Afghanistan, as described above, Soviet actions were counteracted by corresponding increases in aid to the mujahedin. The result was strategic stalemate and, ultimately, the Soviet leadership chose withdrawal over a continued quagmire.

Given that Gorbachev wanted to get out of Afghanistan from the moment he came into office, would it have been possible for the United States to have ended its support to the mujahedin in 1985 and still achieved the Soviet withdrawal? That was not necessarily the case. Although Gorbachev wanted to extricate the USSR from the moment he assumed the leadership, as shown above, he was not prepared to simply cut-and-run. As noted, during the initial two years of Gorbachev's leadership—1985 and 1986—the Red Army intensified its combat operations against the mujahedin. From the United States' point of view, ensuring the Soviets actually left Afghanistan meant blunting any Soviet progress in the opening years of Gorbachev's premiership. As it turned out, the Soviet Union's increased military efforts collided headlong with the Stinger missile, the Milan anti-armor weapon, the SPG-9 rifle and the other enhanced support that the United States gave to the

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[186] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), 31.
[187] Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 196.

mujahedin following the 1985 escalation.[188] For example, after the mujahedin acquired Stinger missiles in September 1986, Soviet aircraft undertook a series of responses that reduced their potency against the mujahedin. As Alan Kuperman describes, Soviet fixed-wing aircraft flew higher, which reduced the accuracy of their strikes against mujahedin forces, while helicopters flew lower, increasing the potential for the resistance to hit them with small arms fire.[189] A March 1987 report from the American Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that, since the Stinger's introduction, "the quantity of direct close air support to Soviet/Afghan ground operations has been reduced significantly," while "on-call air strikes" to support Soviet and Afghan ground operations were "less responsive than was possible previously."[190]

The Stingers, and the other post-1985 support, represented the culmination of what the United States had been doing since 1979: providing increasing tranches of weaponry to the mujahedin as part of a broad campaign of pressure against the Soviet Union. Whenever the Soviets escalated, those efforts were nullified by increasing aid to the mujahedin.

In turn, the willingness of the United States to continue participating in a sustained war of attrition was a function of the strong, bipartisan consensus behind getting the Soviets

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[188] On the tactical impacts of these weapons, see Milt Bearden and James Risen, *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2003), 270–71.
[189] Kuperman, 248.
[190] Information Report from Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington DC to Various Recipients, March 1987, 'Impact of the Stinger Missile on Soviet and Resistance Tactics in AF,' Available in Cold War International History Project Document Reader Compiled for the International Conference 'Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan, 1979-1989,' Washington D.C., 29-30 April 2002, Volume 1: U.S. Documents, Document Number 123, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/towards-international-history-the-war-afghanistan-1979-1989.

out of Afghanistan. One driver of that American resolve was that American policymakers saw a clear strategic interest in checking Soviet expansionism, notably including in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf. Additionally, the mujahedin's rebellion against Soviet occupation was widely-viewed as defensible in terms of liberal ideals, because the rebels were fighting an occupying army that was perpetrating a brutal counterinsurgency campaign. In remarks on the floor of the House of Representatives in December 1985, Stephen Solarz said that:

> Over the course of the last 6 years, as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a quarter of the Afghan people have been driven into exile. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been killed. The Soviet Union's Army of occupation has engaged in the carpet bombing of the countryside and has waged war in the most cruel and barbarous fashion.[191]

Solarz also spoke admiringly of the "heroism of the Afghan people in their just struggle against the occupation of their country by the Red army."[192] Representative Dante Fascell, a Democrat from Florida and the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, stated that "the most basic necessities of the civilian population—their crops and livestock—have been targets in the Soviet war against innocent people," and that it was important that "the world continue to oppose the Soviet war in Afghanistan."[193] Representative Robert Lagomarsino, a Republican from California, exclaimed that "there can be no denying that a genocide is truly underway today in the [sic] Afghanistan."[194] On

[191] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 27 (December 18, 1985 to December 20, 1985), December 18, 1985, 37810, Statement by Rep. Solarz.
[192] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 27 (December 18, 1985 to December 20, 1985), December 18, 1985, 37810, Statement by Rep. Solarz.
[193] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 27 (December 18, 1985 to December 20, 1985), 37810, Statement by Rep. Fascell.
[194] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 27 (December 18, 1985 to December 20, 1985), 37811, Statement by Rep. Lagomarsino.

the sixth anniversary of the Soviet invasion, Democratic Senator Bill Bradley used a *New York Times* editorial to state that "the genocide in Afghanistan is one more appalling episode in a historical pattern of Soviet terror, and the world must now forcefully oppose it."[195] Arnold Raphel, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, also accused the Soviet Union of perpetrating a genocide in Afghanistan.[196]

The mujahedin committed serious human rights abuses as well. In the early years of the war, the mujahedin aimed to seize towns in Afghanistan in order to bolster their claims to be a legitimate government.[197] When the mujahedin launched attacks against urban areas, they often killed civilians through the use of shelling.[198] Mujahedin forces also executed captured Soviet personnel and targeted civilians who were deemed to collaborate with the Kabul government or with the Soviet occupation forces.[199]

American policymakers focused much more on the abuses committed by the Soviet Union. That reflected the United States' strategic interest in combatting the USSR. Additionally, the Soviet treatment of Afghan civilians was so bad that, contrary to what occurred regarding Nicaragua and other countries in which the United States backed anti-

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[195] Bill Bradley, "Captive Afghanistan, 6 Years Later; Fighters Need U.S. Aid," *The New York Times*, December 27, 1985, sec. Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/27/opinion/captive-afghanistan-6-years-later-fighters-need-us-aid.html.
[196] Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality*, 284.
[197] Lester W. Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War, 10th Anniversary Edition* (Quantico, Va.: U.S. Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division, 2005), 121 & 124, http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS72248.
[198] Grau and Jalali, 115.
[199] "Tears, Blood and Cries: Human Rights in Afghanistan Since the Invasion, 1979-1984," December 1984, A Helsinki Watch Report, Prepared by Jeri Laber (Helsinki Watch) and Barnett Rubin (Yale University), 197–200 & 208, https://www.hrw.org/reports/1984/afghan1284.pdf.

communist rebellions, American ire remained focused on the Red Army, rather than also being directed at the rebels.

Overall, the United States' support for the Afghan mujahedin reflected much of what Dominic Tierney describes as the "crusade" tradition in American war-fighting: the tendency for American popular support for engaging in armed conflict to depend upon a "black-and-white, good-versus-evil view of a conflict."[200] In this case, a policy that served American strategic interests was also widely-defended, by politicians on both sides of the aisle, in terms of American ideals. As Representative Jim Leach observed in spring 1986, "both political parties and, I think, all elements within the parties are in virtually unanimous agreement on the awesomeness of the problem and the awfulness of Soviet policy."[201]

Due to an amalgam of realpolitik and idealism, the United States was willing to provide the mujahedin with vast amounts of weaponry over the course of a decade, enabling them to counteract every effort by the Soviet Union to defeat the insurgency through an intensification of its military operations. Working with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others, the United States helped the mujahedin to evict the Red Army from Afghanistan. On February 15, 1989 the last commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan became the final Red Army soldier to withdraw from the country.[202]

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[200] Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2010), 43.
[201] The Situation in Afghanistan, Hearing Before The Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session., 12.
[202] "Last Soviet Leaves Afghanistan," accessed April 10, 2017, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-02-15/news/8903050546_1_soviet-soldier-afghanistan-soviet-withdrawal.

The Larger Impact on the Soviet Union

Not only did American support to the mujahedin contribute to achieving the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, but by inflicting a major defeat on the USSR it was likely one factor among many that pushed the Soviet Union towards its collapse. The USSR's quagmire in Afghanistan did not—by itself—represent a mortal blow to the material well-being of the USSR. After all, as described, the Soviet leadership chose to fight the Afghan war on the cheap. Mark Galeotti emphasizes that the total cost to the Soviet Union of its decade-long occupation "was equivalent to that spent in one year subsidizing basic foodstuffs."[203] Notwithstanding that, the costs borne by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan increased over time. Although the American intelligence community underestimated the figures contemporaneously, it is now believed that the Soviet Union's military burden during the 1980s was at least 15 percent of the country's total economy, and possibly over 30 percent of the overall economy.[204] The burdens of the Afghan occupation—although not substantial when viewed in isolation—were ones that an ailing Soviet economy clearly did not need. American military support to the mujahedin was one source of pressure on an empire that was in worse shape than many realized. Paula Dobriansky, an expert on the USSR who served on the Reagan administration's National Security Council staff, emphasized to this author in 2018 that the Reagan administration's various initiatives to pressure the Soviet Union were intertwined. As Dobriansky put it:

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[203] Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1995), 224.
[204] Andrew F. Krepinevich and Barry Watts, *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 172 & 174.

> From the very beginning of his presidency, Ronald Reagan was focused on the Soviet Union. He judged that the USSR had vulnerabilities and, from that view, flowed the administration's various efforts to put pressure on Moscow, including through speeches challenging the USSR and its ideology, the "Star Wars" initiative, and support for anti-communist freedom fighters. Those initiatives were inter-connected, not separate. All of them were about challenging Soviet domination.[205]

Joseph DeTrani, a former CIA officer who served as executive assistant to CIA Director Bill Casey between 1981 and 1984, made a similar point when he told this author:

> Multiple elements of American pressure contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States' support for the mujahedin in Afghanistan had a very significant impact, especially because taking casualties and suffering real costs was a blow to Soviet morale. The Reagan Doctrine worked alongside other elements of pressure such as the Strategic Defense Initiative and propaganda, which included distributing banned Soviet literature inside the USSR. The various elements worked together to weaken the Soviets.[206]

The American support to the mujahedin could not, by itself, have caused the collapse of the Soviet Union. The burdens it imposed were not great enough, when viewed in isolation, to have fatally undermined the USSR. Nevertheless, it was one plank in a broader array of policy initiatives that imposed burdens on the USSR during the 1980s, at a time when the USSR proved unable to meet the pressures it was confronting. Former Secretary of State George Shultz maintains that by shattering the aura of Soviet power, the Afghan defeat sent an important signal to other captive peoples within the Soviet empire. Shultz emphasized to this author that Afghanistan "broke the notion that once the Soviets were there, they would always stay."[207]

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[205] Paula Dobriansky, Interview with Author (By Phone), January 25, 2018.
[206] Joseph DeTrani, Interview with Author, November 15, 2016.
[207] Shultz, "Interview with Author."

In sum, what we can reasonably say is that American military support to the mujahedin achieved its primary objective of evicting the USSR from Afghanistan because it helped the resistance prevail in a prolonged war of attrition with the Soviet army. It also likely played a contributory role in the Soviet Union's ultimate collapse by adding to the burdens on the USSR during the 1980s. The United States also achieved the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan at relatively little cost to itself. The United States provided approximately $2 billion in assistance, in nominal dollars, to the mujahedin while Soviet ground troops were in Afghanistan. That is equivalent to around $4.5 billion in 2017 dollars.[208] In each of 1985 and 1986, the peak years of American assistance, the United States provided approximately $500 million—measured in nominal dollars—in support to the resistance. By comparison, total outlays by the Department of Defense for those fiscal years were $245 billion and $258 billion.[209] Therefore, assistance to the mujahedin at the program's peak represented just 0.2% of the United States' total defense expenditure. Furthermore, the United States lost no lives in combat because, under its agreement with the ISI, it did not send CIA personnel into Afghanistan.[210] In August 1988, Arnold Raphel, who was then the American ambassador to Pakistan, and American Brigadier General Herbert Wassom lost their lives when President Zia's plane, on which they had been

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[208] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 34–35; "CPI Inflation Calculator."
[209] Report of the Secretary of Defense, Caspar W. Weinberger, to the Congress on the FY 1987 Budget, FY 1988 Authorization Request and FY 1987 -1991 Defense Programs, Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 5, 1986, 95, http://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/Secretary-of-Defense-Annual-Reports/.
[210] Bruce O. Riedel, *What We Won : America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014), xiii; Bruce Riedel, "Book Talk, What We Won: America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-1989, Talk at the Brookings Institution, Moderated by Strobe Talbott, Washington, D.C. Tuesday, July 8, 2014, Transcript," n.d., https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/20140708_riedel_afghanistan_transcript.pdf.

travelling, crashed over Pakistan. Zia and his ISI chief, General Akhtar, were also killed, along with other Pakistani officials and officers.[211] As Steve Coll wrote in 2004, "a joint U.S.-Pakistani air force investigation turned up circumstantial evidence of mechanical failure in the crash, although the exact cause remained a guess at best."[212]

Overall, the monetary and human costs to the United States of helping the mujahedin to evict the Soviet army from Afghanistan were relatively small. The aftermath of the Soviet defeat, however, proved much less satisfactory from the United States' point of view. It is to an analysis of the aftermath that we now turn.

The Aftermath of a War of Attrition

During the 1990s, a bitter civil war raged in Afghanistan, during which various mujahedin factions turned their guns on one another. Afghanistan became a failed state and, out of the chaos, emerged the Taliban movement that seized Kabul in 1996. The Taliban would go on to provide safe haven for Osama bin Laden and his foot-soldiers, who would use Afghanistan as their base for planning the 9/11 attacks.

To what extent were these developments a direct result of the United States' support to the mujahedin in their fight against the Soviet Union in the 1980s? There are at least two reasons why understanding what occurred after the Soviet withdrawal is more complex than any simple, linear story that runs from President Carter's approval of lethal assistance in December 1979, to NSDD-166 in 1985, through Soviet defeat, to state failure in

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[211] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 178–79.
[212] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 179.

Afghanistan in the 1990s, and finally to airliners smashing into symbols of American might in 2001.

First, the United States did not directly assist the "Arab volunteers" who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and who would go on to form the nucleus of al Qaeda. Instead, Osama bin Laden and cleric Abdullah Azzam supported many of the Arab volunteers through their "Bureau of Services," which was in turn backed by a financial network built upon financing from Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states.[213] Second, even if the United States had not assisted the mujahedin, it is very plausible that foreign fighters from the Arab world would have flocked to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets in any case. Bruce Riedel emphasizes that point when he states that:

> The Arabs who came to Pakistan to join the war against the Soviet Union came because they were determined to fight the Soviets. They cared very little that their ally was the CIA. It was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that created the firestorm of anger across the Islamic world that brought thousands of young men to fight in Afghanistan and become radicalized.[214]

Notwithstanding these two points, mujahedin fighters went on to join the Taliban's ranks, al Qaeda, and other jihadist organizations. The future Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, as well as Jalaluddin Haqqani—whose fighters would play a significant role in the post-2001 insurgency in Afghanistan against American and NATO forces—both fought for Yunus Khalis' party, Hezb-i Islami Khalis.[215] Furthermore, the mujahedin's war generated knowledge that would be incorporated into the tactical and strategic repertoire of the

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[213] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., 2004), 55.
[214] Riedel, *What We Won*, xii.
[215] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:305–6.

jihadist movement in subsequent years and that would be used against the United States on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq in the early twenty-first century. Itai Brun describes how some of the knowledge acquired by the mujahedin was subsequently "institutionalized" in the al Qaeda organization as a result of the mujahedin's preparation of "encyclopedias of Jihad."[216]

One major question is whether the United States could have successfully evicted the USSR from Afghanistan without suffering subsequent catastrophe? The answer is possibly, but achieving a Soviet withdrawal without subsequent disaster would have been a huge policy challenge, even if considerable attention and resources had been devoted to it. In order to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan, the United States helped the mujahedin wage its protracted war of attrition. Continuing to match the Red Army's operational intensifications with increased aid to the mujahedin left behind a devastated land. The conflict led to the deaths of around one million Afghans and left the country littered with millions of mines.[217] The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that the 1980s conflict made 6.2 million Afghans refugees.[218] Afghanistan was awash with vast amounts of weaponry, from small arms to heavy weapons. Barnett Rubin estimates that, during the 1980s, the Soviet Union and the

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[216] Brigadier General Itai Brun, "'While You're Busy Making Other Plans' – The 'Other RMA,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 4 (August 1, 2010): 560.
[217] Joseph J. Collins, *Understanding War in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011), 34.
[218] "'Afghanistan 10 Years after Soviet Pull-out,' Press Briefing by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Spokesperon, Palais Des Nations, Geneva" (UNHCR, February 12, 1999), http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=3ae6b81cf0&query=Return%20to%20Afghanistan.

United States "poured fifty times more resources into the enterprise of destruction than they had into development" during the earlier decades of the Cold War.[219]

The cycle of repeated infusions of military aid to the superpowers' respective proxies bred a conflict that was increasingly intense. It bequeathed a devastated society that was susceptible to state failure and that would have been very hard to repair quickly, even with considerable policy attention and resources. The most obvious means to have avoided the continued conflict from which Afghanistan suffered during the 1990s would have been for the Afghan parties to have reached a durable political settlement shortly after the Soviet withdrawal. The Bush administration pursued such an outcome, but it failed because of the competing interests of the various parties to the conflict and due to the United States' aversion to nation-building in foreign lands.

Upon the Soviet exit from Afghanistan, the prevailing assumption was that the communist regime, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), would soon be overthrown. In a meeting in late February 1989, Pakistan's foreign minister told President George H.W. Bush that the Afghan resistance would "soon tear apart the existing Afghan government."[220] Some officials in Moscow, such as Defense Minister Dmitrii Iazov, also judged that the PDPA regime, led by Najibullah, would fall within a few months.[221]

When President Bush met with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in June 1989 he told her privately that the United States was "not softening our position on

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[219] Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3.
[220] Memorandum of Conversation, President's Meeting with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, February 24, 1989, 4:51-5:22 p.m., American Ambassador's Residence, Tokyo, Japan, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-02-24--Bhutto.pdf.
[221] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 180.

Najibullah—he must go."[222] In public remarks after the meeting, President Bush emphasized that:

> The effectiveness of our mutual policy [to support the mujahedin] was proven last February, when the last Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan. And we agreed, however, that the job is not done. The mujahedin continues, and their struggle for self-determination goes on, a goal that both the United States and Pakistan continue to support.[223]

Some in Congress continued to argue for backing the mujahedin by stressing that the rebels were fighting for self-determination. In 1989, the Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan argued that "throwing away ten years of hard-won gains and hard-fought struggle on behalf of self-determination in Afghanistan to negotiate with a criminal regime such as Najibullah's, an Afghan Hitler, would be one of the great sell-outs of this era."[224]

At the same time, the Bush administration was concerned about what type of government emerged in post-Soviet Afghanistan. The objectives for American policy specified by the Bush administration in its first Afghanistan policy statement, National Security Directive 3, are indicative of some of that administration's concerns. It stated that:

> Working in concert with Pakistan, the United States should use its influence and resources to (1) promote Resistance cohesion; (2) promote a peaceful political succession, rather than support any individual or faction; (3) avoid a civil war and (4) prevent the emergence of a new Afghan government that is pro-Soviet, pro-Iranian or messianic-Islamic.[225]

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[222] Memorandum of Conversation, Plenary Meeting with Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan, June 6, 1989; 11:20-11:30 a.m., The Cabinet Room, The White House, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 3, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-06-06--Bhutto.pdf.
[223] George H.W. Bush, Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, June 6, 1989, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=17115.
[224] Quoted in Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 74–75.
[225] National Security Directive 3, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, February 13, 1989, 1, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsd/nsd3.pdf.

The directive's stress on the need to prevent the establishment of a "messianic-Islamic" government demonstrates that the Bush administration was well aware of the potential for the establishment of a very illiberal government in Afghanistan. During the summer of 1989, President Bush emphasized that concern in separate meetings with both Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the Saudi foreign minister. Bush told Bhutto that he did not wish to see "another radical leader, like the Ayatollah [Khomeini] who just died, resurrecting himself in Afghanistan."[226] Eight days later, Bush told the Saudi foreign minister that the United States "wanted to avoid the emergence of a Khomeini-like figure" in Afghanistan.[227] The British government, which had also backed the mujahedin, was similarly concerned about the behavior of some of the rebels. In June 1989, the United Kingdom's Foreign Office handed Peter Tomsen, the United States' special envoy to the Afghan resistance, a report that "cataloged [Gulbuddin] Hekmatyar's numerous assassinations of Afghans and foreigners."[228]

In August 1989, the Bush administration made a policy decision that no lethal assistance purchased with American money would be provided to either Hekmatyar or Sayyaf, the two most radical mujahedin leaders.[229] In spite of the change in American policy, it had little effect on the ground for three reasons. First, funds from Saudi Arabia and other Arab sources continued to flow to those parts of the mujahedin that the United

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[226] Memorandum of Conversation, Plenary Meeting with Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan, June 6, 1989; 11:20-11:30 a.m., The Cabinet Room, The White House, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library."
[227] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, June 14, 1989, 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., The Oval Office, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-06-14--al-Faisal.pdf.
[228] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:287.
[229] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 105.

States ceased supporting.[230] Second, during this period, Pakistan's ISI continued to favor Hekmatyar and tried to install him in power in Kabul.[231] Third, the CIA proved reluctant to change its approach. As Richard Haass, who was then on the NSC staff with responsibility for South Asian affairs, later recalled:

> Every couple of months I'd go out to Langley and I'd have the same unsatisfying conversation with all the guys who were saying, 'well, yes, I know what we really want to do but we can't quite do that.' I felt the United States was slow to change its policy, basically put more pressure on the Pakistanis not to help certain groups……The person I remember then who was the big warlord was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and he, to me, was the symbol of what was wrong with the policy. Here was this guy who may have been a good anti-Soviet but was clearly violently anti-American; he was this nut, basically. So I mentioned the idea that we were—the CIA, the DoD—still involved with people like him, I felt we were way too slow to jettison him and others like him.[232]

Contrary to the expectations of its swift demise, the PDPA regime would survive until April 1992. One reason it managed to stave off military defeat was because the USSR continued to provide it with copious amounts of military assistance even after Soviet ground troops left. Moscow continued to supply Najibullah's forces with aircraft, tanks, armored personnel carriers, rocket launchers, and SCUD tactical ballistic missiles.[233] In spring 1990, the Bush administration estimated that the Soviet Union was still giving more than $300 million per month to the PDPA.[234]

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[230] Rubin, 105.
[231] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:356.
[232] Richard Haass Oral History, Special Assistant to the President; National Security Council Staff's Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs | Miller Center, accessed April 28, 2017, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/interviews-with-the-administration/richard-haass-oral-history-special-assistant.
[233] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 29.
[234] Hearing before the Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, March 7, 1990, United States Policy Toward Afghanistan (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 40–42.

Another major factor behind the mujahedin's inability to oust the PDPA after the Soviet withdrawal was the fragmented nature of the resistance. Each of the seven exile parties wanted power for themselves and commanders within Afghanistan sought to reap the spoils of victory individually. During the insurgency against an occupation force, the fragmented nature of the resistance had been an advantage—the USSR could not defeat it with a shattering blow against a single commander or unit. As it attempted to oust the PDPA regime after the Soviet withdrawal, however, the fragmented movement proved unable to transform itself into a conventional military force. That became very clear in March 1989 when, in an effort to secure a territorial base for an opposition government, between 5,000 and 7,000 mujahedin fighters began an offensive upon the city of Jalalabad.[235] The battle proved to be a failure for the mujahedin, primarily because, in Peter Tomsen's words, "ill-prepared, disorganized, and divided mujahedin guerillas" tried to carry out a "conventional assault on a well-fortified city."[236] By the end of the Jalalabad battle, it had become clear that Najibullah was not going anywhere quickly.

The United States, still working with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, continued to provide military assistance to the rebels. In 1989, the United States supplied somewhere between $300 and $350 million in military assistance.[237] As Rubin notes, in 1989 the mujahedin received "Stingers, heavy artillery, and other arms considered appropriate for a shift from guerilla tactics to more conventional warfare."[238] At the same time as providing

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[235] Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 22.
[236] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:262.
[237] Peter Tomsen estimates that the assistance totaled $300 million, while James M. Scott gives a figure of $350 million. They both agree that assistance in 1990 was approximately $50 million lower than in 1989. Tomsen, 1st ed.:395; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 35.
[238] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 100.

this military aid, the Bush administration tried to achieve a political settlement in Afghanistan.

Ahead of a visit by the Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, to the United States in September 1989, the State Department formulated an approach for Secretary Baker to adopt with his Soviet counterpart. The State Department's plan was for Baker to reiterate the United States' desire to see a political settlement, while "emphasizing the practical reality that the resistance will not enter into a power-sharing arrangement with Najibullah (or his core supporters in the PDPA)." The Secretary would also stress the United States' "interest in the emergence of an Afghanistan which has good relations with all its neighbors and contributes to regional stability."[239] When President Bush met with Shevardnadze in the Oval Office, he assured the Soviet official that "we have no interest in seeing an anti-Soviet regime installed in Kabul."[240]

Shortly after that meeting, Baker and Shevardnadze travelled together to Jackson Hole in Wyoming, where they had further discussions about Afghanistan. They released a joint statement in which they stated that "the two sides agreed on the need for a political settlement in Afghanistan on the basis of national reconciliation, one that ensures the peaceful, independent, and nonaligned status of Afghanistan."[241] Nevertheless, the United

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[239] Afghanistan Talking Points for One-on-One with Shevardnadze, September 13, 1989, James A. Baker Papers, Box 115, Folder 6, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
[240] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, September 21, 1989, 2:00 p.m.-3:05 p.m. EDT, The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 5, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-09-21--Shevardnadze.pdf.
[241] Joint Statement by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, September 23,1989, Reprinted in Department of State Bulletin, November 1989, Volume 89, Number 2152, 7.

States adopted the position that Najibullah had to depart power at the beginning of a "transitional period," during which an interim government would exercise power and preside over the organization of elections.[242] By contrast, the Soviet Union argued that Najibullah should remain in power during the transitional period leading to elections.[243]

On December 3, 1989, Bush, Gorbachev, Baker, and Shevardnadze had a detailed discussion about Afghanistan during the Malta summit. Shevardnadze put forward the idea of an "interim council to discuss and set up free elections to be monitored by the UN."[244] The American president argued that an impediment was the mujahedin's reluctance to engage with Najibullah. Bush stated that:

> Najibullah is a major hang-up. About that the resistance groups are united. They all say that reconciliation is impossible with him there.[245]

Baker opened the way for an agreement by shifting the American position to countenance that Najibullah could exit power at the end of a transitional period, rather than at the beginning. Despite that, Gorbachev made clear that the Soviet Union was not prepared to commit to Najibullah's departure, stating that:

> We cannot order Najibullah out. If they decide he should go, O.K. It is the Afghan's process and it is a developing process. No one can force him.[246]

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[242] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 108.
[243] Rubin, 108.
[244] Memorandum of Conversation, Bush–Gorbachev, Second Expanded Bilateral Meeting, Malta, 4:35 p.m. – 6:45 p.m., December 3, 1989, Document No. 85, in *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush: Conversations That Ended the Cold War*, National Security Archive Cold War Readers. (New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 562.
[245] Memorandum of Conversation: Bush–Gorbachev, Second Expanded Bilateral Meeting, Malta, 4:35 p.m. – 6:45 p.m., December 3, 1989, Document No. 85, 562.
[246] Memorandum of Conversation: Bush–Gorbachev, Second Expanded Bilateral Meeting, Malta, 4:35 p.m. – 6:45 p.m., December 3, 1989, Document No. 85, 563.

When Baker met with Gorbachev in February 1990, the American secretary of state reiterated that the mujahedin would not deal with Najibullah, emphasizing that:

> We really have limited influence on the mujahedin. We want to have a political solution in Afghanistan. We really do. We are convinced, however, that we cannot bring the mujahedin along unless there is some mechanism where at the end of the transition process there will be a change in government. So what I have suggested is that we need a process that begins with Najib in power but when it ends he'll be out.[247]

One reason the United States' potential influence on the mujahedin was limited was because the movement already had plenty of weaponry by this point and was confident of continued support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia regardless of American actions.

On March 20, 1990, Baker and Shevardnadze met again. Baker sent a cable to President Bush the same day giving him a readout of the discussion.[248] Baker had suggested to Shevardnadze that "if Najibullah were to go, we could immediately accept the principles of negative symmetry [a mutual American and Soviet cessation of arms to their proxies], a ceasefire, and national elections." Shevardnadze countered that "no one could force Najibullah out, and our [the United States'] starting point would lead to a dead end." Shevardnadze went on to describe a possible way forward: "Najib said he would support elections and that the elections could be run by the UN with all sorts of international

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[247] Memorandum of Conversation by United States Department of State, Meeting between Secretary Baker, President Gorbachev, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Friday February 9, 1990, 1:00pm-3:00pm, The Kremlin, Moscow, available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 38, 951266 DOS 365, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., 9–10.

[248] Memorandum for the President, Sent via Cable, From James A. Baker III to George Bush, March 20, 1990, Subject: My Meeting With Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Folder "Special Separate USSR Notes Files, Gorbachev Files, OA/ID 91126-006, Brent Scowcroft Collection, Bush Presidential Records, George HW Bush Presidential Library," n.d.

observers to guarantee its fairness." In his cable to Bush, Baker recounted the response he gave to Shevardnadze and added an additional comment for Bush's consideration:

> I said the mujahedin would never accept it if Najib could run in he [sic] elections. It was not a case of being right or wrong, this was simply the reality. He asked if we would think more about the elections approach. Frankly, I have got to say, there is something paradoxical and indefensible about us opposing elections that are free and fair. If the mujahedin won't participate in such elections, how can we justify continued support for them?[249]

President George Bush recognized that his secretary of state had fastened upon a significant problem and he wrote a comment in the margin next to Baker's observation. Bush's comment simply read: "Brent?? good point."[250] Bush wanted to draw the attention of Brent Scowcroft, his National Security Advisor, to Baker's observation. American efforts to find a political settlement were being impeded not only by the Soviet Union's continuing commitment to Najibullah, but also by the mujahedin's aversion to engaging in any process that did not guarantee Najibullah's departure.

By the summer of 1990, the military situation in Afghanistan looked, at least to some, to be stalemated.[251] With the mujahedin having failed to overthrow Najibullah by force, and with the diplomatic track stymied, it was at this point that President Bush and senior levels of his administration increasingly sought to extricate themselves from

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[249] "Memorandum for the President, Sent via Cable, From James A. Baker III to George Bush, March 20, 1990, Subject: My Meeting With Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Folder "Special Separate USSR Notes Files, Gorbachev Files, OA/ID 91126-006, Brent Scowcroft Collection, Bush Presidential Records, George HW Bush Presidential Library."

[250] I am grateful to Thomas Blanton, Executive Director of the National Security Archive at The George Washington University, for informing me about this cable and pointing out Baker's observation, as well as President George Bush's annotation.

[251] U.S. Special Envoy Peter Tomsen recounts that this was his assessment, although he notes that "CIA officers objected to my assessment that a battlefield stalemate existed in Afghanistan." Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:394.

involvement in Afghanistan. When he met with Gorbachev on June 2, 1990, Bush told the Soviet leader that: "On Afghanistan, we would really like to be disengaged. We would like to cut loose, and we have no interest in a radical, and Muslim administration."[252]

The enthusiasm within the United States for backing the mujahedin, which had been so high when Soviet forces were on the ground, was waning by this point. The United States' strategic stake in Afghanistan was reduced after Soviet forces left and the mujahedin's continuing fight could no longer be defended as easily in idealistic terms. President Bush had acknowledged to Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1989, when they met at the Malta summit, that the United States had a lower strategic stake in Afghanistan than the Soviet Union; Bush told Gorbachev that "Afghanistan is more important to you than to us."[253]

At one congressional hearing in March 1990, Representative Lee Hamilton voiced his concerns that the United States was backing "fundamentalist people wanting power for themselves and nobody else" and worried that perhaps they wanted "only to establish their own view of their religion and none other."[254] Hamilton went on to say that:

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[252] Memorandum of Conversation, Bush–Gorbachev, Final Private Meeting, Camp David, June 2, 1990, 11:15 a.m. – 12:59 p.m., and 3:00 p.m., Document No: 102, in *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush: Conversations That Ended the Cold War*, National Security Archive Cold War Readers. (New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 689.

[253] Memorandum of Conversation, First Restricted Bilateral Session with Chairman Gorbachev of Soviet Union, December 2, 1989, 12:00 - 1:00 Pm, Maxim Gorkii Cruise Liner, Malta, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 5, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-12-02--Gorbachev%20Malta%20First%20Restriced%20Bilateral.pdf.

[254] Hearing before the Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, March 7, 1990, United States Policy Toward Afghanistan (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 43.

> I am beginning to wonder whether or not we are actually helping people that have the same world view that we have or whether just by mere inertia, we are continuing to support people whose ideals, whose view of the world, if you would, are very different from our own.[255]

Eight months after the Soviet Union had left Afghanistan, one State Department official observed to a journalist that the congressional consensus on backing the mujahedin was eroding, in part because:

> The perception that we are supporting a good cause is not there any more. We are no longer fighting the evil empire. They've gone. Now it's just Afghans fighting Afghans.[256]

With reduced American interests at stake in Afghanistan, and with military support to the mujahedin no longer representing the idealistic cause it once did, the United States gradually decreased its support to the mujahedin before ending it altogether. Congress voted to supply approximately $50 million less in military assistance for 1990 than in 1989.[257] Congress allocated $250 million for 1991.[258]

The Bush administration wanted, in the words the president used to Gorbachev in June 1990, to "cut loose" from Afghanistan. Even so, the president cared about how the United States extricated itself from involvement—it would be much better if the United States could cease its involvement simultaneously with the Soviet Union, thereby avoiding sacrificing the United States' partners to a regime still backed by the USSR. To that end,

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[255] Hearing before the Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, March 7, 1990, United States Policy Toward Afghanistan (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 43.
[256] Simon Tisdall, "Afghanistan: US Goes Cool On Guerrillas As They Blow Chance To Topple Regime," *The Guardian*, October 6, 1989.
[257] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:395; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 40.
[258] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 76.

during the fall of 1990, American Under Secretary of State Robert Kimmitt led efforts to negotiate a mutual agreement to cease American and Soviet aid to their respective Afghan partners—what was known as a "negative symmetry" agreement.[259]

The efforts by Kimmitt and the Soviet ambassador in Washington failed to produce a negative symmetry agreement by the close of 1990.[260] As Kalinovsky describes, Soviet KGB chief Kriuchkov, in particular, opposed the agreement and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze himself might have been lukewarm towards it because of the importance he ascribed to doing right by Najibullah.[261] In August 1991, hardliners in the Soviet Union—led by Kriuchkov—launched a coup attempt against Gorbachev that failed. Rubin describes how the defeat of the coup shifted Soviet Afghan policy because it was a defeat for the PDPA's major backers in Moscow.[262] The path was now open for a U.S.-Soviet "negative symmetry" agreement. On September 13, 1991, Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin and Secretary Baker released a joint statement that the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to "discontinue their weapons deliveries to all Afghan sides," with the mutual cut-off going into effect by January 1, 1992.[263] The statement also called for the United Nations to "work with the Afghans to convene a credible and impartial transition mechanism whose functions would include directing and managing a credible electoral process."[264] By the

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[259] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:425.
[260] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 109.
[261] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 194–95.
[262] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 111.
[263] US-Soviet Joint Statement on Afghanistan, Released in Moscow on September 13, 1991, in US Department of State Dispatch, Bureau of Public Affairs, September 16, 1991, Volume 2, No. 37, 683.
[264] US-Soviet Joint Statement on Afghanistan, Released in Moscow on September 13, 1991, in US Department of State Dispatch, Bureau of Public Affairs, September 16, 1991, Volume 2, No. 37, 683.

end of 1991, after twelve years during which it had funneled copious amounts of military assistance to the mujahedin, the United States was no longer backing a proxy force in Afghanistan with lethal aid. As it turned out, the Soviet Union ceased to exist five days before the negative symmetry agreement took effect.

The United States had extricated itself from involvement in Afghanistan, but without having achieved a political settlement in the country, in spite of the efforts by President Bush and Secretary Baker early in their tenure. Why had those efforts failed? They foundered on the competing interests of the multiple parties involved. As is often the case when external actors intervene in civil wars, there were various actors with a stake in the outcome who could block a settlement—what political scientist David Cunningham terms "veto players."[265] In this case, the goals of the various veto players were starkly at odds with each other. The mujahedin movement was unified in its reluctance to negotiate with the Kabul regime and in its desire to see Najibullah leave. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was reluctant to see that outcome. As a CIA analysis from February 1990 put it:

> Diplomatic progress has been hamstrung most by the refusal of the resistance to negotiate with the Kabul regime and by Moscow's unwillingness to remove People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) leader Najibullah and the senior party leadership.[266]

Additionally, Pakistan's goal in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal was the establishment of a pro-Pakistan, Islamist Afghanistan. Pakistan tried repeatedly to install

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[265] David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 875–92.
[266] "The Search for a Political Settlement in Afghanistan: Strategies and Objectives of Key Actors," 7 February 1990, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, in Folder 'Working Files - Afghanistan 1989-1992 [2],' OA/ID CF01304-011, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 2.

one of the most radically Islamist mujahedin commanders, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, in power. The same CIA analysis from February 1990 stated that Pakistan's "military-intelligence community would prefer to give the military option more time before embarking on a negotiating process."[267]

Overall, the CIA's analysis underscored that any hope of a political settlement in Afghanistan faced obstacles created by "the widely divergent objectives of key internal and external players."[268] Having foundered in its efforts to reach such a settlement, the George H.W. Bush administration devoted rapidly decreasing attention to Afghanistan. Bruce Riedel recounts that he does not recall "a single principal-level meeting to discuss the situation in Afghanistan" during 1991 and 1992, when he served on the Bush administration's National Security Council.[269] The last NSC meeting with Afghanistan as the subject during the George H.W. Bush administration took place in March 1989.[270] There were three NSC "Deputies Committee" meetings—meetings comprising the deputy heads of departments and agencies with national security responsibilities—focused on Afghanistan during 1991.[271] The final "Deputies Committee" meeting on Afghanistan

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[267] "The Search for a Political Settlement in Afghanistan: Strategies and Objectives of Key Actors," 7 February 1990, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, in Folder 'Working Files - Afghanistan 1989-1992 [2],' OA/ID CF01304-011, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 3.
[268] "The Search for a Political Settlement in Afghanistan: Strategies and Objectives of Key Actors," 7 February 1990, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, in Folder 'Working Files - Afghanistan 1989-1992 [2],' OA/ID CF01304-011, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 1.
[269] Riedel, *What We Won*, 132.
[270] "NSC Meetings—George H.W. Bush Administration (1989–1993)," George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, June 27, 2013, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/NSC%20Meetings%201989-1992--Declassified--2013-06-27--REVISED.pdf.
[271] These took place on March 5, 1991 (NSC/DC 260), April 12, 1991 (NSC/DC 271), and May 17, 1991 (NSC/DC 282). "NSC/DC Meetings—George H.W. Bush

during the Bush administration occurred on January 3, 1992, just after the negative symmetry agreement with the Soviet Union went into effect.[272]

One reason for the Bush administration's declining attention to Afghanistan was the need to focus on the huge transformation unfolding in Eastern Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. There was another and deeper reason for why the United States paid decreasing attention to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. As Dominic Tierney describes, one of the major traditions in American thinking about war is what he terms the "quagmire tradition," which is an aversion to nation-building and a fear of getting bogged down in foreign lands.[273] This was much in evidence after the Soviet Union had withdrawn from Afghanistan, especially after the Bush administration's efforts to reach a political settlement foundered. In a 2004 interview, Richard Haass—who served on the George H.W. Bush administration's National Security Council staff with responsibility for South Asia—explained that:

> I think for the [George H.W.] Bush administration and the Clinton administration, there was a kind of passivity, a lack of ambition about Afghanistan, not so much because we thought it would sort itself out well, but there's a sense of, it's Afghanistan, it will be messy, but it will be an Afghan sort of solution. We could try, but we probably won't make much difference.[274]

Administration (1989–1993)," George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, November 29, 2012, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsc_and_dc_meetings_1989-1992-declassified.pdf.

[272] Ibid. This was NSC/DC 331.

[273] Tierney, *How We Fight*, 1st ed.:35.

[274] Richard Haass Oral History, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Staff's Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, George H.W. Bush Administration (The Miller Center, University of Virginia, May 27, 2004), https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/richard-haass-oral-history-special-assistant-president.

After extricating itself from involvement in Afghanistan, the United States would leave it to the United Nations to try to bring peace to that country. In mid-April 1992, Najibullah realized that he no longer had sufficient domestic support to remain in power and he fled the presidential palace and sought refuge at the UN compound in Kabul.[275] In Secretary Baker's papers at Princeton University are his talking points for a meeting with President Bush in mid-April 1992, at the time the Najibullah regime was collapsing. Baker's points for his conversation with the president noted that "local and tribal rivalries mean Afghanistan's future will probably be fragmented and violent." Nevertheless, they also stated that "we have little ability to influence events in Afghanistan."[276]

Following Najibullah's fall, the various factions of the mujahedin movement proceed to wage war against one another in a quest for power and, consequently, Afghanistan descended into a failed state. In the midst of this chaos, in late 1994 a new movement, the Taliban, emerged and swept across Afghanistan; in September 1996, it seized control of Kabul. Shortly after doing so, the Taliban found Najibullah and killed him, before hanging his body in a public place in Kabul.[277]

Although the Taliban movement was led by Mullah Mohammed Omar, who had been a mujahedin commander, much of the group's military power was not provided by former mujahedin fighters. Instead, it comprised several units of former PDPA officers and war orphans who had been raised in madrasas in the Afghan-Pakistan border region.[278]

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[275] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:481.
[276] Proposed Agenda For Meeting With The President, April 15, 1992, 1:30 p.m., James A. Baker Papers, Box 115, Folder 9, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
[277] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 333.
[278] Tomsen, 1st ed.:533; Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 211.

David Edwards explains that a major reason underpinning the Taliban's success was the reputation they developed for being able to provide security in the areas they held, a stark contrast to the bitter civil war that had raged since Najibullah's fall.[279]

The new regime in Kabul would go on to provide sanctuary to a Saudi with increasingly audacious ambitions, Osama bin Laden. Having participated in the war against the Soviet occupation during the 1980s, and having founded the al Qaeda organization in 1988, Bin Laden departed Afghanistan in 1990.[280] He returned in 1996 and he and his al Qaeda organization would use the country as a sanctuary to plot terrorist attacks against the United States.

Whether American policymakers could have prevented Afghanistan from becoming a base for global jihadism in the 1990s is unknowable. Even if American policymakers had devoted considerable policy attention to the country after the end of 1991, it is far from clear that the United States would have been able to stabilize it following the devastating conflict that had raged since 1979, which was an externally supported war of attrition. The United States did not even really try.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

A Realist War: Backing An "Enemy of my Enemy"

As demonstrated above, American policymakers' decision to support the mujahedin, and to provide substantial support during the rebels' protracted war of attrition with the Soviet Union, can be explained by the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war.

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[279] Edwards, *Before Taliban*, 293-294.
[280] Stenersen, *Al-Qaida in Afghanistan*, 21; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 56–57.

American support was driven by both strategic interests and a widespread consensus, in both the executive branch and in Congress, that aiding the mujahedin could be defended in terms of the ideal of self-determination.

Realist theory would argue that the policy of supporting the Afghan rebels simply reflected the strategic interests of the United States in checking Soviet expansionism. Additionally, it would argue that the United States was willing to work with the mujahedin—regardless of their ideological character—simply because they were an "enemy of my enemy." John Mearsheimer cites the United States' support for the Afghan mujahedin during the 1980s as a preeminent example of the strategy of "bloodletting" as a means of gaining power in the international system.[281]

It is indisputable that a major driver of the United States' support to the mujahedin was to pursue what American policymakers saw as the nation's strategic interests. As described, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan occurred at the end of a decade that had seen a string of setbacks for the United States on the world stage and many American policymakers feared that the USSR was gaining an edge in the Cold War. Providing support to the mujahedin offered a way to check Soviet global gains. Additionally, a major reason for backing the mujahedin was to bog the Soviet Union down in Afghanistan so as to impede the spread of Soviet influence and power further in the direction of the Persian Gulf, a region vital to the United States and its allies because of its oil resources.

The theory of liberal-democratic proxy war includes strategic interests as one driver of American support to rebel movements. At the same time, the United States' commitment

[281] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 1st ed. (New York ; London: WWNorton & Company, 2001), 154–55.

to liberal ideals—notably self-determination—reinforced the willingness of American policymakers to provide robust support to the mujahedin. For the period during which Soviet troops were on the ground in Afghanistan, the demands of the United States' strategic interests and the demands of its ideals were in alignment. The United States could back the mujahedin in order to check Soviet power, while also helping a rebel movement that was fighting for self-determination and against an army waging a brutal counter-insurgency campaign. It is notable that some of the champions of the mujahedin's cause, such as Senator Paul Tsongas and Representative Stephen Solarz, both Democrats, were not archetypal, realist "Cold War warriors." As noted, many members of the legislature who spoke approvingly of the mujahedin's struggle also opposed the Reagan administration's support to the Nicaraguan contras, rebels who were fighting a Soviet-aligned regime and who were, therefore, also "an enemy of my enemy."

Nevertheless, relying solely on the case of American policy towards Afghanistan in the 1980s, it is not possible to refute a purely realist argument. That is precisely because the United States' strategic interests and one of its major ideals were in accord. They reinforced one another. What does refute an explanation of American support for rebellion dependent solely on a realist logic is a comparison of American policy towards Afghanistan alongside other cases of U.S. support to rebels in the 1980s. In particular, chapter 5 will describe how the United States vacillated in its support to the Nicaraguan contras and how Congress prohibited such aid in 1984. In that case, many American policymakers also regarded the United States to have strategic interests at stake in checking the expansionism of Soviet-aligned regimes. Even so, that strategic rationale was not enough to generate high levels of American support for the contras. Many American policymakers, especially

Democrats in Congress, believed that the contras' rebellion was contrary to American liberal-democratic ideals. Consequently, Democrats in Congress used their power to impose limitations on how much support the United States could give to the rebels. Chapter 6 will explain why the Reagan administration never provided military support to the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, despite the fact that some in Congress—and in the administration—called for doing just that. In that case, to many in the administration and the legislature, it appeared that the rebels had no greater popular support than the Marxist regime in Mozambique and they had a horrendous human rights record. Once again, the United States' liberal-democratic ideals served to constrain support for an anti-communist rebellion. The realist account is insufficient; the United States' liberal-democratic principles condition how it engages in proxy warfare.

Ideological Competition

The United States' support to the mujahedin was part of its broader ideological competition with the Soviet Union. As described, a Marxist-Leninist party, the PDPA, seized power in Afghanistan in 1978 and subsequently attempted to transform the country in accord with Marxist-Leninist precepts. The PDPA, having won power, also moved Afghanistan into the Soviet camp. The PDPA's efforts to undertake radical reform of Afghanistan precipitated widespread resistance to its rule and, in an effort to shore up the regime and hold on to its new ally, the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979. The United States' subsequent support to the mujahedin was, in a sense, part of the broader ideological struggle of the Cold War in that it aimed at preventing Afghanistan from becoming a permanent member of the communist camp. Nevertheless, an ideological

competition explanation for this case would be on firmer ground if the United States had supported a rebel movement that shared its ideological values. The mujahedin clearly did not.

In that sense, a realist account does better than an ideological competition one at explaining this case. Aid to the mujahedin was driven much more by the rebels' utility in imposing costs on the USSR and bogging it down than by any ideological affinity with the rebels. The theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, however, illuminates one aspect of the United States' ideals that did contribute to the nation's support to the mujahedin. Since the Soviet Union was violating Afghan self-determination and perpetrating egregious human rights abuses, there was widespread consensus that helping the mujahedin was justifiable. It was not just for strategic reasons; it also reflected American ideals, even if the mujahedin themselves did not subscribe to those ideals.

An Alternative Explanation for the Ultimate Costs of Supporting the Mujahedin: Principal-Agent Challenges

The American effort to leverage lethal assistance to the mujahedin in pursuit of U.S. foreign policy interests was bedeviled by two intertwined principal-agent problems. The first was created by a misalignment of interests between the United States on the one hand and the mujahedin movement on the other. Both the United States and the mujahedin shared an interest in driving the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, beyond that objective, which was achieved by February 1989, American interests in Afghanistan diverged from the mujahedin movement in two major ways. First, although three of the seven parties constituting the mujahedin's political leadership represented, in Barnett

Rubin's words, "conservative and Islamic sectors of the old regime," the remaining four parties were Islamist.[282] The four Islamist parties wanted to establish governance structures in Afghanistan that diverged significantly from American concepts of good governance. Second, in spite of their divisions, the one thing that unified the mujahedin's political leadership after the Soviet withdrawal was a deep-seated aversion to any sort of negotiation with the hated PDPA regime. This made it difficult for the United States to compel the resistance to engage in negotiations that might have produced a workable political settlement, and which became a foremost interest of the United States as it tried to wind down the conflict. A CIA analysis from February 1990 underscored the difficulty that this principal-agent problem produced for American efforts to reach a settlement. It explained that:

> Although they have received large amounts of aid from the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, the resistance groups are fiercely independent and unlikely to be convinced by outside supporters to enter negotiations they oppose.[283]

As described above, this pronounced resistance among the mujahedin to negotiating with Najibullah proved one of the key impediments to American efforts to reach a political settlement to the conflict after Soviet troops withdrew.

The second principal-agent problem related to divergent interests between the United States and Pakistan. Due to geographic necessity, the United States relied upon Pakistan as the conduit of aid to the mujahedin. The United States acceded to the request

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[282] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan*, 38.
[283] "The Search for a Political Settlement in Afghanistan: Strategies and Objectives of Key Actors," 7 February 1990, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, in Folder 'Working Files - Afghanistan 1989-1992 [2],' OA/ID CF01304-011, Richard Haass Files, National Security Council, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 5.

by Pakistan's president, Zia ul-Haq, that operational control over the assistance to the mujahedin be given to the ISI.[284] Unsurprisingly, Pakistan decided to distribute aid to the mujahedin in ways designed to serve its own interests.

Pakistan, in common with the United States and the mujahedin, had an interest in driving the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Beyond that, under Zia's leadership and afterwards, Pakistan also had an overriding interest in creating a pro-Pakistan, Islamist-governed Afghanistan. A former Pakistani general estimated that the four Islamist parties received about 75 percent of the external military assistance for the mujahedin, with Gulbuddin Hekmatar receiving the largest share.[285] Pakistan's preference for giving the most support to the Islamist factions of the mujahedin reflected at least two major factors. First, Zia ul-Haq was a committed Islamist. During his leadership, he enacted a program of "forced Islamization of the army and state."[286] Considering his Islamist political beliefs, it is unsurprising that Zia would favor ideological brethren when dispensing aid to the mujahedin fighters. Second, Pakistani leaders and officials were keenly focused on the strategic threat from India. Since the 1947 partition, Pakistan and India had fought two major wars, in 1965 and 1971. One of Pakistan's strategic nightmares was, and remains, facing a situation in which Afghanistan was pro-Indian, thereby leading to Pakistan's encirclement. To help avoid a pro-Indian Afghanistan, it made strategic sense, from a Pakistani perspective, to back Islamist groups in the country—after all, no Islamist group would consider aligning with Hindu-majority India against Islamic Pakistan.

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[284] Riedel, *What We Won*, 63.
[285] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 49.
[286] Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxxi.

Pakistan's support for the Islamist parts of the movement diverged from the United States' interest in seeing a non-fundamentalist Afghanistan and in achieving a political settlement to the war. Pakistan's actions over the previous decade, guided by its own interests, had empowered the Islamists, who wanted to create an Islamist state as a successor to the PDPA. What is more, in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan doubled down on its strategy of trying to create an Islamist Afghanistan led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as opposed to engaging earnestly in efforts to reach a political settlement. Pakistan tried repeatedly to install Hekmatyar in power. By 1991, in Peter Tomsen's characterization, Pakistan was taking hundreds of millions of dollars of American assistance intended for the mujahedin and was using it to pursue a "military strategy that contradicted U.S. interests and policies."[287] Having failed to make Hekmatyar undisputed leader of Afghanistan, in the mid-1990s Pakistan adopted a different approach—the ISI provided support to the Taliban in its sweep across Afghanistan.[288] Pakistan had finally achieved its pro-Pakistan, Islamist government in Kabul.

Delegating many operational aspects of assisting the mujahedin to Pakistan had advantages and disadvantages for the United States. On the positive side, it allowed the United States to assist the mujahedin without American personnel having to deploy inside Afghanistan, with all the risks that would have carried. On the other hand, Pakistan's favoritism of the most extreme Islamist groups within the mujahedin empowered those forces and impeded efforts to achieve a political settlement after the Soviet withdrawal.

[287] Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 1st ed.:425.
[288] Tomsen, 1st ed.:535–41.

Overall, therefore, a principal-agent framework elucidates some of the major reasons why the United States' aid to the mujahedin resulted in such significant problems for the United States after achieving the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nevertheless, a principal-agent framework, on its own, is insufficient to explain the overall level of effectiveness achieved by American support to the mujahedin. During the period in which Soviet forces were on the ground in Afghanistan, the close alignment of American and mujahedin interest in expelling those forces was not enough to ensure that outcome. That outcome also required the United States to furnish the mujahedin with large amounts of military assistance over a prolonged period of time. As documented, the United States was only willing to do that because—in addition to having a strategic interest in driving the USSR out of Afghanistan—American policymakers were convinced of the justifiability of the mujahedin's war. Hence, the drivers of American support to the Afghan rebels, identified by the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, were crucial to understanding the effectiveness of the policy in helping the mujahedin to prevail in a protracted war of attrition. It was not just a principal-agent challenge, but a principal-principal one as it pitted American aid to the mujahedin against the Soviet Union's willingness to pour more and more into Afghanistan in an effort to win.

After the Soviet withdrawal, the United States continued to provide weaponry to the mujahedin, in spite of an apparently wide divergence between the United States' "strategic interests" and those of the mujahedin and Pakistan. Even though many policymakers saw a declining interest in backing the mujahedin after the Soviet withdrawal, some others continued to argue for supporting the rebels to allow them to achieve what was viewed as real self-determination, not least the fall of the Najibullah

regime. Hence, America's liberal ideals contributed to a continuation of support for the rebels, thereby exacerbating the principal-agent problem associated with backing the mujahedin.

Furthermore, the principal-agent problems themselves were not necessarily insurmountable. In reality, the United States did not try to address them because, with its aversion to nation-building in foreign lands, its policy interest in Afghanistan declined rapidly. As Richard Haass later described Afghan policy during the period after February 1989:

> It wasn't a priority, people didn't get ambitious, and they allowed it to drift, subcontracting it out in large part to the Pakistanis.[289]

Of course, "subcontracting" Afghan policy out to Pakistan meant that, understandably, Pakistan would pursue its own interests. That reflected a huge principal-agent problem. Nevertheless, it was one the United States did not attempt to solve because of the rapid decline in policy attention paid to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, something that was, in part, a product of the United States' liberal-democratic character.

CONCLUSION

During the 1980s, the United States helped the mujahedin prevail in a protracted war of attrition against the Soviet Union. The United States' decision to do so reflected its strategic interests and the ideal of self-determination. Based on interests and ideals, there was wide-ranging support among American policymakers, in both the executive branch

[289] Richard Haass Oral History (Miller Center, University of Virginia), Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Staff's Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, George H.W. Bush Administration."

and in Congress, for providing huge amounts of support to the mujahedin over the course of a decade. American support to the rebels helped to hand the Soviet Union a stunning defeat in Afghanistan, which likely played a contributory role in the USSR's ultimate collapse. Nevertheless, a major consequence of participating in a prolonged war of attrition over Afghanistan was that by the end of the 1980s the country was devastated, which set the stage for its becoming a failed state. The Bush administration tried during 1989 and 1990 to reach a political settlement, but it foundered on the competing interests of the parties involved. Thereafter, partly as a result of its aversion to nation-building in foreign lands, American policy attention to Afghanistan declined rapidly. The United States did little to try to arrest the new threats that were beginning to grow in a land that had been devastated by a great power proxy war.

Chapter 5

A Struggle Over American Interests and Ideals:

Support to the Nicaraguan Contras, 1981-1990

In July 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front—a Marxist-Leninist guerilla group backed by Cuba—came to power in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas were the armed vanguard of a broad coalition that opposed Anastasio Somoza Debayle, a pro-American but brutal dictator. Having seized power, the Sandinistas quickly sidelined more moderate members of the anti-Somoza coalition, embarked upon building a communist state in Nicaragua, and began funneling arms to a Marxist-Leninist insurgency in El Salvador.

The Carter administration tried to induce the new Nicaraguan regime to establish a constructive relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, senior officials in the Carter administration were concerned about the Sandinistas' alignment with Cuba and the USSR, as well as the Sandinistas' support for Marxist insurgents in El Salvador. Consequently, President Carter authorized the CIA to undertake covert action directed against Nicaragua; it was of a non-lethal variety, focused primarily on propaganda efforts designed to publicize the Sandinistas' objectionable behavior and their relationship with Cuba.[1]

From the moment it assumed office in January 1981, the Reagan administration was determined to address what it saw as the challenge posed by a Soviet- and Cuba-aligned regime in close proximity to the United States. The administration terminated

[1] Robert Michael Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, vol. 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 150–51.

American economic aid to Nicaragua in the spring of 1981. Several months later, a senior American diplomat warned the Sandinista leadership that, unless they ceased their support for the insurgents in El Salvador, the United States would ratchet up pressure on them. After that diplomatic effort yielded nothing, in December 1981 President Ronald Reagan authorized the CIA to provide military support to the "contra" rebels, who were armed opponents of the Sandinistas and who enjoyed sanctuary in neighboring Honduras.[2]

When Reagan first authorized assistance to the rebels, the policy's stated objective was to counter the Sandinistas' support, in cooperation with Cuba, to the insurgency in El Salvador. Both of the intelligence committees in the United States' Congress accepted that providing support to the contras for that purpose was justified. As the size of the contras' insurgency grew during 1982, however, opposition mounted within the United States Congress to supporting the rebels. For the next five years, American politics was consumed by a bitter struggle over the issue. As a covert action finding signed by President Reagan in September 1983 confirmed, the Reagan administration's goals went beyond simply impeding the Sandinistas' efforts to export Marxist-Leninist revolution. The Reagan administration wanted to change Nicaragua's domestic political system. Meanwhile, many in Congress, especially within the Democratic Party, argued against aiding the contras, viewing the policy as unnecessary to defend American interests and inconsistent with American ideals. The result of this struggle was that, between 1982 and 1987, the United States provided the contras with faltering, inconsistent, military aid. Every year during this period saw close votes in Congress on whether or not to provide assistance to the rebellion.

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[2] Some sources capitalize the word "contras," whereas others do not. In this chapter, I write "contras" in lower case, even if the word was capitalized in sources from which I quote.

In 1984, Congressional opponents of backing the contras managed to enact a complete ban on providing support to them. Subsequently, in June 1985, partly driven by the Sandinistas' showcasing of their close links to Moscow and their increasingly repressive behavior at home, Congress set the prohibition aside and voted to provide non-lethal assistance to the contras. The following year, the legislature voted to furnish military assistance to the rebels once again and that tranche of aid began to flow to them in October 1986.

Unbeknownst to members of Congress when they voted on contra aid in 1985 and 1986, some officials in the Reagan administration, most notably Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North of the National Security Council (NSC) staff, had devised ways to aid the contras while circumventing the 1984 congressional ban. Only 8 weeks after Congressionally-approved military support began to flow to the contras again in 1986, the world learned that North had—earlier that year, while the Congressional ban was in place—funneled to the contras some of the proceeds generated by secret arms sales to Iran. This revelation precipitated what became known as the "Iran-contra" scandal. Following the scandal, Congress refused to authorize any new military support to the rebels.

The fight over whether or not to support the contras was a struggle over what American interests and ideals required. Opponents of aiding the contras argued that American interests did not require changing the Sandinistas' domestic political system, just tackling their external behavior. Due to the Sandinistas' efforts to export Marxist-Leninist revolution, many in Congress accepted the Reagan administration's initial rationale for providing limited support to an anti-Sandinista rebellion. President Reagan and other officials in his administration, however, believed that the surest way to protect American interests, and also promote U.S. ideals, was to put an end to the Sandinistas' Marxist-

Leninist system of government in Nicaragua. Many opponents of contra aid admitted that the Sandinista regime was politically repressive and that it denied democracy. Nevertheless, opponents of the policy argued that the rebels were no better in their adherence to liberal ideals. They argued that the contras did not enjoy any more domestic support than the Sandinista regime and that the rebels were committing human rights abuses just as bad—if not worse—than the regime itself.

Throughout the 1980s, the contra rebels were outmanned by the Sandinista regime. When President Reagan first authorized support to them, the rebels numbered only around 500 fighters.[3] At that time, the Sandinista regime had at least 15,000 active-duty troops, in addition to approximately 50,000 reserves and militia forces.[4] The contras' ranks would expand over the next six years, swelled in particular by Nicaraguan peasants who joined the rebellion because of their opposition to the Sandinistas' policies, notably including the forcible establishment of agricultural collectives. By mid-1987, the contras' military force comprised approximately 18,000 combatants.[5] Those numbers still paled in comparison to the Sandinistas' military, which consisted of over 70,000 active-duty troops and 46,000 reserve forces.[6]

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[3] Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 200.

[4] Memorandum for Robert M. Kimmitt, Executive Secretary, National Security Council, From CIA Executive Secretary, 9 November 1984, Subject: Nicaragua -- The Military Build-Up Since July 1979, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP00M00244R000500130003-9.pdf.

[5] National Intelligence Estimate, Nicaragua: Prospects for Sandinista Consolidation, August 1987, CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 4, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89M00699R002201790008-1.pdf.

[6] National Intelligence Estimate, Nicaragua: Prospects for Sandinista Consolidation, August 1987, CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 6.

The contra rebels were not only outmanned, they were outgunned. The communist bloc provided the Sandinista military with an array of weaponry, including tanks, armored personnel carriers, and helicopter gunships. In light of their numerical and technological disadvantages, the contras adopted the tactics of a guerilla insurgency. For the most part, they avoided conventional head-on-head confrontations with Sandinista forces and instead engaged in ambushes and sabotage operations. The CIA provided training in guerilla tactics and supplied weapons that were useful for that style of warfare.[7] Of particular importance to contra operations was their ability to use base camps in Honduras.[8] The rebels were able to deploy into Nicaragua to conduct ambushes and sabotage operations, sometimes remaining in Nicaragua for extended periods of time. When their supplies ran low or when the Sandinista army threatened to inflict major damage on the rebel forces, the contras could retreat to their sanctuaries in Honduras.

As a result of the competing support given to both sides of the conflict, the Sandinistas were never able to defeat the contras and the rebels were never able to overthrow the regime. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the contras' military fortunes ebbed and flowed with changes in American support to them that resulted from the finely-balanced political debate in Washington D.C. This externally backed war of attrition ended because both sides eventually decided to call it quits.[9] The United States, in the aftermath of Iran-contra, ceased its provision of military support to the rebels. On

[7] Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons*, 201–2.
[8] For a detailed discussion of the benefits the external sanctuaries provided to the contras, see Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2009), 126–44.
[9] On this point, and the confluence of factors that led to the end of the war, see Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 721–26.

the other side, the Sandinistas gave up because their economy was in dire straits and Soviet economic aid was no longer sufficient to keep it afloat. The way in which the opposing sides mutually gave up was shaped by a peace plan put forward in 1987 by the president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias. The plan emphasized the need for democracy in Central America and both the Sandinistas and the United States ultimately accepted that holding an election in Nicaragua offered a way to end the war. Although Congress never appropriated additional military support to the contras after the Iran-contra scandal broke in late 1986, the United States provided the contras with "non-lethal" aid between 1987 and 1990 in order to help hold them together as a cohesive force. That served as a threat to the Sandinistas: if they did not hold a free and fair election, the United States might opt to restore military support to the rebels once again. The Sandinistas proved willing to allow a free and fair ballot, which they thought they could win, in order to put a definitive stop to American aid to the contras. The Sandinista regime permitted election observers from around the world to oversee that election in February 1990.

The Sandinistas lost at the ballot box. For all of its divisiveness, the conflict in Nicaragua ended on terms that the Reagan administration had desired all along—Nicaragua had held a free election and the Sandinistas were out of power. The costs of achieving that result were high. The war of attrition caused tens of thousands of deaths and much economic devastation. In spite of the ebbs and flows in American aid over the decade, the United States' support to the contras was sufficiently sustained to pressure the Sandinistas into permitting an election. The fact that the United States ultimately achieved what had been a key objective of the Reagan administration all along reflected, in a major way, a lucky break—with growing anxiety about whether Soviet economic aid would be sufficient

to meet their needs, the Sandinistas decided to call it quits in the war of attrition at around the same time as the United States. Although American military support to the contras was brittle, so was the Sandinistas' capacity to keep fighting by the late 1980s.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The next section provides background to the conflict between the Sandinista regime and the contras. Then, I apply the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war to explain why President Reagan authorized American military support for the contras and why that policy became the subject of such political debate in Washington D.C. I evaluate the various steps that constitute the policy model that is central to that theory: presidential assessment of U.S. interests; presidential assessments of whether supporting a rebellion was likely to further U.S. interests and whether doing so was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals; the presidential decision reached and policy objectives set; and the degree of consensus in Congress that supporting a rebellion would promote U.S. interests and was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. The model provides a clear explanation of why American support to the contras was so politically contentious and inconsistent during the course of the 1980s. The chapter then analyzes how, as a result of the low degree of consensus in Congress regarding support for the contras, American military support to the rebels varied over the course of the 1980s and the consequences that had for the effectiveness of the Reagan administration's policy. The final part of the chapter assesses the alternative explanations for the nature and result of the United States' support to the contras—a realist account, an ideological competition account, and a principal-agent account—before offering concluding thoughts on this case.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

In 1912, President William Howard Taft sent American marines to Nicaragua to protect a pro-American government that was facing a revolt.[10] In January 1927, another American president, Calvin Coolidge, sent marines back to Nicaragua to assist the country's government once again.[11] Over the next five years, the U.S. Marines confronted a determined guerilla fighter, Augusto César Sandino, in the rugged land of northern Nicaragua.[12] Having proved unable to quash Sandino's resistance, the United States withdrew its marines in 1932.[13]

In February 1933, Sandino reached a peace agreement with Nicaraguan President Juan Bautista Sacasa. The following year, Anastasio Somoza García, the leader of Nicaragua's National Guard—an organization the United States had helped establish—had Sandino assassinated and Somoza García subsequently seized political power in 1936.[14] Somoza García was himself assassinated in September 1956. Somoza García's son, Luis Somoza Debayle, then became the country's president, but in 1963 he passed power to his younger brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle.[15]

There is a myth that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had said of Somoza García that "he's a son of a bitch, but he's ours." As Andrew Crawley explains, it is unlikely that

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[10] Kagan, 6.
[11] Kagan, 8.
[12] Kagan, 15–16.
[13] Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2007), 30.
[14] Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002), 22–23.
[15] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 32.

Roosevelt ever actually said that about the Nicaraguan leader.[16] Even so, there is a reason why the statement achieved mythic status—as a description of the Somoza dynasty, it rang true. Anastasio Somoza Debayle had a predilection for attending torture sessions of the regime's enemies and by the mid-1970s the Somoza family owned more than one-fifth of the country's land.[17]

In the early 1960s, Tomás Borge, Carlos Fonseca, and Silvio Mayorga formed an armed opposition group that aimed to end the Somoza family's rule.[18] The three founders were attracted to Marxism. Notwithstanding that, they chose to portray their mission as a nationalist one by naming their organization the "Sandinista National Liberation Front" (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or FSLN),* harkening back to Sandino's military exploits against American Marines; the FSLN began its own armed struggle in 1963.[19]

During the 1970s, widespread political opposition to Somoza Debayle's rule began to gather steam. In 1972, Managua was rocked by major street protests and, in response, the National Guard launched a crackdown in the capital.[20] Following an audacious FSLN attack in 1974, Somoza unleashed his National Guard to undertake a brutal counter-insurgency effort against the Sandinistas.[21] Political opposition to the Somoza regime

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[16] Crawley explains that the first appearance of the quote in print was actually in reference to Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself, following his winning of the 1932 nomination as the Democratic candidate for president. See Andrew Crawley, *Somoza and Roosevelt: Good Neighbour Diplomacy in Nicaragua, 1933-1945* (OUP Oxford, 2007), 152–53.
[17] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 32–33.
[18] Kinzer, 57.
[19] Kinzer, 58.
[20] Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 167.
[21] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 28.

accelerated after the January 1978 assassination, by pro-Somoza assailants, of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who was the editor of *La Prensa*, an opposition newspaper.[22] Beginning in late 1978, and continuing through early 1979, President Jimmy Carter's administration attempted to mediate between Somoza and his opponents by proposing that Somoza submit to a vote on his continued rule, but the Nicaraguan leader rejected the United States' proposed terms for such a vote.[23]

Early in 1979, Fidel Castro informed the Sandinistas that he was prepared to support them in their armed struggle.[24] In May 1979, the FSLN launched a major military offensive and the following month, as part of a strategy of allying with a broad cross-section of Somoza opponents, the Sandinistas announced the creation of a five member junta—effectively a government-in-waiting—comprising Alfonso Robelo, Violeta Chamorro, Sergio Ramírez, Moisés Hassan, and Daniel Ortega.[25] Chamorro was the widow of the murdered newspaper editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. As Stephen Kinzer explains, both Robelo and Chamorro were "true believers in Western-style democracy."[26]

A June 1979 CIA analysis of the situation in Nicaragua judged that "the vast majority of the population is probably sympathetic to the [Sandinista National Liberation] Front because it is perceived to be the only group actively challenging the Somoza

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[22] James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 153.
[23] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 66–67; William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 21–22; Robert A. Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," in *Public Opinion in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Controversy over Contra Aid*, ed. Richard Sobel (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 226.
[24] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 67–68.
[25] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 94.
[26] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 73.

government."[27] In a memo to President Carter on June 23, 1979, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski warned that "the Sandinistas are getting a lot of arms from the Cubans."[28] In July, the opposition junta announced the names of a 12-member cabinet, which included additional political moderates such as Arturo Cruz, and sent a letter to the General Secretary of the Organization of American States (OAS) promising that after the junta took power it would hold free elections.[29]

On July 17, 1979, Somoza fled Nicaragua.[30] In the following hours, Somoza's National Guard collapsed and on July 19 Sandinista forces marched into Managua and established a government run by the 5-member junta.[31] On July 20, the Carter administration decided upon an effort to "try to assist the new regime in a manner that would increase the prospects for democratization and regional security."[32] In September 1979, President Carter welcomed three members of the junta—Daniel Ortega, Alfonso Robelo, and Sergio Ramírez—to the White House.[33] In November 1979, the Carter

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[27] Research Paper, Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front, June 1979, CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, Available from CIA CREST, 3, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80T00942A001200040001-7.pdf.

[28] Memorandum for The President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, Subject: SCC Meeting on Nicaragua, June 23, 1979, Folder 'Meetings - SCC 170, 6/23/79,' in Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Materials) Subject Files, Box 30, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 1.

[29] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 106–7.

[30] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 70–71.

[31] Kinzer, 72–73.

[32] Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," 227.

[33] John M. Goshko, "Three From Nicaraguan Junta Get Red-Carpet Welcome Here," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1979, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/09/25/three-from-nicaraguan-junta-get-red-carpet-welcome-here/57f812ba-ab0d-4727-ad52-271ffcb1f669/.

administration submitted a $75 million aid package for Nicaragua to Congress, which was eventually approved during the summer of 1980.[34]

In spite of the effort to develop an amiable relationship with the new Nicaraguan regime, senior officials in the Carter administration were concerned about the implications of the Sandinistas' victory. As Robert Gates describes, only weeks after the Sandinistas took Managua, President Carter signed a covert action finding that was "focused primarily on propaganda, exposing what the Sandinistas were all about, and the Cuban role in supporting the Nicaraguan revolution."[35] The Carter administration was especially concerned that other countries in Central America might succumb to Marxist revolution; officials judged that El Salvador was "the most 'ripe' for political polarization and revolution."[36] A CIA assessment from September 1979 reported that:

> The Sandinistas have supplied arms to Salvadoran guerrillas and are relying on Cuban military advisers based in Nicaragua to help prepare Salvadoran and Nicaraguan combatants for eventual service in El Salvador.[37]

On November 24, 1979, President Carter signed another covert action finding that, according to Gates, authorized "CIA actions to counter the Soviets and Cubans throughout Latin America."[38] In April 1980, both Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo quit the

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[34] Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," 227.
[35] Gates, *From the Shadows*, 1st Touchstone ed.:150–51.
[36] Policy Review Committee Meeting, Summary of Conclusions, Thursday August 2, 1979, Central America, in Folder 'PRC 126 El Salvador and Central America, 10/15/79,' NSC Institutional Files (H Files), Box 78, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 2.
[37] Memorandum, Nicaragua-Cuba: Support of Central American Revolutionaries, 28 September 1979, CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, in Folder 'Nicaragua: 7-9/79,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Country Files (NSA 6), Box 56, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library," 1.
[38] Gates, *From the Shadows*, 1st Touchstone ed.:151.

Nicaraguan junta, having become disillusioned with the Sandinistas' moves to sideline more moderate members of it.[39] The same month, the United States became aware that large caliber Soviet weapons were in Nicaragua.[40] In August 1980, the Sandinistas announced that they would not hold elections in Nicaragua until at least 1985.[41] The next month, a State Department official travelled to Managua and admonished the Sandinistas not to supply arms to the insurgents in El Salvador. The Sandinistas suspended the arms shipments until the day of the 1980 American presidential election, wary of undermining Carter's chances against Reagan.[42] As a CIA analysis from January 1981 indicated, however, Nicaragua resumed arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerillas shortly after Reagan won the election in November 1980.[43]

On January 10, 1981, ten days before Ronald Reagan took the presidential oath of office, Marxist guerillas in El Salvador—the FMLN—launched a military offensive to try to seize power in that country. After three weeks, government forces had successfully blunted the attacks.[44] Even so, the offensive vividly emphasized the danger that another country in the region could fall to communist guerillas. It was in that context that the Reagan administration would formulate its policies towards Nicaragua.

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[39] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 79.
[40] Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from The Situation Room, April 24, 1980, Evening Notes, in Folder '4/21/80 - 4/30/80,' Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, President's Daily Report Files (NSA 1), Box 15, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 2.
[41] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 143.
[42] Kagan, 158–59.
[43] Memorandum, CIA, 2 January 1981, El Salvador: Military Prospects, in Folder "Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski, 10/80-1/81," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection (Donated Materials), Subject Files, Box 24, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, 2.
[44] Russell Crandall, *The Salvador Option: The United States in El Salvador, 1977-1992* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 176–77.

EXPLAINING AMERICAN MILITARY SUPPORT TO THE CONTRAS

Presidential Assessment of American Interests

The Sandinista government in Nicaragua affected American strategic interests, in the view of the Reagan administration, because it was a Cuban- and Soviet-aligned regime on the landmass of the United States' own continent. Additionally, the Sandinistas were apparently trying to export Marxist-Leninist revolution to other countries in the region, most notably El Salvador. As President Reagan's first national security advisor, Richard Allen, described the regional situation in a memo to the president early in his administration, "we have inherited a mess in our own backyard."[45] Secretary of State Alexander Haig informed the first NSC meeting of the Reagan administration that:

> The Cubans are heavily involved in Central America. 600 tons of arms are going into El Salvador in various ways……We have raised the question of arms traffic with the Nicaraguan regime, and they have assured us that they will take action to curb the flow of arms to El Salvador. They claim that the problem arises in lower levels of the government; the evidence does not support them.[46]

President Reagan was keenly focused on ensuring that the Marxist-Leninist guerillas in El Salvador did not win power as a result of the aid they were receiving from Cuba and Nicaragua. At the first NSC meeting of his administration, Reagan emphasized that "El Salvador is the place for a victory."[47] At the next NSC meeting, the U.S.

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[45] Memorandum from Richard V. Allen, Subject: National Security Council Meeting, Wednesday February 25, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.
[46] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 3.
[47] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 6.

Ambassador to Nicaragua, Lawrence Pezzulo, explained that the Sandinistas viewed El Salvador as a "forward defense position for their own revolution."[48] Reagan stressed that if the government in El Salvador fell it would be "seen as an American defeat" and he emphasized that "we must not let Central America become another Cuba on the mainland."[49]

President Reagan and other officials in his administration assessed that the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua threatened the American interest in a secure western hemisphere in which anti-American regimes were not prevalent. An interagency paper produced early in the Reagan administration emphasized that one of the United States' major goals in the region was:

> Preventing takeovers by radical Communist governments that, as local surrogates of Moscow and Cuba, could ultimately threaten Mexican and Venezuelan oil, as well as the security of the Panama Canal and the vital interests of the U.S.[50]

Of especial concern to Reagan administration officials, the further spread of Soviet-aligned governments in Central America could impede the United States' global power projection capabilities. As the head of the CIA's Latin America Division at the time, Dewey Clarridge, later noted, in the event of a war in Europe, the United States' Gulf ports

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[48] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 11, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00002 02/11/1981 [Nicaragua Finding and Central America, Cuba Policy, Intelligence, Caribbean, Poland],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.

[49] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 11, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00002 02/11/1981 [Nicaragua Finding and Central America, Cuba Policy, Intelligence, Caribbean, Poland],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 5.

[50] Interagency Options Paper for the NSC, February 24, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00004 02/27/1981 [Poland, Caribbean Basin, F-15 Aircraft, El Salvador] [1/4],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.

would have been the primary departure points for American troops and materiel being sent to Europe to assist in the defense of NATO allies.[51] Consequently, in the event of having to respond to such a contingency, the United States would have planned to transport military assets through the Caribbean Sea. Cuba already posed a threat to the security of those shipping lanes. The proliferation of additional Soviet-aligned regimes, which could host Soviet military assets, in the Caribbean region would have enhanced the threat to the United States' maritime links to the rest of the world. As a 1982 Reagan administration policy directive regarding Latin America emphasized, there was a potential "interdiction threat to U.S. aerial and maritime routes in the Caribbean Basin" as the result of "potentially hostile airbases and the introduction/augmentation of Soviet Bloc tactical aircraft and weaponry."[52]

Even so, President Reagan did not see the threat posed by the Sandinista regime as so significant that he was prepared to consider direct military action against that government. President Reagan made clear to his national security team that he wanted to avoid "high profile US involvement" in the region, remarking at one NSC meeting in February 1981 that "we don't want to get bogged down in that old Yankee interventionist question."[53] There were, of course, pronounced domestic political reasons for avoiding the

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[51] Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons*, 195.
[52] National Security Decision Directive 71, November 30, 1982, U.S. Policy Toward Latin America In the Wake of the Falklands Crisis, Available from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd71.pdf.
[53] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 18, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00003 02/18/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland, F-15 Aircraft, Saudi Arabia, El Salvador, Nicaragua] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 6.

direct use of American forces in Central America, given the post-Vietnam aversion to American commitments in the so-called "Third World." At the NSC meeting held on February 11, 1981, Secretary of State Haig stressed that "the American people won't support another Vietnam situation where US troops are stationed in Central America."[54] President Reagan would, instead, consider more limited military options to counter what he saw as the harm that the Sandinistas, in conjunction with Cuba, threatened to U.S. interests in the western hemisphere.

Presidential Assessment: Would Supporting a Rebellion be (1) Likely to further U.S. Interests and (2) Was it Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals?

Early in the Reagan administration, Secretary of State Haig informed the president that reducing the flow of weapons from and through Nicaragua to the Salvadoran guerillas would limit the amount of military assistance the United States needed to provide to the Salvadoran government to allow it to survive the Marxist-Leninist insurgency it confronted. As Secretary Haig emphasized to Reagan in a January 1981 memo about El Salvador:

[54] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 11, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00002 02/11/1981 [Nicaragua Finding and Central America, Cuba Policy, Intelligence, Caribbean, Poland],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 3.

> The extent of the future problem will obviously depend on how much outside support the guerrillas continue to receive. If such support is not contained, it would be necessary to expand the size of the Salvadoran military and provide it with major amounts of modern arms……The presence of substantial numbers of U.S. military in the country would run major risks of polarizing the situation in El Salvador, uniting the people against the foreigners, and of polarizing the U.S. along Vietnam lines. If substantial support from outside can be cut off, it appears the current or modestly expanded Salvadoran forces can control the situation so long as we provide the fairly modest amounts of materiel needed.[55]

President Reagan was focused on finding policy options that might be effective in countering the Sandinistas' cooperation with Cuba in sending arms to the guerillas in El Salvador. In the Reagan administration's first NSC meeting, held on February 6, 1981, President Reagan asked his advisers, "how can we intercept these weapons?"[56] On March 9, 1981 Reagan signed a covert action "finding" that authorized providing "all forms of training, equipment and related assistance to cooperating governments throughout Central America in order to counter foreign-sponsored subversion and terrorism."[57] Under the authority of that finding, the CIA began developing some of the contacts that would enable it to provide support to armed opponents of the Sandinistas if the president authorized such action. For example, in August 1981, the CIA's operations chief for the region, Dewey

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[55] Memorandum from Alexander M. Haig, Jr. to the President, January 26, 1981, Subject: El Salvador, in Folder 'NSC 00003 02/18/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland, F-15 Aircraft, Saudi Arabia, El Salvador, Nicaragua] [2/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.

[56] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 5.

[57] "Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, Concerning Operations Undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in Foreign Countries, Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection, March 9, 1981, Scope: Central America," https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/documents/d-nic-5.pdf.

Clarridge, travelled to Honduras to meet with that nation's military officials. He discussed with them possible American support to anti-Sandinista fighters, notably including former members of Somoza's National Guard, who had taken up sanctuary in the country.[58]

The Reagan administration tried exerting diplomatic pressure to get the Sandinistas to cease backing the guerillas in El Salvador. In April 1981, the administration ended American economic aid to Nicaragua.[59] In August, the Reagan administration's Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Thomas Enders, travelled to Managua for discussions with the Sandinista regime.[60] Stephen Kinzer recounts the essence of Enders' message to the Sandinistas, explaining that:

> Enders told the *comandantes* that if they wanted to head off an impending war, they would have to stop providing aid to Salvadoran rebels and other foreign guerrillas, and cut or substantially loosen their military ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union.[61]

Kinzer, who is critical of the Reagan administration's policy towards Nicaragua during the 1980s, explains that the Sandinistas "scorned" the proposed offer and replied to Enders with "scathing denunciations of American intervention in Nicaragua."[62]

Following the failure of the Enders mission, the Reagan administration concluded that military pressure would be needed to achieve an end to Cuban and Nicaraguan support for the insurgency in El Salvador. Secretary of State Alexander Haig had argued that the way to deal with that challenge was to "go to the source of the problem," which would

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[58] Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (University Press of Kansas, 2014), 18.
[59] Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," 227.
[60] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 96.
[61] Kinzer, 96.
[62] Kinzer, 96.

have involved adopting "a program of actions in regard to Cuba."[63] Other administration officials were, however, concerned about moving swiftly to undertaking forceful actions aimed at Cuba directly.[64] Providing military support to anti-Sandinista rebels offered a potential way to impose costs on both Nicaragua and Cuba—which had personnel in Nicaragua working with the Sandinistas to aid the guerillas in El Salvador—in an effort to make them change their behavior. As National Security Advisor Richard Allen noted during a NSC meeting on November 10, 1981, "Cubans in Nicaragua do create opportunities for us" and taking action in Nicaragua was "very different than going directly to Cuba with warlike actions."[65]

President Reagan also believed that efforts to counter the emergence of new communist governments were defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. When it came to the relative legitimacy of a communist government or a rightist military Junta—as existed in El Salvador at the beginning of President Reagan's administration—Reagan was clear that communist governments were worse. He emphasized that point to his advisers at the first NSC meeting of his administration, stressing that:

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[63] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 11, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00002 02/11/1981 [Nicaragua Finding and Central America, Cuba Policy, Intelligence, Caribbean, Poland],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 3.
[64] Minutes of NSC Meeting, November 10, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00024 11/10/1981 [Strategy toward Cuba and Central America, El Salvador] [2/2],' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.
[65] Minutes of NSC Meeting, November 10, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00024 11/10/1981 [Strategy toward Cuba and Central America, El Salvador] [2/2],' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4.

> My own feeling -- and one about which I have talked at length -- is that we are way behind, perhaps decades, in establishing good relations with the two Americas. We must change the attitude of our diplomatic corps so that we don't bring down governments in the name of human rights. None of them is as guilty of human rights violations as are Cuba and the USSR. We don't throw out our friends just because they can't pass the 'saliva test' on human rights. I want to see that stopped. We need people who recognize that philosophy.[66]

This was a private statement that President Reagan made to his most senior national security advisers. It was a clear expression of the president's belief that, no matter the flaws of other governments, communist governments were liable to be among the worst when it came to respecting human rights. As historian Hal Brands writes, "Reagan saw the superpower rivalry as a defining global struggle—a Manichean clash between the forces of freedom and those of totalitarian evil."[67] During Reagan's first year in office, Central America was a region in which the forces of Marxism-Leninism were trying to expand. Given his view that communist governments were the worst of all possible regimes when it came to freedom and human rights, there is little doubt that Reagan felt that stopping that spread was defensible in terms of American ideals.

Presidential Decision and Policy Objectives

On December 1, 1981, President Reagan signed another covert action finding that authorized the CIA to support Nicaraguan armed opposition forces to conduct

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[66] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4.

[67] Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (New York, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 107.

"paramilitary operations" in the country.[68] In his diary that day, Reagan recorded that "we're proceeding with covert activity in Nicaragua to shut off supplies to the Guerillas in El Salvador."[69]

The Reagan administration's policy directive for Central America issued around the same time as the covert action finding—National Security Decision Directive 17—also emphasized that American policy aimed to "assist in defeating the insurgency in El Salvador, and to oppose actions by Cuba, Nicaragua, or others to introduce into Central America heavy weapons, troops from outside the region, trained subversives, or arms and military supplies for insurgents."[70]

CIA officer Dewey Clarridge led the establishment of the contra program. In his memoirs, he recounted the essence of the covert action program he had designed: "My plan was simple: 1. Take the war to Nicaragua. 2. Start killing Cubans."[71] Clarridge also explains in his memoir the logic for aiding anti-Sandinista forces as a way to relieve the pressure on El Salvador, writing that:

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[68] The finding was released, in a highly-redacted form, as part of the congressional investigations into the "Iran-contra" scandal during the 1980s. This author filed a Mandatory Declassification Request (MDR) with the CIA in July 2017 seeking further declassification of the document. The CIA responded in September 2017 and did not declassify any additional text from the finding. See "Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, As Amended, Concerning the Operations in Foreign Countries Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection," December 1, 1981, Signed by President Ronald Reagan, https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/documents/d-all-45.pdf.

[69] Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 52.

[70] National Security Decision Directive 17, January 4, 1982, Cuba and Central America, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[71] Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 197.

> The advantage I saw in taking the offensive in Nicaragua was that we might more successfully interdict the arms traffic to El Salvador, cause the Sandinistas to turn inward to deal with their own guerrilla movement, and perhaps eventually consider allowing a real pluralistic form of government.[72]

At the beginning of the program, therefore, the aim was to impose costs on the Sandinistas and make them focus on confronting an armed opposition movement threatening them, rather than focus their attention on helping Marxist-Leninist guerillas in El Salvador. Clarridge also recounts how the program, according to him, might have encouraged Cuba to reduce its presence in Nicaragua, where its personnel were helping to consolidate Sandinista rule and were working with the Sandinistas to aid the insurgents in El Salvador. As he wrote in his memoirs:

> I certainly didn't intend to go out of my way to find Cubans in Nicaragua to kill. The idea was to make them pay for their involvement in Nicaragua, in the hope that they'd find it too expensive and get out.[73]

The CIA's plan was to provide assistance to a force of about 500 anti-Sandinista fighters who were already in Honduras; the force comprised a mixture of former soldiers from Somoza's National Guard and Nicaraguan peasants.[74] Following President Reagan's signature of the covert action finding, on December 9 and 10, 1981, CIA Director Bill Casey briefed the House and Senate intelligence committees on the finding and the CIA's plan to support the anti-Sandinista fighters in Honduras.[75] As Joseph Persico describes in

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[72] Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 197–98.
[73] Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 198.
[74] Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy For All Seasons: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1997), 200.
[75] Memorandum for the Record, 9 December 1981, Subject: 9 December HPSCI Briefing on the 1 December Presidential Finding on Central America, Available from CIA

his biography of Casey, the CIA Director gave the impression to the intelligence committees that "a five-hundred-man commando strike force would be making hit-and-run raids across the border into Nicaragua, torching an ammo dump, seizing an arms cache, blowing up a bridge, cutting the supply lines into El Salvador."[76]

The Establishment of the Program to aid the Contras

When the armed campaign against the Sandinistas began in earnest, in mid-March 1982, the opening salvos certainly had the character that Casey had briefed to the congressional intelligence committees. Anti-Sandinista fighters detonated explosives on two bridges on the Pan American Highway, which was a route used by the Sandinistas for conveying aid to the insurgents in El Salvador.[77] In addition to working with Honduras, the United States also cooperated with Argentina—whose military regime was vehemently anti-communist—in providing military support to the anti-Sandinista rebels. CIA personnel trained Honduran and Argentinian military personnel in guerilla tactics and the Honduran and Argentinian instructors then trained the rebels in camps located in Honduras.[78] The United States' first batch of support to the rebels included providing them

CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP95B00915R000500110003-2.pdf; Memorandum for the Record, 10 December 1981, Subject: SSCI Hearing of 10 December 1981 Re 1 December Presidential Finding, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP95B00915R000500110004-1.pdf.

[76] Joseph E. Persico, *Casey: From the OSS to the CIA* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1990), 275.

[77] Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons*, 218–19.

[78] Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons*, 201.

with rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, the M72 LAW (Light Anti-Armor Weapon), and mortars.[79]

The anti-Sandinista rebellion that the Reagan administration supported included three factions, who became known collectively as the contras, short for "contra-revolucionarios" or "counter-revolutionaries."[80] First, there was the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (or *Fuerza Democrática Nicaragüense*, FDN) that was commanded by Enrique Bermúdez, a former Lieutenant Colonel in Somoza's National Guard. In addition to Bermúdez, the other senior commanders of the FDN were also former National Guard officers.[81] Second, significant numbers of Miskito Indians from the east of Nicaragua took up arms against the Sandinista regime. The Miskito Indians had, throughout Nicaragua's history, enjoyed autonomy from Managua. During the course of 1981, the Sandinistas forcibly resettled around 8,500 Miskito Indians, which generated widespread resentment and led many Miskitos to flee to Honduras in order to join the contras.[82] Finally, after 1982, Edén Pastora, who had proven himself as one of the Sandinistas' most effective commanders in their fight against Somoza, led a faction of armed opponents based in Costa Rica. He had resigned his post in the Sandinista government in July 1981.[83] Although the CIA tried to get Pastora to coordinate his campaign with the FDN, he refused to do so.[84] The CIA provided less assistance to Pastora's forces than to the FDN and the Miskito Indians.

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[79] Clarridge, 202.
[80] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 155.
[81] Scott, 155.
[82] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 197.
[83] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 184–85 & 214.
[84] Clarridge, *A Spy for All Seasons*, 216.

Degree of Consensus in Congress about whether Supporting the Contras was Likely to Further U.S. Interests and Whether it was Defensible in terms of U.S. Ideals

By the fall of 1981, many American policymakers were troubled by how the regime in Nicaragua had evolved since July 1979. For example, Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts, described the Nicaraguan government as "an authoritarian regime of the left" and Senator Thomas Eagleton, a Democrat from Missouri, voiced concern that the Sandinista government was "exporting its revolution."[85] As noted, when CIA Director Bill Casey briefed the intelligence committees in December 1981, he stressed that support to the contras was a response to Nicaraguan aid to the communist insurgency in El Salvador. Persico explains that Casey's decision to characterize the operation that way reflected his belief that doing so had the "right, reasonable, limited ring" for members of the legislature.[86] Cynthia Arnson writes that members of the intelligence committees "voted funds for a program ostensibly aimed at arms interdiction, in light of convincing evidence that the Sandinistas were providing support to Salvadoran revolutionaries."[87] Within the intelligence committees, there was a high level of consensus in late 1981 that aiding anti-Sandinista fighters for addressing that specific challenge was consistent with U.S. interests and ideals. Not only would the spread of Marxism-Leninism around the hemisphere challenge American regional interests, the Sandinistas appeared to be supporting revolution in a neighboring country, thereby violating the ideal of self-determination.

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[85] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 198.
[86] Persico, *Casey*, 273.
[87] Cynthia Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the Reagan Administration, and Central America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 213.

Outside of the intelligence committees, however, there would soon emerge opposition to the Reagan administration's support for the contras. In February and March 1982, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published details about the covert support to the Nicaraguan rebels.[88] Shortly after that, Congressman Michael Barnes, a Democrat from Maryland, introduced legislation to prohibit the United States from supporting the contras.[89] Representative Barnes argued that support to the rebels could not be defended in terms of the United States' ideals. He emphasized that "this country has for a long time been the world's foremost proponent of the principles of self-determination and noninterference in the affairs of other countries" and that backing the contras was inconsistent with those ideals. As Barnes put it:

> We may not like it, but it is a fact that the Sandinista government was brought to power by a revolution that was almost universally conceded at that time to have overwhelming popular support. It is true that some of that support has eroded, and for good reason. But what gives us the right to determine that Nicaragua should have a different kind of government?[90]

In the face of opposition from some in his party about aiding the contras, Democratic Congressman Edward Boland, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, decided to take action. In April 1982, he authored a provision in the intelligence authorization bill for the next year requiring that none of the funds to support the contras be spent "for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking an exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras."[91] The provision was included

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[88] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 215.
[89] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 4 (March 15, 1982 to March 24, 1982), March 15, 1982, Statement by Rep. Barnes, 4167.
[90] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 4 (March 15, 1982 to March 24, 1982), 4167, Statement by Rep. Barnes.
[91] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 218.

in the secret portion of the bill; while it did not ban aid to the contras, it restricted the objectives of the covert action program, limiting them to countering Sandinista efforts to export revolution. The previous month, following a briefing by intelligence officials, Boland had publicly acknowledged "persuasive evidence" that the Sandinistas were "transferring arms and financial support from and through Nicaragua" to insurgents in El Salvador.[92]

Typical contra operations at this time involved rebels leaving their base camps in Honduras and deploying into Nicaragua for several days to attack Sandinista personnel and towns.[93] An American Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) issued in late 1982 stated that "the anti-Sandinista forces appear to be increasingly effective in conducting small-scale actions—harassment, ambushes, and sabotage operations."[94]

On November 8, 1982, *Newsweek's* cover was emblazoned with a dramatic headline: "America's Secret War: Target Nicaragua." The magazine reported that there were "almost 50 CIA personnel serving in Honduras" who were providing assistance to the contras' insurgency.[95] One month after that article was published, Democratic Congressman Tom Harkin offered an amendment to a defense appropriations bill that

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[92] Cable from the Secretary of State To All American Republic Diplomatic Posts, March 5, 1982, 0326Z, Subject: Statement by Senate and House Select Intelligence Committee Chairmen, Available in CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88B00443R001103940077-3.pdf.

[93] Kagan, 238–39.

[94] Special National Intelligence Estimate, Prospects for Escalating Hostilities Between Nicaragua and Honduras, Director of Central Intelligence, 8 December 1982, SNIE 83.2-82, Available from CIA CREST, 9, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R000902260030-5.pdf.

[95] John Brecher et al., "A Secret War For Nicaragua," *Newsweek; New York*, November 8, 1982.

would have completely prohibited any American support for paramilitary operations either inside or against Nicaragua.[96] Representative Harkin argued that the United States should not be supporting the contras because of their character; he described them as the "remnants of the evil, murderous National Guard."[97] Additionally, because the contras did not control territory inside Nicaragua and had been launching assaults into Nicaragua from their base camps in Honduras, some members of Congress argued during the same congressional debate that American support to the contras represented support for an "invasion."[98] By using that term, opponents of aiding the rebels were, in effect, arguing that the United States was violating the ideal of self-determination.

As an alternative to Harkin's amendment, Edward Boland proposed including his earlier language from the secret portion of the intelligence bill in the defense bill and he emphasized that the Reagan administration had already accepted the language.[99] What became known as the first Boland Amendment passed by 411 to 0 votes in the House.[100] The Republican leadership backed Boland's amendment because they deemed it much preferable to Harkin's.[101] Subsequently, the Senate accepted the same language and on December 21, 1982 President Reagan signed the bill into law. The language of Boland's Amendment read as follows:

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[96] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 242.
[97] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 21 (December 1, 1982 to December 8, 1982), December 8, 1982, 29458, Statement by Rep. Harkin.
[98] For example, Representative Oberstar stated "let us not arm others for an invasion of that country." 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 21 (December 1, 1982 to December 8, 1982), 29460, Statement by Rep. Oberstar.
[99] LeoGrande, 303.
[100] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 163.
[101] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 304.

> None of the funds provided in this Act may be used by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Department of Defense to furnish military equipment, military training or advice, or other support for military activities, to any group or individual, not a part of a country's armed forces, for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.[102]

Michael O'Neil, who served as chief counsel to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence during the 1980s, described to this author what Edward Boland tried to achieve in 1982, recalling that:

> The purpose of the 1982 Boland amendment was to ensure that the Harkin amendment not pass the House. Mr. Boland's judgment was that the best way to forestall it was to offer a substitute that would permit activities in Nicaragua consistent with what had been briefed to the intelligence committees. He made sure that the Agency knew what he was going to do and that they had an advance copy of his amendment.[103]

Representative Boland's position was that a limited program, focused on countering the Sandinistas' role in trying to spread Marxism-Leninism around the hemisphere, was consistent with American interests and defensible in terms of the nation's ideals.

During 1983, the anti-Sandinista insurgency gathered steam. In the opening weeks of that year, some contra forces managed to launch operations deep into Nicaraguan territory.[104] Robert Kagan describes how some contra forces committed human rights abuses as part of their operations during 1983, writing that:

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[102] 128 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 128, Part 21 (December 1, 1982 to December 8, 1982), 29468.
[103] Michael J. O'Neil, Interview with Author and Subsequent Email Correspondence with Author, January 11, 2018.
[104] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 248–51.

> The contras routinely executed Sandinista soldiers and militia captured in ambushes or Sandinista officials sent from the cities to teach in the schools or work in the fields. They frequently killed lay preachers and religious workers who came to the countryside to pick crops in support of the revolution and in service to the [Sandinistas'] 'People's Church.' The contras treated these civilians as enemies, and on this basis justified their rape, torture, and murder.[105]

By March 1983, the CIA estimated that the contras' insurgency was being waged by over 6,500 fighters.[106] In late March 1983, Stephen Kinzer of the *New York Times* revealed that he had located one of the contras' camps in Honduras, bringing more public attention in the United States to the CIA's support for the rebels.[107] That same month, during a speech on Central America, President Reagan had emphasized the strategic threat that would be posed by a proliferation of Soviet-aligned governments in the region, stating that:

> Soviet military theorists want to destroy our capacity to resupply Western Europe in case of an emergency. They want to tie down our attention and forces on our own southern border and so limit our capacity to act in more distant places, such as Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, the Sea of Japan……If we must defend ourselves against large, hostile military presence on our border, our freedom to act elsewhere to help others and to protect strategically vital sealanes and resources has been drastically diminished.[108]

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[105] Kagan, 250.

[106] Memorandum for Director of Central Intelligence, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, From: SA/DCI/IA, 22 March 1983, Subject: HPSCI Hearing on Nicaragua, 23 March 1983, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85M00363R000801770002-1.pdf.

[107] Stephen Kinzer, "At a Border Camp In Honduras, Anti-Sandinistas Are Wary of Visit," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1983, http://www.nytimes.com/1983/03/28/world/at-a-border-camp-in-honduras-anti-sandinists-are-wary-of-visit.html.

[108] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Central America and El Salvador at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Manufacturers," March 10, 1983.

Following the public revelations regarding the program to provide aid to the contras, and in light of mounting opposition in Congress towards the administration's policies in Central America, President Reagan addressed a joint session of Congress in April 1983. In preparation for the speech, administration officials considered whether President Reagan should openly call for American support to the contras, which remained a covert program despite the media revelations about it. Administration officials judged that it would not be desirable to do so because taking that step would raise difficulties under international law and under the Boland amendment.[109]

When Reagan spoke on April 27, 1983 he refrained from acknowledging American military support for the contras. Nevertheless, every member of Congress knew full well that the United States was providing military assistance to the rebels as part of a covert action program. The president stressed the strategic interests the United States had at stake in Central America, emphasizing that "two-thirds of all our foreign trade and petroleum pass through the Panama Canal and the Caribbean" and that "in a European crisis at least half of our supplies for NATO would go through these areas by sea."[110] Reagan also argued that the Sandinistas' behavior was inconsistent with the liberal-democratic ideals of the United States. As Reagan put it:

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[109] "Memorandum from L. Craig Johnstone, Chairman Central America Working Group to CPPG [Crisis Pre-Planning Group] Principals, April 8, 1983, Subject: Presidential Speech on Central America, Final Version, Document No. 38246, in Folder 'NSDD 82A [NSDD 82 File 2] [U.S. Policy Initiatives to Improve Prospects for El Salvador] [12 of 15], Box 91289, Executive Secretariat: NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs) Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library," n.d.

[110] "Ronald Reagan: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America," April 27, 1983, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41245.

> The Government of Nicaragua has imposed a new dictatorship. It has refused to hold the elections it promised. It has seized control of most media and subjects all media to heavy prior censorship. It denied the bishops and priests of the Roman Catholic Church the right to say Mass on radio during Holy Week. It insulted and mocked the Pope. It has driven the Miskito Indians from their homelands, burning their villages, destroying their crops, and forcing them into involuntary internment camps far from home.[111]

It is telling that Reagan's address stressed the Sandinistas' internal repression. The president of the United States was tacitly arguing that these facets of Sandinista behavior justified the United States' siding with the contras. In that vein, Reagan asked rhetorically, "after all these acts of repression by the government, is it any wonder that opposition has formed?"[112]

With the anti-Sandinista insurgency having grown rapidly, there was by this point significant opposition in the House of Representatives to continued American backing for the rebels. By the middle of 1983, Edward Boland was arguing that the United States should cease all support to the contras. In his view, it had become clear that "the purpose and the mission of the operation was to overthrow the government in Nicaragua."[113] For Boland, although the United States was justified in trying to stop the Sandinistas' export of Marxist-Leninist revolution, trying to overthrow the Sandinista government itself was not defensible. The House Majority Leader, Democrat Jim Wright, argued that the United States did not have a "right to invade their country."[114] Representative Barney Frank, a

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[111] "Ronald Reagan: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America."
[112] "Ronald Reagan: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America."
[113] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), July 27, 1983, 21203, Statement by Rep. Boland.
[114] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21179, Statement by Rep. Wright.

Democrat from Massachusetts, acknowledged the Sandinistas' repression but argued that it did not provide justification for helping the contras, saying that:

> I would not want to live under the Government of Nicaragua. I should add that I would not want to live under most of the governments in this world and I do not think that my moral disapproval, strong as it is, ought to be the basis for us trying to overthrow all those governments.[115]

Congressional proponents of backing the contras argued, instead, that support to the contras was in fact justified because of the Sandinistas' actions. The House Minority Leader, Republican Robert Michel, argued that the Sandinistas had "betrayed their revolution" to "an alien ideology with its heart in Moscow and its fist in Cuba."[116] Another Republican, Henry Hyde, argued that, "it would seem to me that we ought to feel guilty not helping the Miskito Indians resist their genocide."[117]

In late July 1983 the House of Representatives, in which the Democrats had a majority, considered a proposal put forward by Edward Boland and Clement Zablocki, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, to prohibit aid to the contras. The House of Representatives passed the Boland-Zablocki proposal by 228 votes to 195.[118] It reflected the low degree of consensus in Congress that supporting the contras was consistent with U.S. interests and ideals.

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[115] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21216, Statement by Rep. Frank.
[116] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21189, Statement by Rep. Michel.
[117] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21183, Statement by Rep. Hyde.
[118] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 312 & 321.

In the Senate, in which the Republicans were in the majority, the intelligence committee did not consider the measure.[119] Nevertheless, the Senate intelligence committee had indicated earlier in 1983 that it would refrain from authorizing funds for covert support of the contras unless the president submitted a new covert action finding that clearly specified the program's purposes.[120] In response, the administration produced a new finding to cover the program and President Reagan signed it on September 19, 1983. The finding stated that the CIA was authorized to:

> ……provide support, equipment and training assistance to Nicaraguan paramilitary resistance groups as a means to induce the Sandinistas and Cubans and their allies to cease their support for insurgencies in the region; to hamper Cuban/Nicaraguan arms trafficking; to divert Nicaragua's energies from support to Central American guerilla movements; and to bring the Sandinistas into meaningful negotiations and constructive, verifiable agreement with their neighbors on peace in the region.[121]

The finding also made clear, however, that the administration saw the objectives associated with aiding the contras as going beyond merely stopping the Sandinistas' export of revolution. It specified the requirements for an end to CIA support to the contras in the following way:

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[119] "Hill-Reagan Contra Tug-of-War: A Chronology" (CQ Almanac, 1988), https://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/document.php?id=cqal88-1142371.
[120] Arnson, *Crossroads*, 123.
[121] "Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, Concerning Operations Undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in Foreign Countries, Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection, September 19, 1983," https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1-Reagan%20Finding%209-19-83%20(IC%2000203).pdf.

> U.S. support to paramilitary activities in Nicaragua will be terminated at such time as it is verified that: (a) the Soviets, Cubans, and Sandinistas have ceased providing through Nicaragua arms, training, command and control facilities and other logistical support to military or paramilitary operations in or against any other country in Central America, and (b) the Government of Nicaragua is demonstrating a commitment to provide amnesty and nondiscriminatory participation in the Nicaraguan political process by all Nicaraguans.[122]

The second criteria for terminating the program was, therefore, related to the domestic political system in Nicaragua. Gary Schmitt, who served on the SSCI's staff at the time, later stated that the finding was "pretty far reaching" in that it made "the termination of funding for the contras conditioned on the Sandinistas negotiating a peace treaty with its neighbors and allowing free elections domestically."[123]

Why did the Reagan administration establish the democratization of Nicaragua as an objective associated with its support to the contras? Not only was seeking democracy in Nicaragua consistent with American ideals, it was the view of the Reagan administration that so long as Nicaragua was a Marxist-Leninist state, it would seek to export that ideology to other places in the hemisphere, threatening a proliferation of Soviet-aligned regimes in the United States' own hemisphere that would be damaging to American interests. The American ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, succinctly expressed that view in a May 1982 cable to the State Department in which he assessed that "Nicaragua's anti-social

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[122] "Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, Concerning Operations Undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in Foreign Countries, Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection, September 19, 1983," 2, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1-Reagan%20Finding%209-19-83%20(IC%2000203).pdf.

[123] Gary Schmitt, Interview with Author and Subsequent Email Correspondence with Author, December 15, 2017.

regional behavior" was "a mere symptom of a deeper political disease."[124] On this view, for as long as Nicaragua remained a Marxist-Leninist state, it would pose a threat to American interests in Central America. As President Reagan expressed to his national security team privately in 1984, he regarded it as unthinkable that the United States would ever be able to reach a negotiated agreement with the Sandinistas, due to their communist ideology. As Reagan stated to his advisers at a private meeting, "if we are just talking about negotiations with Nicaragua, that is so far-fetched to imagine that a communist government like that would make any reasonable deal with us."[125] Changing Nicaragua's domestic political system was, in the view of the Reagan administration, the only likely way to safeguard the United States' regional interests.

Opponents of backing the contras, however, argued that pressuring Nicaragua to change its political system amounted to a violation of self-determination. Democrat Jim Wright, the House Majority Leader, pointedly asked in Congress in 1984, "if we believe in the right of self-determination for El Salvador, then must we not believe in the right of self-determination for other countries, including Nicaragua, with which we disagree?"[126]

In October 1983, the House again voted to ban aid to the contras, but the Senate refused to take that course of action.[127] Ultimately, as part of the fiscal year 1984 defense appropriations bill, members of the House and Senate agreed to provide $24 million in

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[124] Telegram from Ambassador John Negroponte to Department of State, May 19, 1982, Subject: Next Steps in US/Nicaraguan Dialogue, Available from the National Security Archive, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB151/820519.pdf.
[125] National Security Planning Group Meeting, June 25, 1984, Minutes, Page 11, Folder 'NSPG 0091, 06/25/84 Central America (2 of 2),' Box 91307, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG), Ronald Reagan Library., 7.
[126] 130 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 130, Part 10 (May 21, 1984 to May 24, 1984), 14263, Statement by Rep. Wright.
[127] "Hill-Reagan Contra Tug-of-War: A Chronology."

assistance to the contras, which was about half the amount that the Reagan administration had wanted to obtain.[128] While President Reagan assessed that aiding the contras was likely to further American interests and was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, it was clear by the fall of 1983 that there was a very low degree of consensus in Congress that President Reagan was correct.

Why was there a Low Degree of Consensus in Congress for Supporting the Contras?

The low degree of consensus in Congress about whether the United States should support the contras reflected disagreements over what both U.S. interests and the nation's ideals required. Beginning with the requirements of American interests, while many opponents of backing the rebels acknowledged that the United States had a strategic interest in countering the Sandinistas' efforts to export Marxist-Leninist revolution, many in Congress did not feel that defending that interest required changing the Sandinistas' domestic political system. Instead, they felt that the United States only needed to address the Sandinistas' external behavior. When Edward Boland and Clement Zablocki introduced their 1983 bill to prohibit aid to the contras, therefore, the proposal would have also provided overt security assistance to "friendly nations in the region" in order to bolster their ability "to prevent the transfer of arms to insurgencies in the region."[129] As Zablocki exclaimed, "we are all supportive of efforts to stop the flow of arms into El Salvador. That

[128] "Hill-Reagan Contra Tug-of-War: A Chronology"; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 324.
[129] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21171, Statement by Rep. Boland.

is not an issue. We oppose covert assistance for the purpose of overthrowing the Sandinista government."[130]

Additionally, while many opponents of aiding the contras acknowledged that the United States had an interest in minimizing the Soviet and Cuban presence in the western hemisphere, they charged that aiding the rebels exacerbated the problem precisely because it created strategic incentives for the Sandinista regime to seek more aid from its Cuban and Soviet patrons. In October of 1983, for example, Representative Lee Hamilton argued that covert support to the contras had "driven the Nicaraguans ever more deeply into the arms of the Cubans and the Soviets."[131] The following month, Senator Patrick Leahy argued that, "the covert action program is strengthening the hand of Sandinista radicals for bringing in Cuban and Soviet military assistance."[132]

These lawmakers were alleging that the typical cycle of action and counteraction that tends to characterize externally supported civil wars was playing out in Nicaragua. By contrast, the Reagan administration assessed that the fundamental cause of the close relationships between the Sandinistas and the USSR and Cuba was the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Sandinista regime. For example, in a September 1983 speech, Fred Iklé, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, argued vehemently against the idea that it was the United States' actions that were the primary cause of the Sandinistas' behavior. He stated that:

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[130] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21180, Statement by Rep. Zablocki.
[131] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 20 (October 5, 1983 to October 20, 1983), 28562, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.
[132] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 22 (November 2, 1983 to November 9, 1983), 30626, Statement by Senator Leahy.

> The fact is that the Sandinistas, only a few weeks after they come into power, reneged on their promise for early elections, began to attack the democratic trade unions, and invited Cuban military and security personnel in steadily growing numbers. Yet, during the first 18 months of the Sandinista regime, the United States [during the Carter administration] provided more than $120 million in direct aid and endorsed over $220 million in Inter-American Development Bank aid—more than the previous Somoza regime in Nicaragua had received from the United States in twenty years! Clearly, it was not US interference that drove the Sandinistas to link up with Fidel Castro—unless economic aid is regarded as "interference."[133]

There was, in short, a fundamental difference of view between the Reagan administration and opponents of backing the contras. The former believed that the Sandinistas aligned with the Soviet Union and Cuba because they were committed Marxist-Leninists. Opponents of contra aid argued that the Sandinistas built an increasingly close relationship with the USSR and Cuba because of American support to the contras and, therefore, those members of Congress judged that aid to the rebels was a counterproductive policy for promoting American interests.

Additionally, there was a low degree of consensus in Congress that aiding the Nicaraguan rebels was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. Opponents of aiding the contras argued that they lacked widespread popular support in Nicaragua and that they committed human rights abuses just as bad, if not worse, as those perpetrated by the Sandinistas. In July 1983, Republican Congressman Jim Leach argued that the rebels did not, in his view, enjoy domestic legitimacy, exclaiming that they were "ex-somocistas who just 4 short years ago lost a massively popular revolution."[134] Representative Lee

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[133] Fred Iklé, September 12, 1983, Remarks to the Baltimore Council on Foreign Relations, Printed in Congressional Record, October 20, 1983, Pages 28553-28554, Remarks Entered into Record by Rep. Lagomarsino.
[134] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21202, Statement by Rep. Leach.

Hamilton raised concerns about an increasing number of "reports of torture and maiming by the contras."[135] While few opponents of backing the contras would defend the Sandinistas' human rights practices, they argued that the contras were not necessarily any better, in their view. After President Reagan delivered his April 1983 address to Congress on Central America, Senator Christopher Dodd, a staunch opponent of providing support to the contras, delivered the Democrats' response. Dodd acknowledged that "no one in this Congress or this country is under the delusion that the Sandinista government is a model democracy or a force for stability." Nevertheless, Dodd argued that the contras were no better, stating that:

> The insurgents we have supported are the remnants of the old Somoza regime—a regime whose corruption, graft, torture, and despotism made it universally despised in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas may not be winners, but right now we are backing sure losers.[136]

Proponents of supporting the contras disputed that they were solely the remnants of Somoza's National Guard.[137] In fact, there were elements of truth to both views. As James M. Scott describes, many senior officers of the FDN were former members of the National Guard, while many of the movement's foot soldiers were peasants who joined the resistance because of the Sandinistas' policies.[138] John Negroponte later argued that the allegation that the rebels were mainly former National Guardsmen was an "epithet that the

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[135] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21175, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.
[136] "Transcript of Democrat's Response to Reagan Speech on Central America," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1983, http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/28/world/transcript-of-democrat-s-response-to-reagan-speech-on-central-america.html.
[137] See, for example, the remarks by Rep. Don Ritter, 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21453.
[138] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 155.

contras were never able to completely shake, even though they were a much more representative group of people than they were characterized as being."[139]

There was an additional factor, beyond assessments of interests and ideals, that reinforced the significant bloc of opposition in Congress to aiding the contras—the fear of becoming embroiled in another quagmire akin to Vietnam. In his April 27, 1983 address before Congress, President Reagan felt it necessary to offer an assurance that, "let me say to those who invoke the memory of Vietnam, there is no thought of sending American combat troops to Central America."[140] In spite of Reagan's assurance, in his response to the address, Senator Dodd charged that "the painful truth is that many of our highest officials seem to know as little about Central America in 1983 as we knew about Indochina in 1963."[141]

Why did opponents of contra aid fear that military support to the contras might lead to a path involving direct deployment of U.S. forces and eventually an American quagmire? There were at least two facets of the situation in Central America that made some members of Congress anxious. First, some in Congress feared that the Sandinistas might launch significant military action against Honduras in an effort to destroy the contra camps based in that country. If that had occurred, Honduras would almost certainly have called for American help in repelling the Sandinistas. In a December 1982 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE), the intelligence community reported that the situation along

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[139] John Negroponte, Interview with the National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Cold War Interview Series, Episode 18: Backyard, February 21, 1999, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/episode-18/negroponte1.html.
[140] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Central America," April 27, 1983, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41245.
[141] "Transcript of Democrat's Response to Reagan Speech on Central America."

the Nicaraguan-Honduran border had "become increasingly tense" with troops from both countries having fired upon each other.[142] During the course of 1983, tensions between Nicaragua and Honduras continued, including skirmishing between naval vessels of the two countries and cross-border artillery fire.[143] Representative Michael Barnes captured the fear of some American policymakers when he stated in July 1983 that:

> The American people should know that if this effort escalates too much further, the Nicaraguans are going to strike at the exile bases in Honduras. The American people should know that if Nicaragua and Honduras go to war, the United States will probably come to the aid of Honduras.[144]

Second, the contras never looked to be close to defeating the Sandinistas militarily. Consequently, opponents feared that President Reagan would help the contras to finish the job by committing American forces. In June 1985, for example, House Majority Leader Jim Wright emphasized his fear that the Reagan administration's support for the rebels would lead to increased American involvement down the road because the issue had become one of the nation's credibility. As Wright put it:

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[142] Special National Intelligence Estimate, 8 December 1982, CIA, Prospects for Escalating Hostilities Between Nicaragua and Honduras, Available from CIA CREST, 7, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R000902260030-5.pdf.

[143] Memorandum to William P. Clark, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Subject: Central American Working Group Report No. 41, in Folder "NSDD 82A [NSDD 82 File 2] [U.S. Policy Initiatives to Improve Prospects for El Salvador] [14 of 15]," Box 91289, Executive Secretariat: NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs) Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.

[144] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21190, Statement by Rep. Barnes.

> If our efforts should fail, if the contra forces are not successful in spite of our open identification with the military group attempting to overthrow that government, as some of our best military minds suggest they will not be, what do we do then? Then where do we go? Do we then abandon the cause and swallow our pride and our dignity as we did after the Bay of Pigs? Or at that point do we introduce U.S. troops?[145]

The fears among some in Congress that American aid to the contras risked "another Vietnam" added to the low degree of consensus within the legislature regarding the wisdom of aiding the rebels. For opponents of helping the contras, the appropriate response to objectionable Sandinista behavior was not military pressure, but rather diplomatic efforts to resolve such behavior. In October 1983, for example, Edward Boland argued that "our policy should be to encourage peace through negotiation, with and through the Organization of American States, and the shield of security assistance [to friendly governments in the region]."[146] Within the Reagan administration, some officials, notably including Secretary of State George Shultz, accepted that diplomatic efforts were necessary, but also regarded support to the contras as an essential ingredient of leverage in any such endeavor. In a May 1983 memo to President Reagan about Central America, Shultz stressed that the only way to stand any chance of reaching a successful diplomatic outcome was to "show the Nicaraguans that they cannot defeat the anti-Sandinista forces in Nicaragua."[147] Robert Gates recounts the disagreements that existed within the Reagan administration over a diplomatic track, writing that:

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[145] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 11 (June 5, 1985 to June 13, 1985), 15418–19, Statement by Rep. Wright.
[146] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 20 (October 5, 1983 to October 20, 1983), 28535, Statement by Rep. Boland.
[147] Memorandum, George P. Shultz to President Reagan, Subject: Managing Our Central America Strategy, May 25, 1983, Folder 'NSDD 82 (2)', Box 91289, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives, Ronald Reagan Library., 2.

> Shultz supported the covert action, but he believed the administration had to have a diplomatic or negotiating track as well in order to succeed in Central America……..On the other side, [Director of Central Intelligence] Casey, [National Security Advisor] Clark, [Secretary of Defense] Weinberger, and [Ambassador to the UN] Kirkpatrick fundamentally were opposed to negotiations of any kind.[148]

Despite opposition from other senior officials in the administration, Secretary Shultz pursued a diplomatic track by travelling to Nicaragua on June 1, 1984 to meet directly with the Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega. Shultz and Ortega agreed that their two countries would hold follow-up discussions, with the American delegation being led by Ambassador Harry Shlaudeman and the Nicaraguan delegation headed by the country's vice foreign minister, Victor Tinoco.[149] Several weeks after his meeting with Ortega, Shultz explained to the National Security Planning Group (NSPG), the inner circle of Reagan's national security advisers, that it was necessary to pursue serious diplomatic efforts "or else our support on the Hill goes down."[150] Shultz acknowledged that he was not very optimistic about actually achieving an acceptable negotiated solution, rating the chances as "two-in-ten," but he also said that if diplomacy did not succeed it needed "to be clear where the responsibility is."[151] Ambassador Shlaudeman held four meetings with the Sandinistas, with the final meeting concluding in mid-August 1984. None of the meetings produced any progress.[152] After the first meeting, Shlaudeman had reported to the NSPG that the

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[148] Gates, *From the Shadows*, 1st Touchstone ed.:295.
[149] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 410.
[150] National Security Planning Group Meeting, June 25, 1984, Minutes, Page 11, Folder 'NSPG 0091, 06/25/84 Central America (2 of 2),' Box 91307, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG), Ronald Reagan Library., 3.
[151] National Security Planning Group Meeting, June 25, 1984, Minutes, Page 11, Folder 'NSPG 0091, 06/25/84 Central America (2 of 2),' Box 91307, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group (NSPG), Ronald Reagan Library., 10.
[152] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 313–14.

Sandinista delegation "had no intentions of discussing the substance of our disagreements and preferred to focus on 'the shape of the table' and whether or not the meetings should be tape recorded."[153] Partly in response to the finely-balanced congressional debate over aid to the contras, Secretary Shultz had tried to make progress in diplomatic efforts in 1984, but they failed to go anywhere.

Between 1983 and 1988, Congress took numerous votes on whether to provide aid to the contras; the results were always close. William LeoGrande recounts how, in the House of Representatives, "the solidly pro-contra and anti-contra blocs were almost the same size, with 192 members always in favor of aid and 185 always opposed."[154] The results of votes on contra aid typically turned on votes cast by legislators who proved willing to vote for contra aid on some occasions but not others. In the next section, we will consider how American military support to the contras evolved over the course of the 1980s. Due to the finely-balanced debate in Congress, American support to the contras was brittle and inconsistent. We will see how that had significant implications for the contras' fortunes on the battlefield and what that meant for the Reagan administration's efforts to leverage support to the contras as an instrument of foreign policy.

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[153] Minutes of National Security Planning Group (NSPG) Meeting, June 29, 1984, Subject: Central America and Proposed Presidential Finding on Technology Modification, in Folder 'NSPG 0093 06/29/1984 [Central America],' Box 91307, Executive Secretariat: NSC, National Security Planning Group (NSPG) Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.
[154] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 526.

The Evolution of American Military Assistance to the Contras and an Evaluation of Its Effectiveness

Figure 6 gives the total amount of assistance provided by the United States to the contras between 1981 and 1990. The small scale of American support to the contras in the initial year of the covert action program reflected its limited aims. As time went on, however, the Reagan administration attempted to win much larger support for the contras, but it failed to do so due to the bitter political debate waged over the issue.

Year	Total Military Assistance Provided by the U.S. to the Nicaraguan Contras (In Nominal Dollars)
1981	N/A: Program established on December 1, 1981
1982	$19 million in lethal aid
1983	$24 million in lethal aid
1984	No new aid appropriated by Congress. U.S. government aid to the contras prohibited by Congress from October 1984 onwards. Secret efforts by some administration officials raised around $40 million in additional support for the rebels between June 1984 and October 1986.
1985	$27 million in non-lethal aid
1986	$70 million in lethal aid and $30 million in non-lethal aid
1987-March 1988	No new lethal aid approved. In 1987, the U.S. continued to provide what remained of the previous year's appropriation. The U.S. also provided approximately $21 million in non-lethal aid to the contras, within the context of a peace initiative led by the Costa Rican president, Oscar Arias.
March 1988 – February 1990	The contras were given approximately $125 million of "non-lethal" aid as part of an effort to ensure a free-and-fair election in Nicaragua.

Figure 6: American military assistance provided to the contras, 1981-1990. Sources: James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene,* Page 34; CQ Almanac, 1988, *Hill-Reagan Contra Tug-of-War: A Chronology;* James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy,* Pages 52 & 58.

A War of Attrition during which Political Debates in Washington D.C. shaped the Contras' Fortunes

The war in Nicaragua was a war of attrition, aided by Cuban and Soviet support to the Sandinistas and American support to the contras. With a finely-balanced debate in Washington D.C. over whether or not to support the Nicaraguan rebels, the contras'

fortunes were shaped in important ways by how American support to them fluctuated over the course of numerous congressional votes on contra aid.

Cuba began providing military assistance to the Sandinistas during their armed struggle against Somoza Debayle. The Soviet Union began providing the Sandinistas with arms after they had won power.[155] By mid-March 1983, the CIA estimated that Cuba had somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 military advisers and other security forces in Nicaragua to assist the Sandinistas with their counterinsurgency operations. Over the following months, Cuba bolstered its military presence in Nicaragua in the light of contra operations.[156] A June 1983 CIA memorandum stressed that, notwithstanding Cuba's existing commitment to help the Sandinistas, "little was done, however, to bolster the Cuban military presence in Nicaragua until Washington's close links to the anti-Sandinista insurgents became apparent."[157]

As described above, during 1983 contra units undertook operations deep within Nicaragua, increasing the Sandinistas' anxieties. That prompted the Sandinistas to shift their strategy from trying to impede rebel movement near the Honduran border, and defend fixed positions, to a more offensive one that prioritized mobility.[158] Kagan stresses that the Sandinistas' ability to make that change depended upon receiving increased amounts of

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[155] Yuri Pavlov, Interview with the National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Cold War Interview Series, Episode 18: Backyard, February 21, 1999, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/episode-18/pavlov2.html.
[156] CIA Directorate of Intelligence Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, 10 June 1983, Nicaragua: The Arms Buildup and Increasing Cuban Support, Available from CIA CREST, 10, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T00302R000500870021-2.pdf.
[157] CIA Directorate of Intelligence Memorandum for the Director of Central Intelligence, 10 June 1983, Nicaragua: The Arms Buildup and Increasing Cuban Support, Available from CIA CREST, 3.
[158] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 253–55.

military hardware from the Soviet bloc, notably including transport helicopters and armored personnel carriers.[159]

The year 1984 witnessed a further increase in communist bloc support for the Sandinistas. According to a CIA estimate, that year the Sandinistas received 91 tanks from the communist bloc along with four Mi-24 helicopter gunships, a formidable threat to the contras which the Soviet Union delivered to Nicaragua for the first time.[160] In September 1984, CIA Director Bill Casey reported to the National Security Planning Group that "Cuban flights to Nicaragua have increased in frequency over the last several months" and Cuban personnel had become "much more active in training and organizing the Sandinista military forces."[161] The Sandinistas had understandable strategic reasons to seek an enhancement of outside support during 1984. The American invasion of Grenada in October 1983 had almost certainly added to Sandinista angst about the threat of American-supported or American-led regime change in Nicaragua.[162] Additionally, the growing threat of the contras gave the Sandinistas reasons for concern. In November 1984, the American intelligence community issued a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) on Nicaragua's military buildup, which explained that Nicaragua's "overall buildup is

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[159] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 254–55.
[160] Memorandum for Robert M. Kimmitt, Executive Secretary, National Security Council, From CIA Executive Secretary, 9 November 1984, Subject: Nicaragua -- The Military Build-Up Since July 1979, Available from CIA CREST."
[161] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, September 11, 1984, Subject: Review of the [Redacted] and Central America Special Activities, in Folder 'NSPG 0095 09/11/1984 [Central America/Mozambique],' Box 91305, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Planning Group Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2–3.
[162] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 131.

primarily defense oriented, and much of the recent effort has been devoted to improving counterinsurgency capabilities."[163]

While the Soviet Union and the communist bloc increased its assistance to the Sandinistas during 1984, however, Congress voted to cease American military assistance to the contras. The finely-balanced debate in Washington D.C. was tipped in favor of contra opponents by public revelations regarding CIA activities in Central America. In March and April 1984, several ships were damaged by mines around Nicaragua's ports. The contras' political leadership indicated that the rebels had placed the mines.[164] However, on April 6, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that the CIA was actually responsible for the operations.[165] The Senate intelligence committee had been inadequately briefed by the CIA regarding the agency's direct role in the mining. Although Bill Casey had met with the committee twice in March 1984, on both occasions Casey had used the passive voice when describing the mining—he had said that "mines have been placed"—and mentioned the mining in the context of describing activities by the contra rebels.[166] The impression left by Casey's briefings was that the contras had placed the mines in Nicaragua's harbors. The lack of information provided by Casey to the Senate intelligence committee was fairly typical of

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[163] Special National Intelligence Estimate, 16 November 1984, CIA, 'Nicaragua: Implications of the Military Build-Up,' Available from CIA CREST, 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88B00443R000301140015-0.pdf.

[164] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 330.

[165] David Rogers, "U.S. Role in Mining Nicaraguan Harbors Reportedly Is Larger Than First Thought," *Wall Street Journal (1923 - Current File); New York, N.Y.*, April 6, 1984.

[166] Memorandum to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan from Gary Schmitt and Peter Sullivan, April 13, 1984, Subject: Mines, References and Committee Hearings, Box II: 1542, Folder 1, Legislative File, Subject File, Foreign Relations, Central America, Daniel P. Moynihan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

his approach to Congress. Lee Hamilton, who served on the House Intelligence Committee between 1981 and 1986, later recounted to this author that Casey "wouldn't give you one iota of information more than what you had asked for."[167]

The public revelations regarding the mining dealt a further blow to congressional support for the program. On May 24, 1984 the House of Representatives voted once more, by 241 votes to 177, to prohibit support to the contras.[168] After this, William LeoGrande explains that "rather than fight for an unpopular policy in the midst of Reagan's reelection campaign, the White House postponed the confrontation, hoping that the 1984 election results would give it a stronger hand in 1985."[169] Congress passed a new Boland Amendment, which stated that:

> During fiscal year 1985, no funds available to the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, or any other agency or entity of the United States involved in intelligence activities may be obligated or expended for the purpose or which would have the effect of supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua by any nation, group, organization, movement, or individual.[170]

This amendment went into effect on October 12, 1984.[171] Unless further congressional action was taken, the legislature had banned military support to the contras. The United States took a temporary rest from aiding a war of attrition in Nicaragua. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the result was to shift the conflict in favor of the Sandinistas. Robert Kagan explains that "in the last three months of 1984, more than three-fourths of the FDN's forces retreated back across the border into their camps in

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[167] Lee H. Hamilton, Interview with Author (By Phone), January 12, 2018.
[168] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 343.
[169] LeoGrande, 345.
[170] LeoGrande, 345.
[171] Byrne, *Iran-Contra*, 42.

Honduras" while those who remained in Nicaragua "tried to avoid engagements with the Sandinista army."[172] The Sandinistas made good use of their newly-acquired Soviet attack helicopters to target the rebels. As one contra commander later told a journalist, contra forces "ran like rabbits" when they heard the Mi-24 gunships approaching.[173]

In a December 1984 memo, Robert Gates, the CIA's Deputy Director of Intelligence, wrote to CIA Director Bill Casey that, "without US funding for the contras, the resistance essentially will collapse over the next year or two."[174] At the same time, Gates recognized that, precisely because the Nicaraguan conflict had become a war of attrition between competing outside powers, even new American aid to the contras was unlikely to allow the rebels to win. As Gates reported:

> Based on all the assessments we have done, the contras, even with American support, cannot overthrow the Sandinista regime. Whatever small chance they had to do that has been further diminished by the new weaponry being provided by the Soviets and Cubans.[175]

The congressional prohibition on American military support to the contras in 1984 did not, however, end efforts by some U.S. government officials to help the rebels. Robert McFarlane, who served as National Security Advisor between October 1983 and December 1985, later told the congressional "Iran-contra" investigation that during 1984 President Reagan directed that "we assure the contras of continuing administration support—to help them hold body and soul together—until the time when Congress would again agree to

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[172] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 357.
[173] Quoted in Kagan, 525.
[174] Memorandum from Robert M. Gates to William J. Casey, 'Nicaragua,' December 14, 1984, Available from the National Security Archive, 5, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/3-Gates%20Memo%2012-14-84.pdf.
[175] Memorandum from Robert M. Gates to William J. Casey, 'Nicaragua,' December 14, 1984, Available from the National Security Archive, 1.

support them."[176] McFarlane tasked two members of the NSC staff, Donald Fortier and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, with fulfilling the President's admonition.[177] In 1984, as it was becoming clear that Congress would likely vote to prohibit aid to the contras, Robert McFarlane made what Robert Kagan describes as a "veiled solicitation" for assistance for the contras from Saudi Arabia; consequently, Saudi Arabia began providing funding to the contras in mid-1984, at a level of approximately one million dollars per month.[178] The contributions from Saudi Arabia during 1984 helped the contras to stave off military collapse.[179] Nevertheless, with American military support having ceased in October 1984, the contras finished that year on the back foot militarily.

Ronald Reagan was re-elected in a landslide in the November 1984 presidential election against Walter Mondale. Although the Republican Party failed to win control of the House of Representatives in the congressional elections held at the same time—in the subsequent Congress Democrats held 254 seats to the Republicans' 181 seats—Republicans achieved a net gain of 15 seats.[180] Furthermore, the Republican Party did especially well in the south, which meant that a number of southern Democrats in Congress

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[176] Iran-Contra Investigation: Joint Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, One Hundredth Congress, First Session, Testimony of Robert C. McFarlane, Monday May 11, 1987 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 10.
[177] Iran-Contra Investigation: Joint Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, One Hundredth Congress, First Session, Testimony of Robert C. McFarlane, Monday May 11, 1987, 10.
[178] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 340.
[179] Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 340 & 466.
[180] "Party Divisions of the House of Representatives" | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives," accessed November 6, 2017, http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/.

felt politically vulnerable.[181] Southern Democrats consequently had a political incentive to insulate themselves from Republican charges that they were "soft" on national security issues. When the new Congress began in 1985, while there was still no certain majority in the House of Representatives in favor of restoring aid to the contras, the Reagan administration's chances of doing so had improved compared to before the election. In the Senate, the Republicans held a majority of 53 seats to 47 seats after the 1984 elections.[182]

The Reagan administration went on the rhetorical offensive in 1985. President Reagan exclaimed during his February 1985 State of the Union Address that:

> We must stand by all our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.[183]

Reagan was arguing that support for anti-communist rebels was justified because those insurgents were fighting for self-determination—against "Soviet-supported aggression"—and because the rebels were fighting against oppressive political regimes. Reagan went on to emphasize the illiberal nature of the Nicaraguan regime, stating that "the Sandinista dictatorship of Nicaragua, with full Cuban-Soviet bloc support, not only persecutes its people, the church, and denies a free press, but arms and provides bases for Communist terrorists attacking neighboring states."[184] Plenty of legislators would have

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[181] Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 117.
[182] "U.S. Senate: Party Division," accessed November 6, 2017, https://www.senate.gov/history/partydiv.htm.
[183] Ronald Reagan: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union, February 6, 1985, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38069.
[184] "Ronald Reagan: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union."

found it galling that Reagan was only drawing attention to Sandinista human rights abuses despite well-publicized instances of contra abuses as well. Nevertheless, the fact that Reagan made his argument the way he did is significant. The White House clearly believed that couching the contras' rebellion in terms of liberal-democratic ideals was an argument that might help to win support in Congress.

Three weeks later, on February 22, 1985, Secretary of State Shultz used a speech in San Francisco to expand upon the administration's case. He argued for providing military aid to "freedom fighters." Shultz argued that there was a clear strategic rationale for supporting anti-communist insurgencies because it offered a way to check Soviet power; as Shultz put it, "in almost every case in the postwar period, the imposition of communist tyrannies has led to an increase in Soviet global power and influence."[185] Nevertheless, Shultz was adamant that there was also a moral case for backing insurgencies against Soviet-supported governments, arguing that those rebellions were being waged for "independence, freedom, and human rights—ideals which are at the core of democracy and which the United States has always championed."[186] In arguing for aid to the contras, he stated that, "the Sandinista leaders in Nicaragua are moving quickly, with Soviet-bloc and Cuban help, to consolidate their totalitarian power."[187]

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[185] The Hon. George P. Shultz, "America and the Struggle for Freedom." Address before the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco. Re-Printed in State Department Bulletin, April 1985. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., February 22, 1985), 18.
[186] The Hon. George P. Shultz, "America and the Struggle for Freedom." Address before the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco. Re-Printed in State Department Bulletin, April 1985. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., February 22, 1985), 16.
[187] Shultz, 20.

One week later, on March 1, 1985, President Reagan spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference's annual dinner. The president made one of his most infamous claims regarding the contras, arguing that:

> They are the moral equal of our Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance. We cannot turn away from them, for the struggle here is not right versus left; it is right versus wrong.[188]

With both the president and the secretary of state having made a moral case for providing military support to anti-communist rebellions, it fell to a prominent journalist—Charles Krauthammer—to give the policy a name. In an April 1985 column in *Time* magazine, Krauthammer wrote of a "Reagan Doctrine" that proclaimed "overt and unashamed American support for anti-Communist revolution."[189] Krauthammer noted that there was no opposition in Congress to supporting the mujahedin because of a "consensus that resistance to invasion warrants support." Krauthammer argued that support to those fighting what he called "indigenous tyranny" was also justified in cases in which "a revolution is both popular and democratic."[190] Of course, a major part of the American political debate regarding Nicaragua revolved around different views about how popular and democratic the contras' rebellion really was. The Sandinistas had, in fact, helped to make the Reagan administration's case in that regard. The Nicaraguan regime had held an election in November 1984; shortly afterwards, a *New York Times* editorial expressed the

[188] Ronald Reagan: Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference, March 1, 1985, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38274.
[189] Charles Krauthammer, "The Reagan Doctrine," *Time* 125, no. 13 (April 1, 1985): 54.
[190] Krauthammer.

general impression in the United States regarding the election's fairness when it stated that "only the naïve believe that Sunday's election in Nicaragua was democratic."[191]

Despite the Reagan administration's attempt to justify American support to the contras in terms of the nation's ideals, the immediate goal was not met. On April 24, 1985, the House of Representatives voted on a proposal endorsed by the Reagan administration to provide the contras with non-lethal aid. In return for congressional approval of such aid, the administration proposed that it would request a ceasefire and ask the Sandinistas to enter talks.[192] If the Sandinistas refused those steps, only then would the United States furnish new military assistance to the rebels.[193] The House of Representatives narrowly voted against the proposal; it lost by 215 votes to 213 votes.[194] Voting for the proposal were 46 Democrats and 167 Republicans, while voting against it were 201 Democrats and 14 Republicans.[195]

A major reason why the Reagan administration still failed to win majority support for aid to the contras in April 1985 was that, for many in the legislature, the contra rebels did not live up to the ideals that the administration was espousing. In March 1985, Americas Watch—an NGO founded in the early 1980s—published a report on human rights in Nicaragua. The report stated that both Nicaraguan regime forces and contra forces had committed human rights abuses, but it stressed that the FDN, one of the main contra

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[191] Quoted in LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 375–76.
[192] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 368.
[193] Kagan, 368.
[194] The essence of the proposal was contained in an amendment introduced by House Minority Leader Robert Michel. Kagan, 373.
[195] Margaret Shapiro, "House Votes Down 'Contra' Aid Plans: House Votes Down All Proposals to Assist Nicaraguan 'Contras,'" *The Washington Post (1974-Current File); Washington, D.C.*, April 25, 1985.

factions, had perpetrated what it called "the deliberate use of terror."[196] In late March 1985, the American intelligence community had published its own assessment of atrocities committed in Nicaragua, which was shared with relevant congressional committees. The assessment stated that "abuses have been committed by both sides in the Nicaraguan conflict, as would be expected in any war." It reported that "insurgent attacks on military and government vehicles, and on economic targets such as agricultural cooperatives, frequently result in civilian casualties." The assessment reported that "the FDN [contra] leadership has attempted to prevent abuses by disciplining field commanders who allow such behavior." It also charged that "the regime deliberately mixes civilians with military personnel, a practice that almost guarantees casualties to non-combatants."[197]

Opponents of supporting the rebels emphasized that the contras were not living up to the high praise that President Reagan had bestowed upon them. Representative David Bonior said on the floor of the House of Representatives that:

> We are asked to embrace as freedom fighters paramilitary forces who burn homes, and destroy crops, who murder, torture, rape, and kidnap innocent civilians. We are asked to accept as spiritual descendents of our Founding Fathers, a counterrevolutionary army in which 46 out of 48 leaders in the command structure—including the entire general staff, 5 out of 6 regional commanders, and all 30 task force commanders—are former members of Anastasio Somoza's National Guard.[198]

By contrast, proponents of supporting the rebels argued that despite the contras'

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[196] Joel Brinkley, "Rights Report on Nicaragua Cites Recent Rebel Activities," *The New York Times*, March 6, 1985, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/06/world/rrights-report-on-nicaragua-cites-recent-rebel-activities.html.
[197] "Atrocities in the Nicaraguan Civil War, " Available from CIA Crest, March 25, 1985, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T01058R000100170001-7.pdf.
[198] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 7 (April 22, 1985 to April 30, 1985), 8970, Statement by Rep. Bonior.

abuses, they were still much less flawed than the Sandinistas. As House Minority Leader Robert Michel put it, "I don't care if the democratic forces of Nicaragua are good enough to go to Heaven. I'm interested in seeing that they are strong enough to save their country from a Communist hell."[199]

American policymakers and politicians remained engaged in a closely-divided debate over which side of the conflict was better in its adherence to liberal-democratic ideals because neither side was perfect. With the debate so finely-balanced, shifts in the political context could sway the debate. Shortly after the House of Representatives voted down non-lethal aid to the contras in April 1985, the Sandinista president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, visited the Soviet Union, where he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Union affirmed its continuing material support for the Nicaraguan regime.[200] Ortega's trip highlighted the continuing alignment between Nicaragua and Moscow, and it helped to tip the finely-balanced debate in favor of restoring aid to the contras.

One week after Ortega's trip, Representative David McCurdy, a Democrat from Oklahoma, introduced a proposal to provide "humanitarian aid" to the contras.[201] McCurdy's proposal also required that the Reagan administration undertake diplomatic discussions with the Nicaraguan regime.[202] When the House voted on McCurdy's

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[199] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 7 (April 22, 1985 to April 30, 1985), 8964, Statement by Rep. Michel.
[200] Serge Schmemann, "Nicaraguan, in Moscow, Is Promised Aid," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1985, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/30/world/nicaraguan-in-moscow-is-promised-aid.html.
[201] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 377.
[202] Kagan, 377.

amendment in June 1985, it passed by 248 votes to 184.[203] The Senate had already voted twice in recent months to provide non-lethal aid to the contras.[204] The two chambers ultimately agreed to furnish $27 million in non-lethal assistance for the rebels.[205] As Cynthia Arnson explains, Ortega's trip to the USSR altered the political dynamics in Washington because it "undercut the position of Democrats who had argued that adverse trends in Nicaragua, including the government's increasingly close ties to the Soviet Union, were products in part of U.S. pressures caused by the contra war."[206]

Congress' approval of non-lethal aid to the contras in 1985 helped the insurgency to survive. The CIA estimated that the contras' ranks numbered over 15,000 fighters at this time.[207] Nevertheless, the restoration of American non-lethal aid to the contras was plagued by implementation challenges and the amount of time it took to deliver meant that although it helped the contras, it did not enhance their ability to conduct offensive military operations inside Nicaragua itself. Running short of provisions, in late 1985 many contra forces retreated once again into Honduras and the American non-lethal aid ended up providing support to them there.[208] Also in 1985, the United States imposed a trade embargo on the Sandinista regime. In keeping with the cycles of action and counteraction, that move was

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[203] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 383.
[204] "Hill-Reagan Contra Tug-of-War: A Chronology."
[205] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 435.
[206] Arnson, *Crossroads*, 185.
[207] Special National Intelligence Estimate, July 1985, Nicaragua: Prospects for the Insurgency, CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 3, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00573R000901210013-7.pdf.
[208] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 416–17.

one reason why Soviet economic assistance to Nicaragua increased by more than 40 percent during Gorbachev's first year as Soviet leader.[209]

An American SNIE of July 1985 recognized that the war was characterized by dynamics typical of externally supported wars of attrition, notably including ratcheted stalemates. The estimate predicted that, "the level of fighting in Nicaragua will continue to escalate over the next year, although neither side is likely to gain a strategic advantage despite improvement in the capabilities of both."[210]

To help the contra forces deploy back into Nicaragua, in February 1986 President Reagan requested that Congress approve $100 million in military and economic aid.[211] On March 16, 1986, President Reagan delivered a televised address to try to build support for his proposal. The president made a strategic case for backing the rebels, arguing that:

> Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant power in the crucial corridor between North and South America. Established there, they will be in a position to threaten the Panama Canal, interdict our vital Caribbean sealanes, and, ultimately, move against Mexico.[212]

The president did not merely argue for aid to the contras out of strategic concerns. Reflecting the predictions of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, President Reagan realized that to maximize the chances of securing congressional support for the contras he also had to make the case that doing so was consistent with American ideals. In that vein, the president argued that:

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[209] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 370.
[210] Special National Intelligence Estimate, July 1985, Nicaragua: Prospects for the Insurgency, CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 4.
[211] Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," 232.
[212] Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua," March 16, 1986, https://www.reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1986/31686a.htm.

> The Sandinistas have revoked the civil liberties of the Nicaraguan people, depriving them of any legal right to speak, to publish, to assemble, or to worship freely. Independent newspapers have been shut down. There is no longer any independent labor movement in Nicaragua nor any right to strike.[213]

By contrast, Reagan told the American people that "the freedom fighters" were "willing to lay down their arms and negotiate to restore the original goals of the revolution, a democracy in which the people of Nicaragua choose their own government."[214] Ahead of the March 1986 vote on contra aid, Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, also addressed concerns about the contras' human rights record in a letter to Congressman James Sensenbrenner, a Republican from Wisconsin. Abrams wrote that "the key point is that the resistance's record, while not perfect, is! reasonable and is improving, while the Sandinistas have adopted a policy of increasing repression and abuse." He added that $3 million of the administration's March 1986 contra aid request would be devoted to trying to improve the contras' respect for human rights.[215]

On March 20, 1986, the House voted against the president's contra aid proposal by 222 votes to 210.[216] A Reagan administration NSC meeting was convened shortly after that congressional vote. The president opened the meeting with a lament, saying to his advisers, "think how the young men who are the freedom fighters must feel now."[217] It is clear

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[213] "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua," accessed November 8, 2017, https://www.reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1986/31686a.htm.
[214] "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua."
[215] Letter from Elliott Abrams to Honorable James Sensenbrenner, March 20, 1986, Printed in the Congressional Record by Sensenbrenner, 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 4 (March 12, 1986 to March 20, 1986), 5719–20.
[216] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 429.
[217] Minutes of NSC Meeting, March 20, 1986, in Folder 'NSC 00129A 03/20/1986 [Contra Aid],' Executive Secretariat, NSC: Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library," 1.

evidence that Reagan referred to the contras as "freedom fighters" when speaking in private to his advisers; that label for the contras was not something that Reagan only adopted in public.

As had occurred after the April 1985 congressional vote, the Sandinistas managed to sway the closely-balanced debate in the United States once again. On the very same day that the House of Representatives voted down Reagan's military aid request in March 1986, Nicaraguan army units attacked contra camps located inside Honduras.[218] Secretary of State Shultz reflected in his memoirs that the Sandinistas "helped our efforts with Congress by demonstrating, with remarkable ineptness at key moments, that their Soviet- and Cuban-backed regime did pose a serious military threat to its Central American neighbors."[219] When the House voted on contra aid again in June, the Reagan administration's proposal—$70 million of military aid combined with $30 million in non-lethal aid—commanded majority support, winning by 221 votes to 209.[220] Robert Pastor later wrote that the vote was won as a result of "vigorous lobbying by the president" and a "significant Nicaraguan incursion into southern Honduras."[221]

As predicted by the theory, the Congress' restoration of military aid to the contras boosted the rebels' fortunes by allowing them to compete more effectively with the Sandinistas' military machine. As Linnington describes, within weeks of the lethal aid beginning to flow, 12,000 contras launched geographically-dispersed operations against

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[218] LeoGrande, 457.
[219] George Pratt Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's ; Toronto, 1993), 953.
[220] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 460.
[221] Pastor, "The War Between the Branches: Explaining U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua, 1979-89," 232.

Sandinista targets.[222] At a February 20, 1987 NSPG meeting, National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci emphasized that, "the military situation of the contras looks better than it has for a long time."[223] CIA Deputy Director Robert Gates reported that the contras had "stepped up the attacks."[224] Even so, Gates predicted that the most likely development was an intensified stalemate due to the outside assistance flowing to the regime, explaining that:

> The Soviet-Cuban support for the Sandinistas was at $1billion in 1986. They have provided roughly 30 helicopters. There are 2,000 to 2,500 Cuban advisers down to company level and several hundred arrived since November. They also fly and maintain the helicopters. Overall, we should anticipate increased fighting and heavy casualties on both sides in the coming weeks with neither side gaining a decisive advantage.[225]

As part of the new military aid, after February 1987 the contras received Redeye anti-aircraft missiles.[226] A contra spokesman stressed in the summer of 1987 that, as a result of having a capability against the regime's helicopters, the rebels were "in the process of reestablishing the strategic balance."[227] Robert Gates' prediction proved correct, however.

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[222] Abigail T. Linnington, "Unconventional Warfare in U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S. Support of Insurgencies in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and Iraq from 1979-2001" (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University), 2013), 211–12.
[223] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, February 20, 1987, in Folder 'NSPG 145 2/20/87,' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.
[224] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, February 20, 1987, in Folder 'NSPG 145 2/20/87,' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 3.
[225] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, February 20, 1987, in Folder 'NSPG 145 2/20/87,' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 3.
[226] Julie Preston, "Contras Shoot Down Nicaraguan Helicopters, Lose Border Airstrip," *The Washington Post*, June 26, 1987, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/06/26/contras-shoot-down-nicaraguan-helicopters-lose-border-airstrip/ddc0672a-9f86-41b8-ac58-106058930604/?utm_term=.5734a6ec9599.
[227] Preston.

The Soviet Union and the communist bloc continued to back the Sandinistas, helping them to meet the increased threat posed by the contras as a result of American aid. Through communist bloc support, the Sandinistas' stock of attack helicopters grew from 6 in 1985 to 11 in 1987. Meanwhile, its stock of armed transport helicopters grew from 15 to 40 over the same period. Its inventory of T-55 tanks grew from 109 to 131 over those two years, while the number of APCs and reconnaissance vehicles increased from 185 to 272.[228] On the ground, neither side could gain a decisive advantage during 1987.

By this time, the closely-balanced political debate in Washington D.C. had been transformed dramatically. Before Congress had restored military aid to the contras, in early 1986, Oliver North of the NSC staff had developed a plan to charge Iranian officials extra for arms they were secretly purchasing from the United States and then provide some of the proceeds to the contras.[229] The initiative to sell weapons to Iran, which was in the midst of a war with Iraq, was initially conceived by some on the NSC staff as a way to see if the United States might be able to develop a relationship with moderates in the Iranian government.[230] Oliver North grasped an opportunity to leverage the secret arms sales as a way to generate more funding for the Nicaraguan rebels. A portion of the proceeds from the arms sales—estimated at around $3.8 million—was diverted to the contras on North's initiative.[231]

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[228] National Intelligence Estimate, Nicaragua: Prospects for Sandinista Consolidation, August 1987, CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 24.
[229] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 470–71.
[230] Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994), 420–21.
[231] Scott, 180.

In early November 1986, in the mid-term elections, Reagan's Republican Party lost 8 seats in the Senate, thereby forfeiting their majority in that chamber, and the party also lost 5 seats in the House.[232] With Democrats due to hold majorities in both chambers in the new Congress, any administration effort to gain more contra aid was going to be a difficult task. It was about to become harder still.

On Monday November 24, 1986, Attorney General Ed Meese and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan informed President Reagan that some of the proceeds from the arms sales to Iran had been diverted to the contras.[233] The next day, Admiral John Poindexter resigned as Reagan's National Security Advisor and the president fired Oliver North.[234] When Meese briefed reporters, he told them that North was the only government official who had full knowledge of the diversion of funds.[235] Meese explained that Poindexter became aware several months previously "that something of this nature was occurring," but he had failed to inform the president.[236]

The public revelations of secret efforts to help the contras occurred only several weeks after congressionally-appropriated aid to the contras had begun to flow again. The contras' renewed military offensives in late 1986 and 1987 were made possible by the restoration of that Congressionally-approved military aid. The diversion of funds from the

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[232] Gerhard Peters, "Seats in Congress Gained/Lost by the President's Party in Mid-Term Elections." The American Presidency Project. Ed. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California. 1999-2015, Http://Www.Presidency.Ucsb.Edu/Data/Mid-Term_elections.Php.
[233] Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 453.
[234] Jack Nelson and Eleanor Clift, "Poindexter Resigns, North Is Fired: Leave as Meese Says Contras Got Iran Arms Funds: Not Fully Informed About Initiative, Reagan Asserts," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-11-26/news/mn-15596_1_shipment.
[235] Nelson and Clift.
[236] Nelson and Clift.

arms sales to Iran had relatively little impact on the contras' military fortunes because the amount received by the rebels from that gambit, around $4 million, paled in comparison to the $70 million in military aid approved by Congress in 1986.[237]

In the midst of the political scandal—dubbed "Iran-contra"—that erupted in the United States, Oscar Arias, the president of Costa Rica, seized the opportunity to put forward a peace plan for Central America. Arias invited the leaders of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala to a meeting in Costa Rica on February 15, 1987.[238] When the Central American leaders met, they collectively announced a peace proposal to the Nicaraguan government. Among its major planks were cease-fires, democratization, and suspension of military aid from outside powers to insurgents.[239] The proposal was intended as a step towards regional peace—it aimed to end the conflict in El Salvador as well as in Nicaragua.

With the Democratic Party having taken control of the U.S. Congress in the 1986 elections, and following the Iran-contra revelations, Democrats were unwilling to allow the Reagan administration to continue prioritizing military pressure against Nicaragua when there was a peace plan on the table. Reagan administration officials, however, viewed the initial Arias plan as problematic. Under the terms that had been announced, the Sandinistas would be allowed to continue receiving military aid from the Soviet Union and Cuba, while the contras would not be able to receive military support from the United States. When the

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[237] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 473 & 481.
[238] William Branigin, "Costa Rica Pushes New Peace Plan, Cracks Down on Contras," *The Washington Post (Pre-1997 Fulltext); Washington, D.C.*, February 1, 1987.
[239] The English text of the proposal that was put forward at the meeting is available here: "Costa Rica: Proposal for Peace in Central America," *International Legal Materials* 26, no. 2 (1987): 573–79.

Reagan administration's National Security Planning Group met on February 20, 1987, five days after Oscar Arias had convened the meeting to unveil his plan, Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead emphasized that "the diplomatic track is essential for continued support on the Hill," but also acknowledged that "the Arias initiative is helpful yet flawed since it excludes the contras from negotiations with the Sandinistas and calls for a cut in U.S. assistance to the contras."[240] Although he also viewed the Arias plan as "deeply flawed," Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams remarked that Congress "needs the reassurance of a diplomatic track because they are scared of our alleged militaristic intentions."[241]

On March 12, 1987, the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution, by 97 votes to 1, that expressed support for the Arias peace proposal.[242] The overwhelming support reflected the stress that Arias had placed upon democratization, a goal that both opponents and proponents of contra aid could get behind. When Secretary Shultz testified before a House of Representatives committee in March 1987, he argued that continued American support to the contras would be needed if there was to be any hope of getting the Sandinistas to agree to a peace settlement and elections.[243] During the spring of 1987, the Reagan administration indicated that it would request $105 million in new military aid for the

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[240] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, February 20, 1987, in Folder 'NSPG 145 2/20/87,' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 5.
[241] Minutes of National Security Planning Group Meeting, February 20, 1987, in Folder 'NSPG 145 2/20/87,' Box 2, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSPG Meetings, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 6.
[242] John Felton, "The Peace Option to Get a Fresh Airing... ...In Upcoming Talks on Regional Plan," *CQ Weekly*, March 14, 1987, 462–63.
[243] Steven Pressman, "Real Battle Shaping Up Later: House, in a Symbolic Action, Votes Contra Aid Moratorium," *CQ Weekly*, 460-463, March 14, 1987, http://library.cqpress.com.ezproxy.princeton.edu/cqweekly/WR10040963.

contras.[244] However, the Republican minority leader in the House of Representatives publicly emphasized that the administration's military aid request was unlikely to pass Congress; he encouraged the administration to emphasize diplomatic efforts instead.[245]

The White House chief of staff, Howard Baker, and the new national security advisor, Frank Carlucci, explored a joint executive-legislative branch peace initiative by reaching out to the Speaker of the House, Jim Wright.[246] Robert Kagan explains that the White House's aim was "to forge a joint proposal that they could live with, in the unlikely event the Sandinistas accepted it, but which they could use to seek more contra aid in the almost certain event that the Sandinistas rejected it."[247] On August 5, 1987, President Reagan unveiled the "Wright-Reagan Plan." Among its provisions, it called for a cease-fire, the cessation of outside military aid to both the contras and the Sandinistas, and the establishment of a commission in Nicaragua to "assure regular elections open to free participation by all."[248]

The United States government sent the Wright-Reagan plan to a meeting of the Central American leaders in Esquipulas, Guatemala, which was just then convening.[249] The Nicaraguan government rejected the Wright-Reagan plan and Oscar Arias also judged that the Wright-Reagan proposal was tilted against Nicaragua; among the Sandinistas' objections was that the plan required that they no longer receive military support from the

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[244] Linda Greenhouse, "House In Vote To Block Funds for the Contras," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1987, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/12/world/house-in-vote-to-block-funds-for-the-contras.html?mcubz=2.
[245] Pressman, "Real Battle Shaping Up Later: House, in a Symbolic Action, Votes Contra Aid Moratorium."
[246] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 510–11; Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 957.
[247] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 531.
[248] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 513; Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 958.
[249] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 958.

Soviet bloc and Cuba.[250] After conferring with Speaker Wright, Arias decided to move forward with his own proposal.[251]

On August 7, 1987, the five Central American leaders, notably including Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, announced a peace agreement that closely resembled Arias' original draft and which became known as the Esquipulas II agreement.[252] The announcement provoked a difference of opinion among American administration officials. George Shultz believed the agreement, while far from perfect, could form the basis of further diplomatic efforts.[253] Administration opponents of the Esquipulas II agreement considered it beyond redemption because it seemed to risk the termination of American aid to the contras before the Sandinistas had taken meaningful steps towards democratization.[254]

Shultz persevered in his attempts to wield military support to the contras as an instrument of coercive diplomacy. On September 10, 1987, the secretary of state informed Congress that the administration intended, in due course, to request additional aid for the contras, likely at a level of $270 million to cover a period of 18 months.[255] Shultz explained that the aid's purpose would be to pressure the Sandinistas to ensure that the Esquipulas II process actually led to "a negotiated cease fire" and "a democratic opening in Nicaragua."[256] The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Claiborne Pell,

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[250] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 538.
[251] Kagan, 539.
[252] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 515.
[253] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 960–61.
[254] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 516; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 545.
[255] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, To Hear Testimony on Central America Peace Plan, September 10, 1987, Stenographic Transcript, 17.
[256] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, To Hear Testimony on Central America Peace Plan, September 10, 1987, Stenographic Transcript, 16.

suggested that the administration should refrain from requesting more aid for the contras "in order to show its good faith and so as not to cast a negative shadow over the peace process."[257] Senator Dodd argued that the administration should delay any military aid request to avoid "scuttling the Arias plan" by "giving the Nicaraguans an opportunity to slip out" of its provisions.[258]

Recognizing that it lacked sufficient congressional support to achieve it, the administration never actually requested the military aid that Shultz had raised as a possibility. Notwithstanding that, Oscar Arias had indicated that, although he opposed new American military aid to the contras, he did not object to the United States' providing further non-lethal aid to the rebels; in the closing months of 1987, Congress approved approximately $21 million in "humanitarian aid" for the contras, which covered items such as clothing and food supplies.[259] The purpose of such aid was to maintain the contras as an entity, thereby serving as an implicit threat to the Sandinistas to live up to the terms they had agreed to at Esquipulas. With Arias himself having stated that non-lethal aid to the contras would be acceptable, the Democratic-controlled Congress was willing to supply the rebels with that type of support in order to test whether the Arias initiative could bear fruit.

Ahead of another summit meeting of the Central American leaders in mid-January 1988, a congressional delegation, headed by Senator Dodd, travelled to Managua. After

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[257] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, To Hear Testimony on Central America Peace Plan, September 10, 1987, Stenographic Transcript, 3.
[258] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, To Hear Testimony on Central America Peace Plan, September 10, 1987, Stenographic Transcript, 74–75.
[259] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 523–24.

the meetings, one member of the delegation told journalist Stephen Kinzer that the delegation had informed the Sandinistas that if they did not engage in direct talks with the rebels they risked being "hit with another $50 million or $100 million in new aid for the contras."[260]

At the summit itself, Ortega agreed to embark upon negotiations with the contras.[261] The White House subsequently indicated that it would seek additional contra aid as an "insurance policy" against Sandinista backsliding.[262] In late January 1988, the administration submitted a request for $36.25 million in contra aid, of which only $3.6 million would be for lethal aid. However, the notion of providing any military aid to the contras, even a relatively small amount, in the midst of Arias' diplomatic efforts proved too much for Congress. Congressman David McCurdy explained the opposition of moderate Democrats to the proposal by stating that:

> Now is not the time, when substantial progress is being made toward peace and democracy in Central America, to send—or even promise to send—more military aid to the contras. Rather than offer Daniel Ortega a convenient escape clause, let's strengthen the U.S. favorable position by challenging the Sandinistas to further concessions.[263]

The House rejected the administration's aid proposal—both the non-lethal and lethal aid contained therein—by 219 votes to 211 on February 3, 1988.[264] Consequently,

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[260] Stephen Kinzer, "U.S. Legislators Warn Sandinistas on Peace Talks," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1988, http://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/13/world/us-legislators-warn-sandinistas-on-peace-talks.html; LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 529.
[261] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 578.
[262] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 530.
[263] 134 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 134, Part 1 (January 25, 1988 to February 16, 1988), 869, Statement by Rep. McCurdy.
[264] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 532.

the CIA had to cease providing aid to the contras at the end of that month.[265]

The Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives developed an alternative, exclusively non-lethal, aid package; it also failed to pass in the House. Robert Kagan writes that "House Republicans had voted against the Democratic bill, hoping its defeat would lead to passage of a better alternative, but the Democratic leadership felt under no obligations."[266] The House of Representatives had once again stopped the United States from aiding the contras in the war of attrition in Nicaragua. Just prior to the congressional vote on the non-lethal aid package, the Sandinista regime had, in fact, invited the contras to meet to discuss a possible ceasefire and those talks subsequently convened on March 21 in the town of Sapoá; it did not take long for the two sides to sign a ceasefire agreement.[267]

The 1988 congressional votes against providing the contras with any more aid gave the rebels little choice but to agree to a ceasefire with the Sandinistas; without American support, they would have been at a serious disadvantage if they had opted to continue the military struggle. Stephen Kinzer writes that "contra leaders admitted that they had been forced to the bargaining table by the congressional vote cutting off their American aid."[268] White House Chief of Staff Howard Baker said shortly after the agreement that the contra leadership had "decided that if Congress wasn't going to support them, they had had to do the best deal they could."[269] Elliott Abrams remarked that the contras "had to sign some

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[265] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 584–85.
[266] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 585.
[267] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 537.
[268] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 374.
[269] Josh Getlin, "Wright Wants Cutoff of Soviet Aid to Nicaragua," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1988, http://articles.latimes.com/1988-03-28/news/mn-165_1_soviet-military-aid.

kind of agreement because Congress had just smashed them into a corner."[270]

With the contras having been cut-off by the U.S. Congress, however, why did the Sandinistas opt to sign a ceasefire in March 1988? It was clearly not because the Soviet Union was failing to provide them with military assistance. During 1987, the Soviet Union and the Sandinistas had signed new agreements under which the USSR would provide increasing amounts of military aid during the following years.[271] More important was that Soviet and Cuban economic aid was insufficient to keep the Nicaraguan economy afloat any longer. A CIA analysis from June 1988 estimated that the Soviet Union and Cuba had provided the Sandinistas with the equivalent of $535 million in economic aid during 1987. That was slightly lower than the total of $580 million in 1986, but still substantially above the $450 million provided in 1985 and the $320 million furnished to the Sandinistas in 1984.[272] But, as the CIA analysis put it, looking back over the previous decade, "while Soviet Bloc aid has increased, it has not kept up with Managua's needs."[273] Nicaragua's overall economic activity was estimated to have fallen by one-third, in real terms, below pre-1979 levels and inflation had reached an annual rate of 13,000 percent by early 1988.[274] By that year, the Sandinistas were spending more than 25 percent of Nicaragua's diminished GDP on the military.[275] As Hal Brands describes, the effects of the contra war

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[270] Quoted in LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 539.
[271] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 570.
[272] Intelligence Analysis, 24 June 1988, 'Nicaragua: Prospects for the Economy,' CIA, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP04T00990R000100650001-9.pdf.
[273] Intelligence Analysis, 24 June 1988, 'Nicaragua: Prospects for the Economy,' CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 1.
[274] Intelligence Analysis, 24 June 1988, 'Nicaragua: Prospects for the Economy,' CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 3.
[275] Intelligence Analysis, 24 June 1988, 'Nicaragua: Prospects for the Economy,' CIA, Available from CIA CREST, 3.

were "catastrophic for Nicaragua," including because "contra sabotage caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damages."[276] Of course, as Brands also stresses, the Sandinistas' economic woes were not solely a result of the conflict, but were also of their own making because of policies such as price controls and due to the corruption that came with Sandinista rule.[277]

William LeoGrande explains that the Sandinistas' primary motivation for entering the ceasefire agreement in March 1988 was to gain an opportunity to "revive the economy."[278] Stephen Kinzer concurs with that assessment.[279] By entering a ceasefire, the Sandinistas presumably hoped that they could end American support to the contras for good. After all, American opponents of the Reagan administration's support to the rebels had argued that it was time to test whether the burgeoning peace process in Central America could work. Consequently, to put a definitive end to American military aid to the contras, the Sandinistas had to appear to be taking steps towards peace.

Despite the ceasefire, in its aftermath the Sandinistas continued some military operations against contra forces.[280] Robert Gates recounts that senior Reagan administration officials felt that the "long-term prospects" for the contras appeared "bleak."[281] However, while the United States had ended military aid to the contras, it did not abandon them completely. After the Sapoá ceasefire agreement was announced, the House of Representatives passed a new contra aid package, which provided $17.7 million

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[276] Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, 213.
[277] Brands, 214.
[278] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 538.
[279] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers*, 374.
[280] Gates, *From the Shadows*, 1st Touchstone ed.:435.
[281] Gates, 1st Touchstone ed.:435.

in non-lethal aid to the rebels.[282] The House approved the package by 345 votes to 70 on March 30, 1988 and the Senate did so by 87 votes to 7 votes the following day.[283] The non-lethal American support to the contras would enable them to remain a viable movement. It would fall to the administration of George H.W. Bush, who was elected president in November 1988 and who took office in January 1989, to design American policies intended to turn the ceasefire deal of March 1988 into a longer-term settlement in Nicaragua.

From the Battlefield to the Ballot Box

Secretary of State James Baker's talking points for the first Cabinet meeting of the George H.W. Bush administration stressed that the United States had experienced a "decade of frustration" in Central America. Baker's prepared points also stressed that Esquipulas II provided a "good basis for action," but the administration would have to work with Congress to achieve a united U.S. government position to help ensure that all of the Esquipulas II provisions were actually carried out.[284] Among the key provisions of that agreement, of course, was the Sandinistas' promise to hold elections in Nicaragua.

On February 14, 1989, at the conclusion of a two-day summit in El Salvador, the five Central American presidents announced their latest agreement, under which Daniel Ortega committed to allow Nicaraguan presidential and National Assembly elections by

[282] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 539.
[283] LeoGrande, 539; Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 595.
[284] James Baker Talking Points for January 23, 1989 Cabinet Meeting, JAB Notes from 1/23/89 Cabinet Meeting (First Meeting of Bush Administration), James A. Baker Papers, Box 108, Folder 1, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

February 25, 1990.[285] The Sandinista leader also agreed to the participation of international election observers in those elections.[286] The five presidents pledged to formulate a plan within 90 days to achieve the "voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation" of the contras from Honduras.[287]

In his memoirs, James Baker describes that both he and President Bush were "skeptical that the government of Daniel Ortega would ever permit the sort of free elections envisioned by Arias."[288] Nevertheless, they decided to test that proposition. Baker set out to work with Congress in formulating a bipartisan American strategy for reaching a durable settlement in Nicaragua; he was assisted by Bernard Aronson, a moderate Democrat, whom Baker had appointed as his Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs.[289]

After three weeks of negotiations with members of Congress, which Baker later described as "just as arduous and delicate an exercise as anything I would later encounter in my dealings with other countries," the administration had forged an agreement with congressional leaders.[290] It was known as the "Bipartisan Accord" on Central America and was announced on March 24, 1989. Under its terms, the executive branch and congressional leaders agreed to provide the contras with another $66 million in humanitarian aid through the completion of Nicaraguan elections in February 1990.[291] That

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[285] Lindsey Gruson, "Latin Presidents Announce Accord on Contra Bases," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1989, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/15/world/latin-presidents-announce-accord-on-contra-bases.html.
[286] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 628.
[287] Kagan, 628; Gruson, "Latin Presidents Announce Accord on Contra Bases."
[288] James Addison Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 52–53.
[289] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 225.
[290] Baker, 54.
[291] Kagan, 638.

aid would be provided to the rebels as long as they refrained from military offensives during that period.[292]

Rather than work to demobilize the contras, therefore, the Bush administration and Congress decided to support them with non-lethal aid in order to hold them together. That would serve as an implicit threat to the Sandinistas; if they failed to allow a fair ballot, the war could continue. In May 1989, the Bush administration clarified its policy towards Nicaragua in National Security Directive 8 (NSD-8). Among the components of the administration's strategy, the directive explained that:

> We will maintain as far as possible the Nicaraguan Resistance as a viable entity. The Resistance should not be demobilized and voluntarily reintegrated into Nicaraguan society unless democratic conditions have been established which guarantee their physical safety and safeguard their political rights.[293]

Additionally, the Bush administration clarified that it would also work with the unarmed political opposition in Nicaragua. NSD-8 stressed that the United States would "encourage their full participation in the Nicaraguan elections as a referendum on Sandinista rule," provided that "democratic reforms have been adequately implemented."[294]

In undertaking this strategy, the United States encouraged the various parts of the unarmed opposition in Nicaragua to unite, which they did under the name *Unión Nacional Opositor (UNO)*.[295] The UNO brought together 14 out of the 22 non-Sandinista political

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[292] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 555.
[293] National Security Directive 8, May 1, 1989, U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan Resistance, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 2, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsd/nsd8.pdf.
[294] National Security Directive 8, May 1, 1989, U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan Resistance, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 2.
[295] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 559.

parties in the country and choose Violeta Chamorro as its candidate for president.[296] The *Unión Nacional Opositor* was distinct organizationally from the armed opposition, the contras. Nevertheless, one senior contra leader, Alfredo César, would become a senior adviser to Chamorro during the election campaign.[297] Additionally, as Kagan notes, "throughout the campaign UNO leaders went out of their way to associate themselves with the contras."[298]

As James Baker later recounted in his memoirs, the United States took several steps to maximize the chances of a free-and-fair election:

> We pressed the OAS, the United Nations, the Carter Center, the European Union, and many others to flood Nicaragua with election observers. And we convinced the Congress to provide voter registration and other support through the National Endowment for Democracy to attempt to level out the enormous advantages the Sandinistas enjoyed through their control of government resources and personnel.[299]

Many Bush administration officials expected that the Sandinistas were likely to win the elections.[300] By contrast, in a telephone conversation with President Bush in July 1989, Oscar Arias predicted that "if the election is free and fair, the Sandinistas would lose."[301]

On election day itself, more than 2,500 election observers oversaw the polling.[302] A Carter Center mission, led by former President Jimmy Carter personally, played a pivotal role. Among the members of Carter's team was Robert Pastor, who wrote later that

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[296] LeoGrande, 559.
[297] LeoGrande, 560.
[298] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 672.
[299] Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 59–60.
[300] Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 637.
[301] Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Bush and Oscar Arias, President of Costa Rica, July 27, 1989, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 3, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-07-27--Arias.pdf.
[302] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 258.

President Carter got the Sandinista government to agree to allow the mission, in coordination with other observer organizations, to undertake a "quick count" of ballots on election day. The observation missions were allowed to collate vote tallies before the final count was completed, making it possible to detect fraud if a final result was announced that departed significantly from the quick count.[303]

When the election took place on February 25, 1990, 86 percent of registered voters cast ballots.[304] Early the next morning, Jimmy Carter called Secretary Baker from Managua. Carter informed Baker that the "quick count" of early election returns had showed that UNO had won a "substantial victory." Carter also told Baker that Daniel Ortega would make a statement conceding defeat after daybreak.[305] That same day, President Bush spoke with Oscar Arias and told the Costa Rican leader that "UNO's victory is also your victory and a victory for the peace process."[306]

In the final tally of votes, Chamorro had won 54.7 percent, while Daniel Ortega only won 40.8 percent.[307] Daniel Ortega transferred power to Violeta Chamorro on April 25, 1990. The end result of this conflict was that a fundamental objective that had been articulated by the Reagan administration—democracy in Nicaragua—had been achieved.

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[303] Pastor, 238–41.
[304] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 562.
[305] James Baker's Notes from 2/26/90 Phone Call from Former President Jimmy Carter at 4:15am Re: Nicaraguan Elections, James A. Baker Papers, Box 108, Folder 14, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
[306] Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Bush and Oscar Arias, President of Costa Rica, February 26, 1990, Available from George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 1, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-02-26--Arias.pdf.
[307] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 562.

Why were the Sandinistas willing to allow a free and fair election? The Nicaraguan economy was in dire straits by the end of the 1980s, which meant that the Sandinistas had to end the war of attrition. To do so, they needed to secure an end to American support for the contras, once and for all. The way to do that seemed to be to permit an election that was widely seen as free and fair, which meant acceding to former President Jimmy Carter's requests, notably including the conduct of a "quick count," because his verdict would do much to shape international opinion about the integrity of the poll. Additionally, the Sandinistas also believed they would win. As Robert Pastor recounted, "Ortega was so confident that he firmly curbed the excesses of his militants and continued seeking accommodation with the United States."[308]

Understanding the Outcome: Contingency and a War of Attrition

The fact that the proxy war in Nicaragua ended with a satisfactory outcome for the United States—notably a free and fair election—had a lot of contingency to it. The Iran-contra scandal and the Democratic Party's gains in the 1986 American elections meant that the United States ceased its military support to the contras. A regional peace initiative was put forward by Oscar Arias, which emphasized democracy as one of its central components. Both sides decided to give up the war of attrition that had raged throughout the 1980s at around the same time. In February 1988, the U.S. Congress voted down contra aid because the Reagan administration included military aid as part of the proposal; that forced the contras into a ceasefire agreement. On the other side, the Sandinistas entered into a ceasefire because Soviet economic aid was insufficient to keep the economy afloat

[308] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 255.

and so they needed to gain a respite from the war. In the aftermath of the ceasefire, a bipartisan policy emerged in the United States to hold the contras together through non-lethal aid as a way to ensure that the Sandinistas allowed a free and fair ballot. With the United States having made clear that it was unwilling to demobilize the contras until after a real election, the Sandinistas accepted that the only way to end American aid to the contras permanently was to submit themselves to such a poll, which they thought they would win.

The multiple contingent factors that produced the outcome in this case preclude generalizing too much from it. Nevertheless, the course of the conflict demonstrated some of the key predictions of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. Due to the low degree of consensus in Congress in support of President Reagan's decision to back the contras, American military support to the rebels was brittle and inconsistent. When Congress cut-off aid in 1984, the contras were thrown onto the defensive against the Sandinistas, who continued to receive substantial support from Cuba and the Soviet Union. When military aid was restored in 1986, the contras were able to go on the offensive once again. When Congress voted down contra aid in February and March 1988, the contras' strategic situation became perilous and they had to opt for a ceasefire. As it happened, the Sandinistas opted for a ceasefire as well since they, like many in the United States, had wearied of the war of attrition. Even after that point, there was enough bipartisan support in the United States for holding the contras together to encourage the Sandinistas to permit a free election; following all of the bitter debates of the 1980s, American policymakers could agree that offering non-lethal aid to the rebels as a way to encourage democracy was consistent with the United States' ideals. American military support to the contras proved

sufficiently sustained—just—to achieve the Sandinistas' defeat at the ballot box. Also of critical importance to achieving the outcome was that the multi-year pressure exerted by American aid to the contras was followed by a regional peace effort spearheaded by Oscar Arias. Pressure and diplomacy ultimately yielded a peace settlement and elections; the exact combination of coercion and conciliation, however, was not the result of any specific blueprint, but was a product of contingency.

The Aftermath of the Conflict

Following the Nicaraguan election, President Bush lifted all economic sanctions on the country, including the United States' trade embargo. The president also requested congressional approval for a supplemental appropriation of $300 million in economic assistance to Nicaragua.[309] The United States' aid to Nicaragua soon fell victim, however, to dashed hopes regarding how quickly Nicaragua could move beyond the struggles of the Cold War. After assuming the presidency, Violeta Chamorro decided to retain a senior Sandinista, Humberto Ortega—the brother of Daniel Ortega—as chief of Nicaragua's army, while Chamorro herself assumed the position of defense minister. It represented a way to try to prevent Sandinista militants from derailing her presidency.[310] However, it also served to split the UNO coalition and led to Chamorro and her close supporters

[309] Fact Sheet, March 13, 1990, Economic Assistance to Nicaragua, in Folder 'Nicaragua,' OA/ID 05659-012, Mary McClure Files, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library.
[310] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 276.

working with the Sandinistas against some of Chamorro's erstwhile allies.[311] In 1992, Senator Jesse Helms, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, put a hold on $104 million in American aid to Nicaragua in protest of conditions in Nicaragua, notably including the Sandinistas' continuing role in the security forces and the murder of former contra fighters.[312] In August 1992, at the direction of Senator Helms, the Republican staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a report on Nicaragua. The Republican staff investigation reportedly found that 217 former contra fighters had been assassinated after they demobilized and since Chamorro assumed the presidency.[313]

Half of the withheld aid was provided to Nicaragua in December 1992 and in April 1993 the Clinton administration released the remainder of the assistance.[314] The Clinton administration's decision followed indications that the Chamorro government had taken a number of steps requested by the United States, including reducing the size of the Nicaraguan army.[315] However, as William LeoGrande explains, following new evidence suggesting a lack of civilian control over the Sandinista army, the Clinton administration suspended economic aid again in July 1993. American economic aid was only reinstated

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[311] William M. LeoGrande, "Foreign Aid to Central America: Is the Era of Aid Over?," in *The Global Crisis in Foreign Aid*, vol. 1st ed., Space, Place, and Society (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 109.
[312] LeoGrande, 110.
[313] Republican Staff Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 'Nicaragua Today,' August 1992, in Folder 'Nicaragua [General] July 1992-December 1992 [2],' OA/ID CF01375-009, Charles A. Gillespie Files, National Security Council Files, Bush Presidential Files, George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, ix–x.
[314] LeoGrande, "Foreign Aid to Central America: Is the Era of Aid Over?," 110.
[315] Steven A. Holmes, "Nicaragua to Get Blocked U.S. Aid," *The New York Times*, April 3, 1993, http://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/03/world/nicaragua-to-get-blocked-us-aid.html.

in 1994 after Chamorro had taken measures to strengthen civilian control over the military.[316]

Despite these interruptions in American economic aid, the amount of foreign assistance that the United States provided to Nicaragua in the 1990s was significantly greater than the amounts provided to Afghanistan, another country that had been the scene of a proxy conflict during the final chapter of the Cold War. This likely reflected the proximity of Nicaragua to the United States. Figure 7 shows the total foreign assistance—both economic and military—provided by the United States to both countries during the 1990s. All of the figures are given in 2016 dollars to allow a direct comparison.

[316] LeoGrande, "Foreign Aid to Central America: Is the Era of Aid Over?," 110–11.

Fiscal Year	U.S. Foreign Assistance to Nicaragua (In 2016 Dollars)	U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan (In 2016 Dollars)
1990	377	26
1991	355	33
1992	121	50
1993	208	59
1994	122	4
1995	40	19
1996	34	24
1997	38	46
1998	80	12
1999	112	49
2000	47	74

Figure 7: Total U.S. Foreign Assistance to Nicaragua and Afghanistan during the 1990s.

Source: U.S. Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Years 1946–2016, Dataset, (Includes Economic and Military Assistance), Underlying Data for U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants: Obligations and Loan Authorizations, July 1, 1945–September 30, 2016 (Greenbook), (U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), 2016)

In the 1996 Nicaraguan presidential election, Violeta Chamorro did not run. Instead, the major contenders for power were Arnoldo Aleman of the Liberal Alliance and Daniel Ortega. Aleman won the election and although Ortega had alleged fraud, he ultimately accepted the results following an analysis by a Carter Center mission.[317] Robert Pastor describes how much Violeta Chamorro's government had managed to achieve between 1990 and 1996:

> Since the 1991 economic plan, the Chamorro government had conquered inflation. With the exception of two years—in 1993 and 1998 when inflation averaged about 18 percent—the consumer price index was mostly in single digits throughout the rest of the decade, and the growth rate after 1995 averaged above 5 percent.....In 1995 Humberto Ortega stepped down from the army, but by then he had shrunk the armed forces to one of the smallest in Central America, and for the first time in the country's history, the army was professional and nonpolitical.[318]

Violeta Chamorro, who had been part of the unarmed opposition during the 1980s, had presided over a period of recovery following a decade of externally supported proxy war in Nicaragua.

Alternative Explanations

As demonstrated, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war can explain both the nature of, and the impact on the ground of, American military support to the Nicaraguan contras. We now turn to an assessment of whether realist and ideological competition accounts can explain the provision of American military support to the contra rebels—as well as the congressional cut-off in aid in 1984—and whether a principal-agent framework could explain the outcomes that resulted from aid to the contras.

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[317] Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, 283–85.
[318] Pastor, 282.

A Realist Explanation

A realist explanation would argue that the United States provided military support to the contras because Soviet and Cuban support for the Sandinista regime, and that regime's external behavior, posed a challenge to the United States' strategic interests. As noted, President Reagan certainly assessed that aiding the contras could help to promote the United States' strategic interests by countering the Sandinistas' assistance to insurgents aiming to establish other Soviet-aligned regimes in the hemisphere, most notably in El Salvador. Also as described above, when President Reagan made a public case for aiding the contras, he stressed that doing so would serve American interests. Others also argued that the United States had strategic interests at stake in Central America. In its January 1984 report, the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America—which was chaired by Henry Kissinger and had been established by Congress and the administration to try to reach some common ground—emphasized the strategic interests at stake. The report explained the potential risks that the spread of Marxist-Leninist regimes in Central America posed to the nation's ability to project military power globally, stating that:

> The ability of the United States to sustain a tolerable balance of power on the global scene at a manageable cost depends on the inherent security of its land borders. This advantage is of crucial importance. It offsets an otherwise serious liability: our distance from Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, which are also of strategic concern to the United States……To the extent that a further Marxist-Leninist advance in Central America leading to progressive deterioration and a further projection of Soviet and Cuban power in the region required us to defend against security threats near our borders, we would face a difficult choice between unpalatable alternatives. We would either have to assume a permanently increased defense burden, or see our capacity to defend distant trouble-spots reduced, and as a result have to reduce important commitments elsewhere in the world.[319]

[319] Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, Quoted in Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 230.

Furthermore, opponents of backing the contras acknowledged that the Sandinistas posed strategic challenges to the United States. In April 1985, Senator John Kerry, while arguing against giving more military support to the contras and instead advocating more emphasis on diplomacy, outlined what he viewed as the developments that would constitute the "foremost threats to the security of the United States in Central America." The threats he listed were very similar to the strategic challenges the Reagan administration had identified. Kerry said the major threats were:

> One, the implacement of Soviet missiles in the region; two, the establishment of Soviet or Cuban bases in the region; three, the efforts of countries in the region to directly or indirectly support efforts to overthrow or destabilize other countries in their regions; and four, the continued militarization of the region involving the continued and growing presence of foreign military advisers and personnel, including the escalation of the regional arms buildup.[320]

When Senator Jim Sasser delivered the response to Reagan's televised address of March 16, 1986, Sasser stated that Democrats agreed with the administration that Nicaragua "must never become a base for Soviet military adventurism in this hemisphere."[321]

Despite a recognition by policymakers on both sides of the aisle that the Sandinista regime and its behavior posed strategic challenges to the United States, that did not—contrary to what realists might expect—lead to consensus support for backing the Sandinista's armed opponents. As this chapter has shown, different American policymakers reached different assessments of what American strategic interests actually required. President Reagan and others in his administration argued that backing the contras

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[320] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 7 (April 22, 1985 to April 30, 1985), 8854, Statement by Senator Kerry.
[321] Myers, "Sen. Jim Sasser, D-Tenn., Charged Sunday President Reagan Has Failed to Pursue a Diplomatic Solution in Nicaragua."

could serve those interests, whereas opponents of aiding the rebels argued that doing so might merely encourage the Sandinistas to strengthen their alignment with the Soviet Union. Partly as a result of those differing assessments, there arose a finely-balanced debate about whether or not to aid the contras. That close debate meant that in 1984 Congress prohibited military aid to the contras. A realist explanation struggles to account for why that step was taken. There was no major change in U.S. strategic interests in Central America. Instead, contextual factors, notably including CIA Director Bill Casey's failure to brief the Senate Intelligence Committee fully about CIA efforts to mine Nicaraguan harbors, swayed the debate against providing contra aid. The cut-off in aid, therefore, was more a product of the close debate in Congress about whether backing the rebels was consistent with U.S. interests and ideals than it was about any change in U.S. strategic interests.

Additionally, the fact that the debate revolved, in major ways, around what was required by U.S. liberal-democratic ideals, rather than just around the requirements of strategic interests, is something readily understandable on the basis of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, but it is more surprising to realist theories that stress strategic interest as the locus of action. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war would expect, while Reagan administration officials explained what they saw as the strategic rationale for countering the Sandinistas in their public remarks on Central America, their public case was not limited to that rationale. Just as much of the Reagan administration's public case for backing the contras—in fact, probably a greater portion of their arguments—focused on the moral case they saw for supporting the rebels. When the administration went on the rhetorical offensive in early 1985, senior officials certainly stressed the strategic stakes,

but the central part of their argument was that it was morally justifiable for the United States to aid the contras. Precisely because the nation's liberal-democratic ideals impose limits on which rebel movements the United States can support, the Reagan administration felt compelled to explain why American support for the rebels was justifiable in terms of those ideals.

Ideological Competition Accounts

An ideological competition account would explain American military support to the contras as a result of the Sandinista regime's efforts to build a Marxist-Leninist state in Nicaragua and to export that ideology to other states in the hemisphere. An ideological competition account would find it unsurprising that the United States opposed an ideologically-hostile regime by supporting a rebellion against it. Nevertheless, another prediction of an ideological competition account is that the United States will support rebel movements who are ideological allies of the United States. What this case demonstrates is that American policymakers will not always agree on whether particular rebels are ideological allies of the United States and whether they are any better, in ideological terms, than the regime they are fighting. In this case, although there was widespread agreement that the Sandinistas had established a repressive political system that was based on Marxism-Leninism, there was widespread disagreement about whether the contras were any better. Congressional opponents of backing the rebels argued that the contras had a poor claim to be liberal-democrats, not least because—especially at the beginning of the 1980s—the contras included former soldiers of the Somoza regime and the contras perpetrated human rights abuses that, to opponents, made them no better than the

Sandinistas. This case clearly demonstrates that what exactly is required by the United States' liberal-democratic ideals may be open to significant debate. It is the outcome of those debates—and especially the degree to which a president's assessment of what is required by American ideals is shared, or not, by significant numbers in Congress—that will determine whether or not the United States supports rebellions.

A Principal-Agent Framework

Opponents of providing military support to the contras argued that principal-agent problems were a reason to avoid such support. For example, in July 1983, Representative Lee Hamilton argued that the contras were a poor instrument for pursuing what the Reagan administration said were its official policy aims—which did not include military overthrow of the Sandinistas—precisely because the contras had different goals. As Hamilton put it:

> This administration denies any intention to overthrow the Sandinista government. But the validity of the U.S. Government's approach assumes U.S. control of the operation—so that the U.S. intent can be carried out. But the fact is that that control is inadequate. The FDN is an independent force. This question of command and control is important. It is important because those guerrillas that we have armed are supposed to be an instrument of our—United States—foreign policy. But it is clear that they have their own agenda, their own objectives—and it is that objective, clearly stated by their commander to over throw the Sandinistas—that they are following.[322]

In June 1984, Senator Joe Biden also argued for ending military assistance to the contras, including because of the challenges associated with controlling their behavior. Biden stated that:

[322] 129 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 129, Part 15 (July 20, 1983 to July 27, 1983), 21175, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.

> …… the record shows that the [contras'] operations are simply not well enough under control to merit continued U.S. support. The contras have conducted in Nicaragua a pattern of attacks on civilian targets, such as farms, food storage facilities, towns, and harbors which bear no clear causal relationship to the legitimate aim which one can have for such attacks—which is that Nicaragua ends its support for insurgencies.[323]

While these comments by opponents of contra aid illustrate how some American policymakers recognized the principal-agent challenges associated with aiding the rebels, a principal-agent framework is insufficient to explain the results produced by American support for the contras. In this case, both the Reagan administration and the contras had a shared interest in achieving the Sandinista regime's exit from power—after all, officials in the Reagan administration assessed that as long as the Sandinistas remained in power, their Marxist-Leninist ideology would cause them to pose a threat to U.S. regional interests. Given this shared interest between the American administration and the contras, it is difficult to explain, using a principal-agent framework, why the Reagan administration faced such difficulties in helping the contras to achieve the Sandinistas' exit from power during the 1980s.

By contrast, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war furnishes an explanation that consists of two major reasons. First, the Reagan administration was not able to devote as many resources to aiding the contras as it wished. The limits on the resources provided to the contras followed from the United States' institutional structure and the differing assessments between President Reagan and many in Congress about whether aiding the rebels would serve U.S. interests and American ideals. Second, the other side of the

[323] 130 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 130, Part 12 (June 12, 1984 to June 19, 1984), 16968–69, Statement by Senator Biden.

conflict—which is not addressed by a principal-agent framework—especially the support that competing outside powers are willing to give to the opposing regime, will have a significant impact on the military dynamics on the ground. In this case, even when the United States enhanced its support to the contras, military aid from Cuba and the Soviet Union counteracted that aid, which meant that the war settled into a prolonged war of attrition. When the United States ceased support in 1984, the contras were pushed onto the back foot in the military struggle because the Sandinistas continued to receive outside aid. When Congress restored military aid in 1986, the contras were able to make significant gains on the ground, but the war remained a strategic stalemate. When Congress voted against providing more aid to the contras in early 1988, the rebels had to settle for a ceasefire rather than continue the military struggle. The Sandinistas agreed to that as well because the economic aid they were receiving from their own patron was insufficient to meet their needs. Those outcomes were not the result of principal-agent dynamics, but rather the consequences of a contest between two superpower principals.

CONCLUSION

The Reagan administration's support for the Nicaraguan contras precipitated a bitter political struggle in Washington D.C. It was a struggle over what the United States' interests and liberal-democratic ideals required in an incredibly complex world. Many American policymakers and politicians agreed that the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua posed a threat to U.S. interests due to their alignment with Cuba and the USSR. Many in Congress also agreed with President Reagan that the Sandinistas were far from paragons of liberal-democratic ideals. Nevertheless, there was anything but a consensus among

American policymakers regarding the character of the contra rebels waging a rebellion against the Sandinistas. The fact that the contras' army included professional soldiers from Somoza's former National Guard and that the rebels committed myriad human right abuses themselves meant that many American politicians refused to accept that they were any better than the Sandinista regime. Similarly, there was a debate about whether aiding the contras would promote U.S. interests or would simply strengthen the Sandinistas' relationship with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The result of this debate was that the United States' military support to the contras was more halting and inconsistent, and of a lower level, than the Reagan administration wished. Even so, the United States provided enough military support to the contras to allow them to pose a military threat to the Sandinista regime and to engage in a sustained war of attrition with that regime and its outside backers. That war of attrition ended because both sides decided to call it quits around the same time. The Iran-contra scandal and the Democratic gains in the 1986 elections created the political space within the United States for a cessation of military aid to the contras. Importantly, American opponents of aid to the contras could point to an alternative policy, one that offered a possibility of bringing peace and democracy to Nicaragua—backing Oscar Arias' peace plan. The Sandinistas also decided to give up the war of attrition because they needed to gain some respite from the economic challenges their country was facing.

Despite all the divisions and debates of the 1980s, the United States eventually found a policy approach that offered a way to conclude the war of attrition in a satisfactory way from an American perspective. The United States provided non-lethal support to the contras to hold them together and serve as an instrument to ensure that the Nicaraguan

regime permitted free and fair elections. In February 1990, the Nicaraguan people did at the ballot box what the contras had been unable to do on the battlefield; they removed the Sandinista regime from power.

Chapter 6

The Reagan Doctrine in Southern Africa:

Angola and Mozambique, 1981-1992

This chapter examines why the Reagan administration provided military assistance to the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) rebels in Angola from late 1985 onwards, but never provided military assistance to the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) rebels in Mozambique.[1] Both Angola and Mozambique were Portuguese colonies and both received their independence in the aftermath of the 1974 coup in Portugal. Following the departure of Portuguese forces, Marxist-Leninist parties attained political power in both Angola and Mozambique—the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) and the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) respectively. The MPLA and FRELIMO governments both aligned themselves with the communist bloc and received military and economic assistance from that bloc. In both countries, the Marxist-Leninist regimes were confronted by a rebel movement that espoused anti-communism and professed its desire to align with the western world.

In late 1985, the UNITA rebels in Angola began to receive American military assistance, which would continue to flow to them until a peace agreement was signed between them and the MPLA in May 1991. By contrast, the RENAMO rebels in

[1] Some authors write the acronyms for these Angolan and Mozambican rebel movements—UNITA and RENAMO—as well as those for their opponents—the MPLA in Angola and FRELIMO in Mozambique—in upper case letters, whereas others write them in lower case. In this dissertation, I write all of these acronyms in upper case, even if they were written in lower case in the sources from which I quote.

Mozambique did not receive any military aid from the United States, despite calls from some American officials and some members of Congress for that step to be taken.

As this chapter will show, President Reagan favored providing military assistance to UNITA from the beginning of his administration in January 1981. That reflected his view that aiding the rebels could serve U.S. interests by imposing costs on Cuba, which had tens of thousands of troops in Angola to support the MPLA government, and as part of an effort to secure Cuban withdrawal from the country. As will be demonstrated, President Reagan also felt that aiding UNITA could be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals precisely because, in Reagan's view, the MPLA was relying upon external support from the communist bloc to survive. Nevertheless, early in the Reagan administration, Congress refused to lift a prohibition on covert action in Angola—the Clark Amendment—thereby denying the administration's ability to aid UNITA. At that time, key members of Congress doubted that aiding UNITA would be in U.S. interests, assessing instead that diplomatic engagement with the MPLA regime offered a more promising avenue for securing Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

By 1985, several years of concerted diplomatic efforts by assistant secretary of state Chester Crocker had yielded some progress towards reaching a settlement with the MPLA regime, but Cuban troops remained in Angola. Additionally, the amount of Soviet and Cuban military assistance to the MPLA regime had increased over the preceding years. In that context, Congress repealed the Clark Amendment in the summer of 1985 and the Reagan administration proceeded with supplying aid to UNITA. Although a majority in Congress voted for repeal of the Clark Amendment, there remained a significant bloc of opposition to providing military aid to the Angolan rebels; there was a low degree of

consensus that aiding UNITA would promote U.S. interests and ideals. In particular, opponents of aiding UNITA argued that doing so would merely give the MPLA reason to enhance its relations with the USSR and Cuba and opponents also raised doubts about the commitment of UNITA to liberal-democratic values. Consequently, in 1986 there was an attempt led by Lee Hamilton, a Democratic Congressman from Indiana, to re-impose restrictions on American aid to UNITA. That effort failed and the Reagan administration would go on to provide the rebels with aid until it left office.

The war in Angola was an externally backed war of attrition. Cuba and the Soviet Union backed the MPLA regime, while South Africa and the United States—from late 1985 onwards—aided the UNITA rebels. In late 1988, a negotiated settlement was reached under which Cuban troops departed Angola, while South Africa granted independence to neighboring Namibia, a territory that South Africa had long occupied and from which it had supported UNITA. American military assistance to the rebels contributed marginally to the negotiated settlement of late 1988 by reinforcing a strategic stalemate between the competing sides in Angola. Nevertheless, as we shall see, American aid was far surpassed by South African aid to UNITA—which thereby played a larger role in creating a strategic stalemate—and South Africa would have been unlikely to agree to a settlement in 1988 had it not been for a surge of Cuban troops into Angola that year that posed an increased threat to South Africa. Meanwhile, American diplomacy, spearheaded by Chester Crocker, played a much more significant role—compared to U.S. support to UNITA—in securing a Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. In the aftermath of the late 1988 settlement, the George H.W. Bush administration continued providing military assistance to UNITA in pursuit of an internal political settlement in Angola. American aid played a more decisive

role during this phase of the conflict because South Africa had agreed to cease its aid to UNITA as part of the 1988 agreement. In this phase of the conflict, American aid to UNITA helped the rebels to survive and they reached a political settlement with the MPLA in May 1991, which provided for elections the following year. After those elections took place, UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, refused to accept the result and continued to wage war. As we will see, Savimbi turned out to care little about democratic governance, despite what he had maintained during the 1980s when seeking American support.

In the case of Mozambique, President Reagan decided that aiding the RENAMO rebels would have been in neither American interests nor consistent with the nation's ideals. Although the Mozambican government was Marxist-Leninist and aligned with the Soviet bloc, during the early 1980s it showed itself willing to engage with the United States and to move towards the western world. By 1985, Reagan agreed with the advice of the State Department that engagement with the FRELIMO regime was a better way to promote U.S. interests in southern Africa than was confrontation with that government. Also contributing to that decision was the character of the RENAMO rebels, who had a horrendous human rights record. Some in the Reagan administration, however, argued for aiding RENAMO in what would have been another campaign as part of the "Reagan Doctrine." The advocates for doing so argued that aiding RENAMO would provide an additional means to wage geopolitical and ideological war against the communist bloc. Some members of Congress tried to apply political pressure upon the administration to that end, notably including by placing a hold on President Reagan's nominee to be ambassador to Mozambique. Nevertheless, the number of congressional advocates for aiding RENAMO never grew large enough to move President Reagan to support the group. There

was a high degree of consensus in Congress that the president had made the correct decision by refraining from giving aid to RENAMO, a consensus that was reinforced as the group's abysmal human rights practices became increasingly evident during the late 1980s.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The next section provides background to the rebellions in both Angola and Mozambique in order to describe the context for the Reagan administration's policy decisions regarding them. After that, we examine the policy deliberations over whether to aid the UNITA rebels by applying the policy model at the heart of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war to that case. Having done so, we evaluate the effectiveness of American military aid to UNITA. Having considered Angola, the chapter next turns to an examination of the American decision-making regarding the policy to adopt towards the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, as well as the insights that follow from considering what the United States achieved in that country in light of its decision not to support the rebels. Finally, we consider how the alternative theories would explain these two cases, before offering concluding thoughts.

Background to the Rebellions in Angola and Mozambique

The conflicts in Angola and Mozambique were shaped by the interaction of three major forces—decolonization in Africa, the anti-apartheid struggle, and the Cold War competition between the non-communist and communist blocs. Portugal first established a colonial presence in contemporary Angola and Mozambique during the sixteenth century.[2] During the 1960s, anti-Portuguese wars of liberation broke out in both Angola and

[2] Stephen A. Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique: The Frelimo-Renamo Struggle, 1977-1992* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion & Company Limited, 2014), 19.

Mozambique. In Angola, three separate movements fought against Portuguese control. First, there was the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA)—National Front for the Liberation of Angola—which established some relations with the CIA during the 1960s.[3] Second, there was the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA)—the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola—which, as Odd Arne Westad describes, developed into "a Marxist-led front by the mid-1960s, stressing the need for social revolution and the adherence to its purposes of all of Angola's peoples."[4] Between August 1965 and July 1967, Cuban troops provided training to MPLA fighters in one of Angola's neighbors, Congo Brazzaville.[5] Third, there was the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA)—National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola—that was led by Jonas Savimbi and received aid from China during the 1960s.[6] While waging the anti-colonial fight, Savimbi also colluded at times with the Portuguese authorities to enhance his own power relative to the MPLA movement.[7]

In Mozambique, the anti-Portuguese armed conflict began in September 1964 and was waged by a single group, the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) or Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.[8] FRELIMO was led at that time by Eduardo Mondlane, who espoused a socialist political system for Mozambique until his death in February 1969.[9]

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[3] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 210.
[4] Westad, 210.
[5] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 24.
[6] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 211.
[7] Westad, 211; Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 65, 302, 512.
[8] Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique*, 21.
[9] Emerson, 20–21.

In addition to the insurgencies in Angola and Mozambique, Portugal also confronted armed opposition in its third African colony, Guinea-Bissau.[10] Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, Portugal's efforts to pacify the three colonies cost 10,000 Portuguese lives.[11] Additionally, by the 1970s, the prosecution of Portugal's wars in Africa accounted for approximately 5 percent of national GDP.[12] On April 25, 1974, driven in part by mounting domestic political opposition to the colonial wars, a military coup in Portugal succeeded in overthrowing Marcelo Caetano's authoritarian regime in Lisbon.[13]

After assuming power, the new Portuguese government granted independence to its African colonies. In September 1974, it reached an agreement with FRELIMO that provided for Mozambican independence, under a FRELIMO government, on June 25, 1975. Having taken power, as James M. Scott recounts, FRELIMO publicly declared itself to be a "Marxist-Leninist vanguard party," signed a "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with the Soviet Union, and began to receive military and economic aid from the USSR.[14] Stephen Emmerson describes how FRELIMO also embarked on a sweeping transformation of Mozambique, writing that:

> All land was nationalized, abandoned private property and businesses were seized by the state, state farms and collectives were established, and power was increasingly centralized as FRELIMO transformed itself from a mass nationalist movement into a restrictive party of the Marxist-Leninist elite.[15]

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[10] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 211.
[11] Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique*, 21.
[12] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 218.
[13] Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique*, 21.
[14] James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 194.
[15] Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique*, 25.

FRELIMO's victory in Mozambique caused consternation for the white regime in Rhodesia because of FRELIMO's existing relationship with the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). With FRELIMO in control, ZANLA benefitted from sanctuaries inside of Mozambique, from which to launch attacks into Rhodesia across the 1,200 kilometer border between the two countries.[16] The Rhodesian government decided to counter the FRELIMO regime's support to ZANLA by helping to organize an anti-FRELIMO guerilla group—which became known as *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO)—whose first military leader was André Matade Matsangaissa, a former soldier in the FRELIMO government's army who had been imprisoned by FRELIMO for alleged corruption and subsequently fled to Rhodesia.[17] Following the end of white minority rule in Rhodesia in 1980—and the country's independence as the Republic of Zimbabwe—the apartheid regime of South Africa assumed patronage of RENAMO as a means of countering FRELIMO's support for anti-apartheid fighters.[18]

To extricate itself from Angola, the post-coup government in Portugal announced that it would grant that country its independence on November 11, 1975. The three liberation movements—MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA—signed an agreement in January 1975 at Alvor in Portugal as part of which they committed to join a transitional government that would prepare for elections to choose a new government. Within a month of that agreement, however, the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA began fighting one another in pursuit of power.[19]

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[16] Emerson, 27.
[17] Emerson, 38–39.
[18] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 195.
[19] Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1994), 167.

The MPLA, which already had an established relationship with Cuba and the Soviet Union, received additional weapons and materiel from the Soviet Union in early 1975, and also benefitted from the assistance of Cuban military advisers.[20] The MPLA succeeded in gaining control of Angola's capital, Luanda, by July 1975.[21] That same month, President Gerald Ford authorized the CIA to provide weapons and other materiel to the FNLA and UNITA.[22] The Ford administration's assistance to the FNLA and UNITA was an effort to deny military victory to the Soviet- and Cuban-aligned MPLA.[23]

South Africa also supplied the FNLA and UNITA with weapons and by mid-September 1975 South Africa had established its first training camp for UNITA.[24] South African officials sought to deny a victory to the MPLA because of the MPLA's alignment with the communist bloc and because the MPLA was committed to the anti-apartheid struggle. The MPLA had an established relationship with guerillas of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) who were fighting for the independence of what is today the state of Namibia—located between Angola and South Africa—and that had been occupied by South Africa since 1920 when the former Germany colony was granted as a League of Nations "mandate" to South Africa.[25]

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[20] Robert Michael Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, vol. 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 66.
[21] Chester A. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 49.
[22] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 229.
[23] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 113.
[24] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 230.
[25] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 28; I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, vol. Updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 174.

Cuban military instructors arrived in Angola in August 1975 to provide additional assistance to the MPLA.[26] Over the following months, the MPLA managed to gain the edge in the civil war and, in response, 2,500 South African forces invaded Angola in mid-October 1975.[27] The South African intervention helped to undermine the MPLA's military position, which in turn led Fidel Castro in November 1975 to decide upon a deployment of Cuban combat troops to support the MPLA.[28] At the time of this Cuban deployment, senior American officials in the Ford administration assumed that Cuba was acting at the behest of the Soviet Union, but evidence later emerged to indicate that Castro acted on his own initiative and against the wishes of the Soviet general secretary, Leonid Brezhnev.[29] Notwithstanding that, following the beginning of the Cuban deployment, the Soviet Union facilitated the operation. Odd Arne Westad reports that between November 1975 and mid-January 1976, the Soviet Union transported over 12,000 Cuban soldiers to Angola and provided the MPLA and Cuban forces with "hundreds of tons of heavy arms, as well as T-34 and T-54 tanks, SAM-7s, antitank missiles, and a number of MiG-21 fighter planes."[30]

The end of Portuguese colonialism in Angola had been followed by an internationalized civil war. In the latter half of 1975 that conflict exhibited a dynamic common to civil conflicts characterized by external intervention—as one side seemed to be making gains, the opposing side's external patrons provided more aid to their own partners on the ground. In late 1975, however, one of the external interveners decided to give up. The United States had only recently extricated itself from its grueling war in

[26] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 28.
[27] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 230.
[28] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 28–29.
[29] Gleijeses, 29–30.
[30] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 236.

Vietnam, with the denouement of that war having occurred in April 1975 when Saigon had fallen to North Vietnamese forces. Given the United States' recent quagmire, many members of Congress had little appetite for becoming involved in another conflict in the so-called "Third World." In November 1975, press reports revealed that the United States was intervening in Angola and, adding to the political controversy surrounding the operation, the United States was fighting on the same side as South Africa's apartheid government.[31] On December 19, 1975, the U.S. Senate voted to deny any further funding for covert action in Angola—thereby prohibiting further support to either the FNLA or UNITA—and that ban was confirmed by the House of Representatives in late January 1976.[32] The ban on American covert aid to any group in Angola became known as the "Clark Amendment" because its sponsor was Senator Dick Clark, a Democrat from Iowa.

With the United States having withdrawn its involvement, the tide of the conflict shifted in favor of the MPLA and its Cuban allies. By late March 1976, Cuban and Angolan troops had managed to move south to the Namibian border, forcing South Africa's troops to withdraw into South African-ruled Namibia and, by April 1976, 36,000 Cuban troops were deployed in Angola.[33] The United States refused to establish diplomatic relations with the new MPLA regime.[34] The FNLA had been routed during the course of the war and in January 1976 it essentially gave up its military operations.[35] UNITA, which had the smallest number of fighters of the three Angolan factions at the time of the 1974 Portuguese

[31] Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 145.
[32] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 50.
[33] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 34.
[34] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 42.
[35] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 237.

coup, survived to fight another day; following the withdrawal of South African troops, the group's leader, Jonas Savimbi, established a headquarters in northeastern Namibia and South African instructors continued to provide training for UNITA fighters.[36]

Jimmy Carter became president of the United States in January 1977, less than a year after the MPLA had won power in Angola. Officials from the Carter administration heard directly from officials in the MPLA government that Angola wished to establish diplomatic relations with the United States, but the Carter administration indicated it would never take that step unless Cuban troops departed from Angola.[37] For the MPLA government, the Cuban troop presence provided a defense not only against the threat from the UNITA rebels, but also from the threat posed by South Africa, which during the late 1970s continued to launch numerous raids into southern Angola from Namibia.[38]

By April 1978, the CIA estimated that UNITA had a force of at least 18,000 guerillas and the intelligence agency reported that "the guerillas move freely within and are supported by tribal kinsmen in an area of southern Angola comprising roughly one half of the country's territory."[39] Pitted against UNITA were the MPLA regime's forces, which were officially named *Forças Armadas Popular para Libertação de Angola* (FAPLA).[40] As of spring 1978, the CIA estimated that the FAPLA numbered between 30,000-50,000

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[36] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 66–67.
[37] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 102.
[38] For an example of the type of operations undertaken by South Africa during this period, see Gleijeses, 113.
[39] Intelligence Memorandum by the Central Intelligence Agency's National Foreign Assessment Center, 20 April 1978, "Angola: UNITA's Situation and Prospects," Available from CIA CREST, 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000498047.pdf.
[40] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 224.

personnel and continued to be supported by 19,000-20,000 Cuban troops.[41] The same assessment characterized UNITA's military strategy in the following way:

> Savimbi knows he cannot defeat the Neto regime [António Agostinho Neto, the leader of the MPLA at the time] militarily so long as Cuba maintains its strong presence. For this reason, UNITA's prime objective is to inflict as many casualties on the Cuban forces as possible in the hope of undermining their morale and possibly creating pressures in Cuba to reassess its military commitment.[42]

UNITA had, by the end of 1979, relocated its headquarters from Namibia to Jamba, an isolated location in Angola's Cuando Cubango province, about 30 miles from the Namibian border.[43] That same year, as Piero Gleijeses explains, Cuba informed the MPLA that Cuban troops would concentrate on defending Angola from South African military power, while the MPLA's forces, which had received counter-insurgency training from Cuba, would be expected to prioritize defeating the UNITA rebels.[44] In addition to troops, there were also several thousand Cuban aid workers operating in Angola by the end of the 1970s.[45] The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was the MPLA government's major provider of arms.[46]

Lying between Angola and South Africa was South African-occupied Namibia. The South African government had introduced apartheid into the territory, which South

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[41] Intelligence Memorandum by the Central Intelligence Agency's National Foreign Assessment Center, 20 April 1978, "Angola: UNITA's Situation and Prospects," Available from CIA CREST, 5.
[42] Intelligence Memorandum by the Central Intelligence Agency's National Foreign Assessment Center, 20 April 1978, "Angola: UNITA's Situation and Prospects," Available from CIA CREST, 3.
[43] Gleijeses, 192.
[44] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 110.
[45] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 84 & 109.
[46] Gleijeses, 97.

Africa called "South West Africa," during the 1950s.[47] In 1971, the International Court of Justice had declared that South Africa was presiding over an "illegal occupation" of Namibia.[48] In 1977, President Carter's administration established what was known as the "Contact Group"—comprising the United States, Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the United Kingdom—that would seek to persuade South Africa to accept independence for Namibia. The Contact Group formulated a broad plan that called for independence through UN-supervised elections in the territory.[49] In September 1978, the UN Security Council, by 12 votes to zero, adopted Resolution 435 that endorsed a detailed proposal for how to implement independence and elections in Namibia. The South African government rejected the process embodied in the Security Council's resolution.[50] Among its reasons for doing so, the South African government feared that the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO)—that was both fighting for Namibian independence and was an opponent of the apartheid system in South Africa—would win an election in Namibia rather than South Africa's client political movement, which was the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA).[51]

When Jimmy Carter left the White House, UNITA was waging an insurgency in Angola against the MPLA regime and the sizeable Cuban troop contingent in the country. The MPLA regime provided sanctuary to two of South Africa's enemies, SWAPO and the ANC, whose fighters received training from Cuban instructors on Angolan soil.[52] To

[47] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:175.
[48] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 36.
[49] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 146.
[50] Gleijeses, 149–50.
[51] Gleijeses, 155.
[52] Gleijeses, 86.

Angola's south, Namibia remained under the occupation of South Africa and the UN Security's Council effort to chart a path towards its independence, embodied by UNSCR 435, had been stymied by South African intransigence. On the other side of southern Africa, the FRELIMO government in Mozambique, which espoused Marxist-Leninist ideals and was also a foe of South Africa, confronted the RENAMO insurgency. This regional situation would form the backdrop for the Reagan administration's deliberations about whether or not to support the UNITA and RENAMO insurgencies being waged against Marxist-Leninist regimes.

ANGOLA: EXPLAINING THE UNITED STATES' LACK OF AID TO UNITA BETWEEN 1981-1985 AND SUPPORT TO UNITA AFTER 1985

Presidential Assessment of American Interests

From the time the MPLA attained power in Angola with Cuban and Soviet support, Ronald Reagan argued that the United States had an interest in countering the consolidation of a Marxist regime in the country. Reagan viewed the fate of Angola as intertwined with the broader struggle between the communist and non-communist worlds. In a March 1976 televised address, while he was running against President Gerald Ford for the Republican Party's nomination for president in that year's election, Reagan criticized the United States' decision to give up its intervention in the Angola civil war, saying that:

> Like an echo from the past, the voice of Winston Churchill's grandson was heard recently in Britain's House of Commons warning that the spread of totalitarianism threatens the world once again and the democracies are wandering without aim. Wandering without aim describes the United States foreign policy. Angola is a case in point. We gave just enough support to one side to encourage it to fight and die, but too little to give them a chance of winning.[53]

Reagan went on to say that the episode had left the United States as being "viewed by the world as weak and unsure."[54] In a July 1978 radio address, Reagan stated that the MPLA government was "totally sympathetic to Soviet aims."[55] By the time Reagan assumed office in January 1981, the president of Angola was Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who had become the MPLA's leader in 1979. Jose Eduardo dos Santos's personal biography reflected the close links between MPLA-governed Angola and the Soviet Union; he had studied in the USSR and his wife was a Soviet citizen.[56]

Angola had several characteristics that meant its alignment in the Cold War contest impinged upon American interests. First, Angola is a country endowed with significant natural resources. As Gleijeses notes, by the end of Portugal's colonial rule, Angola was "the fourth-largest coffee producer in the world, the sixth-largest diamond producer, an important exporter of iron ore, and sub-Saharan Africa's third-largest oil producer."[57] Second, Angola, and the region of southern African more broadly, is located astride important shipping lanes connecting the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, if the communist bloc established a sizeable presence in the region, it could

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[53] Ronald Reagan, "To Restore America, Televised Campaign Address," March 31, 1976, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/3-31-76.
[54] Reagan.
[55] Ronald Reagan, *Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 59.
[56] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 137–38.
[57] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 25.

have acquired the potential to impede western access to critical resources, as well as to impede the west's power projection capabilities. In 1980, Chester Crocker, who was then a professor of African affairs at Georgetown University and who would become the Reagan administration's assistant secretary of state for the region, explained during congressional testimony that "the security of the Cape Route is by far the most important Western interest in the African region."[58] By the end of the 1970s, the Cape route was the primary access route for oil tankers travelling from the Persian Gulf to the west.[59]

The Reagan administration's first national security strategy, which was prepared in 1982, emphasized how Soviet influence in southern Africa could have ramifications for the United States' global strategic capabilities, stressing that:

> Africa's mineral resources (including oil), plus its strategic location astride the sea lanes from the Persian Gulf, make it of prime importance in economic (and therefore political) terms; the military requirement for the West is essentially preemptive: to deny the Soviets (and Libya) control over key African states and territory from which they could interdict the supply of minerals and oil from Africa and the Middle East.[60]

By the time the Reagan administration came into office, the Soviet Union already had access to military facilities in Angola; three Soviet ships were based in Angola and Soviet reconnaissance planes would deploy there frequently.[61]

As the 1982 national security strategy indicated, the Reagan administration clearly recognized strategic interests at stake in Angola. Those interests were, however, moderate

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[58] J. E. Davies, *Constructive Engagement?: Chester Crocker & American Policy in South Africa, Namibia & Angola, 1981-8* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 58.
[59] Davies, 58.
[60] U.S. National Security Strategy, April 1982, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 44–45.
[61] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 97.

rather than vital and were derived in significant ways from the existing communist influence in the region and the potential for its expansion. The 1982 national security strategy indicated that "military threats to US interests in Sub-Saharan Africa are currently quite small and involve the possibility of local conflicts or domestic instabilities broadening to draw in the superpowers on the side of local clients."[62] The same strategy document identified potential problems facing the United States over the next several years in sub-Saharan Africa, which included "an increased Soviet naval and air presence in the region" and "stepped-up Cuban and Soviet involvement with southern African states which may increasingly rely on Moscow and Havana to counter South Africa's military posture."[63] For the Reagan administration, therefore, it was clear that the central challenge to the United States' interests in southern Africa was the presence of Cuban and Soviet military power.

Presidential Assessment: Would Support to UNITA be (1) Likely to further U.S. Interests and (2) Was it Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals?

Even before he became president, Ronald Reagan had expressed his view that providing assistance to UNITA could help get the Cuban forces out of Angola and that military aid to UNITA could be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. In an April 1978 radio address, Reagan criticized the Carter administration's approach to the Cuban presence in Angola. As Reagan explained his view of the situation:

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[62] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 20.
[63] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 20.

> Our State Department expresses a hope that Cuba will reduce the number of troops in Africa so we can go on normalizing (in a friendly way) our relations with Cuba. This hardly has the sound of a bold trumpet so it isn't surprising that Cuba's top diplomat in Washington has arrogantly announced that the Castro government has no intention of trading its ties with Africa for improved relations with Washington. Our State Department will probably react to this by saying 'pretty please—with sugar on it.'[64]

The implication of this argument was clear—Reagan believed that Cuba would not be ready to leave Angola unless it was confronted with real pressure to do so. One obvious source of pressure would be for the United States to provide some assistance to the UNITA rebels and in May 1980—during the presidential election campaign—Reagan indicated that he felt such action could be defended in moral terms. He argued that aid to UNITA could be justified because of the external support provided by the communist bloc to the MPLA, making an argument couched in the ideal of self-determination. Reagan told the *Wall Street Journal* that:

> I would provide them [UNITA] with weapons. It doesn't take American manpower: Savimbi, the leader, controls more than half of Angola. Apparently he's got quite a force there, and he's never asked for any kind of help, except weapons, and I don't see anything wrong with someone who wants to free themselves from the rule of an outside power, which is Cubans and East Germans—I don't see why we shouldn't provide them with the weapons to do it.[65]

From shortly after they took office, senior Reagan administration officials inclined towards providing military aid to UNITA, in line with Ronald Reagan's stated intention to do so. In order for the United States to provide such support, Congress would have to repeal

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[64] Reagan, *Reagan, in His Own Hand*, 141–42.
[65] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 118; Albert R. Hunt and Thomas J. Bray, "An Interview With Ronald Reagan," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 1980, sec. 1.

the Clark Amendment. On February 4, 1981, Richard Allen, Reagan's National Security Advisor, wrote to Secretary of State Alexander Haig and asked the following:

> It has been suggested that an early legislative initiative ought to be repeal of the Clark Amendment. Would you agree, and if so, do you have a suggestion about how to proceed?[66]

Two days later, Secretary Haig responded to Allen to say that "I agree entirely that we should move to repeal the Clark Amendment," and that once the State Department had completed a policy review towards southern Africa, which was then in progress, he would have further thoughts about how to approach achieving repeal.[67] That same day, Reagan's National Security Council held its first NSC meeting and a significant portion of the discussion was devoted to Cuba's foreign policy activities and the challenges they posed to the United States. It was during that meeting that President Reagan made his comment—quoted in the previous chapter on Nicaragua—about how he felt the United States should not "bring down governments in the name of human rights." After making the comment, he ventured directly from Latin America into a comment regarding Angola and UNITA—the link between the two issues was Cuba, which the Reagan administration saw as expansionist in both its own hemisphere and further afield in Africa. As President Reagan told his national security team at that first NSC meeting:

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[66] Memorandum for the Secretary of State from Richard V. Allen, February 4, 1981, in Box 139, Folder 10, Dept. of State Day File, February 6, 1981, Alexander Meigs Haig Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
[67] Memorandum for Mr. Richard V. Allen from Alexander M. Haig, Jr., February 6, 1981, in Box 139, Folder 10, Dept. of State Day File, February 6, 1981, Alexander Meigs Haig Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

> My own feeling -- and one about which I have talked at length -- is that we are way behind, perhaps decades, in establishing good relations with the two Americas. We must change the attitude of our diplomatic corps so that we don't bring down governments in the name of human rights. None of them is as guilty of human rights violations as are Cuba and the USSR. We don't throw out our friends just because they can't pass the 'saliva test' on human rights. I want to see that stopped. We need people who recognize that philosophy. In Angola, for example, Savimbi holds a large chunk of Angolan territory. With some aid, he could reverse the situation. We should also reestablish relations with countries like Chile who have made substantial progress -- and stop worrying about Allende's fate.[68]

This statement indicates Reagan's view towards Jonas Savimbi and UNITA, and anti-communist political movements more broadly, at the beginning of Reagan's presidency. Even if Savimbi's human rights record did not pass the 'saliva test,' in Reagan's view he was unquestionably better than the MPLA regime, backed by its Soviet and Cuban patrons. Reagan's comment to his advisors also indicates that he felt providing American aid to UNITA could be effective—"with some aid, he could reverse the situation."

President Reagan heard from his advisers during that NSC meeting that, even if American aid to UNITA did not allow the rebels to win a military victory, it could still serve the United States' interests by weakening Cuba. General Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that repealing the Clark Amendment and helping UNITA offered a way to impose costs on Cuba. As Jones argued:

> In 1975, President Ford agreed we needed to put the Cubans on notice for their activities in Angola. The Clark Amendment stopped us. Even if we can't always stop the Cubans, it is important that we make them pay the price of admission.[69]

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[68] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 4.

[69] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 5.

Director of the CIA Bill Casey made a similar argument, stating that:

> The most effective way to put pressure on Cuba would be through Angola. We should seek a repeal of the Clark Amendment and consider aid to Savimbi.[70]

From the very first NSC meeting of the Reagan administration, therefore, the president and some of his top national security officials supported providing aid to Savimbi as a way to impose costs on Cuba and to counteract what was seen as its unacceptable assertion of power overseas.

Presidential Decision and Policy Objectives

Upon completion of the full policy review by the State Department in March 1981, Secretary Haig recommended to President Reagan that the United States should "strengthen Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA group through public support and indirect, covert help, so that he can harass the Cubans in Angola, as part of a broader strategy of pressing the MPLA into dealing with Savimbi and getting rid of the Cubans."[71]

On March 24, 1981, President Reagan approved the State Department's proposed strategy for southern Africa. Reagan noted in his diary for that day that:

> We adopted a plan to persuade African States of our desire to help settle the Namibian question—an election after a const. [constitution] is adopted. At the same time we would urge Angola's govt. to oust the Cubans at the same time we helped Savimbi.[72]

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[70] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 6.
[71] Memorandum for the President from Alexander M. Haig, Jr., March 18, 1981, 'Strategy in Southern Africa,' in Folder 'NSC 00006 03/26/1981 [Poland, Nicaragua, Central America, Southern Africa, Military Operations]' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.
[72] Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 10.

Among the key policy objectives for President Reagan, therefore, were getting Cuban troops out of Angola, helping UNITA, and persuading other states in the region that the United States was playing a constructive role in trying to achieve Namibian independence from South Africa. The primary architect of the administration's overall strategy for southern Africa—and the person who would strive to implement it for the entirety of the Reagan administration—was Chester Crocker, the head of the State Department's Africa Bureau. Crocker conceptualized the strategy towards Angola and Namibia as one of "tacit linkage."[73] The strategy aimed to achieve Namibian independence, while linking that outcome to the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola.[74] Approaching the regional challenges in this way potentially offered a tractable way to make progress because it provided the possibility of trading something desired by the Angolan regime and their Cuban patrons—Namibian independence—for something sought by South Africa and the United States—the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola.

The "tacit linkage" approach was not simply an artefact of American strategy; it also reflected the realities of the political situation in southern Africa. Angola provided sanctuary for both the ANC and for SWAPO insurgents; the latter would infiltrate into Namibia to conduct attacks before returning to their sanctuaries in Angola.[75] To counteract that threat, the South African Defense Force (SADF) periodically mounted operations from Namibia against SWAPO bases in Angola. South Africa's military bases in Namibia also provided the logistical infrastructure from which it furnished assistance to the UNITA

[73] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 65.
[74] Crocker, 67.
[75] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 186.

rebels in Angola. Erica Borghard writes that "the apartheid regime believed supporting UNITA provided a 'low cost' avenue for disposing of the SWAPO threat and Namibian independence."[76] Among the reasons why the MPLA and Cuba desired Namibian independence, therefore, was because it would remove the military threat posed to Angola by South African forces based in Namibia.

A policy paper prepared for the Reagan administration's first NSC meeting made clear that large numbers of Cuban personnel would likely remain deployed in Angola "so long as a significant external threat [from South Africa] exists."[77] Therein lay the potential basis for the Reagan administration's strategy of "tacit linkage" between Angola and Namibia. The United States considered South Africa's occupation of Namibia, as well as SADF operations into Angola, to both be illegal.[78] At the same time, the United States, like South Africa, deemed Cuba's military presence in Angola to be unacceptable. Consequently, promoting Namibian independence, and attempting to leverage that as part of an effort to achieve the withdrawal of Cuban troops for Angola, represented a logical strategic approach.

The administration's April 1982 national security strategy codified the United States' policy objectives in Africa. Among them, it specified that the United States should

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[76] Erica Dreyfus Borghard, "Friends with Benefits? Power and Influence in Proxy Warfare" (Columbia University, 2014), 135–36.
[77] Paper titled 'Cuba Promoting Revolution in Latin America,' Tab 2 in Briefing Materials for 6 February 1981 NSC Meeting, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
[78] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 140.

attempt to "secure the withdrawal of Soviet and Soviet proxy forces on the continent."[79] Foremost among what American policymakers deemed to be "Soviet proxy forces" in Africa was the contingent of Cuban troops deployed in Angola.

Degree of Consensus in Congress that Supporting UNITA was Likely to Serve U.S. Interests and was Defensible in terms of American Ideals

Although the theoretical framework of this dissertation construes the president as the initial decision-maker regarding American support to rebellions, the situation confronting the Reagan administration diverged from that theoretical model because the Clark Amendment, enacted in 1976 when the U.S. Congress wanted to scale back overseas involvement following Vietnam, remained in force. Consequently, as one facet of its regional strategy for southern Africa, the Reagan administration embarked on an effort to secure repeal of the Clark Amendment, which it failed to secure in 1981 because there was insufficient support in Congress for aiding UNITA.

In March 1981, Secretary of State Haig stated in Senate testimony that the administration wanted to see repeal of the Clark Amendment.[80] At this time, Democrats held a majority in the House of Representatives, while Republicans held a majority in the Senate. In late April 1981, the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa recommended that the Clark Amendment continue in force.[81] The full House

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[79] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 6.
[80] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 137.
[81] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 120; "Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Assistance Legislation for FY82 (Part 8),' Mar. 19, 24, 26, 31 - Apr. 2, 27, 1981, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 442,

Committee on Foreign Affairs subsequently voted by 19-to-5 to leave the Clark Amendment in place, a decision that was included in the House of Representative's foreign assistance bill for the following fiscal year.[82] By contrast, the Senate voted to repeal the Clark Amendment. Nevertheless, in the conference committee on the foreign aid bill, the Senate yielded to the House of Representative's position and the Clark Amendment continued in force, thereby prohibiting the Reagan administration from providing aid to UNITA.[83]

Opponents of repealing the Clark Amendment in 1981 did not disagree with the central policy objectives that the Reagan administration had established for Angola; there was broad agreement that the United States should seek the departure of Cuban troops from the country as well as Namibian independence. The disagreement was over whether aiding UNITA would help or hinder those objectives and stemmed from divergent assessments of how cooperative the Angolan government had already been. In late April 1981, Representative Howard Wolpe—a Democrat from Michigan who was a former professor of African affairs and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa—stated that:

> The Angolan Government has been, despite our nonrecognition of that regime and despite the absence of formal diplomatic relationships with the Angolan Government, has been working cooperatively with the United States as with the five contact powers in seeking a settlement of the conflict in Namibia.[84]

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https://congressional-proquest-com.ezproxy.princeton.edu/congressional/docview/t29.d30.hrg-1981-foa-0018?accountid=13314.

[82] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 120.

[83] Scott, 120.

[84] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Assistance Legislation for FY82 (Part 8),' Mar. 19, 24, 26, 31 - Apr. 2, 27, 1981, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 439.

At the same Congressional hearing, Representative Stephen Solarz, a Democrat from New York, also argued that the Angolan regime was willing to play a constructive role in southern Africa. As Solarz explained:

> I met with the Angolan Foreign Minister in New York at the United Nations on Friday and he made it absolutely clear then, as he has on other occasions in the past, that once there is an internationally acceptable settlement in Namibia, pursuant to which South African forces would be withdrawn from that country, he fully expects that all of the Cuban military forces in Angola would depart. Given the extent to which Angola has cooperated with us in the search for a settlement in Namibia, it seems to me if, in fact, we want the Cubans out of Angola, and I think we do, the best way to do it is to get a settlement in Namibia which would clearly be jeopardized by a decision to repeal the Clark amendment at this time.[85]

While Wolpe and Solarz judged that the MPLA regime might cooperate with the United States on a Namibia settlement—and be willing to allow Cuban troops to depart—other members of the subcommittee were less convinced. Representative William Goodling, a Republican from Pennsylvania, stated that "I will wait and see a little before I get so ecstatic about Angola's contributions to a peaceful society at this particular time."[86]

Former Senator Dick Clark argued that American assistance to UNITA would be counterproductive. Clark offered his view that although UNITA was not strong enough to overthrow the MPLA, it "could further destabilize the country which would cause the Government to become even more dependent upon Soviet and Cuban assistance."[87]

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[85] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Assistance Legislation for FY82 (Part 8),' Mar. 19, 24, 26, 31 - Apr. 2, 27, 1981, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 440.
[86] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Assistance Legislation for FY82 (Part 8),' Mar. 19, 24, 26, 31 - Apr. 2, 27, 1981, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 439–40.
[87] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Assistance Legislation for FY82 (Part 8),' Mar. 19, 24, 26, 31 - Apr. 2, 27, 1981, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 286.

When the full House Foreign Affairs Committee voted 19-to-5 in favor of keeping the Clark Amendment, all five votes cast against that move were by Republicans; meanwhile four other Republicans joined with Democrats to vote to continue the restriction.[88] There was insufficient consensus in Congress at this time about the efficacy of backing UNITA to enable the Reagan administration to achieve the authority to do so.

The administration would, at least for the time being, have to pursue its goals in southern Africa without recourse to either the threat of, or actual provision of, military assistance to UNITA. Chester Crocker embarked upon a concerted effort to implement the strategy of "tacit linkage." By October 1982, Crocker and his team had reached more detailed understandings with the other "Contact Group" countries and regional states regarding the parameters of a Namibian independence settlement.[89] Having done that, the focus of Crocker's efforts turned to trying to make diplomatic progress with Angola's MPLA government. When Crocker met with the MPLA's foreign minister in Paris in January 1982, the MPLA official made it clear that Angola was not at that time prepared to countenance the withdrawal of Cuban troops from the country.[90]

On the ground in Angola, during 1982 and 1983 UNITA expanded its military operations beyond its base area in the south-east of the country.[91] Additionally, in August 1983, UNITA successfully seized the town of Cangamba, which in the early 1980s was garrisoned by a MPLA brigade, along with 92 Cuban advisers; UNITA seized the town through an attack by 6,000 of the rebel group's fighters, who were assisted by South

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[88] Judith Miller, "House Panel Acts to Maintain Ban on Military Aid to Angolan Rebels," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1981, sec. A.
[89] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 86.
[90] Crocker, 139–40.
[91] Crocker, 158.

African personnel, as well as South African air strikes against the town.[92] The fall of Cangamba demonstrated to the MPLA and its outside patrons the growing threat that UNITA posed, thanks to the support it was receiving from South Africa. Over the following year, the number of Cuban troops in Angola increased from 30,000 to 39,000.[93] During that period, the Soviet Union also enhanced its supply of weapons to the MPLA.[94]

In September 1984, the MPLA presented Crocker's team with a proposal for a withdrawal of Cuban troops from the country, but it was not a particularly serious bid—the precise terms of the proposal were vague and it only included a commitment to partial Cuban withdrawal rather than a complete one.[95] The MPLA regime offered a refined proposal in October 1984. South Africa's response to the refined Angolan-Cuban withdrawal proposal was also not a workable offer; among its components, it called for a Cuban withdrawal from Angola that was much more rapid than the MPLA and Cuba would have been willing to accept.[96] Crocker recalls that, by the end of 1984, he and his team were "awed by the enormity of the gap to be bridged between the Angolan and South African positions on the Cuban timetable."[97]

With Crocker's diplomatic efforts having made some progress, but with a major gap still existing between the MPLA and Cuba, on one side, and South Africa on the other, a group of American legislators decided to launch an effort to repeal the Clark Amendment.

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[92] Gleijeses, 221–23.
[93] Gleijeses, 226.
[94] Gleijeses, 227.
[95] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 207.
[96] Crocker, 218.
[97] Crocker, 221.

As James M. Scott recounts, the initiative was led by members of Congress—from both political parties—rather than being spearheaded by the Reagan administration.[98]

On June 11, 1985, the United States Senate voted to repeal the Clark Amendment by 63 votes to 34.[99] One month later, on July 10, the House of Representatives also voted to repeal the amendment by a vote of 236 to 185.[100] The balance of opinion in Congress had shifted towards giving the administration the ability to aid UNITA, compared to 1981. To put it in terms of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, the degree of consensus in Congress regarding the efficacy and defensibility of aiding UNITA had increased. That was for at least four reasons.

First, as was the case for debates over aid to the Nicaraguan contras, changes to the composition of the House of Representatives had made that body more sympathetic than it had been in 1981 to contesting the communist bloc through aid to rebels. Although the Republican Party had failed to win control of the House of Representatives in the November 1984 elections, Republicans achieved a net gain of 15 seats.[101] Furthermore, the Republican Party did especially well in the south, which meant that a number of southern Democrats in Congress felt politically vulnerable.[102] Southern Democrats consequently had a political incentive to insulate themselves from Republican charges that they were "soft" on national security issues.

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[98] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 127–30.
[99] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 296.
[100] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 130.
[101] "Party Divisions of the House of Representatives" | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives," accessed November 6, 2017, http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/.
[102] Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 117.

Second, although the Reagan administration did not lead the 1985 push to have Congress repeal the Clark Amendment, it had indicated publicly that it was sympathetic to UNITA's fight against what the administration portrayed as a regime propped up by outside assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. During the early part of 1985, senior administration officials had indicated that UNITA's rebellion was, in their view, consistent not only with American strategic interests but defensible in terms of American ideals. In his speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco in February 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz stressed that UNITA was fighting a regime that relied upon foreign support, thereby suggesting that it was a fight for self-determination. As Shultz explained the matter in the speech:

> In Angola, a Marxist regime came into power in 1975 backed and sustained by 30,000 Cuban troops and substantial numbers of Soviet and East European 'advisers.'.....In Angola, UNITA has waged an armed struggle against the regime's monopoly of power and in recent years has steadily expanded the territory under its control. Foreign forces, whether Cuban or South African, must leave. At some point there will be an internal political settlement in Angola that reflects Angolan political reality, not external intervention.[103]

In his speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference one week later, President Reagan included UNITA among the collection of rebel movements that he argued were fighting against externally aided communist tyranny, stating that:

> Throughout the world the Soviet Union and its agents, client states, and satellites are on the defensive—on the moral defensive, the intellectual defensive, and the political and economic defensive. Freedom movements arise and assert themselves. They're doing so on almost every continent populated by man-in the hills of Afghanistan, in Angola, in Kampuchea, in Central America.[104]

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[103] The Hon. George P. Shultz, "America and the Struggle for Freedom." Address before the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco. Re-Printed in State Department Bulletin, April 1985. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. G.P.O., February 22, 1985), 17–18.
[104] Ronald Reagan: Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference, March 1, 1985, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38274.

With these remarks, senior officials in the Reagan administration were indicating that they viewed UNITA as a rebel movement that was fighting in a way that could not merely further American strategic interests, but whose efforts could be defended as being waged for the American ideal of liberty.

Third, and relatedly, the MPLA's reliance on external support from Cuba and the Soviet Union had been increasing, thereby strengthening the case of those who argued that American counter-pressure would be necessary to reduce the Cuban and Soviet presence in Angola in furtherance of American interests. By 1984, there were 30,000 Cuban troops in Angola, up from 20,000-25,000 during the early 1980s.[105] Additionally, by the middle of the 1980s the Soviet Union had approximately 1,500 military instructors and advisors based in Angola.[106] These increases in Cuban and Soviet military support to the MPLA were driven, in important ways, by the expansion in reach and lethality of UNITA's military operations during the early 1980s, something the rebel group had been able to achieve because of its support from South Africa. In August 1983, an internal Soviet government assessment reported that "the situation in Angola continues to worsen. The survival of the country's progressive government is at stake."[107]

Figure 8 provides the U.S. intelligence community's February 1985 estimate of how much military assistance the Soviet Union had provided to Angola between 1976 and 1983.

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[105] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 208.
[106] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 343.
[107] Quoted in Gleijeses, 227.

Year	U.S. Intelligence Estimate (From February 1985) of Soviet Military Assistance to Angola (in Nominal U.S. Dollars)
1976	64 million
1977	77 million
1978	143 million
1979	99 million
1980	137 million
1981	248 million
1982	322 million
1983	561 million

Figure 8: U.S. Intelligence Estimate of the Soviet Union's Military Assistance to Angola, 1976-1983. Source: National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Pages 12 & 21, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST.

The February 1985 NIE explained that the USSR had introduced "MI-24/25 helicopter gunships, MIG-23 fighter aircraft, and SU-22 fighter-bombers" into Angola.[108] Additionally, the NIE stated that "the USSR has extensive and regular access to air and naval facilities in Angola, and Luanda provides logistic support to the Soviet Navy's West Africa patrol and is a staging base for Soviet long-range reconnaissance aircraft."[109]

The growing Cuban and Soviet role in Angola became a significant plank of the

[108] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 12, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP87T00495R000800800002-3.pdf.
[109] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 11.

arguments put forward by proponents of repealing the Clark Amendment in 1985. For example, Representative Samuel Stratton, a Democrat from New York, argued that:

> As long as the Cubans are in Angola, the people there will never be free to have their own elections. And as long as the Cubans are in Angola, the democratic forces there will never be able to remove the yoke of communism which is kept in place by Soviet surrogates 10,000 miles from their homeland.[110]

Representative John McCain, a Republican member of Congress from Arizona, argued that the United States should be prepared to help "to free those nations that are struggling to throw off the yoke of Marxist-Leninism."[111] The fact that the MPLA regime was receiving such significant assistance from Cuba meant that Cuban-American political groups, such as the Cuban-American National Foundation, argued strongly for repeal of the Clark Amendment.[112] A Democratic Congressman from Florida whose district included a large number of Cuban-Americans, Claude Pepper, emerged as among the foremost advocates of supporting UNITA within the U.S. Congress.[113]

Fourth, despite the concerted efforts made by Chester Crocker and his team during the preceding years, diplomacy had not, by this time, achieved the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola. Between January 1982 and March 1985, there had been close to 20 rounds of direct talks between the United States and the Angolan regime that focused on

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[110] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 13 (June 26, 1985 to July 10, 1985), 18489, Statement by Rep. Stratton.
[111] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 13 (June 26, 1985 to July 10, 1985), 18495, Statement by Rep. McCain.
[112] Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1994), 116.
[113] William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994), 153; Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 304.

Cuban troop withdrawal.[114] Despite that, as noted, Crocker's team still confronted a considerable gap between the opposing parties. Crocker's team tried to close that gap during the opening half of 1985, but no significant progress was made before the congressional votes on repeal of the Clark amendment that summer.[115] With the diplomatic strategy having not yet produced a key American policy objective—Cuban withdrawal—plenty of American policymakers were willing to consider more forceful efforts towards that end.

Notwithstanding that, although the balance of opinion in Congress had shifted between 1981 and 1985 in favor of repealing the Clark Amendment, there also remained plenty of opponents on Capitol Hill to providing aid to UNITA. Those opponents argued that American assistance to UNITA would neither serve American interests nor would it be defensible in terms of the nation's liberal-democratic ideals. Opponents made three major arguments for why backing UNITA was against American interests and ideals.

First, they argued that repealing the Clark Amendment and then moving to assist UNITA would prove counterproductive to achieving the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. Opponents did not dispute that getting Cuban forces out of Angola was in the United States' interest nor that countering the expansion of Marxist-Leninist political systems was morally acceptable. Instead, they raised concerns that siding with the UNITA rebels would merely increase the MPLA's alignment with the communist bloc. In July 1985, for example, Representative Ted Weiss, a Democrat from New York, asked rhetorically, "why would we take a step which would create such anxiety in the

[114] Chester A. Crocker, "Peacemaking in Southern Africa: The Namibia-Angola Settlement of 1988 (Case Study 335)" (Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2017), 27.
[115] Crocker, 12.

Government of Angola that they would have to feel that the thing to do is to keep the Cuban forces there whatever the cost?"[116]

Second, opponents argued that repealing the Clark Amendment would, in effect, align the United States openly with the illiberal policies of the apartheid regime of South Africa, which had been UNITA's strongest backer. For instance, Representative William Gray, a Democrat from Pennsylvania—and a vigorous opponent of apartheid in South Africa—argued that repealing the Clark Amendment would produce a perception that the United States was "militarily supporting the apartheid regime's expansionist efforts in southern Africa." [117]

Third, opponents of aiding UNITA argued that to do so would be inconsistent with liberal-democratic ideals because of doubts about the rebel group's commitment to those ideals. Among the reasons for concern, for some members of Congress, was that Jonas Savimbi and others in UNITA had received military training in the People's Republic of China during the 1960s.[118] In July 1985, Representative Wolpe accused Savimbi of merely "espousing Western capitalistic values" when talking to American audiences in order to increase his chances of receiving support from the United States.[119]

Despite a sizeable bloc of opponents to repealing the Clark Amendment, the balance of opinion in Congress, by 1985, was in favor of that step. With the consensus in

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[116] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 13 (June 26, 1985 to July 10, 1985), 18493, Statement by Rep. Weiss.
[117] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 13 (June 26, 1985 to July 10, 1985), 18496, Statement by Rep. Gray.
[118] For details regarding Jonas Savimbi's time in China, see Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1987), 67 & 78.
[119] 131 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 131, Part 13 (June 26, 1985 to July 10, 1985), 18495, Statement by Rep. Wolpe.

Congress having shifted since 1981, the path was now open for the Reagan administration to aid the rebels. We now turn to an examination of how American military support to UNITA evolved in the period after 1985 and to an evaluation of its effectiveness.

The Evolution of American Support to UNITA after 1985 and an Evaluation of its Effectiveness

Following repeal of the Clark Amendment, the Reagan administration initiated a formal review of American policy towards Angola.[120] As James M. Scott describes, there were two distinct policy approaches advocated by different members of the Reagan administration. Chester Crocker, and others at the State Department, did not want to initiate military assistance to UNITA immediately in the aftermath of the Clark Amendment's repeal. Instead, Crocker argued for using the threat of future American military assistance to UNITA as an instrument of leverage in his efforts to move forward the diplomacy surrounding Angola and Namibia.[121] By contrast, a group of other senior officials in the administration—notably including CIA Director Bill Casey, senior Pentagon officials, and various members of the NSC staff—felt that Crocker's diplomatic efforts had failed and these officials favored beginning the provision of aid to UNITA quickly.[122]

In the midst of the administration's policy review, on August 18, 1985, the MPLA's armed forces—the FAPLA—launched an offensive intended to deliver a major blow to UNITA. It involved about 6,000 troops in total, aided by around 60 Soviet military

[120] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 131.
[121] Scott, 131; Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 296.
[122] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 132.

advisers.[123] The offensive also entailed the use of armored vehicles and tanks, while it was supported by helicopters and jet aircraft.[124] The MPLA's forces advanced from the town of Cuito Cuanavale towards Mavinga, a town that UNITA had controlled since 1980; if the FAPLA could capture Mavinga they would subsequently have been able to advance on Jamba, UNITA's headquarters.[125] By mid-September 1985, with the FAPLA forces having made significant advances towards Mavinga, South Africa unleashed air strikes and artillery fire against them.[126] South Africa's intervention dealt a withering blow to the FAPLA advance, forcing the MPLA's units to retreat to Cuito Cuanavale. The FAPLA suffered 1,550 killed and 1,300 wounded.[127]

The 1985 operation, which amounted to a conventional assault against UNITA's strategic heart, had been urged upon the MPLA by Soviet military leaders, against the advice of Cuba.[128] Cuban forces did not take part in the operation. To many American eyes, however, it appeared that the Soviet Union and Cuba were working in partnership to help the Angolan regime try to crush UNITA's rebellion. That bred congressional pressure during the fall of 1985 for furnishing aid to UNITA. Congressional proponents of aiding UNITA introduced various bills that, if enacted, would have provided overt assistance to the rebels.[129]

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[123] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 355.
[124] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Angola: Options for American Foreign Policy, February 18, 1986 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), 10.
[125] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 192 & 355.
[126] Gleijeses, 355.
[127] Gleijeses, 358–59.
[128] Gleijeses, 345–49.
[129] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 133.

On November 12, 1985, President Reagan authorized the provision of covert military assistance to UNITA.[130] In February 1986 the Reagan administration issued National Security Decision Directive 212 (NSDD 212), which clarified the United States' policy towards Angola, as well as how that policy fit within a broader approach towards southern Africa. NSDD 212 stipulated that the United States' major policy objectives in the region included trying to "reduce and possibly eliminate Soviet and Soviet-proxy influence and opportunities in Angola and southern Africa" and to "seek an internationally acceptable solution to the Namibian problem based on UNSCR 435, and Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola."[131] The directive also described how the United States would pursue a "two-track strategy" towards Angola, which would entail "(a) continuing to negotiate with the MPLA and South Africa on Cuban troop withdrawal in the context of Namibian independence while (b) applying pressure on the MPLA to negotiate seriously and to accept a negotiated settlement."[132]

Under the logic of this "two-track" approach, the United States' assistance to UNITA was to be used in conjunction with Chester Crocker's diplomatic efforts. NSDD 212 also made clear that the Reagan administration construed the departure of Cuban troops

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[130] Scott, 135.
[131] National Security Decision Directive 212, February 10, 1986, United States Policy Toward Angola, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd212.pdf.
[132] National Security Decision Directive 212, February 10, 1986, United States Policy Toward Angola, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1.

from Angola and Namibian independence as a prelude to an internal political settlement within Angola between the MPLA regime and UNITA.[133]

In December 1985, CIA Director Bill Casey had met with Mobuto Sese Seko, the president of Zaire, and reached an agreement whereby the United States would supply weapons to UNITA through that country's territory.[134] Mobutu had his own reasons for opposing the MPLA regime, notably including that he was staunchly anti-communist and because the MPLA had previously supported Katangan separatists who aimed to achieve secession from Zaire.[135]

There were at least two major reasons why the administration wanted to avoid working with South Africa, from Namibian territory, to help UNITA. First, the U.S. government's position was that the South African occupation of Namibia was illegal. Second, the administration wanted to avoid doing what some of its critics charged—aligning with the apartheid government in South Africa and that government's regional policies that sought to defend apartheid. Although the Reagan administration tended to be less hostile towards South African officials than the Carter administration had been, as I. William Zartman writes, "there was no question of removing the basic American antipathy to apartheid."[136]

The decision to support UNITA by working with Zaire was a major reason why the Reagan administration opposed various proposals introduced in Congress in 1985 to

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[133] National Security Decision Directive 212, February 10, 1986, United States Policy Toward Angola, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 2.
[134] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 137.
[135] Borghard, "Friends with Benefits?," 136.
[136] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:208.

provide overt aid to UNITA. Zaire was willing to help the United States provide aid to the rebels covertly—which would allow Mobutu to deny officially that he was working with the United States to assist a rebellion in another African country—but he would have been unwilling to work with the United States as part of an overt program.[137]

In his memoirs, Robert Gates provided further details of how the CIA provided military assistance to UNITA, writing that:

> We sent a man to Jamba to serve as liaison with Savimbi, and a CIA representative would remain there, living in a thatch hut, for the next several years. Our airlift was a masterpiece of logistical planning as we often used a single C-130 to ferry goods from our staging base to Jamba—where the plane would remain on the ground only a few minutes while being quickly unloaded……By February 1986, the NSC had approved providing both Stinger antiaircraft missiles and TOW antiarmor weapons to Savimbi.[138]

The "staging base" that Gates refers to was in Zaire.[139] The CIA also deployed instructors to train UNITA on how to use the American-provided weapons.[140]

Having begun to provide UNITA with military aid, the Reagan administration defended its decision to side with the rebels by publicly arguing that doing so was consistent with the United States' ideals. In defending American assistance to UNITA in that way, the administration was helped by the rebel movement's leader, Jonas Savimbi, who was politically savvy enough to realize that he had to sell himself as a liberal-democrat to American policymakers and politicians in order to maximize his chances of receiving sustained support from the United States. Savimbi had various allies in the United States,

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[137] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 295.
[138] Gates, *From the Shadows*, 1st Touchstone ed.:347.
[139] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 309.
[140] Gleijeses, 309.

notably including the Heritage Foundation and the American Security Council.[141] Those allies helped him to play the part of a leader committed to liberal ideals and democracy by providing him with opportunities to speak in Washington D.C. and to meet with key policymakers, as well as providing him with guidance about how to frame UNITA's case. UNITA also contracted with the lobbying firm of "Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly" to help with its public relations efforts.[142]

In 1985, Savimbi published an article in the Heritage Foundation's journal, *Policy Review,* titled "The War Against Soviet Colonialism." In that article, Savimbi stated that "UNITA is fighting for a free, independent, and democratic Angola," and was fighting for "Western values of democracy, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to own one's home and some land."[143] Savimbi acknowledged that he had received nine months of training in guerilla warfare in China and had met with Mao Tse-tung; but he maintained that he had accepted Chinese support out of necessity rather than conviction.[144] Savimbi stressed that:

> From Mao and the Communists, I learned how to fight and win a guerrilla war. I also learned how not to run an economy or a nation. Collectivist agriculture does not work. Peasants must be able to own their own land, their own houses, and their own cattle. People must be free to practice their religions, and observe their tribal traditions.[145]

Savimbi embarked on a direct effort to portray himself, and UNITA's rebellion, as committed to American ideals. During early 1986, Savimbi made a ten-day visit to

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[141] Borghard, "Friends with Benefits?," 161.
[142] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 310.
[143] Jonas Savimbi, "The War Against Soviet Colonialism," *Policy Review; Washington D.C., Wash.* 0, no. 35 (Winter 1985): 24.
[144] Savimbi, 18–19.
[145] Savimbi, 19.

Washington D.C. In the course of that trip, Savimbi met with President Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz, and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. He also participated in a variety of engagements, including at the Conservative Political Action Conference, the National Press Club, the American Enterprise Institute, and Georgetown University.[146] After he met with Savimbi in the Oval Office on January 30, 1986, President Reagan wrote in his personal diary that Savimbi was a "very impressive figure."[147] That same evening, the president addressed the annual dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) and described UNITA as "fighting in the freedom cause that we began" and called Savimbi the "hope of Angola."[148] The following day, Savimbi addressed CPAC himself. He declared that, "I want that Angola should be free, and that the Angolans should be given a chance to decide by themselves."[149]

In his 1986 State of the Union speech, delivered while Jonas Savimbi was in the midst of his visit to Washington, President Reagan put aid to the Angolan rebels in the broader context of his administration's support to "freedom fighters," and justified it in terms of the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. As the president stated before Congress:

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[146] Bernard Gwertzman, "Angolan Rebel Sees Top U.S. Officials," *The New York Times*, January 30, 1986, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/30/world/angolan-rebel-sees-top-us-officials.html.
[147] "Ronald Reagan's Diary," January 30, 1986, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/white-house-diaries/diary-entry-01301986/.
[148] Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Conservative Political Action Conference. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. Http://Www.Presidency.Ucsb.Edu/Ws/?Pid=36391, January 30, 1986, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36391.
[149] Phil McCombs, "The Salute to Savimbi," *Washington Post*, February 1, 1986, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1986/02/01/the-salute-to-savimbi/b37b8411-a9fe-4cf3-8040-bb189e936d4a/.

> To those imprisoned in regimes held captive, to those beaten for daring to fight for freedom and democracy—for their right to worship, to speak, to live, and to prosper in the family of free nations—we say to you tonight: You are not alone, freedom fighters. America will support with moral and material assistance your right not just to fight and die for freedom but to fight and win freedom—to win freedom in Afghanistan, in Angola, in Cambodia, and in Nicaragua. This is a great moral challenge for the entire free world.[150]

In August 1986, UNITA published a "Platform for National Reconciliation in Angola." The proposal was couched in terms designed to appeal to the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. The opening section of the document stated that:

> In order to achieve national reconciliation and peace in Angola the parties to the conflict must acknowledge that no one can win the war, only a political settlement can bring about durable peace, and that this entails the mutual recognition of each party's legitimacy, tolerance towards those compatriots of different political opinion, and endeavouring [sic] to transform the country's politico-ideological diversity into a basis for Angola's democracy.[151]

Jonas Savimbi was an adept political salesman. He realized that, in order to secure American aid, it was not enough to merely be fighting Cubans and communism. He also had to argue that he was fighting for American liberal-democratic ideals, regardless of the degree to which he sincerely subscribed to them.

In spite of the Reagan administration's public arguments to justify American military support to UNITA, there remained a sizeable bloc of opposition to backing the rebels on Capitol Hill. As they had during the summer of 1985 when opposing the Clark

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[150] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, February 4, 1986, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36646.
[151] "The Platform for National Reconciliation in Angola: Basic Conditions," August 31, 1986, UNITA, Available in Folder 'Angola - 8180 - U.S. Pressure on MPLA Govt. to Negotiate with UNITA,' Incoming FOIA Document Collection, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington D.C.

Amendment, critics of aiding UNITA argued that doing so would be counterproductive in trying to reduce the communist bloc presence in Angola and that helping UNITA would be inconsistent with American ideals. Among the most detailed arguments against aiding the Angolan rebels was presented by Representative Stephen Solarz in an article he published in *The New Republic* in December 1985, which grappled with the question of how widely the "Reagan Doctrine" should be applied. Solarz agreed with the Reagan administration that the United States' central goals regarding Angola were to "secure the withdrawal of the 30,000 Cuban troops, and the adoption of an internationally recognized settlement of the conflict in Namibia, where South Africa is using the presence of Cuban troops in Angola as an excuse to continue its illegal occupation." Nevertheless, Solarz judged that aiding UNITA would actually impede, rather than contribute to, American efforts to attain these goals. As he put it:

> By providing support for Jonas Savimbi, the United States would simply increase Angola's dependence on the Cubans. Rather than allow UNITA to overthrow the Angolan government, Cuba would most likely dispatch more troops to Angola in order to shore up the Luanda regime.[152]

Additionally, Solarz judged that the character of UNITA meant that, if it were to emerge victorious, the resulting government in Angola would not be consistent with American values, arguing that:

> Jonas Savimbi's background and beliefs belie the feverish attempts of his American backers to paint him as an African James Madison. He has described his own political philosophy as Marxist, with a preference for the Chinese system. So even if he were to triumph, the prospects for any genuine political pluralism are hardly encouraging.[153]

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[152] Stephen J. Solarz, "Next Stop, Angola," *The New Republic*, December 2, 1985, https://newrepublic.com/article/79546/next-stop-angola-reagan-doctrine-communism-intervention.
[153] Solarz.

For supporters of backing UNITA, however, the argument that aiding UNITA would only increase the Cuban and Soviet presence in Angola was unpersuasive. Proponents of aiding the rebels argued that Chester Crocker's diplomatic efforts, that had lacked coercive pressure, had not yet produced results and proponents of aiding UNITA held to the view that only pressure would coerce Cuba and the USSR out of Angola. At a congressional hearing in February 1986, for example, Senator Paul Trible, a Republican from Virginia, argued that "to date our diplomatic strategy has been substantially unproductive." He added that, "if, after all this time, that policy has proved ineffectual, it seems to me it is time to try a new approach."[154] This argument reflected a view that the MPLA and Cuba were the main obstacles to a negotiated settlement that would yield both Namibian independence and a Cuban withdrawal from Angola. However, as Chester Crocker indicated during the same congressional hearing, the South African government had also shown little appetite for a negotiated settlement by this time.[155]

Congressional opponents of aiding UNITA attempted to re-impose restrictions on the Reagan administration's ability to support the rebels. In March 1986, Congressman Lee Hamilton, a Democrat from Indiana, introduced legislation that would have required a vote by both chambers of Congress for the administration to have been permitted to continue providing aid to UNITA.[156] Although President Reagan and other senior administration officials had met with Savimbi and praised UNITA's rebellion, American military

[154] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Angola: Options for American Foreign Policy, February 18, 1986, 17.
[155] Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Angola: Options for American Foreign Policy, February 18, 1986, 4.
[156] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 138–39.

assistance to the group remained a covert program. If Lee Hamilton's proposal had been enacted as law, any American aid to UNITA would have needed to have been openly acknowledged, thereby removing the ability of the United States—and, more importantly, its partner in the operation, Zaire—to deny officially that it was aiding Savimbi. Under these circumstances, if Hamilton's proposal had passed it may have led Mobutu to refuse to continue working with the United States to aid UNITA.[157] The Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, Republican Robert Michel, described Hamilton's proposed measure as the "Clark amendment reconstituted."[158] Hamilton's proposal received a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives in September 1986.[159] During that September 1986 debate, Lee Hamilton explained his opposition to American aid to UNITA. He reiterated the charge that it would be counterproductive, explaining that:

> Aid to Savimbi will not produce the goals we seek—namely, the withdrawal of the more than 30,000 Cuban troops and Soviet military advisers from Angolan soil. Rather, it will make Angola more dependent on the Cubans, and less willing to send them home. Aid to Savimbi will prolong and escalate the violence in the region and promote cross-border military action, without benefit to U.S. strategic and political interests. Conflict will not get the Soviets or Cubans out of Angola—negotiations may.[160]

Lee Hamilton also offered his view that aiding UNITA was inconsistent with American ideals, arguing that Savimbi did not have a "credible, consistent, moderate, pro-American, democratic record."[161] Hamilton added that:

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[157] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 376.
[158] Steve Blakely, "Intelligence Bill Is Passed: House Hands Reagan Victory On 'Covert' Aid to Angolans," *CQ Magazine*, September 20, 1986.
[159] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 139.
[160] 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 17 (September 17, 1986 to September 19, 1986), 23619, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.
[161] 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 17 (September 17, 1986 to September 19, 1986), 23618, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.

> UNITA under Savimbi has violated human rights and its abuses undermine chances for popular support. Its history is replete with examples of bombings in public places, kidnaping foreign technicians, killing innocent civilians and mining village farmlands.[162]

Proponents of aiding UNITA, meanwhile, put forward a moral case for supporting the rebellion. Representative Henry Hyde argued that the Angolan people were "entitled to enjoy self-determination as much as any people in the world."[163] Representative Fascell, a Democrat from Florida, urged that the United States should "give the people of Angola an opportunity to be free and independent of the Communist yoke."[164]

Hamilton's measure was defeated by 229 votes to 186 in September 1986.[165] As was the case with American military assistance to the contras, therefore, the Reagan administration's decision to provide aid to the Angolan rebels precipitated opposition from some in the legislature and there was an attempt to restrict it.

Lee Hamilton's effort to draw attention to UNITA's human rights abuses during the September 1986 debate was a relatively rare argument, even for opponents of supporting UNITA. As Piero Gleijeses shows, during 1985 and 1986 opponents of aiding UNITA, both in Congress and in the press, failed to make the group's human rights record a major part of their case.[166]

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[162] 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 17 (September 17, 1986 to September 19, 1986), 23618, Statement by Rep. Hamilton.
[163] 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 17 (September 17, 1986 to September 19, 1986), 23616, Statement by Rep. Hyde.
[164] 132 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 132, Part 17 (September 17, 1986 to September 19, 1986), 23634, Statement by Rep. Fascell.
[165] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 139.
[166] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 300.

The fact that UNITA's human rights record did not become a significant part of the policy debate in 1985 and 1986 is a surprising finding given the expectations that follow from the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. This dissertation's theoretical framework predicts that American policy debates about whether to provide support to an armed rebellion should revolve, in part, around policymakers' assessments of whether a rebellion is defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, notably including the relative human rights records of the rebels and the regime they are fighting. An implication of the theory is that American policymakers who oppose aiding a particular rebellion would be expected to point to a rebel movement's human rights record if that type of argument could help them to make a case for restricting American aid to the rebel group in question.

Why did opponents of backing UNITA not make the group's human rights record a major part of their argument during 1985 and 1986? By that time, UNITA's behavior already included episodes that we might have expected critics of the group to stress during the public debate. In the late 1970s, UNITA initiated bombings in Luanda and other Angolan cities.[167] In July 1986, Washington Post reporter David Ottaway published an article that alleged, based upon eyewitness interviews, that in February 1986 UNITA fighters had killed more than 100 people, many of them civilians, in a village in northern Angola.[168] The same article reported allegations that UNITA had planted significant numbers of land mines, notably including in farmland areas.[169]

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[167] Gleijeses, 301.
[168] David B. Ottaway, "Massacre Charges Taint 'Freedom Fighters': Rebel Image Tainted by Charges, Angola: Two Faces of War," *The Washington Post*, July 29, 1986.
[169] Ottaway.

One potential reason why UNITA's human rights record did not feature more prominently in the arguments of opponents of aiding the group in 1985 and 1986 was a relatively limited amount of clear information reaching American lawmakers about the record of UNITA. William Minter makes the following comment regarding the paucity of information in American political debates regarding Angola during the mid-1980s:

> Particularly revealing of the information gap regarding Angola was the time it took for the outside world to take notice of human rights abuses within UNITA. Later reports revealed killings of suspected rivals to Savimbi as early as 1979, and a 1983 incident witnessed by hundreds in which Savimbi presided over burning an entire family to death. Yet these charges first surfaced only in 1988, in the Portuguese press and in Amnesty International reports, echoed the next year by Savimbi biographer Fred Bridgland.[170]

Piero Gleijeses also points to the dearth of direct information received by American policymakers about what was occurring in Angola. He emphasizes that:

> Very few Americans visited Angola. It was far away, it was expensive to get to, and the Angolan government rarely granted visas to Americans, including journalists. Whereas there was a steady flow of members of Congress and their staffs to Nicaragua, hardly any went to Luanda.[171]

In September 1986, opponents of aiding UNITA had tried and failed to restrict the Reagan administration's ability to do so. The United States had joined the externally aided war of attrition in Angola. It would go on to provide military aid to the rebels until May 1991 when a peace agreement was signed between the MPLA and UNITA. Figure 9 shows the total amount of American military assistance provided to UNITA in each of those years.

[170] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 5.
[171] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 297.

Year	Total Military Assistance Provided by the U.S. to UNITA (In Nominal U.S. Dollars)
1981-1984	Zero. Clark Amendment in force
1985	Clark Amendment repealed by Congress during summer of 1985. Covert military aid to UNITA approved by President Reagan in November 1985.
1986	$15 million
1987	$18 million
1988	$40 million
1989	$60 million
1990	$30 million
1991	Zero new aid

Figure 9: American military assistance to UNITA, 1981-1991
Source: James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene,* Pages 34-35;

We now turn to an evaluation of the effectiveness of American military assistance to UNITA, judged against the Reagan administration's objective of securing a Cuban withdrawal from Angola.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of American Military Assistance to UNITA

The Reagan administration's initiation of military support to UNITA came on the heels of the Soviet-backed MPLA offensive against Mavinga during the summer of 1985. American assistance augmented what was already being provided by South Africa, which

was considerably more than the U.S. contribution; South Africa provided military aid valued at approximately $200 million per year in the latter half of the 1980s.[172]

Nevertheless, American aid helped to bolster the military capability of the rebels, especially as the United States provided the rebels with advanced weaponry such as the Stinger anti-aircraft missile and the TOW anti-armor missile. In a September 1986 letter to President Reagan, Jonas Savimbi reported that:

> Over the past three months, our armed forces have destroyed some twenty-five of the enemy's soviet-made aircraft which is more than their total aircraft loss for the entire 1985. Thanks to your help, this represents a very important military achievement for us, a step forward in our efforts to persuade the other side to accept a negotiated political settlement to the conflict.[173]

Despite the new assets they had received, however, during the course of 1986 UNITA did not achieve any appreciable net improvement in their relative military power due to the infusions of military aid the MPLA regime received from the USSR. A CIA intelligence assessment from June 1986 reported that:

> Soviet ships and heavy-lift transport aircraft have delivered large amounts of military cargo to Angola over the past six months. We believe Moscow's increasing effort this year almost certainly is intended to replenish Luanda's supply of weapons and materiel before the government steps up the tempo of military operations against UNITA.[174]

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[172] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:226–27.
[173] Letter from Jonas Savimbi to President Ronald Reagan, September 9, 1986, Available in Folder 'Angola - 8180 - U.S. Pressure on MPLA Govt. to Negotiate with UNITA,' Incoming FOIA Document Collection, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington D.C.
[174] Intelligence Assessment, 5 June 1986, 'Angola: Surge in Soviet Arms Deliveries,' Produced by CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90B01390R000300340055-0.pdf.

Exemplifying the inability of either side to gain an advantage during the course of 1986 was UNITA's August 1986 attack against the town of Cuito Cuanavale, which was prosecuted by thousands of UNITA fighters and supported by South African military assets. The FAPLA forces counterattacked with tanks, leading UNITA to retreat.[175]

With both the MPLA and UNITA receiving considerable outside aid from their respective patrons, the war was at a stalemate. At that time, however, the stalemate was not sufficiently costly to either side for American-led diplomatic efforts to make substantial gains. During the fall of 1985, the South African government had given Crocker's team a positive reply to a compromise proposal on the parameters for an Angola-Namibia settlement that the United States had put forward in March 1985.[176] It was far from clear, however, that the South African government was really interested in a diplomatic settlement yet—as Crocker later wrote, "the South Africans probably calculated that their forward step was a safe tactical move because Luanda was most unlikely to reciprocate."[177]

That proved to be correct. Crocker later reflected that the United States did not see any positive diplomatic movement by the MPLA during the course of 1986, in part because the outside aid it received from the communist bloc allowed it to contain the threat posed by UNITA. As Crocker later wrote:

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[175] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 372.
[176] Crocker, "Peacemaking in Southern Africa: The Namibia-Angola Settlement of 1988 (Case Study 335)," 12.
[177] Crocker, 12.

> During the 1986 dry season, FAPLA forces avoided any major offensives. But after receiving substantial infusions of Soviet hardware, they kept UNITA under sustained pressure across a large southern arc extending around the edges of its southeastern stronghold. UNITA had proven that it could not be wiped out, but it often found itself on the defensive against more heavily armed FAPLA units……. From Luanda's perspective, the trends could have been worse. Rather than take major risks, the MPLA leadership coalesced around simply playing for time. The military situation did not oblige dos Santos to decide on major moves.[178]

The MPLA could "play for time" because of the military aid it was receiving from the communist bloc, which allowed it to hold the UNITA threat in check. Michael McFaul notes that, between 1985 and 1987, the MPLA's armed forces "acquired from the Soviet Union over 100 MiG-23s and MiG-21s, air-to-air missiles (the AA-7 Apex), 400 T-62 and T-54 tanks, and one of the most sophisticated Soviet air defense systems outside of the USSR."[179] In May 1987, the Reagan administration issued another National Security Decision Directive—NSDD 274—on the United States' policy towards Angola. It described the administration's view of how the military and diplomatic situation had developed since early 1986, reporting that:

> Neither the MPLA nor UNITA is in a position to achieve a military victory, despite Moscow's interjection of almost $1 billion in new Soviet military assistance in support of a continuing attempt by the Soviet Union and its MPLA client to achieve a military solution to the civil war. U.S. efforts to negotiate Cuban troop withdrawal in the context of Namibian independence have been stalled by the unwillingness of the MPLA regime to negotiate seriously.[180]

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[178] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 339.
[179] Michael McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (1989): 123.
[180] National Security Decision Directive 274, May 7, 1987, United States Policy Toward Angola, Executive Secretariat, NSC: National Security Decision Directives (NSDD), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd274.pdf.

Soviet aid to the MPLA helped the Angolan regime to prepare for another offensive against Mavinga—which might then allow it to move against Jamba—in the summer of 1987. The offensive began on July 12, 1987. As was the case with the Mavinga operation from two years earlier, it was urged by the Soviet Union and opposed by Cuba, which did not think that FAPLA forces stood a high chance of making gains in that region because of South Africa's military capabilities in the area.[181] As had been the case in 1985, the South African Defense Force again came to UNITA's rescue by undertaking air strikes and using long-range artillery against FAPLA units.[182] American-provided weaponry in the hands of UNITA, including Stinger missiles, also contributed to stopping the offensive.[183]

Subsequently, South African leaders decided that they would attempt to seize the town of Cuito Cuanavale, to which MPLA forces had retreated, alongside UNITA.[184] That effort produced a counteraction from Cuba. Beginning in mid-November 1987, over a three-month period, Cuba sent 7,500 additional troops to Angola, in addition to over 200 tanks and armored vehicles.[185]

Between November 1987 and March 1988 multiple military engagements between UNITA and the South African Defense Forces, on the one hand, and the FAPLA and Cuban forces, on the other, took place around Cuito Cuanavale.[186] It became a sizeable conventional military battle; South Africa and UNITA were blocked from capturing the town as a result of the Cuban reinforcements that had been sent to help the MPLA.

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[181] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 393.
[182] Gleijeses, 396.
[183] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:236.
[184] Gleijeses, 402–3.
[185] Gleijeses, 420.
[186] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 369.

On March 9, 1988 Cuba embarked on another aspect of its surge into Angola. This involved taking the offensive in the southwest of the country. Thousands of Cuban troops, operating alongside FAPLA and SWAPO personnel and protected from South African air attacks by Cuban mobile antiaircraft weapons, began an advance.[187] By the summer of 1988, Cuba had multiple mechanized infantry regiments, along with artillery and armor units, close to the Namibian border.[188] Cuban forces also "encouraged rumors" that they might engage in "hot pursuit" of South African units into Namibia.[189] In late June 1988, a South African unit in southwest Angola killed a number of Cuban personnel. Cuban forces responded with an airstrike against the Calueque Dam, located in southern Angola, which killed South African personnel. As Peter Rodman later wrote, the clash increased domestic opposition in South Africa to its operations in Angola—not least because the risks of taking further casualties was all too apparent—and Cuba and South Africa realized that they had stalemated one another and for either side to break that stalemate would have required risky escalation.[190]

By 1988, the conflict in Angola had reached what Zartman conceptualized as a "ripe" moment for conflict resolution; as he explains, such moments typically include "mutual, painful stalemates marked by a recent or impending catastrophe," in addition to the reality that "both parties' efforts at unilateral solutions or 'tracks' are blocked and bilateral solutions or 'tracks' are conceivable."[191] Michael McFaul emphasizes that "for the MPLA, their second defeat in as many years at Mavinga made it clear that a

[187] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 428–29.
[188] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 382.
[189] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:227.
[190] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 382.
[191] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:10.

conventional military solution against UNITA was not feasible as long as the SADF remained in Angola."[192]

Meanwhile, by 1988, involvement in the Angolan war through support to their respective proxies had become a costly undertaking for the Soviet Union, Cuba, and South Africa. Zartman writes that "Angola's $4.5 billion debt to the Soviet Union had become unpayable" by this point.[193] For Cuba, its military operations in Angola over the previous decade had cost the lives of approximately 2,000 personnel, similar to American losses in Vietnam, relative to the countries' respective populations.[194] On the other side of the conflict, South Africa had lost air superiority over southern Angola, as a result of Cuba's surge, which made South African involvement a much costlier undertaking than it had been previously.[195]

Castro's surge of forces into the country in late 1987 and 1988, and especially their taking the initiative in the southwest of Angola, represented a decision to escalate the conflict in order to coerce South Africa into a settlement. When he met with President Reagan in Washington on June 30, 1988, Jonas Savimbi told the American president that "the increase to 50,000 troops effectively makes Cuba the master of the situation in the area."[196]

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[192] McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," 127.
[193] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:234–35.
[194] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 516.
[195] Zartman, Updated ed.:234–35.
[196] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting Between President Ronald Reagan and Jonas Savimbi, President of UNITA, June 30, 1988, 9:50 a.m. - 10:05 a.m., The Oval Office, Available in Folder 'Angola - 8180 - U.S. Pressure on MPLA Govt. to Negotiate with UNITA,' Incoming FOIA Document Collection, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington D.C.

With the conflict having reached a hurting stalemate, all parties tested what they could gain at the negotiating table. In May 1988, officials from Angola, Cuba, and South Africa met in London for talks, mediated by the United States.[197] That meeting was the first of what ended up being 12 meetings between those countries that culminated in the signing of a set of accords related to Angola and Namibia in New York on December 22, 1988. During these multiple rounds of negotiations, the parties completed the arduous task of working out the details of a settlement in Angola and Namibia that was acceptable to all. Under the terms of the final settlement, the parties agreed to a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola, as well as a timetable for South African withdrawal from Namibia and independence for that country. Cuba committed to withdraw its 50,000 troops from Angola in stages, with total withdrawal to be accomplished by July 1, 1991.[198] Meanwhile, the parties also agreed that implementation of UNSCR 435—which provided for South African withdrawal from Namibia as well as elections and independence there—would begin on April 1, 1989.[199]

Cuba completed its withdrawal from Angola ahead of the schedule that had been agreed; the final contingent of Cuban troops left Angola on May 25, 1991.[200] Namibia officially achieved its independence on March 21, 1990.[201]

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[197] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 392.
[198] Chester A. Crocker, "Appendix 5, Bilateral Agreement Between the People's Republic of Angola and the Republic of Cuba, 22 December 1988," in *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).
[199] Chester A. Crocker, "Appendix 6, Tripartite Agreement Among the People's Republic of Angola, the Republic of Cuba, and the Republic of South Africa, 22 December 1988," in *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).
[200] Gleijeses, 494.
[201] Gleijeses, 500.

Did American Military Assistance to UNITA play a role in Achieving the 1988 December Agreement as part of which Cuba withdrew from Angola?

American military aid to UNITA played a contributory role in attaining the 1988 settlement, as part of which Cuba withdrew from Angola, but it was far from decisive. The 1980s conflict in Angola exhibited the pattern of "ratcheted stalemates" that often characterize civil wars in which the combatants are externally supported. Chester Crocker later wrote that:

> Pretoria had escalatory options in Angola—to expand its pressure against SWAPO and in support of UNITA—but such action was most unlikely to drive the Soviets and Cubans out; it could, and did, lead to more Soviet military aid and more Cuban troops, not less. Over time, new military stalemates would emerge inside Angola at a higher level of cost and technology.[202]

Eventually, the stalemates became too painful for all parties. Nevertheless, in contributing to that stalemate, American aid to UNITA paled in comparison to the impact of South African support to the rebels, which amounted to approximately $200 million per year in the latter half of the 1980s.[203] Convincing the MPLA that it could not defeat UNITA through military means was, in the main, achieved through South African aid to the rebels, not American aid. In turn, Cuban support to the MPLA, and especially Castro's surge in 1987 and 1988, was the coercive threat that convinced South Africa to sue for peace in 1988. Nevertheless, American aid bolstered UNITA's capabilities against particular advantages enjoyed by the opposing side; American Stinger missiles counteracted Angolan and Cuban airpower, while American-provided TOW missiles counteracted Angolan and Cuban armor.

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[202] Crocker, "Peacemaking in Southern Africa: The Namibia-Angola Settlement of 1988 (Case Study 335)," 10.
[203] Zartman, Updated ed.:226–27.

More important than its military aid to UNITA, the United States played a critical role during 1988 in helping to turn the battlefield stalemate into a diplomatic agreement. Chester Crocker and his team had already played a vital part by conceptualizing the strategy of "tacit linkage" and making the parties to the conflict very familiar with it. During the course of 1988, Crocker's team shepherded the diplomatic discussions by acting as the mediator during 12 rounds of negotiations, which involved assiduous efforts to narrow the gaps—notably including over the schedule for Cuban withdrawal from Angola—between the parties.[204] Crocker's strategy of "tacit linkage" helped to produce an agreement because it offered a way for each of the parties, with their efforts to win military victories blocked, to achieve something that they sought at the negotiating table.[205] Cuba could celebrate the independence of Namibia and bringing an end to South African support to UNITA, while South Africa could celebrate the departure of Cuban troops from Angola.

In a 1989 analysis, Michael McFaul argued that the diplomatic settlement finalized in New York in December 1988 was "achieved despite, not because of, the 'Reagan Doctrine.'"[206] McFaul identified the dismal state of Angola's economy during the latter half of the 1980s, as well as a decline in the Soviet Union's willingness and capacity to keep economic aid to Angola flowing, as factors that rendered a diplomatic agreement with South Africa increasingly desirable for the MPLA.[207] As was the case with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the MPLA had reason to opt for a settlement because economic aid from the communist bloc was no longer sufficient to meet the regime's needs. Meanwhile, McFaul

[204] Crocker, 391–92 & 440–41.
[205] Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution*, Updated ed.:237.
[206] McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," 100.
[207] McFaul, 111–13 & 118.

stressed that the decisive American contribution to reaching the 1988 settlement was Crocker's diplomacy rather than lethal aid to UNITA.[208]

Although Chester Crocker was ultimately able to pursue concerted diplomacy towards resolving the challenges of Angola and Namibia, the Reagan administration was far from unified on the proper strategy to adopt. While Crocker—supported by the secretary of state, George Shultz—advocated for combining military pressure with efforts to attain a negotiated settlement, some in the administration, most notably CIA Director Bill Casey, focused solely on military pressure. Indeed, Casey tried to undermine efforts towards a negotiated settlement in favor of pursuing military options exclusively. Erica Borghard recounts how "around March 1985 CIA Director William Casey instructed Savimbi to continue to take a hard line on peace talks with the MPLA government even as Chester Crocker and the State Department were working toward a negotiated settlement to the civil war."[209] In his memoirs, George Shultz wrote that Casey "used CIA representatives in the field to undermine Crocker with Savimbi and other black African leaders" and that "as early as September 1983, I had to take steps to reconvince Savimbi that Crocker was not leading him into a Cuban trap, charges emanating from what supposedly was our own side."[210]

The Soviet Union also played a constructive role during 1988, albeit a secondary one to the efforts led by Crocker's team at the State Department. After the Soviet-suggested offensive by the MPLA against UNITA in 1987 had failed, and consistent with Mikhail

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[208] McFaul, 134.
[209] Borghard, "Friends with Benefits?," 138.
[210] George Pratt Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's ; Toronto, 1993), 1116.

Gorbachev's stated aim to lessen tensions in regional conflicts, the USSR signaled during the course of the 1988 diplomatic talks that it supported the emerging settlement. It did so by sending diplomats as unofficial observers, although Soviet diplomats were not formal participants in those talks.[211] Soviet officials allowed Cuba to take the lead in the diplomatic talks.[212]

Overall, American aid to UNITA between 1986 and late 1988 reinforced the military stalemate that resulted from the competing aid provided to the MPLA and UNITA by the communist bloc and South Africa respectively. Turning that stalemate into the 1988 political settlement required significant diplomatic efforts by Chester Crocker and his team at the State Department, despite opposition from some other senior officials in the Reagan administration. What the 1988 diplomatic settlement did not resolve was the continuing conflict between the MPLA and UNITA within Angola; rather, the agreement removed Cuba and South Africa from the fight. In the aftermath of the New York agreements, American aid to the rebels continued. In comparison to the part played by American aid in bringing about the 1988 settlement, the United States' post-1988 aid to UNITA played a more decisive role in preventing the MPLA from defeating the rebels on the battlefield and providing the basis for a peace settlement between the MPLA regime and UNITA. It is to that period of the conflict that we now turn.

[211] Crocker, 411–12.
[212] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 464.

Post-December 1988 American Military Assistance to UNITA and its Impacts

Under the New York accords of December 1988, Angola committed to cease providing bases to the African National Congress (ANC), while South Africa committed to end its support of UNITA.[213] Nevertheless, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States had made any commitments regarding military assistance to the MPLA and UNITA respectively.

On January 6, 1989, President-Elect George H.W. Bush sent a letter to Jonas Savimbi in which he assured the UNITA leader that the United States would continue to provide "all appropriate and effective assistance" to the rebel group until a political settlement with the MPLA—described as "national reconciliation"—was achieved.[214] Secretary of State James Baker's prepared talking points for the first Cabinet meeting of the Bush administration, which was held on January 23, 1989, stated that the United States would seek to "implement Angola accords and promote national reconciliation." Baker also added a handwritten addendum to the typed document next to this point—it simply read, "steadfast support of Savimbi."[215]

In January 1989, the MPLA offered a proposal for a political settlement in Angola, but it was a non-starter for UNITA. Among its facets, the government's proposal called for

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[213] Gleijeses, 490.
[214] David Rampe, "Bush Pledges Angola Rebel Aid," *The New York Times*, January 12, 1989, sec. World.
[215] James Baker Talking Points for January 23, 1989 Cabinet Meeting, JAB Notes from 1/23/89 Cabinet Meeting (First Meeting of Bush Administration), James A. Baker Papers, Box 108, Folder 1, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, 3.

Jonas Savimbi to go into exile for a period of time.[216] Jonas Savimbi offered a counter-proposal in March 1989, but the negotiations went nowhere at that point.[217]

Also in March 1989, serious allegations regarding UNITA's human rights record emerged. Individuals with former ties to the rebel movement alleged that a number of the organization's officials had been executed due to suspicions that they were plotting against, or dissenting from the view of, Jonas Savimbi.[218] Among the various allegations against Savimbi was that he had had opponents burned alive.[219] One individual who claimed that there was evidence of serious rights abuses within UNITA was Fred Bridgland, a British journalist who had written a laudatory 1986 biography of Savimbi based on personal interactions with him.[220]

The allegations of serious human rights abuses by UNITA led to scrutiny by the United States Congress.[221] On April 12, 1989, Aryeh Neier, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, gave testimony to the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Africa. Neier described the findings of a recent report that Human Rights Watch had written regarding Angola, based on interviews the organization conducted with refugees who had fled to Zambia and Zaire. [222] The Human Rights Watch report found that "UNITA and Angolan government forces (FAPLA) have engaged in

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[216] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 393.
[217] Rodman, 393.
[218] Craig R. Whitney and Jill Jolliffe, "Ex-Allies Say Angola Rebels Torture and Slay Dissenters," *The New York Times*, March 11, 1989, sec. World.
[219] Whitney and Jolliffe.
[220] Craig R. Whitney, "A Onetime Backer Accuses Savimbi," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1989, sec. World.
[221] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 143.
[222] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 22.

gross violations of the laws of war causing deaths, injuries and great hardships to the civilian population." It accused both UNITA and the government forces of the indiscriminate use of mines and alleged that both sides had committed indiscriminate attacks on civilians in areas controlled by the other side.[223] Neier told the committee that UNITA "seems very much to be waging this war by trying to demonstrate that the Angolan Government, the MPLA, is not able to provide for citizens who live under its control, is not able to feed them, and, therefore, attacking food supplies, and attacking in such a way, and planting mines in such a way as to make it impossible for peasants to farm."[224]

The George H.W. Bush administration was represented at the hearing by Gibson Lanpher, who was the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Lanpher's written statement described UNITA's strategy in the following way:

> UNITA, for its part, does what every guerrilla movement since time immemorial has done: create a climate of uncertainty in the country in the realms of security, freedom of transit, and commercial activity as it seeks to pressure the government to abandon its reliance on external military assistance and to enter into talks which could lead to a genuinely representative government in Luanda.[225]

Lanpher told the hearing that Jonas Savimbi was "trying within the constraints of a

[223] A summary of findings from the report—which was titled "Angola: Violations of the Laws of War by Both Sides"—is available in Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War, 29–31.
[224] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War, 22.
[225] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War, 46–47.

very nasty civil war to minimize human rights abuses."[226] Lanpher made clear that the administration intended to maintain American aid to UNITA in pursuit of a political settlement between the MPLA and UNITA.[227]

In an effort to reach such a political settlement, President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire—who had been working with the United States to provide aid Savimbi—stepped forward as a mediator between the two sides, with the backing of a group of African states.[228] Mobutu convened a summit meeting between MPLA and UNITA officials on June 22, 1989 in the town of Gbadolite in Zaire.[229] At the summit, President dos Santos of Angola and Jonas Savimbi met for the first time and shook hands; they also committed their forces to undertake an immediate cease-fire.[230] However, the cease-fire broke down within a week when UNITA began perpetrating military attacks again.[231] Peter Rodman charges that the reason for the failure of the cease-fire in June 1989 was because Mobutu had tried to take a short-cut to a lasting agreement, writing that:

> Mobutu simply told dos Santos and Savimbi two different accounts of what the other had agreed. He assured Savimbi that he was being treated as an equal participant, on a par with the ostensible leader of the Angolan government, and that dos Santos had agreed to this. He assured dos Santos that Savimbi had secretly agreed to integrate UNITA into the MPLA and to go into temporary exile from Angolan politics. Apparently, neither of these accounts was true. Mobutu told other leaders at Gbadolite that Savimbi had agreed to these things, which leaked out and drove Savimbi—with some justification—to charge betrayal.[232]

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[226] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War, 57.
[227] Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Wednesday April 12, 1989, New Reports of Human Rights Violations in the Angolan Civil War, 45.
[228] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 393.
[229] Rodman, 393.
[230] Rodman, 393–94.
[231] Borghard, "Friends with Benefits?," 174.
[232] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 394.

In September 1989, Mobutu tried once more to mediate a settlement in Angola by convening another summit in Zaire, but Savimbi refused to attend the meeting and sent another UNITA official in his stead.[233] Out of frustration with Savimbi, Mobutu stopped allowing the CIA to provide aid to UNITA via Zaire.[234] President Bush subsequently met with both leaders in Washington D.C. during October 1989.[235] When he met with Mobutu, Bush raised concerns about how Mobutu's blockage of American aid to UNITA would affect the military balance in Angola, stating that:

> Let me raise one very important question: if one side or party in a situation like the Angolan conflict receives supplies from a major power outside the country and the other doesn't, it is very bad; it creates an unbalanced situation. The Soviets are supplying the Angolan Government, but UNITA is currently cut off……What can Savimbi do to satisfy you so you would be willing to make it possible to turn back on the flow of supplies to UNITA?[236]

Mobutu agreed to a suggestion by President Bush that Mobutu and Savimbi meet to reconcile and Mobutu agreed that, after that, he would allow aid to flow to UNITA once again.[237] Bush met with Jonas Savimbi in the Oval Office the following day.[238] Savimbi

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[233] William Claiborne, "Rebel Leader Forgoes Angolan Peace Summit," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1989.
[234] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 84, https://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Cohen-Herman-J.pdf.
[235] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 395.
[236] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire, October 4, 1989, 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. EDT, The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-10-04--Sese%20Seko.pdf.
[237] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire, October 4, 1989, 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. EDT, The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, 4.
[238] All of the quotes that follow are from Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Dr. Jonas Savimbi, President of UNITA, October 5, 1989, 10:30 - 11:15 a.m. EDT, The

complained to the American president that "our logistical situation is not good." Bush assured Savimbi that "we continue to support UNITA" and "we won't allow anyone to dictate to you or to harm your core interests." Bush also explained to Savimbi that "we don't see any feasible alternative to working through Zaire, and through Mobutu" because "the range is just too great." Bush and Secretary Baker informed Savimbi that Mobutu had indicated that he was willing to allow supplies to flow to UNITA once again, if Savimbi met with him. Savimbi also told President Bush that "we would like your support on our call for elections," which was a call that Bush assured him the United States would get behind.

Mobutu and Savimbi subsequently met in France later in October 1989, reconciled with one another, and Mobutu allowed American aid to flow to UNITA once again.[239] The rapprochement between Mobutu and Savimbi came just in time for UNITA. Two months later, the MPLA regime made another effort to deliver a crushing blow to the UNITA rebels. FAPLA units launched another operation towards Mavinga on December 23, 1989 and by the middle of January 1990 UNITA appeared to be in trouble and was running low on fuel and weapons.[240] The United States resupplied UNITA to help them repulse the FAPLA offensive; Herman Cohen, the Bush administration's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, later recounted that "a decision was made to deliver 12 months worth

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Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-10-05--Savimbi.pdf.
[239] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 84.
[240] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 395.

of supplies in three months."[241] As Cohen also recalled, not only did UNITA block the FAPLA operation thanks to the infusion of American support, but UNITA moved onto the offensive in other areas of Angola.[242]

American aid to UNITA had allowed the group to counter the MPLA's military power and hold the regime to a stalemate. That stalemate provided the basis for a settlement between the two sides. The regime was convinced that it could not smash UNITA as long as the rebels could continue to count on outside assistance from the United States.

In March 1990, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker met with the MPLA leader, President dos Santos, in Namibia, where they were both attending the celebrations of Namibian independence. Baker offered some incentives to dos Santos to try to move political negotiations forward; Baker said that if a ceasefire was reached in Angola and there were "good faith" negotiations on national reconciliation then dos Santos could travel to the United States to meet with President Bush at some point in the future.[243] Later that same day, Baker met with the Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. Baker cabled President Bush with a readout of his meeting with Shevardnadze. Baker's cable explained that Shevardnadze had suggested that "the time was ripe" for a political agreement in Angola and had said that "dos Santos was ready for it."[244]

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[241] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 84.
[242] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 85.
[243] Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze, March 20, 1990, 6:00pm - 9:30pm, Windhoek, Namibia, Available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 38, 951266 DOS 365, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.10.
[244] Memorandum for the President, Sent via Cable, From James A. Baker III to George Bush, March 20, 1990, Subject: My Meeting With Soviet Foreign Minister

With the MPLA's latest offensive against Mavinga having been blocked, and with UNITA going on the offensive in other parts of Angola, dos Santos and his Soviet patrons had made clear that they were ready for a serious effort at reaching a political agreement. After Namibia, Secretary Baker travelled to Zaire where he met with Savimbi and they discussed possible alternative mediators to Mobutu; one of the possibilities was Portugal, a choice that proved acceptable to the Angolan government. Negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA subsequently resumed in June 1990 under Portuguese mediation, after which MPLA and UNITA representatives met approximately every month between then and November 1990.[245] For his part, Savimbi maintained that his goal was free and fair elections in Angola and his supporters in the United States helped him to convey that message to American audiences.[246]

Jonas Savimbi met with President Bush again on October 2, 1990, in the midst of the ongoing talks between UNITA and the MPLA. The American memorandum of the conversation makes clear that Savimbi was well aware that opposition was mounting among some in the U.S. Congress to continued American aid to UNITA. Savimbi mentioned to the president that "some Democrats want amendments to cut the support you

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Shevardnadze, Folder "Special Separate USSR Notes Files," Gorbachev Files, OA/ID 91126-006, Brent Scowcroft Collection, Bush Presidential Records, George HW Bush Presidential Library, 6.

[245] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 86–87.

[246] See, for example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, "The Call of Democracy Still Unheard: Why Do the Soviets Persist in Squandering Scarce Resources on the Shaky Angolan Regime?," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1990, sec. Metro; Part-B; Op Ed Desk.

give to us." President Bush assured Savimbi that the administration would work to ensure a continuation of American assistance.[247]

Two weeks after Savimbi had met with Bush in 1990, the House of Representatives debated an amendment—offered by three Democratic Congressmen, Representatives Ronald Dellums, Mervyn Dymally, and Lee Hamilton—that would have required any military assistance to UNITA to be acknowledged publicly and approved by Congress.[248] It was another congressional effort to put an end to military aid to the Angolan rebels. Dellums told the House that there had been "numerous reports of human rights abuses by UNITA."[249] The amendment failed, with 246 votes against it to only 175 in favor of it.[250] Following the failure of that amendment, Representative Stephen Solarz introduced an alternative one. Solarz explained that his amendment would suspend American aid to UNITA in the event that the MPLA made a serious proposal for a ceasefire and for the holding of multiparty elections in Angola in which UNITA was allowed to participate; if the MPLA reneged on such a commitment, Solarz's amendment permitted American aid to UNITA to be restarted.[251] By proposing to make future American aid to UNITA conditional on a failure by the MPLA to move towards elections, Solarz's amendment was able to garner a one-vote majority in the House of Representatives; it passed by 207 votes

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[247] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Dr. Jonas Savimbi, President of UNITA, October 2, 1990, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-10-02--Savimbi.pdf.
[248] 136 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 136, Part 21 (October 16, 1990 to October 18, 1990), 30178–79.
[249] 136 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 136, Part 21 (October 16, 1990 to October 18, 1990), 30179, Statement by Rep. Dellums.
[250] 136 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 136, Part 21 (October 16, 1990 to October 18, 1990), 30203.
[251] 136 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 136, Part 21 (October 16, 1990 to October 18, 1990), 30206, Statement by Rep. Solarz.

to 206.[252] As Peter Rodman explains, the intelligence bill to which Solarz's amendment was attached subsequently "died for other reasons."[253] Even so, as the record of Savimbi's conversation with President Bush earlier in October 1990 made clear, the UNITA leader was well aware of mounting opposition in Congress to continued aid to his rebel movement. The passage of the Solarz Amendment was another signal to UNITA that it could not count on American military assistance indefinitely. William Minter comments that "UNITA lobbyists and the administration were shocked" by the House of Representatives' vote for the Solarz amendment.[254]

Although Portuguese officials had strived to make progress in the negotiations, by November 1990 the MPLA and UNITA were still not close to an agreement. When they met in November 1990, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze proposed that a team of American and Soviet diplomats would work together to put forward a set of ideas to move the process forward. Herman Cohen and his Soviet counterpart developed a framework for the negotiations and invited MPLA and UNITA representatives to Washington D.C. in December 1990 for a meeting to discuss that framework. The parties agreed to it and issued it as the "Washington Declaration," which specified a "set of principles" to guide "further negotiations."[255] Peter Rodman explains that while Savimbi was in the United States for that meeting he was informed by some of his American backers that his assistance from the United States was unlikely to

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[252] 136 Cong. Rec. (Bound) - Volume 136, Part 21 (October 16, 1990 to October 18, 1990), 30231.
[253] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 396.
[254] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 155.
[255] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 87–88.

continue beyond the end of the fiscal year, which was only 10 months in the future.[256]

Following the meeting in December 1990, Portugal continued its mediating role and moved the negotiations forward on the basis of the Washington Declaration. The United States and the Soviet Union also both sent delegations to that series of negotiating rounds as official observers.[257] The efforts produced an agreement that was signed on May 31, 1991 in Lisbon, as part of which the MPLA and UNITA declared a ceasefire and committed themselves to elections in Angola, while both the United States and the Soviet Union pledged to halt military aid to their respective partners.[258]

With the ceasefire reached, the Bush administration made good on its earlier offer for a meeting between President Bush and President dos Santos. The Angolan leader met with his American counterpart in the Oval Office on September 16, 1991. President dos Santos confirmed to President Bush that elections would be held in Angola sometime between September and November of the following year, 1992. Bush asked, "is the man in the street in Luanda excited about democracy?" To that, President dos Santos remarked that "people are for it, and peace is bliss."[259]

Bush met with Jonas Savimbi three weeks later, on October 7, 1991. Savimbi stated that he did not trust the MPLA to allow fair elections, telling Bush:

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[256] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 396.
[257] Oral History Interview with Ambassador Herman J. Cohen, Initial Interview Conducted on August 15, 1996, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interview by: Charles Stuart Kennedy, 88.
[258] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 397.
[259] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with President Dos Santos of Angola, September 16, 1991, 11:00 - 11:25 a.m. EST, The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-09-16--dos%20Santos.pdf.

> After 16 years of warfare against UNITA the government is certainly not going to put down power and allow it to be at the disposal of UNITA or others. The MPLA will stall and cheat.[260]

The ceasefire generally held during the fall of 1991. In the spring of 1992, new allegations of serious human rights abuses within UNITA came to light.[261] Defectors from UNITA alleged that members of the organization had been tortured and killed, including one of UNITA's most senior officials whom Savimbi viewed as a potential rival for power.[262] In Secretary Baker's prepared talking points for a meeting with President Bush on April 15, 1992, the Secretary of State planned to raise the issue with Bush and his prepared document included the following points:

> As you know, Jonas Savimbi has come in for harsh criticism lately after admitting serious human rights abuses within UNITA. A particularly egregious example involved the murder of two prominent UNITA figures, including its former Washington representative, who had very good ties on the Hill. Hank Cohen just delivered a very tough message from me to Savimbi in Luanda. Hank said UNITA must conduct a public investigation and hold accountable those identified as responsible for the murders. UNITA cannot hide behind an 'internal inquiry.' Angola's first elections are now set for September 29-30. Savimbi knows he must deal with these allegations and successfully transform UNITA into a political party if he is to be competitive. Our covert, non-lethal support for UNITA will end June 1. Of course, a free and fair election in September is our major goal. We have said we will work with whatever government emerges.[263]

Baker's talking points reflected waning confidence in UNITA and Savimbi at the

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[260] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with Dr. Jonas Savimbi, President of UNITA, October 7, 1991, 10:20 - 11:00 a.m., The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1991-10-07--Savimbi.pdf.
[261] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 397.
[262] Fred Bridgland, "Angola's Secret Bloodbath," *Washington Post*, March 29, 1992.
[263] Proposed Agenda For Meeting With The President, April 15, 1992, 1:30 p.m., James A. Baker Papers, Box 115, Folder 9, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, 2–3.

highest levels of the Bush administration. When the Angolan elections were held in September 1992, the MPLA won 53.74 percent of the votes in the legislative elections, compared with 34.10 percent for UNITA; in the presidential election, dos Santos won 49.57 percent of the votes while Savimbi won 40.07 percent.[264] The UNITA leader alleged that the MPLA had committed fraud and his forces resumed their armed struggle.

Peter Rodman maintains that there were reasons to question the integrity of the election contest, writing that there was a "woefully inadequate UN election-monitoring operation."[265] Whatever the objective reality regarding the fairness of the September 1992 elections, when Savimbi subsequently alleged fraud the Bush administration was unwilling to give him the benefit of the doubt. The various allegations that had already emerged against Savimbi meant there was sufficient reason to distrust his commitment to liberal democracy. On October 17, 1992, Margaret Anstee, the UN's Special Representative for Angola, stated that "while there were certainly some irregularities in the electoral process, these appear to have been mainly due to human error and inexperience" and that there was "no evidence of major, systematic or widespread fraud, or that the irregularities were of a magnitude to have a significant effect on the results."[266] Two days later, the U.S. State Department released a statement to announce that it agreed with the UN's verdict and said that the United States supported the conclusion that the elections in Angola were "generally free and fair." In light of that, the United States urged the MPLA and UNITA to participate in the second round of presidential elections, which were constitutionally required because

[264] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 500–502.
[265] Rodman, *More Precious than Peace*, 398.
[266] "U.S. Urges Quick Arrangements for Angolan Runoff Elections," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch* 3, no. 42 (October 19, 1992): 778.

no candidate had attained 50 percent in the first round.[267] Savimbi was outraged that the United States declined to back him up and refused to meet with senior American officials.[268] The second ballot was never held because Savimbi opted for war instead.[269]

As William Minter writes, "Savimbi's return to war exhausted the patience of all but his most diehard admirers."[270] The Clinton administration gave diplomatic recognition to the government of Angola, under the MPLA, in May 1993.[271]

Even without external support, UNITA was able to continue its fight against the MPLA by finding an alternative source of financing for its war. UNITA captured significant areas rich in diamonds and used proceeds from mining those diamonds to buy weapons on the international market.[272] As Jeremy Weinstein notes, UNITA "managed close to 10 percent of global diamond production in the 1990s, and its annual revenues approached US$600 million."[273] The conflict continued until 2002, when the MPLA's military killed Jonas Savimbi close to the country's border with Zambia.[274]

How should we evaluate the effectiveness of American military aid to UNITA in the aftermath of the 1988 New York agreements? The central political objective associated with American military aid to the rebels was to convince the MPLA to reach a settlement

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[267] "U.S. Urges Quick Arrangements for Angolan Runoff Elections."
[268] Kenneth B. Noble, "Angolan Parties Begin Indirect Talks on Election," *The New York Times*, October 15, 1992, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/15/world/angolan-parties-begin-indirect-talks-on-election.html.
[269] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 500–502.
[270] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 155.
[271] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 145–46.
[272] Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 286.
[273] Weinstein, 287.
[274] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 392.

with UNITA that included a transition to a political system permitting free and fair multi-party elections. In helping to bring about the political agreement of May 1991, American aid to UNITA had played a more determinative role than it had in reaching the "external" agreement of December 1988. As noted, in December 1989—with Mobutu's efforts to broker a settlement between the MPLA and UNITA having made little progress—the MPLA had tried once again to win a military victory over UNITA with an offensive against Mavinga. Despite a mounting swell of opposition within the U.S. Congress to continuing aid to UNITA by this time, the Bush administration did not face any restrictions on its ability to provide an infusion of military aid to UNITA to counter the MPLA's offensive. The surge of American support to the rebels at this time was critical to allowing UNITA to repulse the MPLA's efforts and to showing that, in the face of external support to both sides, the conflict was stalemated. That stalemate provided the basis for an internal political settlement because it demonstrated to both the MPLA and UNITA that they could not win what they desired on the battlefield alone.

As well as the military stalemate on the ground, both the MPLA and UNITA received indications that their respective external patrons were not necessarily prepared to back them for the long-haul. As Secretary Baker's discussions with his Soviet counterpart in March 1990 made clear, like the United States the Soviet Union deemed that the time had come for a settlement and indicated that to the MPLA's leader, President dos Santos. In late 1990, as noted, the United States and the Soviet Union developed a framework for a settlement to the conflict and presented that to the warring parties. Both of the competing external parties to the conflict had decided that it was time to prioritize a political settlement in Angola over continuing to wage a war of attrition.

Jonas Savimbi also recognized that, no matter what the George H.W. Bush administration intended to do, there was mounting opposition in the U.S. Congress to open-ended aid for his movement. Savimbi clearly knew about the opposition among some in Congress to continued aid to UNITA because he raised the matter with President Bush directly in early October 1990. Given that Savimbi could not count on indefinite congressional acquiescence to aid to UNITA, it made sense for him to cut a deal with the MPLA if it offered him an opportunity to win power at the ballot box.

Both the MPLA and UNITA decided to take their chances on a negotiated settlement, facilitated by the United States, the Soviet Union and Portugal, which was finally agreed in May 1991. By the time that peace agreement was reached, Angola had suffered considerable devastation. Between 1975 and 1991, more than 350,000 Angolans were estimated to have been killed.[275] The United Nations estimated that, between 1980 and 1988, Angola suffered economic losses equivalent to six times the country's 1988 GDP.[276] At least 70,000 people in Angola are estimated to have been injured as a result of landmines strewn during the country's civil war.[277] Although the post-1988 American military aid to UNITA helped to bring about the May 1991 settlement, the ultimate consequences of that settlement were far from consistent with American objectives or the nation's ideals. Although the settlement led to elections in September 1992, ultimately Jonas Savimbi chose war over democracy. In 1992 it became undeniable that Savimbi cared more about power for himself than about free and fair elections. He was not the liberal-democrat that he had professed to be. Instead, as *The Economist* magazine

[275] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 488.
[276] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 4.
[277] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 392.

emphasized in its obituary of the rebel leader, Savimbi was a "despoiler with a gun in his hand."[278]

[278] "Jonas Savimbi, Obituary," *The Economist*, February 28, 2002, https://www.economist.com/node/1010682.

MOZAMBIQUE: EXPLAINING THE LACK OF AMERICAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO RENAMO

While the Reagan administration provided military assistance to UNITA in Angola from late 1985 onwards, the administration never extended the "Reagan Doctrine" to Mozambique by providing military aid to the RENAMO rebels in that country. We now turn to the question of why that was the case.

Presidential Assessment of American Interests in Mozambique

As indicated above, the Reagan administration viewed it as in the United States' interests to reduce the Soviet and Cuban presence in Africa. Among the Reagan administration's overarching policy objectives in Africa, as described by the April 1982 national security strategy, was to "secure the withdrawal of Soviet and Soviet proxy forces on the continent."[279]

Cuba provided some assistance to the FRELIMO government in Mozambique in countering the RENAMO insurgency against it. As a policy paper prepared for the Reagan administration's first NSC meeting in February 1981 indicated, "some 150 Cuban counterinsurgency experts reportedly arrived in Mozambique last month to assist the Machel government deal with a growing insurgency."[280]

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[279] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 6.

[280] Paper Titled 'Cuba Promoting Revolution in Latin America,' Tab 2 in Briefing Materials for 6 February 1981 NSC Meeting, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library."

Nevertheless, the Cuban and Soviet presence in Mozambique was much lower than in Angola. In December 1977, the president of Mozambique, Samora Machel, had indicated to Raúl Castro, Cuba's minister of defense, that he might request Cuban troops to assist Mozambique in defending against military pressure by Rhodesia.[281] In response, Castro made clear that Cuba wished to avoid sending large numbers of personnel to Mozambique, including because of Cuba's existing commitment of resources to Angola.[282]

The CIA estimated that the Soviet Union and Cuba each had approximately 800 military advisers in Mozambique at the end of 1984.[283] At that time, the Soviet Union had between 800 and 1,200 advisers in Angola, while Cuba had over 30,000 troops in that country.[284] Cuba's contingent of civilian aid workers in Mozambique also paled in comparison to the number sent to Angola; in 1985, while there were 3,635 Cuban aid workers in Angola, there were only 237 in Mozambique.[285] Additionally, the Soviet Union provided much less military support to the Mozambican regime than it did to the MPLA regime in Angola. As Chester Crocker later wrote: "unlike oil-producing Angola, Mozambique did not have the necessary foreign exchange earnings to pay for large-scale, sustained imports of Soviet hardware."[286] Figure 10 shows the American intelligence community's estimates of the amount of Soviet military hardware delivered to

[281] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 142.
[282] Gleijeses, 142.
[283] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 23.
[284] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 23.
[285] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 326.
[286] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 243.

Mozambique between 1976 and 1983; it also includes the amounts delivered to Angola over the same period—as was given in Figure 8—as a comparison.

Year	U.S. Intelligence Estimate (From February 1985) of Soviet Military Assistance to Mozambique (in Nominal U.S. Dollars)	U.S. Intelligence Estimate (From February 1985) of Soviet Military Assistance to Angola (in Nominal U.S. Dollars)
1976	$2 million	$64 million
1977	$18 million	$77 million
1978	$105 million	$143 million
1979	$55 million	$99 million
1980	$50 million	$137 million
1981	$55 million	$248 million
1982	$117 million	$322 million
1983	$240 million	$561 million

Figure 10: U.S. Intelligence Estimate of the Soviet Union's Military Assistance to Mozambique and Angola, 1976-1983. Source: National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Page 21, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST.

In early 1985, the CIA reported to American policymakers that "according to Soviet officials," the USSR's "stake and obligations in Mozambique are less than in Angola, where a Soviet and Cuban intervention brought to power—and sustains—the MPLA." By contrast, the CIA reported that "Soviet prestige is not linked as closely to the survival of the [Mozambican] Machel regime."[287] That did not, however, imply that the Soviet Union's

[287] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 14.

stake in Mozambique was zero. The CIA stressed that "Moscow is unlikely to write off Mozambique" and Samora Machel was accorded "high-level attention" when he travelled to Moscow in February 1984 to attend Yuri Andropov's funeral.[288]

While Mozambique proclaimed itself a Marxist-Leninist state and had relations with both the Soviet Union and Cuba, the level of Soviet and Cuban presence in the country was nowhere near as high as it was in Angola. For the Reagan administration, which was concerned about Cuba's overseas presence and expansionism, Mozambique was bound to breed lower levels of anxiety than Angola. At the same time, as the 1982 national security strategy indicated, the Reagan administration viewed Mozambique as a "client" of Moscow.[289] The administration's National Security Decision Directive 75 (NSDD 75), which pertained to overarching U.S. relations with the USSR and which was issued in January 1983, specified the United States' objectives with regard to clients of the USSR. As NSDD 75 described the goal:

> U.S. policy will seek to limit the destabilizing activities of Soviet Third World allies and clients. It is a further objective to weaken and, where possible, undermine the existing links between them and the Soviet Union. U.S. policy will include active efforts to encourage democratic movements and forces to bring about political change inside these countries.[290]

Consequently, one major goal of the Reagan administration would be to weaken the links between Mozambique and the Soviet Union.

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[288] National Intelligence Estimate, February 1985, Soviet Policies in Southern Africa, NIE 11/70-85, Director of Central Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 14–15.
[289] U.S. National Security Strategy, Folder 'NSDD 32 [1 of 4],' Box OA 91311, Executive Secretariat NSC, National Security Decision Directives (NSDDs), Ronald Reagan Library, 20–21.
[290] National Security Decision Directive 75, U.S. Relations With The USSR, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, January 17, 1983, 5, https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDDS/NSDD75.pdf.

Presidential Assessment: Would Support to RENAMO be (1) Likely to further U.S. Interests and (2) Was it Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals?

The State Department, which took the lead on the development of American policy towards Mozambique, formed the view in the early 1980s that American aid to the RENAMO rebels was unnecessary to achieve the weakening of Mozambique's links with the Soviet Union and Cuba. Additionally, given the character of the RENAMO rebels, the State Department had a clear view that assistance to them would have been completely inconsistent with the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. President Reagan was not involved in policy-making towards Mozambique in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, as we shall see, he gave his clear endorsement to the State Department position in 1985, following a meeting with the leader of Mozambique, which was recommended by the State Department.

The major reason why American aid to RENAMO would have been unnecessary to weaken the relationships between the Mozambican regime and the USSR is because the FRELIMO government proved willing to move towards the United States and the west of its own accord. In October 1981, the Mozambican foreign minister, Joachim Chissano, visited Washington D.C. and indicated to Deputy Secretary of State William Clark that Mozambique wished to try to achieve a better relationship with the United States.[291] Odd Arne Westad writes that, "increasingly impatient with the advice he received from his Soviet and East German aides—and in spite of his socialist convictions—Mozambican leader Samora Machel already in 1982 began a slow reconciliation with Washington."[292]

[291] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 236.
[292] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 362.

In September 1982, a senior State Department official wrote to William Clark, now Reagan's national security advisor, to confirm that Secretary of State George Shultz had approved the opening of a "political dialogue" with Mozambique's government that was "designed to test the Mozambicans' willingness to move away from their strict pro-Soviet stance." The State Department presented the objectives of the strategy in the following way:

> The ultimate goal of this strategy is to foster the development of, if not a pro-western, at least a more truly non-aligned government in Mozambique, and to build a more solid framework for ongoing relations. If these goals are achieved, the Soviets will be denied an unquestioned and unquestioning ally in southern Africa, and we will have created a degree of leverage which can be used to advance our own interests.[293]

In December 1982, a senior-level delegation from the State Department visited Mozambique for meetings with the country's president and foreign minister. During those discussions, Mozambican officials assured the Americans that they would not permit the establishment of "Soviet strategic bases" in Mozambique and that they would diversify their arms suppliers away from the "Soviet Bloc" and towards the west.[294]

By 1983, senior Mozambican officials had indicated that they wished to have the United States government encourage private investment in their country, as well as to

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[293] Memorandum from L. Paul Bremer III, Executive Secretary of the State Department to William P. Clark, September 9, 1982, Subject: Relations with Mozambique, in Folder 'Mozambique (09/01/1982 - 12/31/1982)', Box 4, Executive Secretariat: NSC, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

[294] Memorandum from L. Paul Bremer III, Executive Secretary of the State Department to William P. Clark, December 28, 1982, Subject: Results of U.S. Mission to Mozambique, in Folder 'Mozambique (09/01/1982 - 12/31/1982)', Box 4, Executive Secretariat: NSC, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

receive humanitarian and development aid from the United States.[295] That same year, Mozambique established an embassy in Washington D.C.[296]

The Mozambican FRELIMO government also showed itself willing to play a constructive regional role, from an American perspective, by helping Chester Crocker's diplomatic efforts towards the challenges of Angola and Namibia, notably including by facilitating American discussions with the MPLA regime.[297]

The British government, headed by Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, also had a favorable opinion of Samora Machel's government at this time. Among the reasons for Britain's positive attitude towards Machel was the helpful role that the Mozambican government had played during the "Lancaster House" talks in 1979 that culminated in Zimbabwe's independence the following year. Mozambique had encouraged the ZANU guerillas based in Mozambique to make some concessions during those talks.[298]

Overall, by the mid-1980s, therefore, the FRELIMO regime in Mozambique had showed itself willing to move itself closer to the United States and the west, even while it retained links with Cuba and the Soviet Union and continued to receive military hardware and advisers from those countries. The U.S. State Department had been willing to encourage this movement of the FRELIMO regime—although it was still a proclaimed Marxist government—towards the United States, viewing it as consistent with the United States' interests. Chester Crocker's deputy in the African Affairs Bureau, Frank G. Wisner, stated to Secretary Shultz in October 1983 that the policy of engaging FRELIMO had "been

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[295] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 237.
[296] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 156.
[297] Crocker, "Peacemaking in Southern Africa: The Namibia-Angola Settlement of 1988 (Case Study 335)," 15.
[298] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 235.

successful as the Mozambicans have pledged not to permit Soviet bases and have quietly cooperated with us in a number of areas."[299] Thus, in the view of the State Department, the United States' interests required continuing to engage with the government of Samora Machel, rather than aid the RENAMO rebels that were waging war against it.

For Chester Crocker and other members of the State Department, the appropriateness of that approach was also reinforced by the nature of the RENAMO rebels themselves and the fact that their rebellion seemed wholly indefensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. That was for three major reasons. First, State Department officials had serious doubts that RENAMO could claim to be an indigenous, popularly-supported rebellion; instead, the insurgency appeared to be largely the creation of a foreign country, Rhodesia. As Piero Gleijeses writes:

> RENAMO had been created in 1976 by Rhodesian intelligence officers, who developed it into a military force to punish President Machel for his support of Zimbabwean rebels.[300]

Jeremy Weinstein explains that the Rhodesian intelligence service had helped to recruit "discontented Mozambicans, including colonial army veterans and ex-FRELIMO guerrillas, for the new insurgent force."[301] The Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization then provided training for the recruits.[302] Following the end of white minority rule in Rhodesia, and its independence as Zimbabwe, South Africa assumed patronage of

[299] Quoted in Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 281.
[300] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 186.
[301] Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 76.
[302] Weinstein, 111.

the RENAMO rebels, providing the group with bases, logistics support, intelligence, training, and weapons.[303]

In an analysis of RENAMO published in 1985, the CIA reported that, as Zimbabwe approached independence, "South Africa assumed sponsorship of RENAMO."[304] South Africa did so in order to gain a means to counter Mozambican aid to the African National Congress (ANC). As Chester Crocker wrote in his memoirs, the RENAMO insurgency was a "proxy war inherited from the Smith regime [the last government of Rhodesia] by the South African Defense Force."[305]

Second, RENAMO's military operations included numerous indiscriminate attacks against civilians. Jeremy Weinstein summarizes RENAMO's mode of military operations when he writes that:

> RENAMO's methods were brutal and authoritarian yet effective. Participation was largely coerced, even in areas likely to be supportive of RENAMO's cause. Killings were widespread, and insurgent forces participated in the war's largest massacres. RENAMO augmented its financial base—hedging against a South African withdrawal—by systematically looting household property, trading in illegal goods, and extorting payments from private enterprise in exchange for protection.[306]

Based on the extensive data he compiled on violence against civilians during Mozambique's civil war, Weinstein reports that RENAMO fighters were linked to more than 80 percent of the total attacks perpetrated against civilians during the conflict.[307]

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[303] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 186; Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 243.
[304] Intelligence Memorandum, 4 March 1985, The Mozambique National Resistance, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 3, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP04T00447R000100310001-9.pdf.
[305] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 235.
[306] Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 79–80.
[307] Weinstein, 211.

The U.S. government was well aware of RENAMO's brutality. In a February 1985 message to Washington, the U.S. embassy in Mozambique reported that "there can be no ambiguity as to the terrorist activities of RENAMO."[308] A CIA intelligence memorandum issued the next month reported the following regarding RENAMO's attacks on civilians:

> In addition to insurgent attacks against FRELIMO, RENAMO's activity also includes some banditry. The insurgents have looted stores and civilian homes, and they bayonetted dozens of civilian passengers during ambushes near Maputo in January, according to the international press.[309]

Third, although RENAMO vocally stated that it was anti-communist, it did not articulate its positive ideological beliefs especially clearly and it failed to make a convincing case that it was committed to liberal-democratic ideals, even in a rhetorical sense. A CIA intelligence memorandum from March 1985 reported the following:

> In our judgment, RENAMO has little appeal beyond the rural peasantry, in large measure because its political ideology is undeveloped and simplistic. The insurgents' pronouncements are little more than vehemently anti-Communist sloganeering, describing Machel as an agent of Soviet expansionism and condemning his acceptance of Soviet, Cuban, and East German advisers. RENAMO professes vague support for a democratic form of government and a free-market economy, and it swears allegiance to the Mozambican nationalism of the late Eduardo Mondlane, FRELIMO's first president, but it has not articulated these views in a well organized fashion. In our view, RENAMO remains essentially an anti-FRELIMO movement.[310]

Given the FRELIMO regime's demonstrated willingness to engage with the United States and the west—and to move towards it—combined with the character of the RENAMO rebels, the State Department had adopted a clear view of what American policy

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[308] Quoted in Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 281.
[309] Intelligence Memorandum, 4 March 1985, The Mozambique National Resistance, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 7.
[310] Intelligence Memorandum, 4 March 1985, The Mozambique National Resistance, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 5.

should be regarding the rebels—avoid anything to do with them. By contrast, South Africa backed RENAMO throughout the 1980s. Although the FRELIMO government and South Africa reached an agreement in March 1984—known as the Nkomati Accord—under which the two countries agreed to cease their support for the ANC and RENAMO respectively, South Africa continued to aid RENAMO. A May 1986 intelligence assessment produced by the CIA reported that:

> Our reading of the current military situation in Mozambique, together with US Embassy reporting on persistent, credible allegations of continued South African aid to RENAMO, leads us to believe that South African military officers continue to extend limited quantities of assistance to RENAMO despite public protestations to the contrary.[311]

A State Department analysis written in January 1987 also judged that South Africa had continued to provide support to RENAMO.[312] The United States never did the same; we now turn to an examination of how, in 1985, President Reagan endorsed the State Department's engagement with the Mozambican regime.

Presidential Decision: No American Military Assistance to RENAMO

By March 1985, the CIA assessed that RENAMO had at least 12,000 armed guerillas.[313] An American Special National Intelligence Estimate regarding Mozambique, issued in June 1985, reported that "the Mozambican Government's security position

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[311] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 9, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T01017R000707220001-2.pdf.
[312] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 380.
[313] Intelligence Memorandum, 4 March 1985, The Mozambique National Resistance, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Available from CIA CREST, 1.

continues to decline" and that "RENAMO is now able to move freely throughout all 10 provinces and increasingly is showing the ability to raid—but not take and hold—major cities."[314] The year 1985 was when the name "Reagan Doctrine" was coined and when the United States' support for anti-communist insurgencies moved into high gear—the administration ramped up support for the Afghan mujahedin, managed to get non-lethal aid restored to the Nicaraguan contras after the congressional cut-off of the previous year, and the Clark Amendment was repealed. Notwithstanding that, the Reagan administration refrained from backing the RENAMO rebels. The clear view of the State Department was that American interests and ideals were best served by working with the regime rather than the rebels. Siding with the latter would have put an end to the positive movement in the U.S.-Mozambican relationship and would have given strong incentives for the FRELIMO government to seek greater aid from Cuba and the USSR. In fact, the June 1985 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) on Mozambique stated that, "continuation of the present situation could lead to a further erosion of Soviet influence and credibility as a military patron and a political-economic role model."[315] That suggested that the United States could meet its policy objective—weakening the relationship between the Soviet Union and Mozambique—if it continued to refrain from siding with RENAMO. That impression was bolstered by the 1985 SNIE's judgment about what was likely to occur if

[314] Special National Intelligence Estimate, June 1985, Mozambique: Short-Term Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP97S00289R000200240001-1.pdf.
[315] Special National Intelligence Estimate, June 1985, Mozambique: Short-Term Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 3.

the security situation confronting the Mozambican government worsened, which would have been the result had the United States aided RENAMO. As the SNIE stated:

> Should the security situation deteriorate precipitately, Machel—or a hardline successor—could feel compelled to renounce the Nkomati Accord and move closer to the Soviet Union. This would return the situation to the status quo ante 1983—a Soviet client confronting a hostile South Africa, a situation judged against US interests.[316]

As a strong signal of the positive movement in the U.S.-Mozambique relationship, and to contribute to further development of it, the State Department requested approval from the White House to issue an invitation to Samora Machel, president of Mozambique, to undertake an official visit to Washington D.C. in 1985. In making the case for that visit, the State Department stressed the following to Bud McFarlane, the national security advisor:

> Machel has made a considerable turn-around in his orientation and has become much more pragmatic economically and politically. He has accepted U.S. suggestions to privatize large sectors of the economy and move it more toward the West, including IMF [International Monetary Fund] and IBRD [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] membership. He has also become a strong proponent of the Administration's regional policy.[317]

The State Department also informed the White House that President Machel was facing pressure from "pro-Soviet" individuals in Mozambique to demonstrate that there

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[316] Special National Intelligence Estimate, June 1985, Mozambique: Short-Term Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 4.

[317] Memorandum from Charles Hill, Executive Secretary of the State Department, for Robert C. McFarlane, December 7, 1984, Subject: Official Working Visit for Mozambique President Samora Machel, in Folder 'Mozambique (01/01/1984 - 12/31/1984),' Box 4, Executive Secretariat: NSC, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

were tangible benefits associated with his opening to the west; if President Reagan received Machel in Washington it could offer just such a demonstration.[318]

Secretary of State George Shultz explains in his memoirs how the month prior to the visit, notwithstanding the fact that the White House had already cleared Machel's visit to the United States, President Reagan became "uneasy" about his meeting with Machel and "worried that he was being led into a trap."[319] Despite those misgivings beforehand, however, Reagan had a positive meeting with Machel, whom he met on September 19, 1985 in the Oval Office. Shultz described how Reagan was "charmed and impressed" with the Mozambican leader, who "regaled us with anti-Soviet jokes and derogatory anecdotes about communism gleaned from his trips to Moscow."[320] In his personal diary after the meeting, Reagan wrote that Machel "turned out to be quite a guy & I believe he really intends to be 'non-aligned' instead of a Soviet patsy. We got along fine."[321] In public remarks with President Reagan after their private meeting, Machel stressed that Mozambique was trying to put some distance between itself and the Soviet bloc by stating that "Mozambique is an independent and nonaligned African country."[322]

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[318] Memorandum from Charles Hill, Executive Secretary of the State Department, for Robert C. McFarlane, December 7, 1984, Subject: Official Working Visit for Mozambique President Samora Machel, in Folder 'Mozambique (01/01/1984 - 12/31/1984),' Box 4, Executive Secretariat: NSC, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library."
[319] Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1116.
[320] Shultz, 1117.
[321] Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 354.
[322] Ronald Reagan, "Remarks Following Discussions With President Samora Moises Machel of Mozambique," September 19, 1985. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39134.

The State Department, with Crocker in the lead, had made the case that neither American interests nor U.S. ideals would be well-served by backing the RENAMO rebels. Instead, they would be better secured by continuing to move forward the U.S. relationship with the FRELIMO government. Through meeting with Machel, and especially based on his personal interactions with the Mozambican leader, Reagan had given his endorsement to the policy proposed by the State Department—the administration would continue to develop relations with the Mozambican government rather than siding with the rebels.

Degree of Consensus in Congress that Refraining from Supporting RENAMO was Likely to Serve U.S. Interests and was Defensible in terms of Liberal-Democratic Ideals

Notwithstanding the president's inclination to side with the State Department following his September 1985 meeting with Machel, other senior officials in his administration, as well as some members of Congress and outside organizations, urged him to change his mind and support RENAMO. Already in late 1984, leaders from thirteen conservative organizations sent an open letter to President Reagan in which they charged that the State Department, driven by Chester Crocker, was pursuing a policy approach that they argued would result in "the consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship in Mozambique, where the courageous 'RENAMO' Freedom Fighters have been moving ever closer to toppling the pro-Soviet regime of Samora Machel and replacing it with a pro-Western democracy."[323] In an editorial in March 1986, the conservative publication *National Review* accused the State Department of bucking President Reagan's true policy of supporting "freedom fighters" and exclaimed that "if the President is serious about

[323] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 282.

supporting freedom-fighters he must get his own people in line."[324] As James M. Scott notes, RENAMO established an office in the United States, which was located at the Heritage Foundation, and it made efforts to get the Reagan administration and Congress to provide support to the rebel movement.[325]

Outside of the State Department, there were officials within the Reagan administration who advocated for aiding RENAMO. The senior official who was most in favor of taking that step was CIA Director Bill Casey.[326] Constantine Menges, who served on the administration's NSC staff between 1983 and 1986, was another advocate for supporting the rebels and even proposed that course of action, although it was contrary to administration policy, to some Republican legislators.[327]

On Capitol Hill, proponents of aiding the Mozambican rebels included Senator Jesse Helms, a Republican from North Carolina, Senator Malcolm Wallop, a Republican from Wyoming, and Representative Dan Burton, a Republican from Indiana.[328] In the fall of 1985, Senator Wallop introduced a bill that would have provided American assistance to RENAMO. In correspondence with the State Department regarding the measure, Wallop argued that aiding the rebels was justified because of what he saw as the communist bloc's aims in southern Africa and because of the nature of the Mozambican government. As Wallop argued his case:

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[324] Gleijeses, 282.
[325] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 201.
[326] Scott, 204.
[327] Scott, 202.
[328] Scott, 202.

> I believe the Marxists are bent on turning any development in the region to their own advantage and that they fully intend to try to dominate southern Africa. To be sure we do not know what sort of government RENAMO would set up. There, however, we could have some influence. We do know [underline in original] what the government of Samoro [sic] Machel is: cruel, repressive, inefficient, undemocratic and Marxist. How can we support that when the State Department finds it difficult and sometimes impossible to support governments aligned with us which are no worse and sometimes even better?[329]

In late 1986, Senators who advocated aiding RENAMO blocked the nomination of Melissa Wells as the U.S. ambassador to Mozambique in an effort to get the administration to change its policy approach.[330]

However, the bloc of legislators who supported backing RENAMO never grew large enough, or politically strong enough, to achieve a change in the administration's policy. While RENAMO had their advocates on Capitol Hill, there was a high degree of consensus in Congress that the Reagan administration had made the appropriate decision by refraining from providing support to the rebels. One major reason for that was precisely because the State Department could point to successes in its efforts to re-orient the Mozambican government away from the communist bloc and towards the west. In his June 1986 correspondence with Senator Wallop, James Dyer, an assistant secretary at the State Department, explained why the Reagan administration did not support Wallop's bill to provide assistance to RENAMO. Dyer wrote that:

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[329] Letter from Senator Malcolm Wallop to James W. Dyer, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, March 18, 1986, Available from CIA CREST, 2, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90B01390R000801090014-7.pdf.
[330] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 204.

> The Mozambican Government has moved toward the U.S. position on key issues facing the UN, e.g. ended its support for the Soviet position regarding Afghanistan and supported the U.S. in our successful effort to establish a rapporteur on religious intolerance in the UNHRC [United Nations Human Rights Council]. In spite of continuing to receive Soviet military equipment and supplies, the Mozambican Government has still not allowed the Soviets to base military units in its country. Paralleling this shift to political neutrality is the country's adoption of a mixed economy with a revitalized role for the private sector, including foreign investment.[331]

Dyer also pointedly explained that:

> Our policy is one of influencing the direction it [Mozambique] takes through positive, rather than negative actions. In accordance with that policy, we see nothing to gain, and everything to lose, in switching from support for the Government of Mozambique to support for an ill defined attempt to overthrow that government.[332]

The State Department, in short, felt that aid to RENAMO would undermine—rather than enhance—American interests, which required a weakening of the relationship between the Mozambican government and the Soviet Union. An updated Special National Intelligence Estimate on Mozambique, also issued in June 1986, included an indication of Mozambique's weakening relationship with the USSR, reporting that "Moscow delivered about $175 million in arms in 1985, the lowest amount in three years, and only $55 million in economic assistance."[333]

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[331] Letter to Senator Malcolm Wallop from James Dyer, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, June 1986, Available from CIA CREST, 1, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90B01390R000801090014-7.pdf.
[332] Letter to Senator Malcolm Wallop from James Dyer, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, June 1986, Available from CIA CREST, 2.
[333] Special National Intelligence Estimate, June 1986, Mozambique: Short-Term Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 2.

In a June 1987 hearing, the chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Paul Simon, a Democrat from Illinois, stated that he supported the administration's policy towards Mozambique. He explained that he judged that the administration's policy served American interests, arguing that:

> Mozambique, although a Marxist state, is moving in the right direction. The government is developing more ties with Western nations, implementing positive economic reforms, working in earnest with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and adhering to the Nkomati accord.[334]

Another important reason why American advocates of aiding RENAMO proved unable to change administration policy was because of the character of the rebel group. It proved to be a considerable challenge to argue that their rebellion could be defended in terms of the United States' liberal-democratic ideals. In May 1986, the CIA issued an intelligence assessment about RENAMO, which was written at the request of the NSC's Director of African Affairs, Phillip Ringdahl.[335] The assessment reported that RENAMO's military wing comprised approximately 15,000 fighters who seemed "cohesive and highly motivated." The assessment reported that RENAMO had "killed dozens of civilians described by our Embassy in Maputo as innocent bystanders."[336] Elsewhere, it commented that "recent US Embassy reporting notes that RENAMO's heavy-handed tactics often undercut its efforts to gain popular support, and cites a large number of well-documented incidents where RENAMO guerillas, in addition to attacking economic targets, have killed,

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[334] Hearing before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, June 24, 1987, Mozambique and United States Policy (U.S. G.P.O., 1987), 2.
[335] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST."
[336] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 3.

kidnapped, or maimed civilians."[337] The assessment later commented that RENAMO's governance efforts compared unfavorably with UNITA's in Angola and with FRELIMO's own efforts:

> RENAMO's failure to develop a more thorough-going political program and to implement it in practice is a major shortcoming in the eyes of most observers. In particular, the slow pace of the insurgents' movement toward establishing a shadow government in areas under their control in central Mozambique contrasts sharply with Savimbi's accomplishments in Angola and of Machel's Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO). Prior to independence from Portugal, FRELIMO had established a rudimentary government structure, including a limited number of schools and medical clinics, in the northern part of the country. RENAMO, according to US Embassy reporting, provides only a limited number of civil or social services.[338]

James M. Scott describes how, during the period in which RENAMO advocates had blocked Wells' nomination to be ambassador to Mozambique, "reports of new RENAMO massacres undermined the claims of the right wing."[339]

Samora Machel had died in an airplane crash in October 1986. In the statement President Reagan released after the Mozambican leader's death, Reagan said that Machel was a "voice for moderation in the region" and went on to say that "we hope to work closely with his successors to continue the improvement in our bilateral relations and to further the cause of peace in southern Africa."[340] Samora Machel's successor as president of Mozambique, Joachim Chissano, visited London in May 1987 and met with Margaret

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[337] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 9.
[338] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 6.
[339] Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*, 208.
[340] Ronald Reagan, Statement on the Death of President Samora Moises Machel of Mozambique, October 20, 1986. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36616.

Thatcher. The British Prime Minister sent a letter to President Reagan following the meeting in which she relayed that Chissano seemed to be intent on continuing Mozambique's move away from the Soviet Union and towards the western world.[341] Consistent with the policy of engaging the FRELIMO government, President Reagan also met with Chissano in early October 1987.[342]

In April 1988, an independent contractor and expert on refugee issues, Robert Gersony, completed a report for the State Department on the conflict in Mozambique, based on interviews with refugees. He had been contracted by the State Department's Bureau for Refugee Programs, in December 1987, to complete an analysis of refugee flows from Mozambique as a result of the Bureau's conclusion that the number of refugees from Mozambique had increased by 300 percent over the previous year.[343] Among Gersony's major findings were that "the level of violence reported to be conducted by RENAMO against the civilian population of rural Mozambique is extraordinarily high" and, based on an extrapolation from his interview data, he reported that RENAMO might have murdered 100,000 civilians or more.[344] His interviews with refugees also elicited allegations of various other abuses perpetrated by RENAMO, including "beatings, rape, looting, burning of villages, abductions and mutilations." Gersony also reported that he received some

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[341] Ronald Reagan Letter to Margaret Thatcher, May 19, 1987, Re: Mozambique, Available from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109384.
[342] Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 536.
[343] Robert Gersony, "Rebels Create Havoc in Mozambique," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (June 30, 1988): 31.
[344] Gersony.

serious allegations of abuses by FRELIMO forces, but that they were of a much lower number than the allegations he had heard levelled against RENAMO.[345]

With its documented brutality, RENAMO faced a huge hurdle in garnering sufficient support in Washington D.C. for it to benefit from American aid. As William Minter described the situation:

> RENAMO never won prominence in Washington policy circles. Its congressional backers were few in number. Dhlakama [RENAMO's leader] never visited Washington or hired a high-powered Washington lobbying firm. RENAMO's backers within the intelligence agencies and the military joined with private far-right groups to urge official US support on the UNITA model, and seemed in 1986 and 1987 to have some chance of success. But by 1988 RENAMO was so linked with atrocities that even many right-wingers thought it wise to seek some public distance.[346]

With a high degree of consensus in Congress that the Reagan administration had made the appropriate decision—both for U.S. interests and ideals—by refraining from giving aid to RENAMO, the political pressure exerted upon the administration to change course was never pronounced enough to precipitate a serious reconsideration of that decision.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the United States' Decision to Refrain from Aiding RENAMO

Contrary to what occurred in Angola, on the other side of southern Africa, the United States never became an external supporter of the war of attrition in Mozambique. By refraining from aiding the RENAMO rebels, the United States was able to undertake a

[345] Gersony.
[346] Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, 155–56.

policy of engagement with the FRELIMO regime, which reinforced that government's move towards the west.

Nevertheless, even without American aid to the rebels, the conflict still became an externally supported war of attrition. As described, South African support was critical to the expansion of RENAMO's military capabilities and operations in the early 1980s. As a CIA assessment from 1986 recounted, South African assistance to RENAMO between 1980 and 1984 included "organizational and tactical direction, training, communications equipment, medical and other nonlethal supplies, small arms and ammunition, and intelligence support."[347] After it signed the Nkomati Accord with Mozambique in 1984, South Africa appeared to reduce its military support to RENAMO, but it did not cease such support completely.[348] Chester Crocker later wrote that arguing to South African officials to comply with Nkomati proved to be a "sterile exchange."[349]

On the other side of the conflict, the FRELIMO government had its own external backers. In addition to the military assistance it received from the Soviet Union and Cuba, from 1982 onwards it also received support from Zimbabwean ground troops. Zimbabwe's prime minister, Robert Mugabe, deployed several thousands of his country's forces to support RENAMO in order to help protect the railway and oil pipeline that ran between the Mozambican port of Beira and Mutare in Zimbabwe, which were critical infrastructure links for Zimbabwe.[350] A February 1987 CIA intelligence assessment reported that:

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[347] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 9.
[348] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 10.
[349] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 248.
[350] Intelligence Memorandum, 15 May 1986, Mozambique: RENAMO Today--Profile and Prospects, Available from CIA CREST, 3.

> Maputo remains heavily dependent on external support in its efforts to contain the insurgency. Soviet arms and advisers continue to play a central role in Mozambique's counterinsurgency efforts. Zimbabwe has increased the number of its combat troops in Mozambique to about 6,000, most of whom are deployed to defend the Beira transportation corridor.[351]

In 1987 and 1988, FRELIMO undertook a significant military offensive against RENAMO, supported by Zimbabwean troops, along with soldiers contributed by Tanzania and Malawi.[352] Despite that effort, FRELIMO was unable to defeat RENAMO's insurgency militarily. Negotiations between FRELIMO and RENAMO subsequently began in 1988.[353] During the period in which those negotiations were under way, some conservatives in the United States continued to argue that the United States should align itself with RENAMO because of FRELIMO's Marxist-Leninist beliefs and its links with the Soviet Bloc. For example, writing in 1990, Constantine Menges—who had served as the CIA's national intelligence officer for Latin America between 1981 and 1983, then as a special assistant to President Reagan until 1986—argued that FRELIMO had "close ties with the Soviet bloc," had only undertaken "limited internal steps toward moderation" and suggested that it had moved towards the west simply as a means of maximizing its economic assistance from outside parties.[354] Among the policy recommendations that Menges advocated was a program of American assistance to the rebels in Mozambique, writing that "the United States should provide enough military assistance to RENAMO to

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[351] Special National Intelligence Estimate: Memorandum to Holders, February 1987, Mozambique: Prospects for 1987, in Folder 'Mozambique - 17496,' Incoming FOIA Document Collection, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington D.C., 4.
[352] Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 77.
[353] Weinstein, 77.
[354] Constantine Christopher Menges, *The Twilight Struggle: The Soviet Union v. the United States Today*, AEI Studies ; 497 (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1990), 177–78.

expand its operations and its area of control until victory."[355] There was no chance of the George H.W. Bush administration following Menges' advice. In March of 1990, President George H.W. Bush welcomed President Chissano of Mozambique to Washington and gave American support to the Mozambican leader's decision to engage in direct talks with RENAMO about ending the conflict.[356] Shortly after that visit, Secretary Baker told his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, that the United States was "quite concerned about the RENAMO atrocities."[357]

Between 1990 and 1992, FRELIMO and RENAMO brokered a plan for peace, which as Jeremy Weinstein writes included provisions for "the demobilization of both forces; the construction of a new, unified national army; and the implementation of a system of democratic government in which members of both movements could participate." In October 1992, the conflict concluded when FRELIMO and RENAMO signed a peace agreement.[358]

This case stands as a good example of how engagement with potential adversaries, rather than pressure, can achieve American policy objectives. Of course, correctly identifying situations in which that is the case relies upon reaching accurate verdicts on the motivations of other states. In this case, the Mozambican government, in spite of its Marxist ideology, proved not to be especially strongly-wedded to the Soviet bloc and was open to

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[355] Menges, 180.
[356] Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting Between President George H.W. Bush and President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, March 13, 1990, The Oval Office, Available from the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-03-13--Chissano%20[1].pdf.
[357] Memorandum of Conversation, Secretary Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze, March 20, 1990, 6:00pm - 9:30pm, Windhoek, Namibia, Available in Soviet Flashpoints Collection, Box 38, 951266 DOS 365, The National Security Archive, Washington, D.C., 9.
[358] Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 80.

engagement with the United States and the western world.

Notwithstanding that, even though the United States refrained from participating in the conflict as a supporter of the rebels, the war in Mozambique still exacted an awful toll. It was estimated that one million people died in the conflict between 1977 and 1992, while millions of others were displaced.[359] One reason for the scale of the devastation in Mozambique was that it was still an externally supported war of attrition even without American participation—South Africa aided RENAMO's insurgency against FRELIMO, which was aided by its own backers. Another major contributory cause of the devastation was RENAMO's mode of operations, which targeted civilians and the country's infrastructure, including schools, healthcare facilities, and transportation links. As horrific as the devastation in Mozambique during the 1980s was, it would almost certainly have been worse still if the United States had aided RENAMO as a small number of the American policy elite urged. Instead, informed by a considered assessment of the nation's interests and its ideals, the Reagan administration refrained from taking that course and that decision was met with a high degree of consensus in Congress that it was the appropriate one.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Realism

A realist theory of international politics illuminates some of the reasons why the United States provided military assistance to the UNITA rebels in Angola but not to the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique. The United States had a strategic interest in minimizing

[359] Emerson, *The Battle for Mozambique*, 8.

the influence of the communist bloc in southern Africa because of the region's natural resources and its position astride sea lanes from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. Since the major manifestation of that communist bloc influence was the sizeable contingent of Cuban troops in Angola and Soviet military aid to that country, a realist would find it logical that the United States would have aided UNITA in an effort to impose costs on the communist bloc as part of a strategy to get them to withdraw from Angola. By contrast, the Cuban and Soviet military presence in Mozambique was much less than in Angola; a realist would argue that there was therefore less imperative to aid the rebels in that country. Additionally, Angola's strategic importance was greater than Mozambique because of its possession of natural resources, notably including oil.

The Reagan administration's decision to support UNITA was unquestionably aimed at imposing costs on Cuba, with the ultimate aim of getting Cuba to withdraw from Angola. As described, during the Reagan administration's first NSC meeting, General Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that repealing the Clark Amendment offered a way to impose costs on Cuba for its military deployments in Angola and the CIA Director Bill Casey concurred with that argument.[360] As described above, in March 1981, having approved the State Department's strategy for southern Africa, President Reagan noted in his personal diary that the United States would "urge Angola's govt. to oust the Cubans at the same time we helped Savimbi."[361]

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[360] Minutes of NSC Meeting, February 6, 1981, in Folder 'NSC 00001 02/06/1981 [Caribbean Basin, Poland] [1/2],' Box 91282, Executive Secretariat, NSC: NSC Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 5–6.
[361] Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 10.

As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, President Reagan's decision to aid UNITA was informed by his assessment of the nation's strategic interests. Nevertheless, as the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war also expects, American aid to UNITA was not merely driven by a calculation of strategic interest. There are four major pieces of evidence for that conclusion.

First, safeguarding at least some of the nation's strategic interests could be achieved without supporting the Angolan rebels. Despite the United States' lack of diplomatic relations with the MPLA regime, American companies were still able to do business in Angola, especially in the energy sector.[362] As Karen Unger Kwiatkowski notes, "Angola was the only Reagan Doctrine case where the United States had—and maintained throughout—a significant, secure and peaceful trading relationship with the "enemy" government."[363] Therefore, it was not the case that the U.S. required a change of regime in Angola in order to benefit from the country's hydrocarbon reserves.

Second, while there was a realpolitik argument for aiding UNITA, this step was not taken until late 1985. That is surprising from a realist point of view. Since reducing communist bloc influence in Angola was in the United States' strategic interests, why did the nation not take that step until the mid-1980s? The answer, of course, was because Congress declined to lift the Clark Amendment earlier than that. As this dissertation's theory predicts, the United States' liberal-democratic character—both its ideals and institutions—act as a constraint on the executive branch's ability to aid rebellion in other countries in cases in which there is not a high degree of consensus in Congress that doing

[362] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 159–60.
[363] Karen Unger Kwiatkowski, "The Overt/Covert War in Angola: A Case Study of the Implementation of the Reagan Doctrine" (The Catholic University of America, 2005), 19.

so is in the nation's interests and is defensible in terms of its ideals. It was not until 1985, after several years of Chester Crocker's concerted diplomatic efforts had failed to achieve a Cuban withdrawal from Angola, and after an expansion of Cuban and Soviet aid to the MPLA over the preceding years, that there was sufficient support in Congress for repealing the Clark Amendment.

Third, arguments made by proponents of supporting UNITA were not framed solely in terms of strategic interests. As demonstrated above, proponents of aiding the rebels also couched their arguments in terms of the nation's liberal-democratic ideals. To offer one additional example to those given above, in February 1986 Senator Orrin Hatch, a Republican from Utah, made the case for aiding Savimbi in the pages of the *Washington Times.* He argued that the conflict in Angola was "a battle over ideologies: Soviet totalitarianism vs. freedom, self-determination and democracy."[364] Whether American policymakers were sincere or not when making such arguments, it is significant that they felt it important to couch support for UNITA in terms of both interests and ideals. They recognized that public arguments for aiding a rebellion would be more compelling if those arguments included a defense of such support in terms of American ideals. Jonas Savimbi also clearly recognized the importance of presenting UNITA's objectives as focused upon democracy, if he was going to maximize the chances of receiving sustained American support.

Fourth, realism cannot explain the absence of American support to RENAMO satisfactorily. Although Cuban and Soviet assistance to the FRELIMO government in Mozambique was much lower than to the MPLA government in Angola, it was not zero.

[364] Quoted in Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 299.

A pure realpolitik argument could have been made for supporting RENAMO as a way to force the communist bloc to expend more resources through its efforts to defend the FRELIMO regime. Aiding RENAMO would have represented a way to "bleed" the communist bloc in southern Africa. While taking that step may have led to an expansion of the communist bloc presence in southern Africa, it could have hurt the communist world overall. A CIA intelligence analysis on Mozambique from February 1987 illuminated the strategic situation confronting the Soviet Union in its relationship with Mozambique, reporting that:

> With the Zimbabwean intervention [to assist the FRELIMO government], the Soviet Union has been able to avoid temporarily making hard choices on levels of military support to Maputo or considering any introduction of Cuban combat forces. Moscow's primary near-term objectives in Mozambique are to help the regime to defend itself without incurring significant new costs or commitments and to encourage the new Chissano government to revitalize Mozambique's pursuit of socialism at home and close ties to the USSR.[365]

As noted earlier, the director of the CIA, Bill Casey, advocated providing military support to RENAMO. Casey had a realpolitik view of international politics and apparently felt that helping the insurgents in Mozambique could cause the Soviet Union to expend additional resources to defend one of its global partners. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration never aided RENAMO. That was for two reasons. First, an alternative argument could, and was, made that U.S. interests did not require a bleeder strategy in Mozambique; there was another way to further American interests. It involved engaging the Mozambican regime to weaken its ties with Moscow. Second, a bleeder strategy was

[365] Special National Intelligence Estimate: Memorandum to Holders, February 1987, Mozambique: Prospects for 1987, in Folder 'Mozambique - 17496,' Incoming FOIA Document Collection, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, Washington D.C., 3–4.

not adopted because it could not be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. The RENAMO rebels were beyond the pale. As Chester Crocker put the matter in his memoirs, the Mozambican rebels were an "African Khmer Rouge."[366] A practitioner of pure realpolitik might have aided RENAMO. The liberal-democratic United States did not.

Ideological Competition

Both the MPLA government in Angola and the FRELIMO government in Mozambique were self-identified Marxist regimes. Nevertheless, that was not sufficient for the United States to support rebel movements in both countries, in spite of the fact that both rebel movements claimed to be anti-communist. This case shows that the actual behavior of political movements—rather than just their self-identified ideological labels—is likely to have an impact on how the United States interacts with them. While both the MPLA and FRELIMO were Marxist-Leninist parties, the latter showed itself willing to move towards the west, which led the United States to engage it diplomatically rather than to act confrontationally towards it. Additionally, the actual behavior of the rebel movement in Mozambique, rather than just its ideological pronouncements, was critical to determining the United States' policies towards it. As we saw, although RENAMO espoused anti-communist beliefs, its political program was regarded by many American policymakers as underdeveloped. That, in addition to its abysmal human rights record, meant that the Reagan administration refrained from providing it with support.

That is not to say that all American policymakers and politicians concluded that the United States should have refrained from undertaking ideological competition in

[366] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 293.

Mozambique. There were some who argued that FRELIMO's Marxism-Leninism constituted an important reason why the United States should have been wary of engaging that government. For example, as Senator Malcolm Wallop wrote in a letter to the State Department in March 1986:

> I am deeply concerned that the United States Government has given strong support to the Marxist regime in Mozambique……I remain unconvinced that we can turn the situation around through expanding contacts with Machel's Marxist Government.[367]

Instead, Wallop advocated providing aid to RENAMO. In a Senate hearing in June 1987, Senator Jesse Helms was highly critical of the State Department's refusal to even talk with RENAMO given that they were "anti-Communist" while the government they were fighting was a "Marxist government."[368] As Chester Crocker later wrote, some conservatives in the United States adopted an attitude towards African regimes that Crocker pithily summarized as "once a Marxist, always a Marxist."[369] Writing in 1990, Constantine Menges, a former Reagan administration NSC staff member, argued that "there is a puzzling contrast between U.S. policy toward the Communist MPLA movement in Angola and policy toward FRELIMO in Mozambique."[370] He went on to argue that there was "no apparent explanation for this contrast in the U.S. government's perception of two similar Communist movements."[371] In fact, there was an explanation for the divergent

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[367] Letter from Senator Malcolm Wallop to James W. Dyer, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, March 18, 1986, Available from CIA CREST."
[368] Hearing before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, June 24, 1987, Mozambique and United States Policy, 9 & 16.
[369] Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 287.
[370] Menges, *The Twilight Struggle*, 177.
[371] Menges, 177–78.

policies adopted by the United States towards Angola and Mozambique during the 1980s. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the United States' decisions about whether to aid rebellions will depend upon assessments of what American interests and ideals require. Ideology does play a role, but the meaning of ideological labels is something that is assessed by policymakers rather than something that leads to automatic action. Despite the fact that Angola and Mozambique were both governed by Marxist-Leninist regimes, the United States aided a rebellion in the former but not the latter because the FRELIMO government's behavior was better, from the perspective of many American policymakers, than its ideology, while the RENAMO rebels' behavior was much worse than their espousal of anti-communism.

A Principal-Agent Framework

The main alternative theoretical framework for explaining effectiveness is a principal-agent one. How would a principal-agent analysis explain the results produced by the United States' support of UNITA in Angola and the consequences of the United States' decision not to aid RENAMO in Mozambique? A principal-agent framework would stress that the United States and UNITA had a shared interest in securing a withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, which the United States was able to pursue successfully by providing resources to UNITA. At the same time, a principal-agent framework would argue that, following the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, the United States' and UNITA's interests diverged. The United States' major interest was in seeing a peace settlement in Angola that included free and fair elections. By contrast, UNITA's major interest was in securing power. This divergence of interest, a principal-agent account would emphasize,

explains why continued American military assistance to UNITA after 1988 did not enable the United States to achieve its goals—while UNITA took American aid, it ultimately opted to use its military power to return to war after the 1992 elections, in pursuit of power, rather than to accept the election results.

Regarding Mozambique, a principal-agent account would emphasize that the United States' interests and those of RENAMO were not closely aligned. The United States' interest was in weakening the ties between the FRELIMO government and the Soviet Union. RENAMO's major interest was in overthrowing that government. Since the FRELIMO government showed itself, over the course of the early 1980s, willing to move towards the west, the United States did not have an interest in helping RENAMO to overthrow the regime.

In broad terms, when considering policy effectiveness, the above principal-agent account explains major aspects of these two cases. Nevertheless, the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war illuminates two additional aspects. First, whether the United States' interests are aligned or not with a particular rebel movement will not always be obvious and will, instead, be a matter for debate among American policymakers and politicians. Although UNITA's interests and those of the United States diverged following the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, that divergence was not clearly recognized by all American policymakers at the time. There was a debate about whether Savimbi and UNITA were truly committed to liberal democracy or whether Savimbi merely said that in order to garner support from the United States. As shown above, some opponents of aiding UNITA had raised concerns that Savimbi was merely telling American audiences what they wanted to hear. Nevertheless, plenty of other American politicians believed—or at

least claimed to believe—that Savimbi was sincere in his calls for democracy in Angola, something he stressed on numerous occasions, including to President Bush personally in the Oval Office. The general point that this episode highlights is that whether or not American interests are aligned with those of a potential partner will not always be a matter of widespread consensus within the United States, but could be subject to debate. The outcome of that debate—including whether or not the United States actually supports the rebel movement in question—will depend on the degree of consensus among officials in the executive branch and legislators in Congress about whether or not American interests and those of potential partners are aligned.

Second, the United States' decision to refrain from aiding the RENAMO rebels was not merely a product of divergent interests between the United States and RENAMO. That outcome was also, as the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war stresses, the result of divergent ideals. Although RENAMO professed to be a pro-western, anti-communist movement, its human rights record was horrendous. For many American policymakers and politicians, RENAMO were beyond the pale.

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of his administration in 1981, President Reagan favored providing American military support to the UNITA rebels in Angola. He felt that doing so would promote American interests by imposing costs on Cuba, which would encourage Cuba to withdrew the tens of thousands of troops it had deployed to Angola. President Reagan also assessed that aiding UNITA could be defended in terms of American ideals because, in his view, the MPLA government was both Marxist-Leninist and was being

propped up by Cuban support, thus making aid to UNITA both a matter of anti-communism and self-determination. Despite the fact that President Reagan favored aiding UNITA from the beginning of his presidency, the United States refrained from taking that step until late 1985 because Congress refused to repeal the Clark Amendment in 1981. There was a low degree of consensus in Congress that aiding UNITA would promote both U.S. interests and ideals.

It was only in 1985, after several years of American diplomatic efforts led by Chester Crocker had failed to get Cuban troops out of Angola, that a sufficient number of American legislators were prepared to lift the Clark Amendment, which allowed the Reagan administration to proceed with furnishing military assistance to the Angolan rebels. Even after that step was taken, however, the degree of consensus in Congress regarding the efficacy and morality of that action remained low, which led to an effort—spearheaded by Congressman Lee Hamilton—to re-impose restrictions on American aid to UNITA. This was a case in which American support to a rebellion was brittle. In spite of that, the United States' objective of seeing Cuban troops depart Angola was achieved under the terms of the 1988 New York Accords. The United States was able to achieve that goal, despite the fact that U.S. support to UNITA was brittle, because South African aid to the rebels was substantial. That helped to create a military stalemate in Angola that proved sufficiently costly to Cuba by the late 1980s that it opted for withdrawal. Additionally, Chester Crocker's diplomatic efforts played a critical role in helping to turn a stalemate on the ground into progress at the negotiating table. In the aftermath of Cuban withdrawal, American aid to UNITA continued and by helping the rebels to survive against the MPLA that aid provided the basis for an internal political settlement in Angola. That settlement

included elections in 1992. The holding of those elections also seemed to herald the achievement of another American objective in Angola: what had been called "national reconciliation" by the Reagan and Bush administrations. As it turned out, the United States' partner, Jonas Savimbi, was less interested in democracy than he had claimed. Ultimately, American support to UNITA proved to be a failure because Savimbi, who had spent a significant amount of time living by the gun while arguing he wanted to live by democratic rules, showed himself unwilling to move beyond his life as a fighter.

On the other side of southern Africa, the Reagan administration never extended the "Reagan Doctrine" to Mozambique by supporting RENAMO. As a matter of pure realpolitik that would have had some logic to it as a way to force the Soviet Union to expend more resources to defend a regime that had a "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" with the USSR. Nevertheless, as the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war stresses, the United States is unlikely to act purely as a result of the dictates of realpolitik. Instead, when assessing whether to support RENAMO, officials in the Reagan administration and legislators in Congress considered whether doing so would have promoted both American interests and liberal-democratic ideals. As the FRELIMO government, although it was Marxist-Leninist, had made clear that it was willing to move away from close alignment with the USSR towards a more non-aligned status, many American officials and representatives concluded that aiding a rebellion in Mozambique would have been counter to U.S. interests. Additionally, because RENAMO behaved with such brutality, many policymakers in the United States concluded that helping them was wholly inconsistent with U.S. ideals. Consequently, Mozambique never became a venue for the Reagan Doctrine's provision of support to anti-communist rebellion.

Chapter 7

Hopes and Horrors:

The United States' Responses to the Libyan and Syrian Rebellions, 2011-2014

This chapter examines the Obama administration's policy responses to the Libyan and Syrian rebellions between 2011 and 2014. The Libyan rebellion broke out in February 2011. After the rebels made a number of initial gains, and organized themselves under the political leadership of the National Transitional Council (NTC), the Qaddafi regime managed to regain the military initiative and by mid-March 2011 regime forces were bearing down on Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city and the epicenter of the rebellion.[1] That bred significant concerns among many outside observers that an attack by Qaddafi's forces on the city would result in large-scale loss of lives. Confronted with that imminent threat, and under the authority of a UN Security Council resolution that authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, the United States—along with NATO allies and Arab partners—launched airstrikes against Qaddafi's ground forces. After they had nullified the immediate threat to Benghazi, the coalition's airstrikes continued and helped

[1] There are many accepted variants of how to write "Qaddafi." In this chapter, I use "Qaddafi" and, for purposes of standardization, I render all mentions of his name in that way, even if an alternative spelling was used in sources from which I quote. The political leadership body of the Libyan opposition, when originally formed, called itself the "Transitional National Council" (TNC) but subsequently changed its name to the "National Transitional Council." In the main body of the text of this chapter, I consistently write "National Transitional Council (NTC)," but when quoting from sources I use whatever version appeared in the original source. For the Syrian leader, I write his last name as "Assad," rather than "Asad," and I render all mentions of his name in that way, even if an alternative spelling was used in sources from which I quote.

support rebel military advances. The opposition captured Tripoli in August 2011 and in October they killed Qaddafi. Through American and coalition air support to the rebels, the battlefield in Libya was tilted in favor of the rebels and it allowed them to win a military victory. The aftermath of that victory was marred by problems. Various geographically-dispersed militias that constituted the rebel movement fought one another for power and neither the United States nor its partners during the 2011 intervention had any appetite for deploying a stabilization force in Libya. What is more, the victorious rebels in Libya had no enthusiasm for having such a force deploy to Libya either.

The uprising in Syria began in March 2011 and was quickly met with substantial repression by the Assad regime. For the remainder of 2011, a substantial strand of the opposition to Assad remained focused on peaceful protest and resistance, although there was increasing militarization of the opposition from the summer of 2011 onwards. In September 2012, CIA Director David Petraeus and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recommended to President Obama that the United States provide some military assistance to vetted parts of the anti-Assad opposition as the beginning of an effort to threaten the Assad regime and thereby improve the prospects of a diplomatic settlement in Syria. That proposal was also supported by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and General Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. President Obama rejected the proposal to arm the anti-Assad opposition in September 2012. Nevertheless, during the first half of 2013, President Obama changed course and authorized the CIA to provide lethal aid to the anti-Assad rebels.

This chapter examines why the United States intervened in Libya in 2011 in a way that tilted the battlefield decisively in favor of the anti-Qaddafi rebels and why President

Obama rejected a proposal to provide lethal aid to the anti-Assad opposition in Syria in September 2012, before authorizing that step in 2013. This chapter's analysis of the high-level decision-making undertaken by the Obama administration towards military aid to the anti-Assad opposition stops in 2013, due to limitations in the information that is publicly available at present. Nevertheless, as this chapter will show, there is sufficient public information currently available to explain the policy change between the fall of 2012 and the summer of 2013, as well as to examine some of the fundamental aspects of President Obama's policy approach that shaped American engagement with the anti-Assad opposition for the remainder of his presidency. This chapter also evaluates what insights we can attain regarding the effectiveness of American support to rebels from the outcomes produced by the Obama administration's responses to the Libyan and Syrian rebellions.

BACKGROUND TO THE REBELLIONS

On December 17, 2010, fruit seller Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself alight in the town of Sidi Bouzid, located in north-central Tunisia, following the confiscation of his grocery cart by a local police officer.[2] As Marc Lynch emphasizes, what Bouazizi did was a "calculated political act" that "came in the wake of a series of particularly brazen land grabs in the farmlands surrounding Sidi Bouzid."[3] Subsequently, protestors assembled outside the town's police station, where the security forces responded by shooting at them; the Tunisian regime attempted to censor coverage of the protests in the town, but that effort failed, in large part because updates on what was happening were disseminated via social

[2] Cesare Merlini and Olivier Roy, eds., *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), vii.
[3] Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, Kindle Edition, vol. 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 75.

media.[4] The protests in Tunisia swelled and spread to cities across the country. By mid-January, over 10,000 protestors had taken to the streets of the country's capital, Tunis.[5] On January 14, 2011, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia after 23 years in power. In a statement released by the White House, President Obama applauded the "courage and dignity of the Tunisian people" in what he called their "brave and determined struggle for the universal rights that we must all uphold."[6]

In the aftermath of Ben Ali's ouster, large-scale protests erupted in Egypt on January 25, 2011. In Egypt, the protests were launched on the initiative of the "April 6 Youth Movement"—a political movement that had formed in 2008—and the rallies quickly grew as other groups joined them.[7] On Friday January 28, 2011, the protests against Egypt's Hosni Mubarak regime escalated dramatically. Hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets of Cairo and by the end of that day they had managed to take control of Tahrir Square in the heart of the city.[8]

Hosni Mubarak made a televised address to the Egyptian people that same day, during which he stated that his government ministers would resign, while he would remain in office.[9] After that speech, President Obama spoke by telephone with Mubarak. One of

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[4] Lynch, 1st ed.:75–76.
[5] David D. Kirkpatrick, "President of Tunisia Flees, Capitulating to Protesters," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, January 15, 2011, sec. A.
[6] "Statement by the President on Events in Tunisia," whitehouse.gov, January 14, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/14/statement-president-events-tunisia.
[7] David E. Sanger, *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 289.
[8] Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:91.
[9] "Revolution in Cairo - Jan. 28," Frontline, accessed December 28, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/day-to-day/jan-28.html.

the American president's advisers later recounted to David Sanger that the Egyptian leader insisted that "Nasser put down something like this. So can I. Just give me ten days."[10]

On February 1, 2011, Mubarak appeared on Egyptian television once again and proclaimed that, although he would not continue as president after the end of his current term in September 2011, he would stay in office for the time being to ensure a smooth transition.[11] The speech was met with anger among the protestors in Tahrir Square.[12] After Mubarak had spoken, and demonstrated his seeming unwillingness and inability to meet the demands of the protestors, President Obama telephoned the Egyptian leader again. That evening, Jake Sullivan, a senior adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, emailed Clinton with a summary of what President Obama had told Mubarak. Sullivan reported that:

> POTUS [President of the United States] spoke to Mubarak. Was very direct. Mubarak told him he didn't know Egypt; he had taken a big step with his speech; and the protests will die down. POTUS said he saw it a different way.[13]

After speaking to Mubarak directly, President Obama made public remarks. He made clear that he felt the time had come for Mubarak to step aside. As President Obama expressed the point:

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[10] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:292.
[11] Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:95.
[12] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:295.
[13] Email from Jacob Sullivan to Hillary Clinton, Tuesday, February 1, 2011, 6.14pm, Subject: POTUS-Mubarak, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05778506, Release Date: 12/31/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_DecWeb/O-2015-08630-DEC/DOC_0C05778506/C05778506.pdf.

> It is not the role of any other country to determine Egypt's leaders. Only the Egyptian people can do that. What is clear—and what I indicated tonight to President Mubarak—is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now.[14]

On the following day, Mubarak's regime made a concerted attempt to quash the protests in Tahrir Square, but that effort failed.[15] For the next nine days, Mubarak refused to give up power and, as a result, the number of protestors continued to increase. The Egyptian military's leadership eventually made it clear to Mubarak that it would not continue to support him; on February 11, 2011 he yielded power and left Cairo for Sharm el-Sheikh.[16] Another Arab authoritarian ruler had been ousted as a result of people power.

The revolutions in both Tunisia and Egypt included violent efforts by the regimes to quell the protests, but in neither case did the authoritarian leader tenaciously cling to power. Both Ben Ali and Mubarak gave up relatively quickly, not least because in both cases the military declined to defend their autocratic leader staunchly. When President Obama spoke on the day that Mubarak yielded power, he stated—in an echo of Martin Luther King Jr.—that in Egypt it had been the "moral force of nonviolence" that had "bent the arc of history toward justice once more."[17]

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[14] "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Egypt, Grand Foyer of The White House, 6:44 P.M. EST," whitehouse.gov, February 1, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/01/remarks-president-situation-egypt.

[15] Pro-regime assailants rode camels into Tahrir Square and attacked the protestors, leading the incidents to become widely-known as the "Battle of the Camels." Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:96.

[16] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:301–2; Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:98.

[17] "Remarks by the President on Egypt, 3:06 P.M. EST," whitehouse.gov, February 11, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/11/remarks-president-egypt.

On February 17, 2011, major anti-Qaddafi protests broke out in Libya. Significant protests did not begin in Syria until mid-March 2011. We now turn to an examination of how the Obama administration responded to the uprising in Libya.

EXPLAINING AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

Rapid Growth of an Armed Rebellion: February 2011

In Libya, the uprising against Muammar Qaddafi, who had been in power for 42 years, immediately escalated to violent confrontation between the regime and its opponents. The catalyst for the uprising was the arrest of a prominent lawyer and human rights activist in Benghazi on February 15, 2011; in response to that arrest, hundreds of people flocked to a major square in Benghazi, where they rioted and were countered by the security forces' use of tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and water cannons.[18] Political activists announced that February 17, 2011 would be the beginning of a Libyan revolution; they issued a call to action and on February 17 there were significant protests in five cities, notably including both Benghazi and Tripoli, with the demonstrators calling for Qaddafi to leave power.[19]

Qaddafi's security forces, and some of the anti-regime protestors, quickly resorted to violence. Human Rights Watch reported at the time that the death toll from the initial four days of protests, between February 17 and February 20, was already 233 people; the organization also stated that it had serious concerns that the Libyan authorities were

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[18] Robert H. Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars: Air Power in Kosovo and Libya* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2015), 151; Alan J. Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?: Reassessing NATO's Libya Campaign," *International Security* 38, no. 1 (July 6, 2013): 109.
[19] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 151–52.

"using unjustified and unlawful force."[20] Marc Lynch describes the rationale that led Qaddafi to unleash the use of force against his opponents, writing that:

> Qaddafi's rapid turn to violence followed directly and rationally from his reading of the events of the last few weeks. He had no intention of following Ben Ali and Mubarak into prison or exile because of a failure to use the military power at his disposal.[21]

On February 17, in the city of Al Bayda, located to the east of Benghazi, defectors from the police force reportedly began shooting against Qaddafi regime forces.[22] Protestors also attacked police stations in that city.[23] On February 20, protestors set fire to government buildings in Tripoli.[24] That same day, a protestor in Benghazi drove a car filled with propane tanks and explosives into a regime security building in the middle of the city—from which regime forces had been firing at protestors—and a crowd of protestors subsequently stormed the building.[25]

The United States' deputy chief of mission in the American embassy in Tripoli sent an update to the State Department regarding what had occurred during the night of February 20. It reported that:

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[20] Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Governments Should Demand End to Unlawful Killings," February 20, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/20/libya-governments-should-demand-end-unlawful-killings.
[21] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 76.
[22] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?," 109.
[23] Ethan Daniel Chorin, *Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 195.
[24] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?," 109.
[25] Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 1st ed.:196.

> There were anti-regime protests and violent clashes throughout Tripoli during the night, with heavy gunfire ongoing from 10 PM until early this morning. A rumor that Libyan leader Muammar al Qaddafi had fled to Venezuela sparked celebrations throughout the city after midnight, with thousands of Libyans rushing to Green Square; government security forces then reportedly opened fire in Green Square on the gathered civilians. Two Embassy local employees were eyewitnesses to this, and claim they saw at least 9 bodies in the aftermath. Embassy staff have observed several burned police stations throughout the city, as well as the People's Assembly building (parliament-equivalent) on fire. The Italian Embassy reports that the Interior Ministry was also set on fire overnight. In parts of the city, omnipresent billboards of Qaddafi have been torn down. Burned out hulks of police cars are visible on several roads.[26]

On February 21, 2011, Jeffrey Feltman, the United States' Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, summarized the situation in Libya to senior State Department colleagues by writing that Qaddafi "has certainly shifted Libya back to being a rogue state" and that the Libyan leader might "qualify for war criminal status."[27] With the violence and chaos in Libya swelling, numerous Libyan diplomats around the world—including the Libyan ambassador in the United States and the entire Libyan delegation at the United Nations—defected from the Qaddafi regime, sided with the

[26] Email from Huma Abedin to Secretary Clinton, February 21, 2011, 8:02 AM, Subject: Overnight Update from Dcm in Tripoli, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05778494, Release Date: 09/30/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_SeptemberWeb/O-2015-08630-150/DOC_0C05778494/C05778494.pdf.

[27] Email from Jeffrey D Feltman to Jacob J Sullivan, Secretary Clinton, James B Steinberg, Monday, February 21, 2011 1:05 PM, Subject: Re: Libyan Mission Just Announced Plans to Bring Libya before the Security Council, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Email Collection, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05778703, Release Date: 12/31/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_DecWeb/O-2015-08630-DEC/DOC_0C05778703/C05778703.pdf.

opposition, and called for the international community to take action to help resolve the situation.[28]

The opposition quickly organized itself into an armed rebellion. The Qaddafi regime's security forces suffered from large numbers of defections during the opening stages of the uprising and by February 22, 2011 the main military garrison in Benghazi had defected from the regime.[29] Also around this time, Qaddafi's interior minister, Abdul Fattah Yunis, defected to the opposition and he took an elite unit of the Qaddafi regime's special forces with him.[30] The rebellion's political leadership was established in the form of the National Transitional Council (NTC), which was led by Mustafa Abdul Jalil and Mahmoud Jibril, both of whom had served in the Qaddafi regime.[31] The NTC was based in Benghazi, in Libya's east, and that city also provided a major base for the rebels' military forces. In multiple urban areas across Libya, volunteers organized themselves into neighborhood battalions, typically comprising between twenty and 200 fighters.[32]

The various units of the rebellion—dispersed across the country with many organized on a local basis—were united by their shared goal of getting rid of Qaddafi. In the words of Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn, Libya's rebellion was "a revolution disconnected beyond the shared goal of Qaddafi's defeat, resulting in unique political and

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[28] "Libyan Diplomats Defect En Masse," February 22, 2011, *Al Jazeera*, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/02/201122275739377867.html.
[29] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 153.
[30] Frederic Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," in *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, ed. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 107.
[31] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 153–58.
[32] Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 107.

military structures and relationships in every major city and sub-region."[33] As Mary Fitzgerald's account shows, individuals with Islamist and Salafist beliefs who fought in the anti-Qaddafi rebellion tended to join mixed battalions, which included both non-Islamist and Islamist fighters, and Islamists generally acquiesced to the NTC's overall political leadership of the rebellion while pushing for the council to become more ideologically diverse.[34]

Qaddafi made a televised speech on February 22 in which he declared that "I have not yet ordered the use of force, not yet ordered one bullet to be fired," but he added the threat that, "when I do, everything will burn."[35] The Libyan leader referred to his opponents as "greasy rats" and "cockroaches."[36] Qaddafi exclaimed that:

> Libya will become a new Afghanistan, there will be a civil war……I and millions will cleanse Libya inch by inch, abode by abode, house by house, alley by alley, person by person, until you have cleaned the country from filth and contaminants.[37]

The Libyan leader's choice of language was highly concerning; historically, the dehumanization of one's enemies has been a common characteristic in numerous episodes of large-scale violence.[38] By this time, Benghazi and numerous other towns in the east of Libya—the Cyrenaica region—had fallen to the opposition. In Tripoli, pro-Qaddafi militia

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[33] Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn, "Introduction," in *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, ed. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.
[34] Mary Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place: Libya's Islamists During and After the Revolution," in *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, ed. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[35] "Defiant Qaddafi Vows to Fight On," *Al Jazeera*, February 23, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/02/201122216458913596.html.
[36] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 158; "Defiant Qaddafi Vows to Fight On."
[37] Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 1st ed.:202.
[38] For more on that issue, see Miguel Angel Centeno and Elaine Enriquez, *War & Society* (Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2016).

fighters had killed scores of people, including by driving around the streets in pickup trucks and firing upon crowds.[39] The international media reported that the Qaddafi regime had used airplanes and helicopters to attack protestors.[40] A senior diplomat in the United States' embassy in Tripoli, someone who had previously served in Iraq, reported to one of her State Department colleagues that the situation in Libya's capital at this time was "worse than Baghdad in 2004-2005."[41]

On February 23, the president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, became the first NATO leader to call for the alliance to impose a no-fly zone against Libya.[42] The United States suspended its embassy operations in Libya on February 25, 2011. The following day, the United Nations Security Council adopted, by a unanimous vote, Resolution 1970, which deplored "the gross and systematic violation of human rights, including the repression of peaceful demonstrators" in Libya and condemned "incitement to hostility and violence against the civilian population made from the highest level of the Libyan government."[43] The resolution imposed an arms embargo against Libya, referred the situation in the

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[39] Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Qaddafi Orders Brutal Crackdown as Revolt Grows," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, February 23, 2011, sec. A.

[40] "Libya Struggles to Quell Spreading Revolt," CNN, February 22, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/02/21/libya.protests/index.html.

[41] See Email from Janet A Sanderson to Patrick F Kennedy and Kathleen T Austin-Ferguson, Tuesday February 22, 2011, 22:40:17, Subject: Re: Suspending Embassy Ops, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05779263, Release Date: 12/31/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_DecWeb/O-2015-08630-DEC/DOC_0C05779263/C05779263.pdf.

[42] Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour, "Libya No-Fly Zone Call by France Fails to Get David Cameron's Backing," *The Guardian*, February 23, 2011, sec. World news, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/23/libya-nofly-zone-david-cameron.

[43] United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1970 (2011), February 26, 2011, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1970%20%282011%29.

country to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and froze the assets of designated Libyan officials. Two days later, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that "Qaddafi's brutal attacks on his own people are unacceptable and will not be tolerated" and that the Libyan leader had "lost the legitimacy to govern and it is time for him to go without further violence or delay."[44]

Also in late February, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair—who while he was in office had presided over a significant improvement in the United Kingdom's relationship with Libya—urged the Libyan leader that it was time to step down. As a summary of a February 25, 2011 phone call between Blair and Qaddafi—which was sent by Tony Blair's office to Jake Sullivan, a senior aide to Secretary Clinton—indicated, Qaddafi told Blair that there was "no violence on the streets" and claimed that the situation was "an attempt to re-colonise Libya."[45] Tony Blair spoke with one of Qaddafi's senior aides on March 1. Blair reported to Secretary Clinton that Qaddafi's aide had "balked" at the idea of Qaddafi stepping aside and Blair commented that "I fear they're dug in."[46]

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[44] Press Release, February 28, 2011, U.S. Department of State Office of the Spokesman, Remarks by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to the Press, Palais Des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, https://geneva.usmission.gov/2011/02/28/secretary-of-state/.

[45] Email from Catherine Rimmer to Jake Sullivan, 25 February 2011 16:57, Subject: URGENT - PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05779843, Release Date: 09/30/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_SeptemberWeb/O-2015-08630-152/DOC_0C05779843/C05779843.pdf.

[46] Email from Tony Blair [Aclb] to Secretary Clinton, Jake Sullivan, Tuesday, March 01, 2011 02:25 PM, Subject: Re Libya, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439 Doc No. C05785341, Release Date: 10/30/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_OctWeb/212/DOC_0C05785341/C05785341.pdf.

On March 3, President Obama condemned the "active urging of violence against unarmed citizens by Qaddafi" and stated that "Qaddafi needs to step down from power and leave."[47] By this time, the anti-Qaddafi rebels were in control of Benghazi—Libya's second city—as well as other cities in the east of the country; opposition forces also held the port of Misrata—between Tripoli and Sirte—and the city of Zawiyah, to Tripoli's west.[48] The peak of the rebellion's fortunes, before the outside air campaign commenced, was March 5, at which time the opposition held "at least half of the country's populated areas."[49] From then onwards, Qaddafi's forces successfully clawed back various cities that had been captured by the opposition.[50] As it proceeded with its counteroffensive, the regime attacked urban areas using aircraft, helicopters, and mortars.[51]

The real prize for Qaddafi's forces was the city of Benghazi, where the NTC was headquartered. On March 10, 2011, the chairman of the NTC, Mustafa Jalil, said in a media interview that the council wanted to see elections in Libya, stating that "as soon as the regime falls, we will have six or seven months to call elections."[52] However, by that time, the opposition were clearly on the back foot and regime forces were making steady progress towards Benghazi. On March 12, the Arab League publicly called for the United

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[47] "Remarks by President Obama and President Calderón of Mexico at Joint Press Conference," March 3, 2011, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/03/remarks-president-obama-and-president-calder-n-mexico-joint-press-confer.
[48] Christopher S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31.
[49] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?," 117.
[50] Kuperman, 112.
[51] Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 1st ed.:206.
[52] Christopher M. Blanchard, "Libya: Unrest and U.S. Policy" (Congressional Research Service, March 29, 2011), 25, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc33051/m1/1/high_res_d/RL33142_2011Mar29.pdf.

Nations to impose a no-fly zone in order to counter, in the words of the Arab League's secretary general, "any military action against the Libyan people."[53] As armored units of the Qaddafi regime bore down on Benghazi, which was home to 700,000 people, senior officials in the Obama administration confronted the decision of whether, and if so how, to intervene to stop Qaddafi attacking the city.

Presidential Assessment of U.S. Interests

President Obama's assessment of the United States' interests in Libya have to be viewed within the context of his beliefs about the United States' strategic interests in the Middle East more broadly. From the beginning of his presidency, President Obama held the view that the United States had—in recent years—suffered from a "preoccupation" with the greater Middle East, in terms of both resources and time, to the detriment of other regions of the world, notably including the Asia-Pacific.[54] President Obama did not dismiss the idea that the United States continued to have significant interests in the Middle East, but he did believe that the United States had to do a better job of appropriately calibrating its involvement in the region.

The Obama administration's first National Security Strategy, issued in May 2010, pointedly stated that the United States' ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan "cannot define America's engagement with the world."[55] The same National Security Strategy enumerated what the Obama administration saw as the nation's most important interests in

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[53] "Arab League Calls on U.N. to Impose Libya No-Fly Zone," *Reuters*, March 12, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-arabs/arabs-to-meet-on-libya-no-fly-zone-on-agenda-idUSTRE72B1FI20110312.
[54] Derek H. Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 53–54.
[55] "National Security Strategy" (The White House, May 2010), 8.

the greater Middle East. They included the following: the security of Israel; the achievement of Palestinian statehood; the security and stability of Iraq; addressing Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and its destabilizing activities in the region; non-proliferation; countering terrorism; and access to energy resources.[56]

When the revolutionary wave began cascading across the Arab world, few in the United States would have argued that Libya was a country in which the United States had major strategic interests at stake. David Sanger notes that by then Libya had no nuclear weapons program, having agreed to give it up 8 years earlier, and its oil exports were not especially large.[57] When President Obama's senior national security team convened for a number of meetings in mid-March 2011 to deliberate what to do about the unfolding crisis in Libya, some of the president's senior advisers emphasized the lack of strategic stakes. As Robert Gates, who was then the secretary of defense, emphasized in his memoirs, "I believed that what was happening in Libya was not a vital national interest of the United States."[58] In addition to Gates, other senior officials, notably Vice President Joe Biden and National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, argued that the United States had insufficient interests at stake to justify intervening in Libya.[59]

On March 15, 2011, President Obama presided over two meetings of the National Security Council. The American intelligence community reported that Qaddafi's ground forces had reached Ajdabiya and it would be a matter of days—at the most—before they

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[56] "National Security Strategy," 24.
[57] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:345.
[58] Robert Michael Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, Kindle Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 511.
[59] Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle over American Power*, First Edition. (New York: Random House, 2016), 173–74.

arrived in Benghazi.[60] France and the United Kingdom were working to get the UN Security Council to pass a resolution authorizing a no-fly zone in Libya.[61] At the second of the NSC meetings on March 15, President Obama articulated what he saw as the broader interests at stake for the United States as a result of what was happening in Libya and because of the positions that major American allies and partners—the UK, France, and the Arab League—had already adopted. As David Sanger recounts, based on his interviews with participants in the meeting and, he says, some of their notes of the meeting, President Obama told his senior officials that:

> If we don't act, if we put brakes on this thing [the mounting calls for international action against Qaddafi], it will have consequences for US credibility and leadership, consequences for the Arab Spring, and consequences for the international community.[62]

President Obama saw the credibility of the United States' global leadership at stake. He also saw that his decision would have consequences for the trajectory of the "Arab Spring." At this point in time there were reasons to be hopeful about the direction in which the region was moving, following the changes of political leadership in Tunisia and Egypt. If the region genuinely moved in a more democratic direction, that could have been beneficial for U.S. interests. However, if Qaddafi was allowed to repress Libya's uprising with large-scale violence, that would have significantly set back any chance of peaceful changes in other places in the region as authoritarian leaders received the message that there would be few consequences for taking such actions.

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[60] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:343; Ben Rhodes, *The World as It Is*, Kindle Edition (Penguin Random House, 2018), 112.
[61] Valentina Pop, "Britain and France Push for Libya No-Fly Zone," *EU Observer*, March 8, 2011, https://euobserver.com/news/31940.
[62] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:345.

Despite seeing these interests on the line in Libya, President Obama did not view the United States as having huge strategic interests at stake, however. As Obama later told journalist Jeffrey Goldberg regarding his decision-making towards Libya in mid-March 2011:

> Option one would be to do nothing, and there were some in my administration who said, as tragic as the Libyan situation may be, it's not our problem. The way I looked at it was that it would be our problem if, in fact, complete chaos and civil war broke out in Libya. But this is not so at the core of U.S. interests that it makes sense for us to unilaterally strike against the Qaddafi regime.[63]

President Obama assessed that the United States had moderate, rather than vital, interests at stake as a result of the Libyan crisis. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war emphasizes, therefore, any military options Obama was going to consider would be limited ones rather than large-scale American intervention. President Obama had, of course, campaigned for the presidency with a pledge to "end the war in Iraq responsibly."[64] He was not about to embark on another large-scale war in the Middle East unless he felt that vital American interests were at stake and Libya did not meet that criterion.

Additionally, during the policy deliberations over Libya in March 2011, some of Obama's advisers argued forcefully that the United States had a moral obligation to prevent Qaddafi from unleashing indiscriminate violence. Most prominently, Samantha Power, who was then serving on the NSC staff and who had previously authored a book about the United States' historical failures to prevent genocide, argued the moral case for protecting

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[63] Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
[64] Barack Obama: 'Remarks in Washington, DC,' July 15, 2008. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, accessed May 26, 2018, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77643.

the people of Benghazi.[65] Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes also advocated American intervention in order to avert large-scale killing by Qaddafi's forces.[66]

In his comments to his advisers on March 15, 2011, President Obama made clear that his decision-making regarding Libya would not be driven solely by a cold-hearted consideration of interests. He told his national security team that day that "we can't play the role of a Russia or a China" and allow large-scale loss of life to occur in Benghazi if the United States had the means to stop it through a limited military action. As Obama put it to his team, "that's just not who we are."[67] When talking to Jeffrey Goldberg in 2016 about his foreign policy approach, President Obama put the matter as follows:

> For all of our warts, the United States has clearly been a force for good in the world. If you compare us to previous superpowers, we act less on the basis of naked self-interest, and have been interested in establishing norms that benefit everyone. If it is possible to do good at a bearable cost, to save lives, we will do it.[68]

In grappling with what to do about Libya, President Obama considered the United States' interests and its ideals to be at stake.

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[65] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 173.
[66] Gates, *Duty*, 511.
[67] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:345.
[68] Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," April 2016.

Presidential Assessment: Would Support for the Anti-Qaddafi rebels be (1) Likely to Promote American Interests? And (2) Would it be Defensible in terms of Liberal-democratic Ideals?

The decision President Obama confronted in mid-March 2011 was whether to intervene in Libya in order to avert an imminent large-scale attack against the city of Benghazi. The commander-in-chief's immediate decision was whether to act in order to prevent a potential humanitarian outrage. Undertaking a military intervention to accomplish that would require striking against the Qaddafi regime, which would have the effect of impairing the regime's military capabilities. Degrading the regime's military capabilities would serve to benefit the anti-Qaddafi rebels; therefore, President Obama's decision also amounted to deciding whether or not the United States should bolster the rebellion's prospects.

While deliberating over what to do, Barack Obama was keenly focused on what policy option would truly stand a chance of averting the imminent threat to Benghazi. In the first of the two NSC meetings held on March 15, 2011, President Obama's advisers presented him with proposals for a no-fly zone over Libya, which was the option that France, the United Kingdom, and the Arab League had been advocating. President Obama was unhappy to learn that a no-fly zone would not actually address the major threat to Benghazi, which was posed by Qaddafi's ground troops and tanks.[69] Derek Chollet, who was a senior member of the NSC staff at the time, later recalled that the president instructed his advisors to reconvene later that evening and told them that "by the time I come back, I

[69] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 97; Gates, *Duty*, 518.

want some real options."[70] When the meeting re-assembled that evening, Obama's advisers presented him with an option that could actually counter the threat to Benghazi—conducting airstrikes against Qaddafi's ground forces.[71] Since those forces had not reached Benghazi yet, they represented targets that could be identified and struck from the air; if they advanced into the city, destroying them would have been a much more difficult military mission to accomplish while limiting civilian casualties.

Air strikes against Qaddafi's ground forces would clearly put the United States, and its allies and partners that participated in the operation, on the side of the anti-Qaddafi rebels. Air strikes would amount to tilting the battlefield against the regime and towards the armed opposition. As noted above, on March 3, President Obama had already stated publicly that Muammar Qaddafi should exit power. In addition to removing the immediate threat to Benghazi, if President Obama authorized an air campaign against Qaddafi's ground forces, it would potentially give the rebels a serious chance of defeating Qaddafi's regime, the military strength of which was far from impressive. Prior to the uprising, Libya's army was estimated to be around 50,000-strong, of whom half were conscripts, augmented by another 40,000 fighters in militia forces.[72] However, Christopher Chivvis, a RAND Corporation scholar, estimates that only 10,000-12,000 troops remained loyal to Qaddafi at the time of the uprising.[73]

Admittedly, the rebels who had embarked on armed opposition to the Qaddafi regime were weaker still. Rebel forces comprised defectors from the Qaddafi regime's

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[70] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 97–98.
[71] Chollet, 98.
[72] *The Military Balance 2010*, vol. 110 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2010), 262.
[73] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 108.

military, as well as civilians who had taken up arms. The rebels had acquired weaponry by seizing it from regime depots at the beginning of the revolution, or benefitting from the weapons that regime defectors brought with them. Even so, in general, many of the small arms that the rebels possessed were in poor condition and although the rebels had several T-55 tanks, Qaddafi had more advanced T-72s.[74] To provide mobility, the rebels turned to "technicals", which were pickup trucks on which they mounted machine guns.[75]

Although they were outmatched by the Qaddafi regime, the rebels had shown themselves able to capture a number of towns, prior to the regime's counter-offensive. If the United States and its allies intervened by attacking Qaddafi's ground forces, it was plausible that doing so might shift the balance of power within Libya sufficiently to give the rebels a chance of winning. That was especially the case because the Qaddafi regime did not have any major power patrons. Qaddafi also lacked regional supporters—as a former State Department official from the Obama administration emphasized to this author in 2016:

> Virtually all of the Arab League hated Qaddafi, especially since he had tried to overthrow a number of them in the past. He had some support from within the African Union—about half of the AU liked him, mainly because of the aid he had doled out to them.[76]

The Libyan regime was unlikely to get significant material support from any powerful external parties that might help it to mitigate an adverse change in the military balance in the event that the United States and its allies used air power against the regime.

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[74] Chivvis, 106.
[75] Chivvis, 106.
[76] Author interview with former Obama Administration State Department Official, Fall 2016.

Thus, in mid-March 2011, there were good reasons for President Obama to think that the revised option his advisers put before him—not just a no-fly zone, but air strikes against Qaddafi's ground forces—could both lift the immediate threat to Benghazi and give the rebels a chance to remove Qaddafi from power themselves.

As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the other issue that lay at the center of the Obama administration's policy deliberations was whether siding with the rebels was defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. On one side of the conflict, the Qaddafi regime's behavior had clearly violated liberal-democratic norms. Not only had Muammar Qaddafi presided over a highly-repressive political system for four decades, but the threat that his forces would attack Benghazi and kill large numbers of people gave strong reasons, in terms of liberal-democratic ideals, for a move to side with the rebels. The other part of the equation, of course, was whether the rebels themselves were appropriate partners for the United States. The most direct and high-level attempt to assess the character of the rebels was a meeting between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Mahmoud Jibril, the number two leader in the National Transitional Council (NTC), on March 14, 2011 in Paris. Jake Sullivan, a senior adviser to Clinton, described the meeting to this author as an opportunity for the secretary of state to assess whether the NTC "passed some basic threshold of viability as an opposition force." As Sullivan emphasized, "if Secretary Clinton had found that Jibril was not a credible partner, that would have been a real constraining factor on American action in Libya."[77] Mahmoud Jibril later recounted to a journalist that the meeting was "more of an investigation than a dialogue." He added that Clinton's questions for him included: "Who are you guys? What kind of objectives do you

[77] Jake Sullivan, Interview with Author, January 9, 2018.

have?" and "Are you capable of running the country?"[78] In her memoir, Hillary Clinton recounted that she "found Jibril to be impressive and polished, especially for the representative of a rebel council on the verge of annihilation."[79] She added the following about her assessment:

> If the United States agreed to intervene in Libya, we would be making a big bet on this political scientist and his colleagues. Over four decades Qaddafi had systematically removed anyone who might pose a threat to his rule and pulverized Libya's institutions and political culture. So we were unlikely to find a perfect George Washington waiting in the wings. All things considered, Jibril and those he represented might well be the best we could hope for.[80]

Philip Gordon, who was then the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, later recounted that during this period the Libyan opposition "said all the right things about supporting democracy and inclusivity and building Libyan institutions, providing some hope that we might be able to pull this off."[81] After military intervention had begun, at the end of March 2011, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates gave testimony to Congress about the operation. Gates, of course, had opposed intervention in the internal administration debates, but he publicly defended the administration's actions. In that testimony, Gates made a telling statement about the Libyan opposition. He acknowledged that information about the true character of the Libyan rebels was murky, but he emphasized that "we know a lot about Qaddafi and that is reason enough to help them."[82]

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[78] Kevin Sullivan, "Tough Call on Libya Still Looms Over Clinton," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2016.
[79] Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 1st Paperback Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 301.
[80] Clinton, 302.
[81] Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/hillary-clinton-libya.html.
[82] Gates, 521.

The decision to side with the rebels could be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals not because the Obama administration had very high certainty that the rebels would be able to establish a functioning liberal democracy, but instead because Qaddafi had violated liberal ideals so egregiously that seeing whether an alternative could be better was worth trying.

After she had met with Mahmoud Jibril in Paris, Secretary Clinton told the White House that "there was a reasonable chance the rebels would turn out to be credible partners." Secretary Clinton also relayed that France and Britain were willing to take the lead in any military action against Libya, while the Arab League would offer its support.[83] Clinton recommended that the United States take military action.[84]

Presidential Decision and Policy Objectives

By the time of the second NSC meeting on March 15, 2011, there remained divisions among the senior members of Barack Obama's national security team about whether or not to intervene militarily to halt the advance of Qaddafi's forces towards Benghazi. Vice President Biden, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen, and National Security Advisor Tom Donilon remained opposed to intervention. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, and NSC staff members Samantha Power and Ben Rhodes all argued for intervention.[85]

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[83] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 302.
[84] Gates, *Duty*, 511.
[85] Gates, 518.

President Obama decided that the United States had to intervene. Robert Gates later described why the president took that course of action, writing that "the president said it was a close call, but we couldn't stand idly by in the face of a potential humanitarian disaster."[86] The fact that France, the United Kingdom, and the Arab League were calling for action also informed President Obama's willingness to act, including because it made a decision to intervene more defensible in terms of American ideals since the United States would be working alongside others including key partners in the Arab world. Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security advisor, later commented that "the president would never have done this thing on our own."[87]

At the same time, as senior White House official Derek Chollet later wrote, "despite his sense of urgency, Obama did not believe that Libya was a vital national interest."[88] Consequently, he opted for a limited mode of American military intervention. Obama decided that the United States would not deploy ground forces during the intervention and its role would be to provide only its "unique capabilities" to the coalition action to protect civilians from Qaddafi's forces. President Obama instructed that the United States would play a big role at the outset of the conflict, notably including by destroying Libya's air defense assets, but then would allow its European and Arab partners to lead the ongoing military mission while the United States would contribute specific capabilities in which its allies were lacking.[89]

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[86] Gates, 518.
[87] Becker and Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall."
[88] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 99.
[89] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 65.

President Obama instructed the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, to work to achieve a Security Council Resolution that would authorize a broader mission than simply a no-fly zone. Rice succeeded in getting the Security Council to approve Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011. The resolution authorized UN member states to "take all necessary measures" to "protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory."[90] The resolution passed by 10 votes to zero, while Russia, China, Germany, India, and Brazil all abstained.

In public remarks the next day, President Obama explained why the situation in Libya mattered to the United States, stressing that both the United States' interests and its values were at stake. As the president explained:

> Left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people. Many thousands could die. A humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilized, endangering many of our allies and partners. The calls of the Libyan people for help would go unanswered. The democratic values that we stand for would be overrun. Moreover, the words of the international community would be rendered hollow.[91]

[90] United Nations, Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011), March 17, 2011, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%20%282011%29.
[91] "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya," March 18, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/18/remarks-president-situation-libya.

Obama also stressed that, as specified in UNSCR 1973, there were certain actions that Qaddafi could take to avoid military action against him. He would have to undertake an immediate cease-fire, stop all attacks against civilians, stop the advance on Benghazi, withdraw troops from other populated areas, and allow critical supplies to all areas in Libya.[92]

Qaddafi failed to meet those conditions. The advance of his forces towards Benghazi continued. The United States launched air strikes, along with NATO allies and Arab partners, on March 19, 2011. The first strikes were conducted by French aircraft against several armored vehicles that were approaching Benghazi.[93] Those French strikes took place before the coalition had conducted operations against Libya's air defense network. Shortly afterwards, the targeting of Qaddafi's air defenses commenced. Over the next six days, the United States and its partners destroyed Libya's air defenses and regime ground units, including tanks and artillery, that were posing the most immediate threat to the city of Benghazi. Among the military assets that the United States used to nullify the threat from Libya's air defenses were sea-launched Tomahawk missiles, B-1 bombers, and B-2 bombers. American F-15s, F-16s, and Harrier jets were among those that launched strikes against the Qaddafi regime's ground units.[94] One fighter for the Qaddafi regime later told a journalist that his unit was about four miles from Benghazi when they came under fire from coalition airstrikes; he recalled how he saw a strike against a nearby vehicle that was transporting artillery and said that "we never heard it or

[92] "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya."
[93] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 79.
[94] Chivvis, 81–84; Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 176–78 & 181.

saw it. The men just blew up."[95] Once coalition airpower had entered the fray, Qaddafi regime forces had no chance of massing in sufficient numbers to capture Benghazi.[96]

The United States commanded the opening stage of the coalition's military campaign and the codename assigned to that operation was "Odyssey Dawn." On March 31, 2011, consistent with President Obama's decision to share the military burden with allies and partners, NATO took command of air operations over Libya in a mission that was named "Unified Protector."[97] During the opening salvo against Libya—until March 31, 2011—the coalition had flown 952 strike sorties, of which 436 were flown by the United States.[98] Libya's location enabled coalition airplanes to ingress from European bases, without having to fly over third countries, and the flat and open landscape of northern Libya facilitated the targeting of regime forces, at least while they were outside of urban areas.[99] The United States continued to participate in Unified Protector, but its role would be to provide its "unique capabilities" in support of the operation.

On March 28, 2011, at the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington D.C., President Obama delivered remarks on the operations so far. The president stressed that he had decided upon American military intervention because "when our interests and

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[95] Peter Gwin, "Former Qaddafi Mercenaries Describe Fighting in Libyan War," *The Atlantic*, August 31, 2011, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/08/former-qaddafi-mercenaries-describe-fighting-in-libyan-war/244356/.
[96] Karl P. Mueller, "Victory Through (Not By) Airpower," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, ed. Karl P. Mueller (RAND Corporation, 2015), 375.
[97] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 182.
[98] Gregory, 182.
[99] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 79.

values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act."[100] The president justified his decision to act by emphasizing several characteristics of the situation, including the fact that it was possible to design a military operation that limited the United States' direct military commitment. As Obama stated:

> In this particular country—Libya—at this particular moment, we were faced with the prospect of violence on a horrific scale. We had a unique ability to stop that violence: an international mandate for action, a broad coalition prepared to join us, the support of Arab countries, and a plea for help from the Libyan people themselves. We also had the ability to stop Qaddafi's forces in their tracks without putting American troops on the ground. To brush aside America's responsibility as a leader and—more profoundly—our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are……Moreover, America has an important strategic interest in preventing Qaddafi from overrunning those who oppose him. A massacre would have driven thousands of additional refugees across Libya's borders, putting enormous strains on the peaceful—yet fragile—transitions in Egypt and Tunisia. The democratic impulses that are dawning across the region would be eclipsed by the darkest form of dictatorship, as repressive leaders concluded that violence is the best strategy to cling to power.[101]

Obama emphasized that the military mission had been, and would continue to be, to save civilian lives and stated that "broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake." At the same time, President Obama underscored that the United States' fundamental political objective remained Qaddafi's departure from power and a transition to a new political system. As Obama made clear:

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[100] "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya," March 28, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-address-nation-libya.

[101] "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya."

> We will deny the regime arms, cut off its supplies of cash, assist the opposition, and work with other nations to hasten the day when Qaddafi leaves power. It may not happen overnight, as a badly weakened Qaddafi tries desperately to hang on to power. But it should be clear to those around Qaddafi, and to every Libyan, that history is not on Qaddafi's side. With the time and space that we have provided for the Libyan people, they will be able to determine their own destiny, and that is how it should be.[102]

The military mission was to save lives. The United States' broader political objective—Qaddafi's exit from power—was informed by a view within the United States' government that Qaddafi was the biggest threat to civilians in the country and that the threat would remain until he had yielded political power.

In short, the United States and its allies and partners would keep the pressure on the Qaddafi regime. They would continue to intervene in order to tilt the military balance away from the regime so that the Libyan opposition could take the lead in achieving Qaddafi's exit from power and establishing a new political system in the country. On March 22, 2011, the NTC had released a statement that expressed its intention to work for goals that were consistent with liberal-democratic ideals, explaining that it was committed to building "a constitutional democratic civil state based on the rule of law, respect for human rights and the guarantee of equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens including full political participations by all citizens and equal opportunities between men and women and the promotion of women empowerment [sic]."[103] The day after President Obama's remarks at NDU, the Libyan opposition published a document containing its high-level aspirations for a new Libya. The document emphasized the NTC's commitment to establishing a "free and democratic society" that would uphold the "supremacy of international humanitarian

[102] "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya."
[103] Blanchard, "Libya: Unrest and U.S. Policy," 25–26.

law and human rights declarations" and that would be achieved through "dialogue, tolerance, co-operation, national cohesiveness and the active participation of all citizens."[104]

Over the next 7 months, until Unified Protector ended on October 31, 2011, the United States, along with the rest of the coalition, tilted the battlefield towards the rebels. An analysis of how that happened is provided below. Before we examine that issue, however, we consider the degree of consensus in Congress regarding President Obama's decision to side with the opposition and what it meant for the durability of that support.

Degree of Consensus in Congress regarding President Obama's Decision to Intervene in Libya

On March 1, 2011, the Senate had unanimously passed a resolution that urged the UN Security Council to take action to protect civilians in Libya, including imposing a no-fly zone. The Senate resolution also applauded "the courage of the Libyan people in standing up against the brutal dictatorship of Muammar Gadhafi and for demanding democratic reforms, transparent governance, and respect for basic human and civil rights." It welcomed "the outreach that has begun by the United States Government to Libyan opposition figures" and supported "an orderly, irreversible transition to a legitimate democratic government in Libya."[105] On March 18, 2011, the day after the United Nations Security Council had passed Resolution 1973, President Obama informed congressional

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[104] The Interim National Council, "A Vision of a Democratic Libya," *The Guardian*, March 29, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/29/vision-democratic-libya-interim-national-council.
[105] Senate Resolution 85 (S.Res.85), March 1, 2011, 112th Congress, 1st Session, https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/senate-resolution/85/text.

leaders of his decisions, including that the United States would only contribute "unique capabilities." As Robert Gates recounts in his memoirs, "there was no real disagreement" expressed by the members of the legislature.[106] Nevertheless, on March 23, Speaker of the House of Representatives John Boehner sent a letter to President Obama expressing the view that he and "many other members of the House of Representatives" felt more clarity was needed regarding the mission in Libya.[107]

As the air war over Libya dragged on into the summer of 2011—when, as we shall see below, the rebels and the Qaddafi regime were locked in a stalemate—the Obama administration faced mounting criticism in Congress about U.S. involvement. Critics of the administration's action cast doubt on whether U.S. interests in Libya were sufficient to merit continued involvement and also argued that the administration should have obtained congressional approval for intervention since the War Powers Resolution requires the president to obtain such authorization if military action continues for more than 60 days. In early June 2011, shortly after the House of Representatives approved a resolution criticizing the administration for not attaining congressional approval for action in Libya, Senator Richard Lugar wrote in the pages of *The Washington Post* that the administration had shown a "disdain for Congress and constitutional principles." Lugar also expressed doubts that U.S. interests were at stake in Libya, writing that "because the president has not made his case to Congress, the American people have no clear understanding of the

[106] Gates, *Duty*, 519.
[107] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 91.

U.S. interests at stake in Libya, how much this will cost and what other priorities will have to be sacrificed."[108]

Several weeks later, on June 24, 2011, the House of Representatives took two further votes related to the United States' involvement in Libya. The House voted 295-to-123 against a resolution to authorize American military operations in Libya. At the same time, however, the House also voted by 238-to-180 against a measure to prohibit funding for direct U.S. combat actions in Libya.[109] The House of Representatives, in short, sent a very mixed message: it had failed to pass a resolution authorizing the war, while it also failed to prohibit funding for combat operations. The votes reflected several major concerns among some in Congress. Some judged that the United States lacked a compelling strategic interest in Libya. Others were concerned that the military operations had lasted longer than originally expected and were seeming to drag on in an open-ended way. Other members of Congress were concerned about what they regarded as a matter of constitutional principle in that they believed the president should accept the requirements of the War Powers Resolution. Derek Chollet later explained the administration's approach towards congressional authorization as follows:

> Obama had justified US involvement on an unusual, and controversial, legal theory that such a limited, "unique capabilities" operation was not the kind of "hostilities" that required congressional approval. Since we had (wrongly) assumed that the bulk of the US military role would be over in just weeks, we did not seek an explicit authorization from Congress.[110]

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[108] Richard G. Lugar, "The Obama Administration's Dangerous Course on Libya," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2011, sec. Opinions, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-obama-administrations-dangerous-course-on-libya/2011/06/03/AGDD3mJH_story.html.
[109] Jennifer Steinhauer, "House Rebuffs Libya Mission; No Funds Cut," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, June 25, 2011, sec. A.
[110] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 105.

The stalemate on the ground in Libya at this time—June 2011—reflected the military weaknesses with which the rebels had begun the campaign and some of the deficiencies they continued to exhibit. With the conflict dragging on, congressional criticisms began to mount. The congressional votes in the summer of 2011 are a good example of how, when some members of the policy elite have doubts about whether intervention in a civil war is consistent with American interests and values, there is scope within the United States' liberal-democratic system for efforts to restrict such interventions. In this case, however, there remained enough members of the legislature who deemed American involvement in Libya to be defensible in terms of both American interests and ideals to block attempts to restrict funding for military operations.

The disquiet in Congress during the summer of 2011 showed that American involvement—which was benefitting the anti-Qaddafi rebels—was potentially brittle. Had the war dragged on considerably longer, the opposition in Congress might have increased further and impactful restrictions on American involvement might have been introduced. As it happened, within two months, the Libyan rebels would take Tripoli. Despite the rebels' military weaknesses, the Qaddafi regime was also a weak military force and had no external patron to help counter the shift in military power that had been effected by the coalition air campaign.

We now turn to an analysis of how the military campaign progressed and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the United States' decision to side with the rebels. We will see both why the war was at a stalemate in the summer of 2011—the rebels were trying to overcome a significant initial military disadvantage relative to the regime—as well as

how the imbalance in outside support to the rebels, compared with no major support to the regime, meant that Qaddafi's days were numbered.

THE NATURE OF AMERICAN MILITARY AID TO THE ANTI-QADDAFI REBELS AND AN EVALUATION OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Helping the Libyan Rebels to Achieve Qaddafi's Removal

Following the beginning of the air campaign, with Qaddafi's ground forces under attack from above, rebel fighters from Benghazi managed to make a swift advance to the west, with some advancing all the way to Sirte, Qaddafi's hometown, located more than 300 miles from Benghazi; nevertheless, as Chivvis writes, the opposition's "breakout had been short lived, and in the first weeks of NATO operations the rebels were forced back to Ajdabiya," located only 100 miles to the west of Benghazi.[111] During the three weeks after NATO assumed command of the air operations, the alliance conducted over 1,300 strike sorties and these were aimed both at Qaddafi's ground units that were threatening opposition-controlled towns, as well as against command-and-control assets and the regime's logistics infrastructure.[112] In spite of the air bombardment that Qaddafi's military was suffering, the rebels displayed significant weaknesses in taking and holding territory in the early part of the war. Many rebel fighters lacked military training, notably in small unit tactics. Thus, after coalition warplanes helped to clear a path of advance for rebel units, they would often retreat again once Qaddafi's forces counter-attacked.[113]

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[111] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 101.
[112] Chivvis, 103–4.
[113] Chivvis, 106–7.

As noted above, the rebels also began the conflict at a marked disadvantage in the weaponry they could field. Some in the United States argued for providing arms to the rebels. Only days after the onset of the air campaign, Senator John McCain suggested taking that step in order to "get the momentum reversed back in the other direction."[114] In early April 2011, former President Bill Clinton stated publicly that he "would be inclined to" arm the rebels and said that he "sure wouldn't shut the door to it."[115] Others cautioned that the United States did not know enough about the character of the rebel forces. Representative Mike Rogers, the Republican chairman of the House intelligence committee, cautioned that "it's safe to say what the rebels stand against, but we are a long way from an understanding of what they stand for."[116]

From the publicly available record at the time of writing, it is unclear whether the United States ever actually furnished arms to the rebels. It has been reported that President Obama signed a covert action finding sometime in the summer of 2011 to authorize the CIA to arm the anti-Qaddafi opposition.[117] Some American partners in the military operation, notably including Qatar, did furnish weapons to the rebels.[118]

Whether or not the United States actually provided arms to the rebels, the U.S. and its partners clearly intervened on the side of the opposition through their sustained airstrikes against the Qaddafi regime. The rebels benefitted from what served, in effect, as air support

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[114] "McCain: I Hope U.S., Others Arm Libyan Rebels," CBS News, March 22, 2011, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mccain-i-hope-us-others-arm-libyan-rebels/.
[115] Jennifer Epstein, "Clinton: Consider Arming Rebels," *Politico*, April 4, 2011, https://www.politico.com/news/stories/0411/52466.html.
[116] Susan Cornwell, "Clinton Says No Decision on Arming Libyan Rebels," *Reuters*, March 30, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-usa-arms/clinton-says-no-decision-on-arming-libyan-rebels-idUSTRE72T5KM20110331.
[117] Becker and Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall."
[118] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 108.

from coalition warplanes. It took some time to ensure that those air operations were operating smoothly and that the alliance could reliably differentiate Qaddafi's forces from those of the opposition. On April 8 2011, NATO airstrikes inadvertently hit a column of around twenty tanks that the rebels had captured from the regime and were putting to their own use.[119] This incident—and the broader issue of coordination it raised—received high-level attention within the U.S. government. In an April 8, 2011 email to various colleagues, the State Department's Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, indicated that Secretary Clinton had already raised with him the issue of coordination between NATO and the NTC. As he wrote, Secretary Clinton had "expressed deep frustration that there doesn't seem to be an existing, working mechanism for communication between the TNC and NATO (thus leading to mistakes such as attacks on TNC tanks)" and, Feltman reported, "she asked us to find a way to fix this, now."[120] One option that State Department officials discussed, and that had already been advocated by France and the United Kingdom, was the idea of establishing a "NATO liaison cell" in the headquarters of the NTC in order to improve coordination.[121] One issue related to such a step, however, was the implication it would carry that NATO was recognizing the NTC. However, as Feltman assessed the matter to his colleagues:

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[119] Gregory, 184.

[120] Email from Jeffrey D Feltman to Various Recipients, Friday April 08, 2011, 19:53:58, Subject: Benghazi and NATO, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05780518, Release Date: 02/29/2016, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_Feb29thWeb/O-2015-08631HCE_FEB29/DOC_0C05780518/C05780518.pdf.

[121] Email from Joan A Polaschik to Various Recipients, Friday, April 08, 2011 12:36 PM, Subject: Stevens Update - April 8 at 1200, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05780518, Release Date: 02/29/2016, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_Feb29thWeb/O-2015-08631HCE_FEB29/DOC_0C05780518/C05780518.pdf.

> Without question, having a NATO liaison in Benghazi would have the appearance of NATO leaning in the direction of the TNC. But NATO's operations already show a considerable lean away from Qaddafi.[122]

NATO as an institution did not establish a liaison office with the anti-Qaddafi rebels.[123] Instead, particular member states undertook that role. On April 19, 2011, the British foreign secretary, William Hague, announced that the United Kingdom would send a "military liaison advisory team" to the NTC. His statement reported that the move was consistent with UNSCR 1973 because "our officers will not be involved in training or arming the opposition's fighting forces, nor will they be involved in the planning or execution of the NTC's military operations or in the provision of any other form of operational military advice."[124] Notwithstanding that, the UK's Ministry of Defence reported that the team sent to Benghazi would comprise "experienced British military officers" who would "advise the NTC on how to improve their military organisational structures, communications and logistics."[125] Shortly after the UK's announcement, France and Italy also announced that they would send "liaison officers" to help the Libyan rebels improve their organization and communications abilities.[126]

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[122] Email from Jeffrey D Feltman to Various Recipients, Friday, April 08, 2011 3:08 PM, Subject: RE: Benghazi and NATO, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05780518, Release Date: 02/29/2016, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_Feb29thWeb/O-2015-08631HCE_FEB29/DOC_0C05780518/C05780518.pdf.
[123] Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 111.
[124] "UK Military Liaison Advisory Team to Be Sent to Libya," U.K. Ministry of Defence, April 19, 2011, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-military-liaison-advisory-team-to-be-sent-to-libya.
[125] "UK Military Liaison Advisory Team to Be Sent to Libya."
[126] Steven Erlanger, "Allied Move Suggests No Quick End in Libya," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, April 21, 2011, sec. A; Adrian Croft, "UK to Send Military Advisers to Libyan Rebels," *Reuters*, April 19, 2011,

As Robert Gregory explains, the Libyan rebels also developed a novel way in which they could share information about the locations of Qaddafi's forces and that could then be used in NATO's targeting processes; rebel forces used Google Earth to obtain coordinates of Qaddafi forces and those coordinates were then disseminated via Twitter, making them available for NATO to use in its targeting.[127] Before NATO acted on information received in ways such as this, it corroborated its accuracy using its own intelligence capabilities.[128]

Although the United States tried to ensure that the military burden was shared with its allies and partners, it turned out that the United States' "unique capabilities" were quite extensive. The United States provided 75 percent of the aerial refueling tankers used in the air campaign as well as 75 percent of the "Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance" (ISR) data used during operations.[129] From April 21, 2011 onwards, the United States also devoted two Predator drones to operations in Libya, which provided a greater ability to target Qaddafi's forces when they were not in open areas.[130] American assets helped the coalition air operations to have a decisive effect on the ground. Additionally, several months after the NATO air campaign began, the United States resupplied several of its NATO allies with precision-guided weapons because they had run low.[131] As Robert Gregory writes about the air operations, "with the conglomeration of aerial sensors and

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https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-libya/uk-to-send-military-advisors-to-benghazi-in-libya-idUSTRE73I2HX20110419.

[127] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 186–92.

[128] Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 115.

[129] Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, "NATO'S Victory in Libya," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (April 3, 2012): 6.

[130] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 121.

[131] Gates, *Duty*, 522.

strike assets, NATO wreaked havoc on every tank, armored personnel carrier, and artillery piece that they could spot from the air."[132]

In mid-May 2011, helped by coalition airstrikes, rebel forces pushed back Qaddafi's forces from areas surrounding Misrata and thereby relieved the city from some of the heavy weapons fire to which it had been subjected by the regime.[133] As Human Rights Watch later wrote regarding the regime's treatment of Misrata and other urban areas during the conflict:

> In the fighting, government forces repeatedly launched indiscriminate attacks with mortars and GRAD rockets into civilian-inhabited areas, especially in Misrata and towns of the western mountains. The coastal city of Misrata suffered a two-month siege with near daily attacks that killed scores of civilians and for a while blocked delivery of humanitarian aid.[134]

Even with air strikes helping the rebels, however, in the summer of 2011 the war appeared to have reached a strategic stalemate. The pattern of territorial control in Libya had not changed significantly over the previous several months. The Qaddafi regime was well-served by its initial advantage in relative military power, not least its more advanced weaponry and the fact that the regime's forces had both greater military training and experience than the opposition.[135] Jeremy Shapiro, who served on the State Department's Policy Planning Staff at the time, later recounted that:

> There was a moment, around about June or July, when the situation on the ground seemed to settle into a stalemate and we weren't sure we were winning, or at least winning quickly enough.[136]

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[132] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 183–84.
[133] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 123.
[134] "World Report 2012: Events of 2011" (Human Rights Watch, 2012), 597, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2012.pdf.
[135] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 109.
[136] Becker and Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall."

The conflict had become a war of attrition, as emphasized by a senior American officer who at the end of May 2011 commented that "we're grinding down the regime."[137] In an effort to shift the battlefield in favor of the rebels, from May onwards the United Kingdom and France committed attack helicopters to the operations and also reportedly bolstered rebel capabilities by providing training and advice through special forces.[138] Christopher Chivvis writes that:

> In June [2011], in a significant increase in its commitment, France airdropped weapons and ammunition along with humanitarian supplies to Misrata and the Nafusah Mountains. French aid included assault rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and Milan antitank missiles.[139]

Even as the coalition was grinding away at the Qaddafi regime's power, it was not the case that the United States was committed to the Libyan leader's violent ouster. The political goal was Qaddafi's departure, whether it was achieved through a political settlement or through a military victory for the armed opposition. In mid-July 2011, the United States formerly recognized the NTC as the "legitimate governing authority for Libya."[140] The United States then made a high-level attempt to broker a political settlement that included Qaddafi's exit from power. Three senior American officials—Jeffrey Feltman, Gene Cretz, and Derek Chollet—met with several of Qaddafi's aides in Tunisia. According to the summary of the meeting sent by Feltman to colleagues in Washington, the U.S. officials told their Libyan counterparts that "Qaddafi's time is finished" and that

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[137] Quoted in Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 124.
[138] Chivvis, 126.
[139] Chivvis, 157.
[140] Andrew Quinn, "Seeking to Free Funds, U.S. Recognizes Libya Rebels," *Reuters*, July 15, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-meeting-usa/u-s-recognizes-rebels-as-libya-legitimate-government-idUSTRE76E2QF20110715.

the purpose of their meeting with the Libyans was to "discuss the modalities of his departure."[141] In response, one of the Libyan officials said that the country had been betrayed by the United States after it had made an agreement—in 2003—to surrender its WMD program, exclaiming that "we gave up our weapons because we thought the U.S. would guarantee our security." The Libyan officials also urged that the United States consider a peace proposal that the African Union (AU) had put forward in April, which called for a ceasefire, to be followed by dialogue among the opposing sides in Libya to establish a transition period. In April, the NTC had rejected the AU's peace proposal immediately because it did not state that Qaddafi, and his sons, would have to yield power.[142] As the U.S. officials reported back to their colleagues in Washington after the July meeting in Tunisia, "it was clear that the Libyan delegation was not ready to accept or discuss the need for Qaddafi to step aside before a ceasefire or at the beginning of a political process."[143] In short, Qaddafi's aides showed no sign that the regime would be willing to acquiesce to a fundamental demand of the Libyan opposition, which was also an American policy objective. As Derek Chollet, one of the American participants in the meeting, later recounted to this author:

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[141] Email from Jeffrey D. Feltman to Various Recipients, July 16, 2011, Subject: Read-out of Meeting, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05784030, Release Date: 12/31/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_DecWeb/O-2015-08632-DEC/DOC_0C05784024/C05784024.pdf.

[142] Kareem Fahim, "Truce Plan For Libya Is Rejected By Rebels," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, April 12, 2011, sec. A.

[143] Email from Jeffrey D. Feltman to Various Recipients, July 16, 2011, Subject: Read-out of Meeting, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05784030, Release Date: 12/31/2015."

> After the July meeting in Tunis, I concluded that those around Qaddafi were not in the psychological place to do a deal. The inability to reach a deal for Qaddafi's departure was not due to misunderstandings or a lack of perception. In diplomacy, there are deals that cannot be done.[144]

With little sign that Qaddafi was willing to yield power, for the United States and its partners to achieve his departure they would need to keep prosecuting the war until the rebels won on the battlefield. The apparent strategic stalemate was dramatically broken in August 2011. On August 15, rebel forces advanced from the Nafusah Mountains, in the west of Libya, towards Tripoli; coalition warplanes intensified their bombing of Tripoli and of regime defenses around the capital.[145] On August 20, rebel forces—spearheaded by the Zintan and Misrata militias—advanced into Tripoli as coalition airstrikes helped to clear the way for them.[146] Frederic Wehrey gives an example of how the coalition used its intelligence picture to help the rebels make advances on the ground; he cites an instance when a rebel commander received a phone call from a representative of the coalition who passed him information about the state of the defenses around Qaddafi's compound.[147] The rebels were able to take that compound on August 23, 2011. Tripoli had fallen.

The remaining regime redoubts were the towns of Bani Walid and Sirte, which stubbornly held out against rebel attempts to seize them.[148] On October 20, Muammar Qaddafi attempted to flee the city of Sirte and the rebel forces that surrounded it.[149] Qaddafi's convoy was attacked by an American Predator drone as well as by French and

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[144] Derek Chollet, Interview with Author, December 7, 2017.
[145] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 160–61.
[146] Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 1st ed.:253.
[147] Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 117.
[148] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 165–67.
[149] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 198.

British warplanes; Qaddafi tried to escape but was captured by rebel fighters and executed.[150] NATO's air campaign, Unified Protector, was officially ended 11 days later on October 31. During the campaign, NATO aircraft flew 9,700 strike sorties; they destroyed 600 tanks and armored personnel carriers as well as more than 400 artillery pieces.[151]

As a result of the coalition's tilting of the battlefield, Qaddafi was gone and the rebels had won. Their victory proved to take longer than many had expected. The military weakness of the rebels, relative to the regime, at the outset of the conflict meant that the war became one of attrition. Yet, the air campaign, over time, tilted the balance of power on the ground in favor of the rebels. As Frederic Wehrey writes, "NATO's extended attrition campaign against Qaddafi's fielded forces allowed for the revolutionaries to close the skill gap with their adversaries."[152] Erica Borghard and Costantino Pischedda emphasize the lack of basic military skills exhibited by the rebels in the early days of the rebellion, notably including numerous instances when they massed in open areas—rendering them "vulnerable to government firepower"—and their failure to establish dug-in defensive positions along the route of the regime's advance towards Benghazi in March.[153] Erica Borghard and Costantino Pischedda correctly conclude that:

> The rebel ground forces' eventual success was made possible by NATO's gradual attrition of Qaddafi's forces from the air. Airpower also contributed to the rebel victory by providing breathing room that permitted rebel skill, armaments, and coordination with NATO to improve.[154]

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[150] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 167–68; Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 200.
[151] Gregory, *Clean Bombs and Dirty Wars*, 200.
[152] Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 125.
[153] Erica D. Borghard and Costantino Pischedda, "Allies and Airpower in Libya," *Parameters; Carlisle Barracks* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 67–68.
[154] Borghard and Pischedda, 66.

Coalition airpower was able to provide the time and space for the rebels to become good enough to win precisely because Qaddafi did not have any outside patrons to come to his aid. If Qaddafi had been the beneficiary of a major power patron who provided his regime with advanced anti-aircraft systems—and who helped to replenish the men and materiel he was losing—then it would have been harder for outside airpower to shift the balance against him. It would also have taken even longer to do so. Since Qaddafi did not have any major backers, although the anti-Qaddafi rebellion became a war of attrition, it ultimately lasted for a much shorter period of time than the other conflicts considered in this dissertation. Additionally, notwithstanding its initial military advantages over the rebels, the Qaddafi regime was not an especially impressive military power. The costs of undertaking the Libyan intervention were also low, compared to other modern campaigns waged by the United States. NATO did not suffer a single casualty during the campaign and the monetary cost to the United States for its involvement was $1.1 billion.[155] The monetary cost to the coalition as a whole was "several billion dollars."[156]

The Aftermath of the Rebels' Victory

On October 18, 2011, two days before Qaddafi was killed, Secretary Clinton visited Libya. Jake Sullivan, who joined Clinton on that trip, later recalled to this author that it was clear to him that there were concerning signs about Libya's prospects. As he recounted:

[155] Daalder and Stavridis, "NATO'S Victory in Libya," 3.
[156] Mueller, "Victory Through (Not By) Airpower," 380.

> My level of optimism about where Libya was headed was not high. We visited a hospital for wounded fighters and the whole place was awash with guns. The Secretary met with Jalil, Jibril, and other members of the TNC's leadership. They were sober and had clear ideas, but they were struggling to execute those ideas. There were some worrying signs during our visit—for example, the TNC struggled to organize motorcades.[157]

Sullivan's lack of optimism proved well-founded. Although Libya would go on to hold legislative elections in July 2012 that were widely-regarded as fair, and that paved the way for the formation of a new government, the country's politics increasingly took place "in the context of militia control," in the words of a former American ambassador to the country.[158] As Dirk Vandewalle stresses, the militias proved to be an "insurmountable obstacle" to effective governance in the period after Qaddafi's fall because they left the NTC "without the coercive power to affect decisions."[159]

Post-Qaddafi Libya also became an arena in which jihadist groups were able to operate with considerable latitude. That became all too clear when jihadists attacked a U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi in September 2012, killing four Americans. Additionally, weapons that had been seized from the Qaddafi regime's depots proliferated across the surrounding region and significant numbers of people fled Libya, notably including by making the precarious crossing across the Mediterranean to Europe.[160]

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[157] Sullivan, "Interview with Author."
[158] Scott Shane and Jo Becker, "A New Libya, With 'Very Little Time Left,'" *The New York Times*, February 27, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/libya-isis-hillary-clinton.html.
[159] Dirk Vandewalle, "Libya's Uncertain Revolution," in *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, ed. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.
[160] Eliot A. Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 179.

Although the disparate parts of the opposition had managed to work together to bring down the Qaddafi regime, the fragmented movement ultimately succumbed to significant infighting that hindered security. As Alan Kuperman correctly observed in 2013, Libya's new government "failed to disarm or bring under its control the dozens of militias that arose during the revolution," which "resulted in deadly turf battles between rival tribes and commanders, as well as a growing threat from radical Islamists."[161]

What has happened in Libya since then is a very far cry from the hopes of western policymakers in the fall of 2011. In spring 2016, President Obama himself acknowledged that the situation in Libya was a "mess."[162]

Could the aftermath have been better managed by the United States and its allies to avoid some of the instability that has afflicted Libya since 2011? Senior staff on the Obama administration's NSC began policy planning efforts for a post-Qaddafi Libya even before the air campaign against the regime had commenced.[163] Nevertheless, those planning efforts did not result in a sustained focus at the highest levels of government about how to approach the challenges of building a new Libya. As former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told Brendan Gallagher during the latter's research on the United States' planning for the aftermath in Libya, "there was not a single bit of post-conflict planning that I was aware of."[164] Similarly, Admiral James Stavridis, who was the Supreme Allied

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[161] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?," 126.
[162] Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
[163] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 109.
[164] Brendan Robert Gallagher, "The Day After: Lessons in U.S. Postwar Planning" (Princeton University, 2017), 252.

Commander of NATO during the Libya conflict, told Gallagher that "there was no appetite, no interest in Washington in anything beyond 'complete the NATO mission.'"[165]

One obvious step that the United States and its allies might have taken after the fall of Qaddafi would have been to deploy a stabilization force to Libya. For example, writing in 2016, Eliot Cohen argued that it would have been advisable to have "put some thousands of American and European troops into Libya to help stabilize that country after the overthrow of Colonel Qaddafi."[166] Among the tasks that such a mission might have attempted would have been trying to disarm the various militias that were competing for influence. The United States' decision to refrain from committing a stabilization force was largely the result of two factors. First, neither President Obama nor many in Congress had much enthusiasm for deploying a large-scale American ground presence in the country. As former NSC official Derek Chollet later wrote, President Obama was "determined not to allow Libya to morph into a massive American-led effort, draining resources and attention."[167] By the summer of 2011, as described above, there was a mounting sentiment in the legislature against the operation in Libya. There was unlikely to be much enthusiasm in Congress for sending American ground forces to stabilize post-conflict Libya, even if the president of the United States had set out to do so.

Second, the victorious anti-Qaddafi forces did not want an external peacekeeping force either. The Libyan opposition had made clear from the start of the uprising that it wanted to be seen as winning victory over the Qaddafi regime itself and that it would be

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[165] Gallagher, 252.
[166] Cohen, *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power & the Necessity of Military Force*, 147.
[167] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 109.

reluctant to have an outside force deployed to the country in the conflict's aftermath. As one United States foreign service officer, John Godfrey—who had served in Libya and was an expert on the country—wrote to colleagues on February 27, 2011:

> Libyan contacts have consistently said they do not want overt foreign military assistance in toppling Qaddafi. "This is something we must do for ourselves," is the message. Depending on how events in/around Tripoli play out going forward, there is space for covert military assistance to the opposition (including arms shipments); the fighting should be done by the Libyans themselves, who are clear in emphasizing their willingness to do so.[168]

On the Libyan opposition's attitude towards a post-conflict stabilization force, Godfrey added that:

> Libyans are so far wary of the idea of a PKO [peacekeeping operation]; however, that could change depending on how long Qaddafi holds on and how bloody and chaotic things get in/around Tripoli before he goes. If/if a PKO is warranted, important to minimize its presence and role in the east, where the opposition has things better in hand and the culture is more inimical to the presence of foreign forces.[169]

As it turned out, there was never any strong enthusiasm among the Libyan opposition for an outside stabilization force in the aftermath of Qaddafi's fall. Of course, that aligned with the reluctance among American policymakers to deploy such a force. In response to the question of why there was no peacekeeping force deployed to Libya, Ivo

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[168] Email from John Godfrey to Various Recipients, Sunday February 27, 2011, 15:17:04, Subject: Libya: Thoughts on Post-Qadhafi Assistance & Governance, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05780053, Release Date: 12/31/2015, https://foia.state.gov/searchapp/DOCUMENTS/HRCEmail_DecWeb/O-2015-08630-DEC/DOC_0C05780053/C05780053.pdf.

[169] "Email from John Godfrey to Various Recipients, Sunday February 27, 2011, 15:17:04, Subject: Libya: Thoughts on Post-Qadhafi Assistance & Governance, U.S. Department of State, Secretary Clinton Emails, Case No. F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05780053, Release Date: 12/31/2015."

Daalder, who was the U.S. representative to NATO at the time of the conflict, told this author the following:

> The Libyans didn't want any foreign boots on the ground, because they believed it would undermine the legitimacy of their gains. Nor was there any desire in Europe, NATO or the UN to take on this mission. NATO and the EU offered help on building security forces, but even that was seen as too much by the NTC. The subsequent argument that we should have done more ignores the reality that the only way to do that would have been forcefully and without the consent of those in control in Libya.[170]

In short, the victorious Libyan revolutionaries wanted to take it upon themselves to build a new political system in their country and the United States was more than happy to allow them to take on that task.

The Libya Intervention: Was it a Failure?

How should we evaluate the effectiveness of the military intervention that the United States, along with its allies and partners, undertook in Libya in 2011? As noted, there were two major American political objectives towards Libya following the rebellion's beginning: to protect civilians; and to achieve Qaddafi's departure from power in order to enable the establishment of a new political system. Clearly, the United States attained its objective of ending Qaddafi's regime. On the related goal of enabling the establishment of a new political system, much less progress has been made. In September 2017, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)—a UN political mission—produced an "Action Plan for Libya," which was endorsed by the UN Security Council. As Benjamin Fishman explains, the plan offered a basis for a political process in the country with a number of elements, including a national political conference, the organization of

[170] Ivo H. Daalder, Interview with Author (By Phone), December 16, 2016.

municipal elections, and efforts to unify the various militias.[171] Whether the UN plan manages to facilitate progress over the coming years remains to be seen. What we already know is that the state of governance and stability in Libya in the immediate years following Qaddafi's ouster fell far short of what many American policymakers hoped, in 2011, might be possible.

With regards to the other major political objective—protecting civilians—there remains room for debate about the United States' performance in that mission. For any military intervention that is justified as an effort to save innocent lives, evaluating its effectiveness requires a counter-factual analysis of what would have happened in the absence of the intervention. As Taylor Seybolt writes, "to count the number of lives saved requires the determination of the number of people who would have died in the absence of military intervention but did not die because the intervention occurred."[172]

In the case of Libya, there is a debate regarding the likely outcome if NATO had not intervened in 2011. Alan Kuperman has argued that NATO's humanitarian intervention in Libya probably led to an increase in the number of civilian casualties, compared to what would otherwise have occurred in the country during its 2011 conflict.[173] Kuperman extrapolates from the nature of the violence before NATO intervened and argues that, without the alliance's military campaign, Qaddafi would have recaptured Benghazi about six weeks after the conflict began, producing an overall death

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[171] For more on the plan, see Ben Fishman, "Libya's Election Dilemma," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, May 21, 2018, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/libyas-election-dilemma.
[172] Taylor B. Seybolt, *Humanitarian Military Intervention: The Conditions for Success and Failure* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 32–33.
[173] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?"

toll of approximately 1,100.[174] By contrast, with the intervention, the rebels defeated Qaddafi's forces and the conflict lasted 36 weeks, and probably killed between 8,000 and 11,500 people.[175] According to estimates by Human Rights Watch, the coalition's air campaign directly caused 72 civilian deaths, while the United Nations estimated that the civilian death toll from the air campaign was 60 people.[176]

Kuperman's counter-factual analysis rests, as it must, on assumptions about what Qaddafi's forces would have done once they reached Benghazi in March 2011 and how the rebels would have responded. Kuperman argues that Qaddafi's forces would have refrained from unleashing indiscriminate violence against civilians in Benghazi, given how the regime had acted up until that point in the conflict, and that the rebels would have stopped fighting once Qaddafi regained the city.[177] Others disagree with that counter-factual analysis. The Brookings Institution's Shadi Hamid argues that:

> Any Libyan who had opted to take up arms was liable to be captured, arrested, or killed if Qaddafi "won," so the incentives to accept defeat were nonexistent, to say nothing of the understandable desire to not live under the rule of a brutal and maniacal strongman. The most likely outcome, then, was a Syria-like situation of indefinite, intensifying violence.[178]

Of course, no-one can ever know what would have occurred if Qaddafi's forces had been allowed to reach Benghazi, nor how many lives would have been lost during the remainder of the war if the rebels had continued to fight. Nevertheless, Shadi Hamid's

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[174] Kuperman, 120.
[175] Kuperman, 122–23.
[176] See Wehrey, "NATO's Intervention," 122.
[177] Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention?," 119-121.
[178] Shadi Hamid, "Everyone Says the Libya Intervention Was a Failure. They're Wrong." Brookings Institution, *Brookings* (blog), April 12, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/04/12/everyone-says-the-libya-intervention-was-a-failure-theyre-wrong/.

point emphasizes that, for all of the instability that has been evident in Libya since 2011, it is possible that the death toll might have been even higher had the United States, along with its allies and partners, not intervened when Qaddafi's forces were bearing down on Benghazi.

That said, there would have been a much greater claim for the effectiveness of the intervention, beyond saving Benghazi, if it had been followed by a more secure Libya in the aftermath of Qaddafi's ouster. Driven by its interests and ideals, the United States acted to avert a potential slaughter. At the same time, there was no appetite for a major military commitment and definitely no appetite for a ground deployment or stabilization force. With NATO allies and Arab partners, the United States used air power to shift the battlefield against the regime and thereby allowed the rebels to win. In the aftermath of victory, the United States largely left the task of trying to rebuild and secure Libya to the victorious revolutionaries.

EXPLAINING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY APPROACH TO THE ANTI-ASSAD REBELS IN SYRIA

The Uprising and its Militarization

The catalyst for the political uprising in Syria was the late February 2011 arrest and beating by security forces of a number of youths who had been caught writing anti-regime graffiti in Deraa, located in the country's south west. Syria expert David Lesch describes the youths as "Syria's Muhammad Bouazizi."[179] Marc Lynch recounts that, in response to protests that broke out in Deraa against the security forces' treatment of those arrested, the Assad regime "struck hard, fast, and brutally in an effort to prevent any revolutionary momentum from building."[180] The regime proved unable, however, to halt the momentum of protest. After Deraa, demonstrations broke out in other parts of Syria, such as Idlib province in the northwest, which like the area around Deraa had suffered from a lack of public services and high youth unemployment.[181] Other major locations that became sites of early protests included the cities of Homs and Hama, as well as the predominantly Sunni-inhabited areas of Darayya and Eastern Ghouta, which both lay in the environs of Damascus.[182]

As protests grew, and although the protestors themselves remained largely peaceful, during the first week of April 2011 reports emerged that government snipers were

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[179] Lesch, *Syria*, 92–93.
[180] Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:182.
[181] Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Edition, Adelphi (Series) (International Institute for Strategic Studies) ; 438. (Abingdon: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), Kindle Locations 752-754.
[182] Hokayem, Kindle Locations 755-756 & 777-778.

firing on demonstrators in various Syrian cities.[183] By early May 2011, Amnesty International reported that a minimum of 542 people had been killed by Syrian security forces over the previous two months.[184] The regime had been engaging in what David Lesch later described as a "schizophrenic response," whereby it announced some concessions and reforms at the same time as the security forces were unleashing a repressive crackdown. Lesch surmised that this reflected Bashar al-Assad's attitude that "one offers concessions only from a position of strength, never from a position of weakness."[185]

The Assad regime's repressive actions were generating high-level policy concern within the United States government. On May 19, President Obama delivered a speech at the State Department on the changes that had been sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa over the previous months—which he described as a "story of self-determination"—and he articulated the United States' overarching policy toward the region. With regards to Syria, the president stated that "the Syrian regime has chosen the path of murder and the mass arrests of its citizens." President Obama went on to confront Bashar al-Assad with a choice and to make clear some of the specific steps that the United States expected to see him take, saying that:

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[183] Lesch, *Syria*, 94–95.
[184] Molly Hennessy-Fiske and Roula Hajjar, "Tens of Thousands Protest across Syria," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/06/world/la-fg-syria-protests-20110507.
[185] Lesch, *Syria*, 100–101.

> The Syrian people have shown their courage in demanding a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: He can lead that transition, or get out of the way. The Syrian government must stop shooting demonstrators and allow peaceful protests. It must release political prisoners and stop unjust arrests. It must allow human rights monitors to have access to cities like Dara'a; and start a serious dialogue to advance a democratic transition.[186]

In speaking about the region more broadly, Obama acknowledged that "hardship always accompanies a season of hope."[187] When it came to Bashar al-Assad's choice, he opted for horror over hope. In July 2011, the U.S. ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, visited Hama—where large-scale protests had been taking place over the previous weeks—in support of the Syrian people's right to peaceful protest and their demands for political reform. The French ambassador to Syria also visited Hama at the same time.[188] Towards the end of July, the Syrian regime killed hundreds of people in Hama when it attacked the city.[189]

During the summer of 2011, in the face of the regime's increasing repression, the uprising—which until this point had remained largely peaceful—began a process of militarization. Numerous rebel units were established by defectors from Assad's military as well as civilian volunteers, who typically had prior military training from their period of conscription.[190] On July 29, 2011, a collection of officer defectors from the Assad

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[186] "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa," May 19, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa.
[187] "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa."
[188] Anthony Shadid, "Syrian Protesters Remain Defiant, and Western Envoys Offer Support," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, July 9, 2011, sec. A.
[189] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 113.
[190] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Locations 1386-1390.

regime announced, from Turkey, the establishment of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). As Charles Lister recounts, the stated aims of the FSA were "to protect peaceful protesters demonstrating against President Bashar al-Assad's regime and to initiate resistance operations against his security forces."[191]

On August 18, 2011, President Obama said in a written statement that:

> We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.[192]

President Obama's willingness to call for Assad's departure almost certainly reflected a prevailing sentiment, both within the United States government and outside of it, that the Assad regime's days were numbered. In the midst of the dramatic changes that had been sweeping the Middle East over the previous months, the idea that another regional strongman would leave power in the face of mounting protests was understandable. At the same time, President Obama stressed that "the United States cannot and will not impose this transition upon Syria," but instead it would pressure "Assad to get out of the way of this transition."[193] Part of that pressure would be applied through sanctions, which the United States had already enacted against Syrian regime officials and Obama announced that sanctions would be increased.

The United States, along with other allies and partners, also attempted to pressure the Syrian regime diplomatically, but to little avail. In early October 2011, Russia and

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[191] Charles Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand" (Brookings Institution, Center for Middle East Policy, November 2016), 3.
[192] "Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria," August 18, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/18/statement-president-obama-situation-syria.
[193] "Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria."

China vetoed a draft UN Security Council Resolution, which had been drafted by France, Germany, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. The resolution condemned the Syrian regime's repression and would have set the groundwork for security council-approved sanctions if the regime's behavior did not change.[194] Even that weak step against the Assad regime proved too much for Russia and China. The Russian ambassador to the United Nations exclaimed during the Security Council's meeting that "we cannot agree with this unilateral, accusatory bent against Damascus."[195] He also accused NATO member states of harboring the intent to intervene in Syria in the same way as they had done in Libya.[196] Meanwhile, China's ambassador stated that the international community "should fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity."[197] In response, the United States' ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, stated that:

> The United States is outraged that this Council has utterly failed to address an urgent moral challenge and a growing threat to regional peace and security. Several members have sought for weeks to weaken and strip bare any texts that would have defended the lives of innocent civilians from Assad's brutality. Today, two members have vetoed a vastly watered-down text that does not even mention sanctions.[198]

Ambassador Rice rebutted Russia's accusation that the west was gearing up for a military intervention in Syria and she described such accusations as a "cheap ruse by those

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[194] United Nations Security Council, Draft Resolution S/2011/612, 4 October 2011, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2011/612.
[195] United Nations, Record of Security Council's 6627th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 6 p.m., New York, S/PV.6627, 3, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6627.
[196] United Nations, Record of Security Council's 6627th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 6 p.m., New York, S/PV.6627, 4.
[197] United Nations, Record of Security Council's 6627th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 6 p.m., New York, S/PV.6627, 5.
[198] United Nations, Record of Security Council's 6627th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 6 p.m., New York, S/PV.6627, 8.

who would rather sell arms to the Syrian regime than stand with the Syrian people."[199] Ambassador Rice was pointing to Russia's long-standing military relationship with Syria; during the course of 2011 alone, Russia had sold the Syrian regime an estimated $500 million worth of arms.[200]

The Arab League also put forward a peace plan for Syria in October 2011; although the Syrian government indicated that it would participate in efforts based upon the plan, it quickly became clear that the regime had no intention of doing so.[201] The United Nations Security Council made another attempt at diplomatic action in February 2012. However, Russia and China vetoed another resolution; that one demanded the Syrian regime, as well as armed opposition groups, halt violence and also demanded that the regime implement the latest version of the Arab League's peace plan.[202]

In late February 2012, the secretaries-general of the UN and Arab League, Ban Ki-moon and Nabil Elaraby, announced the appointment of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as a joint UN-Arab League special envoy on Syria. Annan's task was to seek "an end to all violence and human rights violations" in Syria and to promote "a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis."[203] The urgency of Annan's mission reflected the fact that the crisis in Syria was fast becoming a full-blown civil war. As Emile

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[199] United Nations, Record of Security Council's 6627th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 6 p.m., New York, S/PV.6627, 8.
[200] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Locations 2959-2966.
[201] Hokayem, Kindle Locations 2722-2737.
[202] United Nations Press Release, 4 February 2012, Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Syria as Russian Federation, China Veto Text Supporting Arab League's Proposed Peace Plan, SC/10536, https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10536.doc.htm.
[203] "Kofi Annan Appointed U.N.-Arab League Envoy to Syria," *Reuters*, February 23, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-syria-envoy/annan-ahtisaari-top-contenders-to-be-u-n-syria-envoy-idUSTRE81M25G20120223.

Hokayem later emphasized, "by early 2012, the armed struggle became a defining, dominant and irreversible feature of the Syrian uprising, even if peaceful demonstrations and civil disobedience continued to take place in parallel to armed action."[204] By this time, the Free Syrian Army was rapidly expanding its guerilla attacks on the Syrian regime's forces.[205] As Charles Lister describes, during the first half of 2012, the FSA also established new organizational structures on the ground—larger units were formed with geographic responsibility for particular towns and provinces and these evolved into formal "Provincial Military Councils" (PMCs) that served as a means for units in Syria to coordinate with the FSA's leadership in Turkey.[206] By June 2012, the Free Syrian Army held significant territory in the northern and central regions of Syria and was inflicting more than 20 deaths per day upon the regime's forces.[207] One driver of the FSA's expansion was continuing defections from the Assad regime; between 30,000 and 60,000 personnel were estimated to have defected from Assad's military by the middle of 2012.[208]

Notwithstanding the FSA's growing size and reach, it had definitely failed to establish a monopoly on the use of armed force against the regime. By the close of 2012, only about half of the armed opposition groups in Syria—which may have totaled close to 1,000 by this time—proclaimed an affiliation with the FSA.[209] Among the armed

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[204] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Locations 1372-1374.
[205] Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand," 6.
[206] Lister, 6–7.
[207] Liz Sly, "Syria Rebels Gaining Ground, Strength," *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2012.
[208] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Locations 1416-1419.
[209] Hokayem, Kindle Locations 1416-1419.

opponents of the regime were various jihadist organizations, a development documented in detail by Aaron Y. Zelin. One of those jihadist groups was Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaeda's Syrian branch, which began fighting during the fall of 2011.[210] Most of its fighters were Syrians, rather than foreign combatants.[211] Some jihadist organizations from farther afield, including a Uyghur group and a Caucasus and Chechen group, seized the opportunity afforded by Syria's escalating war to move into the arena as a means of gaining combat experience.[212]

The growth in the ranks of the rebellion—as well as the proliferation of distinct armed factions—was fueled by outside support. As Marc Lynch notes, the first half of 2012 witnessed the onset of "uncoordinated, large-scale flows of support to the rebels" and considerable portions of that aid came from "Islamist-minded Gulf networks."[213]

On the other side of the conflict, the Assad regime benefited from the support of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia in countering the growing threat posed by its armed opponents. From early in the uprising, Iranian support to the regime included the provision of weapons, military advice, as well as personnel.[214] Hezbollah—an Iranian proxy force that wields

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[210] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Deciphering the Jihadist Presence in Syria: An Analysis of Martyrdom Notices," *CTC Sentinel (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point)* 6, no. 2 (February 2013): 7, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/02/CTCSentinel-Vol6Iss22.pdf.
[211] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Jihadists in Syria Can Be Found on the Internet," *Al-Monitor*, October 18, 2012, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/jihadists-in-syria-can-be-found-on-the-internet.
[212] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Syria: The Epicenter of Future Jihad, PolicyWatch 2278," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 30, 2014, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syria-the-epicenter-of-future-jihad.
[213] Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 131.
[214] Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant*, Kindle Locations 2122-2128.

significant power in Lebanon—had declared its backing for Assad in May 2011 and during 2011 and 2012 it provided training and advice to the Syrian regime's forces.[215] Meanwhile, Russia provided multiple shipments of small arms, ammunition, and other defense materiel to the Syrian regime.[216]

In mid-March 2012, Kofi Annan unveiled a six-point peace plan for Syria; among its provisions the plan called for a ceasefire by all parties in Syria.[217] On the basis of Annan's plan a ceasefire did go into effect briefly and UN observers entered the country to monitor it; the effort came to naught, however, and in June the United Nations announced that it was suspending the observer mission due to escalating levels of violence.[218] In late June, Kofi Annan convened a summit meeting in Geneva to address the crisis and to try to reach a common approach between major external parties regarding a political transition process. The Geneva summit produced a communiqué, agreed to by both the United States and Russia, that attempted to bridge, in an artful way, the differences between the various

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[215] Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah in Syria" (Institute for the Study of War, April 2014), 11–12, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf.
[216] Richard Galpin, "Russian Arms Shipments Bolster Syria's Embattled Assad," *BBC News*, January 30, 2012, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16797818; Thomas Grove and Erika Solomon, "Russia Boosts Arms Sales to Syria despite World Pressure," *Reuters*, February 21, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-russia-arms/russia-boosts-arms-sales-to-syria-despite-world-pressure-idUSTRE81K13420120221; "Isolate Syria's Arms Suppliers," Human Rights Watch, June 3, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/03/isolate-syrias-arms-suppliers.
[217] United Nations, Press Release, 21 March 2012, In Presidential Statement, Security Council Gives Full Support to Efforts of Joint Special Envoy of United Nations, Arab League to End Violence in Syria, SC/10583, https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sc10583.doc.htm.
[218] "U.N. Suspends Observer Mission in Syria," CNN, June 16, 2012, https://www.cnn.com/2012/06/16/world/meast/syria-un-monitors/index.html.

parties regarding Assad's future. Specifically, the communiqué included the following proposed step regarding a political transition:

> The establishment of a transitional governing body which can establish a neutral environment in which the transition can take place. That means that the transitional governing body would exercise full executive powers. It could include members of the present government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent.[219]

In her memoirs, Hillary Clinton explains that, during the summit's haggling over the language of a communiqué, she had proposed the phrase "mutual consent" precisely because the Syrian opposition would never consent to Bashar al-Assad's inclusion.[220] However, Clinton's description of what happened immediately after the issuance of the communiqué in Geneva emphasizes how diplomatic progress on Syria was stymied—no matter how creative the language adopted—by the fundamental gap between the United States and Russia regarding Assad's future. Clinton writes the following about what happened upon the conclusion of the June 2012 Geneva summit:

> Trouble started almost right away. The press missed the intent and plain meaning of "mutual consent" and read it as an admission that Assad could stay in power……Lavrov [the Russian foreign minister] did his best to fuel this interpretation. "There is no attempt to impose any kind of a transition process," he told the press. "There are no prior conditions to the transfer process and no attempt to exclude any group from the process." That was technically true but blatantly misleading.[221]

There was a fundamental difference in American and Russian objectives with regards to Syria. The United States wanted to see Bashar al-Assad exit power in the near future—as did the Syrian opposition—whereas Russia wanted him to remain.

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[219] Action Group for Syria, Final Communiqué, June 30, 2012.
[220] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 387.
[221] Clinton, 387.

In early August 2012, Kofi Annan resigned from his role as UN-Arab League special envoy. In his resignation statement, he exclaimed that:

> The bloodshed continues, most of all because of the Syrian government's intransigence and continuing refusal to implement the six-point plan, and also because of the escalating military campaign of the opposition—all of which is compounded by the disunity of the international community.[222]

With the violence continuing to get worse in Syria, and with efforts at diplomatic solutions having made little progress, Hillary Clinton recounts how she and others within the Obama administration began to consider the option of providing military assistance to the anti-Assad rebels.[223] Clinton wrote in her memoirs that she and David Petraeus, the director of the CIA, discussed during a July 2012 meeting whether it would be beneficial to "vet, train, and equip moderate opposition fighters" in Syria; at that point, according to Clinton, Petraeus was already getting ready to present a plan to President Obama to do just that.[224] The CIA director presented that plan to President Obama in September 2012.[225]

Presidential Assessment of U.S. Interests

Once again, President Obama's assessment of the United States' interests in Syria reflected his assessment of American interests in the Middle East more broadly. As noted earlier, the Obama administration's May 2010 National Security Strategy enumerated the following as among the nation's most important interests in the greater Middle East: the

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[222] UN News, August 2, 2012, Kofi Annan Resigns as UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy for Syrian Crisis, https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/08/416872-kofi-annan-resigns-un-arab-league-joint-special-envoy-syrian-crisis.
[223] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 389.
[224] Clinton, 391.
[225] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 218.

security of Israel; the achievement of Palestinian statehood; the security and stability of Iraq; addressing Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and its destabilizing activities in the region; non-proliferation; countering terrorism; and access to energy resources.[226] Additionally, Obama had, during his May 2011 speech at the State Department about the Middle East, summarized what he saw as the core interests that the United States had pursued in the region over the previous decades, saying that:

> For decades, the United States has pursued a set of core interests in the region: countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; securing the free flow of commerce and safe-guarding the security of the region; standing up for Israel's security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace.[227]

Based on these two statements, we are able to postulate at least five interests that President Obama likely felt were at stake in Syria in September 2012 when he was presented with a plan to arm the anti-Assad opposition. First, the national security strategy emphasized the United States' interest in "nonproliferation." Syria certainly affected that interest because of its substantial chemical weapons stockpile. Derek Chollet, a senior official on the Obama administration's NSC staff at the time, later wrote that "although the administration stressed the importance of Assad's departure as the political objective, during 2011-14 chemical weapons were seen as a higher priority for America's security interests."[228] During an August 2012 press conference, President Obama made what became known as his "red line" warning regarding Syria's chemical weapons, stating that:

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[226] "National Security Strategy," 24.
[227] "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa."
[228] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 132.

> We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people. We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.[229]

Second, the security and stability of the wider region were at stake. By September 2012, according to estimates from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 230,000 refugees had fled Syria.[230] This refugee outflow threatened to destabilize other countries, notably including Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey, to which many refugees fled.

Third, Syria affected the American interest in counter-terrorism given the growing involvement of jihadist organizations, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, in the conflict. Such organizations were gaining combat experience through their participation in the war and thereby increasing their military capabilities.

Fourth, as the May 2010 National Security Strategy stated, the United States had an interest in countering Iran's destabilizing activities in the region. That was clearly a concern in Syria given that the country had acted as a major conduit of Iranian support to Hezbollah in Lebanon and because of the Iranian Quds force's role in helping the Syrian regime counter the rebellion.

Fifth, the crisis in Syria had potentially serious ramifications for Israel's security because of the involvement of a variety of actors in Syria that were hostile to Israel—

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[229] "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps," August 20, 2012, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps.

[230] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria Crisis: Fact Sheet: Timeline and Figures, http://www.unhcr.org/5245a72e6.pdf.

jihadist organizations, Hezbollah, and the Quds force—as well as the potential for any successor government to the Assad regime to pose a threat to Israel.

Presidential Assessment: Would Support for the Anti-Assad rebels be (1) Likely to Promote American Interests? And (2) Would it be Defensible in terms of Liberal-democratic Ideals?

In September 2012, when President Obama considered the proposal to provide military assistance to the anti-Assad opposition, the conflict in Syria had already claimed over 20,000 lives and that toll was rising by over 100 people every day.[231] In his memoir, Ben Rhodes, who was deputy national security advisor at the time, explains that the proposal considered by Obama in the fall of 2012 was "a small-scale recommendation to engage a portion of the opposition, providing them with a fraction of the support that Russia and Iran were providing to the Assad regime." The proposal, according to Rhodes, would have been primarily intended to enable the United States to build some relationships with parts of the anti-Assad opposition.[232] Of course, even though the proposal was apparently a very modest step, if adopted it could have provided the foundation for an increase in support to the opposition in due course.

Each of the several accounts that have been written of President Obama's deliberations, in September 2012, about whether to provide military support to vetted parts of the anti-Assad opposition have stressed that the commander-in-chief was keenly focused on whether that policy option was likely to be effective.[233] One of President Obama's big

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[231] "Estimated 100 Daily Deaths as U.N. Monitors Leaves Syria," August 23, 2012, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/estimated-100-daily-deaths-as-unmonitors-leaves-syria/.
[232] Rhodes, *The World as It Is*, 197.
[233] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 218–20; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 391–92; Chollet, *The Long Game*, 141.

questions was whether arming an insurgency had ever worked in general. As Hillary Clinton recounts in her memoir, "the President asked for examples of instances when the United States had backed an insurgency that could be considered a success."[234] At some point during the policy deliberations in 2012, the CIA produced a study on the results of its previous efforts to assist insurgencies. President Obama concluded that arming insurgencies had generally been an ineffective policy. As Obama later recounted to David Remnick:

> Very early in this process, I actually asked the C.I.A. to analyze examples of America financing and supplying arms to an insurgency in a country that actually worked out well. And they couldn't come up with much.[235]

In addition to his conclusion that aiding insurgencies has generally failed to be an effective policy, President Obama apparently had specific concerns regarding aspects of the anti-Assad rebellion. He judged that American support to the Syrian opposition would not be an effective way to promote U.S. interests. From the accounts of the policy deliberations, two concerns seem to have been foremost in the commander-in-chief's mind. First, President Obama was concerned that the United States did not have sufficient information about the opposition to enable it to provide arms only to those factions who were aligned with U.S. interests and values. As Derek Chollet later wrote, President Obama was "concerned about the nature of the Syrian opposition, believing we needed to know more about it before providing lethal support."[236] Hillary Clinton writes that "the President

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[234] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 392.
[235] David Remnick, "Going the Distance: On and Off the Road with Barack Obama," *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/going-the-distance-david-remnick.
[236] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 141.

thought we needed more time to evaluate the Syrian opposition before escalating our commitment."[237] The reasons for concern about how well the United States knew the armed opposition in Syria are readily understandable. As noted, there were numerous armed factions operating in Syria by this time and many of them were not affiliated with the Free Syrian Army. Additionally, there were clear indications that jihadist organizations were operating in Syria. Thus, there were reasons to worry that providing arms to the opposition would lead to some of those weapons ending up in the possession of extremist organizations, thereby bolstering their own power. Clearly, that would have been inconsistent with both the United States' interests and its ideals.

Second, the commander-in-chief was apparently concerned that the disparity in relative military power between the rebels and the Assad regime—combined with the support that Iran and Russia were providing to the regime—meant that American assistance to the rebels was never likely to impose sufficient pressure on the regime to achieve the political transition that the United States sought. Hillary Clinton later wrote that the president "worried that arming the rebels was not likely to be enough to drive Assad from power and that with all the weapons already flowing into the country from Arab nations, our contributions would hardly be decisive."[238]

Although the Assad regime's forces had suffered tens of thousands of defections by September 2012, those soldiers had quit the ranks of a military that was both much larger and more capable than that which had existed in Libya. When the rebellion against the Assad regime began, the size of the Syrian army numbered 220,000 personnel, in

[237] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 392.
[238] Clinton, 392.

addition to over 100,000 in paramilitary forces.[239] In addition, substantial parts of Assad's military had remained loyal, notably including large portions of the Alawite-dominated officer corps.[240] Due to the strength of the regime's military, there was reason to think that a substantial amount of American support would have been required in order to produce a significant impact on the battlefield.

A further reason for reaching that view was because of the regime's major backers—Iran and Russia. By this point in the conflict, both had shown that they were sticking with the Syrian regime. Iran had provided manpower and materiel to the regime—as had its proxy Hezbollah—to help combat the rebellion. Russia had continued to ship significant amounts of small arms to Assad, not to mention having blocked any substantial action at the UN Security Council. Both Iran and Russia had strong rationales for helping the Syrian regime to survive. For Iran, the Syrian government was a key ally in the Arab world and provided a conduit for funneling support to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran's relationships with both Syria and Hezbollah provided it with partners bordering Israel who could enable Iran to pose a threat to Israel, thereby bolstering Iranian deterrence against Israel. Meanwhile, Russia benefited from a naval facility in Syria—at Tartus—and Vladimir Putin, who had returned to the presidency in May 2012, loathed the idea of seeing any more autocrats fall from power at the hands of opposition movements that had the backing of the United States. Putin had been Russian prime minister when Russia abstained on the UN Security Council resolution authorizing "all necessary measures" in Libya, while Dmitry Medvedev served as president. Shortly after the coalition air campaign

[239] *The Military Balance 2010*, 110:272–73.
[240] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:360.

against Libya began, Putin made his displeasure very clear; he had said that the UN resolution resembled "medieval calls for crusades."[241]

Due to Iranian and Russian support to the Assad regime, there was a predictable logic that would likely follow any significant American support to the Syrian rebels; that aid was likely to be counteracted by more Iranian and Russian support to the Syrian government, leaving the military balance on the ground largely unchanged.

Obama administration proponents of arming vetted factions of the anti-Assad opposition offered arguments for why the policy made sense despite the challenges. They argued that the United States should provide military support to vetted, moderate parts of the opposition to help ensure that the power of those factions was not increasingly eclipsed by more radical factions. Another major argument put forward by proponents was that even though American aid to the rebels could not be decisive—in the sense of allowing the rebels to overthrow the regime militarily—it might make it clear to the regime that it could not win a military victory, thereby opening up the possibility of a diplomatic settlement. As Hillary Clinton wrote in her memoirs:

> Petraeus and I argued that there was a big difference between Qatar and Saudi Arabia dumping weapons into the country and the United States responsibly training and equipping a nonextremist rebel force. And getting control of that mess was a big part of our plan's rationale. What's more, the goal was not to build up a force strong enough to defeat the regime. Rather the idea was to give us a partner on the ground we could work with that could do enough to convince Assad and his backers that a military victory was impossible. It wasn't a perfect plan, by any means. In fact, the best I could say for it was that it was the least bad option among many even worse alternatives.[242]

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[241] Gleb Bryanski, "Putin Likens U.N. Libya Resolution to Crusades," *Reuters*, March 21, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia/putin-likens-u-n-libya-resolution-to-crusades-idUSTRE72K3JR20110321.
[242] Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 392.

Presidential Decision in 2012: No Military Support to the Anti-Assad Rebels

President Obama decided not to authorize military support to the anti-Assad opposition in the fall of 2012.[243] Later, in interviews with journalists and in public comments he explained that he had indeed concluded that providing military support to the rebels was unlikely to prove an effective way to promote U.S. interests. Towards the end of 2013, President Obama commented to journalist David Remnick that "when I hear people suggesting that somehow if we had just financed and armed the opposition earlier, that somehow Assad would be gone by now and we'd have a peaceful transition, it's magical thinking." He went on to elaborate why he saw that argument as fanciful, remarking that:

> We have looked at this from every angle. And the truth is that the challenge there has been, and continues to be, that you have an authoritarian, brutal government who is willing to do anything to hang on to power, and you have an opposition that is disorganized, ill-equipped, ill-trained, and is self-divided. All of that is on top of some of the sectarian divisions…….And, in that environment, our best chance of seeing a decent outcome at this point is to work the state actors who have invested so much in keeping Assad in power—mainly the Iranians and the Russians—as well as working with those who have been financing the opposition to make sure that they're not creating the kind of extremist force that we saw emerge out of Afghanistan when we were financing the mujahedin.[244]

In 2016, Jeffrey Goldberg published an extended article on President Obama's foreign policy, based on multiple interviews with the president. In that article, Goldberg writes that Obama had told him the following regarding his decision-making towards Syria:

[243] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 220; Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 392; Panetta, *Worthy Fights*, 450.
[244] Remnick, "Going the Distance: On and Off the Road with Barack Obama."

> When you have a professional army that is well armed and sponsored by two large states who have huge stakes in this, and they are fighting against a farmer, a carpenter, an engineer who started out as protesters and suddenly now see themselves in the midst of a civil conflict.....[pause].....the notion that we could have—in a clean way that didn't commit U.S. military forces—changed the equation on the ground there was never true.[245]

The only ways in which aiding the Syrian rebels could have brought about Assad's exit from power were if the rebels had become sufficiently threatening to his regime's survival that he was willing to consider exiting office as part of a negotiated settlement or if the rebels became strong enough to overthrow the regime. In Obama's view, even the first scenario was unlikely because of the disparity between the regime's military strength and that of the rebels, as well as the seeming willingness of Iran and Russia to offset outside assistance to the opposition by increasing their own aid to the regime. Obama's view, at least as he presented it to Goldberg, was that the only way the United States could change the "equation on the ground" was by using American forces to help the rebels overthrow the regime. That was not an option that President Obama was willing to entertain. He did not regard U.S. interests in Syria as vital enough to justify overthrowing the regime directly, especially because he did not want to repeat what he viewed as the quagmire in which the United States had found itself in Iraq after 2003.

For the remainder of 2012, the conflict in Syria continued to grow worse and worse. Units affiliated with the Free Syrian Army had tried to take the city of Aleppo beginning in July 2012 and the regime responded with substantial force, including significant airstrikes and artillery against the city. The result was a city divided between the regime and the rebels, which became the scene of devastating urban fighting and a stalemate that

[245] Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," April 2016.

would not be broken until the Syrian government recaptured the city in late 2016.[246] Lakhdar Brahimi, who had replaced Kofi Annan as the UN-Arab League special envoy for Syria, brokered a ceasefire in October 2012, but it fell apart immediately.[247] By the close of 2012, the United Nations estimated that Syria's war had likely already claimed the lives of more than 60,000 people.[248] There were also at least 500,000 refugees from the conflict by that point.[249]

Degree of Consensus in Congress that President Obama's Decision to Refrain from Supporting the Anti-Assad Opposition was the Correct One

There was a low degree of consensus in Congress that President Obama had reached the correct decision—assessed relative to American interests and ideals—when he refrained from supporting the anti-Assad opposition in the fall of 2012. Legislators from both parties issued clear calls for the United States to support the Syrian opposition. Senators John McCain, a Republican from Arizona, Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina, and Joseph Lieberman, an Independent from Connecticut, had called on the United States to arm the anti-Assad rebels in February 2012, only days after Russia and China vetoed the draft UN Security Council resolution on Syria. Senators McCain, Graham, and Lieberman argued that aiding the rebels would promote both the United

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[246] C. J. Chivers, "Rubble and Despair of War Redefine Syria Jewel," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast); New York, N.Y.*, December 19, 2012, sec. A.
[247] "Damascus Car Bombings as Syria 'Ceasefire' Ends," *BBC News*, October 29, 2012, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20121575.
[248] UN News, January 2, 2013, Data Suggests Syria Death Toll Could Be More than 60,000, Says UN Human Rights Office, https://news.un.org/en/story/ / /429282-data-suggests-syria-death-toll-could-be-more-60000-says-un-human-rights-office 2013.
[249] "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria Crisis: Fact Sheet: Timeline and Figures."

States' strategic interests as well as the nation's ideals; as they put it, "the end of Assad's rule would not only be a moral and humanitarian victory for the Syrian people; it would be a strategic defeat for the Iranian regime."[250] In June 2012, Senator Marco Rubio, a Republican from Florida, published an op-ed in which he argued that:

> Diplomacy doesn't stand a chance in Syria unless the military balance tips against Assad. With Iran and Hezbollah now directly involved in the conflict—sending soldiers and weapons into Syria—the U.S. must stop insisting that arming the opposition will only make the violence worse.[251]

Some Democrats on Capitol Hill also called for the United States to aid the Syrian rebels. In March 2012, in response to a question about Syria, Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a television interview that "Libya is a model for how we can aid rebels" and also stressed that the United States' policy response to the crisis in Syria should involve "no American troops on the ground."[252] In August 2012, Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, argued that "the U.S. should strengthen its direct engagement with Syrian rebels by providing more robust support—up to and including lethal aid—to opposition groups that specifically commit to building a pluralistic and democratic Syria." Coons argued for helping the anti-Assad rebels for humanitarian

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[250] "Senators Graham, McCain, and Lieberman Statement on Syria," February 8, 2012, https://www.lgraham.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/2/post-625f19d1-802a-23ad-48a1-1b1e29ced80c.
[251] Marco Rubio, "Assad's Fall Is In America's Interests," *Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2012, sec. Opinion, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303665904577450241196981150.
[252] Press Release, March 4, 2012, Blumenthal Announces Resolution Calling on U.N. to Charge Syrian President with War Crimes, Office of Senator Richard Blumenthal, https://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/blumenthal-announces-resolution-calling-on-un-to-charge-syrian-president-with-war-crimes.

reasons, stressing that "the heart-wrenching reports of patriotic rebels struggling to prevent government forces from massacring innocent civilians cannot be ignored."[253]

It was not, however, the case that Congress was united behind the option of aiding the Syrian armed opposition. There were cautionary voices, such as Senator Jim Webb, a Democrat from Virginia, who warned in March 2012 that "we need analytical metrics before we debate providing assistance [to the Syrian opposition], military or otherwise, in what United Nations officials have recently characterized as a civil war."[254] Others in Congress raised concerns over whether the United States knew enough about the opposition to provide them with aid.[255]

Overall, there were a mixture of views in Congress regarding what to do in Syria. Nevertheless, there were advocates from both parties for arming the Syrian opposition and, through their public statements, they applied political pressure on the administration to take that step. One of the most prominent examples occurred in February 2013. At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Senator John McCain asked Secretary of Defense Panetta and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, the following:

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[253] Chris Coons, "Obama Should Arm Syrian Rebels," *USA Today*, August 30, 2012, http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-08-30/chris-coons-syria-rebels/57444282/1.

[254] Press Release, March 22, 2012, 'Corker, Webb Introduce Bill Requiring Reports on Syrian Opposition, Weapons Stockpiles,' Office of United States Senator Bob Corker, accessed June 16, 2018, https://www.corker.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/3/corker-webb-introduce-bill-requiring-reports-on-syrian-opposition-weapons-stockpiles.

[255] Amie Parnes and Jeremy Herb, "Obama Will Not Arm Syrian Rebels; Romney Sees a 'Lack of Leadership,'" *The Hill*, May 30, 2012, http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/229951-president-will-not-arm-syrian-rebels-romney-says-he-should.

> How many more have to die before you recommend military action? Did you support the recommendation by then Secretary of State Clinton, and then head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) General Petraeus, that we provide weapons to the resistance in Syria? Did you support that?[256]

Both Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey confirmed that they had supported the proposal to provide military aid to the opposition. Senator McCain had drawn attention to the divisions among the Obama administration's senior national security team as a way to pressure the administration to help the rebels in the face of a deteriorating situation in Syria.

The political pressure exerted on President Obama by some in Congress over this issue reflects the expectations of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. This was a case in which the president had decided not to provide military support to a rebellion, having assessed that doing so would not be likely to promote American interests and ideals. Nevertheless, there was a low degree of consensus in Congress that the president had reached the correct decision and advocates of aiding the rebels generated political pressure on the commander-in-chief to reconsider the decision.

In addition to the political pressure exerted by some in Congress, Mitt Romney, the Republican Party's nominee in the 2012 presidential election, criticized President Obama for not having supported the Syrian rebels. In a major foreign policy speech in October 2012, Romney talked about the opportunity to inflict a severe blow to Iran's regional influence, promising that:

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[256] Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, February 7, 2013, Department of Defense's Response to the Attack on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, and the Findings of Its Internal Review Following the Attack (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), 29.

> In Syria I'll work with our partners to identify and organize those members of the opposition who share our values and then ensure they obtain the arms they need to defeat Assad's tanks, helicopters and fighter jets. Iran is sending arms to Assad because they know his downfall would be a strategic defeat for them. We should be working no less vigorously through our international partners to support the many Syrians who would deliver that defeat to Iran, rather than sitting on the sidelines.[257]

Various think-tank analysts also called for aiding the Syrian opposition.[258] The pressure from some domestic quarters to aid the Syrian rebels was part of the context for President Obama's continuing deliberations about what to do regarding Syria during late 2012 and early 2013. The situation on the ground continued to grow worse during that period.

Spring 2013 Onwards: United States' Support for the Anti-Assad Rebels

During the spring of 2013, President Obama gave approval for the CIA to provide lethal assistance to the anti-Assad rebels.[259] It is likely that President Obama's decision reflected both developments on the ground in Syria and the political pressure for arming the rebels that existed in the United States. There were probably at least five underlying reasons why President Obama authorized a step that he had rejected the previous year.

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[257] Mitt Romney: 'Remarks on Foreign Policy at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia: "The Mantle of Leadership",' October 8, 2012. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=102930.

[258] For one example, see Michael Doran and Salman Shaikh, February 8, 2013, "Arm the Syrian Rebels. Now.," The Brookings Institution, accessed September 2, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/02/08-arm-syria-rebels-doran-shaikh; Also see the comments by Marc Lynch on the political pressure exerted on President Obama on this issue, Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 133.

[259] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 222–23.

First, the CIA reportedly revised its plans for the program, especially by devising ways to enhance the United States' control over what happened to the weapons it provided to the armed opposition in Syria.[260] Those revisions could have bred increased confidence that American weapons would not wind up in the possession of the more extremist factions among Syria's opposition.

Second, there were concerning signs that the rebellion in Syria was moving in an increasingly radical direction. In late 2012, eleven opposition factions—whose ranks included around 25 percent of the opposition's overall number of fighters—had established the "Syrian Islamic Front" (SIF).[261] The SIF made clear, when it announced its establishment, that it was committed to Salafist ideology.[262] Additionally, Jabhat al-Nusra, al Qaeda's branch in Syria, was continuing to grow in strength. During the final three months of 2012, the group played a pivotal role in inflicting several significant military setbacks to the regime in the north of the country.[263] As Charles Lister writes, "if July to September 2012 had proved to be a period when jihadists assumed a more strategically notable role in the overall conflict against the Assad regime, then November and December 2012 was when they began to underline their potential military superiority to other insurgent groups."[264] Consequently, by early 2013 there was a stronger rationale—given the United States' interest in arresting the development of Syria as a base for terrorist and

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[260] Landler, 221–22.
[261] Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand," 7.
[262] Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Syrian Islamic Front: A New Extremist Force, PolicyWatch 2031" (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 4, 2013), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-syrian-islamic-front-a-new-extremist-force.
[263] Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, Kindle Edition (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 85.
[264] Lister, 93–94.

extremist organizations—for providing American lethal aid to more moderate factions of the opposition in an effort to prevent them from being eclipsed by the more extremist groups.

Third, in response to the military gains made by the opposition in late 2012, Iran and Hezbollah increased their military assistance to the Assad regime. By early 2013, personnel from Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps had established a paramilitary organization in Syria that was named the "National Defense Force" and that would provide the Assad regime with an infusion of military manpower.[265] The benefits to the Assad regime of Iranian and Hezbollah support were demonstrated in April 2013 when regime and Hezbollah forces launched an offensive against the areas surrounding the town of al-Qusayr. The town, which lies close to the border with Lebanon, had been occupied by rebels for more than a year and was strategically significant, including because it lies close to the main highway between Damascus and the port of Tartus, where Russia had a naval facility.[266] As Nicholas Blanford explains, Syrian regime and Hezbollah forces re-captured the town of al-Qusayr itself in June 2013; the operation was the first time that Hezbollah "played a significant lead combat role in the Syria war."[267] During the offensive, Hezbollah made significant use of Iranian-supplied artillery rockets.[268] Since one of the United States' interests was to counter Iran's regional influence, notably including the influence it possessed through its proxy Hezbollah, by the spring of 2013 there was a

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[265] Lister, 90.
[266] Nicholas Blanford, "The Battle for Qusayr: How the Syrian Regime and Hizb Allah Tipped the Balance," *CTC Sentinel (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point)* 6, no. 8 (August 2013), https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/08/CTCSentinel-Vol6Iss86.pdf.
[267] Blanford.
[268] Lister, *The Syrian Jihad*, 137.

greater rationale for helping the anti-Assad opposition as a means of countering Iran and its proxies in Syria.

Fourth, by the spring of 2013 there was evidence that the Assad regime had used chemical weapons in an effort to counter the uprising. The first such allegations emerged in December 2012, after the regime had struck a district in the city of Homs.[269] On April 25, 2013, the White House announced that the American intelligence community had assessed that the Assad regime had indeed used chemical weapons.[270] A key American policy objective had been to ensure the security of the Syrian regime's chemical weapons and to prevent their use. There was now a rationale for assisting the opposition as a way to signal to the Assad regime that further use of chemical weapons would carry costs, thereby potentially acting as a deterrent.

Fifth, the low degree of consensus in Congress about whether President Obama had made the correct decision in the fall of 2012 regarding arming the rebels contributed to further political pressure on the White House. In May 2013, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 15-to-3 for legislation to supply arms to "vetted" factions of the anti-Assad opposition.[271] As Elizabeth Saunders argues, one reason that presidents are likely to be concerned about high levels of opposition among the policy elite towards the president's policies is that such opposition can "cue" the broader public—although evidence shows it is generally not highly-focused on foreign policy—to pay attention to the issues on which there is division between the president and others in the policy elite. Thus, presidents have

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[269] Lister, 93.
[270] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 12.
[271] Patricia Zengerle, "Senate Panel Backs Arming Syria Rebels," *Reuters*, May 21, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-usa/senate-panel-backs-arming-syria-rebels-idUSBRE94K1AG20130522.

a political incentive to try to bargain with and accommodate those within the elite who are opposed to a particular policy, especially if there are significant blocs of dissent and if the issue becomes salient enough.[272] That dynamic was at work during the spring of 2013. President Obama had called for Assad to go, but it had been publicly acknowledged that the previous year he had rejected arming the anti-Assad opposition. Despite that, developments were getting worse on the ground in Syria and prominent members of the policy elite, both within the administration and on Capitol Hill, had called for the United States to provide lethal aid to the opposition.

According to Mark Landler, President Obama approved providing military aid to the anti-Assad opposition in April 2013.[273] In June 2013, by which point the U.S. intelligence community had concluded that the Assad regime had definitely used chemical weapons, the White House decided to confirm publicly that the administration was providing military support to the Syrian opposition. On June 13, 2013, Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes released a public statement explaining that:

> Following a deliberative review, our intelligence community assesses that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year.[274]

The military assistance that President Obama had authorized to the anti-Assad opposition was a covert program. Nevertheless, in the context of the political pressure it

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[272] Elizabeth N. Saunders, "War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force," *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 466–501.
[273] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 222–23.
[274] "Statement by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syrian Chemical Weapons Use," whitehouse.gov, June 13, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/13/statement-deputy-national-security-advisor-strategic-communications-ben-.

had been facing to arm the rebels, the White House took the step of acknowledging that President Obama had authorized military assistance to the Supreme Military Council (SMC), which was the overarching military command for the Free Syrian Army. As Rhodes' June 2013 statement explained:

> Following on the credible evidence that the regime has used chemical weapons against the Syrian people, the President has augmented the provision of non-lethal assistance to the civilian opposition, and also authorized the expansion of our assistance to the Supreme Military Council (SMC), and we will be consulting with Congress on these matters in the coming weeks. This effort is aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of the SMC, and helping to coordinate the provision of assistance by the United States and other partners and allies. Put simply, the Assad regime should know that its actions have led us to increase the scope and scale of assistance that we provide to the opposition, including direct support to the SMC. These efforts will increase going forward.[275]

In an on-the-record conference call with reporters the same day, Ben Rhodes confirmed that "the president has made a decision about providing more support to the opposition" and "that includes military support."[276]

President Obama's decision to approve such support to the Syrian opposition was likely the result of a mixture of adverse developments on the ground in Syria as well as the political pressure he had been facing to arm the anti-Assad opposition. That domestic political pressure might not have been enough to produce the decision to provide military aid to the rebels if it had not been the case that the situation in Syria had continued to get worse, which exacerbated the pressure to do something in response. Nevertheless, the

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[275] "Statement by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syrian Chemical Weapons Use."

[276] On-the-Record Conference Call by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes on Syria, June 13, 2013. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=104549.

White House's decision to confirm publicly in June 2013 that the United States was providing military assistance to the anti-Assad rebels reflected the political pressures facing the administration and represented an attempt to respond to them.

In the months that followed that June 2013 announcement, there is little evidence currently available in the public domain to suggest that the United States moved quickly to provide substantial amounts of aid to the Syrian opposition.[277] One year after Ben Rhodes' statement, in June 2014, Robert Ford published an op-ed in the *New York Times*. Ford had been the U.S. ambassador to Syria; he was withdrawn from the country in October 2011 due to security concerns, but had continued in his position until February 2014 when he resigned because he concluded that he could no longer support American policy towards the country. In his June 2014 op-ed, Ford made clear that he felt the United States had not provided significant military assistance to the anti-Assad opposition and argued that the United States should step up its efforts.[278] As Ford argued:

> To be sure, there is no military solution, but it is possible to salvage something in Syria by preparing the conditions for a genuine negotiation toward a new government. And that requires empowering the moderate armed opposition. First, the Free Syrian Army needs far greater material support and training so that it can mount an effective guerrilla war……the Free Syrian Army must have more military hardware, including mortars and rockets to pound airfields to impede regime air supply operations and, subject to reasonable safeguards, surface-to-air missiles. Giving the armed opposition these new capabilities would jolt the Assad military's confidence. Even Iran would have to consider the safety of its supply flights. That caution would inform Iranian thinking and might even stir Tehran to join us in pushing for serious negotiations.[279]

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[277] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 225.
[278] Robert S. Ford, "Arm Syria's Opposition," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2014, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/opinion/ford-arm-syrias-opposition.html.
[279] Ford.

One reason that the United States' military aid to the Syrian opposition remained limited between June 2013 and June 2014 was because of the agreement struck with the Assad regime in the fall of 2013 regarding Syria's chemical weapons. On August 21, 2013, the Assad regime launched a sarin attack against rebel-controlled areas in Damascus, killing close to 1,500 civilians.[280] Over the following week, the United States geared up to launch airstrikes against nodes of the Assad regime's military capability. At the end of August, President Obama announced that he would seek congressional approval for undertaking strikes. However, by mid-September, Russia and the United States had jointly agreed on an alternative to American military action: the Assad regime would give up its chemical weapons stockpile.[281] The effort to destroy Syria's chemical weapons subsequently took place under the auspices of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations. For the period between September 2013 and when the OPCW mission was declared complete—in June 2014—the United States required continued cooperation from the Syrian regime in meeting the terms of the agreement. Consequently, to encourage the effort to proceed there was a reason for the United States to avoid ramping up its support to the anti-Assad opposition too dramatically. As Derek Chollet later wrote, "after the deal with Russia to remove the chemical weapons, the regime was a necessary silent partner in relinquishing its stockpiles."[282]

After June 2014, that rationale for soft-pedaling military assistance to the anti-Assad opposition went away. To date there has been insufficient public reporting about the high-level decision-making within the Obama administration regarding CIA support to the

[280] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 1.
[281] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 227–30.
[282] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 132.

anti-Assad opposition after June 2014 to undertake an analysis of the policy direction given to the CIA after that time. Press reports have indicated that by the end of the Obama administration total costs for the CIA program—reportedly codenamed "Timber Sycamore"—were approximately $1 billion and that among the support provided by the United States to vetted rebels were anti-armor weapons.[283] Secretary of State John Kerry, who served between January 2013 and January 2017, made repeated diplomatic efforts to reach some sort of workable political settlement in Syria, but the Assad regime was never sufficiently threatened by the armed opposition to force it to consider such an agreement.[284]

Among the major reasons why that was the case is because the dynamic of action and counteraction was very much evident in the Syrian conflict. On occasions when the anti-Assad opposition made significant gains on the ground, Iran and Russia stood ready to provide further backing to the regime, thereby nullifying the prospects of any decisive shift. As already described, Iran had increased its support during early 2013 after the Assad regime had been pushed onto the back foot. Another clear illustration of the Assad regime's ability to garner increased support from its patrons, when needed to nullify gains by the opposition, was provided by the Russian escalation in September 2015. In the spring of that year, Islamist factions among the armed opposition—aided in particular by support from Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—captured significant territory in Idlib province, thereby posing a growing threat to Assad's core stronghold of Latakia.[285] In September of

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[283] Mark Mazzetti, Adam Goldman, and Michael S. Schmidt, "Behind the Sudden Death of a $1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria," *New York Times*, August 2, 2017.
[284] Lesley Wroughton, "Kerry's Ceaseless Diplomacy Faces Sternest Test on Syria," *Reuters*, September 25, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-kerry/kerrys-ceaseless-diplomacy-faces-sternest-test-on-syria-idUSKCN11V0FZ.
[285] Hassan Hassan, "Syria's Revitalized Rebels Make Big Gains in Assad's Heartland," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed February 9, 2017,

2015, Russia escalated its involvement in defense of the regime. Up until this point, Russia had already, in the words of Dmitry Adamsky, "kept the regime afloat through diplomacy and airlifts and sealifts of ammunitions and supplies."[286] In September 2015, Russia intervened to aid the Assad regime through an air campaign. By January 2016, Russian airstrikes had destroyed large numbers of FSA assets, including logistical facilities and arms depots.[287]

The fact that the Assad regime could count on two major outside patrons represented a fundamental difference between the rebellion in Syria and that in Libya. In 2011, a coalition air campaign had tilted the battlefield in favor of the Libyan rebels; without any outside patrons, Qaddafi had no means to counteract that shift. In Syria, Iranian and Russian support made any meaningful shift in the battlefield towards the opposition unlikely.

The significance of external backers, or their absence, was also demonstrated by the United States' other war in Syria—the one against the "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria." The jihadist organization "Islamic State in Iraq"—a successor to al Qaeda in Iraq—had entered the Syrian conflict in mid-May 2013 and by June 2013 the group—now the "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS)—had, Lister reports, "overt presences in areas of Aleppo, Raqqa and Deir ez Zour."[288] ISIS would go on to capture significant amounts of

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https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/28/syrias-revitalized-rebels-make-big-gains-in-assads-heartland/.

[286] Dmitry Adamsky, "Putin's Damascus Steal," *Foreign Affairs*, September 16, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-09-16/putins-damascus-steal.

[287] Lister, "The Free Syrian Army: A Decentralized Insurgent Brand," 19.

[288] Lister, *The Syrian Jihad*, 119–20.

territory in both Syria and Iraq, and it declared a "caliphate" in June 2014 in the areas in which it had obtained control.

With the growing strength of ISIS, in May 2014 President Obama announced an effort to train-and-equip Syrian rebels to fight ISIS.[289] Congress subsequently approved the program in September 2014.[290] That train-and-equip program was run by the Pentagon and focused on aiding Syrian rebels to fight ISIS; the program to aid the armed opposition against Assad remained a CIA-run program.

The Pentagon's train-and-equip program proved to be a failure; in September 2015, the head of Central Command informed Congress that only "four or five" trainees were in combat in Syria against ISIS.[291] There were multiple reasons for the program's failure; among them, it was a logistically complex undertaking because fighters were trained outside of Syria in regional states and then had to transit back into Syria and also because the program's explicit focus on combatting ISIS likely discouraged recruitment among those in the opposition whose priority was fighting Assad. Subsequently, the Pentagon developed a much more effective way to combat ISIS in Syria. American airpower and special forces supported local forces in Syria, most notably the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) whose ranks included significant numbers of Kurdish fighters. Unlike the Assad regime, ISIS did not have any external patron to help it offset the impact of American support to the SDF. Over time, therefore, a combination of American airpower and special

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[289] Chollet, *The Long Game*, 142.
[290] Ian Swanson, "Senate Approves Obama Request to Arm, Train Syrian Rebels," The Hill, September 18, 2014, http://thehill.com/policy/finance/218248-senate-approves-obama-request-to-arm-train-syrian-rebels.
[291] W. J. Hennigan, "U.S. Commander Says Only 4 or 5 Pentagon-Trained Fighters in Syria," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-fg-isis-fight-20150916-story.html.

forces, combined with partner forces on the ground, clawed back ISIS' territory; it took time, but there was little doubt that with the infusion of American support to its partners on the ground, ISIS-controlled territory would be painstakingly retaken. Through this strategy, ISIS' declared capital, Raqqa, was recaptured by SDF forces in October 2017, almost four years since it fell under ISIS control.[292]

Due to Iranian and Russian support to the Assad regime, any prospect of American military aid to the anti-Assad opposition decisively shifting the contest between the rebels and the regime was much less likely. President Obama judged that the only way to have a decisive impact against the Assad regime would have been for the United States to intervene directly to overthrow Assad, something he was unwilling to entertain. In a press conference towards the end of his presidency, in December 2016, President Obama was asked about Syria and whether he felt any responsibility for what had unfolded there during his presidency. His answer illuminated why he had concluded that American military aid to the anti-Assad rebels could never be decisive. As Obama put it in that press conference:

[292] "Raqqa: IS 'capital' Falls to US-Backed Syrian Forces," BBC News, October 17, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41646802.

> With respect to Syria, what I have consistently done is taken the best course that I can to try to end the civil war while having also to take into account the long-term national security interests of the United States. And throughout this process…….whenever we went through it, the challenge was that, short of putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, uninvited, without any international law mandate, without sufficient support from Congress, at a time when we still had troops in Afghanistan and we still had troops in Iraq, and we had just gone through over a decade of war and spent trillions of dollars, and when the opposition on the ground was not cohesive enough to necessarily govern a country, and you had a military superpower in Russia prepared to do whatever it took to keep its client-state involved, and you had a regional military power in Iran that saw their own vital strategic interests at stake and were willing to send in as many of their people or proxies to support the regime—that in that circumstance, unless we were all in and willing to take over Syria, we were going to have problems, and that everything else was tempting because we wanted to do something and it sounded like the right thing to do, but it was going to be impossible to do this on the cheap.[293]

Since Russia's escalation in September 2015, the Assad regime incrementally, and brutally, clawed back territory from the opposition. It did so through a combination of indiscriminate violence, sieges, and selective ceasefires with the opposition. The regime's incremental but real progress was vividly emphasized by the regime's recapture of Aleppo late in Barack Obama's presidency. When President Obama's second term came to a close in January 2017, significant tracts of Syrian territory still lay outside the Syrian regime's control, but it was clear that Bashar al-Assad was not leaving power anytime soon. He was, however, ruling over a devastated land. More than 450,000 people had been killed in Syria's civil war and millions more had been displaced by the conflict.[294]

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[293] "Press Conference by the President: Transcript" (The White House, December 16, 2016), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/12/16/press-conference-president.

[294] "Syrian War Monitor Says 465,000 Killed in Six Years of Fighting," *Reuters*, March 13, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-casualties/syrian-war-monitor-says-465000-killed-in-six-years-of-fighting-idUSKBN16K1Q1; United Nations News Service, "UN News - Syria: Human Toll and Suffering Are 'sickening,' UN Relief

Would Stronger American Support to the Anti-Assad Rebellion have led to Better Outcomes?

Since Syria's conflict bred a humanitarian crisis of truly epic proportions, a critical policy question is whether the United States could have acted differently so as to avoid that outcome. Of particular interest to this dissertation's enquiry is whether earlier and stronger military support to the anti-Assad opposition would have led to a different outcome by threatening Bashar al-Assad's hold on power sufficiently that he might have considered a political settlement to the war. Some analysts have made the case that President Obama erred by not providing military aid to the rebels sooner and in more significant amounts than was actually the case. Charles Lister, an expert on Syria who has studied the conflict closely, including through numerous meetings with the opposition, argued in 2017 that the Obama administration never devoted sufficient resources to the CIA program to aid the rebels. As he argued in a media interview:

> They never gave it the necessary resources or space to determine the dynamics of the battlefield. They were drip-feeding opposition groups just enough to survive but never enough to become dominant actors.[295]

In March 2016, Steven Heydemann, another expert on Syria, lamented that the United States had never given the anti-Assad opposition sufficient support to enable it to counter Iranian and Russian aid to the regime. As Heydemann argued:

Chief Tells Security Council," UN News Service Section, April 28, 2016, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53814#.WJ3atRIrLR1.

[295] Mazzetti, Goldman, and Schmidt, "Behind the Sudden Death of a $1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria."

> While the opposition's lack of coherence has made it harder to deal with, the fighters succeeded in pushing the combined might of the Assad regime to the point of regime collapse, not once but three times: in mid-2012, again in mid-2013 and in the summer of 2015. Each time, external intervention from the regime's backers, unmatched by comparable support to the opposition, tipped the military balance back in the regime's favor, forestalling conditions that might have forced the regime into negotiations. Even after large-scale Iranian intervention in 2013 to prevent the regime's fall, the armed opposition continued to gain ground. By mid-2015, opposition gains had pushed the Assad regime into such a precarious position that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his military to intervene. It was only well into the uprising, and in response to the failure of the United States and its allies to respond to appeals for assistance, that the armed opposition underwent a process of radicalization.[296]

We will, of course, never know what would have happened in Syria if the United States had provided more substantial military support to the anti-Assad opposition and had done so sooner. There is, however, another potential implication to Heydemann's observation about how outside support to the Assad regime salvaged that government on three major occasions; Iran and Russia might have been so resolutely committed to saving the Syrian regime that no matter how much weaponry the United States provided to the rebels, the military balance on the ground was unlikely to change decisively because of counteraction by Assad's patrons. If that was the case, there was likely to be little gain from doubling down on American backing to the rebels, especially for humanitarian reasons. Rather than decisively changing the balance on the ground, escalating American military assistance to the rebels was likely just to lead to further strategic stalemate.

Instead, the most likely way in which the United States could have decisively changed the military balance on the ground would have been to intervene directly with

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[296] Steven Heydemann, "Why the United States Hasn't Intervened in Syria," *Washington Post: Monkey Cage*, March 14, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/14/why-the-united-states-hasnt-intervened-in-syria/.

American forces early in the conflict to overthrow the Assad regime and then to deploy a stabilization force into Syria. President Obama had no intention of taking that course of action and neither did many other people in Washington D.C. That is why "arming the rebels" became the policy option that was frequently put forward by advocates of greater intervention in Syria; the logic of action and counteraction carried real risks, however, that pursuing that option strenuously would merely escalate an externally supported war of attrition, rather than save lives.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

As President Obama did not consider the proposal to provide military support to the armed opposition in Syria until the fall of 2012—almost a year after the coalition air campaign in Libya had concluded—one obvious question is to what extent the experiences of American military intervention in Libya shaped President Obama's decision-making towards Syria? We can reasonably postulate that the consequences of the Libyan intervention were not a central driver of President Obama's decision in the fall of 2012 to refrain from furnishing military aid to the Syrian rebels. That is because, at that point, the aftermath of the Libya intervention had not become especially dire from the perspective of American policymakers. As noted above, Libya had successfully held elections in July 2012. As Mark Landler reports, President Obama discussed the proposal to arm the anti-Assad rebels with his senior national security team shortly prior to the attack by militants on the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi in Libya.[297] It was that attack that vividly demonstrated the instability and security challenges that plagued post-Qaddafi Libya.

[297] Landler, *Alter Egos*, 218–21.

Nevertheless, when that attack took place, President Obama had already opted not to accept the proposal to arm the anti-Assad rebels. Therefore, the deteriorating situation in Libya, reflected in the Benghazi attack, could not have been determinative of Obama's decision about aiding the Syrian rebels in the fall of 2012.

When asked by this author about the impact of the Libya intervention on the Obama administration's decision-making regarding Syria, David Petraeus, who was director of the CIA from September 2011 to November 2012, responded with the following observation:

> I tend to think that the "lessons of Iraq" and perhaps the "lessons of Afghanistan" were more important in the case of the Obama Administration's decision-making regarding Syria than the "lessons of Libya." The latter were not that clear when the president was deliberating about what to do in Syria.[298]

It was not the aftermath of the Libyan intervention that made President Obama wary of direct, large-scale American military action in the Middle East. In October 2002, five months before the United States' invasion of Iraq began, Obama—who was then a state senator in Illinois—argued against the war and stated that:

> I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences.[299]

Obama subsequently felt vindicated in his warning that an occupation of Iraq would be a risky endeavor for the United States. In August 2007, while he was running for the Democratic Party's nomination for president for the following year's election, Obama said that Iraq had been a "catastrophic war," which the United States had initiated "with no

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[298] David Petraeus, Interview with Author (via Email), December 2017.
[299] Barack Obama, "Remarks on Iraq (Transcript)," October 2, 2002, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99591469.

appreciation of how many enemies we would create, and no plan for how to get out."[300] During his presidential campaign in 2008, Obama told voters that he would, as president, bring an end to the war in Iraq. As Obama was publicly skeptical of the United States' ability to undertake effective military occupations in the Middle East from before when he became president, he did not need the experience of Libya to make him cautious about embarking on another major military intervention in the region. In the fall of 2012, when he considered the proposal to arm the Syrian rebels, Obama assessed that the policy option would not prove decisive. The only way to have such a decisive effect was for the United States to overthrow the Syrian regime directly. President Obama would have concluded that such an operation was a poor idea, whether the Libya intervention had occurred or not.

We now turn to an analysis of how the alternative theories of realism and ideological competition would explain the United States' support for the Libyan opposition, as well as how they would explain President Obama's decision-making regarding the provision of military aid to the anti-Assad rebels. After that, we consider what insights follow from a principal-agent framework regarding the effectiveness of American support to the Libyan and Syrian rebels.

Realism

A realist framework does not furnish a convincing explanation for why, on the one hand, the United States provided decisive support for the Libyan rebels, but on the other hand President Obama rejected aid to the Syrian rebels in September 2012. After all, a

[300] Barack Obama, Remarks in Washington, DC: 'The War We Need to Win', August 1, 2007. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=77040.

realpolitik calculus would arguably have implied the opposite decisions: no support to the Libyan rebels, but military aid to the Syrian rebels from early on in that uprising. To many observers, the United States' strategic interests in Libya were relatively small. That is why Robert Gates, who tended to have a realist approach to foreign policy, argued against intervention in Libya in 2011. After the air campaign against Libya had begun, Henry Kissinger and another realist-minded former secretary of state, James Baker, wrote that "the United States did not have a vital interest at stake in Libya."[301] On the other hand, a realpolitik approach to foreign policy could have counseled arming the anti-Assad opposition in Syria from early on in the conflict in order to impose costs not only upon the Assad regime but also upon its patron, Iran, which was clearly an adversary of the United States.

A realist framework fails to provide a convincing explanation of the United States' responses to the Libyan and Syrian rebellions because the United States' liberal-democratic character shaped the responses to those armed uprisings. In Libya, even though the United States did not necessarily have huge interests at stake, President Obama authorized an intervention, which took the side of the Libyan rebels, because the Qaddafi regime was threatening to attack the city of Benghazi in an act that could have egregiously violated human rights. Additionally, the rebels articulated a vision for a new Libya that would be based on liberal-democratic norms. Even with low strategic interests at stake, American ideals helped to produce a decision in favor of siding with the anti-Qaddafi rebels.

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[301] Henry A. Kissinger and James A. Baker III, "Grounds for U.S. Military Intervention," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2011, sec. Opinions, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/grounds-for-us-military-intervention/2011/04/07/AFDqX03C_story.html.

In Syria, even though the United States could have imposed costs on Iran in the fall of 2012 by arming the anti-Assad rebels, that was not enough to produce a decision to aid those rebels. President Obama's primary concern was not bleeding a regional adversary in Syria, but rather to consider whether the United States could, through a military operation of limited means, stem the chaos that was engulfing the country. Even among advocates of arming the rebels, their arguments for doing so were not solely, or even mainly in many cases, focused on imposing costs on Iran, but rather on trying to find a way to end the bloodshed and suffering in Syria.

Ideological Competition

There was an element of ideological competition that informed the United States' support to the Libyan rebels and Syrian rebels. After all, the changes sweeping the Arab world in 2011 were, in a significant way, a contest between authoritarianism and what appeared to be a yearning for liberal democracy among significant numbers of people in the region. Ideological competition cannot by itself, however, explain the United States' support to the armed opposition in Libya and Syria. That is clear from considering the United States' tepid response to political protests in Bahrain and the monarchy's reaction to them, in comparison to the positions adopted by the United States regarding Libya and Syria.

At the same time as Libya's uprising began in 2011, so did large-scale protests in Bahrain. Demonstrators there initially called for political reforms, including a new constitution and the creation of an elected legislature, but subsequently began to call for

the fall of the Bahraini monarchy.[302] The security forces responded with mass arrests and the use of deadly force against demonstrators. The Bahraini monarchy requested assistance from Saudi Arabia and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and, in mid-March 2011, GCC troops intervened in Bahrain to put down the unrest.[303] The United States urged the Bahraini security forces, as well as the GCC, to "show restraint and respect the rights of the people of Bahrain."[304] Nevertheless, after the GCC troops had helped disperse the protests, the Bahraini regime commenced what Marc Lynch describes as "a comprehensive campaign of repression and intimidation that collectively punished almost the entire Shi'a majority."[305]

The United States' reaction to the repression in Bahrain was muted. It is fairly easy to explain why that was the case using this dissertation's theoretical framework. The first stage of that framework emphasizes a presidential assessment of the United States' interests. In Bahrain, the United States had interests at stake, but they were contrary to any effort to help the protestors oust the monarchy in that country. The headquarters of the United States' Fifth Fleet is in Bahrain and is a critical component of the United States' posture in the Persian Gulf. Additionally, Saudi Arabia made very clear to the United States that it regarded itself to have major strategic interests in quashing the protests in Bahrain

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[302] Kelly McEvers, "Bahrain: The Revolution That Wasn't," *NPR*, January 5, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/01/05/144637499/bahrain-the-revolution-that-wasnt.
[303] Mark L. Haas, "The United States and the Arab Spring: Threats and Opportunities in a Revolutionary Era," in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideologies*, ed. David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas (Westview Press, 2014), 509; Lynch, *The New Arab Wars*, 72.
[304] "Statement from the Press Secretary on Violence in Yemen and Bahrain," whitehouse.gov, March 13, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/13/statement-press-secretary-violence-yemen-and-bahrain.
[305] Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, 1st ed.:138.

and that meant that the American response to the demonstrations there would have major implications for the state of the strategically-important U.S.-Saudi Arabia relationship. Saudi Arabian leaders had already reacted with indignation at the way President Obama withdrew support from Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.[306] Jeremy Pressman emphasizes that strategic concerns about the health of the U.S.-Saudi partnership strongly influenced the United States' muted response to the events in Bahrain when he writes that:

> What U.S. interest militated against active support for Bahrain's political opposition? While it would be easy to point to Bahrain's support for basing the U.S. Navy, a stronger reason for the U.S. position was the Saudi-U.S. alliance and Saudi outrage when the Obama administration publicly turned against Egypt's Mubarak just weeks earlier.[307]

If the United States' responses to the Arab spring had been purely driven by ideological concerns, the United States would have likely adopted a stronger stance against the crackdown on protestors in Bahrain undertaken by the monarchy in that country and its GCC allies. The major reason why the United States did not vigorously oppose the actions of the Bahraini government, in the same way as it did the actions of Qaddafi and Assad, was because American interests, as well as ideological concerns, informed U.S. decision-making. While Bahrain was a close American partner in the region, and was closely allied to Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria had long been American adversaries. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, the United States' responses to the rebellions in

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[306] Both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates were forced to cancel planned visits to Saudi Arabia in March 2011 after the House of Saud made clear that it would not host them. See Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, "Saudi and Iranian Interests Create U.S. Dilemma," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2011, sec. World, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/18/world/18diplomacy.html.

[307] Jeremy Pressman, "Same Old Story? Obama and the Arab Uprisings," in *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, ed. Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch (Westview Press, 2013), 224.

Libya and Syria were driven by assessments of both American interests and liberal-democratic ideals.

Principal-Agent Frameworks

In response to the rebellions in both Libya and Syria, President Obama established as an American political objective the exit of the regime's leader—Qaddafi and Assad respectively—from power. In both cases, the armed opposition shared that objective with the United States. Given that major interest alignment between the United States and the rebels, if we only adopt a principal-agent perspective, there should have been little impediment in either case to the United States helping the rebels to achieve the departure of the regime's leader.

In reality, American military support on the side of the Libyan rebels proved effective in helping them remove Qaddafi, whereas the provision of American military assistance to the anti-Assad opposition never came close to securing the Syrian leader's departure. Among the reasons for the different outcomes in Libya and Syria, of course, were that the Assad regime was stronger militarily than the Libyan regime and it also had two major power patrons, Iran and Russia, whereas Qaddafi did not have a major external supporter. Consequently, regardless of the fact that the United States and the armed opposition shared the objective of achieving Assad's removal from power, the amount of American resources needed to bring that about would have been extensive and more than President Obama was prepared to expend. A comparison of Libya and Syria underscores that, when trying to understand the effectiveness of American support for rebels, it is necessary to consider not only the relationship between the United States and the rebel

movement in question, but also the implications for effectiveness that follow from the other side of the conflict—the regime the rebels are fighting and that regime's outside patrons.

CONCLUSION

In the spring of 2011, the uprisings in the Arab world inspired considerable hope, both in the region and in the United States. Reflecting that sense of hope, in May 2011 President Obama said that "shouts of human dignity are being heard across the region." While he cautioned that "it will be years before this story reaches its end," he also said that the United States could not "hesitate to stand squarely on the side of those who are reaching for their rights, knowing that their success will bring about a world that is more peaceful, more stable, and more just."[308]

By the end of Obama's presidency, the hope of 2011 had been replaced by multiple horrors, notably including in Libya and Syria. In the former, although Qaddafi was gone after 42 years of brutal dictatorship, the country was plagued by instability. In Syria, when Obama left office, the estimated death toll from the country's civil war was around half a million people.[309] Could those horrors have been avoided? That is a question that will, and should, be subject to much examination in the years that follow. The above analysis illuminates the challenges associated with trying to shape the regional transformations in a positive way through providing military support for armed rebellion. Once the uprisings in Libya and Syria had become militarized, there was an obvious reason why the provision of military support to anti-regime rebels became a much-touted and discussed option in

[308] "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa."
[309] "Syrian War Monitor Says 465,000 Killed in Six Years of Fighting."

American policy debates, both in the public discourse and in administration deliberations. That policy option seemed to offer the United States a way to help remove the Libyan and Syrian regimes, thereby creating space for the people of those countries to build new political systems, without requiring the large-scale deployment of American military forces, which was politically unpopular in the aftermath of a decade spent in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In Libya, American intervention, as part of a coalition air campaign, titled the battlefield decisively towards the rebels. The United States and its partners were able to achieve that shift in the battlefield because, although the rebels exhibited various military weaknesses, the Qaddafi regime's military was far from impressive and the regime lacked major external patrons. Even though American support on the side of the rebels helped them to remove Qaddafi, the aftermath was disappointing. The rebel movement, which had been united in the aim of getting rid of Qaddafi, fragmented and various militias fought with one another. Meanwhile, the United States and its partners had no appetite for deploying a stabilization force to Libya in an effort to provide security to help a new political system emerge. The United States' reluctance to undertake such an operation reflects what Dominic Tierney characterizes as the "quagmire tradition" in American thinking about war.[310] That reluctance on the part of the United States to deploy a ground force was mirrored by a reluctance on the part of the NTC to have any outside force deploy to Libya.

[310] Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2010).

In Syria, providing military aid to the armed opposition always faced a major obstacle to securing Assad's exit from power—Iran and Russia staunchly backed the Syrian regime and their aid to it could counteract support from the United States and others to the rebels. Given that dynamic, President Obama was probably correct to conclude that trying to have a decisive impact on the ground through efforts to "arm the rebels" was a losing proposition. The way to have had a decisive impact would have been to embark upon a direct American invasion of Syria to change the regime. That would have left the United States to undertake an occupation of the country and to lead an effort to help construct a new political system in Syria. Whether President Obama was correct to eschew that option is another issue that will, and should, be analyzed and debated for years to come. In learning the lessons of Syria, however, it must be recognized that providing military aid to the opposition was unlikely to help the rebels achieve Assad's departure through a political settlement or military victory. The real question is not whether President Obama should have armed the rebels sooner and more significantly; rather, the fundamental question is whether the United States should have stayed out completely or whether it should have intervened with its own forces in an effort to end the bloodshed.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This final chapter undertakes three tasks. First, it reviews the theoretical conclusions reached from the analysis in this dissertation. Second, it considers potential avenues of future research. Third, it presents policy recommendations for American policymakers in order to inform their deliberations about how to respond to armed rebellions in other countries.

Theoretical Conclusions

What Factors have Influenced whether the United States has provided Military Support to Armed Rebellions?

As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war argues, whether or not the United States provides support to an armed rebellion in another country is determined by an assessment of the nation's interests and its liberal-democratic ideals. As a result of the fragmentation of power in the making of American foreign policy, both the president and Congress play a role in making those assessments. Contrary to realist theories, American support for armed rebellion is not driven solely by the nation's strategic interests. At the same time, contrary to the expectations of theories grounded in ideological competition, American support to rebellion is not simply a matter of promoting the nation's ideology.

Of the case studies in this dissertation, American support to the Afghan mujahedin was the one in which there was the most widespread agreement that supporting the rebels could promote U.S. strategic interests and could be defended in terms of the nation's ideals. As the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan—thereby moving its military power closer

to the strategically-vital Persian Gulf—there was widespread agreement among American policymakers and politicians that countering the Soviet occupation would serve U.S. interests. American policymakers, in both the executive branch and in Congress, also assessed that aiding the mujahedin could be defended in terms of American ideals because the Afghan resistance were fighting an occupation force that was waging a brutal counter-insurgency campaign, thereby violating both self-determination and human rights. Among the advocates of helping the mujahedin during the 1980s were Representative Stephen Solarz and Senator Paul Tsongas, neither of whom were archetypal Cold War warriors who emphasized the practices of realpolitik.

By contrast, of the case studies examined, it was the Reagan administration's support for the Nicaraguan contras that precipitated the most significant political debate in Washington D.C. about whether aiding the rebels was likely to promote U.S. interests and the nation's ideals. President Reagan argued that aiding the contras could serve U.S. interests by countering the spread of Soviet- and Cuban-aligned regimes in the western hemisphere. He also argued that aiding the contras could be defended in terms of liberal-democratic ideals because the Sandinistas were a repressive and Marxist-Leninist government. Many in Congress, by contrast, argued that the Sandinistas' relationship with the Soviet Union only grew stronger as a result of American aid to the contras, which meant that U.S. support to the rebels, in this view, did little to promote American interests. Additionally, a major part of the American political contest regarding support for the contras was waged on moral grounds. Opponents of aiding the rebels maintained that, judged relative to the ideals of self-determination, human rights, and democracy, the contras were no better than the Sandinistas themselves. The result of the political contest

was that the United States' support to the rebels was brittle; Congress prohibited support to the rebels in 1984, before subsequently reversing course in 1985 due to a change in the composition of the House of Representatives and because of Sandinista behavior that showcased their alignment with Moscow and their domestic repression. However, following the Iran-contra revelations in late 1986, Congress never approved any further military aid for the contras.

The Reagan administration's provision of support to the UNITA rebels in Angola produced another debate over whether providing aid to the rebels would serve American interests and liberal-democratic ideals. Although President Reagan favored providing UNITA with aid from the beginning of his presidency in 1981, the administration was unable to take that step until 1985 because of the congressional prohibition on covert action in Angola. In 1985, following an expansion of the Cuban and Soviet presence in Angola over the preceding years, Congress voted to repeal the Clark Amendment and the Reagan administration proceeded to supply military aid to UNITA. Nevertheless, due to the continuing doubts among a significant bloc in Congress about whether or not aiding the rebels was consistent with U.S interests and ideals, Congressman Lee Hamilton led an effort to re-impose restrictions on aid to UNITA. The effort failed, but it was another example of how Congress can endeavor to act as a check on the executive branch's ability to support rebellion if there is only a low degree of consensus in Congress that doing so will serve American interests and ideals.

In the case of another rebellion in southern Africa during the 1980s—that waged by RENAMO in Mozambique—the United States refrained from providing military support to the rebels in spite of the call by some policymakers in the United States for such

support to be furnished. That decision reflected, in significant ways, the United States' liberal-democratic character. The State Department was able to demonstrate that engagement with the Mozambican regime, rather than confrontation, enabled the United States to achieve a core policy objective—weakening the link between the FRELIMO government in Mozambique and the Soviet camp in the Cold War. Additionally, RENAMO's brutality and widespread human rights violations meant that, even during the Reagan administration when the United States was furnishing support to various anti-communist insurgencies around the world, the RENAMO rebels proved to be beyond the pale. Contrary to realist predictions that major powers will be willing to back any rebel movement that can help that power compete in the international system, there are limits as to whom will be an acceptable partner for the United States. Those limits are less stringent than many Americans might deem appropriate, but they are real nonetheless.

The case study chapters also demonstrated that the predictions of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war do not solely apply to the United States' decision-making during the Cold War. The theory identifies factors that continue to influence whether or not the United States supports armed rebellion. The theory also fared well in explaining the United States' support to the Libyan and Syrian rebels during the Obama administration. President Obama's decision to intervene in Libya in 2011, as part of a coalition air campaign, reflected his assessment of both American interests and the nation's ideals. The United States had an interest in countering Qaddafi's repressive response to the uprising in Libya, in order to discourage the revolutionary wave sweeping the Arab world from decisively turning in a violent direction. Qaddafi's behavior, both during his preceding 42 years in power, and in particular his threats to the city of Benghazi, were

contrary to liberal-democratic values. As President Obama reportedly told his senior national security team on the day he decided that the United States should intervene in Libya, the nation could not allow large-scale loss of life to occur in Benghazi if the United States had the means to stop it through a limited military action. As Obama put it, "that's just not who we are."[1] Nevertheless, in June 2011, with the air campaign continuing but with the fighting on the ground in Libya appearing stalemated, there existed growing doubts in Congress about the intervention. That precipitated an effort in Congress to restrict funds for American combat operations in support of the coalition's operations. The effort was unsuccessful. Even so, it was yet another example of how Congress can attempt to restrict American support on the side of rebels in cases in which there is not a high degree of consensus in the legislature that aiding rebels is consistent with the nation's interests and ideals.

In contrast to the Obama administration's actions in Libya, the United States never provided such decisive support to the anti-Assad rebels in Syria. In the fall of 2012, President Obama decided against a policy proposal, supported by the director of the CIA, the secretary of state, and the secretary of defense, to begin providing military support to vetted factions of the armed opposition in Syria. While the repressive actions of the Assad regime, and the mounting human costs of the conflict in Syria, potentially offered a humanitarian rationale for aiding the rebels in Syria, President Obama concluded that trying to promote U.S. interests and ideals through support to the rebels was unlikely to prove effective. Given the military power of the Assad regime, and especially the fact that it was bolstered by significant aid from Iran and Russia, President Obama determined that

[1] Sanger, *Confront and Conceal*, 1st ed.:345.

the United States would not be able to help the anti-Assad rebels achieve significant gains by merely providing military aid to them. President Obama judged that the only way to have a decisive impact would be through changing the Assad regime directly, an option he was not prepared to entertain because, in his view, U.S. interests were not sufficiently vital to justify that course of action and because he was skeptical of the prospects for success following the removal of the Assad regime. Nevertheless, there was a low degree of consensus in Congress that refraining from aiding the anti-Assad rebels was the correct course of action and the administration faced political pressure at home during the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2013 to support the armed Syrian opposition. President Obama authorized such support in the spring of 2013. It was not solely a result of the domestic political pressures he was facing; developments on the ground in Syria, notably including the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and the increasing power of extremist factions in the conflict, likely changed the commander-in-chief's calculation of what U.S. interests required. Even so, the political pressures exerted upon the Obama administration in late 2012 and into 2013 demonstrate the prediction that if a president decides against aiding a rebellion, but there is a low degree of consensus in Congress that the decision is the appropriate one, the president is liable to face political pressures to change course.

What Factors have Determined how Effective American Support to Rebel Movements has been in Achieving the United States' Foreign Policy Objectives?

Aiding rebels as an instrument of statecraft requires helping to sustain them in a war of attrition. That is for two reasons. First, rebels often begin at a military disadvantage relative to their opponent. It will, consequently, typically take time for rebel movements to close the gap in military power that exists between them and their opponent. Second,

American aid to rebellions is liable to be counteracted by an enhancement of military effort on the other side of the conflict. If the rebels are fighting an occupation force, that occupying power is liable to put more resources into the conflict in an effort to counteract American aid to the rebels. If the rebels are fighting an indigenous regime, that government is likely to seek new, or increased, assistance from outside patrons to offset American support to the rebels. Consequently, aiding a rebellion in a way that is likely to serve American political objectives typically requires providing sustained support to them in order to allow them to fight a protracted war of attrition. As the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war makes clear, the United States will only be likely to provide sustained support if there is widespread agreement, among the president and many members of Congress, that aiding the rebellion is consistent with both American interests and ideals.

The campaign to aid the Afghan mujahedin was a genuinely bipartisan war. Consequently, the United States provided sustained support to the rebels over a decade, which helped the mujahedin to counteract each of the Soviet Union's major attempts to make military gains by intensifying its operations in Afghanistan. With sustained American support, the mujahedin achieved the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, which had been the United States' ultimate political objective from the time that President Carter approved aid to the resistance.

The contrast between Afghanistan and Nicaragua was striking in that regard. Due to the much more contentious political debate in Washington D.C. regarding support to the contras, American military support to the Nicaraguan rebels was brittle and inconsistent. When Congress prohibited military aid to the rebels in 1984 the results on the ground were dramatic as the contras were thrown onto the back foot militarily because the Sandinista

regime continued to receive considerable amounts of support from the Soviet Union and Cuba. When Congress restored military aid in 1986, by contrast, the contras were able to go on the offensive again. Even so, the war remained a strategic stalemate, in part because both sides were aided by outside powers, whose contributions counteracted each other. In early 1988, when Congress voted against more aid for the contras, the rebels accepted a peace agreement with the Sandinista regime.

In Angola, American aid to UNITA during the late 1980s provided the rebels with capabilities against particular advantages enjoyed by the opposing side; American Stinger missiles counteracted Angolan and Cuban airpower, while American-provided TOW missiles counteracted Angolan and Cuban armor. American aid did not create the military stalemate in Angola, but it bolstered it and thereby made some contribution to the diplomatic settlement of 1988 that saw Cuba withdraw its troops from Angola. More important than its military aid to UNITA, however, the United States played a critical role during 1988 in helping to turn the battlefield stalemate into a diplomatic agreement as a result of the efforts of Chester Crocker and his team. Subsequently, American military aid to UNITA following the 1988 agreement allowed the group to survive against the MPLA regime's military power, which was augmented by continuing support from the Soviet Union, and helped the rebels to hold the regime to a military stalemate. That stalemate provided the basis for the 1991 political settlement between the MPLA and UNITA.

The conflicts in Libya and Syria also exemplify how American support to rebels is liable to involve the United States in aiding one side in a war of attrition and the implications that has for the likely effectiveness of this policy option. In Libya, the Qaddafi regime was bereft of external patrons. Although the coalition air campaign and other

support to the rebels had to help the anti-Qaddafi opposition close the military gap with the regime, that support did not have to counteract external aid to Qaddafi to enable the rebels to win. While the rebels' military victory still took 7 months, it was a much shorter military campaign than the other case studies considered in this dissertation, in each of which both the rebels and their opponents had external patrons. In the case of Syria, pursuing the United States' fundamental political objectives—the exit of Assad and a transition to a new political system—through military support to the rebels faced the considerable challenge presented by Iranian and Russian support to the regime. Any increase in American aid to the armed opposition could be counteracted by increased aid to Assad from the regime's outside patrons. Faced with that challenge, President Obama decided not to try to win a war of attrition in Syria against Iran and Russia.

The Long-Term Consequences of American Support to Armed Rebellions

The primary focus of this dissertation's analysis regarding effectiveness was on the determinants of whether American aid to rebellion is likely to achieve a president's declared political objectives. As shown, there is a link between the determinants of whether the United States supports a rebellion and the likely effectiveness of such support for achieving stated political objectives. Additionally, as elaborated in chapter 3, there are three reasons to expect that, even if aid to a rebellion allows the United States to achieve its declared objectives, the long-term consequences of support for armed rebellion are liable to be poor when judged from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power.

First, victorious armed rebellions are, in general, unlikely to be followed by democratic governance.[2] As Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan argue, the violent methods used during an armed rebellion are liable to be continued by victorious rebels if they eventually form a government and armed rebellions are liable to exclude many citizens from participation because of the physical and moral barriers to violence. These dynamics will tend to impede the development of democratic governance in the aftermath of successful rebellion.[3]

Second, the fact that American support to rebellions is liable to precipitate a war of attrition between the United States and its rebel partner, on the one hand, and the regime and its own external patrons—or an occupying power—on the other, increases the risk that the conflict becomes especially devastating. When external powers support opposing sides of a conflict, that tends to increase both the duration and lethality of conflicts.[4] This dynamic carries the risk that considerable devastation will be inflicted upon the country in question, potentially planting the seeds of future security threats.

Third, in the aftermath of devastating wars of attrition, the United States is liable to reduce its involvement in the country swiftly. One strand of American thinking about war is what Dominic Tierney calls the "quagmire tradition," which describes an aversion to

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[2] For empirical analysis of this issue, see Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 215–17.
[3] Chenoweth and Stephan, 32–39 & 207–9.
[4] Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East*, Kindle Edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 130; Aysegul Aydin and Patrick M. Regan, "Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 573–97; Matthew Moore, "Selling to Both Sides: The Effects of Major Conventional Weapons Transfers on Civil War Severity and Duration," *International Interactions* 38, no. 3 (July 1, 2012): 325–47.

"nation-building," understood as constructing friendly, functioning states in other countries.[5] As Tierney emphasizes, the American reluctance to engage in "nation-building" overseas is, in part, a reflection of the United States' classically liberal ideals because such efforts are in tension with the ideals of anti-imperialism and a commitment to limited government.[6] As Tierney makes clear, the aversion to nation-building in foreign lands is a long-running strand of thought in American foreign policy, not simply a result of the United States' experiences in recent decades in places such as Vietnam and Iraq.[7] Due to this tendency to tire quickly of nation-building overseas, the United States is liable to avoid devoting significant attention or resources to helping societies overcome the challenges they face in the aftermath of armed rebellions. Additionally, as the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war predicts, American presidents will typically opt for a limited military option such as aiding rebellion when they assess that the United States has moderate interests at stake in a particular country. The fact that interests are moderate, rather than vital, militates against long-term policy involvement by the United States.

The cases considered in this dissertation furnish evidence for these three dynamics, reinforcing our expectation that, even in cases in which the United States manages to achieve its declared political objectives, the long-term consequences of aiding a rebellion are liable to be disappointing. We will consider the evidence from the case studies suggestive of all three dynamics in turn.

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[5] Dominic Tierney, *How We Fight: Crusades, Quagmires, and the American Way of War*, vol. 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2010), 34–35.
[6] Tierney, 1st ed.:46–47.
[7] Tierney, 1st ed.:77.

First, in the aftermath of political or military victory, rebels are liable to continue the use of violent means in pursuit of their own political goals, rather than making the switch to peaceful means. In Afghanistan, following the eviction of the Soviet Union in 1989, the mujahedin movement fragmented and competing factions each tried to win power for themselves by continuing their military efforts. In Angola, although American aid to UNITA helped to provide the basis for a peace settlement in 1991, which led to elections in 1992, Jonas Savimbi—who had been waging war since the 1960s—refused to live by the results delivered at the ballot box because they were unfavorable to him. In Libya, following the fall of Qaddafi, the armed opposition, which had been united in pursuit of Qaddafi's exit, splintered as the movement's various constituent militias prioritized the continuation of armed means in furtherance of their own power.

Second, the cases also demonstrated how externally supported wars of attrition are liable to escalate into especially deadly conflicts. The conflict in Afghanistan during the 1980s led to the deaths of around one million Afghans and left the country littered with millions of mines.[8] The conflict also produced an estimated 6.2 million refugees.[9] Between 1975 and 1991, during the externally backed proxy war in Angola, more than 350,000 Angolans were estimated to have been killed.[10] At least 70,000 people in Angola are estimated to have been injured as a result of landmines strewn during the country's civil

[8] Joseph J. Collins, *Understanding War in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011), 34.
[9] "Afghanistan 10 Years after Soviet Pull-out," Press Briefing by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Spokesperson, Palais Des Nations, Geneva (UNHCR, February 12, 1999), http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=3ae6b81cf0&query=Return%20to%20Afghanistan.
[10] Chester A. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 488.

war.[11] More recently, the Syrian conflict also escalated to produce tragedy on an epic scale, with hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. Although the United States did not provide decisive support to the rebellion, the conflict still became an externally aided proxy war, with various countries providing military aid to the opposition while Russia and Iran backed the regime. With such outside support, the conflict escalated to levels that likely would not have occurred if it had remained a solely domestic war.

Third, the cases also included examples of how the United States is liable to reduce its policy involvement fairly swiftly in the aftermath of rebellions. The clearest examples of that tendency from among this dissertation's case studies were the aftermath of the Afghanistan war and the aftermath of Qaddafi's fall in Libya. In the former, having helped the mujahedin to evict the Soviet Union, the George H.W. Bush administration pursued efforts to facilitate an internal political settlement in the country. However, after they failed, the United States paid decreasing attention to Afghanistan. The country was left to suffer from the consequences of the devastating war of attrition that had been waged by the superpowers over it during the preceding decade. As Robert Gates commented in his memoirs, after the withdrawal of the USSR, "Afghans could resume fighting among themselves—and hardly anyone cared."[12] In the case of Libya, President Obama's stated limitation that the United States would not deploy ground forces to the country continued in the aftermath of Qaddafi's fall. There was no effort to deploy an outside stabilization force; such a step was favored by neither the countries in the coalition that had intervened

[11] See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 392.
[12] Robert Michael Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, vol. 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 433.

nor by the victorious Libyan opposition themselves. Whether a stabilization force could have achieved success in enhancing security in post-Qaddafi Libya is unknown, but once again it was not tried.

Some Surprising Empirical Findings Related to the United States' Support for Armed Rebellion

The research revealed two major things that were surprising, given the expectations of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war. First, as explained in chapter 6, UNITA's human rights record did not become a significant part of the American policy debate in 1985 and 1986 regarding whether or not the United States should provide military support to that rebellion.[13] That was a surprising finding because this dissertation's theoretical framework predicted that American debates about whether to provide support to an armed rebellion should revolve, in part, around policymakers' assessments of whether a rebellion is defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. An implication of the theory is that American policymakers who oppose aiding a particular rebellion would be expected to point to a rebel movement's human rights record if that type of argument could help them to make a case for restricting American aid to the rebel group in question. As indicated in chapter 6, one likely reason for the limited focus on UNITA's human rights record in the American policy debate was the relatively small amount of information that American politicians had regarding the situation on the ground in Angola.

[13] This is emphasized by Gleijeses. See Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 300.

The other surprising finding—relative to the expectations of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war—is that although American support to each of the contras, UNITA, and the anti-Qaddafi rebels was subject to a low degree of consensus in Congress, in each of those cases the United States managed to achieve its central political objectives. The United States saw the conflict in Nicaragua end with an election that the Sandinistas lost, the United States saw Cuban troops withdraw from Angola and the MPLA government subsequently reach an internal settlement with UNITA, and the United States saw the Libyan rebels overthrow Qaddafi. These outcomes were, at first blush, surprising given the expectations of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war, which predicts that American support to rebellions is unlikely to be successful when the United States' support for a rebellion is brittle due to a low degree of consensus in Congress. Nevertheless, the outcomes in these three cases occurred, in spite of brittle American support to the rebels, due to contingent factors.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas were willing to reach a settlement rather than continue the conflict, in spite of the cessation of American military aid to the rebels after the Iran-contra scandal, because of the economic devastation in Nicaragua and amid a realization that Soviet economic aid could no longer make up for that devastation. In Angola, in a similar way, the MPLA proved willing to reach a negotiated settlement because, by the late 1980s, its economy was devastated and it confronted a decline in the Soviet Union's willingness and capacity to keep economic aid to Angola flowing.[14] Additionally, American military aid to UNITA was vastly exceeded by considerable South African aid.

[14] Michael McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (1989): 111–13 & 118.

It was that aid that helped to convince the MPLA and Cuba that UNITA could not be defeated on the battlefield and, as described in chapter 6, a surge of Cuban forces into Angola during late 1987 and 1988 coerced South Africa into reaching a settlement that required it to grant independence to Namibia. In the case of Libya, the weaknesses of the Qaddafi regime and the absence of any major external supporter of the regime meant that the rebels were able to overthrow the regime before domestic political concerns about American involvement led to restrictions on U.S. military action.

Potential Avenues of Future Research

The theory of liberal-democratic proxy war provides a basis for three additional avenues of research. First, there is merit to examining how other major states' interests and ideological beliefs shape their support for armed rebellions. It would be instructive to analyze whether a similar theoretical framework can be applied to the decision-making of other states. As a first step in that research, it would be useful to examine whether the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war can explain the decision-making of other liberal democracies about whether or not to support armed rebellion. It is unlikely that exactly the same theory can be used for that purpose because of the pronounced institutional power of the United States Congress in the making of American foreign policy. To explain the likely outcomes in other liberal democracies, the theory would need to be revised to take account of the degree of institutional power that a legislature has over foreign policy decision-making in a particular democracy.

Second, an obvious question that follows from this dissertation's analysis is whether some of the central insights regarding effectiveness also apply to American

military support to established governments for purposes of helping them to undertake counter-insurgency campaigns. Those campaigns are also liable to become protracted wars of attrition. Consequently, whether an American effort to help another government counter an insurgency succeeds will plausibly depend, in part, on whether American military support to the government in question is sustained over time. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine if presidential and congressional assessments of whether supporting a particular government is consistent with American interests and ideals can help to explain the effectiveness of helping governments undertake counter-insurgency campaigns.

Third, this dissertation raises the question of whether the policy model at the heart of the theory of liberal-democratic proxy war can be applied to American decisions regarding the use of military force more broadly. It would be useful to examine whether a model that casts the president as making an initial decision—based upon interests and ideals—about whether to use force and then models Congress as rendering a verdict on the president's decision can be used to explain when the United States resorts to the use of military force in general.

Policy Recommendations

For those concerned with the morality of the United States' behavior on the world stage, the influence of the nation's liberal-democratic character on how it has supported armed rebellions has been a decidedly mixed story. American political debates about whether to aid rebellion have revolved, in major ways, around competing arguments about whether particular rebel movements were any better than their opponents when it came to their commitments to liberal-democratic ideals. That said, the outcomes achieved by

American military support for rebellions have left much to be desired. The American record in that regard clearly reflects Samuel Huntington's broader point about the United States when he argued that:

> Critics say that America is a lie because its reality falls so far short of its ideals. They are wrong. America is not a lie; it is a disappointment. But it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope.[15]

The United States has provided support to various rebel movements that, even in those cases in which they might have been better than the regimes they were fighting, still behaved in ways that were far from liberal or democratic. Additionally, the aftermath of the United States' various efforts to back armed rebellions has been far from a story of good governance and liberal democracy. Even so, among the reasons for hope is that American policymakers and citizens, by virtue of living in a society that permits free enquiry and open political debate, have the opportunity to learn the lessons of their nation's past. It is to an effort to extract some of the policy implications from this dissertation's study that we now turn. There are three major policy recommendations that future American policymakers should bear in mind if they find themselves deliberating and debating whether or not to support armed rebellion in another country.

1. Think Carefully Before Supporting an Armed Rebellion and Weigh that Policy Option Against Alternatives

American policymakers should think carefully before providing support to an armed rebellion in another country. Achieving American policy objectives through that

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[15] Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1981), 262.

means is liable to require helping the rebels to undertake a sustained war of attrition. American policymakers should be wary because the United States will only be likely to provide sustained support for a rebellion if there is widespread consensus in the United States that aiding the rebellion is both in the nation's interests and defensible in terms of liberal-democratic ideals. If there is not such widespread consensus, American backing for the rebellion risks precipitating a domestic political fight, which could render the United States' support for a rebellion brittle. If that occurs, it will undermine the likelihood of achieving American political objectives through support of a rebellion. Additionally, the aftermath of American support to an armed rebellion is liable to be poor. Armed rebellions rarely lead to democratic governance; civil wars in which both sides are supported by external actors tend to be protracted and bloody; and the United States, because of its aversion to nation-building in foreign lands, tends to reduce its involvement swiftly in the aftermath of supporting a rebellion.

Overall, therefore, American policymakers should think carefully about whether the potential benefits to aiding a particular rebellion are likely to outweigh the challenges. The potential benefits and downsides of supporting a rebellion should be carefully compared with other possible options; those will include refraining from any sort of military intervention whatsoever as well as intervening directly with large-scale American military power.

The best option will depend on the context of a particular case. It might involve policy instruments other than military power. The United States' policy towards the FRELIMO government in Mozambique during the 1980s should serve as a reminder that eschewing a confrontational approach to states with different ideological dispositions can

sometimes achieve results better than waging war against them. The challenge, of course, is determining in the real world when conciliation will be more beneficial than confrontation. In the case of Mozambique during the 1980s, the horrendous human rights record of RENAMO helped to make that decision clearer for many American policymakers.

The bottom line is that American policymakers should not rush to "arm the rebels"—despite its apparent attractiveness of offering a way to do something without committing large numbers of American troops—without thinking very carefully about whether it is a viable policy option and comparing its benefits and drawbacks in a particular scenario with other options that the United States might have at its disposal.

2. Beware Rebels Who Say What Americans Want to Hear

American policymakers should be wary of rebels who, eager for American aid, profess a belief in liberal-democratic values. They may be sincere or they may be skilled at telling American officials and politicians what they want to hear, as was the case with Jonas Savimbi in the 1980s. Before providing aid to a particular rebel movement, American policymakers should devote considerable effort to learning whether the rebels are sincerely committed to liberal-democratic ideals and whether their behavior is good enough to merit American support. In undertaking that analysis, American policymakers should approach the task with a degree of skepticism because rebel movements will realize that in order to maximize their chances of securing American support they will need to try to make a persuasive claim that they are committed to liberal-democratic ideals. Of course, even when American policymakers attempt to scrutinize the ideals and behavior of particular

rebel movements, it may be difficult to obtain clear information about the true ideological commitments and behavior of certain rebels. Therefore, if they do decide to support a particular rebellion, American policymakers should consider whether there are effective ways to monitor the behavior of recipients of American aid and ways to cease such aid if the rebels in question do not behave as American policymakers believe they should.

3. If American Policymakers Decide to Provide Military Support to a Rebellion, they should (A) Think Strategically (B) Try to Avoid a War of Attrition, and (C) Plan to Help Manage the Aftermath of a Rebellion

Having considered the option to support a rebellion carefully—including comparing it against other policy options—and having investigated whether the rebels in question are committed to liberal-democratic ideals, American policymakers might decide that the best course of action will be to provide aid to a rebellion. If they reach that decision, they should do three major things as part of a policy of aiding the rebels.

First, they should think strategically about how to leverage that support to the attainment of their political objectives. Providing support to a rebellion is a means of attaining goals rather than an end in itself. Policymakers should, therefore, consider how exactly such support might be used to attain objectives, including what other policy instruments should be used in conjunction with military support to rebels. One important consideration is how military support to a rebellion might be used as leverage in diplomatic efforts to achieve the United States' policy goals. Among the case studies in this dissertation, in both Nicaragua and Angola during the 1980s, American military support to rebels alone did not produce political settlements. Instead, diplomatic efforts—led by Oscar

Arias in the case of Nicaragua and Chester Crocker in the case of Angola—were necessary to reach settlements that secured major American political aims. In cases in which they opt to provide military support to rebels, American policymakers should consider what else is necessary as part of a strategy to achieve American objectives, including how support to rebels can be used in the service of diplomatic efforts.

Second, American policymakers should consider how to deter a conflict from becoming a contest in which both sides are staunchly supported by outside powers, which is liable to become a protracted and deadly war of attrition. In cases in which the United States aids the rebels, that means trying to minimize the support provided by other powers to the opposing side in a conflict. American policymakers will have to consider what potential policy tools they have at their disposal to achieve that.

Third, American policymakers should plan for how they can contribute to producing the best possible governance and stability in the aftermath of a rebellion. American officials, if they decide to support a rebellion, should proactively make the strategic and moral case for remaining involved in the country in question after the end of the war. Even if they do that, there will likely remain a strong aversion in the United States to long-term nation-building efforts. Consequently, the United States should consider what other mechanisms might be leveraged for the purposes of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. Such arrangements might draw upon contributions from international organizations, regional organizations, and international financial institutions.

History seldom yields obvious lessons. Nevertheless, when Washington D.C. is next consumed with a debate about whether or not to aid an armed rebellion, policymakers should think carefully before opting to provide support to a rebellion. Aiding the rebels is likely to require providing support to them over the course of a protracted war of attrition. Only if there is widespread consensus in the United States that doing so is in both the United States' interests and consistent with its ideals is American support likely to be sustained enough to help the rebels to keep fighting that war of attrition. Without providing such sustained support, the United States faces an impediment to achieving its policy objectives through support of a rebellion. Even if the United States is able to achieve its policy objectives, the long-term consequences in the country in question are liable to be poor when viewed from the perspective of a liberal-democratic great power.

That said, whether or not the United States should support a particular armed rebellion will depend upon the characteristics of the specific country in question and the other policy options that are available to the United States. If, having studied the option of providing support to a rebellion alongside other possible courses of actions, the United States proceeds with aiding a rebellion, policymakers should think strategically, try to avoid a war of attrition, and plan to help manage the aftermath of a rebellion.

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AUTHOR'S INTERVIEWS

The following former U.S. government officials and elected representatives spoke to the author on-the-record, at least for some portion of the conversation. The position(s) listed for each individual are those they held during a period that was a focus of this dissertation's analysis.

— Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (July 1985 to January 1989), Interviewed in person on November 16, 2017, Washington D.C.

— Derek Chollet, Principal Deputy Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff (2009-2011), Senior Director for Strategic Planning on the NSC staff (2011-2012), and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (2012-2015), Interviewed in person on December 7, 2017, Washington D.C.

— Ivo Daalder, United States Permanent Representative to NATO (2009-2013), Interviewed by phone on December 16, 2016.

— Joseph DeTrani, Executive Assistant to Director of the CIA Bill Casey (1981-1984), Interviewed in person on November 15, 2016, Washington D.C.

— Paula Dobriansky, National Security Council staff member (1981-1987) with responsibility for European and Soviet Affairs, Interviewed by phone on January 25, 2018.

— Mickey Edwards, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Oklahoma's 5th District (1977-1993), Interviewed by phone on June 4, 2018.

— Philip Gordon, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (2009-2013), White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf Region (2013-2015), Interviewed in person on December 15, 2016, Washington D.C.

— Lee Hamilton, Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Indiana's 9th District (1965-1999), Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (1986-1987), Interviewed by phone on January 12, 2018.

— Charles Hill, Executive Aide to Secretary of State George Shultz (1985-1989), Interviewed in person on April 27, 2016, New Haven, CT.

— John Negroponte, U.S. Ambassador to Honduras (1981-1985), Deputy National Security Advisor (November 1987 – January 1989), Interviewed in person on October 31, 2016, Washington D.C.

— Michael O'Neil, Chief Counsel to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (1977-1989), Interviewed in person on January 11, 2018, Washington D.C.

— David Petraeus, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (September 2011 – November 2012), Interviewed via email in December 2017.

— Gary Schmitt, Minority Staff Director, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (1982-1984), Executive Director of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (1984-1988), Interviewed in person on December 15, 2017, Washington D.C.

— George Shultz, U.S. Secretary of State (1982-1989), Interviewed by phone on May 20, 2016.

— Jake Sullivan, Deputy Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2009-2011), Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff (2011-2013), National Security Advisor to the Vice President of the United States (2013-2014), Interviewed in person on January 9, 2018, Washington D.C.

In addition to the individuals listed above, additional former government officials spoke to the author wholly on background or off-the-record.

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