Intermediary Employment in Gray Zone Competition:
How Revisionist States Use Non-State Actors to Perform State Security Functions

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Abstract

The contemporary international security environment is ripe with examples of aggressive revisionist state activity full of ambiguity, deception and disinformation just under the threshold of war. The annexation of Crimea by "little green men," the Chinese construction of islands and employment of "fishermen" to occupy atolls and harass those who navigate disputed waters in the South China Sea and Iranian employment of Shia foreign legions in Syria, are all examples of revisionist state actors attempting to renegotiate their strategic position as regional powers.

The challenges presented by these actions are not indicative of "normal" state competition, nor traditional military action, rather they fall into a gray space between peace and war. However, the objectives achieved by these actors are reminiscent of those traditionally only accomplished through war. So, are strategic competitors or state adversaries looking for a fight to disrupt the international status quo? Likely not, notable adversaries are conventionally deterred. Revisionist state actors are too dissatisfied with the international status quo to stand by idly, but the costs of violating international norms through traditional or conventional means of competition are too steep. The current nature of the international system creates a revisionist dilemma that forces such actors to operate in the gray zone. The gray zone represents an additional realm for revisionist powers to compete multidimensionally to achieve zero sum gains without much of the backlash that would occur through similar action in the conventional economic and military realms.

This dissertation explores the dynamics of one of the most common elements of gray zone activity – the employment of intermediary actors or ambiguous forces. Intermediary actors consist of those actors employed directly or indirectly by states to achieve security related objectives for the state under ambiguous conditions of attribution. Such actors can range from militaristic to political. Specifically, I map out the intermediary force choice set available to revisionist state actors and analyze how such actors deploy intermediaries based on environmental conditions. Empirical analysis indicates the employment of intermediaries varies according to attribution (overt/covert) and the level of revisionist state control (centralized/decentralized). I argue the employment of intermediary actors by revisionist states is strategic and a function of target state antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests between a revisionist state and status quo power; and informal access within the target state. The available literature and practical knowledge reveal the employment of intermediaries is a key component of gray zone competition. This dissertation examines *if* and *how* intermediaries are applied to achieve desired effects by revisionist states.

Through the empirical analysis of a series of comparative cases using process tracing and structured, focused comparisons on Iran and Russia, this dissertation evaluates the full scope of conditions under which intermediary actors are employed in gray zone competition in a way that systematically clouds international response in terms of attribution, intent and legality. I find explanatory power in the theory's ability to predict intermediary employment outcomes. This research assists in furthering the academic gray zone literature and reveals key policy implications with regard to asymmetric deterrence.

The views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author. They do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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1 Introduction

The Puzzle

When Viktor Yanukovych was removed from office by Ukrainian parliament in February 2014 and chaos and violence ensued following Euromaiden, the regional major power, Russia, was faced with an opportunistic choice in how to regain control of vulnerable Crimea. Crimea was already semi-autonomous, nearly sixty-percent ethnic Russian and the population held a significant amount of discontent with the corrupt Ukrainian central government. Within Crimea, Ukraine operated 190 military bases manned by about 15,000 Ukrainian personnel (Bērziņš, 2014). Also within Crimea, 10,000 – 18,000 Russian military personnel were legally stationed through a bilateral treaty – a fraction of the 25,000 authorized (Bērziņš, 2014; Kofman et al., 2017). The modern Russian military could have easily taken advantage of tenuous political situation and laid siege with conventional military means and achieved a similar result in the illegal annexation of Crimea in a timely fashion. However, Russia selected a much more gradual approach that selectively injected ambiguity and confusion through the use of predominately undistinguished, dismounted personnel and local militia. Over the course of three weeks in March 2014, the democratic right of self-determination by the autonomous government of Crimea was recognized by Russia and a shocking 97-percent of Crimeans elected to join the Russian Federation under a referendum (Adesnik, 2014). So why did Russia not seize Crimea conventionally? They possessed escalation dominance, historical ties and regional hegemony. Why did they instead pursue a strategy full of ambiguity and gradualism when they feasibly could have achieved the same end with a conventional strategy, much more quickly? Was this Russian approach selected for tactical reasons, or was it part of a broader strategy designed to probe the resilience and response of the target and status quo powers? Perhaps the Crimea case was viewed as an opportunity to test the limits of international resolve.

Over the past five years, various state actors have ambiguously and aggressively taken action to disrupt regional stability and threaten U.S. interests and status quo provision. The challenges presented by these actions are not indicative of "normal"

state competition, nor traditional military action, rather they fall into a gray space between peace and war. However, the outcomes achieved by these actors are reminiscent of those traditionally only accomplished through war.

The annexation of Crimea occurred under an incredible cloud of confusion and ambiguity with unmarked soldiers, or "little green men," while the Kremlin consistently denied a role in military activity. The little green men were not the only ambiguous forces injected into Crimea. Serbian paramilitary personnel and pro-Russian biker gangs appeared suddenly as well, manning checkpoints in Belbek, Crimea and spreading pro-Russian propaganda (Ostrovsky, 2015). The intervention of Russian forces in support of Russian-backed intermediary actors in Crimea was reinforced through disinformation and information manipulation to defray international legal constraints and exploit international systemic vulnerabilities in the Russian sphere of influence. Once intervention progressed to a more overt phase, Russians appealed to those sympathetic to unrest and occupied territory as self-proclaimed peacekeepers or saviors. The now well-known Crimea example of coercive and aggressive activities that occur in the space between peace and war, known as the gray zone, are also increasingly prevalent elsewhere.

Many other examples of aggressive activities short of open warfare that do not fit neatly into categorizations of terrorism or covert war are prevalent in the contemporary international security arena. The Chinese construction of islands in the South China Sea and the employment of "fishermen" to occupy atolls and harass those who navigate disputed waters quickly come to mind. The turbulent situation that developed in Iraq and Syria following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011 presented an opportunity for Iran to renegotiate their strategic position in the Levant. Iranian intermediary forces (Quds, Hezbollah, Shia battalions from Afghanistan and Pakistan) actively sought to coerce key power brokers to maximize influence in ways that occur just under the radar of major state powers. Iran is deliberate in disguising true intentions by working through key intermediaries and avoiding direct confrontation with major powers.

So, are strategic competitors or state adversaries looking for a fight to disrupt the international status quo? Likely not, notable adversaries are conventionally deterred (Work et al., 2019). State actors that participate in gray zone activity are too dissatisfied with the

international status quo to stand by idly, but the costs of violating international norms through more direct confrontation are too steep (Mazarr, 2015, 61). The current nature of the international system creates a revisionist dilemma that forces such actors to operate in a gray zone of international competition.

Gray Zone Competition Situated Within the Strategic Choice Set

States have a range of options available to them in the consideration of security challenges, that range from "do nothing" to overt war. These options are not solely within the military realm – political, economic and hybrid options exist as well. States self-select the options available to them, based on elements such as adherence to ideological principles, regime type or membership in binding alliances.
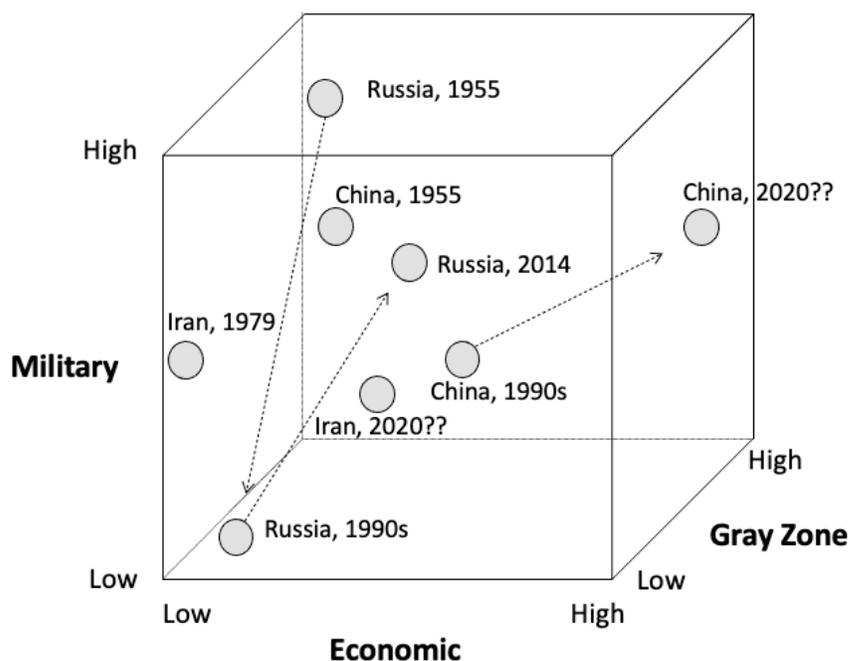
Figure 1.1.   The gray zone as a dimension of foreign policy competition

The gray zone represents another dimension for revisionist powers to compete and achieve zero sum gains without much of the backlash that would occur through similar action in the economic and military realms. Competition in the gray zone occurs under the shadow of war, below the threshold of major conflict. Historically, issue linkage served as a powerful restraint to actions outside the status quo. By tying cooperation in one realm of

power to another, the resulting binding nature can serve to significantly increase transaction costs if a state behaves poorly. This phenomenon traditionally served to decrease the profitability of deception, because deception uncovered in one realm (i.e. military), would equate to increasingly negative returns in another realm (i.e. economic) (Keohane, 1982). The recognition of the gray zone assists revisionist state actors in bypassing issue linkages to a significant degree. In the past decade major revisionist powers have achieved tremendous gains through gray zone competition at the expense of the international status quo. Examples include territorial gains, such as in Ukraine and the South China Sea artificial islands; increased economic dependence through elements of the Belt and Road Initiative and enhanced regional influence through the deployment of unmarked or ambiguous intermediary forces to protect infrastructure or control assets. These activities are occurring not just in the Middle East or former Soviet Republics, but all over the world. As of yet, such revisionist efforts continue largely unabated by the international community, a community which appears puzzled in how to address gray zone challenges. Gray zone competition is unique and requires unique analytical attention. There are several parts of the IR literature that are tangential to gray zone competition and the employment of intermediary actors. The literature on covert warfare, proxy warfare and Non-State Actors provide some useful tools for evaluation of competition in the gray zone. However, there remains a clear-cut dichotomy between concepts of war and peace, and state vs. non-state actors (Kausch, 2017). Such demarcations are increasingly blurred empirically and such perspectives are, thus, increasingly unfit to asses strategic competition in international politics. Contemporary gray zone actors appear to combine features of war and peace, state and non-state for strategic advantage. For this project, I frame gray zone conditions as those where revisionist states probe international redlines and legal precedent to achieve zero-sum gains, test resolve and the probability of retaliation in the space of international competition between western notions of war and peace under ambiguous conditions of attribution. Understanding the dynamics of how revisionists employ gray zone strategies is incredibly important for international relations as well as for policymaking.

Intermediary Actors as a Means for Strategic Adjustment

Empirical observation reveals the employment of intermediary, or surrogate actors are one means through which strategic adjustment is obtained under conditions of gray zone competition. The regional or international status quo largely confines revisionist state action to the gray zone, leaving the employment of intermediary actors as one means to achieve strategic adjustment. Intermediary actors are defined as those actors employed directly or indirectly by revisionist states to achieve objectives for the state under ambiguous conditions of attribution. Intermediaries for this research are perhaps best described as surrogates used by revisionist states to achieve security related gains normally achieved by state actors (i.e. conventional military). Intermediary actors are not synonymous with proxy actors due to subtle differences in proximity to the state and multidimensional capabilities, but for the purposes of this project, the distinction is irrelevant.

Considerable variation regarding intermediary actor employment is evidenced through empirical analysis, particularly regarding attribution and the level of state control. Intermediary employment in Crimea was overt and centralized for the Little Green Men, while nearly simultaneously in the Donbass, employment was covert and decentralized for separatists, Chechens and Cossacks. Is this variation random, or could it be attributed to systematic factors that can be used to identify revisionist state strategy or intent? The interrogation of such factors could prove useful in determining how such activity might be deterred in the future.

The international relations literature reveals several reasons why proxies are used by states: plausible deniability (Borghard, 2014; O'Rourke, 2018); costs and efficiency (Borghard, 2014; Byman & Kreps, 2010); costly signaling (Bapat, 2012); and defraying domestic costs of conventional intervention (Salehyan, 2010). This literature is valuable in identifying why states employ intermediary actors. But what are the conditions under which intermediaries are or are not employed? How does intermediary employment vary based on conditions at the target? Do the interests of the revisionist state in relation to the status quo power influence intermediary employment? These areas are where this dissertation contributes to the international relations literature.

Theory of Intermediary Actor Employment

This dissertation seeks to map out the intermediary actor employment choice set available to revisionist state actors and analyze the conditions under which employment varies. In pursuit of this objective, I develop a theory of intermediary actor employment to describe variation in attribution and the level of control between the revisionist state actor (RSA) and the intermediary. The theory is designed to describe the conditions under which intermediary actors *are (or are not)* employed and *how* they are employed.

I argue the employment of intermediary actors by revisionist state actors is a function of three primary variables: the perceived antecedent conditions at the target, the symmetry of interests between the RSA and status quo power regarding the target, and the level of informal access by the RSA at the target. This argument operates under the assumption that states seeking a revision to the status quo take advantage of gray zone conditions by employing intermediaries in such a way so as to minimize the probability of escalation (by the target or status quo power as those with veto authority). As such, the theory represents a series of sequential considerations that shape intermediary employment by the revisionist state. First, analysis of the target antecedent conditions permits a state seeking revision to determine whether the target is permissive or resistant to intermediary employment. Next, analysis of the parity of interests between the state seeking revision and the status quo power reveals the perceived "stake" each power has in a disruption at the target. Lastly, analysis of the degree of informal access reveals paths available to intermediary employment. I argue the variables of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests are critical to determine *if* intermediary actors are employed by a revisionist state. The variables of symmetry of interests and informal access determine *how* intermediaries are employed.

Empirical Design

To examine the plausibility of the theory to describe if and how intermediaries are deployed by revisionist states, this dissertation examines the empirical evidence of two revisionist state actors: Iran and Russia. To assess the theory of intermediary employment fully, I process trace 52 total observations across 12 cases. I test whether gray zone competition is a purely contemporary phenomenon by examining a wide array of

observations, all of which exhibit gray zone characteristics, spanning from 1979 to 2019. Finally, analysis of each revisionist state includes observations that are geographically distant to interrogate intermediary employment (or non-employment) in geographic areas at, or beyond, the outer limits of revisionist influence. I examine each case from the perspective of the revisionist state – target state – time period triad, taken in context of their relationship with the intermediary actor and status quo power. Each case is evaluated over two time periods to tease out within case variation. Through the detailed analysis employed this design, I am able to examine generalizability and determine whether the theory's mechanisms accurately describe empirical variation regarding attribution and the level of state control.

Plan of the Dissertation

In Chapter 2, I expand upon the concepts of gray zone competition and intermediary actor employment. I situate the gray zone concept within the realm of international competition and identify the international political conditions that make contemporary gray zone competition more acute. I then draw out specific elements of gray zone competition, concluding with the utilization of intermediary actors by revisionist states in pursuit of strategic adjustment.

I develop the theory of intermediary employment in Chapter 3. The theoretical model builds on the concepts of gray zone competition and intermediary employment developed in the previous chapter. I define the dependent and independent variables and describe variation within. Through the three primary mechanisms of the model (antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access) I am able to generate six testable predictions that shape intermediary employment. Finally, I discuss indicators and measurements before addressing methodological challenges and solutions.

Chapters 4 and 5 test the utility of the theory through empirical analysis. Chapter 4 examines the plausibility of the theory to explain intermediary employment (or non-employment) by Iran, with 29 observations across seven cases, ranging in time from 1979 to 2019. I show that the three mechanisms underlying the theory's predictions (antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests, and informal access) describe the majority of Iranian instances of intermediary employment. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis

across observations on patterns of behavior identified throughout the case. Appendix A.1 details the findings for Iran.

Chapter 5 continues the empirical analysis with the examination of 23 observations of Russian intermediary employment across five campaigns. Russian cases of intermediary employment span from Georgia in 1992 amidst the collapse of the Soviet Union to Libya in 2019. Within the Russia chapter, I examine Crimea and the Donbass as most-similar cases to identify alternative explanations for variation in the dependent variable while conditions are constant under the same revisionist state – target state – time period triad. Through this analysis, I show Russian strategic intent was quite different for the two targets, resulting in the outcome of differing intermediary employment strategies. Appendix A.2 details the Russia findings.

Chapter 6 concludes by discussing the theoretical expectations and findings. It then outlines implications in terms of policy and potential for intermediary deterrence. One point discussed is the reluctance of the international community to recognize the ability of gray zone competition to degrade the international status quo and the risk of multidimensionality in intermediary operations. The evidence presented in this dissertation demonstrates that intermediary employment specifically, and gray zone competition writ large, represent genuine foreign policy concerns that adversaries exploit as strategic means to achieve zero-sum gains.

2 Gray Zones and Intermediary Actors: What Are They, What Are They Not?

Introduction

In this chapter, I situate the gray zone concept within the realm of international competition. First, I will discuss trends in contemporary international politics that make the use of gray zone strategies more acute. Next, I will situate gray zone activity within the strategic choice set available to state actors with revisionist behavior seeking strategic adjustment. A specific look at the costs, benefits and risks for revisionist states will help inform the conditions under which the use of gray zone strategies is beneficial. I will then frame gray zone competition by pulling out some undeniable, primary characteristics. Finally, I will narrow the analysis to one primary characteristic, which is the focus of this dissertation - the role of intermediary actors in pursuit of strategic adjustment.

Contemporary International Competition and Period of Power Transition

The post-Cold War world presented the United States with tremendous opportunity. The U.S. was left so powerful it was able to embrace a foreign policy of liberal international order and set out to create stability by remaking the world in its own image (Mearsheimer, 2018; Walt, 2019). Theories on democratic peace and economic interdependence demonstrated explanatory power in the stability that emerged in world markets and the absence of state on state conflict after the Cold War. Globalization and technological innovation led to advancements that were never imagined, many with foreign policy implications. Under such circumstances, the major powers of the world certainly share common interests and mutual benefit through the interconnectedness of economies and institutions. Energy markets are more stable and trade is more predictable, or so it seems. Cooperation on counterterrorism and other common dangers benefit the collective.

The high degree of interconnectedness and cooperation in a world dominated by U.S. liberal hegemony does not imply that all states are satisfied with the status quo. Many states are deeply dissatisfied with the current distribution of power, the nature of institutional rules and norms and Western domination. However, the international system is structured in such a way that the costs of going to war to disrupt the status quo outweigh

the benefits. Deterrence by the West, enabled by nuclear power, remains effective in preserving the status quo in the conventional realm (Altman, 2017).

Unfortunately, conventional deterrence also set conditions for revisionist powers to effectively operate in the space just short of war. At the end of the Cold War, Russia had no expectations for the expansion of NATO other than through the unification of Germany. However, liberal hegemonic expansion by the U.S. through NATO impeded deeply into Russia's sphere of influence. Russia was too weak to answer, and perhaps cautiously optimistic until April 2008 at the Bucharest Summit. Here, NATO heads of state agreed to welcome aspiring states, Ukraine and Georgia, into NATO – states that share a border with Russia. Such expansion was likely unacceptable for a major power and seen as extremely threatening for the regional status quo (President Russian Federation, 2010). By August of the same year, the country of Georgia was invaded to assist separatists and reinsert Russia's position as an unchecked leader of regional power. Russia followed suit with Ukraine in 2014 and set an important precedent in the face of the international status quo.

By 2030, the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) predicts there will exist no single hegemonic power, and the number of states that can claim great or middle power status will climb substantially (National Intelligence Council, 2017). Rising regional powers such as China, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey and Iran are asserting growing power and influence regionally and globally to renegotiate and secure political, social and economic interests. Basic realist assumptions inform us that states can never be certain about the intentions of others. Mearsheimer (2006) argues the structure of the international system forces every major power to think and act like a revisionist state when it is in their best interest (Mearsheimer, 2006). The period of power transition has considerable potential for future turbulence.

The nature of how warfare is strategized and executed also seems to be in transition (National Intelligence Council, 2017; Strachan, 2006). Declarations of war are nonexistent in the West since the end of World War II and participation in conflicts short of war has become the norm. The U.S. has engaged in more conflicts short of war than they have actual wars (Kapusta, 2015, 3). Most of these are characterized as counterinsurgency or counterterrorism efforts. Even since the end of WWII , the U.S., allies and adversaries have

engaged in dozens of covert conflicts, many of which were interestingly marked by tacit collusion with rival powers (Carson, 2018). Such collusion helped signal expectations of adversaries on objectives of limited war.

The conflicts and aggression prevalent in the contemporary gray zone between peace and war are distinct from other competition short of war. Gray zone strategies are specifically designed to achieve zero-sum changes to the status quo while not alerting the international community to decisively respond. The best gray zone strategies employ multiple, reinforcing elements of hard and soft power to achieve gains. In maintaining the stability of the status quo, the U.S. is hesitant to participate in gray zone competition. As will be demonstrated, contemporary belligerents use this to their advantage.

Naturally, leaders and governments seek to control pathways to large scale escalation. The IR literature is rich regarding deterrence, coercion and the benefits of mutual secrecy and collusion to convey intent for limited war. However, numerous recent actions by state actors in the gray zone do not fall in line with existing literature. Contemporary gray zone activities are risky ventures, as they purposely distort or falsely convey signals, thereby increasing the uncertainty and risk for potential war. The repercussions or costs (sanctions, international condemnation and increased scrutiny, institutional/NATO hardening and increased defense expenditures) of operating in the gray zone seem prohibitive, yet gray zone strategies persists.

Three important points are exhibited in this overview of contemporary conflict and knowledge of outcomes. First, the utilization of gray zone strategies is strangely costless. From the employment of intermediary actors in Ukraine, Africa and the South China Sea, to the strategic denial of attribution and the acquisition of territory, the costs imposed on state aggressors are relatively miniscule. For example, with regard to Russia's incursion into Ukraine, most sanctions originated from the U.S. and the EU and were political in nature (i.e. visa restrictions and frozen individual assets). Some claim the trade related sanctions (i.e. export bans to Russia) crippled the Russian economy and strength of the Ruble, but in reality it was the simultaneous loss due to a drop in oil prices that caused the economic strain (Pettersen, 2016). One comprehensive statistical assessment that disentangled the simultaneous economic impacts of the drop in oil prices and the sanctions

from 2014-2018 found the sanctions appeared to have a very small, if any, effect on the growth of the Russian economy (Kholodilin & Netšunajev, 2019). Second, such activity is incredibly difficult to deter, as demonstrated in the case of Russian sanctions. Tactics used by revisionist states in the gray zone are fabricated around ambiguities in actors, intent and international law. These ambiguities significantly stall international response and stymie decisive counteraction. Finally, there appears to be strategic and operational variation in how state aggressors engage in gray zone competition to achieve outcomes. From employing "fishermen" as intermediaries in the building of islands in the South China Sea to information manipulation and strategic denial and redirection of accusations, the employment of gray zone strategies varies based on local and international circumstances. These points raise several important questions: How do revisionist state actors select gray zone strategies while minimizing risk in the economic, diplomatic and military realms? Does an increase in gray zone activity desensitize the international community to future similar activities? How does the utilization of asymmetric intermediary actors generate gains for revisionist state actors?

Gray Zone Competition Within Strategic Choice Set

What are the conditions under which major powers select certain strategies over others in pursuit of their interests? Taliaferro et al. (2012) describe grand strategy as "…the organizing principle or conceptual blueprint that animates all of a state's relations with the outside world, for the purpose of security itself and maximizing its interests," (Taliaferro et al., 2012, p. 15). There are numerous components to a respective state's grand strategy that are situation dependent, but the most comprehensive strategies incorporate multiple elements of national power that are integrated and mutually reinforcing. When a state considers how to align threats (domestic and international), uncertainty, resources and aspirations or ambitions, there are several options through which they can pursue strategic aims. At one end, in pursuit of strategic adjustment[1] a state can elect to pursue strategies of intervention. At the other end, the state can elect to do nothing, which could result in

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[1] Taliaferro et al. (2012) define the politics of strategic adjustment as "…the extent to which the state in question expands, contracts, or in any way significantly changes its overall strategic capabilities and commitments," (Taliaferro et al., 2012, p. 16).

little to no change, or perhaps invite competition. Everything in between these two extremes occurs in gradations. This research is focused somewhere in the middle of this range of strategies, and particularly on an aspect of what is phrased the "gray zone." What logic drives states to launch strategies in the gray zone of international competition? Stated differently, why would states decide to pursue gray zone strategies rather than employing other foreign policy tools and how do they do so while minimizing the probability of escalation? When states select gray strategies, they do so because other options are off the table, as they are plagued by costly or risky constraints that force competition in the gray zone. Some of these costs, benefits and risks/constraints are depicted in the table below.

Strategy/FP Option	Costs	Benefits	Risks/Constraints
Conventional Military Intervention (Overt)	- Significant blood & treasure - Time - Political	- Centralized Command/ Control - Coordinated multidimensional effort	- Loss - Enduring commitment - Legality - Scale
Unconventional Intervention (Overt/Covert)	- Blood & Treasure - Time	- Less blood & treasure - Politically more acceptable - More clandestine	- Loss - Escalation - Enduring commitment
Gray Zone Competition (Intermediary Actor Employment and Dependency manipulation)	- Minimal; strangely costless	- Plausible Deniability - Extend reach/power - Establish local partners - Generate confusion; delay retribution - Enhance bargaining position - Minimize domestic upheaval - Minimize domestic political constraints (i.e. Cong approval) - Secrecy/freedom of maneuver - Incorporate non-mil means	- Escalation - Loss - International condemnation - Credibility - Potential sanctions
Political/Economic Sanctions	- Time - Trade loss	- Cheaper than deployment	- Encourage covert efforts
Do Nothing	- Status quo remains	- Avoid confrontation	- Future vulnerability

Table 2.1.   Range of Options for State Strategic Adjustment[2]

It is important to note that the table above is not synonymous with the spectrum of conflict. The spectrum of conflict is heavily researched and typically ranges from hybrid

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[2] The costs/benefits/risks/constraints in this table are from the perspective of the revisionist state employing the respective option for strategic adjustment. See Ostovar (2018) for a discussion of benefits and risks from the Iranian example.

war, to limited and total war. Even policy experts in classifications of war (Hoffman, 2016) provide ample warning that black and white distinctions between war and peace need to be expanded in order to address contemporary security concerns. As alluded to above, there are conditions under which states exhibiting revisionist behavior are compelled or incentivized to pursue foreign policy options that are not clearly delineated between the choices of war or not war. There are numerous factors, which I will expand upon here, that may constrain the use of force in the conventional realm, but are appealing in the realm of gray zone competition.

Understanding Gray Zone Competition

This dissertation explicitly does not seek to define the gray zone. Such an exercise would constitute a "fool's errand" that would generate falsely conveyed hard boundaries on a concept that is inherently "gray" and transcends western notions of war and peace.[3] Rather, this dissertation seeks to analyze one of the major internal components of gray zone competition (intermediary force utility) to identify patterns of activity that prove useful in generating explanatory power to assist with the understanding of strategic gray zone competition resident within contemporary international relations. I will, however, develop some parameters in order to situate gray zone competition within the range of possible options by states exhibiting revisionist behavior. To do so, I will use a hybrid approach by first making clear what is not gray zone competition. This "donut hole" approach will remove confusion on closely related options that are often conflated with gray activity. I will then begin to describe gray zone competition based on some key themes from related literatures and how adversaries view concepts the West perceives as gray. Next, given ambiguities involved in gray zone competition, rather than placing hard boundaries around what constitutes gray zone competition, I will instead pull out some of the primary characteristics to frame elements that are common across empirical cases of gray zone competition. Finally, I will tease out one particular undeniable characteristic of gray zone

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[3] There are many in the policy community who do attempt to define the gray zone. For one of the better definitions, see Maren Leed, "Square Pegs, Round Holes, and Gray Zone Conflicts: Time to Step Back," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 16, No. 2 (Summer/Fall, 2015): 133-143.

competition, the employment of intermediary forces, as the focus of my study. The following section expands on strategic competition that I do not classify as gray zone.

What Does <u>Not</u> Constitute Gray Zone Competition

Due to the challenges associated with defining exactly what gray zone competition is, it seems useful to first outline explicitly what is not gray zone competition. Briefly, I will cover gray zone competition as distinct from other strategic options in pursuit of change to the status quo. Fundamentally, gray zone competition results from political objectives by revisionists seeking to achieve strategic adjustment. The means used to achieve political objectives through gray zone competition are not exclusive to this realm of competition. As I will demonstrate, there are several means that are conducive to gray zone competition due to various factors (info environment, access, political (in)stability, etc.), but the same means may also be used in major war. At the extremes, gray zone competition is clearly not major war and employing gray strategies is not the same as doing nothing. Gray zone competition is specifically designed to remain below the threshold of major war, while a state's decision to do nothing would not result in desired strategic adjustment.

Gray zone competition is also not synonymous with proxy war; however, there are clear parallels between the two concepts. Proxy war consists of conflict wherein security partnerships are formed between asymmetrically capable states and non-state groups that involve the exchange of qualitatively different resources (Borghard, 2014; Salehyan, 2010). As mentioned in the introduction, I do believe there are subtle differences between proxy forces and intermediary actors in gray zones that revolve around proximity to the state and the employment of multidimensional intermediary actors, rather than just proxy military forces. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, such distinctions are irrelevant. The proxy war literature is useful to this research in a few ways. First, much scholarly work in this field is focused on *why* states use proxies (Borghard, 2014), the nature of the relationship between states and proxies (principal-agent) and why such relationships can be problematic (Byman & Kreps, 2010; Salehyan, 2010). Knowledge of the proxy war literature is important in framing the purpose of this research, and logical

next step – which is understanding the nature of the relationship between states and intermediaries and *how* states employ intermediary actors in gray zone competition.

Finally, gray zone competition is not equivalent to hybrid warfare. Broadly, hybrid threats are defined by NATO as "…a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary and civilian measures [that] are employed in a highly integrated design," (NATO, 2014). This definition could describe nearly every major conflict. There is emphasis on military and non-military means. But again, gray zone competition is the strategy that results from political objectives. Hybrid conflict is distinguished by the means to execute strategy.

The preceding brief distinction of what does not constitute gray zone competition is intended to clarify distinctions between gray zone competition and other types of conflict or means of achieving political goals that are often conflated with gray zone competition. The next section will tease out some primary characteristics or parameters that are common in gray zone competition to further clarify the concept.

Framing the Gray Zone

While it is futile to try to define gray zone competition, it is useful to frame the gray zone to develop a common understanding of primary characteristics. The concept of gray zone competition has been a heavy topic of discussion in U.S. policy circles for at least the past decade. The 2010 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review referenced the "…ambiguous gray area that is neither fully war nor fully peace," (DoD, 2010, 73). Japan began using the phrase in 2010 to describe Chinese actions in the South China Sea (Jackson, 2017, 41). There is much disagreement on whether the employment of contemporary gray zone strategies represents a "new way of war." After all, the world learned the pinnacle of excellence in warfare consists of winning without fighting from Sun Tzu thousands of years ago. Clearly the concept of strategic competition under the threshold of war is not a purely contemporary phenomenon.

In recent years, the phrase "gray zone" has become a catch all to describe crisis and conflict short of major war that is not easily explained by existing international relations literature. In his criticism of the gray zone concept, Arquilla (2018) makes the argument that operations in the space short of war are a Marxist characteristic that influence the

strategic thought of Russia and China, two heirs of Marx (Arquilla, 2018, 6). He describes how the Marxist paradigm does not make fine distinctions between various types of low-intensity conflict, such as irregular warfare and terrorism. Rather, Arquilla argues the gray zone constitutes an essential part of the realm [or spectrum] of war (Arquilla, 2018). Without getting into definitions of what constitutes war, I argue gray zone competition predominately occurs in the dimension directly adjacent to actual war. If gray zone competition is short of war, then it is not part of the spectrum of war. It is, however, a distinct part of international strategic competition and can be used to achieve some of the outcomes that are often only found through war.

Gray Zone Literature Themes

The literature on gray zone competition is considerably limited, especially within the field of international relations, but there are a few important themes that are useful in the formulation of a more robust distinction of gray zone strategies. First, gray zone strategies are represented in the space between peace and war and the actors involved deliberately tailor activity to fall below the threshold of all-out war (Brands, 2016; Kapusta, 2015; U.S. Department of State, 2017; Wilson & Smitson, 2017). At the lower bound, gray zone competition exceeds ordinary state competition as defined by international law. Such activity does not need to clearly violate international law, but must generate confusion regarding legality. For example, raising oil prices or imposing tariffs can be classified as ordinary competition, while coercive threats targeted at key countries to shut off the flow of vital natural resources on which the target state is dependent, could potentially constitute gray zone activity. At the upper bound of gray zone competition, we know kinetic activities can heavily influence non-kinetic gray zone activity (Koven et al., 2017). As mentioned, I do not think it is useful to qualify the specifics of upper and lower bounds for gray zone activity as such competition is inherently nebulous.

Second, gray zone activities are purposefully shrouded in ambiguity in at least three ways: identification of the actors involved, the applicability of legal frameworks (Hurd, 2017; Marxsen, 2016; Poznansky, 2019), and the purpose or intent of such activities (i.e. limited war aims, etc). Like the information domain, international law represents a domain

through which gray zone actors purposefully move to achieve outcomes. Even covert actions contribute to the establishment of precedent.

Third, the actors involved tend to consist of major powers who desire a revision to at least the regional status quo (Altman, 2017; V. Jackson, 2017; Mazarr, 2015). Actors pursue specific changes to international order and seek to gain a larger share of influence within their region and thus, the international community. It is common for such actors to use multiple elements of government power and employ subordinate actors at multiple levels, to include the use of intermediary forces in pursuit of tactical and operational level objectives. At all levels, the cost of escalation is placed on the shoulders of the defender (V. Jackson, 2017; Mazarr, 2019).

Finally, time is an important factor when considering outcomes. Some activities are designed to achieve short-term tactical objectives while others are focused on long-term strategic objectives through strategic gradualism (Bragg, 2017; Mazarr, 2015). The cumulation of interim effects are used in the generation of long-term outcomes. The individual instances may not appear as a part of gray zone competition until viewed through this lens.

Additionally, we know from adversarial doctrine and foreign policy writing that revisionist state actors understand Western notions of peace and war and purposefully seek to exploit vulnerabilities in these preconceptions. RSAs understand asymmetries of power exist in relation to the status quo power and also believe the U.S. is fluent in hybrid warfare. The next section briefly addresses how strategic adversaries approach gray zone competition.

Adversarial Doctrine and Foreign Policy

As a part of my review of the literature, I conducted a cursory analysis of adversary military doctrine, foreign policy white papers and historical and contemporary writings by key figures to assess adversary perspectives of gray zone competition. Specifically, I sought to determine whether adversaries acknowledge the space between peace and war, whether they seek the employment of multiple elements of state power for national security ends; whether they acknowledge the utility of ambiguity from attribution and legal

perspectives; and whether multiple time horizons are a factor for gray zone competition. The results of this assessment of adversarial gray zone doctrine is summarized below.

Strategic competitors to the international status quo generally recognize the space between peace and war as distinct, but the perception of what is acceptable behavior during peacetime and wartime is at odds with Western notions. In the interest of national security or threats to strategic ambition, the entire government is resourced to achieve strategic objectives. Several accelerants contribute to this reality. First, these revisionist state actors are not the current hegemon. Thus, they are not burdened with the responsibility of maintaining alliances and interests in the face of rising uncertainty and risk of loss, and are incentivized to pursue zero-sum gains to the contrary. Second, contemporary major strategic competitors tend to consist of neo-authoritarian regimes who rely on state owned-enterprises (SOEs) which maintain the state as the center of gravity and provide access to resources (multiple, coordinated elements of national power) that would otherwise be unavailable in more democratic societies. It is important to note, however, that the Russians in particular, view the United States as the "master" of hybrid warfare. Russians view the color revolutions and Arab Spring as the work of the United States. This perspective is important, as it shapes our understanding of how U.S. actions abroad may be interpreted.

Third, these actors generally possess a history rich in traditions of "People's War," unrestricted warfare and active measures or political warfare that emphasize the utility of all aspects of power to achieve strategic objectives. The "Gray Zone" is a Western creation, the boundaries of which are reinforced through international law, institutions and norms. However, without acknowledgement of this space in international relations, is there risk of undesirable consequences to U.S. led international order? This is a large part of what this dissertation seeks to understand.

There are four basic components that narrow the frame on describing gray zone competition. The components are shaping conditions, actors, primary mechanisms and potential outcomes and they are expanded in the next section.

Shaping Conditions

As Arquilla points out, adversaries have sought out ways to attrit, coerce or deter each other through actions short of war for centuries. Considering strategic international competition in this space, there are some global trends – which I phrase "shaping conditions" – that interact with one another to make contemporary gray zone activities more acute. First, there is a re-emergence of great power competition and a return to multipolarity (Haass, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2018; National Intelligence Council, 2017; Walt, 2019; Wright, 2018). Liberal hegemonic world order managed by the U.S. and key Western allies is in decline. Second, neo-authoritarian revisionist adversaries seeking zero-sum gains are on the rise (Kenney et al., 2019; Mazarr, 2015). Such states are integrated into certain aspects of the global environment through partnerships in trade or security, but are often ripe with State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) where the state is maintained as the center of gravity. Third, the information revolution and advancements in technological innovation enhance the interconnectedness of societies nearly instantaneously. Cyber operations, social media and the interconnectedness of key digital systems enable what the Russians call "non-contact warfare," (Bērziņš, 2019). Information can easily be manipulated overtly or covertly for purposes of political warfare or active measures. Finally, international law is contestable and open to interpretation (Sari, 2019). Often, revisionist state actors simply ignore international law or strategically target legal vulnerabilities to achieve revisionist goals. These trends collectively interact to shape conditions that are especially lucrative for activities in the gray zone and dictate the degree to which a particular revisionist state may be willing to employ gray zone tactics. The strategic manipulation of these trends has the potential to result in powerful conditions of ambiguity in terms of attribution, intent and legality.

Actors

Analysis of competition in the gray zone reveals the interaction of three specific actors: the revisionist state, status quo power and target state. First, the Revisionist State Actor (RSA) consists of the aggressor state that employs gray zone strategies in an effort to seek zero-sum gains over the status quo power. Such actors are too dissatisfied with the regional or international status quo to do nothing, but not willing to risk a disruption to the

status quo through conventional means (V. Jackson, 2017; Lanoszka, 2016; Mazarr, 2015). In other words, such actions are executed with the intent of altering the status quo in the revisionist actor's favor. Important to identification of the RSA is intent, which tends to be ambiguous in gray zone competition. Once again, in a self-help world we can never be sure the intentions of others and intent can become revisionist over time (Mearsheimer, 1994, 2006). Revisionist states, like all states, are strategic in their pursuit of survival in the international system. Revisionist states are not confined simply to neo-authoritarian or undemocratic states, as Mearsheimer (2006) argues, all powers can exhibit revisionist behavior when it is in their interest – this includes the United States.

The second actor consists of the status quo power. In many cases, this is represented by the U.S. as the contemporary global superpower with the responsibility of maintaining the international status quo. However, mid-level regional powers can theoretically operate in the gray zone against a regional status quo power. Russia represents a regional status quo power in Eastern Europe and China represents a regional status quo power in Asia – two regions where numerous states are dissatisfied with the regional status quo Russia and China influence.

The final actor in gray zone competition, whose position in gray zone competition is a critical factor, is the target state. Although the RSA seeks zero sum gains in their competition with the status quo power, the physical terrain where such competition occurs often includes a target state. Examples here include Ukraine, Georgia, Syria, Yemen and others. The target of gray zone competition is incredibly significant because the target has the authority to determine whether the interaction remains in the gray zone. The gray zone aggressor selects actions based on their perception of how the target will react and calibrates their actions based on anticipated target tolerances. This includes relationships or alliances between the target state and the status quo power – taking into account secondary responses to actions directed at the target state. This anticipated strategic interaction is a large part of gray zone competition, as such competition is inherently designed to remain below the threshold of open war. Thus, the probability of escalation is critically important. Lastly, it is possible for gray zone competition to occur without a target state. Examples of this include the building of artificial islands in the South China Sea and

potentially competition in the cyber domain. However, even in these cases, it can be argued the target state consists of regional powers that share claims to the disputed territories.

Primary Mechanisms of Gray Zone Competition

Given the shaping conditions and actors mentioned above, there are a few primary mechanisms through which RSAs can employ gray zone strategies. It is important to note gray zone approaches tend to involve a multiple elements of power (diplomatic, economic, etc), or pursue a cross domain approach (Bērziņš, 2014, 2019). In the contemporary era of conflict, the amount of non-military tools of coercion have increased considerably while state boundaries have blurred in various socio-economic spheres due to globalization and technological advancements (Howard & Czekaj, 2019, 177). Powerful gray zone strategies are reinforced through multiple elements of national power. The synergistic effects created through the employment of multiple elements of power sequenced over time and space is likely a more streamlined process in neo-authoritarian states, where the state or party controls substantial portions of the economic and information realms in addition to the military and political realms.

There are two primary mechanisms through which revisionist state actors operationalize gray zone strategies: coercive capabilities and antecedent conditions. RSAs actively seek to manipulate these mechanisms for zero sum gains. These mechanisms are expanded below.

Coercive Capabilities

Through coercion, revisionist state actors are able to impose change in the achievement of gains through threats to the target state, or defender (Schelling, 1966). RSAs employ two specific coercive capabilities to achieve such gains. The first is multidimensional dependency manipulation. The manipulation of dependencies is the degree to which revisionist state actors seek to make other states dependent for long-term viability. An increase in dependence leads to an increase in coercive capability of the revisionist state. The manipulation of dependencies is common in economic realm, where RSAs seek to generate compliance through State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) or resource provision (Abi-Habib, 2018; Conley et al., 2019; Kenney et al., 2019). In 2018, Russia

unveiled the longest bridge in Europe, known as the Crimean bridge. The 18.1km bridge connects mainland Russia to Crimea and drastically reduced Crimea's reliance on Ukraine (Agence France-Presse, 2018; Petersen, 2019). Under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), debt manipulation is commonplace. In many cases, China has pursued lending opportunities to countries with extreme debt-GDP ratios (Abi-Habib, 2018). Natural resource encroachment is a common economic coercion tactic. On August 13, 2019 the Chinese moved the survey vessel Haiyang Dizhi 8 off the shore of Vietnam where it is drilling for gas (Reed, 2019). The vessel was escorted by Chinese military ships well into the Vietnamese exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Revisionist state actors also pursue economic coercion through illicit finance and other means, such as international sanctions. However, the more common manipulation of dependencies occurs through the control of critical resources and the ownership of businesses in target states by RSAs. The recent investment by Gazprom, Russia's state-owned natural gas company, in the TurkStream project will increase Turkish natural gas dependency on Russia at a time when U.S.-Turkish relations are considerably strained (Gardin et al., 2019). Iran provides the IRGC with the authority to directly manipulate the economic environment. The IRGC entered the economic realm following the Iran-Iraq War and have since been the recipient of numerous no-bid contracts, especially in the fields of natural resources and large-scale infrastructure development (Wehrey et al., 2009). Further, there are several informal societal structures, such as Bonyads or foundations, over which the IRGC exercises considerable influence. Thus, even under sanctions, IRGC owned, partially owned or influenced firms have the ability to generate revenue and manipulate the economic realm.

Economic dependencies are also often tied to the political realm. Campaign donations, international lobbying and media manipulation represent components of political manipulation used by revisionist state actors to pursue political change designed to increased dependency of selected political leaders on the revisionist actors (Abi-Habib, 2018; Jones, 2019).

The second major coercive capability RSAs employ, often in tandem with dependency manipulation, and the subject of my dissertation, is intermediary forces. As stated in the introduction, I define intermediary actors as those employed by states to achieve security related objectives for the state under ambiguous conditions. Such forces

are often falsely labeled non-state actors, but the nature of the relationship between intermediaries and state actors varies in at least three ways: attribution, level of state control and organizational structure. Examples of intermediary actor employment in contemporary gray zone competition are substantial and expanding with every opportunity. The employment of intermediary actors, as opposed to a revisionist state's military forces, represents a choice made by key decision makers within a revisionist regime designed to achieve specific objectives under gray zone conditions. The goal of this research is to generate some explanatory power in how such choices are made. The specifics of my analytic approach on how RSAs employ intermediary actors consist of the asymmetry of interests between the RSA and status quo power and antecedent conditions.

Antecedent Conditions

The socio-political-economic conditions at the target state are the subject of much scholarly attention regarding vulnerability of the population to civil wars, insurgencies and hybrid warfare (Fearon & Laitin, 2003a; Lanoszka, 2016). Vulnerable socio-political-economic conditions are ripe for exploitation, but they are also subject to targeted cultivation. This qualifies such conditions as a mechanism because of the process through which RSAs can strategically manipulate socio-political-economic conditions in their favor. Lee (2017) broadens socio-economic conditions as "antecedent conditions" and classifies them as political, economic, social and informational (Lee, 2017). Under such conditions, target state characteristics such as ethnic makeup, poverty, unemployment and government repression can all influence the state's susceptibility to gray zone tactics.[4] Weak antecedent conditions present greater opportunity for regional gray zone actors to step in amidst discontent, chaos and confusion.

Alternatively, socio-economic conditions may not exist at all, as with disputed economic zones such as those in the South China Sea where China built and then occupied territory that did not previously exist. In these areas, antecedent conditions are transplanted from the mainland once territorial construction is complete.

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[4] For a discussion on how weak socio-political-economic conditions make states vulnerable to insurgency and hybrid warfare see, James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *The American Political Science Review* 97, No. 1 (February 2003): 75-90. Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, No. 1 (2016): 175-195.

Common Outcomes of Gray Zone Competition

So what are the outcomes when RSAs employ gray zone tactics in pursuit of zero sum gains? Something the contemporary international security environment has become accustomed to over the past decade is land grabs. Altman (2017) finds 112 land grabs were seized through faits accomplis since the end of WWI (Altman, 2017). While all of these land grabs were not under gray zone conditions, land grabs and land reclamation are commonly referenced outcomes of gray zone competition (V. Jackson, 2017; Mazarr, 2015, 2019; Petersen, 2019).

Another common outcome is a "frozen conflict." Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine represent conflicts that have reached a point of stagnation (Grant, 2017). These conflicts could be representative of failed gray zone strategies or experimental regions for such strategies. From an international relations standpoint, such conflicts can simply be classified as stalemates with the absence of negotiated settlement. Most of these conflicts are ripe with gray zone characteristics in one form or another.

Another common outcome is increased regional influence, or at the very least, increased regional fear of the RSA. The gradual approach often taken by RSAs to erode the status quo in their favor is not lost on states in the region. The Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and many other Pacific states are constantly reminded of the growing influence of China in the region. Multiple aspects of life in multiple dimensions are in a constant state of flux, from fishing practices and shipping lanes to trade relationships and island building/occupation.

Finally, a common outcome of gray zone competition is the gradual manipulation of international norms and the reestablishment of a baseline from which to judge acceptable state behavior. Schelling (1966) described this type of behavior as "salami slice" tactics. The same references have been used frequently by the policy community. The gradual erosion of the status quo on the outer reaches of the global super power is a common

outcome of gray zone competition, and likely the specific target of many RSA operations. These primary characteristics of gray zone competition are depicted in the figure below.
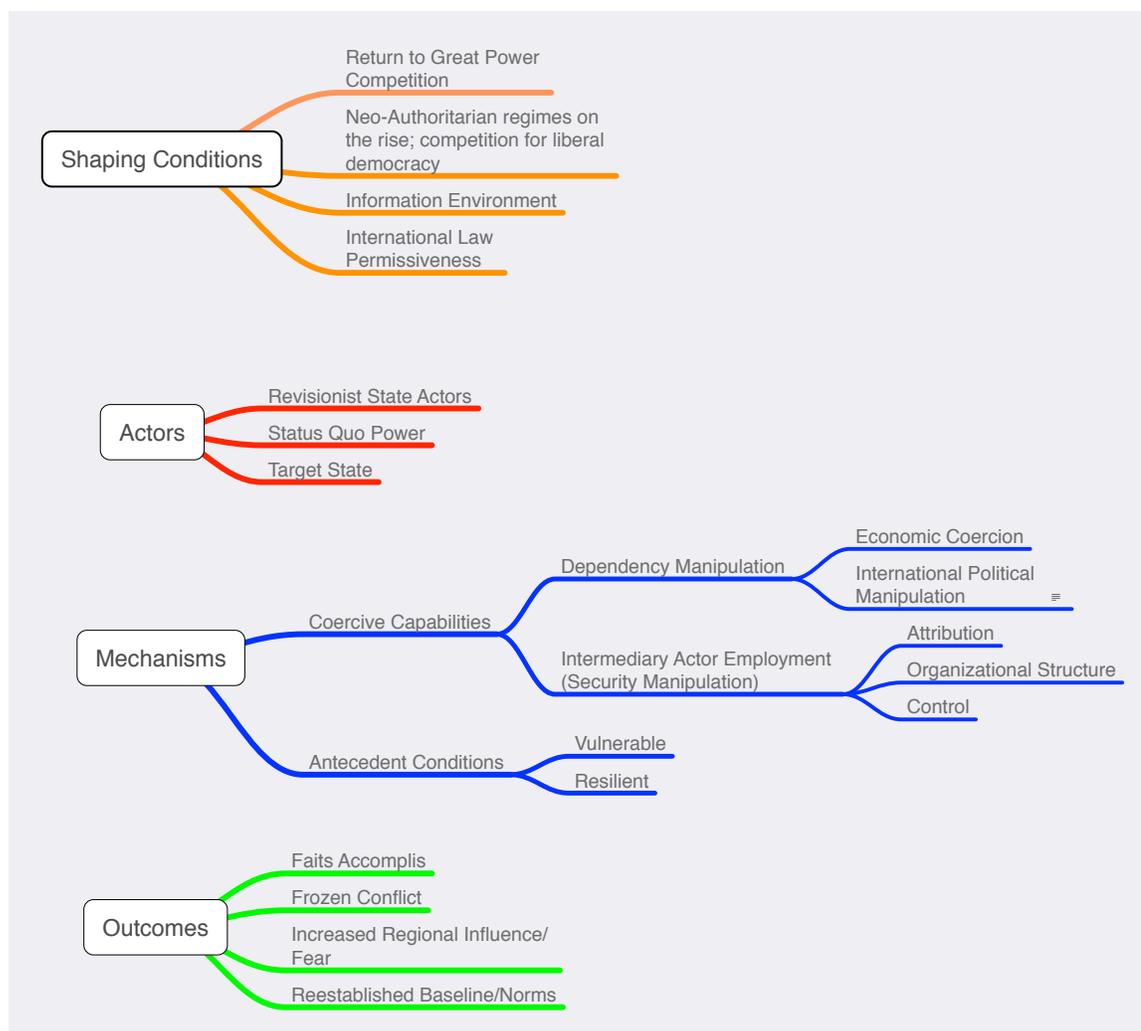
Figure 2.1.   Primary characteristics of gray zone competition

To summarize this section, there are many factors that may constrain the use of force or competition in one realm of strategic competition over another. Looking back at Table 2.1, there are cases where the literature states conflict should not occur. But empirically, we are seeing the occurrence, just not in terms the West would define as war. Factors that might constrain the initiation of conflict in other realms include the potential for loss. Unknowns in terms of capabilities or potential reactions of target states may lead a revisionist state to estimate an unacceptable probability of loss, which subsequently leads the revisionist to pursue a gray zone strategy. Similarly, the scenario may indicate high

potential for long-duration, potential for escalation, enduring commitment, or the desired means for achieving change may be illegal or unpalatable to domestic audiences. In these cases, a revisionist state may be constrained in conventional realms, and thus incentivized to pursue a gray zone strategy. The following section will expand on one undeniable element of gray zone strategies – the employment of intermediary actors.

Intermediary Actor Employment as a Component of Gray Zone Competition

Nearly every empirical instance of gray zone competition includes reference to intermediary actors, commonly referenced as proxy actors. When an empirical case includes the presence of intermediaries, there are then four actors in contention for strategic interaction: the RSA, status quo power, target state and intermediary. Intermediary actors consist of those employed by states to achieve security related objectives for the state under ambiguous conditions of attribution. Such actors can range from illicit businesses to militaristic in nature. There are a few elements of intermediary actor employment that help with the understanding of the concept. These are expanded below.

First, the employment of intermediary actors is often multi-dimensional – emanating not only from the military realm, but also the economic, and political realms. In some cases, if revisionist states are successful in the economic and political realms, the military component may be unnecessary. Second, intermediary forces are cultivated or grown, not simply resourced by the state (Galeotti, 2016). In the context of proxy conflicts, there exists a partnership between state and non-state groups where the state provides some sort of financial and/or militaristic (guns, equipment, logistics, etc.) capability toward a common end. Intermediaries consist of a far more robust investment by the state that can reach all the way down to the most micro-aspects of target society. Among other benefits, this helps the state avoid many of the pitfalls that result from the principal-agent relationship commonly referenced in the proxy literature. Third, intermediaries may reside within the target state and be "employed" by the revisionist state, or they may reside outside the target state and be "deployed" to the target. We see both examples empirically. Finally, as will be expanded upon in the theory chapter, the employment of intermediaries by revisionists varies in three fundamental ways: the level of state control (centralized to decentralized); the organizational structure of intermediaries (formal to informal); and the

level of attribution (overt to covert). Additionally, there are a series of global conditions that make the employment of intermediary actors especially lucrative to revisionist states.

Three primary global environmental circumstances interactively generate conditions that are favorable to the utilization of intermediary actors. First, the interdependence of global economies makes conventional military confrontation even more costly. Second, increased awareness of the general public on state actions abroad due to instantaneous worldwide media imposes additional (audience) costs on state actions. Lastly, state actors in the contemporary security environment have a proof of concept that security goals can be achieved through the outsourcing of requirements in a manner synonymous with a simple business transaction. Each incursion or use equates to the establishment of a new baseline. This is not to say the employment of intermediary actors did not occur prior to the U.S. becoming the superpower – the use of fifth columns appeared in Thucydides (Owen, 2018). Rather, I am arguing the employment of intermediary actors is uniquely lucrative to revisionist state actors in the contemporary global environment. In other words, competition in the gray zone, including the use of intermediaries, is not new, but global trends have made such activities more acute.

In addition to the global trends reinforcing the utility of intermediary actors, there are several other reasons why the employment of intermediaries is lucrative to states seeking revision to the status quo. Factors such as: plausible deniability, attribution ambiguity, legal ambiguity, domestic polity concerns, domestic political constraints, and financial constraints, among others, present options that are often considered low-risk, high-reward. The employment of intermediary actors as a means to achieving gray zone strategies is an empirical reality that deserves scholarly attention. Indeed, state actors seeking revision to the status quo employ intermediaries in a variety of ways to achieve specific objectives within gray zone strategies. A theory of this behavior is developed in Chapter 3.

3   Theory, Design and Measurement

Introduction

In this chapter, I expand research objectives and the conditions that shape the employment of intermediary actors under gray zone conditions. I define my dependent and independent variables and describe variation within each. Next, I propose six hypotheses and outline what I expect to find through the operation of my theory. Finally, I clarify the design of my approach, case studies and how I measure the variables. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of methodological concerns and solutions.

The Argument

This dissertation seeks to map out the intermediary actor employment choice set available to revisionist state actors and analyze how such actors deploy various intermediaries based on international and target conditions. Empirical observation reveals states seeking a revision to the status quo employ intermediaries in a manner that varies, at a minimum, according to attribution (overt/covert) and nature of state control (centralized/decentralized). In Syria, we see the use of Shia networks with some level of direction from Hezbollah and the IRGC. In Crimea, unmarked but uniformed Russian soldiers were employed, seemingly as an extension of the state. Why and how does this variation occur? What is the strategic choice set available to revisionist states and how do they select intermediary employment strategies? We know based on the available literature and empirical knowledge covered in the previous chapter that the employment of intermediaries is a key component of gray zone competition. Additionally, although not new, contemporary global trends facilitate conditions that make competition in the gray zone more acute.

To reemphasize a point from the previous chapter, the employment of intermediaries under gray zone conditions consists of the strategic interaction between four separate actors: The state seeking revision, the status quo power, the target state and the intermediary actor. Analysis of the relationships between each combination of these actors is part of the calculus in determining associated costs, benefits and risks. The consideration of all elements of this strategic interaction is required to effectively scope this project.

The conditions above drive two primary research objectives. First, this research seeks to understand more specifically how states exhibiting revisionist behavior assess the costs, benefits and risks associated with employing intermediaries to develop strategies that minimize the probability of escalation. The second major objective is to more specifically understand how employment of intermediary actors varies across empirical cases. While within case analysis helps with the understanding of the evolution of relationships and tactics, across case analysis will assist with developing clarity on strategy and broader trends. Variation of employment across cases spans from covert attribution and decentralized RSA control at one end of the spectrum (Iranian intermediaries in Iraq 2003-2011); to overt attribution and centralized RSA control at the other end (Crimea). Research questions for this project focus on the conditions that most contribute to differentiating this variation, such as the vulnerability of antecedent conditions at the target, geographic and cultural proximity, and the level of informal access between the RSA and target state.

I argue the employment of intermediary actors by revisionist state actors is a function of the perceived antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests between the RSA and status quo power, and the level of informal access by the RSA at the target. This argument operates under the assumption that states seeking a revision to the status quo take advantage of gray zone conditions by employing intermediaries in such a way so as to minimize the probability of escalation (by the target or status quo power as those with veto authority). Analysis of the target antecedent conditions permits a state seeking revision to determine whether the target is permissive to intermediary employment. Analysis of the parity of interests between the state seeking revision and the status quo power reveals the perceived "stake" each power has in a disruption at the target. Finally, analysis of the degree of informal access reveals paths available to intermediary employment. I argue the makeup of intermediary employment is based on the interactive nature of these three explanatory variables. I expand the theory in the next section, where I define and discuss variation in the DV and explain the causal linkage with the explanatory variables.

Dependent Variable

Empirical observations on the employment of intermediary actors under gray zone conditions demonstrate considerable variation. How does the IR literature inform us about

the nature of this variation? In the closely related proxy war literature, numerous scholars have analyzed *why* states employ proxy actors – plausible deniability (Borghard, 2014; O'Rourke, 2018); costs and efficiency (Borghard, 2014; Byman & Kreps, 2010); costly signaling (Bapat, 2012); and defraying domestic costs of conventional intervention (Salehyan, 2010). But when it comes to the analysis of *how* intermediaries (or proxies) are employed among various dimensions to take advantage of gray zone characteristics, the international relations literature is sparse. While it is useful to understand why a state might employ a proxy, such analysis tells us very little about strategy or intent, the analysis of which could yield greater explanatory power in the assessment of the strategic aspirations of revisionist states and potentially reveal opportunities to deter such activity. The literature is insufficient in providing descriptive and predictive power in the analysis of the contemporary environment of international politics, where intermediaries have become a multidimensional tool or means for strategic reconnaissance (probing) and gain. This is where my project adds to the literature. The dimensions where empirics indicate the employment of intermediary actors vary are expanded below.

The dimension most well developed in the IR literature is attribution. Overt attribution clearly links the role of a state, or sponsor, to the actions of the intermediary. Covert attribution is where a state manages intermediary activity with the intention of concealing their role and avoiding acknowledgement of any connection (Carson, 2018). The covert intervention literature is closely linked to attribution and useful for this analysis. O'Rourke (2018) explains that covert interventions are the result of foreign policy decisions based on debate over risks and rewards in terms of both tactical and strategic factors (O'Rourke, 2018). Estimations on costs and likelihood of success represent tactical considerations, while the state's desire to signal resolve or restraint on the international stage represent strategic considerations. Carson (2018) links covert intervention to domestic audience constraints and the ability of the intervening state to signal limited intent if discovered (Carson, 2018). Carson contends that by intervening covertly, states operate in another space, which he calls the "backstage," where actors are able to avoid the critiques and constraints of a public audience.[5] Downes and Lilley (2010) claim that covert

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[5] For a discussion on the evolution of state use of anonymous forces post-WWI, see Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 87.

interventions are a symptom of democratic institutions that inherently possess many "veto points" that can slow preparations for war. By intervening covertly, the authors argue leaders can pursue successful foreign policy while ensuring reelection domestically (Downes & Lilley, 2010). All of these factors are important in the analysis of how multidimensional intermediary actors are employed by states seeking a revision to the status quo. Empirically, we observe significant variation in the dimension of attribution. In the case of the Russian incursion into Crimea, the "little green men" were unmarked soldiers, but they were wearing uniforms, speaking Russian and carrying Russian weapons. From an intermediary force standpoint, the little green men were relatively overt. Similarly, Shia militias operating against ISIS in Iraq as Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) post-2014 commonly wore matching black uniforms and face masks. Both of these examples constitute something of an "open secret" where the target state and international community know exactly the attribution of the actors despite RSA denials of attribution. Conversely, Shia intermediaries operating in Iraq post-2003 and Chinese Triads operating in Hong Kong represent a much more covert approach. In summary, attribution is the level of acknowledgement of the link between the state seeking a revision to the status quo and the intermediary actor. The theory operates under the assumption that covert intervention is costly. It is more difficult for a state to resource a covert intervention than overt and the risk of exposure could place added limitations on a revisionist state's ability to influence a target state. This project seeks to systematically analyze variation in attribution as one dimension of intermediary force employment. Attribution is distinct from state control (or agency) which will be discussed in the next section.

The employment of intermediaries also varies in reference to RSA control. This is a major area of research within the proxy war literature. Proxy war scholars point to the risk involved with delegation and the challenges involved in maintaining control over proxy actions (Borghard, 2014; Byman & Kreps, 2010). Centralized control equates to direct authority over the behavior of intermediaries across domains. This is a common characteristic in the Chinese employment of intermediaries, where the CCP often plays a direct role in the command, control and synchronization of intermediary forces in the economic, military and political realms. Similarly, in some cases, Russia seeks to exhibit centralized control and coordination of political and military operations (Galeotti, 2016).

In other cases, intermediaries are employed in a decentralized fashion that may be the result of numerous factors, such as strategy, informal access and historical ties. There does appear to be a relationship between level of control and attribution: the more centralized state control, the more difficult it is to maintain covert attribution. This theory operates under the assumption that centralized control is risky because it could increase the probability of attribution, which could in turn increase the probability of conflict escalation. Variation in the level of RSA control represents the second dimension of my DV. This project seeks to understand variation in the employment of intermediaries under conditions of gray zone competition on the right side of the figure below. It is the primary goal of this project to understand systematic causes of the variation among these dimensions. The left side of the figure situates the focus area of this study within the larger strategic choice set available to states seeking a revision to the status quo.
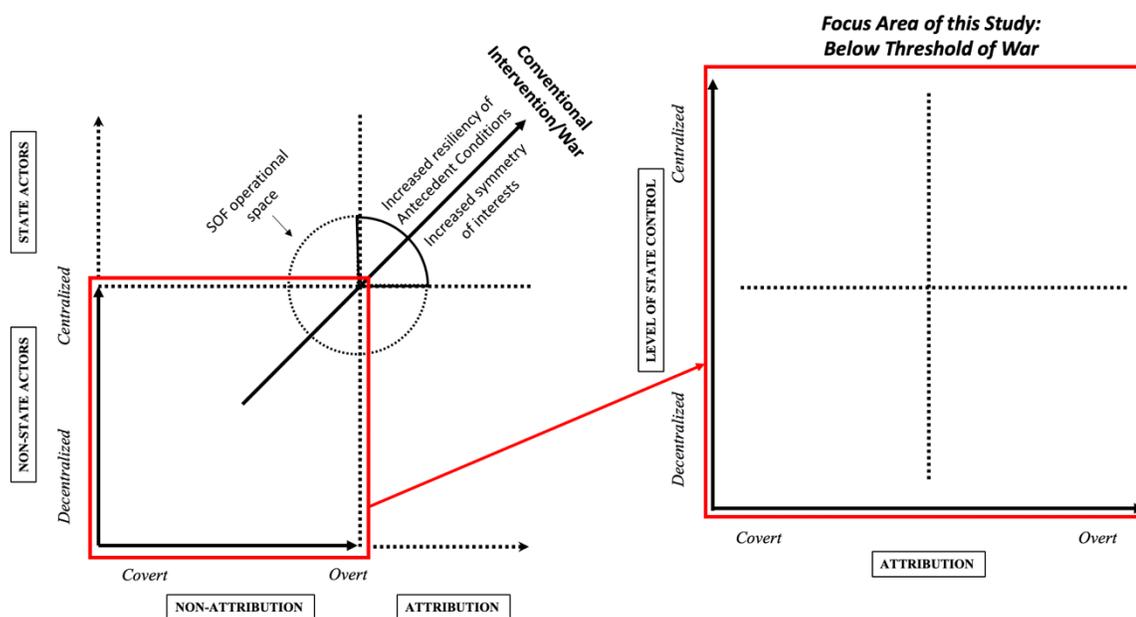
Figure 3.1.   DV situated within the realm of broader conflict

I argue RSAs employ various strategies within the dimensions outlined above to achieve specific gains. This project is primarily concerned with understanding the conditions under which intermediary actor intervention varies among these dimensions. I am also interested in determining whether variation occurs symmetrically, or if certain conditions place intermediary force employment in one quadrant. It is important to note

that the employment of intermediaries occurs not just in the security realm, it is often multidimensional. The next section will outline my key explanatory variables.

The Independent Variables

This project assumes that gray zone competition generates parameters that confine the achievement of zero-sum gains to a narrow range of possible actions. Revisionist states are first and foremost concerned with enhancing regional power/hegemony. They are secondarily concerned with the limits or boundaries of international response. In other words, states seeking a revision to the status quo will pursue zero-sum gains within the boundaries of international response and when boundaries are too constrictive, they will pursue other non-traditional means to achieve such gains. One of these means is the employment of intermediary actors. Intermediary actors may be organic to the revisionist state, such as was the case with the deployment of the Little Green Men to Crimea. Conversely, they may be cultivated and grown from within the target state, such as with Lebanese Hezbollah. What are the conditions under which a state seeking a revision to the status quo will employ intermediaries in one dimension of the DV over another?

I argue the manner in which RSAs employ intermediaries is the result of a series of sequential considerations. The most significant constraint for RSA employment of intermediaries is the anticipated probability of escalation by the target state or allies. Each of the following calculations is an evaluation within this constraint. First, the revisionist state must evaluate whether the target state is permissive to intermediary employment. Target states that have resistant antecedent conditions are more difficult to influence with intermediaries. Second, the revisionist state must evaluate the relative interest of the status quo power in the target state. If the status quo is heavily invested in the target state, the probability of escalation is higher. Third, the revisionist state evaluates their level of informal access. In areas where informal access is high, there exists greater potential for covert attribution and decentralized control. I argue that revisionist states will seek to maximize the utility of informal access in order to minimize the probability of escalation. These considerations drive three independent variables: Antecedent Conditions, Symmetry of Interests and Informal Access. These explanatory variables are captured in the following causal logic graphic and expanded below.
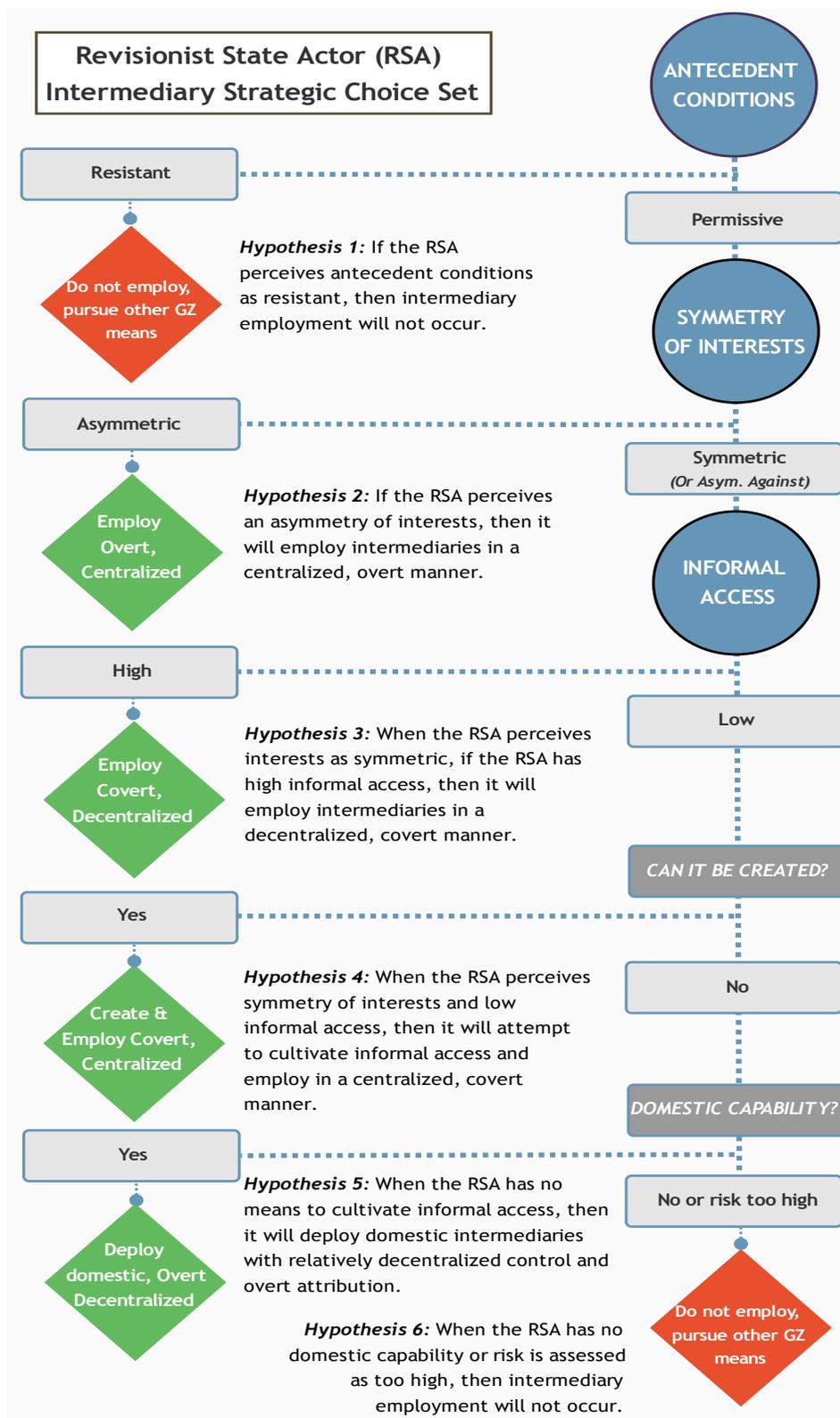
Figure 3.2.   Intermediary actor employment causal logic diagram

IV1: Antecedent Conditions

The conditions at the target state are a primary consideration for a state seeking a revision to the status quo through the employment of intermediaries. The target may be perceived as resistant to the employment of intermediaries, or it may be perceived as permissive. The more vulnerable the revisionist state perceives the target, the lower the probability of escalation and the more permissive the target is to intermediary employment. Conversely, the more resistant target conditions are, the higher the probability that the target state or status quo power will escalate. I evaluate the conditions at the target state according to the variable of Antecedent Conditions.

The literature points to a correlation between the weakness of state institutional structures and the risks such vulnerabilities create, both domestically and from external predatory actors. From the domestic perspective, Fearon and Laitin (2003) state, "Insurgents are better able to survive and prosper if the government and military they oppose are relatively weak – badly financed, organizationally inept, corrupt, politically divided, and poorly informed about goings-on at the local level," (Fearon & Laitin, 2003b). A large portion of the social movement literature is premised on the presence of grievances that often result with under-performing governments. When governments are weak, popular resistance is given room to grow. Strong popular resistance consists of strong popular mobilizing structures (leadership structures, connective structures and social embeddedness (Tarrow, 1998)), manifested through the political, economic and social realms of a target society. Lee (2017) categorizes these elements under the concept of "resistance potential," which is the potential for resistance among individuals or groups within a state to oppose, fight or refuse to cooperate with or submit to control by the state (Lee, 2017). Kausch (2017) also notes a correlation between the weakness of state institutions, prevalence of informal structures and the attractive power of these conditions to outsiders. Kausch (2017) argues that outside [revisionist] actors are encouraged by weak state institutions and that such weakness makes target states more vulnerable to non-state challengers. The interplay between institutional strength and popular resistance strength is what I refer to as antecedent conditions.

I define antecedent conditions as the socio-political-economic characteristics at the target state. The antecedent conditions at the target can range from permissive to relatively stable, or resistant. Strong antecedent conditions are resilient in the face of RSA aggression and gray zone strategies. Permissive, or vulnerable, antecedent conditions serve as a mechanism through which RSAs can manipulate dependencies (directly or through intermediaries) and more effectively shape outcomes. I argue the sequential analysis of states seeking a revision to the status quo is first concerned with whether the target state has resistant or permissive antecedent conditions. Target states with resistant antecedent conditions present considerable risk and revisionist states will seek other means, such as dependency manipulation, than to employ intermediaries under these conditions.

Hypothesis 1: *If the RSA perceives antecedent conditions as resistant, then intermediary employment will not occur.*

I evaluate antecedent conditions based on indicators of the strength of domestic institutions and the strength of popular resistance. The strength of domestic institutions consists of governing structures, external dependencies and the licit economy. The strength of popular resistance consists of the presence or absence of political, economic and social components of mobilizing structures in a target society.

In the event antecedent conditions are evaluated as permissive, I argue states seeking a revision to the status quo through the employment of intermediaries will next consider the symmetry of interests with the status quo power.

IV2: Symmetry of Interests

The next major consideration of revisionist states in the employment of intermediary forces is the strategic interests of the status quo power, with regard to the target, in relation to their own. Numerous factors can influence a respective state's level of interest in the target of RSA aggression. This variable is taken within the context of a return to great power competition and the concept of offensive realism, where great powers ultimately seek to maximize power in pursuit of hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001). However, to remain below the threshold of war in the attainment of zero-sum gains, revisionist states will calculate the relative symmetry of interests of the status quo power in order to determine the most effective intermediary employment strategy without

provoking a costly response. I argue the most significant factors include geographic proximity, alliances or historical ties, and commercial value. For areas where RSAs are considering the employment of intermediaries, the evaluation accounts for the comparative interests of status quo powers to carefully gauge the likelihood of response and permissiveness of aggression.

The measure of strategic interests between an RSA and the status quo power can range from asymmetric to symmetric. The more either power is invested in the target state, whether through economic, military or geopolitical means, the greater the stake the respective power will possess. The RSA's perception of the status quo power's level of interest, in comparison to their own, is a critical factor in considering the employment of intermediary forces. For targets where the revisionist state perceives an asymmetry of interests, there is more freedom to maneuver without provocation of response.

Hypothesis 2: If the RSA perceives an asymmetry of interests, then they will employ intermediaries in a centralized, overt manner.

The purpose of exploiting the gray zone for RSAs is to revise the status quo without provoking costly international response. Thus, RSAs will seek to test the limits through various methods of probing redlines and precedent in international law. In areas where interests between the revisionist state and the status quo power are more symmetric, the chances of provocation are higher and RSAs will seek more covert and decentralized intermediary employment in an effort to achieve modest gains while maximizing plausible deniability. In this instance, revisionist states must turn to evaluation of informal access.

IV3: Informal Access

What underlies the most successful of them [movement organizations] is the role of informal connective tissue operating within and between formal movement organizations (Tarrow, 1998, p. 137).

With the variable of informal access, I am interested in the structures, relationships and mechanisms that transpire across formal boundaries where information, goods and services flow freely on informal systems that are reinforced through trust and reciprocity. I define informal access as the access of one state to another through informal conduits, most often structured through religion, familial, tribal/clan or illicit economic connections.

Through these conduits flow information, resources, and personnel. The utilization of informal access is costly for revisionist states. It requires more time, energy and resources to operate through informal structures than by simply deploying centralized, overt intermediaries. I argue the ability of an RSA to access a target state informally will shape the way they employ intermediary actors. There are many literatures that touch on the concept of informal access, including those in the fields of informal governance, network analysis, warlord governance, and non-state actors. Their application to this project is briefly summarized below.

First, it is very common for informal governing structures to exist in low-intensity and post-conflict environments. Within these societies where institutions are often weak or challenged, it is incredibly common for parallel structures to emerge in the political, social and security realms. In some cases, where formal governance does not extend all the way to the village level, forms of traditional or customary authority serve as the governing structures for locals. These types of structures are especially prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where such authority often predates Westphalian order. In Afghanistan, three bodies of informal political order govern life at the local level: village councils (shuras/jirgas with elders); village representatives (qaryadars, maliks); and religious leaders (Mullahs) (Murtazashvili, 2016). In Africa, it is commonplace for relatively democratic governing structures and forms of traditional authority to operate as hybrid systems of government, with minimal characteristics of competing authority (Logan, 2009). The sectors where customary or traditional governance is most commonly found is in basic law and order (Sharia law, Pastunwali), dispute resolution, and small scale infrastructure (Murtazashvili, 2016). Informal governing structures are focused at the lowest levels of these societies and dynamically evolve to suit the needs of the citizens within the constraints of the environment in which they live.

In some cases, there exist sub-national informal governing structures that are less stable. The literature on warlord governance captures this point (P. Jackson, 2003; Marten, 2012; Reno, 1999). There are many distinctions between warlord governance and the informal governance literature I mentioned previously. Warlord governance is often found in societies that are in closer proximity to the realm of conflict and warlords possess some level of veto power, usually through violence, that supplants the shared power between

traditional authority figures mentioned under informal governance. Warlords tend to emerge when centralized governmental control is absent or broken and are common in areas where governmental reach does not transcend from the central to local level (P. Jackson, 2003). As a result, local people act on their own to provide security. There are examples within the warlord literature that are useful to this project. It is not uncommon for warlords to develop informal linkages with external states and companies (P. Jackson, 2003). Warlord partnerships with the rubber, timber and diamond industries help establish linkages that reinforce potential for future interaction. Such partnerships also provide sources of income to supplement other, illicit income. Warlords are able to establish linkages to external states because they provide stability in areas that would otherwise not exist.

Informal governing structures and warlord governing structures are linked to the outside world through networks that transcend state boundaries. The network analysis literature portrays the relevance of this component. Networks are defined as, "…sets of relations that form structures, which in turn may constrain and enable agents," (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009). Analysis of networks helps reveal how the interaction of relationships create structure among actors through dynamic processes. Within network analysis exist several measures of centrality, which determine the strength of access of a particular node to other nodes in the network (Hafner-Burton et al., 2009; Zech & Gabbay, 2016). Formal networks are those with defined borders where links are established with formal sectors of society (Rosas, 2001). Relationships in formal networks tend to be impersonal and hierarchical. Informal networks are those where relationships are developed based on familial and cultural ties where members share values and norms that provide meaning to social and mutual exchange processes. For example, in Ghana, women travel across West African states using informal social networks to sustain small businesses dependent upon trade. Informal networks are sustained through trust and reciprocity and governed by shared norms and values (Wrigley-Asante, 2018). These informal networks intersect with formal networks that provide access to formal sectors of the government, and in the case of female traders in Ghana, access to formal sectors of the economy. Informal networks require some form of reciprocity to be sustained.

Kausch (2017) integrates the relationship between state institutional weakness and the prevalence of non-state actors. She argues that when outsiders, or revisionists, who perceive target state weakness, they may, "…team with local non-state actors who have the domestic roots, connections and knowledge…" rather than pursue direct intervention (Kausch, 2017). The ability for outside actors to "team up" with non-state actors is dependent upon informal access that are established through those domestic roots, connections and knowledge. Without informal access, establishing such a team would prove challenging.

Collectively, the literature on informal governance, warlord governance, network analysis and non-state actors shapes the conception of informal access. What is the degree to which a revisionist state has access to a target state through informal means? In areas where traditional, customary or warlord forms of authority are prevalent, where informal networks operate freely based on shared familial, linguistic, religious, tribal or other cultural connections, the potential for informal access by a revisionist actor with means to exploit such connections is high.

Hypothesis 3: *When the RSA perceives interests as symmetric, if the RSA has high informal access, then it will employ intermediaries in a decentralized, covert manner.*

Decentralized intermediary employment is important in the management of attribution. In areas where revisionist actors are informally tied in to the community level of a target state, the potential for decentralized employment is high. From the social movement literature, we know community based movements thrive because they do not require any special organized efforts to maintain them over time and across space (Tarrow, 1998, p. 131). However, if the state seeking revision does not have a high level of informal access, other options still remain. There are two sub-variables under Informal Access that operate in the event of low informal access. First, there may exist the opportunity to create, or cultivate, informal access. This option may be perceived as timely, or costly, but it may enable action in cases where other options may not exist.

Hypothesis 4: *When the RSA perceives symmetry of interests and if the RSA has low informal access, then it will attempt to cultivate informal access and employ intermediaries in a centralized, covert manner.*

Second, in the event the cultivation of informal access is perceived as too costly or timely, the state seeking revision has the option to turn to domestic capabilities. Intermediaries operating from the revisionist state pose a higher risk with regard to attribution. Nonetheless, I do expect to find such employment under these conditions.

> *Hypothesis 5:* *When the RSA perceives symmetry of interests and it has low informal access with no means to cultivate informal access, then it will deploy domestic intermediaries with relatively decentralized control and overt attribution.*

Finally, it is possible that such domestic capability does not exist, or the risk of employing intermediaries is assessed as too high.

> *Hypothesis 6:* *When the RSA perceives symmetry of interests, if the RSA has low informal access and no domestic capability or if it assesses the risk as too high, then it will not employ intermediaries.*

Of note, Hypotheses 1 and 6 can only be measured through negative cases, which are inherently difficult to identify.[6] The predictions of these hypotheses are summarized in the chart below.

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[6] Negative cases of employment were observed with the Iran case; however, I was unable to identify any negative cases for the Russia case.
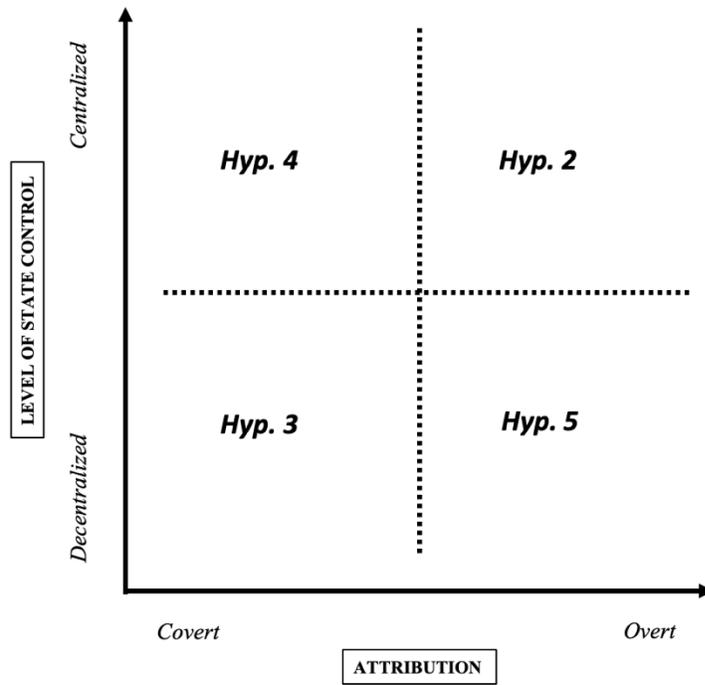
Figure 3.3.   Expected operation of explanatory variables

Research Objectives, Scope Conditions and Alternative Explanations

As mentioned earlier, this project addresses two primary research objectives. First, this research seeks to understand more specifically how states exhibiting revisionist behavior assess the costs, benefits and risks associated with employing intermediaries to develop strategies that minimize the probability of escalation. Research questions for this objective are focused on assessment of the range of options available to revisionist states, to include perception of target conditions, status quo power interest and relationship with local and transnational sub-state entities. The second major objective is to more specifically understand how employment of intermediary actors varies across empirical cases. Research questions for this objective are focused on across-case analysis to identify patterns or trends that may make inferences on future gray zone competition more apparent. Collectively, the accomplishment of these objectives will enable the development of implications on factors most influential in the employment of intermediaries, insight into potential deterrence of nefarious intermediary activity, and the influence of temporal phenomenon on employment. This will address the question of whether gray zone strategies really do represent something new, or simply strategies that are more permissive to achieving gains under the current unipolar status quo.

It is important to outline scope conditions that clearly specify the parameters within which this theory is expected to operate. First, to be clear, the unit of analysis is the Revisionist State Actor (RSA) – target state – time period triad, but taken in context of their relationship with the intermediary actor and status quo power. The universe of cases to which this theory applies are those where intermediary actors (military or non-military) are ambiguously employed by an RSA in the presence of a status quo power under gray zone conditions. ***Gray zone conditions are where RSAs probe international redlines and legal precedent to achieve zero-sum gains, test resolve and the probability of retaliation in the space of international competition between western notions of war and peace under ambiguous conditions of attribution.*** This theory does not apply to the analysis of third-party intervention by states that are not revisionist in nature or seeking a change to the international status quo. Nor does this theory apply to the thousands of cases of proxy actor employment that did not occur under gray zone conditions. Finally, RSA employment of intermediaries is often compounded by the extensive use of propaganda, cyber

operations and terrorist operations, both domestically and internationally. The detailed study of these forms of influence and how they are related to intermediary actor employment lies outside the scope of this study. Similarly, the specific details of RSA financing through both licit and illicit means to support these efforts is often opaque, and thus not heavily focused on in this research.

It is important to consider potential objections and alternative explanations prior to moving forward. Critics of this work will be quick to point to the gray zone concept generally, and intermediary actors in particular, as tautological in that they are simply another catch phrase to describe hybrid warfare, non-contact warfare, proxy warfare, active measures and so forth (Arquilla, 2018; Elkus, 2015). While I clearly believe the gray zone concept and intermediary actor employment are distinct phenomena, such distinctions do not matter for the purposes of this research. I would argue there is a slight distinction between proxy forces and intermediary actors based on proximity to the state, or level of agency. In other words, intermediary actors are not simply resourced to do the state's bidding. Rather, they are carefully cultivated as surrogates over time essentially into non-state actors/armies for the state (i.e. higher degree of agency). Additionally, there is a high degree of multidimensional intermediary actor employment (mil, econ, political, info). Whereas proxies are often resourced materially and financially by the state, encouraged to do the state's bidding and typically only referenced in the military realm. Although I do agree there are subtle differences between proxy actors and intermediary actors, such distinctions are not relevant to this research. I am primarily concerned with how revisionist state actors perceive the choice set of available options for intermediary actor employment highlighted in Figure 3.1.

Although existing scholarly work does not directly address the questions this research seeks to evaluate, there are two potential alternative explanations that I address here and incorporate into my project. The first is regarding the proxy literature principal-agent relationship (Byman & Kreps, 2010; Salehyan, 2010). As many proxy conflict scholars note, there exist problems with agency and when principals (states) delegate, they inherently relinquish some level of agency over outcomes (Byman & Kreps, 2010). The proxy conflict scholars fond of principal-agent models could argue that variation of my dependent variable is simply accounted for due to this loss of agency and that we might

expect to observe variation that is directly linked to the amount of control mechanisms the principal employs over the agent. In other words, more state control mechanisms equate to intermediaries that are more overt and centralized. The problem with this logic, which is even recognized in the proxy literature, is with regard to sequence. As Borghard (2014) effectively points out, it is often the proxy who moves first in the perceived principal-agent relationship. Proxies are often embedded on the ground before a state moves in to employ their services, thus the proxy has the potential to retain more leverage in the relationship (Borghard, 2014). The principal-agent model alone is not sufficient to describe the variation we are seeing empirically in intermediary employment.

The second alternative explanation is that variation of my DV is purely due to conditions at the target and regional hegemony. According to this logic, RSAs would employ intermediaries that are more overt and centralized (OC) in areas that are closer to the geo-political center of the revisionist power. This contention is more about power projection, resources and the extent of regional hegemony, than strategy. Thus, we would expect to find OC methods only within a certain geographic proximity to the RSA and Covert and Decentralized (CD) methods in geographically distant areas. While this argument is tempting, I think it underestimates the primary RSA objective, which is to achieve zero sum gains without provoking costly international response. According to the logic of my argument, we should still expect to see the employment of intermediaries in an OC manner in areas where permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetry of interests exist, regardless of geographic proximity.

To evaluate the explanatory power of this theory, I explore variation in intermediary actor employment through a series of comparative case studies in which I use process tracing and structured, focused comparison to determine the conditions under which a state seeking revision employs intermediary actors. Specifically, I assess the employment of intermediaries by Iran from 1982 to 2019; and the Russian employment of intermediaries from 1992 to 2019. The cases of employment selected for this project are not all inclusive, but they exhibit the material necessary to fully analyze the full scope of conditions under which various revisionist state actors employ intermediary actors in the dimensions depicted in Figure 3.1.

This dissertation makes several scholarly and practical contributions. First, while many scholarly efforts focused on the employment of proxies in warfare exist, there is very little IR scholarly attention focused on the employment of proxy actors under conditions short of war. This project is the first systematic study designed to assess how the employment of intermediary actors varies across time and space under conditions of gray zone competition. Additionally, this project complements the very limited IR literature related to gray zone activity. The gray zone represents an important dimension of international politics that is inadequately researched in the field of IR. The existing literature is focused primarily on gray zone tactics. Closely related literatures on proxy warfare and covert intervention provide valuable insight into elements of gray zone competition, but do not specifically recognize the gray zone. This project expands the literature by bridging these closely related fields of IR in terms of shaping conditions, actors, mechanisms and outcomes of gray zone strategies in addition to understanding how adversarial strategies are designed to alter the U.S. led status quo. The application of greater academic rigor to the concept of gray zones will serve to collapse the vast array of marginal references to gray zone activity and reveal causal processes and structures for a unique phenomenon where strategic competition is on the rise.

In addition to these scholarly contributions, this dissertation provides several practical implications regarding strategic decisions shaping contemporary conflict participation and management. The conflicts in which the U.S. and western allies do find themselves involved are increasingly ripe with gray zone characteristics. This project assists with understanding how specific elements of asymmetric threats to the status quo might be deterred. The evolution of conflicts and competition in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere are littered with dozens of non-state actors with varying degrees of attribution and perceived coordination with state actors. Future conflict is likely to consist of many of the same characteristics due to the incentives generated in the current global environment and the profound ability of adversaries to generate zero-sum status quo gains in their favor. This dissertation also seeks to understand the role intermediaries play in compelling adversaries to reveal intent. An understanding of the role intermediary "probing" plays with generating an adversary to reveal intent will help address questions of why RSAs are not using conventional means and why there are so many new instances

of intermediary force employment. This analysis will help reveal how state actors intend to achieve revisionist goals through specific combinations of intermediary actor employment and support future policies on asymmetric deterrence.

The focus on the employment of intermediary actors under conditions of gray zone competition is theoretically important and timely. The revelation of little green men in Crimea was alarming to the international community. The post-Westphalian world is accustomed to interstate conflict that is qualified with uniformed, identifiable state armies in pursuit of relatively clear objectives. The U.S. participation in Vietnam opened contemporary Western eyes to the confusion and ambiguity generated by non-state actors that is resident in many intrastate conflicts. The "rules of warfare" set forth after WWII through the Geneva Conventions were proven laughable by Russia and their acquisition of Crimea. In 2014, Russia demonstrated to the world there are no rules, even in limited war. With ambiguity as a critical element, Russia was able to achieve gains while those states operating under the status quo were left scratching their figurative heads wondering whether or not a rule was violated. This systematic analysis of key elements of ambiguous force employment is important strategically to help inform whether adversary employments should be perceived by the international community as alarmist with potential to escalate to war, alter the international status quo, or simply as saber rattling designed to add noise and confusion.

Design

The research objective of this project is to assess the causal effect of my explanatory variables on variation in intermediary actor employment by Revisionist State Actors (RSAs). To examine this objective, I will conduct a series of comparative case studies using process tracing and structured, focused comparison to evaluate how RSAs employ intermediaries to achieve specific gains under gray zone competition. I selected cases that vary according to my explanatory variables, as well as the dimensions in my dependent variable. This ensures variation in multiple directions to maximize potential explanatory power.

I specifically use a controlled comparison to look at cases among different RSAs to assess how differences in my IVs reveal variation in my DV. The use of many cases allows

for several different types of comparisons that are useful in determining the relative strength of my IVs. This design allows me to establish the conditions under which different levels of my IVs are associated with different outcomes. Additionally, process tracing within cases is useful in revealing different causal paths that lead to the same outcome.

Case Selection

To test the power of my explanatory variables, I conduct a structured, focused comparison of the strategic interaction between two state actors exhibiting revisionist behavior in 12 target locations. First, I evaluate the Iranian employment of intermediaries from Hezbollah in Lebanon in the 1980s to Shia militias around the world in 2019. Next I focus on the Russian employment of intermediaries from Georgia in 1992 to Libya in 2019. Across all 12 cases, I evaluate 52 observations of intermediary employment or non-employment. Through this approach, I conduct a deep dive into the employment of intermediaries by two very different states seeking a revision to the status quo. By using process tracing within cases, I can thoroughly evaluate the causal mechanisms for the dimensions in which intermediary actors are employed. This longitudinal analysis will also allow me to "zoom out" and compare variation in my IVs between actors.

I select these cases for a number of reasons in addition to those mentioned above. First, the case must occur under gray zone conditions. I use elements from Chapter 2 to evaluate whether a case exhibits gray zone characteristics: Actors and Mechanisms. To be selected, the case must exhibit an RSA employing intermediaries in competition with a status quo power. These criteria eliminate many cases of proxy actor employment where gray zone conditions do not exist. Next, the case must also include mechanisms of gray zone competition – specifically coercive capabilities (dependency manipulation and/or intermediary actor employment) and variable antecedent conditions. All cases occur below the threshold of war. Collectively, these criteria define parameters for the universe of cases.

Second, I reviewed the gray zone "canon" to determine where there is consensus on cases reflective of gray zone competition or cases that at least possess considerable gray zone characteristics. Russia is by far the most prolific gray zone actor, with a distinction in the literature between Russia writ large, and Russia's involvement in Ukraine. China is next, with most references to China's island construction in the South China Sea, but also

to Chinese efforts with the Belt and Road Initiative and presence in Africa. Finally, Iran is commonly referenced as a gray zone actor. Specific references were to Iranian actions in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and South America. The summary of this analysis is reflected in the table below.

	Koven et al. (2017)	Maren (2015)	Sukhankin (2018/19)	Nantulya (2019)	Legarda & Nouwens (2018)	Marten (2019)	Clarke & Tabatai (2019)	Tabatai (2019)	Jackson (2017)	Matisek (2017)	Mazarr (2015)	Karber (2015)	Kapusta (2015)	Lanoszka (2016)	SOCOM (2016)	ISAB (2017)	Galeotti (2016)	Erickson et al. (2019)	SMA/NSI (2016/17)	Sum of References
Colombia 2002-2016	1																		1	2
Libya 2011-2016	1																		1	2
Russia-Ukraine 2014-present	1										1	1	1		1	1			1	7
China – SCS/BRI/Africa		1		1	1			1			1		1		1			1	1	9
Iran – IRGC/Syria/Iraq /Africa/Yemen/ S. America		1					1	1	1		1				1				1	7
Russia – writ large		1	1			1		1	1	1				1	1	1	1		1	11
Syria							1								1					2
North Korea								1							1					2

Table 3.1.   Cases referenced as Gray Zone in related literatures

The Cases

Iran (1979-2019). Iran claims a prominent position in the employment of intermediaries in gray zone competition. The cultivation of Hezbollah by the IRGC in the 1980s is often considered the "model" for intermediary force growth and employment (Alaaldin, 2018; Kam, 2017). Hezbollah is a good example of a multidimensional intermediary force. The group is a battle-tested military organization, but they also exist as a religious organization, political party and proxy government, delivering goods and services. However, Hezbollah is not the only intermediary force employed by Iran.

In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, the Ayatollah fostered the growth of political and military intermediaries for future use in Iraq (SCIRI, Dawa and Badr Corps). Later, after the U.S. invasion in 2003, multiple smaller groups, such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah, were shaped as intermediaries with various levels of attribution and control. The intermediaries utilized by Iran were not always unified in their approach. In

fact, many intermediaries were often at odds with one another. However, the variety of intermediaries provided Iran with options in employment. In addition to the Iranian and Iraqi Shia intermediaries, Iran recruited Shia "Brigades" from Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as individuals from Bahrain and refugee camps. Iran has much experience in employing intermediaries. During the Iran-Iraq War, 4,565 people of 250,000 killed on the Iranian side were foreign nationals from all over the Middle East. Alfoneh (2018) found through the meticulous readings of press reports on funeral services in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon between 2012-2018, there were 535 Iranian, 841 Afghan, 112 Iraqi, 1,213 Lebanese and 153 Pakistani Shia foreign fighters killed in Syria and Iraq (Alfoneh, 2018b). The Iran case is complex, to say the least.

With Iran, I evaluate intermediary employment in Lebanon (1982-2006); Afghanistan (1979-1989); Afghanistan (2007-2018); Iraq (2003-2011); Syria (2011-2018); Iraq (2014-2019); and Yemen (2014-2018). The wide range of cases of Iranian employment provides considerable variation in both the explanatory and dependent variables. Target locations represent a mix of geo-cultural similar populations and domestic institutional strengths.

Analysis of Iranian employment is important to this project because case analysis shows that Iranian intermediaries navigate informal structures very well. Tribal, religious and political structures that permeate the Middle East, and to a certain extent, the world appear to enable Iran to employ intermediaries in a much more covert and decentralized (CD) fashion. This project seeks to evaluate whether these informal structures are a powerful catalyst for intermediary employment.

Russia (1992-2019). Russia is the source of most of the literature on gray zone competition. Their annexation of Crimea and participation in the Donbas embodied all the key elements of gray zone competition. There are numerous examples of how Russia attempted to manipulate the gray zone politically, economically and militarily. Russia is clearly a revisionist state and employed intermediary forces across dimensions represented by the DV. The "Little Green Men" employed in Crimea represent a more overt and centralized approach. The utilization of Wagner, other Russian Business Networks and Russian "Motorcyclists International" fall somewhere in the middle of attribution and

control. Finally, Russian relationships with criminal networks, smugglers and organized crime seem to represent employment in the covert and decentralized realm.

With Russia, I map the evolution of intermediary force employment in Georgia (1992-2008); Crimea, Ukraine (2014-2018); the Donbass, Ukraine (2014-2018); Syria (2015-2018); and Libya (2016-2019). The Russia analysis is unique because of the gravitas with which they have employed intermediary forces over the past decade. Russian intermediary employment often supports secessionist movements. Russia has a long history of intermediary force employment and they appear to have adjusted how they employ these actors, reflecting strategy. The numerous incidents in which Russia employed intermediaries facilitated experimentation with various degrees of attribution and levels of state control.

Excluded Cases

In addition to the cases of gray zone activity represented in Table 3.1, I also considered Angola 1975-2002 and Venezuela 2010-2019 as potential cases. I did not select Colombia 2002-2016 or North Korea to use as cases because they do not possess a significant combination of the two primary factors of gray zone competition I mentioned earlier (actors and mechanisms) and gray zone competition by the actors is not apparent in both dimensions of my DV. I would classify these conflicts as containing elements of proxy war and occasional participation of RSAs, but not under gray zone conditions. The conflict in Colombia (2002-2016) consisted of non-state actors (FARC), illicit funding streams (drug trafficking), and third-party intervention (U.S.). But there were no significant elements of gray zone competition. Similarly, North Korea's use of covert actors, such as Office 39, represents at most only one dimension of my DV.

Angola (1975-2002) is commonly referenced in the proxy war literature. The U.S., China and Russia all served as external principals in relation to proxy forces. Ethnic cleavages and decades of conflict generated vulnerable antecedent conditions. This case represents clearly covert and overt third-party intervention and proxy war, but it does not embody key elements of gray zone competition that occurred below the threshold of war. Additionally, covert intervention or financial support cannot be conflated with gray zone competition.

The ongoing situations in North-Central Africa and Venezuela do possess elements of gray zone competition. Russia has employed intermediaries in these areas in ways that demonstrate variation in my DV. Although I do not specifically focus on Chad, Sudan, or the Central African Republic as stand-alone cases, my analysis on Libya is a useful foray into the broader African situation. Russian ambition in the broader region is intricately connected. Finally, the Venezuela situation is not yet developed enough for analysis using this model. Wagner and other similar groups represent a common thread in these cases.

Finally, China represents a glaring absence from the list of cases. Although China meets all the criteria for inclusion for this project, I have simply placed this case aside for inclusion on a future project due to time constraints on project completion. I do not expect the exclusion of this case to detract from the explanatory power of my theory. Rather, I expect the China case to reinforce the influence of the explanatory variables on the outcome.

With the cases I have selected, I believe I am able to effectively evaluate variation of my dependent variable and demonstrate explanatory power with my IVs. For each case, I make two temporal observations that are selected based on conditions of participation. For each case, I define why I select the respective time periods. These cases provide multiple observations on several dimensions. Further, these cases will allow me to rule out competing potential explanations for intermediary actor employment that revolve around principal-agent models and simply enhancing regional hegemony.

The selection of cases of intermediary employment by Iran and Russia are important for the testing of my theory for a few additional reasons. First, these revisionist states are geographically and cultural quite different. They employ intermediaries in different regions, but we also observe overlap in Syria. Second, the regime types are different. Decisions on employment and utilization likely manifest differently between the two governments. Third, the power of the two revisionist actors is different. Russia is much stronger militarily, economically and has a larger population size. Collectively, the findings revealed through analysis of intermediary employment based on the conditions above will substantially enhance the generalizability of the theory.

One potential criticism of the case selection is the absence of negative cases which would reinforce Hypotheses 1 and 6. Although I do examine two negative cases, such cases prove difficult to find. Both negative cases I found were those of Iran. Although I could not find any examples of Russian non-employment, based on the observations in this project, I expect the theory would operate in the same fashion evidenced by the Iranian examples.

Measuring the Dependent Variable

To account for the dependent variable, I look for observable indicators of each dimension represented in Figure 1. With a thorough examination of each case, I categorize the employment of intermediaries in each dimension, as depicted in Table 3.2, below. Attribution is overt if the relationship between a revisionist state and intermediary is publicly acknowledged. State control is centralized if the revisionist state has a direct role in the organization, strategy and employment of the intermediary. Revisionist states exert control through various methods, from emplacement of covert military personnel within the ranks of intermediaries, to centralized training or recruiting in the target state or within the revisionist state. The distinctions are often difficult to identify, but I adhere to specific measures for the dependent variable, located in Appendix B.

Dimension	Range			
Attribution	Covert	Lean Covert	Lean Overt	Overt
Level of State Control	Decentralized	Lean Decentralized	Lean Centralized	Centralized

Table 3.2.   **Measures of Dependent Variables**

Measuring the Independent Variables

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent conditions are the socio-political-economic conditions at the target state that can serve as a catalyst or deterrent to intermediary employment by a revisionist state. These range from resistant to permissive and are comprised of two primary indicators: strength of domestic institutions and strength of popular resistance. The strength of domestic institutions consists of governing structures, external dependencies and the

licit economy. The strength of popular resistance consists of political, economic and social components. For the political component, strong factionalization within an inefficient government, compounded by the participation of a resistance organization will enable political opportunity that could add to the legitimacy of the resistance and serve as a mechanism for change. Economically, the presence of an illicit economy can lead to resource generation and self-sufficiency. Socially, strong socio-ethnic divides with robust, homogenous networks can lead to strong resiliency and resistance potential. The strength of popular resistance can range from weak to strong. The combination of strong popular resistance and weak institutional strength qualifies as permissive antecedent conditions.

Asymmetry of Interests.

In the evaluation of state interests in a target state, there may exist little reason to influence the target based on economic or political incentives, but there may exist great importance from historical perspectives. I evaluate the measurement of this sub-variable based on three primary indicators: geographic proximity, alliances/historical ties, and commercial value. Interests between the state seeking a revision to the status quo and the status quo power can range from Symmetric to Asymmetric.

Informal Access

As stated previously, informal access is the access of one state to another through informal conduits. Access is permitted through "ties" which I capture with three indicators: socio-cultural proximity, ideological convergence and strategic convergence. For socio-cultural proximity, states that share common socio-cultural factors, such as ethnicity, religion, or language present more pathways for information, resources and personnel to travel. For this indicator, I look for the presence or absence of both weak and strong ties. The stronger the socio-cultural proximity a revisionist state has to a target state, the more access the respective state will have into the informal conduits of the target.

The next indicator is ideological convergence, which is most likely to occur through strong ties. Ideology has much to do with how individuals and groups self-identify and how they frame ideological issues for collective action. For example, during the cultivation of Hezbollah the IRGC fostered the adoption of Velayat-e Faqih as a founding principal,

where Ayatollah Khomeini was recognized as the Jurist Theologian. This does not simply convey similarity of cultures or religion (like the previous indicator); it represents the convergence of ideologies under conditions of corresponding loyalty.

Finally, I use the indicator of strategic convergence, which is most likely to occur through weak ties, to measure informal access. This indicator is measured by assessing the convergence between the revisionist state and the target society in terms of their vision of regional order, perception of threats and strategies to address those threats. The alignment of vision and interests in addressing threats indicates high strategic convergence. For this indicator, I look for the presence or absence of ties based on alignment of strategic vision and interests.

Collectively, these three indicators shape the degree of informal access one state has within another. Informal access ranges from high to low. For all explanatory variables, the specific coding rules for measurement are provided in Appendix B.

Methodological Concerns

The methods of inquiry outlined above introduce two methodological concerns that are worth noting. First, there exists the issue of selection bias. By only selecting cases that do well in illustrating the causal processes of the model, there is an argument that I am leaving out cases that do not fit my theory. The empirical reality of gray zone competition significantly limits testable cases, perhaps to such a degree that the employment of intermediaries under gray zone conditions may be classified as rare events. Nonetheless, there exist concerns over generalizability. I have attempted to address these concerns by focusing my research on multiple observations of intermediary employment. Within each RSA – target state – time period triad, multiple observations allow me to interrogate all portions of my theory to assess the operationalization of each variable. Then, zooming out, I examine the operation of variables across cases.

An additional concern that may exist is with regard to negative degrees of freedom. Degrees of freedom represent the number of independent ways in which a final calculation is free to vary. This becomes a problem in political science when the number of explanatory variables exceed the number of cases. While this is not typically a problem with large-N

quantitative studies, it is somewhat of a problem for this project. Legitimate causal relationships cannot be made on the basis of negative degrees of freedom (Fearon, 1991). Concerns over negative degrees of freedom are addressed in a couple ways. First, for both revisionist states, I analyze multiple campaigns. Each of these campaigns is relatively distinct. Within most campaigns, there are typically multiple observations of intermediary employment. In the end, I find 52 total observations across the 12 campaigns. Taken collectively, degrees of freedom may still represent a concern, but the risk is mitigated in large part.

Due to the relatively contemporary nature of available data in gray zone competition, the development of strong causal inferences is considerably challenging. Therefore, it is the objective of this project is to enhance descriptive inferences as they relate to the employment of intermediary actors under gray zone conditions. This research does not pretend to provide substantial predictive ability, rather it seeks to provide descriptive power that may lead to general inferences and potential for further research.

Structure of the Cases

The following two chapters are case studies on Iran and Russia respectively. For each of the case studies, the structure for analysis is as follows. First, I open with an overview of the chapter, the utility and justification for each sub-case of intermediary employment, and an overview of findings. Next I provide a brief overview of each revisionist state's history of intermediary employment and other relevant contextual factors framing RSA intermediary employment. Finally, I interrogate each of the 12 cases according to the structure outlined in the following paragraph.

For each of the 12 cases in this project, I first provide a narrative summary of key contextual events and actors that shape intermediary employment. The next section consists of the analysis of the two dimensions of the dependent variable and concludes with a summary table of findings. Analysis of the DV is followed by detailed interrogation of indicators for the three independent variables (antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access). Assessed values of indicators for each variable are noted along the way and summarized in a comprehensive table at the end of each case under the heading

"Target Summary." Finally, at the end of each case I evaluate the utility of the theory in describing the observed outcome.

At the end of each case study chapter, I draw comparisons of the sub-cases and compare results to reveal overall trends or conditions under which the theory did or did not operate as expected. Finally, I summarize observed and expected outcomes to reveal whether hypotheses were supported. The following chapter begins this analysis with the interrogation of Iran's employment of intermediary actors from 1982-2019.

4   Iran

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I developed a theory of intermediary actor employment based on the interaction of antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access as a revisionist actor – target state – time period triad. This chapter provides a detailed empirical analysis of several Iranian instances of intermediary employment. Iran's use of intermediaries as a means to achieve foreign policy objectives began in 1982 with Hezbollah and remains a critical aspect of their foreign policy arsenal.

Over the course of this chapter, I seek to establish a baseline for the conditions under which intermediaries are employed Iran and how variation in the variables of antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access influence the outcome of how intermediaries are employed. In a fashion similar to Russian intermediaries covered later in Chapter 5, the strategy for Iranian intermediary employment matured considerably in the period since the initial cultivation of Hezbollah in 1982. Over time, Iran developed an approach to diversify the intermediaries, providing more options for employment. Around the end of initial U.S. occupation in Iraq (2011) and more earnestly in Syria and post-ISIS Iraq, Iran employed both political and military intermediaries with a diverse array of attribution and state control. As operations at the target locations progressed, Iran was able to strategically toggle intermediary behavior to suit strategic objectives. This empirical observation is indicative of a deliberate strategy by Iran to maximize gains through intermediary employment. In other words, Iran's employment of intermediaries is not opportunistic, rather it is strategic.

As outlined in the preceding chapter, this project argues the variables of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests are critical to determine *if* intermediary actors are employed by a revisionist state. I further argue the variables of symmetry of interests and informal access determine *how* intermediaries are employed. The empirical evidence of Iranian intermediary employment supports these predictions. All cases of Iranian employment contain permissive antecedent conditions. In 13 of 25 observations where intermediaries were employed, the theory correctly predicted *how* the intermediaries were

employed. Understanding not just whether or not a revisionist state employs intermediaries, but the nature of their deployment (i.e. centralized/overt; decentralized/covert; centralized/covert; or decentralized/overt) is critical for implications on how such behavior might be deterred under gray zone conditions.

This chapter analyzes Iran's employment of intermediaries across 29 observations in seven cases: Lebanon (1982 and 2006); Hazarajat, Afghanistan (1979-1989); Afghanistan (2007-2018); Iraq (2003-2011); Syria (2011-2018); Iraq (2014-2019) and Yemen (2014-2018). These cases are not the only instances of Iran's employment of intermediaries. However, they are useful in the analysis of how variation in antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access operate with regard to attribution and the level of state control (DVs). The selected cases also represent a mix of targets that demonstrate variation in geographic and cultural proximity to test the explanatory power of the theory with targets that are geographically and culturally dissimilar to Iran.

Unique to this chapter are observations of non-employment (Hazarajat, Afghanistan and Yemen). In these cases, I find the variables of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests were strong factors in the reluctance of the revisionist state to employ intermediaries. With Hazarajat, antecedent conditions were resistant and interests in comparison to the Soviet Union were symmetric. With Yemen, antecedent conditions were semi-permissive, but the relative interests with Saudi Arabia were asymmetric against Iran. These findings support the importance of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests as key factors in the decision-making process of revisionist states on whether to utilize intermediaries in the pursuit of zero-sum gains against the status quo.

Finally, with regard to informal access (IV3), I find the element of ideological convergence is important, however perhaps not as significant as one would expect with an ideologically driven Islamic state. In fact, of those targets where intermediaries were employed, ideological convergence was a factor in only 60-percent of observations. However, strategic convergence was present in the remaining 40-percent of cases. This finding is important, as it indicates a willingness of Iran to partner with intermediaries that are not ideological aligned with the Grand Ayatollah and concept of Velayat-e Faqih. Such a concept reveals a potential expansion of Iran's area of influence.

Case Selection

The first case in this chapter evaluates Iran's seminal intermediary – Hezbollah. The two time periods bookend the use of Hezbollah in Lebanon, while later deployments are covered in the Syria and Iraq cases. This case is used to analyze how Hezbollah matured over time as an intermediary of Iran. With this case, measurement of all explanatory variables remains constant across time periods, however variation of the DV is observed regarding attribution during the second period. Although the theory does not describe this variation, it reveals explanatory power in understanding why the variation occurred – which was the political participation of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The second case covers the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan. Iranian interest in Hazarajat occurred simultaneously to the cultivation of Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, despite many of the same characteristics, intermediary employment did not occur in Hazarajat. The theory identifies major differences in antecedent conditions and informal access that prohibited employment in this case.

Twenty years later, Iran returned to the idea of intermediary employment in Afghanistan through the Mashhad Taliban. In contrast to the Hazarajat case, the resistance strength component of antecedent conditions and informal access measures were much higher during the 2007-2018 period. Variation in antecedent conditions between the two time periods in this case helps explain variation in the level of state control. Finally, strategic convergence omits the relevance of ideological convergence required for informal access.

The fourth case is on post-Saddam Iraq, 2003-2011. With this case, antecedent conditions (IV1) and informal access (IV3) remain constant while variation in interests (IV2) is observed. I use this case to analyze whether variation in interests results in variation of the outcomes. Here variation in the outcome was not significant, but the theory does help explain the conditions under which symmetry of interests (IV2) may not operate as expected.

With the Syria case from 2011-2018, values of the explanatory variables remain constant while variation is observed with the outcome. This case helps the reader begin to understand how intermediaries may be employed strategically to execute different tasks or

requirements, requiring a range of options from the revisionist state. This case is also useful for the comparative analysis between Iran and Russian employment of intermediaries during the same time period in the same target state.

The next case evaluates Iran's employment of intermediaries in Iraq in the era of ISIS, 2014-2019. In this case the explanatory variables once again remain constant. I use this case in comparison to the previous case on Syria to determine if similar explanatory variables result in a similar mix of outcomes – which they do. Together, these two cases are useful in supporting the contention that Iranian strategy for intermediary employment evolved to provide them with a variety of options for employment to achieve specific objectives.

Finally, the last case on Yemen represents the only case of this project where interests are stacked asymmetrically against the revisionist state. I use this case to evaluate how the asymmetry of interests prohibits intermediary employment. I find when interests are asymmetric against the revisionist state, the variable operates in the same manner as if interests were symmetric. This finding, in conjunction with low informal access result in the non-employment of intermediaries in Yemen.

The findings of this chapter reveal that Iran's employment of intermediary actors occurs in a manner predicted by the theory at some point in each of the seven cases, and with 17 out of 29 total observations. I find support for hypotheses 1 (no employment), 2 (centralized/overt employment), 3 (decentralized/covert employment), 4 (centralized/covert employment), and 6 (no employment). I also discover acknowledgement by Iran of the strategic utility of different intermediaries and attempts to diversify efforts to achieve strategic gains. Intermediaries under Iran have a maturation component and we can observe a point with some intermediaries, such as Hezbollah, where Iran essentially considers them an extension of their own domestic forces. A primary theme throughout this chapter is Iran's desire to cultivate intermediaries through factionalization. Iran created cleavages where they did not exist and exploited existing cleavages to establish or coopt intermediaries for strategic utility. Finally, through this case, we observe a clear link between military and political intermediary efforts. The most successful intermediary

employments include an element of political integration. Iran learned of this utility over time and it is especially evident in the Lebanon, Iraq and Syria cases.

The roadmap for the remainder of this chapter is as follows. First, I briefly introduce Iran's history of intermediary employment and then summarize intricacies of Shia Islam and Velayat-e Faqih as they relate to intermediary employment. The introduction of these contextual elements frames understanding of how contemporary Iranian intermediaries are employed. Next, I interrogate the seven cases of intermediary employment by Iran used for this project, including two cases where Iran decided against intermediary employment. The theory is applied to each campaign, or target location, to identify measures for each variable and understand the empirical conditions under which the theory operates as hypothesized. Finally, a case summary and conclusion draw out the findings, evaluate the explanatory power of the theory and tie together important themes of Iranian intermediary employment.

Contextual Factors Shaping Iranian Intermediary Employment

History

Iran's history of intermediary employment is relatively short. The first instance of successful employment was in 1982 with Hezbollah. The findings of this project reveal that Iran's intermediary utility centers around a desire to intervene on behalf of oppressed Muslims. This motivational factor did not come easily for Iran's leaders and only matured as a tool of contemporary Iranian foreign policy due to the catalysts of the Iraq War, death of Ayatollah Khomeini and post-war reconstruction. The following section briefly outlines the development and evolution of the organization designed to employ intermediaries abroad on behalf of Iran – the IRGC Quds force.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on April 22, 1979 in the face of the conventional Iranian military, Artesh, following the Iranian Revolution (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Khomeini was deeply suspicious of the Artesh after the revolution due to the persistent threat of a coup and he eventually purged the organization, decimating its officer ranks and overall morale (Ostovar, 2016; Uskowi, 2019). IRGC prominence grew quickly through both experience and Iranian law. The invasion of Iran by Iraq on September 22, 1980 transformed the IRGC

from an urban conglomeration of four militias into a formidable military force (Ostovar, 2016, p. 63). In 1982 the IRGC emerged as the official transnational protectors of Iran and the Shia faith upon the establishment of the independent ministry of the Pasdaran (IRGC). The Iranian constitution codified the role of the IRGC in protecting the revolution and interests of Shia Muslims abroad. The mandate for an extraterritorial component eventually became the driving force for the establishment of the Office of Liberation Movements (*Daftar-e Nehzatha-ye Rahaei-Bakhsh*), the predecessor to Quds (Alfoneh, 2018b; Ostovar, 2016). The responsibility of the IRGC to conduct extraterritorial operations, or to "…export the revolution," provided ideological and moral justification for Iran to intervene in foreign countries (Ostovar, 2016, p. 104). When Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982, Iran began to frame the Iraq war as part of their greater struggle against imperialist influence in an effort to unify efforts under a common cause. Amidst the growing power of the IRGC, due to their tactical successes against Iraq, they began to call for the establishment of a "Jerusalem (*Quds) Army*," to achieve the "greater victor" over Israel as the invasion in Lebanon unfolded (Ostovar, 2016, p. 109). The "lesser victory" in the debate for priorities was victory in the war against Iraq. The decision was made to support the Shia resistance in Lebanon, albeit as a secondary effort with limited resources. The constraint on IRGC resources, due to the Iraq war, forced the IRGC to invest in Lebanon in an unconventional manner, leading to the eventual establishment of Hezbollah.

The IRGC evolved into a multifaceted organization in the period since the Iran-Iraq War, with eleven subordinate institutions. It is a military organization (covert and overt), an intelligence organization, a socio-cultural organization, an educational institution and a business conglomerate. Quds is the element of the IRGC that operates as the "employer" of intermediary forces abroad, supported by the other IRGC institutions, and the focus of the remainder of this chapter as the primary broker of intermediary forces (Wege, 2013).

In 1990, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei directed the Quds to establish "Hezbollah cells" all over the world (Bajoughli, 2019; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019; Uskowi, 2019).[7] With this mandate, Quds assumed a more direct role in developing

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[7] For more on the evolution of the IRGC, Quds and the Basij, see: Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nader Uskowi, *Temperature Rising* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); and Narges Bajoughli, *Iran Reframed* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019).

their networks abroad with funding through their burgeoning business empire. The motivational factors and primary components of Iranian employment of intermediary actors in the contemporary era are best identified through the detailed analysis of Tehran's role in the growth and use of Lebanese Hezbollah and involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The remainder of this chapter will examine these campaigns in detail. The following section briefly describes the ideological components of Shia Islam and Velayat e-Faqih as they relate to intermediary employment.

Shia Islam and Velayat-e Faqih

Shia religious politics in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon are all intimately connected due to religious centers in each of the countries and legacies of leadership within high ranking Shia families who trace their descent from the Prophet Mohammad. The two preeminent Shia religious centers are in Najaf, Iraq and Qom, Iran (Mousavi & ShahidSaless, 2015). Smaller centers are located in Karbala, Iraq, Isfahan, Iran and Mashhad, Iran. Shia religious seminaries, or *Hawzas* are the center of religious education. Once a religious figure becomes a leader to students of the hawza and is entrusted to publish a juristic book known as *risalah amaliyah*, he is given the title of ayatollah (Djavadi, 2010). The risalah is a manual, similar to a series of position papers, from the ayatollah that provides guidance to questions about Islamic law and procedures for common life. Individuals who attain the title of Grand Ayatollah, and given authority to make legal decisions within Islamic law for followers, are given the title of *Marja-e Taqlid* or "source of emulation" within the Shia community. There are marja at each of the main religious centers (i.e. Najaf, Qom, etc.) and on occasion, the distinction of Grand Marja is given to a religious figure who is recognized over several regional or worldwide hawzas. This structure is complex and unique to Shiite Islam, but important for understanding the network dynamics and connections among intermediary actors that persist throughout the region today. Most of the leaders in Iranian intermediary organizations are networked through connections of hawzas.

Velayat-e Faqih, (also Wali al-Faqih or Velayat e-Faqih) is referenced consistently throughout this chapter as part of an ideological vision that serves as a unifying factor and is especially evident in the explanatory variable of informal access. Velayat-e Faqih is also

unique to Shiite Islam and refers to the "guardianship of the jurisprudence," where Islam provides the Islamic jurist (Faqih) authority over people. Grand Ayatollah Khomeini advanced this vision of an Islamic state led by senior members of the Shia clerical establishment and Supreme Leader of the Iranian government (Blanford, 2011; Qassem, 2010, p. 67; Uskowi, 2019, p. 33). Velayat-e Faqih forms a foundation of the Iranian constitution and somewhat disputed among followers of Shia faith. Not all Shia subscribe to this vision of religious authority, but we will observe cases in this project where Velayat-e Faqih influences intermediary employment. Velayat-e Faqih is an important aspect to most of the cases in this chapter.

The contextual factors outlined above help inform the manner in which Iran employed intermediaries in the cases that follow. The evolution of Quds as intermediary broker for Iran, the role of Shia Islam and the concept of Velayat-e Faqih are important concepts for each of these cases. The following section moves to the interrogation of the seven Iranian cases of intermediary employment discussed in this project.

Detailed Summary of Campaigns (Targets)

For the analysis of each target location of intermediary employment in this chapter and the next chapter on Russian employment, I use the method outlined here. First, I summarize what occurs in the case and my findings. Next, I briefly contextualize the key events and actors that shape the conditions for intermediary employment at each target. I then evaluate measures for the level of attribution and level of state control (DVs) based on the theory as described in Chapter 3 and indicators outlined in Appendix B. Subsequently, I assess the measures of antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests, and informal access (IV's), again using the criteria provided in the theory chapter and measurements indicated in Appendix B. Finally, I summarize findings and note peculiarities for each campaign before proceeding to the next case. The first case below is on Lebanon.

Lebanon

Eight Iranian Revolutionary Guards are buried in the martyrs' cemetery in the village of Brital on the eastern side of the Beqaa Valley (Blanford, 2011). It was in and around this village in 1982 that the Iranian IRGC began the process of recruiting and training Shia radical Islamists for what eventually became Hezbollah. On November 12, 1982, Israeli jets bombed the IRGC training camp after the attack on the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, and a car bomb attack on an Israeli Defense Force headquarters in Tyre, Lebanon. Of the numerous intermediaries employed by Iran, none have achieved the allegiance and solidarity with the vision of Ayatollah Khomeini as Hezbollah. The IRGC's cultivation of Lebanese Hezbollah was intimate, long and meticulous. The use of Hezbollah by Iran as a surrogate to extend Iranian dominance and security in the region is often referenced as THE model for proxy warfare. Through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran created an intermediary actor with proximity to the "greater victory," which was that over Israel. The nature of current and future employment of Hezbollah as an intermediary by Iran is shaped by how Iran initially cultivated this organization.

Through the detailed analysis of Iran's cultivation of Hezbollah in Lebanon, I examine the plausibility of the theoretical mechanisms to influence variation in the levels of attribution and state control (DV). The first time period for this case is 1982 when

Hezbollah was created and they conducted their initial operations in Lebanon. The second time period is 2006 when Hezbollah was last employed domestically in Lebanon during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict. The theory operates as expected during the first time period: permissive antecedent conditions, symmetric interests and high informal access resulted in covert, decentralized intermediary employment, supporting hypothesis 3. However, similar conditions during the second time period resulted in a different outcome (overt, decentralized). Although the theory does not predict the outcome, it helps with understanding of what contributed to the outcome – most significantly their contemporary posture as a de facto extension of the IRGC and their integration into the Lebanese political system. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that framed Iran's employment of intermediaries in Lebanon across both time periods.

Cultivation and Evolution of Hezbollah as an Intermediary of Iran

This section briefly outlines Hezbollah's cultivation, evolution and utility as an intermediary for Iran with a focus on the two time periods used for this analysis (1982 and 2006).[8] In 1975, a Lebanese militant arm of the Movement of the Disinherited organization was recruited by Shia Imam Musa al-Sadr under the acronym, Amal (*Afwaj Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*) (Blanford, 2011). After al-Sadr's disappearance in Libya in 1978, Nabih Berri assumed leadership of Amal and steered the organization in a secular direction. Shia religious leaders were dismayed with new direction and several Dawa party affiliated activists joined Amal in a covert attempt to subtly redirect the group toward a more radical Islamic vision.[9] The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 incentivized a secession within the organization and the development of "Islamic Amal" from the ranks of Amal. Amal pursued change through political means, while Islamic Amal viewed the political system as inherently corrupt and oppressive and sought change through militant means (Saade, 2016, p. 98). These events shaped the foundation for the creation of Hezbollah.

Iran took note of the Shia struggle, but largely ignored Amal and their plight in Lebanon for the first few years of Khomeini's reign. Priorities were initially on the Iran-

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[8] This is not an exhaustive summary of the history of Hezbollah, rather this narrative isolates key elements of cultivation, evolution and relations with Iran that have potential to influence utility.

[9] Future Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was among those who infiltrated Amal.

Iraq War, but slowly Khomeini was motivated by the "greater victory" with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini brokered a deal with Hafez al-Assad to forward position 5,000 *Pasdaran* (IRGC) forces in Syria for anticipated deployment in Lebanon to confront Israeli forces.[10] However, by the time the IRGC arrived in Syria, the main fighting between Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Syrian forces, who entered Lebanon as IDF opposition, was over. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad had no desire for the robust IRGC force to move into Lebanon and risk reigniting a war which would undoubtedly further involve Syria (Blanford, 2011). However, Assad did agree to a military accord with Iran for the IRGC to help build a Lebanese resistance force. As a sign of how motivated Iran was to gain a foothold in Lebanon, they agreed to provide Syria with nine million tons of free oil per year in exchange for deploying the IRGC (Blanford, 2011; Tompkins Jr. et al., 2017). It is unclear whether the original intent of the resistance force was to enable Lebanese Shia to defend themselves or to extend the arm of Iran to the border of Israel. However, Iranian incentives provided to Syria and the outcome indicate the latter.

Of the initial 5000 IRGC personnel sent to Syria, about 1500 remained to construct a base on the Lebanese border in the town of Zabadani (Blanford, 2011; Hokayem, 2010). It was here that an old smuggler trail linked Syria to the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon (Blanford, 2011). The initial IRGC personnel used the smuggling trail to slowly move into the Bekaa Valley, renting houses in Baalbek and visiting surrounding villages. The Revolutionary Guards were unarmed and dressed in khaki uniforms as they initially sought to spread the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini and enhance the religious awareness of the oppressed Shia population. Patiently, over a few years, the IRGC transformed the Bekaa Valley into "mini-Iran," (Blanford, 2011). Portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini, religious symbols and anti-Western propaganda came to dominate the area. Religious fervor seemed to increase as women began to don the full-length black chador and IRGC clerics provided lectures on the Quran and Khomeini's vision for the future of the Islamic Republic (Blanford, 2011).

The consolidation of relatively disparate factions of Shia activists and militants was a critical step for the IRGC to generate utility with an intermediary. The IRGC created a

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[10] The relationship between Syria and Iran is an important component to Iran's intermediary success.

coalition of numerous Shia factions, including al-Musawi's Islamic Amal movement and adherents to the Lebanese Party of the Islamic Call (*Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamiyya*), or Dawa Party. Additionally, student groups such as the Lebanese Union of Muslim Students, small Shia institutes and organizational subsidiaries, such as Dawa's network of secret armed cells, called Qassam, augmented the coalition (Blanford, 2011). They were motivated by a combination of Israeli occupation, Ayatollah Khomeini's success in the Iranian revolution and lack of Lebanese political progress in furthering the needs of the Lebanese Shia. The radical coalition was led by Lebanese clerics, most of whom studied in Najaf under Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir as-Sadr (Blanford, 2011). The movement leaders met in late 1982 to establish a constituent body that later became the nucleus of Hezbollah (Harfoush, 2013; Library of Congress, 1989).[11] Of the nine delegates selected to the lead the movement, three were from the Beqaa Valley, three from Islamic Amal and three were from the other various factions (Blanford, 2011). The organizational leaders constituted a vision that was pan-Islamic and focused broadly on Islamic law, resulting in the "Manifesto of the Nine," (Qassem, 2010). The three primary agreements were recognition of the role of Islam as foundation for the new organization; recognition of Israel as the ultimate confrontational priority requiring a jihad solution; and recognition of the Velayat-e Faqih, where the Shia clerical establishment (residing in Iran) held authority over the faith (Blanford, 2011; Qassem, 2010, p. 67; Uskowi, 2019, p. 33). Hezbollah was the first non-Iranian entity to adopt Velayat-e Faqih, which cemented the organization's ideological alignment with Iran.

Hezbollah grew quickly. The distribution of revolutionary literature and propaganda supported recruitment and the incorporation of religious scholars from Iran in the teachings of Lebanese citizens and recruits brought legitimacy to the IRGC efforts. The recruitment process was meticulous. Volunteers were required to submit an application with endorsement by two Shia clerics (Blanford, 2011). Once accepted, the recruit was blindfolded and transported to the IRGC training camp in the Bekaa Valley near the village of Janta. The IRGC ran the first two iterations of courses to train new recruits and then

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[11] Leaders included Sheikh Sobhi Toufaily (first Hezbollah secretary general), Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (current secretary general), Sheikh Mohammed Yazbek (current member of the party's Shura Council), and Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed (head of Hezbollah political council) (Harfoush, 2013).

handed over all but the more advanced training to Lebanese trainers (Blanford, 2011). The most promising recruits were sent to Iran for three-months of advanced courses.

Hezbollah executed their first operation as an intermediary of Iran on November 21, 1982, by seizing local government offices and the army barracks in Baalbek (Blanford, 2011; Tompkins Jr. et al., 2017). The army barracks became the new headquarters in Lebanon for the IRGC and the mobilization of Shia dissidents in Lebanon by the IRGC gained traction as an Islamic resistance movement. Over the next few years, Hezbollah absorbed the majority of Shia factions in Lebanon and guided them toward unified collective action. The injection of Pasdaran by Iran was strategic and well timed to exploit the relevant factors to Iranian advantage (Saade, 2016, p. 145). The IRGC not only supplied personnel, money and supplies, they also began recruitment and religious education. They were able to take advantage of existing organizational structures of Amal, inject military and religious training, and form the foundation of Hezbollah (Blanford, 2011). By the end of 1982, Iran was able to consolidate disparate factions into an organized entity capable and motivated to conduct operations against a common Israeli enemy.

Ten years later, Hezbollah entrenched their stance through political participation. Grand Ayatollah Khamenei felt Hezbollah could gain influence over the strategic direction of Lebanon through political office. The decision to participate in the 1992 election, which was the first election since 1972, was contentious within the Shura Council and the Grand Ayatollah in Iran was called upon to make the final decision. In 1992, Hezbollah won twelve seats and consistently held about ten-percent of total seats in each election since (Tompkins Jr. et al., 2017). With the exception of the June 2005 election, the power balance in each Lebanese government was either neutral, or in Hezbollah's favor (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Internationally, Hezbollah was hesitant to gain control of governing institutions because it would further expose the organization to external dangers, such as international sanctions (Hokayem, 2020). Nonetheless, political participation provided Hezbollah (and Iran) with additional means to legitimize their efforts and influence outcomes in Lebanon. Hezbollah political participation also represented a way for Iran to politically influence or redirect national efforts in ways favorable to the Ayatollah. Hezbollah participation in Lebanese politics was another critical step in the Iranian plan to maximize influence.

The Long Arm of Iran and Maturation of Hezbollah

> A preeminent requirement for any rational Hezbollah strategist would thus have been to design a means of deterring Israel from such a reoccupation, or coercing it into halting one should deterrence fail (Biddle & Friedman, 2008, p. 49).

The quote above is a hypothetical reference to a 2006 Hezbollah strategist, but is actually more reflective of Iranian objectives regarding the utility of Hezbollah as an intermediary. With the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, Hezbollah demonstrated their ability to deter Israeli aggression, and when deterrence failed, they demonstrated their ability to coerce Israeli behavior. This outcome represented one of the primary Iranian objectives of Hezbollah utility.[12]

After Israel withdrew from South Lebanon in 2000, frequent border violations and heightened tensions remained on both sides. Kidnappings, assassinations and car bombings were the most common occurrences. Several factors contributed to the initiation of the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. However, it was the kidnapping of two Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers and the deaths of eight others on July 12, 2006 that ignited Israeli intervention. Hezbollah was in the midst of conducting typical low-level harassment attacks as a part of Operation True Promise, where Hassan Nasrallah vowed Hezbollah would not rest until Israel released Lebanese Druze Christian prisoner Samir Quntar and three others (Hirst, 2010). Nasrallah never imagined the Israelis would respond with such force (Biddle & Friedman, 2008; Wilkins, 2013). In less than 24-hours, Israel initiated a massive pre-planned strike that targeted Hezbollah rockets and observation posts (Biddle & Friedman, 2008). Israel sought U.S. support for a war in Lebanon for some time and the July 12th provocation served as the trigger for such action. Along with the execution of military targets, many Israeli attacks destroyed civilian targets, which emboldened Lebanese resistance strength and support for Hezbollah. Further, the existence of a common enemy presented opportunity for an alliance between the Sunni Palestinians and Lebanese Shia. Through this conflict, Iran recognized the Arab struggle in Israel and strategic convergence between the Palestinians and Hezbollah emerged. The populations of Sunni nations across the Middle East and Africa supported the Lebanese. The Egyptian

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[12] An additional objective of transnational utility will be discussed in the Syria and Iraq cases.

Muslim Brotherhood even requested 10,000 mujahideen join their Shia brethren in Lebanon (Hirst, 2010). Strategic convergence and Lebanese domestic resistance grew as a result of the Israeli invasion. Before the conflict, 58-percent of Lebanese supported Hezbollah's right to retain weapons. After the conflict, 87-percent of Lebanese supported Hezbollah (Hirst, 2010, p. 357).

The 2006 Hezbollah–Israel conflict is often referred to as a proxy war between Iran and the U.S., where Israel acted on behalf of the U.S. and Hezbollah operated on behalf of Iran (Wilkins, 2013). There were clear regional divisions that framed the conflict. Iran and Syria were aligned in pursuit of regional domination and opposition of Western influence. The U.S., Israel and more moderate Arab state leaders (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan) were aligned most significantly in the prevention of Iran from becoming a nuclear power (Wilkins, 2013). However, rather than a proxy war, the 2006 conflict is more appropriately viewed as the employment of an Iranian intermediary in the face of Israeli intervention.

The outcome of the 2006 conflict demonstrated that Hezbollah matured fully as an intermediary for Iran. Hezbollah provided Iran with proximate presence and the ability to deter Israeli incursion. This conflict represented manifestation of decades of Iranian efforts in Lebanon. The U.S. provided ample room for the Israelis to achieve their objectives (rescue captured soldiers and disarm Hezbollah) by delaying calls for a cease fire. However, after 34-days of fighting, it was fairly clear that Iran could use Hezbollah to both deter and coerce Israel.

Finally, it is worth noting here that Hezbollah operations in 2006 were the last to date of domestic employment. Subsequent Hezbollah operations occurred transnationally in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kuwait, Cyprus, Thailand and Turkey. Later, in 2012 and 2014, Hezbollah deployed on Iran's behalf to Syria and Iraq. By this time, in many ways Hezbollah was indistinguishable from the IRGC itself. These deployments are covered later in the Syria and Iraq cases.

In summary, Hezbollah transformed from an organization that was entirely dependent upon resources and training from Iran to one that was almost indistinguishable from the IRGC over the course of 25-years. This maturation is why Uskowi (2019) refers to Iran's intermediaries as "Shia Liberation Armies." The initial development of Hezbollah

by the IRGC was meticulous. However, through careful cultivation, Iran integrated several ideological and structural control mechanisms to influence Hezbollah's behavior. By 2006, Hezbollah's dependency on Iran decreased substantially, while their influence over the Lebanese government increased. Through Hezbollah, Iran created standoff to deter Israeli aggression and coerce behavioral change when necessary. Additionally, the organization's tactics evolved from the use of terrorism to domestic guerilla warfare, and later to expeditionary warfare. Hezbollah matured from supporting anti-government positions to participating in government with considerable influence. The following section will evaluate the explanatory power of the theory for this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The time periods for the analysis of Iran's employment of Hezbollah as an intermediary are 1982 when Hezbollah was formed and 2006, when the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict occurred and Hezbollah was last employed domestically within Lebanon.

Attribution

Iran began their cultivation of Hezbollah in 1982 in a covert fashion. They infiltrated into the Beqaa Valley through a historical smuggling route and although they wore tan matching uniforms, the uniforms contained no insignia. The distribution of resources was managed by IRGC personnel in Syria – with Syria as a known confidant. The development of Hezbollah within Lebanon was fashioned to appear as a movement or revolution within the Shia community and the role played by Iran was purposefully minimized. The IRGC designed the cultivation of Hezbollah in such a way that the local power brokers would take over the lessons of the IRGC and the organization would develop its own, domestic inertia. This was indicated through the gradual transition of military and religious instruction in Hezbollah training camps between 1982-1985 to Lebanese Shia. With the publication of the "open letter" in 1985, it became clear that Hezbollah was ideologically aligned with the role of Ayatollah Khomeini in Velayat-e Faqih and attempts to unify the plight of the "downtrodden" across the Muslim world due predominately to Western imperialism, but there remained no formal acknowledgement of Hezbollah as an agent of the Iranian state. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, intelligence reports

and the media made it clear that Iran was supporting Hezbollah, but the extent or type of support was unclear. Attribution during the first time period can be rated as covert.

By the second time period, attribution between Iranian and Hezbollah became overt. Iranian support for Hezbollah was visible. The Iranian Foreign Minister and UNSC representative both supported Hezbollah's efforts publicly in July 2006 (as did the Syrian foreign minister) (Wilkins, 2013, p. 180). Hezbollah was the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars per year, thousands of rockets, missiles and munitions, and advanced communications equipment from Iran (Biddle & Friedman, 2008). In one case, the U.S. was able to convince Iraq and Turkey to deny Iran access to airspace to prevent a shipment of weapons from reaching Hezbollah. Iran also found it easier to support Hezbollah with the perception of legitimate intent after 1992 as they became a formal part of the Lebanese government. Hezbollah also built legitimacy among non-Shia within Lebanon through humanitarian and reconstruction programs, such as those of Jihad al-Binaa. Iranian support of a Hezbollah with rising popularity was positive for Iran. The perception of support for Hezbollah amidst Israeli aggression was favorable for Iran and the strategic convergence among Shia and Sunni populations across the Middle East and North Africa was unfavorable for the U.S.

Of note, in the period since 2006, two specific events made the attribution between Hezbollah and Iran even more overt: the executions of Mughniyeh in 2008 and Qasem Soleimani in 2020. Following the execution of Mughniyeh, Hezbollah developed a more offensive approach to their operations that required integration with the IRGC. Later, in 2012 and 2014, the deployments of Hezbollah by the IRGC revealed more details of the relationship. Finally, with the execution of Qasem Soleimani in January, 2020, the IRGC overtly attributed their relationship with Hezbollah, and other intermediary actors. The commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force, General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, gave a press conference immediately following Soleimani's death with the flags of all of Iran's intermediary actors in the background. The image below is from the press conference with flags from left to right: Iran, IRGC, IRGC Aerospace Force, Hezbollah (Lebanon), Ansar Allah (Yemen), Popular Mobilization Unit (Iraq), Hamas (Palestine), Fatemiyoun (Afghan), and Zainabiyoun (Pakistani).

Figure 4.1.   Jan 9, 2020 Press Conference by IRGC in front of Iranian intermediary flags

With the exception of Hamas, together these flags represent the Shia Liberation Armies (SLA) described by Uskowi (2019). Attribution moved from covert to overt between the two time periods.

Level of State Control

The level of state control over Hezbollah by Iran can be rated as decentralized for both time periods. Hezbollah was cultivated by the IRGC from inception. As a result, mechanisms of state control were built into the relationship. The first mechanism was the allegiance of Hezbollah to the idea of Velayat-e Faqih in the 1982 agreement of the "Manifesto of nine." In this agreement, Hezbollah acknowledged the role of Ayatollah Khomeini as both a religious arbiter and as the leader, who "…defines the general politics of a nation's life," (Qassem, 2010, p. 114). This mechanism was ideological.

Another mechanism of state control was revealed in the Shura Council. Hezbollah is managed by a central nine-member Shura Council. One member of the Shura Council is elected the Secretary General. Seven members of the Council are Lebanese and two members are Iranians – one from the Iranian embassy in Beirut and one from the embassy in Damascus (Tompkins Jr. et al., 2017). In the event of a disagreement, the Grand

Ayatollah was called on to adjudicate – as he did on the occasion of Hezbollah's decision to run for political office and in their deployment to Syria. By cultivating Hezbollah from the ground up, the IRGC was able to emplace control mechanisms to not only appeal to the Shia population of Lebanon through faith and dependency manipulation, but also to maintain a decisive stake in the strategic direction of Hezbollah.

Despite the control mechanisms emplaced by Iran in the structural makeup of Hezbollah during the first time period, the mechanisms for control were rarely utilized. There were a few indicators of potential for centralized control during the second period, but they were not substantial. During the conflict, there were reports that Iranians fought alongside Hezbollah. Some Quds documents were captured during the conflict in Lebanon, indicating Iranian personnel were on the ground (Cordesman et al., 2007). However, Wilkins (2013) found that Iran did not directly control Hezbollah's operations, rather Hezbollah made decisions that reflected their own needs and those of their constituents (Wilkins, 2013). Similarly, Cordesman (2006) found that none of the Israeli officials from intelligence and military organizations who briefed during the war mentioned Hezbollah acted with direction or command from Iran or Syria (Cordesman et al., 2007). Empirical evidence indicates control was decentralized prior to the conflict as well. Based on timing, it is quite clear Iran did not direct Hezbollah to initiate the 2006 conflict with Israel. In fact, Iran likely would discourage Hezbollah from provoking an Israeli reaction until absolutely necessary. The lack of ideal timing of the 2006 conflict for Iran is indicative of decentralized control.[13] By the second time period, Hezbollah was relatively free to conduct operations as they saw fit inside Lebanon. They were trusted to conduct operations independently and with little oversight. Iran assumed more of a supporting role than that which was observed in 1982 when Iranian advisers were integrated in Hezbollah ranks.

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[13] Of note, the U.S. and Israel thought the timing was fortuitous and an attempt to distract attention away from a pending G8 summit in Russia where Iranian nuclear aspirations were to be a topic of discussion. However, the lack of proportionality in the Israeli attack and history of kidnappings do not support this contention. Finally, Israel long sought a green light from the U.S. For more, see (Wilkins, 2013, p. 174).

DV Summary

The employment of Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982 can be rated covert with decentralized state control. For the second time period of analysis, the utility of Hezbollah can be rated as leaning overt with decentralized state control. The Hezbollah of the 1980s grew more formalized and attribution became less covert as organizational systems and procedures became more diversified and institutionalized.

The nature of state control Iran held over Hezbollah at onset was decentralized. Iran harnessed collective action within Iran and cultivated Hezbollah with mechanisms in place to nudge behavior as needed. Control was originally engineered with Hezbollah through the maintenance of two seats on the Shura Council, funding and resource support, and ideological motivation. While Iranian control over Hezbollah operations was also institutionalized to a degree, the evolution of the organization to one that was relatively self-funded and self-governed decreased dependency on Iran. The original intent for internal employment of Hezbollah against the Israelis manifested again by the second time period. The Hezbollah of 2006 demonstrated the ability to operate with little oversight or centralized Iranian control. However, it is unlikely Hezbollah would have been so successful absent Iranian funding and material support. The reliability of Hezbollah to operate in a decentralized fashion in the attainment of objectives beneficial to Iran was powerful and instrumental in the future utility of the intermediary. A summary of assessed dependent variable values is reflected in the table below. The next section covers the analysis and classification of independent variables for the Lebanon case.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Lebanon	1982	Iran US	Hezbollah	Covert	Lean Dec.
	2006	Iran US	Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Dec.

Table 4.1. DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Lebanon

IV Analysis and Classification

As a reminder from Chapter 3, the explanatory variables consist of antecedent conditions of the target state; symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and the status quo power with regard to the target state; and the level of informal access the revisionist state has within the target state. Evaluations of indicators for each of these variables are interrogated below. For more information on the variables and indicators, please see Appendix B.

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Indicators for antecedent conditions consist of domestic institutional strength and resistance strength. Institutional strength is evaluated based on World Governance Indicators, external dependency, and the licit economy. Resistance strength is evaluated based on the political, economic and social strength of the popular resistance.

The antecedent conditions in Lebanon during the first time period were permissive to intermediary employment, but only after they were catalyzed by the IRGC. Domestic institutions were weak and popular resistance was ripe for exploitation. By 2006, domestic institutions were much stronger, but economic instability remained and potential for the further weakening of domestic institutions was high. For the second time period, antecedent conditions are rated as permissive. Thorough evaluations of these factors are expanded below.

Domestic Institutions.

When Hezbollah was established in 1982, domestic institutions in Lebanon were incredibly weak. The World Bank governance indicators are not available prior to 1996, however we can estimate the strength using the same indicators. The U.S. has a history of involvement in Lebanon since at least 1958 when President Eisenhower deployed 15,000 U.S. Marines to Lebanon in the wake of a coup in Iraq and fear the Middle East would fall prey to Egyptian and the Soviet influence. During the intervention, the U.S. quietly ended the second term of the Lebanese President Chamoun, and arranged the election of Army General Fuad Shehab as the new leader (Kelly, 1996). Along with the U.S., Israel and Syria intervened periodically prior to the establishment of Hezbollah. In 1970, King Hussein of Jordan evicted Palestinian refugees from Jordan and up to 400,000 of them found refuge

in Lebanon (Kelly, 1996). The Syrian military made incursions to address fighting between Lebanese and Palestinian factions inside Lebanon and also deployed surface to air missiles inside Lebanon to guard against Israeli jets. In 1978, Israel launched a major incursion into southern Lebanon. Notably, the U.S. as the status quo power in Lebanon, together with the UN, condemned the Israeli incursion and established the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNFIL), which was 42 years old as of 2020. Later, President Carter sought to strengthen the government of Lebanese President Elias Sarkis in 1978 and publicly condemned Israeli actions. In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, driving all the way to Beirut. The U.S. subsequently led a multinational force deployment to facilitate a de-escalation. In August 1982, a new President, Bashir Gemayel, was elected and then assassinated less than a month later. After the subsequent massacre of Palestinian civilians in refugee camps, President Reagan made the decision to re-launch U.S. involvement in Lebanon to enable "…the Lebanese government to resume full sovereignty over its capital," (Reagan, 1982). This history of instability is indicative of weak governing institutions that were plagued during the first time period with episodes of war and unrest.

Economically, due to the Lebanese civil war, hundreds of thousands of skilled workers left the country between 1975-1989, to include teachers (Kubursi, 1999). Prior to the civil war, the economy was among the best in the Middle East. The war resulted in massive damage to infrastructure and the development of "enclave" economies, all while international investment ground to a halt. Collectively, inflation jumped, domestic production dropped along with employment, militias usurped the government in taxation of the populace and the government was forced to borrow heavily from the Central Bank (Kubursi, 1999). Massive debt ensued. Following the war, the Hariri government began reconstruction by borrowing internationally with strong optimism that the lull in violence would translate to prosperity. Unfortunately, the period following war resulted in billions of dollars in international debt.

During the first time period, domestic institutions within Lebanon were incredibly weak. The government was unstable, with several leaders over a short period of time, including one military president emplaced by a foreign power. Lebanon also did not have a monopoly on violence. They were dependent upon external governments for basic provisions. Israel and Syria were consistent in cross border

incursions. The civil war resulted in a massive talent loss, the accumulation of debt and subsequent reliance upon international lending.

Domestic institutions in 2006 were much stronger than when Hezbollah was founded, however there still remained considerable weakness. Most significantly, the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005 resulted in considerable government instability. Additionally, by the second time period, Hezbollah created a means through which to influence or manipulate the governing institutions in their favor through political participation within the Lebanese government. Political participation and representation can be a double-edged sword – as participation in government increases, Hezbollah assumes more responsibility of both government successes and failures. In the case of increasingly negative government performance, Hezbollah may perceive pressure to enhance their government position to maintain the relative stability and prosperity from which they benefited since 1992. Additionally, the economy remained heavily reliant upon international lending, something external actors like Russia attempted to exploit. During the second time period, the International Monetary Fund expressed concern over the vulnerability of the Lebanese economy to extremely high levels of debt and slowing economic growth. By the end of 2006, government debt rose to over $40-billion, which was 178-percent of GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2007). Finally, corruption was relatively consistent across both time periods. Domestic institutions can be rated as weak in 1982 and weak-moderate in 2006, due to enhanced stability, but remain precarious due to the neighboring instability in Syria delicate balance of power between competing political factions and economic strain.

Popular Resistance.

The strength of popular resistance is measured by the presence or absence of strong factionalization within the government, ungoverned economy and the strength of socio-ethnic divides. The popular resistance strength prior to the establishment of Hezbollah was relatively weak, but the IRGC put considerable energy and resources into the development of mobilizing structures. The shared grievances, specifically among Shia Muslims in Lebanon, resonated with all Muslims. The IRGC was able to cultivate or build resistance structures through religious centers and clergy that drastically enhanced the resistance strength of Lebanon. Without the concerted efforts of clerics and exploitation by

the IRGC, the antecedent conditions would not have been as vulnerable to intermediary employment. This component appears to constitute a conscious decision by IRGC leaders charged with cultivating the intermediary organization.

Political factionalization during the first time period existed without much of a Shia voice. The ability of Hezbollah to influence outcomes was challenged without support from political elites. The 1992 elections allowed Hezbollah to gain a political foothold. Since 1992, Hezbollah improved their position in the political realm through political representation and participation. In this way, Hezbollah government officials were able to influence political outcomes and add legitimacy to their cause. The addition of this mechanism for change strengthened the resistance potential of Hezbollah and the Shia subset of the Lebanese population by the second time period.

The illicit economy was profound during the first time period and was clearly present during both time periods. During the early 1990s, the illicit drug market operated with Syrian military support in the Bekaa Valley (Cordesman, 2019). From the period of 1991-2015, the size of the informal economy in Lebanon hovered around 30-percent, which is actually close to average (Medina & Schneider, 2018).[14] In 2006, the estimated size of the shadow economy was 33-percent of GDP. For the purposes of this research, there does exist a sizeable informal economy for both time periods.

The socio-political factions that existed in Lebanon during the rise of Hezbollah occurred mostly along ethno-religious lines and operated in close proximity to the prevalence of the informal economy. There was a clear disparity in economic and political development and opportunity. The Shia had no political voice, other than that of the clergy who advocated for equality. The Shia lagged behind the Christians in economic development and institutional equality (Tompkins Jr. et al., 2017). Goods and services that were not available or provided by the central government were acquired through the informal economy or black market. The combination of the IRGC's strengthening of awareness of political factionalization, reinforcement of socio-ethnic divides and the informal economy resulted in strong popular resistance dynamics. By the second time period, socio-economic divides strengthened through political participation and social

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[14] Notably in the period since 2008, the size of the illicit economy in Lebanon dropped below 30-percent.

engagement by Hezbollah. Strong social divides with homogenous networks led to strong resilience and resistance potential.

In summary, the antecedent conditions for Lebanon can be rated as permissive during both time periods. In 1982, domestic institutions were weak in the wake of civil war and popular resistance was strategically cultivated by the IRGC to a point where it was very high. For the second time period, domestic institutional strength notably improved, but there remained key constraints from the political, economic and socio-ethnic realms that resulted in weak domestic institutions and relatively strong popular resistance.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

As described in Chapter 3, the symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and status quo power with regard to the target state are evaluated based on geographic proximity, alliances or historical ties with the target, and commercial value based on total exports to the target. Evaluations of these indicators are provided below.

Geographically, Iran is not considered proximate to Lebanon based on the criteria used for this research. Separated by both Iraq and Syria, the geographic proximity of Iran to Lebanon is assessed as far – which is the same assessment as the proximity of the U.S. as the status quo power to Lebanon. However, as noted under the third explanatory variable (informal access), the cultural proximity and shared history minimizes the geographic distance between the two countries. Additionally, the integration of Syria (which is classified as "near") into the Iranian fold enabled Iran to substantially shorten the geographic distance to Lebanon.

Historical ties between Iran and Lebanon can be rated as moderate during both time periods. Cultural ties were stronger and covered in the next section. Analysis of the Lebanese Shia subset alone renders strong historical ties; however, the Shia comprise less than one-third of the total Lebanese population. When the entirety of the Lebanese state is analyzed, historical ties or alliances were not substantial during either time period.

The U.S. had a relationship with the Lebanese military and government as well, that remained moderate over both time periods. As portrayed under the domestic institutions section above, U.S. administrations from Eisenhower to Reagan invested

resources into Lebanon in an effort to maintain stability and influence in the country. U.S. interests in Lebanon continued to 2018, with billions invested in economic and military aid in the previous ten years alone.

The commercial value of Lebanon to Iran increased substantially between the two time periods, but still only amounted to 0.08-percent of total exports. Value for the U.S. held steady for both time periods, around 0.1-percent of total exports. Commercial value was nearly identical for both countries by the second time period, but remained in favor of the U.S.

The interests of Iran and the U.S. regarding Lebanon can be rated as symmetric for both time periods. The largest change between time periods was in commercial value, however the significance of the change was marginal. The next section evaluates informal access for Lebanon.

Informal Access (IV3)

Informal access is evaluated based on the degree of socio-cultural proximity, ideological convergence, and strategic convergence. Greater proximity and convergence lead to greater informal access. Evaluations of these indicators are expanded below.

Informal access to Lebanon by Iran can be rated as high for both time periods. Socio-culturally, the country of Lebanon is assessed as related to Iran. The distinction between similar and related in this campaign is not easy. There are multiple cultures and religions that shape the political and social spheres in Lebanon. With religion alone, there is a nearly identical split between Shia, Sunni and Christian populations. The Shia community is considered the largest of the 18 recognized sects in Lebanon, but still less than one-third of the country's total population (Hokayem, 2010). There are certain geographic regions, such as the Beqaa Valley, that are culturally similar to Iran, but the country as a whole is assessed as culturally "related," where the two states have many cultural traits in common. Importantly, the related cultural proximity did translate to informal access for Iran, as noted below, which was a necessary condition for the cultivation of Hezbollah.

Lebanon holds significant cultural value for Iran. Relations between the two countries predate the establishment of Lebanon as a state (Hokayem, 2010). The land of Jabal Amil is considered the oldest known Shia community and important center of Shia scholarship (Ataie, 2013; Hourani, 1986). In the sixteenth century when Safavid ruler, Shah Ismael I, introduced Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran, he turned to scholars of Jabal Amil to spread the new faith (Blanford, 2011). Shah Ismael sought to stabilize his territory in the face of Sunni Ottoman opposition to the west through the unification of religion. During this process, leading scholars from Jabal Amil and the Bekaa Valley resettled in Iran, where they learned Persian, married and lived (Blanford, 2011; Hokayem, 2010). This began the linkage of families and cultures across the Levant that continues in the contemporary era. Beirut was also a major commercial and cultural center that attracted Iranian elites, while also serving as a sanctuary for Iranian opponents of the monarchy in the latter half of the 20th century (Hokayem, 2010).

In addition to the scholarly and cultural linkages to Lebanon, several powerful Shia clerics from Iraq and Iran brought their practices to Lebanon. Musa al-Sadr from Iran and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah from Iraq, in addition to many other lesser known clerics, spent years furthering the scholarly work and issues important to Shia Islam (Saade, 2016). Through this work, considerable linkages between religious institutions in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq were strengthened. Imam al-Sadr advocated for opportunities for Shia Muslims in Lebanon plagued with poor social conditions and lack of political opportunity in 1959, when the "…most eminent Shia authority in Lebanon…" and Mufti of Tyre, Sayyed Abdel Hussein Sharafeddine, nominated Musa al-Sadr as his successor (Blanford, 2011). In 1968, Musa al-Sadr founded the organization, Movement of the Disinherited (*Harakat al-Mahrummin*), as a platform to further the needs of Shia Muslims in Lebanon (Blanford, 2011).[15] Imam al-Sadr is considered the "architect of the awakening of Lebanon's Shi'ite community," (Hokayem, 2010).

Ideological convergence was clearly present between Iran and Lebanon during both time periods. Analysis of how Lebanese people self-identify and how issues

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[15] Musa al-Sadr pursued political opportunity and advocacy for basic humanitarian needs of Shia until his disappearance in Libya in 1978.

are framed for collective action reveals strong ideological convergence with the Shia subset. Most significantly is the recognition within Lebanon among the Shia population of Velayat-e Faqih. The Shia population in Lebanon identifies as Twelver Shia and recognize the role of the Ayatollah in the religion.

Strategic convergence was also present between Iran and Lebanon during both time periods. As Hezbollah gained political access in the central government in 1992, strategic convergence strengthened. Shared views of regional order, perception of threats and how to deal with threats strengthened within Lebanon as they dealt with Israeli incursions during the second time period. Strategic convergence even manifested with non-Shia groups across the Middle East and North Africa. There are a few characteristics of Hezbollah that are worth noting as they indicate the degree to which the IRGC helped strengthen ideological and strategic convergence within Lebanon.

First, Hezbollah created a part-time force of village guards, known as *tabbiyya* who were responsible for the security and protection of their villages against outsider incursions. However, the *tabbiyya* also performed very important social functions. These village guards were given responsibilities that included hanging up posters, banners, and flags, distributing the Al-Ahd Hezbollah newspaper, and organizing prayers at local mosques twice per week (Blanford, 2011). The *tabbiyya* also have a liaison who interfaces weekly with Hezbollah regional commanders to synchronize efforts. The village guards were particularly effective, tactically, during the 2006 conflict (Blanford, 2011). Interestingly, the *tabbiyya* concept is very similar to the strategy later used by United States special operators in Afghanistan, termed Village Stability Operations (VSO).

The second tool used by Iran and Hezbollah to weave the organization into the local social fabric was the Martyrs' Foundation (*Mu'assasat al-Shahid*). This organization was created to support the families of fallen Hezbollah fighters with pensions, health care and education for children (Blanford, 2011; Saade, 2016). According to a 1984 issue of Hezbollah's newspaper, Al-Ahd, the Martyr's Foundation was founded with significant support from the Islamic Republic of Iran (Saade, 2016). In 2007, the United States designated the Martyrs Foundation a terrorist organization and, in February 2020, expanded the designation to an additional 15 individuals and entities (Pompeo, 2020). The

Martyrs Foundation and its subsidiaries have operated globally for decades. In the United States, the organization was called the Goodwill Charitable Trust Organization based in Dearborn, Michigan (Clarke, 2017). The Martyr's Foundation served as an effective tool for Iran to increase the dependency of Shia recruits and their families, thereby enhancing their ability to influence Lebanon.

A third major feature enacted by Iran through Hezbollah was the development of a social welfare network. Hezbollah's relationship with the Lebanese state was tumultuous in the early years of existence, to say the least. The state was essentially absent in large swaths of Shia territory. In place of the state, Iran and Hezbollah created the Holy Struggle for Construction (*Jihad al-Binaa*), which somewhat mirrored the work done by the IRGC in Iran following the Iran-Iraq War. This organization repaired damage caused by fighting, delivered essential services, established infrastructure and eventually evolved to building dozens of hospitals, mosques, homes, digging wells and providing financial credit (Blanford, 2011; Saade, 2016). Naim Qassem, who served as Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah, described the organizational features of Hezbollah, articulated above, as social welfare networks that help sustain the community's "…will to embrace the resistance," (Blanford, 2011; Qassem, 2010). The IRGC encouraged most of these social immersion efforts, modeling many after their own. Immersion in the community through consistent interaction in all facets of life was a foundational component of Iran's strategy in enabling Hezbollah. Once again, Iran manipulated dependencies of the people on Hezbollah to further integrate into the social fabric.

Overall, informal access between Iran and Lebanon is assessed as high for both time periods. The indicators used for the assessment of this variable are measured by their presence or absence. If a range of values were applied to the indicators, we would likely find the level of informal access of Iran into Lebanon to be higher than any comparative country, with the exception of Iraq.

Target Summary

The relationship between Iran and Hezbollah evolved from the simple creation and employment of Hezbollah as a resistance organization against Israeli aggression, to an institutionalized state entity with authority and power to deter and coerce

Israeli aggression. Iran's reasons for using Hezbollah to conduct operations, rather than Quds, are due to several factors that center around access, deniability and desire to avoid escalation.

The theory operates as expected during the first time period of the Lebanon case. Although not initially permissive, Iran deliberately generated permissive antecedent conditions.[16] Subsequently, permissive conditions, symmetric interests and high informal access resulted in the outcome of covert, decentralized intermediary employment, supporting hypothesis 3. By the second time period, the attribution component of the DV changed considerably, from covert to overt. While antecedent conditions were perhaps slightly less permissive, interests remained symmetric and informal access remained high. The summary of the findings of this section are reflected in the table below.

Lebanon: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: 1982		*Time Period 2: 2006*	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***		***Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	UNK	Weak	0.119	Weak-Mod
Resist. Strength	0.667	Strong	1	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	2	***Symmetric***	2	***Symmetric***
U.S.	3		3	
Informal Access	0.75	***High***	0.75	***High***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Hezbollah	***Covert***	Hezbollah	***Overt***
Level of State Control	Hezbollah	***Lean Dec.***	Hezbollah	***Lean Dec.***

Table 4.2.   Iranian employment of intermediaries in Lebanon, 1982-2006

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[16] In fact, this is the only case of this project where an RSA deliberately fostered permissive antecedent conditions. Without a strategy to coalesce disparate factions, Hezbollah might have looked much different in 2006 and existed without the link to Iran through Velayat-e Faqih.

A few considerations help understand why the theory did not operate as expected during the second time period. First, Hezbollah's movement into the overt/decentralized realm may best be explained as their nearly full maturation and absorption essentially as a subordinate element of the IRGC. This characterization of intermediary employment is what the theory predicts we would observe under conditions where a revisionist state deploys a domestic intermediary. This is reflective of the behavior we observe with the contemporary Hezbollah. Second, the pursuit of political opportunity added legitimacy to the Hezbollah cause, while also forcing the organization to make at least a portion of its organization, more overt. While the theory does not describe variation in the dependent variables, it does help understand the conditions under which variation occurred. The following case will evaluate the lack of employment of intermediaries in Hazarajat, Afghanistan.

Afghanistan: Hazarajat

Twice in contemporary history the Iranians have employed, or attempted to employ intermediaries in Afghanistan. The first instance coincided with the Soviet invasion and the second with the U.S. intervention after 9/11. The first instance amounted to a trial and error experiment for the fledgling new Khomeini regime to exert influence abroad, simultaneous to their more meticulous effort in Lebanon. The second instance was with the ideologically distant Taliban. This case will cover the first instance in the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan.

This case is used to explore how variation in resistant antecedent conditions and low informal access influence the outcome of non-employment of intermediaries by Iran. The first time period for this analysis is 1979 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and when the *Shura-ie Inqilab-i Ittifaq Islami Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan) was established. Much like the development of Islamic Amal in Lebanon during the same time period, this Shura was an organization intended to support the needs of a disenfranchised Shia population. The second time period is 1989, when the Soviets departed Afghanistan. With this case, the theory operates as expected. For both time periods, I find resistant antecedent conditions, symmetric interests and moderate-to-low informal access, result in no employment of intermediaries. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that influenced the outcome.

In 1978, the coup that overthrew Afghan President, Mohammad Daoud Khan, presented an opportunity for change to the marginalized and repressed Shia Hazara population in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The subsequent Soviet invasion in 1979 and emerging stability in Iran following the revolution, set the broad conditions for the employment the new Iranian foreign policy in Afghanistan. The Iranian Office of Liberation Movements, the predecessor to the Quds Force as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was charged with supporting the resistance of marginalized Shia populations through the export of the revolution. The situation in Afghanistan was ripe for the expansion of the "Islamic State" once relative stability within Iran, following the revolution, was established.

There were two major sources of power in the Hazara dominated highlands of central Afghanistan, known as Hazarajat. The Khans, represented by the Hazara upper class, were the landlords of the region and the only individuals with the ability to organize mobilization and provide resources (Emadi, 1997; Ibrahimi, 2006, 2009). The other source of power was represented by the clergy. The clergy were split into two camps, which aligned with the Shia Ulema, or religious scholars. There were two prominent theories, or lines of interpretation on the role of religious leaders in politics. Ayatollah Khomeini believed in the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih which supported a political role for religious leaders. The other, more traditionalist theory advocated by Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, called for a non-political role of the Ulema and argued the religious leaders should only provide religious advice or guidance. In Hazarajat, Afghanistan, both interpretations were represented. The traditionalists were led by the elder Ayatollah Sayyed Beheshti. The more radical interpretation was represented by several groups led by more junior religious scholars. Among the most effective were the *Pasdaran-e Jehad-e Islami Afghanistan* (Guardians of the Islamic Jihad of Afghanistan), led by Sadiqi Nili and and Mohammad Akbari,[17] and the *Sazaman-e Nasr Inqilab-e Islami Afghanistan* (Victory organization for Islamic revolution in Afghanistan).

By June 1979, most of central Afghanistan was liberated from control of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and essentially left to fend for itself. In September, Hazara leaders came together for the development of the *Shura-ie Inqilab-i Ittifaq Islami Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Council for the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan) (Ibrahimi, 2006). The development of the Shura was an attempt to unify the efforts of the Hazara population and establish a sort of autonomous region to provide for basic needs. The Shura was a rare convergence of the two ideological camps, but perceived as necessary to further common goals. The president of the Shura was traditionalist, Ayatollah Baheshti. Nili and Akbari were also senior leaders in the Shura.

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[17] Akbari survived the turbulence of Hazara internal war, the Rabbani repression and the Taliban. As of May 2020, he is an Afghan Member of Parliament with broad support throughout Hazarajat. For more information, see: http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=113&task=view&total=2&start=0&Itemid=2.

Iran developed ties with several different Shia groups in Afghanistan as the Soviets invaded, which occurred simultaneously to Ayatollah Khomeini's strengthening grasp on power in Iran. Additionally, with the Soviet invasion a massive influx of around two million, mostly Hazara, refugees fled into neighboring Iran (Ibrahimi, 2009; Uskowi, 2019). The refugees presented a unique opportunity for Iran. With the newly established foreign policy goal of exporting the revolution throughout the world, Iranian leaders found within their borders a population from which they could recruit and train for such a purpose. Training centers were set up throughout Iran (in Taibad, Qom, Gelan, Sabzwar, Tehran, Zabul and Torbat-e Jam) to expose refugees to the ideologic underpinnings of Velayat-e Faqih and the need to export the revolution (Ibrahimi, 2009). This indoctrination and training led to two outcomes for the exportation of the revolution. First, it led to the establishment of the Abouzar Brigade, which was the predecessor to the Fatemiyoun deployed to Syria. The Abouzar Brigade represents the first intermediary that was groomed by Iran and employed against a target state (Iraq), during the Iran-Iraq War.[18] The second outcome was return of many of those indoctrinated to Afghanistan, with newfound allegiance and purpose. As an example, Nasr employed around 4,000 Iranian trained Hazara refugees from 1984-1985 alone. One Nasr base built by Abdul Ali Mazari in the Balkh province, *Paygah-e Al-fat'h*, was very similar to some of the camps in the Beqaa Valley of Lebanon. It included a mosque and a madrasa, in addition to typical military elements, where inhabitants were required to conduct daily religious, ideological and military training (Ibrahimi, 2009). Nasr and Pasdaran trainees were even required to sign a form committing to the ideology of Khomeini. However, despite the ideological commitments and semblance of organizational structure, Hazara did not have the embedded IRGC fanning the flames of resistance and collectivization that was present in Lebanon.

Upon his return from a trip to Iran in 1982, Nili began to increasingly challenge the authority of the Shura and their lack of allegiance to Khomeini. During his trip to Iran, Nili established personal relationships with members of the Office of Liberation Movements

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[18] The employment of the Fatemiyoun as an intermediary will be covered in the chapter on Syria. Their employment against Iraq during the 1980s was minimally effective, but it served as a point of learning for Iran through which they would continue to evolve such employment.

that resulted in military and financial assistance that Nili funneled into his own independent efforts. Eventually, Nili executed an envoy of Beheshti, thereby ending the partnership provided through the Shura. Akbari also publicly announced his independence from the Shura in 1982. The dismemberment of the Shura left several Shia factions operating in Afghanistan with little semblance of cohesion. Although the traditionalists were slowly overcome by the more revolutionary elements under the Khomeini line of thought, the strength of popular resistance remained weak.

By late 1984, the Pasdaran and Nasr organizations joined forces to suppress the Shura organization, to which they formerly belonged. The next five years in Hazarajat were characterized by significant infighting and competition over resources. Finally, in 1987, persistent efforts at unification were achieved amongst the radical Khomeinist groups. In July 1987 in Tehran, the *Shura-ye Iatelaf-e Islami* (Council of the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan) was established to unify pro-Khomeinist Hazara under one alliance (Emadi, 1997; Ibrahimi, 2009). The alliance amounted to more of a power sharing "truce" than anything else. However, this alliance omitted the participation of the traditionalists and thus reinforced segmentation. The alliance was also brokered in Iran, rather than "home grown," or at least nurtured by the IRGC within Afghanistan. Later, in 1988, Nasr and Pasdaran initiated discussions for a merger, which came to fruition in the summer of 1989. The merger resulted in the establishment of *Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan* (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan). Wahdat emerged following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union with aspirations of representing all Hazara with an effective political system for Hazarajat. Nasr leader Abdul Ali Mazari was elected as the leader of Wahdat (Emadi, 1997; Ibrahimi, 2009). After his election, he led a delegation of Wahdat to Iran to thank the Iranians for their support in establishing the unifying organization. Mazari was able to bring peace and stability to Hazarajat for the next four to five years. After the Soviet withdrawal, the Iranians encouraged Wahdat to cooperate with the Pakistan-based Islamic parties, such as Jamiat-e Islami led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, in the Shura that was used to establish the new Afghan government following the ouster of Najibullah. Wahdat refused and was excluded from influencing the structure and policies of the new government. By 1992, the new Tajik Afghan president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, perceived the Hazara as potential adversaries with strong military capabilities. In June 1992, Rabbani launched

what amounted to a three-year military offensive to eliminate potential Hazara adversaries (Emadi, 1997; Gohel, 2010). The Iranian government supported Rabbani against the Shia Hizb-e Wahdat, believing a relatively stable, Tajik-led Afghan government as within its strategic interests, over supporting the loosely allied Hazara. Eventually, in opposition of Rabbani, Mazari was forced to ally with the burgeoning Taliban.[19] The Taliban would go on to overthrow the Rabbani government in 1996 and storm the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i Sharif in 1998.

In summary, there are many similarities between the Hazarajat case and that of Lebanon. Both occurred shortly after the Iranian revolution and during the initial, harsh stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Both cases included populations of disenfranchised Shia populations and some form of external state aggression – Israel in the case of Lebanon and the Soviet Union in the case of Afghanistan. Additionally, both target states possessed Shia populations that were factionalized along different views or strategies of how to direct collective action. In the case of Lebanon, Iran deployed military personnel from the Office of Liberation Movements to cultivate resistance among different factions. In Afghanistan, Iran recruited from the Hazara refugee population within the Iranian borders, conducted ideological training, and provided resources to resistance factions within Afghanistan. However, they did not deploy Iranian mentors to train, advise, assist and cultivate revolution within Iran at nearly the scale they did so in Lebanon. Finally, in Lebanon, the Pasdaran were deployed from the IRGC alone. In Afghanistan, the Sepah-e Pasdaran were supported by the IRGC, while the Sazman-e Nasr were supported by the Iranian Foreign Ministry (Ibrahimi, 2006). It is worth noting the command of the Office of Liberation Movements bounced back and forth between the IRGC and Foreign Ministry during this time period. The internal Iranian organizational and command challenges are reflected in the Hazarajat case through potentially competing and duplicative efforts. The next section applies the theory to this case.

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[19] The temporary Taliban alliance proved fatal for Mazari in March 1995. As the Taliban reinforced Wahdat fighters in strategic positions outside Kabul, they forced the Wahdat fighters to surrender their weapons. When Mazari and other senior Wahdat members attempted to negotiate the return of their heavy weapons for defense of their villages, they were ambushed and executed.

DV Analysis and Classification

The time periods for the analysis of Iranian involvement in Hazarajat are 1979, when the *Shura-ie Inqilab-I Ittifaq Islami Afghanistan* was established, and 1989 when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan.

Attribution

While there was certainly acknowledgment within Iran that the revolution should be exported, there was no record of attribution between Iran and Hazarajat. To the contrary, there exists evidence throughout both time periods that Iran was hesitant to engage with the Hazara, and after Soviet withdrawal, Iran actually supported opposing actors. Engagement that did occur between the IRGC, the Iranian Foreign Ministry and potential intermediaries was relatively covert and infrequent.

Level of State Control

There was no empirical evidence over either time period to indicate that control over any of the Hazara elements was established. There was evidence of the IRGC sponsoring the Hazara Pasdaran and of the Iranian Foreign Ministry sponsoring Nasr. And Nasr did recruit from the Hazara refugee population in Iran for employment in Afghanistan. However, there was little to no effort to direct or influence the operations of the more radical Hazarajat elements. Leaders from the Nasr and Pasdaran elements traveled to and from Iran in pursuit of resources and patronage, but Iran remained hesitant to engage heavily in one group over another. There were reports of Iranian officials observing the Pasdaran in Afghanistan, but not of attempts to control strategy. The Iranian brokered *Shura-ye Iatelaf-e Islami Afghanistan* (Council of the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan) was the only clear indication of an attempt to unify Hazara efforts, but not indicative of any level of Iranian control over the radical organizations.

Overall, this campaign constitutes a case where the revisionist state did not employ intermediary actors. Experimentation with potential employment occurred, but actual employment never manifested. Therefore, there are no measures of the dependent variables.

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

During both time periods of this analysis, Afghanistan can be considered a failed state. Any domestic institutions that were functioning focused on the capitol hub of Kabul. The remainder of the country was governed largely through warlord politics where fiefdoms operated independent of government control or assistance. The Afghan government was heavily dependent on foreign aid during both time periods. Inflation was tremendous, especially by the second time period when expenditures were met by printing more money (Minkov & Smolynec, 2007). Additionally, although the oil and gas sectors were developed between the two time periods, skilled labor did not accompany the development. The agriculture sector was destroyed as the Soviets and Afghan government competed with the mujahideen over resources. The Afghan government pressured farmers to grow cash crops, such as cotton, while the insurgents pressured farmers to grow foodstuffs (Minkov & Smolynec, 2007). Finally, corruption was prevalent, particularly within the small elite PDPA party. As the Soviets withdrew, natural gas, oil and other joint ventures for infrastructure development collapsed (Minkov & Smolynec, 2007). WGI indicators were not available during either time period, but based on the conditions highlighted here, domestic institutional strength can be rated as weak during both time periods. Government institutions in the Hazarajat region were nonexistent.

Popular Resistance.

Despite perceived commonalities in ethnicity, religion and other cultural traits, the popular resistance strength of Hazarajat was also very weak. The Hazara society was incredibly segmented. Segmentation was present between the traditionalist and radical interpretations of the Ulema. The traditionalists sided with the upper class Hazara Khans. The radicals were comprised of predominately lower class Hazaras. Second, segmentation existed within the ideology, strategies and power aspirations of the radical Khomeinists. Ideologically, the Nasr organization was more formally organized. They executed political and military activities as part of a broader strategy that was reinforced

through mosques and madrassas, and they had a propaganda arm that reinforced operations through the publication of magazines (Ibrahimi, 2009). The Nasr strategy was aimed to coopt fringe Hazara elements, such as the Khans, and collectivize action toward a common end. The Pasdaran were considerably less organized. The existed as a coalition of radical mullahs and warlords. The Pasdaran were more radical and as such, they did not enjoy support from the more moderate Hazaras even if they supported Velayat-e Faqih. Their leadership was more junior and the average rank and file were younger than those of Nasr and with lower rates of literacy. The Pasdaran did not spend much time on reinforcing propaganda or information among the population to broaden support, focus was purely on training and fighting.

In summary, the segmentation of the Hazara society prevented any coalescence toward a unified political body that could address the basic governance needs of the people until at least 1987 when Iran brokered a political unification. While there was the presence of an illicit economy, it was minimally effective in supporting the resistance due to the lack of a unified collective political body. The traditionalists depended largely on taxation, while the radicals were heavily dependent on the Iranians for financing operations (Ibrahimi, 2009). Although domestic institutional strength was poor, popular resistant structures were also poor. Therefore, antecedent conditions can be rated as resistant for both time periods.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

The interests between Iran and the Soviet Union over Afghanistan were symmetric according to the indicators used in this theory for both time periods. Geographic proximity was much further for Russia, but Afghanistan was contiguous with the outer reaches of Soviet Socialist Republics. Russia had strong relations with the communist PDPA, which was what ignited the Soviet invasion in 1979. Prior to the invasion, the Soviets spent over $1.2 billion in economic aid and constructed major roads throughout the country (Minkov & Smolynec, 2007). During the first time period, trade with the Soviet Union doubled for Afghanistan and military aid alone amounted to move $370 million (Minkov & Smolynec, 2007). Commercial value and economic interests were certainly

elements of interest for the Soviet Union during the first time period, although exact numbers are unknown.

Iran essentially had no ties with Afghanistan. Even by the time of Soviet withdraw, Iranian exports to Afghanistan were only a fraction of one-percent of their total exports. Commercial value was higher for the Soviet Union than for Iran, although available data suggests this was not a profound consideration as Soviet ambitions were more ideological. Finally, simultaneous to their occupation of Afghanistan, the Soviets were supplying Iran with considerable support in their war against Iraq. Symmetric interests in Afghanistan were reinforced by symmetric interests in Iraq.

Informal Access (IV3)

Informal access for Afghanistan can be rated as moderate-low for both time periods. Socio-cultural proximity is assessed as related. The only socio-cultural tie between Iran and Afghanistan was religion. The Hazara descended from Mongols and speak Hazaragi, which is a combination of Persian and Mongolian words (Blood, 1997). Only around 15-percent of the total Afghan population was Shia (Blood, 1997). Within the Shia faith, there was divergence on interpretation amongst traditionalists and radicals. Ideological convergence was largely absent. Velayat-e Faqih was somewhat of a consideration amongst the radical faction within the Afghan Shia clergy, but only those fighters who fled to Iran as refugees when the Soviets invaded were exposed to the concept.

Strategically, there was no convergence. The inability or unwillingness of Iran to direct the efforts of potential intermediaries, such as Pasdaran, Nasr and Wahdat, toward a common enemy (presumably Russia, the PDPA, and/or Rabbani government) resulted in internal fighting and warlord politics. The Iranians fostered the development of strategic convergence through Wahdat, but the convergence ultimately failed. Informal access did exist, but it was not profound and Iran did little to enhance what did exist. Informal access can be rated as moderate-low for both time periods.

Target Summary

The Hazarajat case had many of the same components as Lebanon, but the two cases resulted in vastly different outcomes regarding intermediary employment. The

Hazarajat region of Afghanistan represented a very similar opportunity for Iran as that of Beqaa Valley. Several competitive factions with a semblance of the informal structure Iran found strength in with Lebanon also existed in Afghanistan. The timing was also identical to the cultivation of Hezbollah. The theory is useful in describing some of the factors that influenced why intermediary employment did not exist for Hazarajat. The results of this case are represented in the table below.

Hazarajat: Summary Evaluations					
	Time Period 1: **1979**			*Time Period 2:* **1989**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Resistant***		***Resistant***
Dom. Inst. Strength	UNK	Weak	UNK	Weak
Resist. Strength	0	Weak	0	Weak
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	4	***Symmetric***	5	***Symmetric***
Soviet Union	5		4	
Informal Access	0.25	***Low***	0.25	***Low***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Not Employed	--------	Not Employed	--------
Level of State Control	Not Employed	--------	Not Employed	--------

Table 4.3.   **Summary indicators for Iranian non-employment in Hazarajat, 1979-1989**

The theory operates as expected with the Hazarajat case. Resistant antecedent conditions coupled with low informal access resulted the outcome of no intermediary employment, supporting hypothesis 1. There were indications Iran was interested in manipulating the antecedent conditions as they did in Lebanon to facilitate more permissive antecedent conditions, however, Hazara mobilizing structures were not conducive to manipulation as they were in Lebanon. The lack of domestic governing institutions coupled with poor resistance strength and major opposition to Velayat-e Faqih resulted in a scenario where attempts at Hazara unification resulted in failure. Ideological and strategic segmentation plagued any potential for employment. The portion of the

Hazara population with the greatest power was the clergy and significant segmentation within the clergy prevented unity toward collective action. Both the IRGC and the Iranian Foreign Ministry dabbled with forms of support to pro-Khomeini, Hazara elements. However, it does not appear that these relationships matured beyond initial consultation. Finally, the hesitancy of Iran to engage fully was conditioned by the aggressor. In Lebanon, the Israeli aggressor represented a sworn enemy. In Afghanistan, the Soviet aggressor (which was also the status quo power), was a valuable ally in the war against Iraq – which was considered the primary goal ahead of exporting the revolution. In summary, the resistant antecedent conditions for Hazarajat were compounded by the strong desire to maintain Soviet support in the war against Iraq. Thus, Iran did not employ intermediaries in Hazarajat. The following case will assess an instance where intermediary employment did occur in Afghanistan, with the Taliban.

Afghanistan: Taliban (Mashhad Shura)

The second case of Iranian intermediary employment in Afghanistan occurred after 9/11 with the Mashhad Shura of the Taliban. Support of the Taliban by Iran is surprising considering they were once enemies. In 1996, following the expulsion of the Tajik Rabbani government from Kabul by the Taliban, Iran maintained support for Rabbani. The Tajik led Northern Alliance found refuge in Mazar-i Sharif during the initial years of Taliban rule. Two years after the Taliban gained control of Afghanistan, they captured the Northern Alliance stronghold and executed 10 Iranian diplomats and an Iranian journalist working at an Iranian consulate in Mazar-i Sharif.[20] Subsequently, the Iranian military and IRGC amassed more than 70,000 troops along the border of Afghanistan and announced another 100,000 military personnel would move into place along the border (Jehl, 1998; Mousavi & ShahidSaless, 2015). The Taliban countered with the mobilization of 10,000 fighters to the Iranian border (UN Secretary General, 1998). The tenuous scenario eventually deescalated due to mediation by the UN and the decision of the Ayatollah against intervention in Afghanistan, but the position of Iran in opposition of the Taliban was clear. A few short years later, this position would change as new challenges emerged.

With this case I am able to evaluate the influence of the strength of popular resistance under antecedent conditions (IV1) and the informal access variable (IV3) on the outcome of intermediary employment. In the previous Afghan case with Hazarajat, poor resistance strength under antecedent conditions and low informal access constrained intermediary employment. With this case, I observe the opposite outcome within the same target state.[21] The first time period for this analysis is 2007 when Iranian support for the Mashhad Taliban was first observed. The second time period is 2018 when the most recent data was available. The following section provides a narrative summary of the key events and actors that shaped Iran's employment of the Mashhad Taliban as an intermediary.

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[20] In addition to the Iranian diplomats, the Taliban systematically slaughtered thousands of non-Sunni or non-Pashtun men and boys. Mazar-i Sharif was the last hold out for the Northern Alliance. The Taliban also imprisoned more than 4,500 men from August-October 1998.

[21] This case could be considered a most-similar case to the previous case in Hazarajat. Although both cases occur in the same target state with similar domestic institutions (IV1) and symmetric interests, the analysis is weakened somewhat as I observe variation in two of my IVs (1 and 3) as well as the DV.

Iran's border with Afghanistan is expansive, as is cross-border influence. The region of Herat in western Afghanistan is most representative of this influence. Herat was an important part of Persia throughout history. The end of the Anglo-Persian War marked by the Treaty of Paris in 1857, required the relinquishment of Iran's claim to Herat but influence and access remained (Gohel, 2010). Today, the city of Herat is often referred to as "Little Iran." Culturally, this part of Afghanistan is nearly identical to Iran. Western Afghanistan and Iran share a close cultural connection through a shared history, religion, common language and economic ties. Iranian food, schools, bookshops and women wearing the black chador, common in Iran, are prominent in the Western provinces of Afghanistan (Gall, 2017; Uskowi, 2019). In eastern Iran, millions of Afghans have a history of living, working and studying in Iran. The Afghan refugee population in Iran, totaling more than two-million, serves to further cement the relationship between Iran and Western Afghanistan. The close relationship, porous border and dense relationships was even evidenced by the very quick spread of Coronavirus from Iran to Herat by mid-February, 2020 (Sediqi & Karimi, 2020). The personal and familial ties that exist between Iran and Afghanistan were "…priceless for Quds," and facilitated the manifestation of intermediary employment (Uskowi, 2019, p. 137).

The Taliban took Herat in 1995 and Kabul in the fall of 1996. Iran's efforts during this period were centered on preventing the Taliban from gaining power, hence their support of the Tajik government through weapons, money and coalition building among somewhat disparate Afghan factions (Khalilzad, 1997). After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, Iranian support to the Northern Alliance in Mazar-i Sharif increased and particular IRGC influence was directed at the liberation of Herat. Crist (2012) states that, "In the first half of 1999 alone, thirty-three cargo planes with 380 metric tons of small arms, ammo and fuel arrived from the eastern Iranian air base of Mashhad to Tajikistan for transport to the Northern Alliance," (Crist, 2012, p. 428).

Prior to 9/11, Iran and the U.S. as part of the "Geneva Group" began discussions on the situation in Afghanistan through talks initiated by UN diplomat, Lakhdar Brahimi (Crocker & Tellis, 2012; Mousavi & ShahidSaless, 2015). These discussions were never taken very seriously by any of the parties, but the dialogue was a positive step toward resolution of common problems, chief among them radical Sunni domination and

terrorism. By the time the 9/11 attacks occurred, the Iranians were primed for the removal of the Taliban regime.

Immediately following 9/11, the Geneva Group became incredibly valuable to both Iran and the United States. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, at the time a senior State Department official, met with Iranian delegations in Geneva and Paris to discuss strategies to defeat the Taliban (Crocker & Tellis, 2012; Ostovar, 2016, p. 161; Slavin, 2013). Over the course of several meetings, the Iranians provided Ambassador Crocker with Taliban locations and recommendations for targeting. Iran also guaranteed support of the Northern Alliance in defeat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, as well as a promise to capture any militants who fled to Iran during the pending operations. Later, in conjunction with the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, Qasem Soleimani personally assisted with planning the advance of the Northern Alliance into Kabul and the IRGC led the operation to expel the Taliban from Herat. U.S.-Iranian relations from the first Geneva Group meetings in 1998 until President Bush's State of the Union speech in 2002 represented a level of cooperation unprecedented since the Iranian revolution.

The trigger for adjustment in Iran's foreign policy toward Afghanistan was the labeling of Iran as part of the "Axis of evil," in President Bush's January 29, 2002 State of the Union address. Crocker was placed in Kabul as the State Department chief of mission in early January 2002 and his senior Iranian counterpart from the Geneva Group arrived as the Iranian chief of mission simultaneously (Crocker & Tellis, 2012). Unfortunately, any trust previously established between Crocker and his counterpart vanished after the State of the Union, and Soleimani and Iranian President Khatami personally felt betrayed (Ostovar, 2016). The subsequent invasion of the U.S. into Iraq reinforced Iranian opposition of what they perceived as western aggression and a true indication of the long-term intent of the U.S.

As the U.S. and Northern Alliance sacked the Taliban regime and ushered in Hamid Karzai, the Iranians grew increasingly concerned about long-term American interests in the region. As the U.S. opened up another front on the western border of Iran, interests converged briefly until Saddam Hussein was removed from power. Once the U.S.

transitioned to stability operations, it became clear that Iran's foreign policy would have to change again. This time, the focus swung back to expelling western influence.

Iranian support for the Taliban began around the same time their support for anti-U.S. forces in Iraq began. In late 2006 to early 2007, U.S. coalition and Afghan forces began interdicting shipments of Iranian weapons destined for the Taliban (U.S. Department of Defense, 2014).[22] Since at least 2013, the IRGC Quds force provided the Taliban with weapons, logistics and training in Tehran, Mashhad, Kerman and Zahedan (Gall, 2017; Stancati, 2015; Uskowi, 2019). In 2012, the Taliban were permitted to open an office in Zahedan, Iran and another in Mashhad was opened in early 2014. While the relationship between the Taliban and Iran was contentious at times, the IRGC maintained flexibility with the Taliban to suit specific needs when opportunities arose. The Sunni Islamic State, or Daesh, later triggered another level of cooperation between Iran and the Taliban. The Taliban represented an opportunity for Iran to counter the Islamic State – Khorasan (IS-K) (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahimi, 2020).

In Western Afghanistan, the locals argue the strongest of all Taliban are Iranian Taliban (Gall, 2017). Quds established a network of associates inside Afghanistan who covertly engaged in operations at Iran's behest between the two time periods (Uskowi, 2019, p. 137). According to Afghan officials, Iran infiltrated police ranks and government departments in addition to simply supporting the Taliban logistically and financially (Gall, 2017). In 2016, Taliban leader Mullah Mansour was executed with a drone strike in Pakistan after returning from a trip to Iran where he met with Iranian and Russian officials (Gall, 2017; Kugelman, 2016). Further, as of 2017, the Iranian regime was actively supporting at least six militant groups in Afghanistan in their anti-government and anti-U.S. efforts (Gall, 2017).

It is important to reinforce the point that the Taliban are not a homogeneous organization, in fact, they are quite fragmented. Within the Taliban, there are several "shuras," that are often in competition over power and resources. The Quetta Shura, located in Quetta, Pakistan, long held the strategic command and control role for the Taliban, with regional shuras in Miran Shah, Pakistan (Haqqani); and Peshawar, Pakistan. In the south

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[22] 2007 is also when Haqqani declared independence from the Quetta Shura.

and east reside the Mashhad Shura in Mashhad, Iran and the Rasool Shura in Farah, Afghanistan (Giustozzi, 2017; Sarban, 2017). The Mashhad and Rasool Shuras do not recognize the authority of the Quetta Shura in the territorial control or leadership of broader Taliban efforts.[23] For the purposes of this research, the portion of the Taliban with which Iran has the closest intermediary relationship is the Mashhad Shura. This is the group referenced as the "Iranian Taliban." Support of the Rasool Shura by Iran also occurred periodically, but was not sustained (Giustozzi, 2017). The Taliban of the Mashhad Shura became a valuable intermediary through which Iran was able to influence outcomes in Afghanistan to their benefit.

In summary, the relationship between Iran and the Taliban ebbed and flowed historically, much like their relationship with another Sunni organization, Hamas. Exogenous shocks to Iranian foreign policy, such as being labeled part of the "Axis of Evil," and the rise of the Islamic State shaped the nature of Iranian support to the Taliban. As with other intermediaries, Iran placed value in the ability to use the Taliban to achieve gains in Afghanistan without much of the backlash that would exist if such efforts were obtained through more overt means.

DV Analysis and Classification

The time periods for the analysis of Iranian involvement with the Taliban are 2007 when support to the Taliban was first acknowledged and the Mashhad Shura was established, and 2018 when the most recent data was available and the relationship was still ongoing.

Attribution

Iranian employment of the Taliban during the first time period (2007) occurred in a covert fashion. Support was only discovered through the interdiction of weapons shipments and the level of sophistication in recovered Taliban weapons. By the second time period, attribution of the relationship is rated as leaning covert. The former Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan, Mohammad Reza Bahrami, repeatedly denied any

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[23] However, until 2011 the Mashhad Shura was considered a regional Shura of Quetta.

support of the Taliban by Iran. They denied support in 2007, even as Iran and the Taliban established the Mashhad Shura, and in 2015 as they redirected efforts toward ISIS (Hodge & Amiri, 2015). In 2016 when Mullah Mansour was killed in a strike after visiting Iran, Ambassador Bahrami acknowledged meetings with the Taliban, but stated they were for information purposes (Gall, 2017; Hodge & Amiri, 2015). Finally, in 2017, the Afghan Army Chief of Staff stated in an interview with the BBC that he discovered documents from the Taliban in western Afghanistan that were proof of Iranian support to the Taliban (Soroush & Yaftali, 2017). Iranian government leaders continue to publicly deny any support for the Taliban, but the meetings between senior leaders, in addition to the establishment of Taliban offices in at least two locations in Iran, represent an overture at something different. Attribution for the second time period is rated as leaning covert.[24]

Level of State Control

For the first time period, the level of Iranian state control in the relationship is rated as leaning decentralized. Support was provided in terms of money, weapons and perhaps strategic direction, but the actions of the Taliban on the ground were not guided by Iran. However, by the second time period, the level of control increased. IRGC personnel perished in fighting alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan – suggesting Iran placed personnel within the ranks of the Mashhad Shura Taliban (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahimi, 2020; Uskowi, 2019, p. 133). The IRGC directed the infiltration of government institutions, especially in the border region where bribery, espionage and the illicit economy were rampant (Gall, 2017). Finally, the IRGC retained a regional command, called the Ansar Corps, that was directly responsible for operations in Afghanistan (Uskowi, 2019). Iran did not have a monopoly on control over all Taliban activity – Pakistan is the dominant actor in this category. However, at least in western Afghanistan, with the Mashhad Shura, we can classify the level of Iranian control over the Taliban as leaning centralized. A summary table of dependent variable values for the Taliban case is represented below. The following section will evaluate the explanatory variables for this case.

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[24] For analysis on how this relationship transitioned to overt status in 2020, see Shahram Akbarzadeh and Niamatullah Ibrahimi, "The Taliban: a new proxy for Iran in Afghanistan?" *Third World Quarterly*, 41:5, 764-782, 2020.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Afghanistan: Taliban	2007	Iran US	Mashhad Taliban	Covert	Lean Dec.
	2018	Iran US	Mashhad Taliban	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.

Table 4.4.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Mashhad Taliban

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

<u>Domestic Institutions.</u>

Afghanistan was essentially a failed state during both time periods, although perhaps slightly more promising than during Soviet occupation in the previous case. World Governance indicators for both time periods indicate substantial weaknesses in government effectiveness, corruption and rule of law. Nearly every measure for governance was worse during the second time period than the first. Afghanistan was heavily reliant upon external actors, chiefly the U.S. and UN. Finally, the illicit economy was rampant during both time periods. In 2017, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated the illegal economy to be between 20 and 32-percent of the country's GDP. Domestic institutions are assessed as weak for both time periods.

<u>Popular Resistance.</u>

Popular resistance structures are assessed as strong during the first time period and moderate-weak during the second time period. The government was inefficient and strong factionalization did exist, however, the Taliban were not able to gain political representation in a way that served as a mechanism of change.[25] In fact, most of the tribes represented in the Taliban have very few tribal members who serve at any level of political representation. For example, during the second time period, the district governor in Panjwai (the birthplace of the Taliban), of Kandahar province was the only member from the Ishaqzai tribe elected at any level of the Afghan government.[26] Opportunity for change through political means was not a viable option.

The illicit economy in Afghanistan was among the largest in the world. Afghanistan consistently ranked as the top producer of opium worldwide. The UN and U.S. backed off counter-narcotics efforts around 2012 in Afghanistan and as a result, the network of illicit drug and smuggling associates metastasized. The IRGC found value in the illicit market as international sanctions and policies of maximum pressure forced

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[25] The 2020 Taliban negotiations with the U.S. may actually strengthen Iran's relationship with the intermediary by fostering resistance strength.

[26] Example based on personal experience of author in Kandahar.

other avenues for funding. It also reinforced IRGC initiatives inside Afghanistan. In 2015, the IRGC paid Taliban intermediaries a salary of $580/month (Stancati, 2015).

The socio-ethnic divides in Afghanistan were incredibly profound. This element is the main indicator that changed between the two time periods. During the first time period, significant socio-ethnic divides existed between homogenous networks, but bridging efforts such as recognition of the Quetta Shura as the central authority and leaders who were willing to bridge divides in pursuit of common objectives strengthened popular resistance structures. However, by the second time period, the Taliban shuras were factious and even fought against each other instead of U.S. or Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) forces. Further, leaders such as Mullah Monsour who sought to balance external support between Iran and Pakistan and bridge divides between Taliban shuras, were executed. The result was a level of self-preservation, territorial claims and prosperity where possible.

Overall, antecedent conditions are rated as permissive during the first time period and semi-permissive during the second time period. During the second time period, socio-ethnic divides were weakened due to infighting and poor strategic convergence between Taliban factions. The following section will evaluate state interests.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Geographically, Iran is contiguous to Afghanistan, and at times throughout history, western regions of Afghanistan were a part of Iran or Persia. The U.S. is not geographically proximate; however, thousands of U.S. forces were stationed in Afghanistan during both time periods.

Although it may appear Iran and Afghanistan have strong historical ties, partnership between the two states was actually quite weak. The strength of ties was most visible in trade between the two countries and billions of dollars in Iranian investments in Afghan infrastructure following decades of war (Nader et al., 2014). However, no formal alliances existed and contemporary Iran did more to undermine the Afghan government than ally in the past twenty years. Iran had a strong history of shared experiences with Herat, but ties to the broader Afghan state for both time periods are assessed as weak.

Conversely, historical ties and alliances between Afghanistan and the U.S. during both time periods were quite strong. By the end of 2007, the focus of U.S. efforts shifted to Iraq, but there were still 25,000 U.S. troops and another 26,703 from UN partners in Afghanistan. Between the two time periods, troop levels surged to over 100,000 in 2011 and then down to a low of around 8,400 by the time President Obama left office. By 2018, there were around 15,000 U.S. military personnel remaining in Afghanistan (George, 2019). Regardless of the military footprint that resides semi-permanently in Afghanistan, both military and political trainers or advisors will likely remain for several years. In 2012, President Obama declared Afghanistan a major non-NATO ally. Several agreements between the two countries resulted from this declaration, including the Bilateral Security Agreement and the Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement. Collectively, the U.S. and Afghanistan partnered in multiple economic, political and military commitments. U.S. alliances and historical ties with Afghanistan in 2007 can be rated as weak, but by 2018, they are rated as strong due to major commitments under the Obama administration.

The commercial value of Afghanistan to Iran is substantially higher than the commercial value for the U.S. as the status quo power. Between the two time periods, the percent of exports from Iran to Afghanistan rose from 0.2 to 3.2-percent of total exports, with some figures as high as 6-percent in 2019. Nonetheless, the commercial value of Afghanistan is higher for Iran than the U.S.

The interests of Iran in comparison to the U.S. as status quo power with regard to Afghanistan are rated as asymmetric for the first time period, and symmetric for the second time period. Between the two time periods, commercial value increased slightly for Iran, but governmental ties between the U.S. and Afghanistan enhanced considerably.

Informal Access (IV3)

Socio-cultural proximity can be assessed as related for both time periods in this case. Afghanistan is predominately Muslim and there is a notable Shia population. However, the Taliban are almost entirely Sunni and the Taliban history of oppression against the Shia and other non-Sunnis resides just below the surface. In western and central Afghanistan, socio-cultural proximity is much higher.

Ideological convergence is noticeably absent in this case. The Taliban are not an incredibly homogenous organization, but they absolutely do not recognize Velayat-e Faqih. There may exist some minimal ideological convergence among those Taliban in Herat who are most susceptible to Iranian influence, but they are not representative of the broader organization.

Strategic convergence is the strongest component in the employment of the Taliban by Iran. Iran desires to maximize influence on its borders and any threat to long-term Iranian influence motivates opportunity for intermediary employment, even if temporarily, in order to achieve long-term objectives. As long as a common enemy exists, the strategic convergence between Iran and the Mashhad Taliban will remain. Iran and the Taliban built structural security around strategic convergence as well. Strategic convergence between the IRGC and Mashhad Taliban grew substantially with the establishment of Taliban office in Zahedan, Iran in 2012, and another in Mashhad in 2014. Additionally, Quds training of Mashhad Taliban inside Iran strengthened ties. The ultimate goal of both entities became accelerating the departure of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the coordination for which could now occur in Zahedan and Mashhad (Abi-Habib, 2012).[27] However, by 2018, internal factionalization within the Taliban limited the efficiency of strategic convergence.

The illicit economy represents another structural component of strategic convergence. A large portion of the opium trade travels through Iran and it benefits both the IRGC and the Taliban. Iranian border guards and security officials found ways to subsidize their income through the facilitation of the opium trade. In 2012, IRGC Quds General Gholamreza Baghbani was the first IRGC officer designated under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act for his activities in facilitating the smuggling of heroin precursors and weapons to Afghanistan and facilitating opiate smuggling through Iran (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012a). The IRGC use of the illicit market is a crucial component for bypassing sanctions to continue to compete below the threshold of war.

In summary, informal access is not particularly strong for either time period. During the first time period it is assessed as moderate and for the second period it is slightly

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[27] The elimination of ISIS-K is also recognized as an objective of this relationship.

weaker. Socio-cultural proximity is related and ideological convergence is absent during both time periods. Strategic convergence dictates the level of informal access for Iran.

Target Summary

Uskowi (2019) describes the relationship between Iran and the Taliban as a "…marriage of convenience," but the relationship persisted despite several challenges. In fact, through the illicit market and the rise of ISIS-K, the relationship strengthened over the two time periods. Ideologically, Iran and the Taliban differ considerably. Despite the divergence in deeply held religious values, both parties view outsiders with common interest. The relationship between Iran and the Taliban is most significantly defined by strategic convergence. The Taliban clearly have several other Sunni patrons – most significantly, Pakistan. While the U.S. was useful for Iran to eliminate the Taliban government immediately following 9/11, Iran's ability to further influence Afghanistan for their benefit stalled. This reality reinforced the value of strategic convergence between Iran and the Taliban in the expulsion of foreign military forces from Iran's sphere of influence. Finally, by the last time period strategic convergence was challenged by the split of the Mashhad Shura from the Quetta Shura that occurred in 2011. Convergence remained between Iran and the Mashhad Shura, but not with the other Taliban shuras – at least not at previous levels. The table below summarizes the findings of the Iranian relationship with the Mashhad Taliban.

Afghanistan, Taliban: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: **2007**		*Time Period 2*: **2018**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***		***Semi-Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.056	Weak	0.061	Weak
Resist. Strength	0.667	Strong	0.333	Weak-Mod
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	5	***Asymmetric***	5	***Symmetric***
U.S.	2		3	
Informal Access	0.5	***Moderate***	0.5	***Moderate***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Mashhad TB	***Covert***	Mashhad TB	***Lean Covert***
Level of State Control	Mashhad TB	***Lean Dec.***	Mashhad TB	***Lean Cent.***

Table 4.5.   Iranian employment of intermediaries in Afghanistan, 2007-2018

With this case, the theory performs as expected during the second time period, but not the first. During the second time period, relatively permissive antecedent conditions, symmetric interests and moderate informal access result in covert, centralized employment, supporting hypothesis 4. In this instance, Quds was able to cultivate informal access primarily through strategic convergence. During the first time period, according to the theory, I expected to observe the more centralized and overt (hypothesis 2) employment of the Mashhad Taliban by Iran, when in fact, employment characterized as covert and leaning decentralized. Interests of the two countries border on the divide between symmetric and asymmetric. However, U.S. interests in the post-9/11 period and after two decades of involvement were fairly robust, perhaps offsetting the distinction by some degree. If the analysis took into account the amount of money spent by the U.S. in Afghanistan as a measure of commercial value, interests between the two states would likely be balanced, or even asymmetric in favor of the U.S. In this event, I would find more support for the theory. The next case covers Iraq from 2003-2011.

Iraq: 2003 – 2011

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 presented Iran with a strategic opportunity to enhance regional influence. The fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq constituted a success for Iran.[28] The lack of effective governing structures in Iraq, along with the weakness of U.S. governing strategy allowed Iran to manipulate the fragile political environment through the deployment of several intermediaries.

I use this case to analyze variation in the level of state control component of the DV. This case is unique because Iran developed a plan for intermediary employment long before the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, despite intimate relations with intermediaries during the first time period, loss of agency between the two time periods inspired the cultivation of new intermediaries. With this case, I find support for the theory during the first time period. The factors shaping the employment of intermediaries in Iraq are the most complex of this project – in conjunction with the post-ISIS case on Iraq. With this case, I observe the convergence of political, military and religious elements that shape intermediary employment. Iran demonstrates intent for the first time in this case to diversify multiple, sometimes competing, intermediaries to attain simultaneous or sequential gains as target conditions change. Such an approach provides Iran with operational flexibility while minimizing risk. The points above become clear through the following brief section on the contextual factors that framed Iran's intermediary employment and a brief background on initial political and military intermediary actors.

Contextual Factors Shaping Iran's Intermediary Employment in Iraq

Well before Saddam Hussein's (or Khomeini's) ascent to power, two of the most influential Shia families were those of Hakim and Sadr. Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim was the marja of Najaf from 1946-1970. While Hakim was marja, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was a young scholar at the Najaf seminary. During this period (1950s-1960s), a fundamental division developed that is reiterated throughout this chapter. There existed two major perceptions on the role of religion in politics. Traditionalists, or quietists,

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[28] Some even believe Iran was complicit with Russia in feeding disinformation to the U.S. about the presence of nuclear weapons. See Carl Wege, *Intelligence Elsewhere: Spies and Espionage Outside the Anglosphere*, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013.

believed religion was above politics (Aziz, 1993). This perspective was that of Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim,[29] his successor Grand Ayatollah Khoei, and that of the current marja of Najaf and disciple of Hakim, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The other camp consisted of activists or radicals who believed the Shia religious establishment should be involved in politics. The activist camp in Iraq was organized under a group called Jamaat al-Ulama, which was originally established to counter the antireligious trends in society that manifested through communism in the 1950s. This basic divide permeated the Shia establishment from Iraq to Iran to Afghanistan and Lebanon and still exists today.

In the late 1950s, the Dawa (*Hizb al-Dawa*) party was formed in Iraq. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr is widely recognized as the party's ideological founder and Muhsin al-Hakim's son, Mahdi al-Hakim is also recognized as one of the founding members (Aziz, 1993). Ayatollah Khomeini would later borrow heavily from the ideological underpinnings of al-Sadr and the Dawa party. The original goals of the Dawa party were to, "…indoctrinate revolutionaries, fight the corrupt [Iraqi] regime, and establish an Islamic state…and export the Islamic revolution to the rest of the world," (Aziz, 1993, p. 209). Branches of the party were successfully exported to Lebanon, likely through al-Sadr's familial ties to Jabal Amel and his cousin, Musa al-Sadr.

In April 1980, Saddam Hussein assassinated Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr (who was thereafter known as the First Martyr). Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim's son, subsequently fled to Iran. A few short months later in September, Saddam Hussein took advantage of the tumultuous situation in neighboring Iran amidst a struggling Iraqi economy and persistent fear of an Iraqi Shia revolution and invaded with a major ground offensive. For the purpose of this research, this war was important in two ways. First, the Iran-Iraq War was the first conflict in which Iran employed an intermediary against a foreign state. The Abouzar brigade was trained, indoctrinated and incentivized to fight against Iraq within the first year of the war (Uskowi, 2019). Second, this war resulted in the establishment of the foundational political and military structures that would facilitate future Iranian influence in Iraq. Most significantly was the establishment of the

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[29] Of note, Ayatollah Khomeini was hosted in exile from the Shah in Najaf from 1964-1978 by Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim.

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) in November, 1982 by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim (Felter & Fishman, 2008; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019; Ostovar, 2016, p. 111). This movement began as an attempt to organize Iraqi Shia refugees in Iran, and those Shia still in Iraq, into a political movement to spread the revolution in Iraq after the fall of Saddam. As the Iran-Iraq War gained momentum, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim subscribed to Ayatollah Khomeini's Velayat-e Faqih ideology and helped strengthen SCIRI. The IRGC was then charged with standing up a military wing of SCIRI that became the Badr Brigade (later Badr Corps or Organization) in 1983.

By the early 1990s, the Badr Corps was a robust organization with centralized command and control. They operated as an integrated element of the IRGC Quds force that received training in Iran (Felter & Fishman, 2008). By the late 1990s, the Badr Corps was organized geographically within Iraq along four major axes and funded by Iran with approximately $20 million per year (Iraq General Security Office, 2002). Leaders within Badr, such as Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani, Hadi al-Amiri, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, would later emerge as key figures in Iranian operations against the U.S. and post-ISIS. By the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003, Iran was well positioned with tentacles permeating the Shia socio-religious structures in Iraq to take advantage of the post-Saddam political and military situation.

The Islamic Dawa party also remained a prominent feature of Shia society and benefited from Iranian support despite the reluctance of the party to subscribe overtly to Velayat-e Faqih. Adherents remained split along quietist and activist lines. Nonetheless, by the time by the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003, Iran was active in support of the SCIRI and Dawa political structures and the Badr military arm of SCIRI. Captured Iraqi intelligence documents from the DoD Harmony Database reveal that prior to 2003 Badr utilized many of the tools Hezbollah employed, such as the provision of essential services like food and medicine to the Iraqi populace, and the use of illicit networks to smuggle personnel and resources into Iraq (Iraqi Intelligence Service, 1996). Iran found value in the multiple, often competing, Shia organizations operating in Iraq and by supporting each organization differently, they were able to diversify interests and minimize risk. This diversified intermediary support strategy continues to present day.

Pre-Invasion

With the intimate support of two powerful Shia political parties prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion, Iran found value in allowing the U.S. to topple the Iraqi Sunni government so the Dawa and SCIRI parties could inject officials in the new government. Militarily, Iran began conducting exercises with the IRGC Quds and Basij forces on the border of Iraq at least as early as December 2002 with clear indication by Iraqi intelligence officials that Iran anticipated and intended to take advantage of the pending U.S. invasion (Iraq General Military Intelligence Directorate, 2002).

On January 4, 2003 the Iraqi Military Intelligence Directorate drafted a memorandum to Saddam Hussein's Secretary on the activities of Iranian agents over the month of November 2002 (Iraq General Military Intelligence Directorate, 2003). Of particular interest was information provided to Iraqi intelligence officials by the Russian military attaché in Baghdad. The attaché informed the Iraqis of the emergence of serious disputes between the Iranian leadership and the Badr Corps due to the fact Ayatollah Khamenei authorized talks with the U.S. prior to the U.S. invasion. The referenced meetings were likely those of the Geneva Group mentioned in the section on the Mashhad Shura Taliban. The fallout with the Badr Corps was so severe that Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis, Deputy Commander of Badr at the time (and future commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah), submitted his resignation.[30] Hadi al-Amiri[31] subsequently urged solidarity in a 16-17 November 2002 meeting amongst Badr Corps leaders with reassurance that the coordination with the Americans was approved by the Supreme Leader. By early 2003, the

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[30] Muhandis presents a good example of how Iran used intermediaries to penetrate the Iraqi government. He joined the Dawa Party in 1977 and then fled to Iran when Dawa was outlawed. He was intimately involved in the 1983 attacks in Kuwait on embassies that supported Saddam (U.S. and France). He fled back to Iran and was convicted in absentia by Kuwait. After the 2003 invasion, he became a senior advisor to interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari. In 2005 he was elected to Iraqi Parliament. Finally, in 2006 the U.S. raised a red flag over their concern of Muhandis' past involvement in Kuwait and he fled again to Iran. He then formed Ka'taib Hezbollah in 2007. He was killed in a drone strike with Qasem Soleimani in January 2020.

[31] Hadi al-Ameri served as Muhandis' chief of staff and would later become the leader of Badr, a Member of Iraqi Parliament, and the Secretary of Transportation. In 2011, he accompanied the Prime Minister to a visit in the Oval Office with President Obama. In late 2019, he participated in the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Iraqis firmly believed the U.S. was coordinating tactically with the Badr Corps – thanks mostly to information provided by the Russian military attaché.

U.S. Invasion 2003

As the U.S. and allies initiated operations in Iraq on March 19, 2003, Iran did its best to minimize conflict and interaction. Their best option and likely strategy was to use the anticipated post-invasion elections to emplace Iranian surrogates through the Dawa and SCIRI parties. Despite the approach of putting political opportunity first, Iran still postured militarily through intermediaries for use as conditions dictated. Within the first two weeks of combat operations, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed frustration over the operations of the Iranian supported Badr Corps and stated armed members of Badr would be considered enemy combatants.[32] Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim quickly countered Rumsfeld, stating to Iranian state run media that Badr was a purely Iraqi entity made up of Iraqi youth and there was no link between Badr and the IRGC (Loughlin, 2003). Hakim further said Badr had been fighting the Iraqi regime for 20 years and they didn't need permission from the U.S. to lead a campaign against Saddam's regime. There were several indications that Iran was hopeful at what might transpire through the U.S. ejection of the Hussein government. Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the IRGC made several comments in the first weeks of the war on the benefits that Iran could receive as a result of U.S. operations in Iraq, including potential reparations from the Iran-Iraq War and the elimination of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) organization that fought against Iran during the war (Radio Free Europe, 2003). Iranian government officials understood the value of permitting the U.S. to remove the Saddam regime. The time it took for the U.S. to get to the stability phase of operations, however, was cause for consternation. Iran was prepared for this contingency with a strategy for intermediary employment.

Iranian strategy for intermediary employment in the period after initial U.S. operations in 2003 consisted of two major efforts in the political and military realms: SCIRI, Dawa and Badr were those with which Iran cultivated relationships prior to the U.S. invasion; and Jaish al-Mahdi/Office of the Martyr Sadr, and the Special Groups constitute

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[32] During the March 28, 2003 Pentagon press conference, Rumsfeld also threated action against Syria if they continued to support Iraq with military resources.

the second segment that Iran began a relationship with after the U.S. invasion. The remainder of this section will briefly expand on these intermediary groups.

Political Intermediaries

The hesitancy of Iran to activate Badr against coalition forces indicated Iranian intent to give primacy to the political line of effort as the best way to maximize influence over Iranian favored outcomes. Elections were initially planned to occur sometime during the summer of 2003. Marines in Najaf, Iraq began registering voters on May 28, 2003 at local schools (Rohde, 2003). However, the next day voter registration was suspended by the new administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), Ambassador Paul Bremer. This came on the heels of his first two administrative orders under the CPA on May 16th, which were the disbandment of the Ba'ath Party and of the Iraqi Army. Members of SCIRI and others in the region expressed frustration with the U.S. decision to postpone elections. They felt elections could bring clarity to the chaos of combat that just occurred and a delay served as a hinderance of Iranian placement of political operatives.

Iranian political surrogates were strategically woven into the Iraqi fabric from the earliest days of U.S. efforts to rebuild the government. Iran desired the establishment of an Iraqi government that was relatively independent of the U.S. and thus, susceptible to Iranian influence (Taremi, 2005). The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) that was established in the aftermath of major combat operations consisted of several Iran friendly members. The interim governing council was established by Paul Bremer in July 2003 to organize a constitutional convention, hold elections and appoint diplomats and ministers (Sachs & Brinkley, 2003). The governing council consisted of 25 members and was designed to provide a proportionate number of seats to each of Iraq's ethno-religious populations. As popular majority, the Shia were provided sixty-percent of the seats. Half of the Shia representatives were previously in exile during Saddam's reign, mostly in Iran (Otterman, 2005). Most significantly, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim (SCIRI) and Ibrahim Al-Jaafari (Dawa) were members of the council who both lived in Iran for substantial portions of their exile.

The Bush administration decided to hand sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government by June 30, 2004 and subsequently write the constitution and hold elections in order to deescalate popular discontent over the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)

administration of the country (Katzman, 2005). Elections were held for a provisional national and provincial assembly on January 30, 2005. This assembly was charged with drafting the constitution and putting it to a national vote. Elections for a permanent government were to follow approval of the constitution.

In advance of the January 2005 elections, SCIRI and Dawa allied under the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) (Katzman, 2005). Abdul Aziz al-Hakim was the top candidate on the UIA slate and Ibrahim al-Jaafari was number seven on the slate. UIA won 48-percent of the vote thanks to a Shia turnout of around 70-percent and Ibrahim al-Jaafari was designated as the Prime Minister. A constitution was later approved on October 15, 2005 and a full-term government was elected on December 15, 2005. The UIA again won the majority of seats, but Sunnis and Kurds mandated that the Prime Minister be someone other than Jaafari. Nouri al-Maliki was nominated and approved in place of Jaafari. Maliki was also a senior Dawa Party member who spent considerable exile time in Iran and Syria, where he built a powerful relationship with Hezbollah (Katzman, 2009).

In May 2007, the leadership of SCIRI enacted some changes that put the perception of distance between the party and Iran, likely due to angst amongst constituents and non-Shia peers over Iranian influence on Iraqi politics. They renamed the organization the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), dropping "Revolution" from the previous name which was a direct linkage to the revolutionary component of Shia Islam linked to Khomeini (Felter & Fishman, 2008; Katzman, 2009). Additionally, they shifted doctrinal platform (Risalah) to follow Grand Ayatollah Sistani from Ayatollah Khamenei – indicating a shift from the radical approach of Shia Islam to the quietist approach (Felter & Fishman, 2008, p. 47).

The fissure between the ISCI and Dawa also widened by August 2009. The Iraqi National Alliance was formed with leadership from the ISCI by Ammar al-Hakim, son of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. This alliance notably included all major Shia political figures, including the Sadr movement, but did not include Nouri al-Maliki (Katzman, 2009). Maliki was given the opportunity to join the alliance, but the alliance would not guarantee his position as prime minister, thus he built a coalition of his own.

Muqtada al-Sadr also pursued a political angle. His party was the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). Sadr was both a hindrance and resource for Iran's strategy. He was resolute in his hatred of the U.S. invasion and critical of Shia who left Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein, such as most Dawa and SCIRI leaders. Through rhetoric focused on these points, he was able to appeal to the hearts and minds of many Shia who also suffered under Saddam in Iraq. Iran continually sought opportunities to appeal to this base.

The overall Iranian political intermediary strategy was not without risk. Political influence is inherently subject to agency loss in the employment of intermediaries. As intermediary politicians and political parties enter into electoral representation, the revisionist state must relinquish a certain amount of agency to the constituency from which the representatives are elected. This was exactly the case with SCIRI and Dawa over time. Therefore, the revisionist state, as the employer, was forced to develop a multi-prong strategy to diversify interests and maximize gains attained through various intermediaries. This diversity occured endogenously to the political realm – as seen with SCIRI and Dawa, but also exogenously to the military and economic realms where possible. The next section will cover what transpired over the same period in the military realm.

Militant Intermediary Strategy

At the time the U.S. invaded Iraq, Iran's militant intermediary influence was concentrated on the 16,000 member Badr organization (Taremi, 2005). Badr was deeply entrenched in Iraqi society with clandestine cells networked across the country. As of the mid-1990s, Iraqi intelligence officials were keenly aware of the penetration of Badr into Iraqi society and their actions to position leaders and network among other key Iraqi players, such as the Kurds (Iraqi Intelligence Service M4 D2/2, 1996). Before the U.S. invasion, Badr received training and resources from both the IRGC Quds Force and Hezbollah to fight against Saddam Hussein (Felter & Fishman, 2008). As of October, 2002, the IRGC was providing Badr with approximately $20 million per year, as well as health insurance, freedom of travel in Iranian cities and registration in Iranian schools for their children (Iraq General Security Office, 2002). These earlier years of Badr support helped Iran build extensive networks for smuggling and resource provision throughout the broader region. As the U.S. initiated major operations in 2003, a letter from the Supreme Leader to

IRGC Commander-in-Chief, Major General Rahim Safavi, directed Quds and Badr not to interfere with U.S. forces and the political process due to the primacy of their political strategy (Golpaygani, 2005). Rather, they were positioned in Iraq as a contingency force to be employed if the elections did not transpire in Iran's favor. This was part of a policy termed "active neutrality," which Ayatollah Khamenei described as a refusal to side with either belligerent during hostilities (Taremi, 2005).

In an effort to minimize attribution of nefarious activity and appease U.S. military officials, the Badr organization was renamed the Badr Reconstruction and Development organization during the early part of U.S. intervention (Stanford University, 2019a). Later, large portions of Badr were absorbed into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The absorption of Badr into the ISF was part of a deal brokered between Nouri al-Maliki and Qasem Soleimani in 2008 after intense fighting against Special Groups in Basra (Ostovar, 2016, p. 174). Soleimani saw the move as in Iran's favor because it further integrated pro-Iranian intermediaries into the legitimately elected Iraqi government. Despite these adjustments to the organizational structure and branding of Badr, this intermediary represented that over which Iran exercised the highest level of control. However, within Badr even before the U.S. invasion, there was competition over ideology in concert with the quietist and radical strains of Shia Islam. The competition would eventually lead to factionalism and the formation of splinter groups.

In the spring of 2008, U.S. and partnered Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) conducted a series of offensive operations directed at new Iranian backed networks. Several declassified interrogation reports over the course of 2007-2008 reveal extensive training and resources provided to detainees in Iran and Lebanon during the same period (Unidentified U.S. Intelligence Agency, 2008). The development of splinter factions from both Badr and JAM over the 2007-2008 time period was perceived by Iran as an opportunity for diversified interests. These groups were termed "Special Groups" or "Special Criminal Groups" by coalition forces. The primary organizations were Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), and the Sheibani network. Collectively, Iranian support to the Special Groups (SGs) constituted much more than the relatively subtle nudges they provided to Muqtada al-Sadr and with a much higher degree of control. Both the IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah were intimate in the training and resource provision of these groups, similar to their

relationship with Badr before the war. Coalition force detainees revealed through interrogation that they were smuggled by bus and air out of Iraq to destinations in Iran, Syria and Lebanon (Unidentified U.S. Intelligence Agency, 2008). They were trained by uniformed IRGC and Hezbollah members on all aspects of military operations, including weapons training, surveillance, map reading, resisting interrogation and communications. The recruits underwent training in a very structured environment for two to four weeks and were provided a cash stipend once training was complete. Intelligence documents discovered by British forces and interrogations after the arrest of AAH and Hezbollah leaders revealed that the IRGC provided up to $3 million per month to the SGs (Gordon, 2007; Ostovar, 2016). The leaders of the special groups were all former Badr or JAM militants who no longer felt they could see their goals realized through their original organizations. Qais Khazali, the founder of AAH, previously served as a lieutenant in JAM and departed when Sadr was forced to deescalate. Muhandis founded KH in 2007 after serving in Badr before the U.S. invasion and the in new Iraqi government as a parliamentarian until his nefarious background was discovered by the U.S. in 2005. Finally, the Sheibani network was led by former Badr commander, Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani. Prior to the invasion, Sheibani led logistics and smuggling operations for the IRGC with Badr (Felter & Fishman, 2008). By 2005, Sheibani was using his decades old smuggling tactics to move munitions, such as Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs), into Iraq for use against coalition forces. In addition to the specialized training and resource provision, Iran also structurally organized the various SGs across Iraq to maximize utility, command and control.

Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia, Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM), were representative of a different relationship. This one could be classified as an intermittent strategic partnership, where Iran essentially had no control or agency. As the situation in Iraq progressed, Iran both benefitted and suffered from the actions and support base of Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia, Jaish al-Mahdi. There were efforts to nudge Muqtada al-Sadr's behavior in 2004 during a period of uprisings in Najaf and Sadr City, ultimately leading to a de-escalation, but Sadr remained unpredictable. In 2008, Sadr signed a ceasefire agreement with coalition forces and redirected JAM toward the provision of social services and political opportunity (Stanford University, 2019b). As U.S. forces withdrew from Iraq in 2011, Sadr and JAM

were no longer in position to serve as an intermediary for Iran, either wittingly or unwittingly.

Through various levels of intermediary employment, with some relationships decades old, Iran was in a position to strategically adjust control and exert influence in Iraq almost at will. The IRGC anticipated and was prepared for the U.S. invasion. They postured for political gains through all cycles of elections and developed mechanisms to nudge behavior in their favor. Actions by coalition forces, Sunni insurgents and rogue Shia militias were all met by differing strategies of intermediary influence. By the time U.S. forces withdrew in 2011, Iran's military and political actors were integrated into Iraqi institutions. As I just highlighted, the employment of Iran's intermediaries in Iraq was incredibly complex and nuanced. Intermediary employment was shaped by religious, political and military factors at a level not exhibited in any other case. Additionally, the number of intermediaries provided Iran with agility in application. The following section applies the theory to this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis of this segment on Iraq are 2003 when the U.S. invaded Iraq and 2011 when the majority of U.S. forces withdrew.

Attribution

During the first time period (2003), attribution for all intermediaries is assessed as covert. In late March, 2003, Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim stated in an interview with state run media, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), that Badr Corps staff, weapons and training facilities solely existed in Iraq and there was no link between Badr and the IRGC (Loughlin, 2003). This statement came as a response to U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's remarks at a Pentagon press conference on March 28, 2003 where he stated:

> The entrance into Iraq by military forces, intelligence personnel, or proxies not under the direct operational control of General Franks will be taken as a potential threat to coalition forces. This includes the Badr Corps, the military wing of the Supreme Council on the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. The Badr Corps is trained, equipped and directed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard and we will hold the Iranian government responsible

for their actions and we view the Badr Corps activity inside Iraq as unhelpful. Armed Badr Corps members found in Iraq will have to be treated as combatants (Rumsfeld, 2003).

Additionally, the Supreme Leader ordered the IRGC and subordinate units (Badr) to, "…not carry out any operations whatsoever which *might identify* themselves until the elections," (Golpaygani, 2005). Khamenei went on to say the forces should prepare to conduct a coup d'état if elections did not go as well as planned. Baqir al-Hakim made a clear attempt to distance the work of SCIRI and Badr from the IRGC despite U.S. statements to the contrary. The absorption of large numbers of Badr personnel into the Iraqi security forces in 2008 reinforced this point, as did actions taken after the death of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim to distance SCIRI/ISCI from Iran. The Iranians redirected focus by pointing to examples of involvement for which they did seek attribution. Iran acknowledged their moral and financial support for the Shia community during the first time period, but Iranian President Khatami argued this did not constitute an act of interference. He used religion by stating it was Iran's right to, "…assist its coreligionists elsewhere," but openly denied the charge that Iran was providing military assistance to Iraqi Shia (Taremi, 2005).

For the second time period in 2011, attribution is rated as leaning covert for all groups. Iran was forced to reassess the situation as U.S. presence lagged, Sadr's JAM served as a wild-card and Sunni resistance to U.S. occupation quickly gained steam. Iran was forced to seek other intermediary means to influence the strategic situation as the political process progressed and political intermediaries were forced to distance themselves from Iran to gain political resources from both constituents and the U.S. In summary, intermediaries in Iraq were used with varying levels of attribution. The Iranians felt they could achieve the greatest gains and long-term stability through the political process; thus, the political intermediaries were the primary focus for Iran – at least in the beginning.

Level of State Control

Levels of state control over intermediaries in Iraq varied during both time periods. Control over SCIRI and Dawa during the first time period is rated as leaning decentralized and decentralized, respectively. Once the new Iraqi governing structures began to emerge, the perception of control over political intermediaries by Iran had to

appear non-existent. The control Iran exercised occurred prior to 2003 by putting the intermediaries in position to maximize opportunity when the time came for employment. The balanced strategy of simultaneously preparing militant intermediaries was an attempt to mitigate risk due to lack of political control. By 2011, Iran was forced to relinquish even more control, or at least the perception of control, in order to ensure political parties with some level of ideological and strategic convergence remained in power. Thus, control over the political intermediaries during the second time period is rated as decentralized.

Control over Badr corresponds with control over SCIRI/ISCI. During the first time period, Badr followed orders that emanated from Iran as they operated as a subordinate unit under IRGC Quds (Felter & Fishman, 2008). They did not interfere in the primary political strategy of Iran and they redirected efforts from potential violent confrontation to reconstruction and development and integration into the Iraqi security forces, which would suit long-term Iranian interests.

Control over other militant intermediaries increased between the two time periods. Muqtada al-Sadr was vehemently opposed to Iranian interference during the first time period. However, once Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) began to interfere with Iranian plans for elections, Iran very deliberately redirected Sadr. In the spring of 2004, Muqtada al-Sadr and JAM initiated a series of violent uprisings in Najaf that lasted for several weeks. Iran was adamant that elections occur the following January and feared that prolonged unrest would cause the U.S. to further entrench U.S. forces, delaying the emplacement of Iranian political intermediaries. Prior to this incident, Iran benefited occasionally from the actions of Sadr due his high appeal among the Iraqi Shia population, but they exercised no real control over Sadr's actions. However, the spring/summer 2004 ordeal in Najaf required an effort by Iran to escalate control over Sadr's actions. As a result, Iranian deployed diplomats to Baghdad to negotiate an end to the hostilities. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami criticized Muqtada al-Sadr publicly as a threat to Shia interests. And finally, Sadr's clerical mentor, Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, renounced Sadr and stated he was no longer al-Haeri's representative in Iraq (Burns et al., 2004; Felter & Fishman, 2008). Sadr relented. Through informal mechanisms of dependency manipulation, Iran was able to generate control over the actions of Sadr.

Finally, the development of Special Groups (SGs) represented a new mechanism of control over outcomes in Iraq. Iran deliberately pursued avenues of intermediary employment where a high level of control could be cultivated through dependency. Divisions that developed as a result of factionalization of Badr and JAM were exploited by Iran. SGs were centrally trained, often in Iran and structurally organized to maximize command and control. Iran cultivated relationships with the SGs using the same techniques they used with Hezbollah in the 1980s and was able to use the SGs as leverage in control over desired outcomes in Iraq. Control of SGs during the second time period is rated as centralized.

In summary, with this case simultaneous variation in levels of attribution and control over intermediaries existed. This approach appears deliberate by Iran in pursuit of their grand strategy. Iran was able to employ various intermediaries, sometimes in competition with one another, to maintain desired levels of attribution and control. Not mentioned in the analysis of the DV above is the surge in forces in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2006-2011. This point compounded Iran's concern with a very large number of U.S. troops Iran's eastern and western borders. There was an omnipresent concern that Iran could be the next target of U.S. invasion. The table below summarized assessments for attribution and state control for this case. The next section will evaluate the explanatory variables for Iraq.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Iraq: 2003-2011	2003	Iran	SCIRI/Badr	Covert	Lean Dec.
			Dawa	Covert	Decentralized
		US	JAM	Lean Covert	Decentralized
	2011	Iran	SCIRI/Badr	Covert	Decentralized
			Dawa	Covert	Decentralized
		US	Special Groups	Covert	Centralized

Table 4.6.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Iraq 2003-2011

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

During the first time period, domestic institutions ceased to exist. Many government institutions that were in existence as coalition forces entered Iraq were shuttered with the disbandment of the Ba'ath Party. Slowly, after the establishment of the CPA, Iraqi Governing Council and interim government, the strength of domestic institutions improved with several caveats. For the initial time period up until at least 2005, domestic institutional strength can be rated as weak, with the average strength of key government capabilities based on world bank governance indicators around 17-percent. By 2011 with the U.S. departure, indicators moved in the positive direction – most significantly under political stability and voice and accountability, with the average at just over 24-percent. For comparison, indicators for the U.S. range between 77-percent in 2003 to just over 75-percent on average in 2011.

During the first time period, Iraq was almost entirely dependent on external assistance. In 2004, the Paris Club put together a plan to reduce Iraqi external debt by 80-percent from the $114 billion (three times GDP) in 2003 (International Monetary Fund, 2005). The most significant revenue generating source, oil, was plagued by significant infrastructure dilapidation and sabotage. Additionally, the volatility of the oil market during both time periods made stable revenue generation difficult. By the second time period, external debt dropped to about 47.5-percent of GDP (International Monetary Fund, 2010). However, external debt remained incredibly vulnerable to oil price and production shocks. External dependency is rated as high during both time periods.

Economic indicators for the first time period demonstrate considerable weakness, as would be expected in the aftermath of large-scale foreign intervention. Unemployment among key populations, such as educated youth were over 35-percent (International Monetary Fund, 2005). Inflation during the first time period was incredibly high, well over 30-percent. By 2011, economic indicators for Iraq improved considerably, but overall, the economy remained vulnerable. Poverty was high, around 23-percent, but the gap between the average income of the poor population under poverty was

only 4.5-percent from the poverty line (poverty gap), indicating a small shift in income could lift the majority of the poor population out of poverty (International Monetary Fund, 2010). Inflation dropped to around six-percent, but unemployment was still over five-percent.

Overall, the strength of institutions is rated as weak for both time periods. Considerable progress was observed over the two time periods, but the significant weakness of governing institutions remained a vulnerability for the employment of intermediaries throughout. The next section will address the strength of popular resistance. Popular Resistance.

Iraq is incredibly fractious. Socio-ethnically, fraction is woven into the fabric of daily life, due mostly to the brutal repression of Sunni Arab Saddam Hussein. Shia were systematically marginalized and repressed in much the same fashion as the Kurds in the north. Within each socio-ethnic subset, further bifurcation generated divergent outcomes. Splits within the Shia and Kurdish camps were significant. Unlike Lebanon, the Shia community in Iraq falls under no single umbrella organization. Those loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini were typically in opposition to other dominant Shia elements, such as with Muqtada al-Sadr, who is opposed to the domination and subjugation of any outsider.

The emplacement of political intermediaries by Iran afforded the same benefits achieved through the emplacement of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics. Their interests were immediately served through high ranking positions by SCIRI, Dawa and related Shia groups in the first Iraqi Governing Council, the interim government and each successive elected government. Additionally, high ranking officials were appointed to significant positions of power in various government ministries. Initial weakness of the Iraqi government served Iranian interests well, as SCIRI and Dawa were able to place their personnel in key positions amidst the initial chaos and confusion. Participation of intermediaries in the initial inefficient government added legitimacy to their cause.

The movement in support of Muqtada al-Sadr was of the radical variety with strong ties emanating out of Sadr City. The efforts of Muqtada al-Sadr strongly resonated with the Iraqi Shia population for two reasons: he struggled alongside the Iraqi Shia during the reign of Saddam rather than seeking exile; and he vehemently opposed the

occupation or interference of any outside power in the politics of Iraq – including the Iranians.

The illicit economic structures within Iraq during both time periods were considerable and a source of major funding for groups such as Badr, the Special Groups and Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). The peak of such efforts for JAM occurred from 2003 until 2007, when Muqtada al-Sadr fled to Iran to strengthen his Shia religious education. In April 2003, an Iraqi Ayatollah exiled to Iran, Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, authorized Sadr to collect the khums, or Islamic taxes, from local Iraqis on his behalf totaling around $65,000 per month (Williams & Bisbee, 2016). More substantial was the massive influx of American cash in the years immediately following the invasion led to an estimated figure of more than $8 billion in waste, fraud and abuse from coalition force investments alone (Bowen, 2013). Additionally, Iraq is in possession of the second largest oil reserves in the world, behind Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi infrastructure was left in shambles by the Hussein administration, which made the oil systems vulnerable to black market adoption. By 2007, the World Bank estimated that up to 30-percent of Iraqi refined fuels were being diverted to the black market and directly contributing to the funding of malign actors (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007). Further, coalition forces at the time (much like Afghanistan) were ordered not to interfere in black market operations and even authorized to allow Iraqi security forces to make use of government resources for questionable personal use at the time.[33]

As summarized previously, the Shia population was divided based on the leadership of the Ayatollahs. Traditionalists, or quietists, believed their role in politics was one of passivity and advisement. The radicals were much more aggressive and critical of the government. SCIRI and Badr were founded by those with a radical interpretation (Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim) and although Dawa founder, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, was also a radical, the populace who affiliated with the Dawa party was split along ideological lines. Beyond the Shia population, the entire country of Iraq was even more factionalized along socio-ethnic lines (Sunni, Shia, Arab, Kurdish, etc.) The

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[33] This point is based on personal experience of the author and interview with U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Gregory Polk on May 28, 2020.

tremendous socio-ethnic divides translated to incredibly homogenous and robust networks. SCIRI, Badr and the IRGC spent considerable time leading up to the U.S. invasion building ties between their organizations and social structures. Economic and social partnerships prevailed throughout the U.S. invasion and served Iranian interests over both time periods. In summary, resistance strength is rated as strong for both time periods. This evaluation, in conjunction with weak domestic institutions results in permissive antecedent conditions.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

The interests of Iran and the U.S. as status quo power were quite similar during the first time period, with geographic proximity as the only factor giving Iran the lead. Geographically, Iraq is contiguous to Iran and distant from the United States. The U.S. did position forces in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at various points before and during involvement in Iraq, but interests in Iraq were not due to proximate geography for the U.S.

While there were no formal alliances between Iran or the U.S. and Iraq, there were important historical ties that played a role in state interests. For Iran, the recent memory of the Iran-Iraq War and persistent concern of Sunni domination guided interest. Additionally, the prevalent Shia population in Iraq, important religious centers of education, and tombs of important imams tied the history of Iran and the Shia religion to Iraq. For the U.S., there remained an undercurrent of unfinished business after the first Gulf War that plagued policymakers. Mention of Iraq and Saddam Hussein arose the day after 9/11 inside the White House. Further, U.S. forces had a presence in Kurdistan on several occasions after the Gulf War, where special operations forces developed important relationships. Lastly, as the status quo power, the U.S. had an obligation through alliances, such as the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), to act on intelligence that indicated WMD presence in Iraq. So, the existence of the NPT and the persistent threat of terrorism from the broader region added a layer of complexity for the U.S. that motivated interests. Thus, Iran is rated as having weak historical ties/alliances with Iraq during the first time period, whereas the WMD and terrorism considerations compounded U.S. interests equating to strong ties to Iraq. For the second time period, the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that marked the U.S. departure from Iraq bound future relations with the two countries. Additionally, the several rounds of negotiations between Iran and Iraq

on national security, commerce, religion and war reparations strengthened formal ties between the two countries. Thus, both Iran and the U.S. are rated as having strong alliances/historical ties during the second time period.

Commercial value for both actors was relatively low during the first time period, with just over one-percent of Iran's exports going to Iraq and 0.04-percent of U.S. exports going to Iraq. However, within two years, the commercial value of Iraq was much higher to Iran than the U.S. In June 2005, Iran's foreign minister visited Baghdad to establish a joint commission to expand bilateral relations and two weeks later, Iraqi Prime Minister Jaafari and ten cabinet members visited Tehran to continue talks (Taremi, 2005). Several agreements were made, including the reopening of consulates; the issuance of visas to Iranian businessmen; a signed memorandum on security cooperation between ministers of defense; the coordination of efforts against terrorism; the construction of two oil pipelines between Basra, Iraq and Abadan, Iran; the provision of electricity from Iran to Iraq; the expansion of transportation and tourism corridors; and a commitment by Iran to provide a $1 billion loan to Iraq for the purchase of goods and services from Iran (Taremi, 2005). By 2011, Iran was one of Iraq's largest trading partners. Nearly four-percent of Iran's total exports went to Iraq, while just 0.16-percent of U.S. exports went to Iraq. Unmentioned is the relative importance of Iraqi oil to international markets. The U.S. has a significant commercial interest in maintaining Iraqi access to international markets. For the purposes of this analysis, Iraq is rated as having little to no commercial value for Iran or the U.S. during the first time period. However, by the second time period, it is clear that Iraq was of greater commercial value to Iran.

In summary, the interests of the revisionist state and the status quo power were relatively symmetric during the first time period. The looming nature of 9/11 and intelligence indicating the presence of WMDs in Iraq catalyzed U.S. interests during the first time period. By the second time period, interests became asymmetric in favor of Iran. Notably, the nature of intermediary employment changed simultaneously.

Informal Access (IV3)

The socio-cultural proximity for Iran's employment of intermediaries in Iraq can be rated as similar for both time periods. Within Iraq, the tombs of Imam Ali in

Najaf, and Imam Hussein, in Karbala, are revered by Shia all over the world. The tombs serve as the sites of the prestigious hawzas and destinations for pilgrimage. Tens of thousands of Iranian Shia intermingled with the Arabs around these two cities for generations and strengthened through marriage and friendship the influence of Iran within Iraqi society (Taremi, 2005).

Iraq possessed a Shia majority population during both time periods, the vast majority of which are of the same branch of Twelver Shia. Through the employment of SCIRI and Badr prior to the U.S. invasion and the long history of intermingling through the Iraqi Shia religious hawzas, Iraq had a built-in informal access network. Similar to Hezbollah, Badr performed social services to Iraqi Shia that included food distribution, coordination with economic and social organizations and the establishment of cover companies to mask illicit activities (Iraqi Intelligence, 2005). In recognition of greater opportunity, through the 1980s-90s, Iran further developed weak ties by providing the Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) party with military resources, including heavy weapons and mortars in 1996 (Iraqi Intelligence Service M4 D2/2, 1996). The relationship developed further when the Kurds provided Badr, SCIRI and Dawa with sanctuary in northern Iraq as the Iranian intermediaries further established networks and capabilities.

Ideological convergence was clearly present; however, convergence was split among the intermediaries Iran employed. The Iranians diversified their approach to the employment of intermediaries to maximize returns on both ideological and strategic convergence. While SCIRI/Badr had a high degree of ideological convergence as the only organizations besides Lebanese Hezbollah that subscribed to Khomeini's Velayat-e Faqih, they did not have the trust and support of the majority of the populace they were attempting to represent largely because the leadership of these organizations lived in exile outside Iran during the reign of Saddam. Muqtada al-Sadr exploited this point in earnest. Sadr was vehemently opposed to any outside influence and did not converge ideologically with Iran. Within Dawa, ideological convergence was a clear point of division. Half of the party followed the quietist camp, while the other half was in support of the revolutionary approach advocated by Dawa founder, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (Felter & Fishman, 2008). The lack of ideological unification within the party hampered Iran's level of control. Finally, for the SGs, ideological convergence manifested by the second time period, in

concert with strategic convergence. In summary, ideological convergence is rated as moderate during the first time period. It was present for SCIRI and Badr during the first time period, and split among Dawa and absent from JAM/OMS. For the second time period, ideological convergence weakened somewhat among ISCI/Badr, split among Dawa and was strong among the Special Groups. The lagged presence of coalition forces in Iraq acted as a catalyst that pushed more Shia toward ideological convergence with Iran. Collectively, ideological convergence is rated as high for the second time period.

Strategic convergence changed with the two major intermediary groups over time. During the first time period, strategic convergence with SCIRI, Dawa and Badr was high. With Muqtada al-Sadr and JAM, strategic convergence was observed, but not intentional. Most significantly during the first time period, Sadr was adamantly opposed to both U.S. presence in Iraq and Iranian influence – in direct contradiction with Iran's "politics first" strategy. However, the Najaf crisis precipitated by Sadr that played out over 2004 did end up converging strategically with Iranian ambitions. Although Iran had no control over Sadr at the time, the instability caused by JAM reinforced the importance of drafting the constitution and conducting elections, which Iran's SCIRI and Dawa intermediaries were well positioned to influence (Felter & Fishman, 2008). Further, Sadr's ability to energize his constituent base was useful for Iran to the degree Iran was able to influence Sadr (through Sistani and Haeri) to join the political fray. During the second time period, the ISCI was forced to distance from Iran, although their participation and influence in the Iraqi political system converged with Iranian strategy. JAM was essentially a non-actor, but the cultivation of the new Special Groups was built on strategic convergence.

In summary, informal access by Iran is rated as high for both time periods. Through some combination of intermediary employment, Iran was able to maintain high informal access throughout both time periods. Once they began to lose influence with SCIRI/Badr around 2008-2009, they pursued other options that manifested through the Special Groups. Thus, by the second time period, informal access was used to cultivate the employment of centrally controlled, covert intermediaries.

Target Summary

Through the employment of intermediaries in 2003-2011 Iraq, Iran grew increasingly aware that their strategy for influence required diversity. Their intermediary employment strategy gave primacy to political intermediaries and all other militant relationships were developed or influenced in an effort to maximize political outcomes. The situation in Iraq presented Iran with a strategic paradox. The U.S. was responsible for guiding the development of the new government. In order for Iran's political surrogates, SCIRI and Dawa, to improve their position within the governing apparatus, they were required to collaborate with the U.S. out of necessity. As a result, this collaboration occasionally led to outcomes that were not beneficial to Iran – which weakened intermediary dependency on Iran. Another way to say this is Iran lost agency over outcomes. In an effort to balance agency losses over one group, Iran diversified interests by employing multiple (often competing) intermediaries. The paradox played out again with Iran's relationship with Muqtada al-Sadr. Sadr's initial foray into violence as a means of influence threatened the 2005 Iraqi elections. Iran employed a multi-prong strategy to nudge Sadr toward a level of compliance that was acceptable to their interests. This included a desire to bring Sadr into the political fold with the hope that his powerful popular base of support would come as well. Ultimately, this effort led to another level of Shia bifurcation that was good and bad for Iranian ambition. Over and again, Iran discovered that in order to achieve the outcomes they desired, they had to relinquish agency over intermediaries and seek opportunities to employ other intermediaries as control mechanisms in attainment of their grand strategy. (Which was America out; Shia in majority control of Iraq; and Iraq somewhat dependent on Iran).

The maintenance of non-attribution with militant intermediaries was essential to Iran's strategy of influence in Iraq. If violent actions in Iraq were directly attributed to Iran, SCIRI and Dawa would be at serious risk of losing electoral support and Iran's strategy of influence would fail to the Sunni opposition. Thus, attribution and control with militant intermediaries were typically covert and decentralized to mask involvement. Further, Iran made significant efforts to redirect attention to areas where attribution was beneficial to their strategy. For example, the perception of de-escalation of Badr through the integration into the Iraqi Security Forces represented something Iran could point to as

an example of how they relinquished control of elements of disruption. Additionally, to further mask nefarious activities, Iran made financial, economic and infrastructure investments to the Iraqi government and organizations. These investments served two outcomes. First, they provided intermediaries tied to the organizations a way to influence the Iraqi populace with means other than violence. This method was used specifically with contributions to Muqtada al-Sadr's political efforts (Felter & Fishman, 2008). Second, the investments reinforced the perception of non-attribution or plausible deniability. Iran could easily point to their August 2004 $300 million infrastructure investment as an example of their true intentions.

In summary, Iran's diverse array of multiple intermediaries with simultaneous levels of attribution and control is reflective of conditions on the ground in Iraq, and Iran's dynamic effort to maximize potential influence while minimizing escalation with the status quo power. This case is representative of how varying levels of informal access can influence the employment multiple intermediaries in pursuit of broader strategy. The table below summarizes the findings for this case.

Iraq: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: **2003**		*Time Period 2*: **2011**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***		***Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.057	Weak	0.247	Weak-Mod.
Resist. Strength	0.833	Strong	0.833	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	5	***Symmetric***	6	***Asymmetric***
U.S.	3		3	
Informal Access	0.88	***High***	1	***High***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	SCIRI/Badr	***Covert***	SCIRI/Badr	***Covert***
	Dawa	***Covert***	Dawa	***Covert***
	JAM	***Lean Covert***	Special Grps	***Covert***
Level of State Control	SCIRI/Badr	***Lean Decent.***	SCIRI/Badr	***Decentralized***
	Dawa	***Decentralized***	Dawa	***Decentralized***
	JAM	***Decentralized***	Special Grps	***Centralized***

Table 4.7.   Employment of Iranian intermediaries in Iraq, 2003-2011

With this case, the theory performs as expected during the first time period. Permissive antecedent conditions, symmetric interests and high informal access resulted in covert, decentralized intermediary employment, supporting hypothesis 3. During the second time period, interests became asymmetric (IV2). According to the theory, in this case we should expect to observe overt, centralized employment. However, what we observed was the cultivation of a new intermediary (SGs) with a higher degree of centralized control. This is an outcome the theory would associate with symmetric interests.

The asymmetric conditions during the second time period may have been inflated due to massive U.S. force presence, leaving the perception of symmetric interests. Additionally, if the model were perceived from a maximum utility perspective rather than sequential, I would find more support for the theory. The change in informal access can be attributed to the desire of Iran to create greater informal access, which supports hypothesis

4. Iran initially found considerable value in their initial "politics first" strategy and passive Badr emplacement. However, as U.S. presence lagged and Iraqi actors such as Muqtada al-Sadr and competing Sunni elements pursued strategies in direct competition with Iran, Iranian leaders sought opportunities to diversify their interests. This resulted in two notable outcomes. First, Iran deployed a deliberate strategy to curb, at least temporarily, Muqtada al-Sadr's ambition. Second, Iran began to exploit lower-level movements within Badr as some became disenfranchised with the "politics first" strategy. Through the SGs, Iran was able to gain access to a segment of the population previously unreachable. Iran's cultivation of Special Groups provided the strategic utility to adjust levels of state control as needed to balance the political effort. The following case will evaluate Iran's deployment of intermediaries in Syria.

Syria: 2011-2018

> Syria is the 35th province [of Iran] and a strategic province for us…If the enemy attacks us and wants to appropriate either Syria or Khuzestan, the priority is that we keep Syria.
>
> - Cleric Hojat al Islam Mehdi Taeb, 2013[34]

The rise of the Arab Spring presented a new challenge for Iran. By 2011, Iran invested a considerable amount of resources throughout the region and U.S. departure from Iraq opened up even more opportunities for influence. Iranian Quds Force operatives were present in Syria prior to the 2011 uprising, training the Syrian army and managing supply routes of weapons and money to Hezbollah (Uskowi, 2019, p. 64). Iran could not afford to lose the valuable alliance built with Bashar al-Assad and Syria. Syria was the oldest ally of Iran and the only country to side with Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. Syria was also the gateway to support for Hezbollah and part of their deterrence strategy in the fight against Israel. Without Syria, Iran's ability to control Hezbollah and threaten Israel would be at risk. Based on comments from Qasem Soleimani and former Basij commanders, Ostovar (2016) stated the threat of the loss of Syria was believed an existential threat to Iran (Ostovar, 2016, p. 207). No doubt, the loss of Syria would significantly weaken Iran's influence in the broader region.

This case is unique demonstrates utility for this project in several ways. First, I use this case to evaluate whether and how variation in the dependent variables occur when the explanatory variables remain constant. This enables me to assess the plausibility of the variables to describe how variation is occurring. Second, this case is the only case in this chapter where antecedent conditions (IV1) are somewhat less important due to the request by Bashar al-Assad to Iran for assistance. Like Russia, Iran was welcomed into Syria, which appears to influence attribution. Finally, as with Iraq, this case is used to isolate the conditions under which multiple intermediaries were employed to achieve a variety of outcomes. I find support for the theory across both time periods and identify efforts by Iran

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[34] Taeb is the head of the Ammar Base – a pro-Khamenei think tank. See Will Fulton, "Iran News Round Up," AEI Critical Threats Project, accessed September 20, 2020 , https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/iran-news-round-up/iran-news-round-up-february-14-2013-1, February 14, 2013.

to strategically employ different intermediaries for different purposes throughout the conflict. I also find evidence of the use of Hezbollah as an extension of the IRGC for the first time in this case. The first time period for this case is 2011 when intermediary employment escalated and 2018 when the most recent data is available. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that shaped Iran's employment of intermediaries in Syria.

Contextual Factors Shaping Iranian Intermediaries in Syria

At the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Iranian presence consisted of IRGC forces mentoring and advising the Syrian military, but many Sunni leaders within the military splintered to develop their own militias in defiance of the regime. The U.S., Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others threw support behind rival factions and the belief that Bashar al-Assad had to go. Iran was not willing to part with Assad and threw their support behind the military.

The U.S. Treasury Department responded to Iranian action in Syria by sanctioning key IRGC leaders, including Soleimani, and Iranian air transportation corridors. Turkish authorities detained an Iranian Yas Air flight as it traveled through Turkish airspace enroute to Syria. On board, in place of the "auto spare parts" listed on the cargo manifest were AK47 rifles, heavy machine guns, mortar shells and 8,000 rounds of ammunition (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012b). As Turkish airspace became a risk for air travel, Iran shifted their flight paths to the south after the U.S. departure from Iraq. Despite U.S. pressure on Iraq to not allow overflight, former Badr commander, Hadi al-Ameri, was Iraq's transportation minister at the time and able to assist with Iranian overflight needs.

Initial Iranian efforts were focused on building and strengthening pro-Assad militias into the National Defense Force (NDF), which they built to a force of 70,000 personnel (Ostovar, 2016). However, the gravitas of the situation made clear to Iranian leaders that the deployment of external intermediaries was needed. Indication of this strategy was represented through the death of the highest ranking IRGC official in February 2013. General Hassan Shateri was a Quds force officer killed while he was traveling between Damascus and Beirut. Shateri was the IRGC's liaison with Hezbollah at the time of his death, as the head of Lebanon operations (Ostovar, 2016). Iran reported Shateri

headed the Iranian Committee for Reconstruction of Lebanon and was in Syria to assess reconstruction plans for Aleppo (BBC News, 2013). However, Shateri's true purpose was likely to coordinate the actions of Hezbollah in Syria.

Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah Secretary General, struggled with the decision to deploy Hezbollah at Iran's request – a decision he did not make until he received a direct appeal from the Supreme Leader (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The deployment of Hezbollah to Syria went against the primary tenants of Hezbollah doctrine (1985 Open Letter and 2009 Political Document). Hezbollah leaders did not have tremendous respect for Bashar al-Assad or the Syrian military. They were concerned deploying to Syria could weaken their support base in Lebanon and ability to resist Israeli incursions (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). In May 2012, Nasrallah, acknowledged publicly that Hezbollah was active in the border areas between Syria and Lebanon. By 2013, Hezbollah operated more overtly across many parts of Syria (Ostovar, 2016; U.S. Deparment of the Treasury, 2012). Like Iran, Hezbollah had a strong interest in the survival of the Assad regime, but within Lebanon, acknowledgement of the deployment drew harsh criticism from the populace. They came under attack inside Lebanon and dozens of civilians were killed as Shia neighborhoods were targeted with bombs – along with the Iranian embassy and Shia cultural centers. Initially, Hassan Nasrallah attempted to minimize Hezbollah participation in Syria. Once deniability was no longer possible, he appealed to the religious and ideological underpinnings on which the organization was built, by stating, "The road to Jerusalem passes through Qalamoun, Zabadani, Homs, Aleppo, Deraa, Hassakeh and Swaida, because if Syria was lost, Palestine would be lost too," (Nasrallah, 2015). He appealed from a humanistic standpoint, often referring to the suffering of the Syrian people. Despite challenges associated with Lebanese popular support, Hezbollah operations in Syria increased as they struggled to justify participation.

In early 2012, Iraqi Shia intermediaries[35] were deployed to Syria as Assad's ability to control the war weakened. In December 2013, Grand Ayatollah Kazem Haeri, Muqtada al-Sadr's previous mentor and Marja of the Qom hawza, provided justification for Shia participation in Syria. By early 2014, more than 500 Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) were buried

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[35] Collectively, Iraqi Shia intermediaries are sometimes referred to as Hayderiyoun (Schneider, 2018).

in Najaf cemeteries after they were killed while fighting in Syria (Chulov, 2014). In addition to AAH, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Liwa Abu al-Fadl, and the Badr organization were all effectively deployed by Iran to Syria between 2012 and 2018. Iraqi intelligence officials believed AAH received around $1.5 to $2 million per month from Iran and the families of those killed received $5,000 each as a form of condolence (Chulov, 2014).

The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq added another layer of complexity to Iranian operations. ISIS built strength among Sunnis in eastern Syria and used valuable natural resources to provide funding and recruiting incentives for their fighters. Among other challenges, as ISIS gained momentum and swept back into Iraq in 2014, most Iraqi intermediaries returned to fight in Iraq – a move that further weakened Assad's and Iran's ability to influence the Syrian situation (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The Iraqi intermediaries were battle-hardened and relied upon to conduct operations with little oversight from Iran. The Iraqi intermediaries remained helpful to the Syrian effort after their return to Iraq by maintaining presence along major routes and border control points along the Iraq-Syria border.

The final group of intermediaries deployed by Iran to Syria were the Afghan Fatemiyoun and Pakistani Zainabiyoun. The Fatemiyoun were successors of the Abouzar brigade that was built from predominately Afghan refugees in Iran from Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and deployed against Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. For the fight in Syria, Iran once again deployed the Fatemiyoun under the ultimate command and control of the IRGC. By January 2018, the Afghan Fatemiyoun had over 800 deaths in Syria and by 2019, at least 2,000 Afghans were killed (Alfoneh, 2018b; Hauch, 2019). The Pakistani Zainabiyoun also deployed by Iran, although in smaller numbers. Behind Iran, Pakistan has the second-highest number of Shia Muslims, with 10-15% (23-35 million) (CIA, 2020). Consistent unrest in Pakistan contributed to a refugee population in Iran, much the same as that of Afghanistan although not at the same level.

The names, Fatima and Zainab, are steeped in Shia religious reference designed to convey the fighters were defenders of sacred shrines. The religious undertones represented a robust attempt by Iran to cultivate strong ideological convergence to groups that were specifically not Iranian. In addition to this religious appeal, recruiting efforts by Iran

included monetary, residency, medical and condolence incentives. In the event such incentives were not enough, Iran used coercion to compel participation as intermediaries. Afghans and Pakistanis were threatened with deportation, imprisonment and travel restrictions by the Iranian regime during the Syria conflict (Hauch, 2019; Schneider, 2018). Additionally, within Iran Afghans and other refugees were treated very poorly. Participating in Fatemiyoun or Zainabiyoun offered refugees an opportunity to gain a level of self-confidence, and even perhaps a little respect.

Lastly, in 2017, Syria and the IRGC developed a new framework to professionalize the NDF and other militias into Local Defense Forces (LDF). The LDF included some, but not all of the NDF as part of a more formalized structure. Most significantly, the LDF was formally a part of the Syrian military, whereas the NDF were civilian volunteers designed to augment the military if necessary. The LDF were organized geographically by Iran and a Syrian Brigadier General was given overall command, with subordinate Iranian regional and governorate level commanders (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 94). Iran and Hezbollah were deliberate in the militias selected to join the LDF, most likely as a strategy to self-select those units over which they could achieve the greatest level of influence. As crises arose, the LDF were instructed to remain affiliated with Iran and coordinate with the Syrian military simultaneously. This reality conveys the primacy of overall Iranian control of the LDF. Most significantly, Iran provided the combat provisioning, condolence payments for martyrs, and entitlements for wounded or missing personnel (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Through the establishment of the LDF, Iran was able to engineer control mechanisms with acquiescence or even support of the target government in the new intermediary structure.

In summary, Iran's intermediary participation in Syria consisted of two intermediary types: domestic militias woven into intermediaries and transnational intermediaries deployed from abroad in support of Iranian objectives. Like other examples, levels of control and attribution varied over time. On occasion, Iran sought to increase control over intermediaries (LDF & Iraq intermediaries) and there were examples of Iranian employment of intermediaries based on capability limitations (Zainabiyoun and Fatemiyoun). Finally, although informal access appears more challenging in this case due to the minority Shia population in Syria, participation came at the request of Bashar al-

Assad. Iran was thereby given a certain level of formal access that initially made them less reliant upon informal structures. The following section will apply the theory to this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

For the purpose of this study, there are two primary groups of intermediaries to consider in the evaluation of the theory. The first group consists of Syrian domestic intermediaries – primarily Shia fighters trained and resourced by the IRGC and Hezbollah into a force with the combined strength of 70,000 to 100,000 personnel, known as the NDF and LDF.[36] The second group consists of the external, or transnational, intermediaries that Iran deployed to Syria. These consist of Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia intermediaries (mostly Badr, AAH and KH), Afghan Fatemiyoun and Pakistani Zainabiyoun. The two time periods for the analysis are 2011 and 2018, representing the height of the Syrian conflict.

Attribution

The level of attribution between Iran and the various intermediaries in Syria was considerably higher than other cases of intermediary employment. Attribution with the NDF for both time periods can be rated as leaning overt. There were attempts during the first time period to maintain a level of covert attribution – especially with Hezbollah due to their own domestic concerns and potential for Israeli incursion (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). However, by the second time period, attribution clearly leaned overt, enabled through a strategic narrative. Attribution can also be rated as leaning overt for Iraqi intermediaries during the first time period, as reflected in the statements of Iranian officials and through propaganda. Funerals of martyrs from Iraq were mourned and acknowledged by Iranian officials. Social media accounts attributed to AAH, the IRGC and Hezbollah equated all Shia fighters as part of the same group with allegiance to Ayatollah Khamenei (Ostovar, 2016). Finally, attribution for Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun can be rated as leaning covert during the first time period overt during the second time period. During the first time period, Iran attempted to create a narrative of grass roots collective action around the Hazara refugee population near the Sayyada Zeinab Mosque

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[36] Of note, there are dozens of domestic armed militias with which Iran and/or Hezbollah developed relations. Some of them became a part of the NDF or LDF, however those that were not absorbed into the larger NDF/LDF structures are not part of this study.

in Syria. The number of Hazara at the time was around 2,000, but there is no evidence they contributed significantly to either Fatemiyoun or Zainabiyoun. By the second time period, attribution became overt. An Iranian film director produced a series of short films highlighting Fatemiyoun's contributions in Syria and they were broadcast in Iranian theaters and through social media. Memorials of martyred Fatemiyoun were attended by thousands in Iran and the Ayatollah publicly commended the organization, which was, "Sent to the Levant under my authority," for their sacrifice (Schneider, 2018, p. 9).

Level of State Control

For the first time period, control over the NDF for Iran is rated as leaning centralized. Iran and Hezbollah played a considerable role in recruiting and organizing the force, but ultimately it remained a civilian volunteer force that was not a part of the Syrian military and dispersed across the country. The NDF received no benefits for their participation and Iran had to limit NDF activity to lower end tactical tasks. According to IISS (2019), the NDF can best be understood as a civilian volunteer network – which makes sense as early commanders described the NDF as Syria's version of the Basij (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The volunteer NDF consisted of 128 different units by May 2014. General Hamadani, who remarked that the NDF were synonymous with Syrian Hezbollah, indicated that the NDF were necessary for short-term gains, but enduring Iranian influence could only be gained by employing intermediaries from outside the Syrian government (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019).

By the second time period, the creation of the LDF enabled Iran to achieve much greater control and even penetration into the state institutional structure. Assad provided Iran the flexibility to build a loyal Syrian intermediary force inside Syria by agreeing to allow embedded Iranian commanders, the provision of material resources and martyr payments, and giving Iran the latitude to select militias for inclusion to the LDF that were most beneficial to them. Syrian commanders within the LDF retained very little authority to veto or redirect Iranian desires. Iranian control for the second time period for the LDF is rated as leaning centralized for the NDF is rated as leaning decentralized.

The transnational intermediaries over which Iran exercised the greatest level of control were Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun. These intermediaries were completely

dependent upon the IRGC and often had senior Iranian officers embedded within the organization for command and control purposes (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 104). This fact was confirmed by the death of Iranian commanders alongside Afghans and Pakistanis in Syria, with acknowledgement of the role of Iranians as tactical commanders. Another way in which Iran sought to increase control was by giving command of these units to retired IRGC officials who were volunteers. In some cases, Iranian IRGC and Hezbollah personnel directly assumed command roles to enhance the level of control within the NDF and Fatemiyoun/Zainabiyoun forces, when necessary (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). By the second time period, Iran developed a formal training pipeline at four locations inside Iran and additional training in Syria administered by the IRGC (Schneider, 2018).

During the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah operated with little Iranian control during both time periods. During the first time period, Iran was able to motivate action eventually, only after an appeal directly from the Supreme Leader. However, Hezbollah did cede to Iranian desires and once in Syria, Hezbollah essentially operated as an adjacent unit to the IRGC. Iranian control over Hezbollah is rated as leaning centralized during the first time period and leaning decentralized during the second time period.

Finally, Iraqi intermediaries were incredibly capable and experienced. They operated in Syria within the confines of Iranian direction. Iranian control over the Iraqi intermediaries is rated as leaning centralized during the first time period. By the second time period, most Iraqi intermediaries returned to Iraq to maximize post-ISIS influence as part of the PMU. A summary of assessed values for attribution and state control is outlined in the table below. The following section will assess indicators for antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Syria	2011	Iran	NDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Hezbollah	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.
		US	Zainab/Fatema	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.
			Iraqi Intermediaries	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
	2018	Iran	LDF	Overt	Lean Cent.
			NDF	Overt	Lean Dec.
		US	Hezbollah	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.
			Zainab/Fatema	Overt	Centralized

Table 4.8.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Syria 2011-2018

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

During the first time period, average World Governance Indicators were behind Lebanon (2006) as the second highest of any case where Iran deployed intermediaries (0.26 average). However, a major difference was the solicitation of Iranian assistance from the Assad regime. By the second time period, the WGI's were among the lowest of cases involving Iran (0.11). The Syrian civil war, competition among numerous non-state actors with the presence of several state actors, and the rise of ISIS all worked against the ability of Syrian domestic institutions to govern.

Due to sanctions and the conflict, the only official external assistance available to Syria was from Iran and Russia. And with pressure of their own, Iranian credit lines more than halved from $3 billion in 2014 to $0.97 billion in 2015 (Gobat & Kostial, 2016). The informal economy was used increasingly during the second time period to avoid international controls. It is difficult to estimate true dependency on Iran for the second time period, but it likely remained considerable.

At the onset of the war, Syria's economy was relatively stable. Non-oil GDP, debt, unemployment and inflation were all at or better than the levels of other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries (Gobat & Kostial, 2016). However, poverty and unemployment climbed between 2005-2010. The economy became a major factor fueling discontent just prior to the war. The income inequality gap was tremendous, with the urban population living very well over the relative poverty of those in rural Syria (Balanche, 2018).

By the second time period, all figures plummeted and the informal economy flourished. Unemployment was as high as 60-percent in 2016 and the poverty rate over 80-percent half way through the time period (Gobat & Kostial, 2016). The massive migration of Syrians due to conflict caused a high number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Due to oil and gas infrastructure damage during the war, the government's ability to generate revenue was hampered considerably. Finally, inflation

skyrocketed by more than 300-percent. The next section will assess the strength of popular resistance structures.

Popular Resistance.

Politically, there was not much opportunity for non-Alawites in Syria during either time period. This was a factor that contributed to the civil war. At the local level in Latakia on Syria's western coast in 2011, several prominent Sunnis pleaded with the governors office after riots to express their discontent that all authority positions in the local administration were occupied by Alawites (Balanche, 2018, p. 8). Hafez al-Assad built a substantial buffer of loyal Alawites within the Syrian military to protect against threats from the Sunni majority. Prior to the civil war, Assad possessed centralized authority over the entire country, but this authority mainly existed through continual negotiations with local power brokers.

Socio-ethnic divides were among the most profound in Syria of any case in this study. Balanche (2018) evaluates Syria's ethnoreligious situation according to three zones: the regime zone, which consists of Alawites, some Sunnis and other minorities; the rebel zone, which is predominately Sunni Arab; and the Kurdish-controlled SDF zone (Balanche, 2018). The regime zone is concentrated in the northwest portion of the country, with Shia presence extending down the Lebanese border. Each of the zones consists of a high degree of factionalization where rivalry, competition over resources and international support often contribute to violent conflict – even within the same zones. Political and territorial cleavages remained significant over both time periods. In fact, Balanche finds that in large part the majority of battles during the civil war occurred along the fault lines of major ethno-religious divides.

In summary, antecedent conditions are assessed as permissive during both time periods. During the first time period, Syria quickly dissolved into a failed state. Weak domestic institutions coupled with strong resistance structures presented a perfect opportunity for external intermediary involvement, however, not just for Iran. The multiple, heterogeneous socio-ethnic divides presented an opportunity for numerous external state actors to compete for influence. The following section will evaluate the symmetry of interests.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Geographically, Syria is rated as near Iran and far from the U.S. However, given the strong ties between Iran and Syria due to Syria's proximity to both Israel and Lebanon, Iran possessed a physical presence in Syria since the 1980s – as discussed in the Hezbollah case.

Iran's historic ties and alliances with Bashar al-Assad and Syria can be rated as strong during both time periods. Iran supported Syria with oil, money and weapons since the revolution, but what hardened the relationship was the commitment by Alawi leaders in Syria to Twelver Shiism. The Alawi sect of Shia Islam represents a minority within the country of Syria. The Alawi deify Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad and first imam of the Shias. Twelver Shiism, which Iranians adhere to, believe Ali is the first imam, not the incarnation of Allah (Uskowi, 2019). In recognition of the growing prominence of Shia religious authority after the Iranian revolution, Alawi leaders in Syria made a substantial religious commitment in 1982 by declaring themselves Twelver Shia. This act strengthened the religious bond with Iran and Lebanon that later served as a powerful form of unification in the justification of future initiatives. Additionally, the Syrians were the only country to support Iran during the Iran-Iraq War and the IRGC had a long-standing agreement with Syria to facilitate support for Hezbollah.

Conversely, the U.S. had very little in terms of historical ties with Syria. Syria did cooperate with the U.S. during the Gulf War in Iraq and there was some intelligence cooperation immediately following 9/11. However, beginning just after U.S. intervention in Iraq, President Bush began to sanction several Syrian entities due to terrorism ties and the U.S. froze all assets of the Syrian government since August 2011.

Commercial value was not particularly high for either the RSA or status quo power during either time period, but in relative terms, it was much higher for Iran. In 2011, 0.4-percent of all Iranian exports went to Syria and in 2017 (latest available data), 0.3-percent of Iranian exports went to Syria. The U.S. figures were $230 million in 2011 and $50.5 million in 2017 (0.02-percent and 0.003-percent respectively). Although a relatively insignificant value, Syria is of higher commercial value to Iran than to the U.S.

In summary, interests between Iran and the U.S. regarding Syria were clearly asymmetric over both time periods, by a substantial margin (5:1). Iran is tremendously invested in Syria due to the geographic access Syria provides to Lebanon and Israel. Additionally, historic ties between Syria and Iran, beginning with Bashar al-Assad's father and Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, remain incredibly strong.

Informal Access (IV3)

Socio-cultural proximity within Syria is assessed as related. There is a 60-percent Sunni majority in Syria, but the IRGC and Hezbollah were still able to build a force of over 70,000 Syrians loyal to Assad and Iran. IRGC Brigadier General Hamadani proudly stated Iran created a "second Hezbollah," inside Syria with the NDF (Karami, 2014). Iran, Hezbollah and the AAH in particular shaped the narrative and associated propaganda to unite the Shia identity.

Ideological convergence was present in Syria, though not to the degree it was in Lebanon or Iraq. The recruiting efforts with Hezbollah's initial movement into Syria were focused on informal networks with which they had access through ideological means. Twelver Shia, which constituted less than two-percent of Syrians, were the initial focus of defense against insurgent attacks, and then for recruitment (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 90). These Shia lived in small villages along the Lebanon border outside major cities, along with Alawi Shia – the sect of Bashar al-Assad. The Fatemiyoun deployment was also an effort to tap into ideological convergence. Protection by these units of the Shia Sayyeda Zeinab Mosque where a small Hazara refugee community resided since the 1990s was powerful for Shia across the region.

Iran expanded ideological convergence through several methods. Social, economic, and educational projects focused on raising the profile of Iran in Syria. In the eastern rural areas of Deir ez-Zur, Iran built schools as they helped push out ISIS (Al-Sham, 2018). The schools taught Farsi and required residents to attend school in exchange for humanitarian aid. Residents in the area were in such despair they felt they had no option but to take humanitarian aid and send their children to school. There are even efforts by Hezbollah to demographically reengineer Syrian areas that were predominately Sunni prior to the war (Chulov, 2017; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Specifically,

in the area directly adjacent to the Beqaa Valley (Zbadani and Madaya), Hezbollah established a buffer area on the Syrian side of the border by returning IDPs and refugees to homes and land previously owned by Sunnis.

Iranian leaders put much effort into generating convergence ideologically among the various intermediaries and their bases of support. The emergence of ISIS enabled Iran and Hezbollah to label the rebels *Takfiri*.[37] Ideologically, this enabled Iran to portray the rebels as a threat to Shia Islam, as well as distinguish between "good" and "bad" Sunnis. This strategy apparently proved effective in coopting Sunnis who were opposed to the rebels (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 102). Iran, Hezbollah and AAH also made attempts through propaganda to unify the identity of all Shia groups. Billboards with pictures of Hassan Nasrallah, Soleimani, Khamenei were common in Shia areas (Al-Sham, 2018). Finally, the ideological justification and unity offered through Grand Ayatollah Haeri's fatwa in December 2013 was substantial. Haeri stated, "The battle in Syria is not for the defense of the Shrine of Sayyida Zeinab but is a battle of infidels against Islam and Islam should be defended," (Abdul-Zahra, 2013). He went on to say that fighting in Syria was legitimate and those who die are considered martyrs. Iran and Hezbollah pursued multiple avenues to maximize ideological convergence among the population and recruits during both time periods.

In areas where ideological convergence was not immediately available, Iran and Hezbollah sought other ways to access informal structures. Transactional appeals were useful on many occasions; however, such access is temporary based on promises and the availability of funds. Hezbollah essentially acted as a subordinate actor to the IRGC, although they had their own concerns and ambitions with a shared border. Iran relied upon Hezbollah to provide money and essential services to recruits and local Syrians in an effort to share the financial burden – resulting in a level of strategic convergence. Iran and Hezbollah also appealed to non-Shia segments of the Syrian population – specifically those within the NDF, but with limited success (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The NDF coalition fostered by Iran maintained a level of strategic convergence and

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[37] Takfiri is a word commonly associated with Sunni Salafis who possess a strict interpretation of Islam and refer to others (such as Shia) as apostates or non-believers. Here, Iran and Hezbollah used the branding of rebels as Takfiri to ideologically motivate protection of the Shia faith.

support for Bashar al-Assad. However, the somewhat heterogenous makeup of the individual militias often equated to rivalry and competition for control over resources (Balanche, 2018).

Once Hezbollah engaged in Syria, strategic convergence between the groups was at the highest possible level. Their political and military objectives were nearly identical: primarily the survival of the Assad regime, development of intermediary groups inside Syria (NDF & LDF), defeat of the insurgency, control of urban centers and reestablishment of supply lines (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Additionally, they sought to minimize other regional actors' ability to increase influence in Syria. Later with the rise of ISIS, strategy converged on the defeat of ISIS which operated in both Syria and Iraq. Strategic convergence existed with the other groups within Syria as well, but not as prevalently.

In summary, informal access during the first time period is rated as moderate, and during the second time period can be rated as moderate-high. The ideological consolidation and identity convergence efforts by Iran throughout both time periods was substantial. It was further reinforced as countering ideologies, such as those of Russia, Turkey and the U.S., increased their stake in the war.

Target Summary

The Syria case is useful to this analysis for a number of reasons. First, Iran's employment of intermediaries in Syria came at the invitation of Bashar al-Assad. The utility of covert intermediary employment was reduced as a result. Second, the target became incredibly complex over time, with the presence of the status quo power and other major powers in the same geographic space. Although the indicators demonstrate asymmetric interests, physical presence indicates a level of symmetry. Third, in this case, we can observe Iranian strategic employment of intermediaries with varying levels of capability. The IRGC treated Hezbollah as a peer force, relying on them for recruiting and financial purposes. Conversely, the most centrally controlled forces, Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun, were not highly skilled militarily and lightly equipped. These forces were used for static purposes, such as holding territory or base defense. Key offensive operations

required the skill of more advanced fighters, such as Iraqi intermediaries, Hezbollah or IRGC led NDF.

Given the incredible complexity of intermediaries and state actors in Syria, empirical evidence indicates Iran and Hezbollah deployed different intermediaries based on strategic necessity. In situations where Iran is not willing to assume strategic risk, they employed intermediaries that were more centrally controlled. In areas where they were able to assume more risk, Iran was willing to employ forces that were more decentralized. The results of the Syria case are depicted in the table below.

Syria: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: **2011**		*Time Period 2*: **2018**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		*Permissive*		*Permissive*
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.421	Moderate	0.035	Weak
Resist. Strength	0.667	Strong	0.667	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	5	*Asymmetric*	5	*Asymmetric*
U.S.	1		1	
Informal Access	0.5	*Moderate*	0.75	*Mod-High*
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	NDF	*Lean Overt*	LDF	*Overt*
	Hezbollah	*Lean Covert*	NDF	*Overt*
	Zainab/Fatema	*Lean Covert*	Hezbollah	*Lean Overt*
	Iraqi Intermed.	*Lean Overt*	Zainab/Fatema	*Overt*
Level of State Control	NDF	*Lean Cent.*	LDF	*Lean Cent.*
	Hezbollah	*Lean Cent.*	NDF	*Lean Dec.*
	Zainab/Fatema	*Lean Cent.*	Hezbollah	*Lean Dec.*
	Iraqi Intermed.	*Lean Cent.*	Zainab/Fatema	*Centralized*

Table 4.9.   Employment of Iranian intermediaries in Syria, 2011-2018

The theory operated as expected in four out of eight observations of employment in this case. According to the theory, permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests should result in overt, centralized intermediary employment. However, especially with Hezbollah, I observed overt, decentralized employment. The main reason for this outcome is likely due to an increase in Hezbollah's maturity between the two time periods and ability to operate without IRGC oversight. By the second time period, Hezbollah was a force in many ways equivalent to the IRGC. Nonetheless, with this case, I find some support for hypothesis 2 (overt, centralized).

Lastly, according to the theory, we should not expect to see the revisionist state attempt to generate greater informal access because interests are so asymmetric. However, by 2017, Iran and Hezbollah played a major role in the development of the LDF and their integration into formal governing structures. Several factors likely played a role in this reality. First, the proximate presence of the U.S. again in Iraq and in Syria to defeat ISIS beginning in earnest around 2016 likely played a major role. Additionally, the involvement of Russia on the side of Syria served as an obstacle to Iranian influence and perhaps motivated Iran to generate more decisive gains within the formal security establishment. Finally, the permissive atmosphere provided by the Syrian government as hosts to Iranian activity removed requirements to maintain more covert attribution. Thus, with the LDF, we see the cultivation of an intermediary that leans centralized and leans overt. The next case will evaluate the employment of Iran's intermediaries in Iraq in the post-ISIS era.

Iraq: 2014 – 2019

In 2014, three factors influenced a new opportunity for Iranian intermediary employment in Iraq. First, the Syrian civil war provided sanctuary and resources for Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) to reconstitute into ISIS. Second, the move of ISIS into Iraq suddenly and forcefully exacerbated ethno-religious tension. Third, Nouri al-Maliki systematically repressed Iraqi Sunnis in the government and amongst the population, fostering anti-Shia sentiment and collective action. Iran's old guard intermediaries, such as Badr and ISCI still held influence in Iraq, but the ISIS problem required a new strategy. This manifested in the form of Popular Mobilization Units, or *Hashid Sha'abi*. Eventually, this coagulation of intermediaries benefited from inclusion in formal government structures, institutionalizing Iran's reach into Iraqi governing systems.

I use this case to once again assess the plausibility of my theory to explain how intermediaries were employed when the explanatory variables remain constant. In this case, I find consistency in the theoretical mechanisms. Between the two time periods (2014 and 2019), values of the explanatory variables did not vary considerably, nor did the values of the outcome. During both time periods, I found permissive antecedent conditions, asymmetric interests and high informal access. This resulted in a nearly identical mix of outcomes across time periods. Three observations during the first time period were characterized as overt, centralized; overt, decentralized; and covert, decentralized. The second time period consisted of the same characterization, with an additional observation of overt, centralized. Thus, I find support for the theory in three out of seven cases. In addition, minor variations within the explanatory variables offer explanatory power in describing each of the outcomes. The following section provides brief context on the events and actors that shaped Iran's employment of intermediaries in Iraq from 2014-2019.

Contextual Factors Shaping Iranian Intermediaries in post-ISIS Iraq

In June 2014, Sunni extremists under the banner of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi consolidated just across the Iraqi border in Syria and struck with resounding force, taking Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. Syria was already dealing with a bloody civil war and Iraq was in the process of governing independently of persistent U.S. oversight. In the years prior to the rise of ISIS,

incidents of Sunni terrorism were met with a heavy-handed response by the government of Nouri al-Maliki. Examples abound of extra-judicial killings and police brutality specifically directed toward Sunnis. One Iraqi Army battalion commander commented at the time that when ISIS made its way to Mosul, the local Iraqis were begging for relief from the Iraqi Army and police (Omar, 2015). In fact, the day after the last U.S. forces left Iraq, Maliki gave the order for arrest of his own Vice President, whom Maliki was informed, had been implicated in a Sunni terrorist plot. This was the first effort in a string of Sunni repression that continued until the arrival of ISIS at the doorstep of Baghdad. According to David Kilcullen, former senior advisor to the U.S. military in Iraq, Sunni leaders in the government and security forces were systematically replaced by loyal Shia, which led the local perception of exclusion by Sunnis (M. Smith & Hirsch, 2014). The removal of Sunni political opportunity would later come back to haunt Maliki.

As Maliki continued the brutal repression of Sunni uprisings, protests began to emerge and gain the support external Sunni sponsors. Some wealthy Sunnis provided funding for food and tents to support the protests, such as Jordanian businessman Khamis al-Khanjar, who also funded pro-Sunni television stations and anti-Maliki messaging (M. Smith & Hirsch, 2014). However, in southern Iraq, Maliki's popularity grew among the Shia majority regions. This reinforced Maliki's repression against the Sunnis.

Simultaneously, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), viewed the civil war in Syria as an opportunity. AQI forces were degraded after years of concentrated U.S. focus. The chaos that ensued in Syria presented an opportunity to interfere with further Shia influence and also to recruit Sunni fighters to strengthen their dilapidated force. Baghdadi sent AQI fighters to Syria for just this purpose, and over the course of the next two to three years, Baghdadi's forces gained control of critical resources, such as Syrian oil fields and electric power plants (M. Smith & Hirsch, 2014).

In 2012-2013, Baghdadi's forces returned to Iraq and launched a series of offenses, called "Breaking the Walls," aimed freeing inmates from Iraq's prisons to swell their ranks. This culminated in July 2013, when Baghdadi's forces freed around 500 prisoners from Abu Ghraib Prison (Weeks, 2013). In March 2013, ISIS flags began to emerge in protests in Sunni dominated areas. Maliki escalated drastically in one such protest in Hawejah

killing hundreds of protestors, which only fed the Sunni narrative and Baghdadi's recruitment. Without political opportunity and intense Shia repression, ISIS gained traction. By October 2013, Maliki returned to the U.S. to ask for help – specifically for weapons. In late December 2013, Maliki's forces tore down the Ramadi protest camps. This sparked massive Sunni uprising, for which AQI/ISIS was now strong enough to take advantage.

After staging forces across the border in Syria, ISIS attacked en masse to seize Mosul at the beginning of June 2014. The Salafi approach used by ISIS appealed to many Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis – to include a leadership cadre of former Ba'athist military commanders who fought for Saddam Hussein. As described by David Kilcullen, behind what became ISIS in 2014 sat the Ba'ath Party and the former regime (M. Smith & Hirsch, 2014). The Ba'athist support was important to the success of ISIS. Not only were they skilled militarily, but they had access to external Sunni support structures that assisted with finance, resource provision and recruiting.

The U.S. did very little to assist Iraq in the fight against ISIS until August 2014 when ISIS marched toward Irbil, Kurdistan where the U.S. has a special relationship and consulate. The U.S. launched air support to prevent ISIS incursion into Kurdistan with the promise that further assistance would come if Maliki resigned. Iran was also important in compelling the resignation of Maliki and made a direct appeal to Grand Ayatollah Sistani (Ostovar, 2016, p. 225). Nouri al-Maliki resigned as prime minister on August 14, 2014. In mid-October 2014, as his administration made inroads in the Iran nuclear deal, President Obama sent a letter to Ayatollah Khamenei stressing their shared interests in confronting ISIS (Solomon & Lee, 2014). The U.S. did not appear interested in curtailing the influence of Iranian intermediaries, in fact, the letter seemed to convey the U.S. was not a threat to Iranian interests in Iraq. The U.S. did, however, object to Badr corps leader, Hadi al-Ameri's pending appointment to the post of interior minister. This was likely due more to Ameri's participation in Badr's extrajudicial killings than Iran's control over Badr actions.

Iran was also slow to formally enter the fight against ISIS and like the U.S., did not make a concerted effort to assist until June 2014. Iran also began with air strikes in June and acknowledged by November 2014 that they had military personnel in Iraq at the

request of the Iraqi government in a purely advisory capacity (Borger, 2014). However, the delayed entrance of Iran into the counter-ISIS fight was mitigated by the employment of well positioned Shia intermediaries. Iran was well postured for the ground effort. Badr, AAH and KH were all in position to defend Shia interests and Qasem Soliemani made visits on occasion to monitor progress and provide assistance. The Badr organization was integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and in late 2013-2014, Badr, AAH and KH all participated with the ISF in fights against ISIS to some degree – often at the request of local Shia leaders.

Hadi al-Ameri led Badr forces in some of the earliest Shia skirmishes against ISIS in Diyala province over the summer of 2014. Nouri al-Maliki, still prime minister at the time, recognized the success of Badr and placed all ISF in Diyala Province under the control of Ameri (George, 2014). When Haider al-Abadi became the prime minister after Maliki, Ameri was initially considered for the interior minister position. However, the move was considered too divisive and the position was instead given to another Badr official with assumed Ameri oversight, Mohammed Ghabban (Counter Extremism Project, 2020). The significance of one of Iran's oldest intermediaries running one of the primary formal governing structures responsible for Iraqi security cannot be overstated. Badr was now in prime position to enhance Shia interests to the next level.

Of note, there remained Shia elements opposed to Iranian interference even as ISIS made gains. Muqtada al-Sadr differed with Iran on several issues, affecting the coalescence of extraterritorial Shia Islam. Sadr did mobilize his Promised Day Brigade (rebranded Mahdi army) to defend Shia shrines in the face of his main rival, AAH (Ali & Kagan, 2014). Since Sadr's return to Iraq following his religious training in Iran from 2008-2011, he sought change mostly through political means and the Sadr affiliated Ahrar bloc gained 34 seats in parliament in 2016. Despite Sadr's efforts to pursue change through political opportunity, elements of JAM continued to conduct operations in a way that demonstrated potential to Iran. On several occasions Sadr was critical of Jaish al-Mahdi remnants that continued to cause bloodshed and even called for their disbandment. Within Jaish al-Mahdi a split emerged, much like that which developed within Amal in Lebanon in the 1980s which Iran immediately began to foster. There were those who believed the Mahdi Army should continue with nationalist perspective, and those who believed in the desires of Iran,

Velayat-e Faqih, and extraterritorial Shia ambition. Factional elements were ripe for inclusion in a new collective of intermediaries under the *Hashid Sha'abi* (PMU).

Hashid Sha'abi – Popular Mobilization Units (2014-present)

Al-Quds Department 900 was the initial IRGC force deployed by Iran to support local Iraqi entities, such as the Badr, AAH, Kata'ib Hezbollah, Qazali (Mahdi splinter), and the Sheibani networks with money and training (Wege, 2013). Qasem Soleimani and the IRGC provided strategic direction, guidance and resources to the collection of Badr, AAH and KH intermediaries, in addition to a few others, that by the end of 2014 became *Hashid Sha'abi*, or Popular Mobilization Units (also Popular Mobilization Forces). In addition to Badr and the Special Groups (SGs) referenced in the Iraq 2003-2011 case, the PMU also consisted of several new SGs that formed from Mahdi Army splinter groups and others that had experience fighting in Syria and against ISIS in Iraq (Knights, 2019). With the new SGs, the IRGC was able to fully exploit ideological and strategic convergence opportunities, resulting in a very high level of Iranian control over some of the new SGs. By 2015, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced that the PMU were an official political party, adding to their legitimacy (Qaidaari, 2015). The collectivization of around 70 Shia militias and 150,000 personnel into the PMU was the result of a strategic move by Iran to strengthen and legitimize Shia capabilities within the government. On November 26, 2016 Iraqi parliament passed legislation that officially incorporated the PMU into the Iraqi Security Forces (C. Smith & Singer-Emery, 2019).

The head of the PMU was the national security advisor, Faleh al-Fayad and the deputy selected was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, founder and commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah. As mentioned throughout this chapter, Muhandis had a rich history with Iran and deep personal ties to Qasem Soleimani. Muhandis also had a long personal relationship with some of the original Hezbollah leaders, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, Imad Mughniyeh and Mustafa Badreddine, as well as ties to Lebanon through the Dawa party (Daoud, 2017). Following the execution of al-Muhandis in January, 2020, Hezbollah stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum left with the departure of Soleimani and al-Muhandis. Sheikh Mohammad al-Kawtharani emerged as a leader to guide strategy in January, with the expectation that Hezbollah would provide political guidance to the Iraqis (Marquis, 2020).

The PMU included numerous key Iraqi Shia groups mentioned throughout. In addition to multiple Badr Brigades, AAH and KH, the Saraya Ashura' militia affiliated with ISCI leader Ammar al-Hakim was part of the group (Al-Tamimi, 2017). It is important to note there are also several Sunni, Turkoman and Christian led brigades as part of the PMU. Many similarities exist between the PMU and the Iranian Basij. The inclusion of minority elements adds legitimacy to this argument. By folding the PMU into the existing governing structures with multiple ethnicities represented and clear ties to political parties, Iran (and the Iraqi government) was able to establish stability and enduring influence. They had legal protection and religious justification with the support of marjas in Najaf and Qom.

During the period since the resignation of Maliki, his successors Haider al-Abadi, Abdul Mahdi and Mustafa al-Kadhimi all have ties to Iran and have been the subject of ridicule by opponents of Iranian influence, such as Muqtada al-Sadr. The execution of Soleimani and Muhandis in January 2020 definitely challenged some of the control mechanisms emplaced by Iran. The executions introduced a certain element of risk as PMU factions and leaders competed for influence and Iranian sponsorship. Iran has come to rely increasingly on Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah for leadership in Iraq, further indicating their willingness to use transnational actors in order to maintain control over intermediary actions (Ahmed, 2020).

In summary, two major factors contributed to the rise of ISIS and further Iranian expansion in the region. First, the Syrian war created space for ISIS to reconsolidate, recruit and find sanctuary. Second, Nouri al-Maliki's repression of Iraqi Sunnis both in the government and among the populace removed political opportunity for Sunnis and increased the sense of desperation among their constituents. Maliki's support (whether passive or active) for the creation of the Popular Mobilization Units set conditions for Iranian intermediaries to become further entrenched into the legitimate structures of Iraqi governance. The realities of intermediary entrenchment and the chaos caused by the Syrian civil war and Sunni ISIS aggression further eroded the border between Iran and Iraq. The following section will examine the application of the theory to this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are 2014 when ISIS began major operations in Iraq and 2019 when the U.S. once again began the transfer of bases back to Iraq. There are also references to 2020 as intermediary employment in Iraq is ongoing.

Attribution

During the first time period, attribution between Iran and Badr and the SGs can be rated as overt. It is difficult to discern attribution between Iran and Sadr during the first time period, however as we will observe, strategic convergence did occur. If a relationship between Iran and Sadr did exist during this period, it can be rated as covert. Notably, Iran was much more overt in their attribution of support to intermediaries in the face of ISIS. In late 2013-2014, the Shia militias that countered ISIS activities were much different than those of the 2003-2011 period. The Shia militias were described as wearing black shirts, often with black masks and camouflage pants with black boots (Morris, 2014). Although similarity of uniforms indicated the elements were more identifiable, to the Iraqi people they were representative of Shia unity and Iranian influence (Omar, 2015).

By folding all major Iranian intermediaries under the PMU umbrella structure, Iran benefited from the masking of attribution with individual subordinate units. The PMU became a legitimate part of the Iraqi government and reference to Iranian support was a reference of support to the Iraqi government. Through reference to the PMU brigade number designations (for example Kata'ib al-Imam Ali is the 40th Brigade), the broader Shia community was able to achieve a rebranding effect that clouded Iran's nefarious activity in support of these groups. Thus, while attribution of the relationship with the PMU was relatively overt, subordinate level relationships were more covert and not readily apparent. Attribution during the second time period remained the same, with the addition of overt attribution between Iran and Hezbollah.

Level of State Control

As a reflection of Iranian strategy, control over intermediaries varied by organization. In 2003, Iranian control was most centralized with Badr. By the time U.S. forces departed, control was most centralized with the SGs and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) in

particular – which continued into the first time period of this case in 2014. With the development of the PMU and mainstreaming of KH, Iran again looked for intermediaries through which control could be highly centralized. The new SG with which Iran maintained the greatest control was most likely Kata'ib Imam Ali under former Mahdi Army commander Shibl al-Zaydi – now part of the formal/legal PMU structure of the Iraqi government.[38] Iran again diversified interests to maximize capabilities.

In addition, through the integration of the PMU into the formal governing structures of Iraq, Iran built in control mechanisms for Iraqi security and government influence. When Muhandis was at the helm, he was able to influence government officials by controlling funding for the PMU and even the establishment of an intelligence branch called Abu Iman, that was geared toward collecting vital intelligence on government officials for coercive use as necessary (Knights, 2019). The national security advisor and head of the PMU since inception, Faleh al-Fayad, was closely linked with Iran. Over the past few years, Iran supported Fayad for the positions of prime minister and interior minister. The leadership of the PMU within existing governing structures added a level of control for Iran. The execution of Soleimani and Muhandis in 2020 certainly challenged Iranian control of PMU actions, but they maintain considerable strategic depth through decades-old intermediary structures and relationships. As long as pro-Iranian Shia are in positions that can influence Iraqi security and governance, Iran will be able to maintain control – either overtly or covertly. Both approaches were used and Iran remains prepared for both approaches in the future.

In summary, by lumping various intermediary capabilities or "units" under the PMU, Iran further obscured attribution and assumed risk with varying levels of control over the numerous intermediary elements, while overtly supporting the broader organization. They increased legitimacy of their efforts by folding the PMU under the Iraqi government and gained access to valuable financial resources, reducing the burden on Iran for operational support. This included the potential for the PMU to receive material support from the U.S. that was intended for the Iraqi government. As a result, the Iraqi government

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[38] Kata'ib al-Imam Ali is the 40th Brigade of the PMU and deployed under Iran to Syria. They splintered off from elements previously under Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and are led by Shibl al-Zaydi (Al-Tamimi, 2017; Knights, 2019).

can legally transfer U.S. weapons and equipment to subordinate units (i.e. KH, AAH and Badr) through the PMU. Finally, Iran was able to access illicit efforts of the PMU amidst increased international pressure on Iran by facilitating smuggling and criminal rackets. A summary of indicators for attribution and level of state control is in the table below. The next section will assess the strength of the explanatory variables in this case.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Iraq: Post-ISIS	2014	Iran	Special Groups	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Badr	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.
		US	Sadr	NA → Covert	Decentralized
	2019	Iran	New Spec. Grps	Lean Overt	Centralized
			Old Spec. Grps	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		US	Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Cent.
			Sadr	Lean Covert	Decentralized

Table 4.10. DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Iraq 2014-2019

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

Indicators for governance capacity of Iraq in 2014 and 2019 reveal persistent weakness. The average values of World Bank Governance Indicators depict a gradual decline over both time periods from their all-time high in 2011. 2014 WGI figures averaged around 21-percent, declining further to 19-percent in 2018. The most significant improvement was in rule of law over the two time periods, but most metrics remained fairly constant. Also, critical to consideration is the Shia majority and the Iranian influence such a majority represents. Major Shia parties consistently reorganized into political blocs for parliamentary elections to hedge for or against Iranian influence. The inability of minority parliamentarians to balance against this reality presented a challenge.

Iraq's dependency on external actors for fiscal sustainability remained high as of 2019. The post-ISIS reconstruction and recovery needs were estimated at $88 billion, stressing existing agreements. As of the second time period, the IMF argued Iraq would be required to rely on medium to long-term external financing (International Monetary Fund, 2019a). The unpredictability of oil revenue generation due to volatile markets may push reliance upon external actors into the longer term.

The IMF inclusive growth indicators for 2019 reveal Iraq's domestic institutions remained weak, but there were some considerable improvements. The deficit was projected to shift to four-percent of GDP and non-oil GDP growth climbed, which is important for medium and long-term revenue stability. Income equality improved and unemployment was just above the international average, at 7.9-percent. Inflation was stable at 0.8-percent.

In summary, while domestic institutional strength may not be as weak as it was in 2003, there remained considerable challenges to Iraqi domestic institutions. For both time periods (2014-2019), the strength of domestic institutions can be rated as weak. WGI indicators grew weaker over the time span, but key economic indicators marginally improved. Regardless, the domestic institutions remained vulnerable

to Iranian influence and intermediary employment. The instability of the primary revenue generating source (oil) further weakened this reality.

Popular Resistance.

Popular resistance structures are very similar to the previous Iraq case (2003-2011). The catalyst presented by ISIS further entrenched Shia structures. In late 2013 and early 2014, the repression of Iraqi Sunnis by Maliki and removal of Sunni political opportunity drove a wedge between political factions, further segmenting Iraqi society. Shia militias that rose up in defiance of Maliki further entrenched the factions. In the post-U.S. period, Muqtada al-Sadr, fresh from furthering his religious education in Iran, was in pursuit of political office. When Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) militants took action in parades or targeted Sunni killings (likely at the request of Maliki or associates), Muqtada al-Sadr was quick to condemn their actions and call for the dismantling of JAM (Institute for the Study of War, 2014). Sadr made a clear effort to distance himself from the aggressive behavior that might link him to Iran, AAH or KH.

Like Badr and Sadr, AAH established a political wing in the aftermath of U.S. withdraw as well, seeking opportunities to gain inroads in the governing institutions. By 2014, AAH political membership was as high as 20,000 and by 2016, they had representation in the Iraqi parliament (Morris, 2014). By the second time period, political parties supporting the PMU won over a third of Iraq's parliamentary seats (C. Smith & Singer-Emery, 2019). The attainment of political opportunity was critical in the legitimization of the PMU and future institutionalization of Iranian interests in Iraq.

The illicit economy was booming as ISIS moved in and it became a major source of revenue for all sides of the fight. As the PMU gained power, they established "economic offices" in major Shia areas and areas of sustained battlefield presence as, "…hubs for organized crime activity," (Knights, 2019). The formalization of the PMU through legal existence by 2016 reduced their dependency on illicit means, but this did not end their exploitation of the illicit economy. Some PMU elements maintained control over various oil fields, pipelines and border control points and diverted oil to Iran through Kurdistan during the second time period (Knights, 2019). Additionally, criminal

rackets tied to PMU elements like AAH still plagued refineries and businesses. Considering the theory, the illicit economy in Iraq remained strong throughout both time periods.

Finally, socio-ethnic divides were near an all-time high during the first time period. Efforts by the Maliki government to isolate Sunnis contributed to support for ISIS, which further reinforced Shia consolidation. The individual socio-ethnic networks became very homogenous with fewer opportunities for brokerage and collective progress. By the second time period, the reopening of political opportunity and defeat of ISIS encouraged positive growth. But political, economic and social structures continued to support strong popular resistance. Overall, resistance strength is rated as strong during both time periods.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

For the first time period, interests in Iraq between the U.S. and Iran were clearly asymmetric. The Obama administration was adamantly opposed to interfering in the sectarian violence that swept through Iraq. The U.S. did have a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) brokered before their 2011 departure, but the existing agreements between the U.S. and Iraq were not binding enough to compel U.S. action, until the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region was threatened by ISIS. Conversely, Iran became one of Iraq's strongest allies. Iran was very deliberate in the cultivation of ties in the aftermath of U.S. withdraw and their interests in neighboring Syria and Lebanon were fundamentally tied to Iraq. From 2010-2017, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad was a former Quds force officer who took a particular interest in the economic activities of Iraq, including the renovation and reconstruction of Shia pilgrimage sites (Alfoneh, 2018a). The former ambassador subsequently was appointed as the Iranian vice president's political advisor, signaling enduring primacy of Iranian interests in Iraq.

Geographically, Iran clearly had more at stake as a contiguous state – especially considering the rise of ISIS on their western border. Iran invested heavily in the government and security forces. Maliki government efforts to purge Sunni rivals strengthened the hold of Shia government allies within Iraq. The pending instability due to the Sunni uprising compelled significant concern from Iran.

The commercial value of Iraq was quite high for Iran during the first time period, with seven-percent of total exports going to their neighboring country. By 2016, Iran was one of Iraq's largest trading partners. By 2018 (latest year of available trade data), nearly eight-percent of all Iranian exports were going to Iraq with only China exporting more to Iraq. In comparison, U.S. exports to Iraq by 2018 were only 0.08-percent of total exports. Commercial value of Iraq for Iran was considerably higher over both time periods.

The interests of the revisionist state and the status quo power can be rated as asymmetric for both time periods. Hesitancy of the U.S. to reengage in Iraq worked to Iran's benefit. The rise of ISIS eventually pulled the U.S. back into Iraq, but without much enduring interest. By the second time period, the U.S was invested once again, but not at the level they were during the previous Iraq campaign.

Informal Access (IV3)

Socio-cultural proximity remained similar for this case during both time periods, as it was during the previous Iraq case (2003-2011). However, the Sunni repression by Maliki and rise of ISIS served to catalyze Shia structures, strengthening internal ties and weakening external ties to a certain degree with the Sunni community.

Ideological convergence is clearly present during both time periods, especially among the PMU. On June 13, 2014, a special representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Sheikh Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalai issued a fatwa called "*wajib al-kifai*," (Rudolf, 2018). Within this fatwa, Sheikh al-Karbalai was able to phrase the defense of Iraq as a "…holy defense against these terrorist aggressors," in reference to ISIS (Rudolf, 2018, p. 4). Grand Ayatollah Naser Shirazi, based in Qom, also issued a fatwa declaring the fighting against ISIS in Iraq a jihad and made the defense of religious shrines the religious duty of all Muslims (Ostovar, 2016, p. 223). In doing so, the marjas not only unified the country through common religious reference, made it the duty of all able Iraqis to defend the country and holy sites against ISIS. Despite ideological differences most significantly between Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Khamenei, the fatwas provided some level of ideological justification for unified Shia efforts. Ideologically, the marjas performed a function that ideologically aligned with that of Iran in the fight against ISIS.

What resulted was a high degree of ideological convergence between the PMU, Sadr's forces and Iran.

After U.S. withdraw in 2011, there was a concentrated effort by Iran's intermediaries to seek political opportunity. Badr's integration into politics was initiated with Ameri's appointment as minister of transportation in 2011. By 2016, Badr held 21 seats in Iraqi parliament, ISCI held 31, and AAH held one. Overall, the Shia "National Alliance" held 177 seats (Anagnostos, 2016). By gaining a large number of votes during parliamentary elections, Shia candidates sought to position themselves for a greater role in the political establishment – including qualifying as potential candidates for prime minister. Further, Badr influence over the interior ministry equated to tremendous power over the police and security forces. The interior ministry was an institution over which Iran consistently sought influence, for obvious reasons. Control over Iraq's police and other security services represents a valuable asset.

Strategic convergence between Iran and intermediaries in Iraq is rated as high for both time periods. For the second time period, there remained a level of strategic convergence between Iran and Muqtada al-Sadr that perhaps strengthened after the deaths of Soleimani and Muhandis. During the first time period, Sadr repeatedly called on the disbandment of Shia militias (PMUs) following the defeat of ISIS. He also called for Iranian backed Bashar al-Assad to step down to prevent further bloodshed in Syria. Finally, he made an effort to engage Sunni leaders in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These efforts directly contradicted Iranian objectives. However, by the second time period, Sadr's continued opposition toward U.S. presence in Iraq was helpful to Iranian interests. Sadr was even called to Qom after Soleimani's death with the idea Sadr might take a greater role in leading the PMU (Ahmed, 2020). After all, some of the most highly controlled PMU elements were formerly under Sadr's command. Sadr botched the opportunity, calling for protests against the U.S., resulting in the death of several protesters which drew harsh criticism from Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Nonetheless, Sadr's influence and access to valuable segments of the Shia population were generally supportive of broader Iranian interests. The further withdraw of U.S. forces could remove some of the strategic convergence over the common enemy that Iran has benefited from since the rise of ISIS and return of the U.S. It will be interesting to see if strategic convergence weakens in the

period after U.S. withdraw and how reliant Iran becomes on ideological convergence as a primary element of informal access.

In summary, informal access in Iraq is rated as high during both time periods. Similar socio-cultural proximity, high ideological convergence and high strategic convergence provided Iran with tremendous flexibility. The execution of Muhandis was likely a challenge for Iran in Iraq due to his high level of adherence to and acknowledgement of Velayat-e Faqih (Ahmed, 2020). However, the multiple intermediaries consolidated under the PMU provided Iran the latitude to access Iraq's informal structures. Informal access remained high during both periods, giving Iran the flexibility to employ intermediaries in nearly any configuration they desired.

Target Summary

The weakness of Iraqi governing institutions and strength of mobilizing structures were lucrative for Iran's employment of intermediaries over both time periods. In fact, antecedent conditions were so permissive and interests were so asymmetric that Iran was able to strategically integrate the PMU in formal Iraqi governing structures. Iran counted on the government's inability to reign in undesirable PMU activity. The legalization of the PMU as a part of the ISF provided the PMU with international legal protections and access to state funding and resources. The establishment of the PMU represented the pinnacle of Iranian intermediary employment to date. The findings of this case are represented in the table below.

Iraq: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: **2014**		*Time Period 2*: **2019**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		*Permissive*		*Permissive*
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.071	Weak	0.231	Weak-Mod.
Resist. Strength	0.833	Strong	0.833	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	6	*Asymmetric*	6	*Asymmetric*
U.S.	3		3	
Informal Access	1	*High*	1	*High*
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Special Grps	*Lean Overt*	New Spec Grps	*Lean Overt*
	Badr	*Lean Overt*	Old Spec Grps	*Lean Overt*
	Sadr	*NA→Covert*	Hezbollah	*Overt*
			Sadr	*Lean Covert*
Level of State Control	Special Grps	*Lean Cent.*	New Spec Grps	*Centralized*
	Badr	*Lean Dec.*	Old Spec Grps	*Lean Cent.*
	Sadr	*Decentralized*	Hezbollah	*Lean Cent.*
			Sadr	*Decentralized*

Table 4.11.   Employment of Iranian intermediaries in Iraq, 2014-2019

The theory operates as expected in three out of seven observations in this case. I find the lack of variation in the explanatory variables reflects a similar lack of variation in the level of state control and attribution (DV). As depicted in the table above, the first case resulted in overt, centralized; overt, decentralized; and covert, decentralized outcomes. The outcomes were identical in the second time period, with the addition of one overt, centralized observation – supporting hypothesis 2. Finally, analysis of the explanatory variables proved useful in understanding how Iran strategically manipulated the environment for enhanced influence over outcomes.

Permissive antecedent conditions precipitated by the Syrian civil war and ISIS, compounded by the asymmetric interests of the U.S. as the status quo power provided Iran with the maneuverability to employ overt, centralized intermediary actors. In an effort to consolidate gains as the interests of the U.S. became slightly more symmetric, Iran

encouraged the tactful integration of key intermediaries into the PMU. With legal protections and government resources, Iran was afforded the latitude to more overtly support the PMU without much of the international retribution that occurred previously with support to individual intermediaries, such as KH or AAH.

Measures of the explanatory variables remained relatively stable over both time periods. Collectively, Iran maintained fairly centralized control over both time periods, however in order to do so, they pursued a dynamic approach by cultivating new influence as relationships with older organizations became challenged either due to internal power struggles and political manipulation, or exogenous shocks, like the execution of Muhandis. Finally, with the legal maturation of the PMU, Iran was able to covertly support PMU subordinate elements, such as KH, AAH and Kata'ib Imam Ali, through the masking of overt support to the broader PMU. The following case will apply the theory to Yemen.

Yemen: 2014-2018

Like the Hazarajat case, Yemen represents a case where Iran elected not to employ intermediary actors. The complexities of Yemen are similar to those highlighted in the Libya case under the Russia chapter. Numerous regional state actors, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran attempted to influence a diverse array of competing domestic factions through varying means of assistance. There are several characteristics that make Yemen a strong possibility for intermediary employment, but for Iran, the risk was too significant or barriers are too strong for employment. With this case, I examine how unfavorable values of the explanatory variables result in the outcome of no employment. Semi-permissive antecedent conditions, asymmetric interests in the adversary's favor, and moderate informal access prohibited intermediary employment. This is a case where many expected Iranian engagement in a fashion similar to other theaters of operation, and the Yemeni government even propelled such rhetoric in hopes of Saudi or broader Gulf participation against the Houthis. Although Iran contributed some military assistance to the Houthis, it never amounted to intermediary employment. With this case, I find the theory operates as expected in describing why intermediary employment did not occur. The following section briefly outlines the contextual factors and major actors that framed the outcome in Yemen over the time periods of 2014 and 2018.

Contextual Factors and Primary Actors Framing Yemen

The history of the Houthi rise is not very long. Until 1962, Yemen was ruled by a Shia Imamate and the subsequent rule by the Sunnis with strong Saudi influence was strenuous on the minority Shia population. Zaydi Shia, who ruled for centuries prior to 1962, were thereafter discriminated against. Shia dominant regions, like Saada in northern Yemen, were ignored by the government and fell on economic despair. In the 1970s-1980s, some Zaydi Shia began to resist the Sunni oppression. One of the first groups to rise up was led by Mohammad Badr al-Din al-Houthi (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). The Houthi family leadership visited Ayatollah Khomeini within days of his arrival in Tehran following the Islamic Revolution to congratulate him on his ascension to power (Uskowi, 2019). This effort was the initiation of a relationship with Iran, albeit geographically and somewhat ideologically distant.

Iranian involvement in Yemen between the Revolution and 9/11 was limited. The Saada Wars (2004-2010) and 2014-2015 civil war represented opportunities for Iran and Saudi Arabia to influence the situation in Yemen. However, as stated by Ardemagni (2019), "It would be simplistic and short-sighted to frame the 2015 Yemeni civil war as a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia…" (Ardemagni, 2019, p. 56). When the Saudi's intervened militarily in 2015, it served as a catalyst to drive the Houthis and Iranians closer together. The IRGC and Hezbollah both deployed personnel to Yemen, but they did little more than resource, train and advise. The relationship between Iran and the Houthis resulted in increased resource provision and training, but no control by Iran over Houthi decision making. The Houthis were modestly supported by Iran over both time periods, but their objectives and motivations were rooted in Yemen. The following section will apply the theory to this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are 2014 when the Houthis took over the Yemeni capital Sana'a and 2018 when the most recent data was available.

Attribution

Iran maintained both covert and overt relations with the Houthis, but not in terms of intermediary employment. Iran was the only country that maintained an embassy in Sana'a, after the Houthis overran government forces there in 2014. The Houthis had their own relationship with Hezbollah and traveled occasionally to Lebanon for consultations with Nasrallah, which were publicly acknowledged (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019). Both the IRGC and Hezbollah had a presence during the time periods evaluated, but there was no attempt at intermediary employment. Further, the Houthis denied any semblance of a proxy relationship with Iran (Kendall, 2017).

Level of State Control

Iran did not exercise control over Houthi operations. During the first time period, the Houthis actually disregarded Iranian recommendations when they took the capital, Sana'a (A. Watkins et al., 2015). The Houthis, like most other anti-government groups in Yemen, were motivated by power, territory and resources. However, both Iran

and Hezbollah provided military training, advice and assistance during both time periods. According to IISS (2019), there was no reflection of Iranian command and control into Houthi operations (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019).

In summary, observation of Iranian influence in Yemen in 2014 and 2018 demonstrates many characteristics that are familiar based on this research. However, despite a number of IRGC and Hezbollah personnel reported in Yemen during both time periods, influence did not escalate beyond basic advice and resource provision. Intermediary employment did not occur in this case.

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

Antecedent conditions in Yemen were semi-permissive for Iranian employment during both time periods. Prior to the civil war, governing structures were not inclusive of the Zaydi Shia minority, which constituted just over one-third of the Yemeni population. Divergent interests between several competing domestic entities resulted in very poor governance. World governance indicators were among the lowest of all cases assessed in this study – worse even than Syria from 2014-2018. The 2014 average was around 0.199 and by 2018 it was 0.101. For comparison, averages for the U.S. during the same time periods were 0.746 and 0.748, respectively. Yemeni domestic institutions were already very fragile during the first time period when the UN Security Council first established a panel of experts to address the country's instability. Much of the instability was spurred by numerous competing domestic and regional actors and the increase in activity by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (Jadallah et al., 2015). By the second time period, the government was split amongst competing entities. The President, Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi, was still recognized the legitimate leader of the country by the international community. But in Sana'a, the Houthi leadership forced the realignment of the General People's Congress (GPC) to support Houthi priorities (Himmiche et al., 2019). Finally, in the South the Southern Transitional Council continued its pursuit of secession

with support from the UAE (Himmiche et al., 2019).[39] Divergent interests between the President, the GPC and Houthis, regional and local leaders presented little space for negotiated governance. This resulted in inefficiency in government policies and spending.

Unsurprisingly, the domestic economy underperformed considerably during both time periods. During the first time period, poverty was at 54-percent and youth unemployment was around 35-percent (International Monetary Fund, 2014). Hadi was heavily reliant upon assistance from Saudi Arabia economically and militarily. Additionally, Yemen was reliant upon remittance inflows from neighboring states and such remittances actually exceed the average annual value of formal external aid to the tune of $2-$4 billion per year, although such income is unreliable in the prediction of future economic stability (UN Security Council, 2020). By the second time period, there was actually GDP growth, but estimated inflation was over 27-percent and problems with governmental institutions limited the payment to civil servants. Poverty was incredibly high and in conjunction with other government shortfalls, 17 million Yemeni people were in need of food aid facing famine (International Monetary Fund, 2019b). The licit economy is rated as poor during both time periods.

Popular Resistance.

Popular resistance structures were robust during both time periods in Yemen, but not particularly strong. Decades of oppression by the Sunni government stoked considerable discontent. Shia dominant areas and southern secessionist areas established shadow governments and informal economic structures which plagued those of the state. While the structures were strong independently through homogeneous ties, intraorganizational cooperation or convergence toward collective action was untenable.

As alluded to, political factionalization was strong during both time periods. However, the hostile takeover of various government institutions by multiple competing entities resulted in considerable inefficiency during both time periods. Due to the collapse of the government, there was no opportunity for the various factions to gain legitimacy through governing structures. Those factions with resources were unable to deliver goods or services to constituents, further enflaming discontent.

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[39] The Southern and Eastern provinces, anchored by Aden, were not a part of Yemen until 1990.

The illicit economy was prevalent during both time periods. The Houthis had access to valuable ports where they assessed taxes on imports and received vital supplies from Iran. They collected taxes or customs rents at the ports as well as major roads. The majority of illicit income came through deals with the telecom sector, tobacco companies, and taxes on petroleum imports (Himmiche et al., 2019). Since 2015, the Houthis provided import licenses to 52 companies through which they could further generate income.

In summary, weak domestic institutional strength interacted with weak-moderate resistance strength across both time periods, resulting in semi-permissive antecedent conditions. While domestic institutions are ripe for exploitation, the Houthis lack substantial coalition to attract greater Iranian attention. The number of actors and lack of coalition building through heterogenous organizations limits Houthi behavior across both time periods. The following section will assess the symmetry of interests.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Yemen represents the only example of Iranian involvement in this study where state interests were stacked asymmetrically against Iran, which is plausibly a major reason we do not observe Iranian intermediary employment in this case. The status quo power for this case is Saudi Arabia, which possesses geographic proximity and ties and alliances with the Yemeni government. Geographically, Saudi Arabia is contiguous, while Iran is rated as far.

Saudi relations with Yemen are long-standing, but still not particularly strong. There are substantial transnational tribal links that extend across the Saudi – Yemen border and partly as a result, Yemen tends to export its instability (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries supported the previous president, Ali Abdallah Saleh, since 1990 when Yemen was unified. However, when the Houthi family first sought governmental change with the Ansar Allah movement, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) negotiated for Saleh to step aside and cede power to his vice president, Hadi in an effort to assuage Houthi ambition (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016). Saudi Arabia's engagement with Yemen was always with the perspective of a potential threat. Iran's relations, conversely, never extended beyond the Houthi family to the Yemen state. Cordial

relations between Grand Ayatollah Khomeini and the Houthi family began after the Iranian revolution and material support of the Houthis occurred as early as 2009 during the Saada wars. For Saudi Arabia, historical ties and alliances can be rated as weak, whereas Iranian ties are rated as weak to non-existent.

Saudi Arabia eclipsed Iran in terms of commercial value, although exports to Yemen over both time periods were still only about 0.3-percent of total exports. Iranian commercial value was substantially lower over both time periods (0.03 and 0.0008). Iran's limited resources due to sanctions during the same time period likely forced investment closer to home. Commercial value is not high for either country, but it is certainly higher for Saudi Arabia.

In summary, interests are rated as asymmetric in favor of Saudi Arabia over both time periods by a ratio of 2:5. Far geographic proximity, weak historical ties and low commercial value leave Iranian interests in Yemen much lower than those of Saudi Arabia. The next section evaluates Iran's level of informal access in Yemen.

Informal Access (IV3)

Informal access is rated as moderate, at best during both time periods. Socio-cultural proximity is classified as related due to the minority Shia population and relative weakness of shared cultural history. Yemeni Shia are distant from Iranian Shia ideologically. Yemeni Shia are Zaydi and follow the Fifth Imam, while Iranian Shia follow the Twelfth Imam. However, there were several attempts to unify the two sects in an effort to increase resonance within the broader aspects of the faith – similar to efforts undertaken by the Saudis and Emirates in their attempts to link Hanbalis, Wahhabis, Salafis and Shafi'is (known as Sunnisation) within the Sunni sect (Ardemagni, 2019). In the mid-1990s, Badr al-Din al-Houthi studied at the seminary (*hawza*) of Qom in a Zaydi approach (Jarudi) that is most similar to Twelver Shia. The Zaydis believe strongly in community engaged imams and the initiation of *Velayat-e Faqih* by Khomeini unintentionally served as a doctrinal bridge between the Iranian and Yemeni Shia (Ardemagni, 2019).

Ideological convergence was not substantial in Yemen. Despite the potential that existed under Badr al-Din al-Houthi mentioned above, the Houthis' goal as

stated when they captured Sana'a was to take a stand against corrupt and ineffective government (Hokayem & Roberts, 2016; Kendall, 2017). Although the Saudi's often attribute Houthi behavior to ideological convergence with Iran, this convergence did not extend beyond rhetoric during either time period.

Finally, there was some level of strategic convergence. The Houthis were in alignment with Iranian strategic vision on weakening Sunni dominance in the region. The chaos of Saudi intervention and focused attention was beneficial to Iranian objectives while concurrent operations in Iraq and Syria were more resource intensive. Within Yemen, convergence between the Houthis and former President Saleh resulted during the first time period, which proved beneficial in the capture of Sana'a. Additionally, rumors of IRGC meetings with the southern separatists would support the Iranian vision of weakened Saudi dominance. However, informal access for intermediary growth would have to consist of more than strategic convergence alone. Overall, informal access is rated as moderate during both time periods.

Target Summary

Many characteristics of the Yemen case appear familiar to other cases in this project. There was a religious component, significant popular discontent, governmental weakness and multiple actors with varying levels of power. Despite quips within Iran that Ansar Allah in Yemen might become synonymous with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the theory indicates such an outcome is unlikely. The findings of the Yemen case are summarized in the table below.

Yemen: Summary Evaluations

Variables	*Time Period 1*: **2014**		*Time Period 2*: **2018**	
	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		*Semi-Permissive*		*Semi-Permissive*
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.066	Weak	0.034	Weak
Resist. Strength	0.333	Weak-Mod	0.333	Weak-Mod
Symmetry of Interests				
Iran	2	*Asymmetric*	2	*Asymmetric*
Saudi Arabia	5	*(Against)*	5	*(Against)*
Informal Access	0.5	*Moderate*	0.5	*Moderate*
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Not Employed	--------	Not Employed	--------
Level of State Control	Not Employed	--------	Not Employed	--------

Table 4.12. **Summary indicators for Iranian non-employment in Yemen, 2014-2018**

The theory operates as expected in this case. Antecedent conditions were notably less permissive and interests were asymmetrically against Iran. And although some level of informal access existed over both time periods, weakness in ideological convergence limited overall access. The interaction of these variables resulted in an outcome of no intermediary employment during either time period, supporting hypothesis 6. Analysis of the explanatory variables proves useful in the analysis of why intermediaries were not employed during either time period in this case. The values for the explanatory variables are notably weaker than cases where we do observe employment. Lastly, this is the only case of the project where asymmetric interests against the RSA are observed. This may be a strong indicator of hesitancy to employ intermediaries. The following section will compare analysis from across all Iranian cases presented in this chapter.

Comparison of Iranian Cases

Overall, the analysis of the conditions shaping Iran's employment or non-employment of intermediaries across seven target locations reveals several findings useful in the evaluation of my theory. Additionally, the theory demonstrates utility in describing how intermediaries were employed across time and space.

This chapter consisted of 29 observations of intermediary employment and non-employment across seven target locations. I found support for the theory in each of the cases and with 17 out of 29 observations. Unique to the analysis of Iran was the opportunity to observe two cases of non-employment. In both of these cases, antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests appear to be strong factors in the revisionist state's calculus of deciding whether or not to employ intermediaries. In the Hazarajat case, antecedent conditions were resistant. Both domestic governing structures and resistance strength were weak. Interests between Iran and the USSR were very symmetric, but the two countries also shared symmetry of interests in the concurrent Iran-Iraq war. For the Yemen case, antecedent conditions were semi-permissive, but interests were strongly asymmetric against Iran. In summary, the variables antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests demonstrate utility in the description of *if* intermediary actors are deployed, or not.

In 11 out of 12 observations where the theory did not operate as expected, the interests of the revisionist state and status quo power were evaluated as asymmetric. However, the outcomes were those the theory would predict to occur under symmetric conditions. There are a couple possible explanations for this. First, this variable may not have the functionality hypothesized and I discuss this more in the conclusion. Rather than a sequential perspective of the strategic choice set available to intermediaries as outlined by the theory, practical employment may be from a maximum utility perspective. Such a perspective would operationalize outcomes associated with hypotheses 3-6 more frequently. Second, actual measures of annual symmetry likely differ from perspectives of symmetry. I also discuss this point in more depth in the conclusion chapter.

Also interesting with the Iran case is the role of ideology. The influence of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini and the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih was widely discussed in this chapter. While certainly a factor with some, I only observed ideological convergence in

50-percent of cases evaluated. Of those cases where intermediaries were employed, ideological convergence was a factor in 60-percent of cases. However, in all cases where intermediaries were employed and ideological convergence did not exist, strategic convergence was present. Ideology is certainly an important component, but definitely not necessary for intermediary employment.

State control does not appear to be influenced by geographic proximity with Iran. Control was split evenly between centralized and decentralized for the overall number of observations and for the cases where intermediaries were deployed in contiguous target states. The highest concentration of observations where control was centralized occurred in Syria (2011-2018) and Iraq (2014-2019). All explanatory variables were consistent during this period (permissive; asymmetric; mod-high informal access). The only other factor not included during this time period was the rise of ISIS. We know Iran perceived ISIS as an existential threat. Although ISIS did not emerge in Iraq until 2014, they may have catalyzed Iran's desire to present a more united front. The findings from this chapter are summarized in the chart below.

Target	Intermediary	Observed DV	Expected DV	Support for Hypotheses
Lebanon (1982-2006)	Hezbollah	Covert/Decentralized	Covert/Decentralized	3
	Hezbollah	Overt/Decentralized	Covert/Decentralized	--
Afghanistan (1979-1989)	Hazarajat	No employment	No employment	1
	Hazarajat	No employment	No employment	1
Afghanistan (2007-2018)	Mashhad Taliban	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Mashhad Taliban	Covert/Centralized	Covert/Centralized	4
Iraq (2003-2011)	SCIRI/Badr	Covert/Decentralized	Covert/Decentralized	3
	Dawa	Covert/Decentralized	Covert/Decentralized	3
	JAM	Covert/Decentralized	Covert/Decentralized	3
	SCIRI/Badr	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Dawa	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	SGs	Covert/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	--

Syria (2011-2018)	NDF	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	Hezbollah	Overt/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Zainab/Fatema.	Covert/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Iraqi Intermediaries	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	LDF	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	NDF	Overt/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Hezbollah	Overt/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Zainab/Fatema.	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
Iraq (2014-2019)	SGs	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	Badr	Overt/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	Sadr	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	New SGs	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	Old SGs	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	Hezbollah	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	Sadr	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
Yemen (2014-2018)	Houthis	Not Employed	Not Employed	6
	Houthis	Not Employed	Not Employed	6

Table 4.13.   Summary of Iran observations and support for hypotheses

In addition to theoretical analysis, there are a few other patterns of behavior exhibited by Iran that are worth noting. First, Iranian intermediary strategy seems to encourage a split within existing groups, or coopt elements of certain groups with the enticement of Iranian Shia dominance and allegiance. This is observed with Hezbollah and the split from Amal, with Iraq on multiple occasions with splits from Badr and Jaish al-Mahid. Splinter groups that can be recruited and coopted seem to be viewed lucratively from the perspective of the IRGC.

Second, as a means to increase control, the IRGC often deploys personnel within the ranks of intermediary forces or in command of such forces. Iran often attempts to mask attribution by calling these personnel volunteers or retirees. Similarly, on occasion, Iran

reinforces tactical capabilities, such as artillery or UAV support, with IRGC or Artesh personnel who are on "vacation or leave" from regular service. We observe the exact same mechanism of control with Russia in the next chapter.

Third, there is a clear link between military and political intermediary efforts by Iran. This is also indicative of desired levels of RSA control. By gaining a foothold in the target state governing structures, intermediaries provide Iran with mechanisms for influence that are otherwise unavailable – including funding. Hezbollah began this process in 1992 and it is now widespread in Iraq. Even in Syria we observe an entry into the governing structures through the LDF. Intermediary participation in government appears to be a primary goal of Iranian employment and an enduring mechanism of control.

There are many additional benefits to the use of intermediaries, as evidenced with Iran's experiences. From a domestic politics standpoint, the political and human cost of employment is substantially reduced. Additionally, intermediaries are financially expedient. Many of Iran's intermediaries were self-financing or became self-financing, which enhanced covert attribution. Intermediaries are valuable for Iran politically and financially.

Summary

Iran began cultivating intermediary actors in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. Over time, the intermediaries became an increasingly reliant means of influencing and shaping foreign policy, bypassing sanctions and avoiding measures of international deterrence. The Iranian regime reaped positive and negative outcomes through intermediary employment and it is clear that variation of employment does exist.

The number and diversity of intermediaries employed by Iran evolved considerably over time. As intermediaries matured, such as Hezbollah and the Iraqi Special Groups, Iran was able to employ them as defacto agents of the state with little centralized control. The theory does not account for the maturation of intermediaries, but it is logical to draw the conclusion that mature intermediaries can be considered a part of the broader "Shia Liberation Army." Those more highly skilled or trained are given more latitude to execute relatively decentralized within parameters and those less skilled are now more centrally

controlled and given less strategically important jobs. Iran basically task oriented intermediaries to perform similar functions to regular military units. This functional approach gives Iran very wide latitude to achieve revisionist intent in the broader region. There do, however appear to be limits to Iran's reach. International sanctions seem to confine Iranian behavior to the region. Additionally, military operations directed at Iranian specific targets, like Qasem Soleimani and Muhandis, have an effect at least to some degree of pushing Iranian activity into the overt realm, which makes future operations easier to deter.

Overall, Iran's employment of intermediaries was useful for the evaluation of this theory. This chapter has shown the utility of the theory in describing the outcomes of intermediary employment across a range of cases, exhibiting different degrees of variation. Additionally, for those outcomes not predicted, the theory lends explanatory power to their understanding. The next chapter interrogates Russia's employment of intermediaries from 1992-2019.

5   Russia

Introduction

The Russian use of proxies is widely debated as a major concern in foreign policy circles, especially since 2014. Little Green Men in Crimea, support for secessionist movements and the development of quasi-private military companies, such as the Wagner Group, are the source of much international angst and confusion regarding the use of state sponsored force. But in Russia, the utilization of surrogates is a well-known means of influence as part of an arsenal that spans centuries. The contemporary Russian use of intermediaries under gray zone conditions is the subject of this chapter.

Over the course of this chapter, I seek to establish the conditions under which the employment of intermediaries occurs for Russia. I also look to develop understanding of how variation in state interests and informal access influence how intermediaries are employed by Russia. Over the past few decades, their employment of intermediaries has matured as a strategic means for the attainment of foreign policy objectives. Initially, intermediary employment was ad hoc and opportunistic. Over time, the Russians identified mechanisms to enhance the success, or maximize utility, of intermediary actors. I show the contemporary Russian approach to intermediary employment is measured. Unlike the Iranians, this chapter demonstrates Russian intermediaries are *only* employed when antecedent conditions are permissive and interests with the status quo power are asymmetric. This finding is contrary to the opinion some foreign policy experts who claim "the Kremlin is usually opportunistic about its use of proxies…" (Carpenter, 2019). The deliberate approach by Russia facilitates the attainment of zero-sum gains in areas that are least likely to escalate to larger scale conflict.

This project predicts the variables of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests condition *if* intermediary actors are employed by a revisionist state. Further, I argue the variable of informal access is a determinant of *how* intermediaries are employed. The empirical evidence on Russian employment supports these predictions. With a mix of cases from within Russia's sphere of influence (Near Abroad) and others on the fringe of Russian influence, I find all observations of employment include permissive antecedent

conditions and asymmetric interests with the status quo power. In other words, Russia only employs intermediaries when permissive and asymmetric conditions are met.

This chapter interrogates Russia's employment of intermediaries across 31 observations in five cases: Georgia (1992 and 2008); Crimea, Ukraine (2014 and 2018); the Donbass, Ukraine (2014 and 2018); Syria (2015 and 2018) and Libya (2016 and 2019). The intermediaries vary in range from ambiguous Spetsnaz and ideologically motivated Cossacks, to quasi-private companies and Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs). These cases are not the only examples of the Russian deployment of intermediaries. However, they are representative of examples of employment that spanned more than one year, thus enabling variation of the explanatory variables. The selected cases also represent of a mix of target states within the Near Abroad and those on the margins of Russian influence.

This chapter demonstrates that Russians place a premium on centralized control. I find Russia makes a clear effort to balance control and attribution based on geo-cultural proximity. In the Near Abroad, Russia was more willing to exert centralized control over intermediaries in conjunction with more overt attribution. This was observed in the cases of Georgia, Crimea and the Donbass. However, for target states that are not geo-culturally proximate to Russia, centralized control was still a priority, but layers of separation were added through the delegation of control to entities such as the Wagner Group.

Finally, with analysis of Russia, I show how the variable of informal access is operationalized for strategic gain. Three of the five cases in this chapter occurred within the Near Abroad, where Russia possessed high informal access. The Syrian and Libyan cases were outside the Near Abroad with lower informal access, and the strategy for deployment of intermediaries was considerably different. Both cases outside the Near Abroad reflect deliberate efforts by Russia to enhance informal access.

Case Selection

The first case on Georgia includes the earliest time period of analysis, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is the first instance where Russia deployed intermediaries outside the new Russian state. The observations in this case establish a

baseline from which to measure the progression of intermediary utilization by Russia. The Georgia case exhibits minor variation in antecedent conditions (IV1), while the other explanatory variables remained constant. Conditions were permissive during the first time period, but hardened considerably by the second – although not to the level of being resistant to employment. The separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provided Russia with a vulnerability to exploit the moderate antecedent conditions during the second time period. Intermediary employment transitioned from ad hoc, to overt and centralized. Finally, this case demonstrates Russia's maturation in intermediary application and the learning that occurred between the two time periods.

The Ukrainian cases in Crimea and the Donbass, represent a most-similar case comparison. Here, antecedent conditions (IV1) and informal access (IV3) are constant, which reveals minor variation in the symmetry of interests (IV2). The comparison of these cases, across the same revisionist actor-target state-time period triad, is helpful in teasing out Russian perceptions of symmetric interests and differentiation in strategic intent. Through the evaluation of the Ukrainian cases, I consider whether alternative explanations account for variation in employment. I find Russian intent was very different based on the intermediary strategies of these two cases. Crimea was intentional, precise and deliberate, with overt, centralized employment due to the perception of asymmetric interests. The employment of intermediaries in the Donbass was initially reticent and opportunistic, shaped by an uptick in international interest after the Crimea intervention and perception of greater symmetry in interests. By the second time period, the majority of intermediaries departed Ukraine, leaving behind overt, centralized separatists. There are two primary explanations for this outcome, as revealed through the research: 1) Intermediaries were needed elsewhere; and 2) Intermediaries were used as a bridge to transition to full Russian control of secessionist enclaves. This process was tantamount to entry into the next phase of operations.

Finally, Syria and Libya represent the only cases outside the Near Abroad. With these cases, antecedent conditions were permissive and interests were asymmetric, but informal access was rated as moderate to low. Differentiation in employment is clearly observable in these cases. The Syrian case is the only observation in this project where a state actor requested a revisionist state's presence, negating the importance of antecedent

conditions. The Libya case reveals the maturation of Russian intermediaries and conditions under which employment strategy and intermediary composition can be adjusted to strategically influence outcomes outside the Near Abroad.

The findings of this chapter reveal employment occurs in a manner predicted by the theory in four out of the five cases. In these cases, I find support for hypothesis 2, which predicts permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests with the status quo power will result in overt, centralized intermediary employment. I did not find support for my theory during the first time period in the Donbass case, or with the Libya case. However, the theory highlights factors under resistance strength and informal access that influence the outcomes.

In what follows, I briefly introduce you to Russia's history of intermediary employment and the primary actors involved. This informs the reader of the long-standing relationships key intermediary actors possess with the Russian state and frames the understanding of how utilization of these intermediaries evolved over time. Next, I once again drill down into the details of the theory to interrogate Russian employment for each of the five cases. This theoretical analysis section provides qualitative justification for the evaluation of each variable based on assessed indicator values across each revisionist state-target state-time period triad. Finally, a case summary and conclusion draw out the findings, evaluate the explanatory power of the theory and tie together important themes of Russian intermediary employment.

Contextual Factors Shaping Russian Intermediary Employment

History

Russia has a very long history in the employment of intermediaries that influences contemporary employment. Throughout Russian expansion from the 16th-19th centuries, Russians used the Cossacks and others to assist separatist or disgruntled populations in the attainment of autonomy (Galeotti, 2016; Marten, 2019b; Sukhankin, 2018a; U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). Calls for non-Russian partisan forces to be part of the official Russian military were even made within the Russian government during this time (Sukhankin, 2018b). During the Cold War, the Soviets frequently used many of the

same tactics to mask attribution that we observe today. Following the (third) coup in Syria orchestrated by Hafez al Assad in 1971, the Soviets deployed soldiers and military instructors to Syria as "tourists" and those involved in the Arab-Israeli or Lebanese wars were told they would have to find their own way out if they found themselves behind enemy lines (Sukhankin, 2018b). Similarly, during the Angolan civil war, Soviet military advisors were deployed as non-military personnel. In the early 1990s, volunteers, including the first observation of Cossacks, were observed in the former Yugoslavia. In 2007, the Russian government formally codified the potential for intermediaries to assist in the economic dimension. Although "mercenaries" are illegal in Russia, Russian parliament authorized Transneft and Gazprom to employ "…arms and special means for securing production procured by the state," (Sukhankin, 2018b). This gave rise to many of the quasi-private military companies that are commonly referenced as agents of the Russian state, but operating under the guise of infrastructure protection, in the modern era. Russia has a long history of employing intermediaries or clandestine forces and masking attribution. The contemporary mask is "business."

Russkiy Mir and the Near Abroad

There are two major factors that shape contemporary intermediary employment: concepts of Russkiy Mir and the Near Abroad. Modern employment of intermediaries by Russia is part of a broader strategy based on ideological vision and ambition to achieve several aims concurrently. These include the goals of restoring Russia's international "rank," asserting its position as the center of Eurasia, in order to cultivate and consolidate a "distinct and somewhat self-contained Russian world that does not adhere … to Western values," (Ruiz Palmer, 2015, p. 53). In Russia, the concept of the "Russian World" or, *Russkiy Mir*, has become an ideological paradigm through which Russian leaders attempt to unify their culture and values of the interests of Russian society (and the state) over that of individuals (Lutsevych, 2016). In many ways, Russkiy Mir is a tool for ideological convergence designed to counter the Western promotion of democracy. The concept grew over the early 21st century and in 2007, Vladimir Putin established the Russkiy Mir Foundation with subordinate centers all over the world including in the United States. Through this foundation, the Russian state partnered with the Russian Orthodox Church to

promote the values of Russians abroad and to challenge Western values (Kudors & Orttung, 2010). The Russian Orthodox Church advocates for the gathering of "Russian lands" and protection of Russian people abroad (Lutsevych, 2016). Russkiy Mir encompasses cultural-linguistic components, but extends beyond Russian or Slavic ethnic boundaries to include all those who feel an affinity with Russia. Finally, Putin established a Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation called *Rossotrudnichestvo*. This agency resides under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in conjunction with the Russkiy Mir Foundation, is used to extend Russian influence internationally. The Russkiy Mir concept directly supports the protection of those ascribing to Russkiy Mir beyond Russia's borders in the Near Abroad.

The phrase Near Abroad, emanated in the 1990s as a reference to post-Soviet states. Many of these states share strong ethno-linguistic, religious and other cultural commonalities with Russia. Further, through the concept of Russkiy Mir, Russia increasingly justifies actions in the Near Abroad as part of their duty to protect interests. Russia attempted to institutionalize the Near Abroad through organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) over the past few decades (Cooley, 2017). With the context of Russia's historical utilization of intermediaries, the ideological construct of Russkiy Mir, and interests and influence in the Near Abroad, the following section will briefly introduce common intermediary actors.

Russia's Preferred Intermediary Actors

> I believe that such [private military] companies are a way of implementing national interests without the direct involvement of the state … I think we could consider this option.

> —Russian President Vladimir Putin[40]

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[40] This is a quote from President-elect Putin's address to the State Duma in 2012. See Igor Zarembo, "Private Military Companies in Russia: to be or not to be," *Russia Beyond*, April 12, 2012, accessed August 19, 2019, https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/04/17/private_military_companies_in_russia_to_be_or_not_to_be_15499.

There are several types of intermediaries Russia employed to attain zero-sum gains against the status quo power between the time periods considered in this project (1992 to 2019). I briefly introduce the primary actors here in order to frame understanding of their relationship with the Russian state and their history of employment. In the contemporary era, the idea of integrating intermediaries was supported by General Nikolai Makarov in 2010 for, "…delicate missions abroad…to avoid the humiliation of 2004 [arrest of Russians in Qatar for crimes in Chechnya]," (Sukhankin, 2019c). Among the most commonly referenced intermediaries are quasi-Private Military Companies (PMCs),[41] such as the Wagner Group, the Cossacks, the Chechens, and Government Organized, or influenced, NGOs (GONGOs). A description of these groups is briefly expanded below.

Quasi-PMCs, such as Wagner, gained notoriety after the Crimea annexation. The Wagner Group descended from a company called the Slavonic Corps, which in turn descended from the Moran Security Group (Marten, 2019b). Each of these companies had ambiguous leadership connections amongst veteran groups, intelligence organizations, military organizations, and the Russian state. Such quasi-PMCs are deployed around the world in support, protection, advise and assist, and ambiguous offensive operations with the semblance of direction from or cooperation with the Russian state.[42] The strong ties to the Russian state are what differentiates these companies from mercenaries, who are willing to work for employers other than the government.

Elements of Russia's Cossack ethnic group almost always accompany Russian intermediary employment. In addition to preforming military tasks for Russia, the Cossacks in particular operate numerous youth education programs, such as paramilitary camps, in Armenia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Ukraine (Lutsevych, 2016). Modern Cossacks proudly trace their heritage back to the 14th century in the area that is now southern Russia and Ukraine. By the 16th century, various Cossack groups consolidated into an independent warrior class who were known for their fierce horsemanship skills and

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[41] I categorize these companies as "quasi-private" because the ownership structures are riddled with ambiguous connections to state entities and they typically receive some level of sponsorship from state institutions.

[42] PMCs are technically illegal in Russia. There are a couple of explanations why this is still the case. 1) It enhances plausible deniability. 2) It denies such companies the opportunity to turn on the state.

served as an autonomous buffer between Czarist Russia and their enemies (Roth, 2016). The Cossacks are strong advocates for the protection of Russian minorities in border areas and outlying former Soviet states, and many are eager to return to an era where they serve as the front-line guard protecting Russian interests. In 2005 Putin stated, "…the fight of Cossacks against crime and terrorism can be very efficient…" and that Cossack troops will remain under the Russian government's command (Bigg, 2005). In the time since this statement, the Cossacks have been employed in Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine and are typically affiliated with the Russian Army's 45th Detached Reconnaissance Regiment (Lutsevych, 2016). They have chapters in most post-Soviet states with a total of around 740,000 affiliated people (Lutsevych, 2016).[43]

Segments of Russia's Chechen ethnic group also commonly operate as Russian intermediaries. The Chechens belong to the North Caucasian group of people who are linguistically and anthropologically related to Ingushes, Abkhazians, Circassians and Dagestanis – all of which are referenced in Russian proxy literature in one conflict or another (Derluguian, 2001).[44] During the Second Chechen War, the Vostok (East) and Zapad (West) Battalions were formed by Russian Spetsnaz, comprised mostly of pro-Russian Chechens with mixed ethnic Russian and Chechen commanders. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov also maintains a Chechen "army" of his own, called Kadyrovtsi, who deployed to Ukraine and Syria (Waller, 2015). Russia has deployed the Vostok and Zapad battalions in official and unofficial capacities to Georgia, Lebanon, Ukraine, Syria and elsewhere as since their establishment in the late 1990s.

Russia also relies upon more ambiguous domestic organizations for various levels of influence abroad often in the form of Government Organized, or influenced, NGOs (GONGOs) (Lutsevych, 2016; U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2018). The most well-known of these groups is the Night Wolves, which is a biker club that participates in the advocation of Russkiy Mir and intimidation. Estonian security officials

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[43] Cossacks and Chechens are referenced broadly in this project, but clearly not all Cossacks and Chechens serve as intermediaries. Elements of the Tersk, Don, Kuban, and Terek Cossacks are most common. Common Chechen intermediaries are those originally recruited by Kadyrov under the Vostok and Zapad battalions. Cossack and Chechen intermediaries can be found on both sides of most conflicts.

[44] Like many other regions during the fall of the USSR, Chechnya attempted to gain independence from Russia through two wars with more than 200,000 lives lost in the 1990s.

categorized the Night Wolves as a security threat (Galeotti, 2016). Putin rode with the Night Wolves in Crimea in 2013 before the invasion. Ukrainian Choice is another example of a GONGO that was important in the Crimea case. Some GONGOs receive and disburse money for Russia under clouded attribution (Lutsevych, 2016). Many of the NGO groups directly target younger generations within post-Soviet states with pro-Russian or anti-Western narratives.

Finally, Russia utilizes their special operations forces, Spetsnaz, in a variety of intermediary roles or functions. In Crimea, they were used as intermediaries themselves (LGM). In the Georgia and the Donbass, they were used as mechanisms to reinforce control over outcomes. In Syria and Libya, they were often used in support roles, providing critical enablers (close air support, artillery, etc.) to other intermediaries. The Russian military personnel involved in intermediary deployments are often called "volunteers," which is a historical reference (Sukhankin, 2018b) but indicates these military personnel were on leave or vacation and not operating in an official capacity. The cases under analysis for this research include various compositions of the intermediaries mentioned above, in addition to a few others that are explained as needed throughout the chapter.

As a final note before we proceed into the individual cases, most of Russia's deployments of intermediaries occurred within the context of the "color revolutions." As NATO and the EU expanded eastward in the 1990s, Russian influence over former Soviet republics (Near Abroad) waned. This reality served as an affront to proud Russians such as Vladimir Putin, who perceived an inevitable return to a more prominent world position.

> All "color revolutions" have a similar hallmark – the West provides informational and material support for protest activism and applauds the violent overthrow of incumbent regimes, installing its own puppets in government (Izvestiya, 2019).

The color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan were perceived by Russia as a mechanism of warfare by the U.S. directed at Russian influence in the former Soviet space (Nilsson, 2018).

With the context of Russian employment of intermediaries highlighted above, the following section is comprised of the five campaigns I use to evaluate the utility of my theory. Each campaign is structured over two time periods, first with a brief narrative of

the conflict and key actors. Next, I assess values for attribution and level of state control (DV). I then qualify values for antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests, and informal access (IVs). Each campaign concludes with a summarized table of outcomes, a discussion of the explanatory power of the theory, and initial implications. The first campaign discussed below is the Russian deployment of intermediaries to Georgia.

Detailed Summary of Campaigns (Targets)

Georgia

Twice in recent history Russia deployed intermediaries to Georgia – 1992 and 2008. The deployments both targeted the secessionist enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These regions were somewhat autonomous from Georgian control even before the fall of the Soviet Union and a consistent target for Russian influence as the USSR began to crumble. The first employment of intermediaries was haphazard and inconclusive, but it set conditions for a more successful second effort later in 2008.

This case is used to establish a baseline from which to measure the maturity of Russian intermediary employment. Additionally, minor variation in antecedent conditions between the two time periods is useful in the analysis of how intermediary employment changed. The first time period (1992) occurred in the midst of a coup, with a lack of legitimate leadership and poor governing institutions. However, by the second time period (2008), Georgia possessed the highest level of governance indicators and institutional strength of any case analyzed in this project. Russia propelled separatist ambition between the two time periods so that in 2008, weakness of sovereignty overshadowed the strength of central governing structures. With this case, we observe the maturation of Russia's intermediary force. Initial deployments were ad hoc and opportunistic. By the second time period, deployment was centrally controlled and more precise. The theory operates as expected during the second time period of this case, but not the first. I find the inability of the theory to describe the first iteration is due mostly to the infancy of Russian operations abroad after the collapse of the Soviet Union and simultaneous independence movements in other former Soviet republics. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that shaped Russia's deployment of intermediaries in Georgia.

Fall of the Soviet Union and emergence of the Russian Hidden Hand

The Georgia case is set within the context of secessionist movements. Intermediary involvement in Georgia also occurred near simultaneously to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, along with the Baltic countries, Georgia declared independence in April 1991 from the Soviet Union, prior to dissolution. Separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia exploited the opportunistic environment and pleaded to Russia for assistance throughout 1991-1992, although low-level conflict began years earlier.

During the first days of 1992, a coup forced Georgia's first independent President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia into exile. After the coup, Gamsakhurdia followers took up refuge in the autonomous region of Abkhazia, alongside the Abkhaz leadership in the town of Gadauta, which was also the location of one of Russia's military bases. Georgian forces pursued Abkhazian separatists and Gamsakhurdian supporters for months, killing and looting indiscriminately (Goltz, 2009). Then in September 1992, the composition of the Abkhazian opposition changed noticeably and Georgian forces were placed on the defensive.

> Georgia was not only fighting the Abkhaz, but rather found itself fighting a strange coalition of local Abkhaz men (and women), Abkhaz and other Circassian volunteers both from the Russian North Caucasus and the wider Circassian Diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East, but also Cossack freebooters and other Slavic soldiers of fortune. Finally,…it became clear that Georgia was also fighting against shadowy elements of the Russian military…(Goltz, 2009, p. 25).

The coalition of intermediaries mentioned above, in addition to Chechen Confederation of Mountain Peoples, drove the more powerful Georgian forces out of most of Abkhazia. These intermediaries were augmented with logistics, artillery and aviation through the Russian military. This was confirmed with the downing of Russian aircraft and capture of Russian "volunteer" pilots with official Russian documents. Russia plainly denied involvement despite clear evidence and countered with claims Georgian forces indiscriminately bombed their own citizens (Goltz, 2009, p. 26). The involvement by Russia during this time period became known as the Russian "Hidden Hand." This observation represents the first time in Georgia that intermediaries were employed by Russia.

The subsequent instability provided Russia with an opportunity to serve as a peacekeeper in Georgia and further consolidate gains.

> The use of military and economic means to obtain subordination to Moscow has been strikingly evident in the recent trials of Belarus and Georgia…In Georgia, military intervention gave Moscow the pretext for political mediation. In the course of it, Georgia learned…that Russia as umpire is not very different from Russia as empire (Brzezinski, 1994).

Georgia went without a president until 1995 when Eduard Shevardnadze was elected. Shevardnadze served previously as the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1985-1991. Prior to his election as Georgian president, Shevardnadze led Georgia as speaker of parliament and further entrenched Russian influence. In 1993, Georgia became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and then in 1994, a signatory to the Russian Collective Security Treaty, which resulted in the establishment of four Russian military bases in Georgia and the maintenance of the headquarters of the Russian Transcaucasian Military District (ZAKVO) in the capital of Tbilisi. In addition, Shevardnadze appointed three Russians to powerful positions within the Georgian government. The former commander of ZAKVO, who was of Georgian decent, General Vardiko Nadibaidze, was appointed Minister of Defense in February 1994 and did not even speak Georgian properly (Gordadze, 2009). Former KGB officers Igor Giorgadze and Shota Kviraia were appointed as Ministers of State Security and Interior, respectively. Despite Shevardnadze's pro-Russian stance, Russia continued to stoke secessionist ambition in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As a result, Shevardnadze gradually pursued anti-corruption campaigns and sought to reconcile relations with the West. Georgia backed out of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and eventually forced Russia to close their Georgian bases in 2007.

Russia consistently escalated support for Georgian separatists between 1999-2008. In November 2003, President Shevardnadze resigned amidst the "Rose Revolution" led by former Minister of Interior, Mikheil Saakashvili. Saakashvili then became president in January 2004 and quickly sent in additional peacekeeping forces to South Ossetia, up to the limit of 500 as brokered in a cease fire agreement while Russia claimed Georgia had as many as 3,000 peacekeepers in the district (Devdariani, 2004; Nichol, 2009). Simultaneously, Russia deployed several hundred intermediaries from Abkhazia,

Transnistria and Russia to infiltrate the separatist regions. Saakashvili proposed several peace plans between 2005-2007 with South Ossetia, but they failed due to claims by the Ossetians they were Russian citizens or the placement of unacceptable demands on the Ossetians (Nichol, 2009). By 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia possessed more than twice the amount of military equipment owned by the Georgian military (Illarionov, 2009). Attacks to Georgian gas and electricity infrastructure escalated, as did bans on imports of Georgian goods. Russians began deporting Georgians and Russians with Georgian last names. In the weeks before the war, Russia executed military exercises on the Georgian border and never left.

The Five-Day War

By the end of July 2008, Georgia believed Russian incursion immanent. The Chechen Vostok battalion commander at the time, Sulim Yamadayev, stated that the Vostok battalion was rotating in and out of South Ossetia every three months for a year and a half prior to the initiation of conflict (Kotenok, 2008). On August 3rd-4th, 300 intermediaries, comprised of "volunteers" and Cossacks, arrived in South Ossetia (Illarionov, 2009, p. 74). More Cossacks (Tersk and Don) were formed into detachments and sent in to South Ossetia on August 5th. The next day, South Ossetian forces (likely augmented by intermediaries with command and control from Russia) began targeting Georgian villages with mortars. Russians knew that any military response by Georgia would feed the Russian narrative that ethnic Russians were being attacked. Intermediaries were also used to secure the Roki Tunnel to manage the subsequent inflow of more overt Russian forces (Asmus, 2010). Simultaneous to the intermediary movements, Russian equipment was repositioned within the separatist districts, including artillery. With Russian military action looming, Georgia elected to strike first on the evening of August 7th. It is possible this was the scenario desired by Russia with their knowledge of clear escalation dominance. Such an initiation would provide Russia with the latitude to once again intervene as a peacekeeping force. On August 8th, Russian President Medvedev declared to the Russian Security Council that many women, children and elderly were dying in South Ossetia at the hands of the Georgian government and, "…we shall not allow our compatriots to be killed with impunity…" (Nichol, 2009, p. 5). On the third day of conflict,

Russia opened a second front with the deployment of soldiers to Abkhazia and positioning ships off the shore in the Black Sea (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011). On August 15, 2008, the French helped broker a six-point cease fire that effectively provided Russia control of the separatist regions (Nichol, 2013). President Medvedev followed up the peace terms by officially recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence on August 26th. The final Russian forces remained in the separatist regions and did not withdraw from extended buffer-zones on the border of the regions until October 9, 2008 (Nichol, 2009).

The role of intermediaries during the Five-Day War varied. The Chechen Vostok battalion that deployed during the 18 months preceding the war was likely an attempt by Russia to bolster the number personnel in South Ossetia above those authorized under international agreements, without provoking international response. Intermediaries were also used to augment Russian military forces and to secure key infrastructure, such as the Roki Tunnel, ahead of the main invasion (Illarionov, 2009). Chechens were observed outside Gori and elsewhere in South Ossetia manning traffic checkpoints (The Jamestown Foundation, 2008). Finally, there are several reports indicating Chechens were used to cleanse the separatist regions of ethnic Georgians, further supporting Russian claims for their secession. In 1936 when Abkhazia was made an autonomous region of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, Abkhazia was "Georgianized" with large numbers of Georgian collective farmers and specialists and the Abkhazian language was replaced with Georgian through official channels (Derluguian, 2001). This was part of Stalin's effort to reduce autonomous zones throughout the republics (Derluguian, 2001). By 2008, the same country (Russia) reversed course and allegedly used Chechen intermediaries to execute ethnic Georgians within Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Nichol, 2009; The Jamestown Foundation, 2008). The use of intermediaries to "Russify" the secessionist territories provided Russia with deniability under international law.

In summary, Russia's 2008 involvement in Georgia represents the precipice of several years of escalation and preparation in the attainment of their ultimate goal, which was to gain control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and prevent Georgia's trend toward NATO. The conflict also provides an early glimpse into the inventory of Russia's gray zone foreign policy mechanisms of influence. Support for secession began in the 1990s and slowly escalated through the stationing of peacekeeping troops in four bases across

Georgia. The deployment of "volunteers" in addition to Russian soldiers who wore no insignia and the rotation of Chechens, added confusion and ambiguity. It is unclear if this utility of intermediaries was designed for the Russian domestic audience, for the target or both. The Russian General Staff initially desired for only the kontraktniki, or professional soldiers, to participate in the Georgian conflict (Vendil Pallin & Westerlund, 2009). Then President Medvedev ordered the initiation of military operations with 19,000 military personnel (later climbing to 40,000) while attending the Beijing Olympics. This included conscript soldiers and the order was given without consulting Russian parliament, as was required by Russian law for the deployment of Russian soldiers outside Russia's borders (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011; Vendil Pallin & Westerlund, 2009). The following section will apply the theory to the Georgia case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are 1992 when we first observe the employment of Russian intermediaries and 2008 when the Five-Day War occurred. The first time period was marked initially by the declaration of independence of Abkhazia and subsequent attack by the Georgian military. Intermediaries responded at the direction of Russia and later, Russian peacekeeping forces were emplaced. The second time period was marked by the posturing of Russian intermediaries and military forces in the separatist regions and subsequent attack by Georgians on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali.

Attribution

Attribution for the Georgia case is rated as leaning covert for the first time period and leaning overt for the second time period. Russia more deliberately attempted to maintain the appearance of non-attribution during the first time period. They plainly denied relations with "volunteers," such as with the discovery of a dead Russian pilot and supporting paperwork in Georgia during the first time period (Goltz, 2009). The majority of relations with intermediaries were from a support standpoint, although there was a visible effort within Russia to recruit and train volunteers for employment.

During the second time period, Russia strategically employed control mechanisms by recruiting and training most intermediaries and integrating them into

existing military structures, which degraded attribution (Illarionov, 2009). Some more clandestine approaches were employed, but not to the degree of the overt employment. For example, there are reports of personnel air assaulting into Georgia prior to the main conflict during the second time period wearing black uniforms with no insignia (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011). Additionally, Cossack and Chechen intermediaries were deployed as separate elements several days ahead of major combat operations with a more ambiguous link to the Russian state (Illarionov, 2009).

During both time periods, Russia openly denied any responsibility for the actions of the intermediaries, although as discussed, attribution was slightly more covert during the first period. During the second period, the large-scale use of conventional military eclipsed the role of the intermediaries after the initial invasion. Russia was in a relatively precarious or fragile position economically and internationally during the first time period and revelation of Georgian intervention could have potentially prolonged Russia's rebuilding efforts after the fall of the Soviet Union and put their position in international institutions at risk. The more covert approach to Georgian intervention provided the Russians with plausible deniability when they needed it most.

Level of State Control

During the initial time period, state control that was relatively decentralized. The nature of Russian intermediary employment during this time period can best be characterized as opportunistic augmentation and support capability reinforcement. Abkhazian paramilitary forces were augmented with North Caucus (mostly Circassian and Chechen) and Cossack volunteers on the ground while critical supporting capabilities such as air support and logistics were provided by Russian military "volunteers." Most of the intermediaries were recruited on Russian soil, transported to the Abkhazian border by Russian bus or helicopter, trained and armed by Russian military (Derluguian, 2001). Although the commander of all forces in Abkhazia during the time was a former Soviet Colonel, Sultan Sosnaliev, there is no empirical evidence to indicate control over operations was centralized in any fashion by the Russian state. As stated by Derluguian (2001), "…the assumption of a unified agency…under conditions of radical uncertainty…" casts a major point of doubt over claims of Russian strategic execution of centralized

control. Rather, intermediaries were provided seemingly as needed or as opportunities for employment arose. Russia was also simultaneously dealing major separatist concerns in the North Caucuses which likely detracted from their ability to engage fully. Overall, control over all intermediaries during the first time period was decentralized.

Although command and control were major weaknesses of overall operations for Russia in 2008, mechanisms were emplaced to make control over the volunteers more centralized for the second time period. Intermediary mobilization was, "…centrally planned and performed via drafting stations at the regional and district military commissariats across Russia's North Caucasus Military District," (Asmus, 2010, p. 237). The Chechen Vostok battalion took orders directly from the North Caucus Military District and chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces in their movement to the South Ossetian capital (Kotenok, 2008). Intermediaries from the Caucuses were mobilized, trained and registered by the Russian military and as such, the Russians were aware of respective strengths and weaknesses (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, p. 27). Intermediaries were predominately assigned to Russian military units, such as the 19th Infantry Division, the North Ossetian peacekeeping battalion, or the Ossetian ministry of defense (Illarionov, 2009, p. 74). By placing the intermediaries within Russian military structures, they were able to maintain a certain level of control that autonomous operations would not allow. In addition, the Russian officials that were emplaced within the government of South Ossetia in particular, assisted with commanding the employment of intermediary and other forces (Nichol, 2009). However, despite Russian attempts to centralize control, there exists serious criticism that the Russians did little to actually direct South Ossetian and Chechen forces in the wake of conflict as they conducted an ethnic cleansing campaign (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011). Whether the lack of control was due to will or capability is unknown. Nonetheless, Russia emplaced control mechanisms and centrally planned intermediary employment for the second time period of this analysis. The level of state control for the second time period was centralized. A summary of the dependent variables is reflected in the table below. The following section will assess the explanatory variables for Georgia.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Georgia	1992	Russia US	Separatists & Volunteers	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
	2008	Russia US	Separatists, Cossacks, Chechens	Lean Overt	Centralized

Table 5.1.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Georgia

IV Analysis and Classification

As a reminder once again from Chapter 3, the explanatory variables consist of antecedent conditions of the target state; symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and the status quo power with regard to the target state; and the level of informal access the revisionist state has within the target state. Evaluations of indicators for each of these variables are interrogated below. For more information on the variables and indicators, please see Appendix B.

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Indicators for antecedent conditions consist of domestic institutional strength and resistance strength. Institutional strength is evaluated based on World Governance Indicators, external dependency, and the licit economy. Resistance strength is evaluated based on the political, economic and social strength of the popular resistance. Evaluations of these factors are expanded below.

Domestic Institutions.

World Governance Indicators are not available for the first time period; however, the strength of Georgian domestic institutions can be assessed as low. In the two years following independence, Georgia was embroiled in low-level conflict, military coups and secessionist movements. Georgia previously played a profound role in the Soviet economy through the supply of food products, minerals and tourism. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Georgian economy struggled for several years due to conflict and political instability. By the time of Georgian independence in 1991, trade disruptions, conflict and poverty all contributed to the country's economic downturn. Political turmoil after the military coup and latency in the establishment of a permanent government resulted in the makings of a failed state. In January 1992, President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a coup that is believed Russia precipitated due to Gamsakhurdia's pro-western stance. Eduard Shevardnadze, who previously served as the Soviet Foreign Minister, was invited by the military junta to return to Georgia, became the speaker of the Georgian parliament, and eventually became president in 1995. Political instability and violence due to secessionist movements plagued governance effectiveness. Rule of law was challenged by mafias and corruption was rampant. Georgian dependence

on Russia gradually eroded, as Shevardnadze slowly pursued a robust anti-corruption campaign and sought policies to repair the economy.

By the second time period, Georgian domestic institutions were much stronger. In fact, average values for the six WGI indicators were higher than any other case included in this project (0.454) with particular strengths in regulatory quality and government effectiveness. However, Georgia suffered due to various means of economic and political warfare by Russia and high external dependency. By 2002, the U.S. provided Georgia with military aid that amounted to two-thirds of their total military budget (Gordadze, 2009). Russia attempted to continuously draw international attention to the political corruption and economic weaknesses that made Georgia's request for NATO and EU membership risky. Russia instituted an economic embargo and severed the energy supply to Georgia in 2006 as a means of manipulating the pro-Western government of Saakashvili. Russia also deported a large number of Georgian migrant workers, which brought in nearly $1.4 billion in 2014 after trade relations were reestablished (Nilsson, 2018). Thus, the licit economy struggled and external dependency remained high as Russia manipulated economic levers. For comparison, trade with Russia reopened in 2012, quickly becoming Georgia's fourth largest importer (Nilsson, 2018).

During the first time period, Georgia's economy was in shambles. They were still largely dependent upon crumbling Russian economic structures. 90-percent of energy needs were imported to Georgia and the majority of industrial raw materials came from outside the country (Library of Congress, 1994). Russia mandated economic dependency through the use of old Soviet structures until May 1992 when import export limitations were dropped for all goods except military and medical (Library of Congress, 1994, p. 205). However, even after trade limitations were relaxed, the Georgian government still controlled imports and as Shevardnadze took power, 40-percent of all imports were from Russia (Curtis, 1996).

During the second time period, Georgia was less reliant upon external sources of funding, but still heavily reliant on external sources of energy. Economic constraints were lifted by 2008 and foreign investment from non-Russian countries increased. As the Georgian economy reformed, they were still quite dependent

upon external investment – especially from the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. The U.S. was Georgia's largest bilateral aid donor from 1992-2008, and immediately after the Five Day War, pledged $1 billion in humanitarian and recovery assistance (Nichol, 2013).

Economic indicators for the first time period demonstrate profound weakness, however, Russia (as the revisionist power) exhibited similar characteristics which inhibited their ability to exploit Georgian weaknesses. Unemployment was low at 0.7-percent due to remnants of state provided wages; however external debt was as high as $150 million (U.S. Department of State, 1994). Between 1991-1992, Georgia experienced a 60-percent drop in Net Material Production and inflation reached 2,000-percent as the Georgians struggled with conflict, domestic labor strikes and a departure from the Ruble Zone (Library of Congress, 1994). These staggering economic indicators generally coincided with other post-Soviet republics at the time.

During the second time period, despite the 2006 Russian economic sanctions, Georgian economic growth was strong and inflation dropped to the single digits (9.7-percent) (IMF, 2010). Economic growth was spurred by economic reforms in the period following the Rose Revolution (2003) and an increase in foreign direct investment. Unemployment was moderate, at 16.5-percent (IMF, 2010). Finally, with the privatization of Georgian institutions since the fall of the Soviet Union, income inequality grew substantially. By the second time period, Georgia had one of the highest levels of income inequality in the European and Central Asian region at over 36-percent (World Bank Group, 2018).

Overall, the strength of institutions is rated as weak for the first time period, and moderate during the second time period. Massive progress was demonstrated by the second time period through economic reforms and the strengthening of governing structures. However, the simultaneous strengthening in autonomy of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, catalyzed with Russian support, hindered overall Georgian progress and provided Russia with the access needed to stoke popular resistance. The next section will expand this point.

Popular Resistance.

During both time periods, popular resistance within Georgia can be rated as strong. Although the separatist regions did not have substantial representation in the Georgian government, support for the government and political elite was low due primarily to perceptions of corruption. Rather than attempting to influence change through the Georgian government, the separatist regions developed their own independent governments and filled positions with the assistance of Russia after the election of the very pro-NATO President Saakashvili in January 2004. On June 7, 2004, the South Ossetian parliament formally asked Russia to recognize their independence and protect Russian citizens living in South Ossetia (Illarionov, 2009). A Russian colonel was appointed as South Ossetia's minister of defense as Russia began targeting Georgia's electric infrastructure. Simultaneously, Abkhazia held presidential elections with Russian support. Although the Abkhazians and Ossetians did not even represent a majority in their own territories, they were able to gain resistance legitimacy through their declaration of independence from the Georgian government and request for absorption by Russia. Political factionalization was strong in both time periods.

Russian objectives, especially by 2008, were simultaneously focused on counteracting the success story that the Georgian state claimed since relative governing stability was achieved in 1995. Georgia's push to join NATO and the European Union (EU) reinforced the Russian desire to prevent their former republic and buffer state from seceding from the Russian sphere of influence. Motivating resistance in the formerly autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was the best means through which Russia could stymie such action. Recognition of Russian populations in the separatist regions, the reinforcement of Russian culture by NGOs, and the issuance of passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians reinforced socio-ethnic divides within Georgia.

At the end of the Cold War during the first time period, the illicit economy was profound. Not only was the black market rampant, government institutions were deeply involved. Police and KGB personnel worked closely with criminal gangs in international drug trafficking, racketeering, and embezzlement (Gordadze, 2009). By the second time period, the shadow economy remained one of the largest in the world (Medina & Schneider, 2018). Georgia has a strong traditional familial and clan structure through which several mafias thrived (Library of Congress, 1994). The strong presence of the illicit

economy contributed to resource generation and self-sufficiency for domestic intermediaries in the separatist regions.

Socio-economic divides in Georgia were relatively strong prior to the first time period, with a substantial Russian diaspora population. This reality was compounded by the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although the ethnic Russians actually represented a minority in these regions. However, Russia was able to reinforce separatist notions and later, the concept of Russkiy Mir to strengthen socio-ethnic divides and add gravitas to the need for Russian influence.

In summary, antecedent conditions for Georgia can be rated as permissive for the first time period, and moderate for the second time period. The strengthening of the Georgian government and attempts to reduce dependency on the Russian economy reduced the vulnerability of antecedent conditions, leading to a moderate rating by the second time period. In contrast with Iranian employment of intermediaries, Russia made incredibly robust attempts to manipulate the antecedent conditions in their favor in the political, military and economic realms, while reinforcing any gains through the information domain. The ability to extend Russian influence through the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provided Russia with a major foothold through which they were able to manipulate Georgian behavior with the certainty of escalation dominance. The next section will analyze the context for this manipulation based on the symmetry of interests between Russia and the U.S.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Once again, the symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and status quo power with regard to the target state are evaluated based on geographic proximity, alliances or historical ties with the target, and commercial value based on total exports to the target. According to the theory, the symmetry of interests contributes to *if* and *how* intermediaries are employed. In other words, we should expect to observe a different outcome if interests are symmetric, vice asymmetric. Evaluations of these indicators for Georgia are provided below.

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Geographically, Russia has a contiguous border with Georgia, while the U.S. is rated as far. In addition, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia was a Soviet republic and contains a large number of ethnic Russians. Prior to 1991, Russia possessed some level of control over Georgia for two centuries. U.S. relations with Georgia are a more recent phenomenon.

Historical ties between Russia and Georgia were strong during both time periods and long standing. Not only was Georgia a republic of the Russian federation for over two centuries, many of Russia's leaders came from Georgia, including Joseph Stalin. The Turks, Persians and Russians all sought to maximize regional influence by subjugating Georgia to some extent throughout history. The most significant Russian influence came in the late eighteenth century when Herekle II sought protection from Russia after the Persians attacked Tbilisi (Library of Congress, 1994). Within the first decade of the nineteenth century, Russia gradually annexed all of Georgia and maintained domination over Georgia for almost two centuries. In 1921, Russia occupied Georgia and established the South Ossetian Autonomous District that mirrored the North Ossetian Autonomous District on the Russian side of the border. In 1936, Abkhazia was made an autonomous district of Georgia (Derluguian, 2001). Russian authority over Georgia remained until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Georgia was also perceived as an important buffer state between Russia and NATO member, Turkey. Even after the Cold War, Russia kept around 15,000 troops and border guards in Georgia in an effort to maintain the southern flank and access to the Black Sea (Library of Congress, 1994). In 1993, Georgia signed the Russian Collective Security Treaty, or "Tashkent Treaty" which consisted of nine post-Soviet states (Nichol, 2014). Under the treaty, member countries were unable to join other military alliances and agreed to provide mutual aid if attacked. Russia also acquired rights under the treaty to place four military bases in Georgia. Georgia withdrew from the treaty in 1999, but Russian influence remained.

Although the shared history of Russo-Georgian relations is strong, the relationship should not be overexaggerated. Georgia is a small country and does not possess any significant natural resources. In comparison to Ukraine, Georgia is not nearly

as significant in these terms nor their cultural and historical ties. However, the timing of the Rose Revolution in 2003 presented an early win for the pro-democracy, or "Freedom Agenda," touted by the Bush administration and posed a risk to Russia with regard to other former Soviet republics (Nilsson, 2018). President Saakashvili's subsequent attempts to strengthen ties to the West reinforced the significance of the broader implications of the "color revolutions" for Russia and the U.S.

Considering U.S. relations, "Western interests in post-Soviet countries have never matched those of Russia…," (Nilsson, 2018, p. 27). In 1992, U.S. budgeted assistance, which included funding for the objectives of the major components of governance (economic growth, just and democratic governance, humanitarian, and investing in people), totaled only $29.16 million (Nichol, 2013). Relations between the U.S. and Georgia did grow stronger after 9/11, but this did not result in a massive increase of U.S. support within Georgia. Georgia (and Azerbaijan) supported U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, offering the use of air bases and providing overflight rights (Nichol, 2014). In October 2004, NATO signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with Georgia in an attempt to improve cooperation and posture the country for NATO membership. By 2008, U.S. budgeted assistance rose dramatically to $895.67 million (Nichol, 2013). By 2012, Georgia deployed the largest number of soldiers (1,560) to the war in Iraq out of any non-NATO member country. The U.S. military did conduct military exercises in Georgia, in fact one such exercise occurred immediately prior to the Five-Day War (Popjanevski, 2009). However, according to former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ronald Asmus, during the period immediately preceding the Russian intervention, American and European officials warned Georgian President Saakashvili several times in clear terms that they would not intervene in the event Russia moved into Georgia (Asmus, 2010).

Finally, it is important to note the opportunistic nature of the timing on Russia's part during both time periods. As detailed throughout this section, Russia postured their desire to absorb Abkhazia and South Ossetia for decades. The deployment of intermediaries during the first time period coincided with the tail end of U.S. participation in the Gulf War and later, the war in Bosnia. The second time period (August of 2008) was just ahead of the U.S. election of President Obama over Senator McCain. President Bush

was focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with intelligence and military assets oriented on terrorism and the Middle East (Asmus, 2010). Additionally, the U.S. was in the middle of the Great Recession. Any conveyance of alarm or concern through U.S. diplomatic or military channels were effectively disregarded and any requests for assistance by the Georgians in the event of war were answered with clear signals from the U.S. on their inability or unwillingness to support. It is difficult to imagine better timing for the Russian incursion.

The commercial value of Georgia during the first time period for Russia was high. Georgia was still tied to Russia through Soviet economic structures and as much as 40-percent of all Georgian imports came from Russia (Curtis, 1996). Total exports for Russia fell as much as 25-percent in 1992, so ties with former Soviet Republics where trade policies remained in effect were even more valuable (Central Intelligence Agency, 1993). Georgia owed millions of dollars in debt to Russia in addition to several other former-Soviet republics. By the second time period, with the ban on imports from Georgia to Russia, the commercial value of Georgia was relatively low. Just over 0.1-percent of all Russian exports went to Georgia ($549 million). Russia had economic flexibility to manipulate trade to their benefit in other domains.

Commercial value for the U.S. during the first time period was relatively non-existent. The percent of total exports from the U.S. to Georgia were less than 0.004-percent due to Russian import export policies. By the second time period, despite growth in diplomatic relations, total exports to Georgia were only about $40 million more than those of Russia and amounting to 0.05-percent of total exports. The commercial value of Georgia to the U.S. was low during both time periods.

Interests between the revisionist state and the status quo power were clearly asymmetric during both time periods, with the some of the greatest differentials (6:1 and 6:2) of any case assessed in this project.[45] Although U.S. interest in the country increased slightly after 9/11, the indicators used for this analysis do not reflect an increase substantial enough to deter Russian aggression.

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[45] The differential in symmetry of interests for Ukraine was also 6:1 during the first time period.

Informal Access (IV3)

Informal access is evaluated based on the degree of socio-cultural proximity, ideological convergence, and strategic convergence. Greater proximity and convergence lead to greater informal access. Evaluations of these indicators are below.

Socio-Cultural proximity between Georgia and Russia is assessed as related. As of 1993, 370,000 ethnic Russians resided in Georgia which amounted to about 6.7-percent of the total Georgian population and the third largest ethnic group behind Georgians and Azerbaijanians (Library of Congress, 1994). By 2002, the figures dropped to around 1.5-percent, or 68,000 Russians according to a Russian census. Russian was the second most spoken language, but not the primary language of the majority of the population. Georgians clearly have a unique culture and language, and within Georgia, the Abkhazians and Ossetians also have unique cultural traits. Socio-cultural proximity with Russia is often exaggerated by Russian propaganda and the concept of *Russkiy Mir*, but there are clearly related characteristics that ease informal access.

The Orthodox church arguably represents the greatest source of cultural similarity between Russia and Georgia. The Orthodox church enjoys some of the highest approval ratings of any institution in Georgia and on occasion, the church has joined forces with pro-Russian NGOs to stoke popular sentiment, especially regarding religious minorities (Nilsson, 2018). During the first time period, 65-percent of Georgians were Orthodox (Library of Congress, 1994). By the second time period, over 80-percent of Georgians were Orthodox. There is a clear distinction between the Russian and Georgian Orthodox churches, however since the era immediately preceding the fall of the Soviet Union, cultural similarity through the churches is profound. It is also important to note that the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not share the same level of religious similarity as the remainder of Georgia. In Abkhazia, religious adherence shifted to align with the Ottomans and Russians based on subjugation (Derluguian, 2001). Religious similarity is not a major vehicle for informal access in the separatist regions, but it was present.

Ideological convergence was present, although it ebbed and flowed between time periods. During the first time period, ideological convergence was strong within the

North Caucus group of people and acted as somewhat of a unifying factor amongst the Circassians and Chechens in the face of perceived systemic oppression that harkened back to their history with Tsarist Russia (Derluguian, 2001; Goltz, 2009). This reality unintentionally benefited Russia, but the sense of ideological convergence was not shaped or promoted by Russia.

Russia did, however, generate a mechanism to promote ideological convergence by the second time period. The concept of Russkiy Mir, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was in full force by the 2008 within Georgia, in addition to efforts of the pro-Russian think tank, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS) (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2018, p. 75). Those with the strongest ideological convergence in the Georgian conflict were the Cossacks (Lutsevych, 2016). Cossack attempts to regain their traditional role as protectors of Russian populations abroad and as frontier guards continued to motivate action (Illarionov, 2009). Russkiy Mir reinforced Cossack ideological conviction.

Strategic convergence between Russia and their intermediaries was clearly present in the Georgia case. Russia initially supported Georgian territorial integrity during the first time period and deployed military personnel to the Russian republic of Kabardino-Balkaria to prevent Circassians from fighting as auxiliary forces for Abkhazia (Zhemukhov, 2010). Russia's history with Circassians is plagued with systematic execution or genocide in the nineteenth century (Dzutsati, 2013). The Circassians are ethnically similar to the Abkhazians, as they share linguistic traits and some level of cultural history (Dzutsati, 2013). The Georgian intervention in Abkhazia in 1992 incentivized Circassian's to support Abkhazia.

> Over 2,000 Circassian volunteers participated in the war under the command of a Nalchik-born retired Soviet colonel, Sultan Sosnaliev. He became the commander of all Abkhaz forces during the Georgian-Abkhaz war...After the war Sosnaliev was appointed Abkhaz Minister of Defence (Zhemukhov, 2010).

This led to strategic convergence during the first time period with Abkhazia, and thereby, eventually with Russia. During the second time period, the increased autonomy of the separatist regions led to some level of strategic convergence. Perhaps

more significantly, cooperation with the Russian state by Chechens and other North Caucus intermediaries assisted in the sustainability of relations with Russia and prevention of Russian oppression in their districts (Illarionov, 2009).

In summary, informal access between Russian and Georgia was moderate-high during both time periods. Socio-cultural proximity was related, and ideological and strategic convergence were present to some degree, but not overly powerful as catalysts. Ideological convergence was strongest with the Cossacks, while strategic convergence manifested with the Circassians during the first time period only after the Russians attempted to initially stop their reinforcement of the Abkhazians. Russia reinforced opportunity for future ideological convergence through the tool of Russkiy Mir, but the mechanism had little impact on intermediary employment during the second time period.

Target Summary

The conflicts in Georgia were small and quick, but raised some serious concerns in terms of democracy, European security and the strength of NATO. These early examples of Russian intermediary employment demonstrate a few important findings. First, it is clear that learning occurred between the first and second time periods. During the first time period, the Russians perceived a lack of control over intermediaries and were still figuring out the best way to manage their capabilities. During the second Chechen war, Russia created the deployable Vostok and Zapad Chechen battalions that were trained and resourced by Russian GRU (Bristow, 2019, pp. 6–7). Prior to the second time period, intermediaries were mobilized strategically and emplaced within existing Russian military structures. Although not directly observed, this likely resulted in the assumption of a certain element of risk with regard to attribution, however it appears this risk was not a major concern perhaps due to the high asymmetry of interests. Second, strategy on intermediary employment seems to change between the two time periods. Russia used intermediaries during the first time period largely to avoid escalation or international retribution and perhaps as economy of force. During the second time period, intermediaries were much more deliberately employed. Russia was able to set strategic international political conditions to justify a conventional military response to Georgian "aggression," and the employment of intermediaries was part of the overall strategy, rather than an opportunistic

and expendable tool for influence. Attribution with other elements that may have been more heavily involved in ethnic genocide, was more covert during the same time period, indicating the variety of options Russia developed to address different objectives or concerns.

According to the theory, with permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests, we should expect to observe overt, centralized employment (hypothesis 2). We do observe this outcome during the second time period, but not the first. There are a few elements that explain why the outcome during the first period was covert, decentralized rather than overt, centralized. First, Russia was focused simultaneously on the disintegration of 14 other republics. Overt, centralized employment is resource intensive and requires substantial investment, as well as escalation dominance. Second, Russian recognition of intermediary utility and control mechanisms for employment were in their infancy. Russian expansion was fairly dormant, as was the need for intermediaries. Nonetheless, I do find support for hypothesis 2 (overt/decentralized) during the second time period. The summary of the employment of intermediaries by Russia in Georgia is represented in the table below.

Georgia: Summary Evaluations

Variables	*Time Period 1*: **1992** Indicator	Evaluation	*Time Period 2*: **2008** Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		*Permissive*		*Permissive*
Dom. Inst. Strength	UNK	Weak	0.151	Weak-Mod
Resist. Strength	1	Strong	1	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Russia	6	*Asymmetric*	6	*Asymmetric*
U.S.	1		2	
Informal Access	0.75	*Mod-High*	0.75	*Mod-High*
Attribution	*Intermediary* Separatists & Volunteers	*Lean Covert*	*Intermediary* Separatists, Coss. & Chech	*Lean Overt*
Level of State Control	Separatists & Volunteers	*Lean Dec.*	Separatists, Coss. & Chech	*Centralized*

Table 5.2.   Russian employment of intermediaries in Georgia, 1992-2008

Lastly, of note Russian efforts to dissuade Georgians from integrating into Western institutions such as NATO and the EU have not ceased since the 2008 war, rather the non-military mechanisms of influence have steadily escalated, especially in the period since 2012. Pro-Russian political parties within the Georgian government, NGOs and robust Russian propaganda machine work together to reinforce the risks from the security, economic and cultural realms to shape a perception among significant segments of the Georgian population that movement away from Russia is increasingly untenable. Georgian aspirations of NATO membership are frozen at this point and the government of Georgia is noticeably less anti-Russia than that of Saakashvili, which deescalates risk for Russia. Georgia substantially decreased dependency on Russia for energy. As of 2018, about 90-percent of natural gas consumed by Georgia originated in Azerbaijan (Nilsson, 2018). However, current political parties in Georgia are hesitant to disrupt the relative stability that has emerged with Russia in the period since the war and the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain under the firm control of Russia. The following campaign exhibits Russia's next intermediary employment in Crimea.

Ukraine: Crimea

In November 2013, Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich made a decision to strengthen economic ties with Russia rather than the European Union. This decision resulted ultimately in the massive popular uprising known as Euromaiden. The Kiev government subsequently restricted protest laws and escalated further, resulting in over 100 deaths. Yanukovich subsequently fled Kiev as instability mounted and protestors took control of government buildings. The interim government that followed struggled to gain control and did not hold an election for a new president until May 2014. In Crimea, the city council of Sevastopol took advantage of Ukrainian national unrest and on February 24th, selected a Russian citizen as mayor (Kofman et al., 2017). On February 27, 2014, unmarked special operations forces dubbed "Little Green Men," (LGM) appeared seemingly overnight, mostly from the Russian naval base in Sevastopol. By the 28th the LGM seized key government buildings in the Crimean capital of Simferopol and the main airport. On March 1st the Russian parliament approved President Putin's request for the use of force in Ukraine to protect Russians and their interests. Within two weeks, Crimean authorities held a referendum in which 97-percent of voters elected to secede and join Russia (BBC News, 2014b). On March 18th President Putin signed legislation finalizing the annexation of Crimea as a part of the Russian Federation.

This case is used in conjunction with the following case in the Donbass as part of a most-similar case analysis. Due to the identical nature of state level variables used in my theory, I can evaluate whether alternative explanations account for variation in intermediary employment. The first time period for these cases is 2014 when Russian deployment of intermediaries first occurred in both regions. The second time period is 2018, when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for Russia to withdraw its armed forces and relative stability normalized. With this case, I find support for the theory across both time periods. Domestic institutions were relatively weak, plagued with corruption – especially during the first time period. By the second time period, Russia possessed physical control of Crimea and the majority of intermediaries were redeployed for operations elsewhere. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that shaped Russia's deployment of intermediaries in Crimea.

Figure 5.1. **Crimea Timeline Map, Feb - Mar 2014** (Kofman et al., 2017)

Within the course of a few weeks over February and March, Russia used intermediaries to gain control of a vulnerable population and critical territory. Between 10,000 – 18,000 Russian military personnel were legally stationed in Crimea prior to 2014 under a bilateral treaty that authorized up to 25,000 Russian troops (Bērziņš, 2014; Kofman et al., 2017). The main intermediary deployed in this case were the LGM, although their attribution was masked at the time – they wore no insignia and Russia initially denied involvement. Russian President Vladimir Putin stated throughout 2014 that the LGM were local self-defense forces, but later revealed in March 2015 they were special operators from the GRU. The LGM were assisted by a few additional intermediaries (though not nearly to the level that would fight in Eastern Ukraine).[46] Main intermediaries in Crimea other than the LGM were the Cossacks, Chetniks, local self-defense forces, and the Night Wolves biker gang. Finally, NGOs such as Ukrainian Choice reinforced pro-Russian narratives and

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[46] There are also reports of Spetsnaz donning uniforms of local Ukrainian police to redirect attribution and add legitimacy to local efforts. See Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017).

consolidated sympathizers prior to and during escalation. As with most Russian intermediaries, the NGOs often possessed informal connective structures through prior military or intelligence service.

By 2018, Russia enhanced their overt military presence in Crimea with only the local self-defense forces and some NGOs remaining as intermediaries. Allegations of the Crimean self-defense forces being involved in "disappearances" were filed in 2018 by the UN (OHCHR, 2018). The period since Putin's signing of legislation to annex Crimea can be characterized as relatively stable, with the exception of the occasional disappearance of pro-Ukrainian agitators allegedly executed by the self-defense forces mentioned above. As the international community questioned the legality of annexation, Russia quickly shifted to an overt conventional posture, significantly militarizing the Crimean Peninsula. By 2018, more than 30,000 Russian conventional military personnel were stationed in Crimea.

In summary, Russian intervention in Crimea represented a shift in intermediary actor employment. Considering the primacy Russia placed on centralized control, a higher number of actors also introduced a higher element of risk for Russia in regard to attribution. Yet, it is clear attribution was an important variable in their calculus for the intervention in Crimea. The array and utilization of intermediaries in Crimea offers a glimpse into how Russia perceived the Ukrainian antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests with the status quo power and ability to access Crimea informally to achieve zero-sum gains. The next section will evaluate the explanatory power of the theory in describing the conditions that shaped Russian intermediary operations in Crimea.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are 2014 when Russian intervention occurred and 2018 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for Russia to withdraw its armed forces. It is important to note the Crimea case analyzed here is separate from Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine. The details of intermediary employment vary considerably between the cases and independent analysis is useful in teasing out elements of Russian strategy.

Attribution

Crimea is one of the first cases where attribution is strategically used by Russia. Attribution between intermediaries employed in Crimea and the Russian state was masked superficially with the employment of Little Green Men (LGM) who wore no insignia, but quickly resolved to an overt status. Russia deliberately masked attribution – likely to generate latency in response by Ukraine and the international community.[47]

When the LGM emerged on February 27, 2014 in Crimea, Russian reporters noted the similarity of LGM uniforms to Russian military uniforms and asked President Vladimir Putin if the LGM were in fact Russian soldiers. Putin responded with, "…you can go to the store and buy any uniform you want. They were local self-defense units," (Furlong, 2019). One year later, in March 2015, Putin stated retrospectively in an interview that he ordered the Defense Ministry to deploy special forces from the GRU with marines and commandos, making attribution overt (Furlong, 2019).

In the consideration of various forms of warfare, several authors (Galeotti, 2016; Rauta, 2016) argue that Russian intervention in Crimea was covert. In the evaluation of conventional force employment, this is true. The identity of special operations forces (LGM) was purposefully masked to inject confusion and ambiguity which delayed Ukrainian and international response. However, when considering the range of actors employed by Russia in this chapter, it is clear that the LGM represent the most overt embodiment of intermediary actor employment. It could be argued that the LGM are not intermediaries at all, rather they are covert Russian military forces and not subject to this analysis. For the purpose of this project, I do include them as intermediaries based on the definition provided at the beginning of this project: those employed by states to achieve security related objectives for the state under ambiguous conditions. LGM fit within this definition.

Russian actions in Crimea during the first time period were overt. The LGM wore matching uniforms, drove Russian vehicles, carried Russian weapons and spoke

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[47] At one point later in 2017, the Security Services of Ukraine (SSU) claimed it was in fact the Wagner group who was responsible for Crimea's annexation. However, Wagner did not emerge as an organization until the early summer of 2014 in the Donbass (Sukhankin, 2019c).

Russian. During the invasion of Crimea, the LGM stated to reporters and Crimeans they were local self-defense forces of Crimea, but on some occasions, they stated they were on orders from the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (Ostrovsky, 2015). While the media and some locals were to some degree initially confused regarding attribution, to most international intelligence officials, the Ukrainian government and many others, it was clear the LGM were some form of Russian Spetsnaz.

True Crimean self-defense forces were, in fact, present in Crimea. Leaders of the self-defense forces stated they were organically grown due to the instability in Kiev and the inability of Crimean police to keep order (Ostrovsky, 2015, pt. 10). LGM or other Russians were not visible in the recruiting and initial training of self-defense forces. However, reporters captured film of uniform and equipment boxes with shipping labels from Russia (Ostrovsky, 2015, pt. 10). The self-defense forces were quickly placed in positions where they could be observed by the Crimean people, mostly guarding government buildings. Russia acknowledged the existence of the self-defense forces, but did not acknowledge the extent of their relationship with the local units. Attribution with the local self-defense forces is rated as leaning overt.

Attribution with regard to the Cossacks, Chetniks, Night Wolves and Ukrainian Choice is also rated as leaning overt. These elements were clearly in Crimea to support the pro-Russian movement and facilitate the referendum. In 2013, Putin rode with the Night Wolves on their annual gathering in Crimea. During the first time period, Russia provided the Night Wolves a half-million dollars to support "the patriotic education of youth," (Lutsevych, 2016). Ukrainian Choice chairman, Viktor Medvedchuk, declared himself Russia's "…informal ambassador of Russia [to Ukraine]," (Warsaw Institute, 2018). Sanctions by the U.S. Department of Treasury in 2014 note Putin's use of Medvedchuk as a liaison with Yanukovich (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2014a). Russia did not directly acknowledge links to these elements, but long-standing relationships and tactical utilization demonstrate a certain level of acknowledgement between the various groups.

Level of State Control

> "The entire operation was planned, organized and controlled under the leadership of Vladimir Putin."

> - U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016

The Russian deployment of intermediaries in Crimea was highly centralized and deliberate. The LGM, who emerged predominately from the Russian naval base in Sevastopol, executed rehearsed operations in a timely manner at the direction of the Russian state – as was revealed by Putin in March 2015. The tactical patience and deliberation enabled Russia to achieve their objectives in Crimea with the loss of only one life on either side. Further, their very quick progression from occupation and construction of self-defense forces, to support for the political referendum and elections demonstrates the degree to which Moscow centralized control to achieve broader, non-military objectives.

The employment of local self-defense forces is also rated as centralized. Prior to the Russian invasion, the leader of paramilitary forces in Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, appealed directly to President Putin for assistance (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). As the LGM moved in, the self-defense forces were recruited, quickly trained, and equipped by Russian military through the Cossacks and leadership in the self-defense forces. Although they were not utilized in Crimea as a robust fighting force, they clearly took direction from Russian military personnel and were placed in high visibility positions to maximize the appearance of a grass roots movement.

The Cossacks blocked off overland access to mainland Ukraine and recruited and trained local volunteers for the SDF, masking more overt Russian presence. Cossack involvement was part of a deliberate plan to invoke ideological convergence in Russia, Ukraine and the broader region. The arrival of the Cossack "volunteers" in Crimea was deliberately sponsored by Russia through the Orthodox Church with the intent to convey moralistic or ideological motivations for external involvement in the Crimea situation. Cossack involvement is rated as leaning centralized.

The Chetniks deployed from Serbia and acted as an auxiliary force. They were predominately used to man checkpoints, but later participated in more tactical roles

in Eastern Ukraine. The total number of Chetniks in Crimea amounted to less than 100 personnel, but their operations clearly supported Russian efforts without interfering in broader objectives. Their deployment is rated as leaning centralized.

The Night Wolves participation in Crimea was fairly non-military in nature, but they carried a certain level of intimidation and were used to rally support and spread narratives to the Crimean populace. They also were used to set up roadblocks and storm the Ukrainian Naval Forces Headquarters during the first time period (Salem, 2014; U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2014b). The U.S. Treasury Department states that sanctions invoked by the U.S. were justified by, among other things, the Night Wolves close connection with the Russian Special Services. Galeotti (2016) contends the organization was effectively coopted by the state. Finally, after the LGM seized the Simferopol airport and stopped air traffic, a plane carrying many Night Wolves was permitted to land at the airport, indicating a level of control and deliberate placement of the biker gang in Crimea by the Russian state (Salem, 2014). The Night Wolves continued to maintain a local chapter in Crimea by the second time period. The biker gang received several other Russian financial grants in the period since 2014, to hold rallies in other former Soviet states to espouse anti-Western rhetoric (Lutsevych, 2016). The level of Russian control over operations of the Night Wolves is rated as leaning centralized during both time periods.

Finally, Russian control of Ukrainian Choice is rated as leaning centralized. Few Ukrainians are as tightly connected to Russian interests as chairman Viktor Medvedchuk. His daughter's godfather is Vladimir Putin and he was instrumental in the conveyance of Kremlin objectives in Ukraine for decades. After the Orange Revolution ended in 2005, Medvedchuk established an informal committee of Ukrainian oligarchs, and as the committee's chair, he acted as an intermediary between Russia and the oligarchs. By 2008, Medvedchuk was considered Putin's "special representative in Ukraine," (Zygar, 2016). Any operations by Ukrainian Choice were conducted within this context.

In summary, Russia utilized a diverse array of intermediaries in Crimea, over which they maintained relatively centralized control and overt attribution. The decision to employ intermediaries overtly was a bold move by Russia that was unprecedented in contemporary history. Such action enabled Russia to substantially reduce

their intermediary footprint by the second time period and transition to a more conventional military footprint. The next section will assess the explanatory power of the theory in determining why and how intermediaries were employed in this fashion.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Crimea	2014	Russia US	LGM	Overt	Centralized
			SDF	Lean Overt	Centralized
			Cossacks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Chetniks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Ukr. Choice	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
	2018	Russia US	SDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Ukr. Choice	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.

Table 5.3.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Crimea

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

<u>Domestic Institutions.</u>

Galeotti (2017) states the Russian government's means to achieve objectives abroad are "…largely determined by the correlation between the strength of the countries' national institutions and their vulnerability to Russian influence," (Galeotti, 2017). In other words, different strengths and weaknesses in the target state's institutions require different approaches. Average WGI measures of domestic institutional strength were relatively high during both time periods of this analysis (0.334 and 0.364 respectively). The greatest weakness during the first time period was in regulatory quality, which includes the ability of the government to implement policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development. Economic challenges were considerable and corruption among political elites was a major source of popular discontent. By the second time period, the greatest weakness was continued political instability and ongoing violence in Eastern Ukraine. Indicators improved marginally among all categories, with the exception of government effectiveness which remained stagnant (0.416). Remarkably, World Governance Indicators were higher than all other cases analyzed in this project, with the exception of Georgia in 2008.

Prior to the conflict, Ukraine was heavily dependent on Russia. Russia was Ukraine's main trading partner and economic structures were tailored to suit Russian objectives. Many Ukrainian industrial outputs required some form of cross-border production and manufacturing was dependent almost completely on Russian gas (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2016). In the period from the fall of the Soviet Union until 2014, a substantial trade asymmetry developed between the two countries. By 2011, Russia accounted for 28-percent of Ukraine's trade, while Ukraine only accounted for five-percent of Russia's trade (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2016). Ukrainian elites who were interested in their own political survival were hesitant to destabilize economic relations with Russia through desperately needed economic reforms. In the summer of 2013, Russia initiated a trade war with Ukraine to demonstrate the degree to which the Ukrainian economy was dependent upon Russia and to encourage Ukraine to join the Customs Union (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2016). As the

Ukrainian economy deteriorated, the Ukrainian population became increasingly disgruntled with the failed economic policies of President Yanukovych. When Russia intervened in Ukraine in February 2014, dependency on Russia was strategically severed.

Following Russian intervention, exports to other Commonwealth of Independence States (CIS) countries drastically shifted Ukraine's trading partners. Russia banned the import of food from Ukraine and restricted products destined for Kazakhstan as well (IMF, 2017). Ukraine scrambled to find energy sources from other countries and markets for exports. However, Ukraine was slowly able to find support from the international community. By the second time period, energy supplies came from Slovakia, Hungary and Poland (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2016). The EU assisted Ukraine with reducing dependency on single sources. While heavy dependency on external sources did not completely erode, the development of interdependence was stronger by the second time period.

Key economic indicators for the licit economy during the first time period were relatively moderate. Unemployment was moderate, at 9.3-percent. Inflation in 2014 climbed substantially to 12.1-percent, and by 2015 spiked to 48.7-percent (World Bank Development Research Group, 2020). External debt was 97.6-percent of GDP in 2014, but Russian intervention caused external debt to exceed GDP by more than 30-percent by 2015 (IMF, 2017). Income inequality was very low based on measures of the licit economy, at 24-percent (World Bank Development Research Group, 2020). Russian influence on the Ukrainian economy was substantial during the first time period – Russia possessed a large number of state-owned banks within Ukraine and held a considerable portion of Ukrainian external debt. As conflict ensued, Russia emplaced a blockade that negatively impacted trade for several years.

For the second time period, selected macroeconomic indicators improved marginally. Unemployment in Ukraine was slightly lower, at 8.8-percent. External debt declined to 88.3-percent of GDP (down from 103.9-percent of GDP in 2017) and inflation was at 11-percent which was the lowest rate since 2013 (World Bank Development Research Group, 2020). Income inequality was the lowest in Europe, at 26.1-percent. These figures are likely skewed due to the prevalence of the shadow economy;

however, we can conclude the licit Ukrainian economy in 2018 improved over the first time period. In summary, domestic institutional strength is rated as moderate during both time periods. The primary challenges of corruption and external dependency during the first time period improved notably by the second time period. The next section will evaluate the strength of popular resistance in Crimea during the two time periods.

Popular Resistance.

During the first time period Crimeans were incredibly disenfranchised with the Ukrainian government. Contemporary Ukrainian politics were split between pro-Western parties desiring greater independence, and pro-Russian parties desiring greater integration with Russia. Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, government incompetence, corruption and scandal left many Ukrainian people craving transparency and greater independence from Russia. However, some political elites were closely aligned with Russia, including President Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions, which represented ethnic Russians and others who desired closer ties with Russia. In addition, Crimea maintained its own constitution, presidency, supreme council and prime minister, that plagued Ukrainian politics since at least 1994 (Stewart, 1997). The Orange Revolution in 2004 was an early indication of popular discontent, co-led by Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. By the first time period for this analysis, Yanukovych as president attempted to appeal to both the pro-Russian constituents who elected him and the pro-Western Ukrainians who increasingly grew disgruntled. Attempts to satisfy all parties led to stronger division and alienation of both camps. The Crimean people and law enforcement structures felt a resounding sense of resentment due to decades of neglect and mistreatment from the Ukrainian central government in Kiev (Galeotti, 2016, p. 284). In summary, significant political factionalization was present in Ukraine during the first time period

Although the estimated Ukrainian illicit economy decreased in size from all-time highs in the late 1990s of more than 50-percent of GDP to an estimated 40-percent in 2014, the black market remained very strong during the first time period (Medina & Schneider, 2018). The Ukrainian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade announced that shadow economy levels decreased to less than 30-percent in 2018, which was the lowest level in ten years, however actual figures are likely somewhat higher

(Istrate, 2019). Regardless, a substantial illicit economy is present for both time periods in Ukraine, leading to resource generation and self-sufficiency for the resistance.

Socio-ethnic divides were present in Ukraine, and especially in Crimea (and Eastern Ukraine) where Russia sought to appeal to the linguistic and ethnic Russian populations (Lanoszka, 2016). Weakness of Ukrainian civil society are apparent during both time periods. Social cleavages between ethnicities, a history of repression especially with the Tatars in Crimea and weakness of the Ukrainian central government to meet the needs of Crimeans strengthened division between ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars. Latent historical grievances, combined with an inability of the Ukrainian government to unify populations with separatist notions, further exasperated socio-ethnic divides and generated conditions where resistance potential was strong.

In summary, antecedent conditions are rated as permissive during the first time period and semi-permissive during the second. Domestic institutions were moderate during both periods of analysis, however political elite corruption plagued domestic structures, especially during the first time period. Additionally, from an economic standpoint, Ukraine was highly dependent upon Russia during the first time period. Resistance strength was especially strong in Crimea. Crimeans are ethnically and cultural more aligned with Russia than Ukraine and geographically separated from Ukraine. Although Crimeans were not robustly represented in the Ukrainian central government, the development of autonomous governmental structures enabled the development of a separatist enclave, similar to that of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. Rather than generating resistance strength through political change across the entire country, resistance strength was generated through independent governing structures and given legitimacy by support from the Russian state. Socio-economic divides between Crimeans and the central Ukrainian state amplified the strength of popular resistance.

By the second time period, Russia controlled about three-percent of Ukrainian territory which corresponds to about 12-percent of the Ukrainian population and 13-percent of total GDP (World Bank Group, 2017).[48] The lack of territorial integrity posed the greatest risk and catalyzed the vulnerability of antecedent conditions. Russia's

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[48] This includes Russian occupation of Eastern Ukraine which is covered in the next section.

targeting of secessionist enclaves once again exposed the inability of the central government to maintain a monopoly on the use of force inside their own borders and enabled Russia to meet the needs of vulnerable segments of the Ukrainian population. The following section will assess the symmetry of interests between Russia and the United States with regard to Ukraine.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Ukraine is contiguous with Russia and rated as far from the United States. The U.S. had no troops or long-term interests stationed in the vicinity of Ukraine during the first time period. By the second time period, the U.S. led a multinational training effort in L'viv, Ukraine with the California National Guard, however geographic proximity remained far.

Russian historical ties and alliances were at an incredibly high level during the first time period. The Crimean Peninsula, in particular, has tremendous historical value for Russia and several alliances or agreements between the two countries prior to the Russian invasion existed. Crimea was actually part of Russia until 1954, when Khrushchev transferred it to Ukrainian control, although Crimea still retained powerful ties to Russia (Galeotti, 2016). Following WWII, millions of Russians moved into Ukraine as the country became a major economic hub for the broader USSR (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia asserted itself in territorial claims in Crimea as early as 1993 (Brzezinski, 1994; Stewart, 1997). Upon collapse, nineteen of twenty-six Soviet bases on the Black Sea fell within newly independent Ukraine and nearly 40,000 Russian military personnel resided in Crimea (Stewart, 1997). In addition, due to the desirable location, many senior Russian military retirees settled in Crimea and were active in local politics (Stewart, 1997).

Apart from their robust historical ties, Ukraine and Russia were also partners in several alliances, treaties and agreements prior to Russian invasion. Like Georgia, Ukraine joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as part of Russia's attempt to maintain an economic union of post-Soviet states. Several agreements existed as part of the CIS, including Ukraine's participation in a joint anti-terrorism center with Russia.

Among the most important agreements was Russian basing rights at Sevastopol in Crimea. This agreement authorized Russia to station up to 25,000 military personnel in Crimea (Bērziņš, 2014). Russian basing rights in Crimea were codified in the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and Russia. This agreement remained stagnate for several years over disagreement on whether Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet belonged to Ukraine or Russia. Finally in 1997, Ukraine ceded basing rights to Russia for leniency in debt repayments (Stewart, 1997). This treaty offered legal justification for Russia to maintain a military foothold in the only ethnic Russian majority region of Ukraine. In 2010, President Yanukovych signed an agreement with Russia to extend the lease of Ukraine's Black Sea port facilities, which included Sevastopol in Crimea (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). This deal catalyzed political separation within Ukraine – those who wanted closer ties with Russia and those who desired Ukrainian nationalism and greater independence from Russia.

By the second time period, diplomatic ties between Russia and Ukraine dropped to a level that made them essentially non-existent. In 2015, Ukraine suspended military cooperation with Russia as a series of economic escalation and retaliation acts occurred (Interfax Ukraine, 2016). While some cooperation between Russia and Ukraine remained by the second time period, most significantly through trade, diplomatic ties were considerably degraded.

Although the U.S. formally opened diplomatic relations with Ukraine in 1992, the first major diplomatic interaction occurred in 1993 and 1994 regarding Ukraine's nuclear disarmament. Following the adoption of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I, U.S. bilateral relations grew substantially. The U.S. provided considerable economic aid designed for reforms and improved trade opportunities (Stewart, 1997). By 1997, Ukraine was the third-largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world. In 2014, ties between the U.S. and Ukraine were moderate and clearly not as strong as those between Russia and Ukraine. By the second time period, the U.S. led a major training mission in Western Ukraine (L'viv) (Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine, 2016). Military partnership between the U.S. and Ukraine escalated tremendously between 2014-2018 from assistance in training to the provision of important equipment to counter Russian aggression. By the second time period, U.S. partnership with Ukraine is rated as strong.

Although the commercial value of Russia to Ukraine is clearly substantial, the value of Ukraine to Russia hovers around just over two-percent of total exports during both time periods. Although this figure is low, the figure for the U.S. is considerably lower – at less than 0.1-percent during the first time period, but climbing to 0.2-percent during the second time period. This amounts to an increase of U.S. exports to Ukraine of more than $1.2 billion by 2018, and coincides with a drop in Russian exports by more than $1.8 billion during the same period. In summary, the commercial value of Ukraine is clearly higher for Russia, but the U.S. has attempted to influence the relationship since Ukrainian intervention. Comparative commercial value has increased dramatically for the U.S., with a swing of more than $3 billion by 2018.

In summary, Russian interests in Ukraine are rated as asymmetric compared to those of the U.S. during both time periods – although notably less asymmetric during the second time period. During the first time period, Russian interests were much stronger in all categories of analysis. By the second time period, major shifts occurred in terms of alliances and commercial value. Economic assistance increased considerably from the U.S. (and other western nations). The commercial value of Ukraine remained stronger for Russia, but by a much smaller margin. The differential between the interests of the RSA and status quo power shrunk by a margin of 6:1 during the first time period, to 5:2 during the second. The asymmetry, however, remained in Russia's favor.

Informal Access (IV3)

Socio-Cultural proximity between Ukraine and Russia is rated as similar, especially between Crimea and Russia. The strong historical ties mentioned earlier are compounded by several cultural factors that make informal access strong. Crimea is considered the birthplace of the Russian Orthodox Church and is where Prince Vladimir the Great was baptized in 988 and medieval Russia followed (Galeotti, 2016). Unlike the remainder of Ukraine, Crimea in 2014 had an ethnic Russian majority of around 60-percent (Pifer, 2020). There were several efforts by Russia to "Russify" Ukraine in recent history. Through Yanukovych in 2012, Russia was able to promote the Russian language as one of Ukraine's official tongues in any area where ten-percent or more of the population spoke Russian (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). The Russian World Foundation

(*Russkiy Mir*) supports 100 Russian Centers around the world and of those in CIS countries, nearly half are in Ukraine (Lutsevych, 2016). In late 2013 when mainland Ukraine was in favor of closer ties with the West, the Russian-speaking majority in Crimea favored closer ties with Russia. By the second time period, socio-cultural proximity with Crimea was strengthened as around 140,000 ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars fled Crimea to Ukraine, while at least 250,000 Russians moved to Crimea (Pifer, 2020).

Due to Russia's close socio-cultural proximity, they had a unique ability to reinforce intermediary employment with socio-cultural justification. They were able to exploit international uncertainty over Ukrainian domestic nuances and justify intermediary employment and broader gray zone influence all with Crimean popular support. Such action introduced considerable latency in Ukraine's and the international community's response.

In this case, much more so than with the Georgia case, there was a deliberate effort to cultivate support of ethnic Russians within Crimea. The development of *Rossotrudnichestvo*, the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation is one major effort supporting this point.[49] This agency was established by presidential decree on September 6, 2008 just after major conflict in Georgia. They promote Russian culture and language abroad and target youth with education programs and opportunities. Even in areas such as Ukraine where socio-cultural proximity is rated as similar, Rossotrudnichestvo is a tool through which soft power is strengthened.

Ideological convergence was present for both time periods in the employment of intermediaries in Crimea. The Orthodox Church again served as a major conduit through which ideological convergence emanated. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox Church desired to regain elements of the lost Russian empire in synchronization with the Russian state (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). Local self-defense forces in Crimea referenced the Russian Orthodox Church through their recruiting process (Ostrovsky, 2015, pt. 10). The Chetniks in particular, shared a strong level of ideological convergence based both on the Orthodox Russian Church and anti-

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[49] For more information on *Rossotrudnichestvo*, see http://rs.gov.ru/en/about.

Western views. The leader of the Chetnik intermediaries in Crimea stated the Serbs had a responsibility to their Orthodox brethren (Di Giovanni, 2014). Chetnik motivation was strongly ideological and the Serbian group claimed in 2014, "it is our duty to be here," (Di Giovanni, 2014). It is unclear whether the Chetniks or other intermediaries operating in Crimea were paid by Russia (Rujevic, 2014).

For the two years leading up to Russian intervention in Ukraine, Ukrainian Choice worked to unify about 300 groups in Ukraine, many of which are linked to the Orthodox Church or Cossack groups (Lutsevych, 2016). These groups had representation in every Ukrainian political district and many local law enforcement offices. Russia used NGOs in Ukraine during both time periods to reinforce narratives and shape conditions for the employment of other intermediaries based on ideological factors.

Finally, it is clear the Russian state purposefully attempted to create the perception of ideological convergence in the case of the Cossacks. The participation of the Cossacks was coordinated through the Russian Orthodox Church at the direction of the Russian state. The involvement of the Cossacks was purposefully attributed in the pro-Russian media as motivated by ideological and patriotic obligations (Information Agency of Russian Cossacks, 2017). Russia shaped a narrative around the idea that Cossacks spontaneously emerged in Crimea en masse out of spiritual and patriotic duty, but it was later revealed Cossack participation was part of broader strategy to convey ideological convergence (Censor.net.ua, 2017; Sukhankin, 2019c). Cossack associations (Council of the Atamans of Crimea, the Union of Crimean Cossacks and the Feodosia Cossack Regiment) have long claimed it their mission to protect the Orthodox faith, educate youth and protect their cultural history (Sukhankin, 2019c; Yurochenko, 2007). With the Cossacks, although ideological convergence existed, the media exaggerated ideological underpinnings to gain ideological support from within Russia and abroad.

Strategic convergence existed during both time periods in the annexation of Crimea, however it was not as substantial of a variable as with other cases. The local self-defense forces, who were predominately ethnic Russians, and Chetniks both benefited from Russian annexation of Crimea through greater Russian influence abroad. However,

strategic convergence was not an overwhelming contributor to intermediary employment in this case.

In summary, informal access by Russia to Ukraine is rated as high, especially in Crimea. Socio-cultural proximity was especially strong and ideological convergence was purposefully cultivated and exaggerated through the media over time. Strategic convergence did exist, although not to the level observed in most other cases in this project.

Target Summary

Ukraine's domestic institutional strength was among the highest of cases evaluated in this project. One would expect this strength to harden Ukraine from intermediary employment. However, the very long history between Russia and Ukraine, the high ethnic Russian population in Crimea and the separatist tendencies of Crimea since the collapse of the Soviet Union eclipsed the strength of domestic institutions and revealed a target that was permissive to intermediary employment.

The theory operates as expected with the Crimea case. Permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests resulted in the overt, centralized employment of a vast array of intermediaries, supporting hypothesis 2. Although domestic institutions were relatively strong, Russia clearly perceived permissive antecedent conditions that were amplified by the unstable Ukrainian domestic political environment following Euromaiden. Additionally, popular resistance within Crimea was strong. Russia also recognized the asymmetry of interests over Ukraine with the U.S. As a result, they deployed the LGM as intermediaries in a manner that was overt and centralized with very little international response or military escalation by Ukraine. Other intermediaries were employed in a similar fashion. The table below summarizes the employment of Russian intermediaries in Crimea.

Crimea: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: **2014**		*Time Period 2*: **2018**	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***		***Semi-Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.278	Weak-Mod	0.455	Moderate (+)
Resist. Strength	1	Strong	1	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Russia	6	***Asymmetric***	5	***Asymmetric***
U.S.	1		2	
Informal Access	1	***High***	1	***High***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	LGM	***Overt***		
	SDF	***Lean Overt***	SDF	***Lean Overt***
	Cossacks	***Lean Overt***	Night Wolves	***Lean Overt***
	Chetniks	***Lean Overt***	Ukr. Choice	***Lean Overt***
	Night Wolves	***Lean Overt***		
	Ukr. Choice	***Lean Overt***		
Level of State Control	LGM	***Centralized***		
	SDF	***Centralized***	SDF	***Lean Cent.***
	Cossacks	***Lean Cent.***	Night Wolves	***Lean Cent.***
	Chetniks	***Lean Cent.***	Ukr. Choice	***Lean Cent.***
	Night Wolves	***Lean Cent.***		
	Ukr. Choice	***Lean Cent.***		

Table 5.4.   Russian deployment of intermediaries in Crimea, 2014-2018

The combination of intermediaries used by Russia in the annexation of Crimea reveal Russian perceptions on the vulnerability of the target characteristics and the potential for escalation. Spetsnaz without insignia, "volunteer" forces from Serbia and elsewhere, motorcycle gangs and local self-defense forces were centrally controlled to manage levels of violence and force capitulation of Ukrainians in an ethnically dense Russian area that was geographically and politically disconnected from the mainland. Additionally, Russia recognized the utility of ideological convergence and the value of the Orthodox Church. The use of the Church as a surrogate for initial management and control of the Cossack involvement is a unique characteristic of this case. The next case evaluates

Russia's simultaneous employment of intermediaries in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine.

Eastern Ukraine: The Donbass

While Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine occurred simultaneously to Crimea, variation in intermediary employment indicates Russian objectives in this region were different and evolved over time. Most scholars assess Russian actions in Crimea and the Donbass as part of a unified effort, but this project reveals intent was quite different. Operations in Crimea were focused on annexation. In the Donbass, Russian objectives are more difficult to ascertain. Galeotti (2016) perhaps says it best, "…if in Crimea the aim was to create a new order, in the Donbass, it was as much as anything else to create chaos…" (Galeotti, 2016, p. 285). Ultimately, both campaigns became part of a strategy to prevent Ukrainian NATO membership. Unlike Crimea, which Putin quickly claimed as Russian territory, in the Donbass region, Russia argued only for "special status" within Ukraine, which is a major component of what transpired through the Minsk agreements (De Wall, 2018). In Eastern Ukraine, Russia's dynamic employment of military and intermediary forces took a variety of forms. The role of conventional or special forces remained concealed to a great extent, while the use of lethal force by intermediaries on the Ukrainian military was used with devastating effect (Ruiz Palmer, 2015).

In many ways, the Donbass served as an experimental test ground for future Russian intermediary employment. Experimentation with intermediaries transitioned through five distinct phases in this case between the initiation of hostilities and the second time period. First, the Russian sponsorship or employment of intermediaries did not exist and separatists operated on their own accord with the anticipation of Russian assistance (Feb-May14). Second, Russia passively allowed Cossacks and Chechens to cross the border and/or activate sympathizers with at most minor guidance and material support (May-July 14). Third, Russia decided to actively support the separatists through resources, relatively covert military enablers, and the direction to the Cossacks and Chechens to centralize control (Aug 14). Fourth, Russia consolidated control further with the targeted replacement (sometimes through execution) of political and military leaders. In many cases, trusted Russian personnel, or agents, were placed in command. This phase is where we first observe Wagner. The fourth phase culminated with the Minsk II agreement which provided the separatist regions with relative autonomy and the freedom to self-govern (Aug 14 – Feb 15). Finally, by the second time period, relative stability was achieved, the

majority of intermediaries departed for other theaters and control of residual separatists was centralized (Feb 15 – 2018).

This case is used to assess the role of my second independent variable, symmetry of interests. In conjunction with the previous case on Crimea, I can use most-similar case analysis to evaluate the role of alternative explanations on the characteristics of intermediary employment. With this case I find the theory operates as expected during the second time period. Comparison between the Crimea and Donbass cases in the conclusion of this chapter will discusses why the theory did not operate as expected during the first time period, with the shadow of operations in Crimea and disjointed resistance as primary factors. Also, with this case I observe further maturation of Russia's intermediary design. The integration of Wagner into the Russian arsenal enables Russia's preference for centralized control while adding a layer of non-attribution. The following section provides a narrative summary of key events and actors that are notably different from Crimea and frames Russia's deployment of intermediaries in the Donbass.

Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine came begrudgingly. The protests in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine, which includes primarily the oblasts (provinces) of Donetsk and Luhansk, occurred throughout March and April 2014. On April 7, pro-Russian separatists riding on the coattails of Euromaidan and the Crimea annexation, declared sovereignty and named their movements the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). As fighting later ensued, the DNR and LNR seized substantial portions of Donetsk and Luhansk, prompting a response from the Ukrainian military. Russian support for the separatists was very limited during this period, as Putin remained hopeful the election of President Poroshenko in Ukraine would result in an opportunity to pull Ukraine back under the Russian fold (Matveeva, 2018). Putin even requested for the separatists to move back the 11 May referendum, which the separatists disregarded (Matsuzato, 2017). Instead, the election of Poroshenko resulted in military escalation from the Ukrainian side and an adjustment to the Russian approach.

Russia was foremost concerned with the high probability of escalation if the Russian military was forced to engage, covert or otherwise (Kofman et al., 2017; Matsuzato, 2017; Matveeva, 2018). As an alternative, international intermediaries began

arriving in the Donbass in earnest in May 2014. Although both groups were present as early as May, June-July 2014 is considered by some (Matsuzato, 2017) as the "Chechen-Cossack" period. It is unknown the extent to which Russia was directly involved in the employment of these intermediaries, but it is clear Russia did nothing to deter the intermediaries from crossing the border into the Donbass, indicating at the very least passive support. Abkhazians and Ossetians were also present in smaller numbers during the same time period.

Slowly, by the late summer of 2014, the Russians became more involved. In July, reports emerged that many of the inexperienced, self-appointed leaders of the separatist movement where being strategically replaced by Russian citizens with previous military or intelligence experience (Baczynska & Vasovic, 2014). A major turning point came at the end of August after a Ukrainian army offensive stormed through the city of Luhansk (Matsuzato, 2017). Separatist leadership was replaced and control was increasingly centralized by Russia as the Minsk protocol ceasefire and the provision of a temporary order of local self-governance was agreed upon for Donetsk and Luhansk in September.

Over the next several months, Russia experimented with many variations of intermediary utilization. Several intermediary actors were observed in Eastern Ukraine. Scaled versions of many of the same intermediaries discussed throughout this chapter were present, with the addition of a new Russian intermediary: the Wagner group. The Donbass represents the first Russian case where observations of intermediary use indicate Russians used different intermediaries for different objectives – indicating strategic intent. I briefly describe each of the main intermediaries in the paragraphs that follow so later, through the theoretical analysis section, we are better able to distill the degree to which intermediaries were part of a deliberate Russian strategy to influence outcomes. Primary intermediary actors for the Donbass are summarized below and then followed by analysis.

First, within both Luhansk and Donetsk, local domestic militia, separatists, or "partisans" previously existed and were centralized and reinforced over time by Russia. The partisans were often led by former Russian military, FSB or GRU personnel. One prominent example is Igor Girkin (aka Igor Strelkov) who emerged as the leader of the Donetsk People's Republic after leading Russian paramilitary groups as an FSB colonel in

Bosnia, Chechnya, Transnistria and Crimea (Kofman et al., 2017; U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). These domestic intermediaries, or partisans, constituted the majority of intermediaries present in Eastern Ukraine and by 2018, were the only major intermediary element remaining (McDermott, 2015). Generally, the separatists were utilized simply as front line infantry requiring little specialized training or skill sets. As Russia formalized control of secessionist enclaves and additional requirements for Russia's transnational intermediaries arose (i.e. Syria), the separatists transformed into a more centralized local security force.

The second group of intermediaries consisted of Russians who deployed in support of Russian campaigns previously. The primary intermediaries in this category are the Chechens and the Cossacks. The Chechen Vostok (East) battalion was previously subordinate to the GRU's official structure, however it was disbanded prior to the Ukrainian conflict. Veterans of the Vostok battalion (in addition to some Dagestanis, Abkhazians and Ossetians) were observed by May as a first attempt by Russia to reign in separatist ambition (Galeotti, 2016). A defector from Ukrainian Security Service, Alexander Khodakovsky, was placed in command of the Vostok battalion (Galeotti, 2016; Kofman et al., 2017). The Cossacks, and in particular the Wolves' Head Battalion, were not used by Russia as an auxiliary to Russian conventional forces as they were in Georgia in 2008, rather they were given autonomy to fight without the appearance of clear control from Russia (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). Although the Cossacks did not fight side by side with the Russian military, they were eventually paid and supported materially by Russia.

The third group consisted of intermediaries outside Russia or the target country who benefit from greater Russian influence and/or have an ideological affinity with Russian objectives. This group is represented by the Chetniks. Many claim the Chetniks are like any other mercenary and purely fueled by money. However, the Chetniks claim they received no money and did not ask for money (Rujevic, 2014). The Chetniks primarily served as an auxiliary force, as they did in Crimea, although in much greater numbers.

The fourth group consisted of covert elements of the Russian military. This included both covert Russian military elements with ambiguous insignia, Russian

"volunteers" who are military personnel on "leave" and Russian military retirees. The Russian *Gruz* 200, or Cargo 200, was the operational phrase used to discretely discuss Russian casualties in Eastern Ukraine (Reisinger & Golts, 2015). Russia continually denied the participation of Russian military personnel, but acknowledged some military personnel were in Eastern Ukraine unbeknownst to the state while they were on leave or "vacation," or that they even became "lost" in the conflict zone (McDermott, 2015). Russian military elements were employed predominately as enablers (artillery, electronic warfare, etc.) and as trainers to separatists on the maintenance and use of Russian equipment. It is likely they assisted with command and control covertly between November 2014 and February 2015.

The final group were those contracted by the Russian state to pursue security objectives. These groups are typically labeled Private Military Contractors (PMCs) or mercenaries, but were in fact agents of the state designed to achieve security objectives that were untenable through ordinary military or diplomatic means. As stated by Marten (2020), the groups in this category typically employed by Russia are not corporate organizations, rather they represent a means which Russia uses for specified security interests (Marten, 2020). These groups are the subject of much scholarly attention and the most well-known example of this type of intermediary is the Wagner group (aka Slavonic Corps, descendent from Moran Security Group).[50] The Wagner group emerged in 2014 in Eastern Ukraine and was subsequently used across the world. They trained in Krasnodar, Russia alongside the GRU and were observed working alongside Russian conventional and special forces worldwide (Marten, 2020; Sukhankin, 2018a). Wagner was not comprised purely of former Russian intelligence or military officials, they also recruited from the Cossacks and separatists in regions they operated over the years (Sukhankin, 2019c).

As an example of how these various intermediaries come together, the following vignette is useful. The Ukrainian 1-24 Mechanized Infantry Brigade is one of the Ukrainian entities that regularly rotated to the front lines of the conflict, termed the area of Anti-Terrorist Operations (ATO) by the Ukrainian military. In April 2016, one of the battalion

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[50] For more information on the evolution of Wagner, see Sergey Sukhankin, "Russian PMCs in the Syrian Civil War: From Slavonic Corps to Wagner Group and Beyond," in *War by Other Means: Russia's Use of Private Military Contractors at Home and Abroad*, Jamestown Foundation, 2019.

deputy commanders and one of the company commanders from the Ukrainian brigade described the distinction between units in the Luhansk oblast.

> We can identify the airborne units by their Soviet flag…We see the "Margellis" flag, who was the founder of the airborne unit in the Soviet Union…a very distinctive flag that everyone knows…The Cossack units have flags and wear certain hats…The Chechens have beards and their own green flag…every unit tries to capture a Chechen because they carry cash. In the last 60 days, we have seen three units. First, are the separatist flags. They are "Ghost" or "Prizrak." They are mercenaries from Russia. Second, are the Cossack flags. Their leader, Dremov, was famous and taken out by Russian Spetsnaz for not following orders. Third, are the airborne unit. They are one of the elite airborne units in Russia (Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine, 2016).

The 1-24 brigade leadership stated the various intermediaries blend in amongst the locals in the village of Fruze during the day and fight at night. Each element was seemingly given a separate area of operations, rather than fighting together. The following graphic, provided by the 1-24 Brigade, depicts the flags and descriptions of intermediary elements fighting adjacent to one another in the vicinity of Fruze, Luhansk oblast in April 2016. The distributed nature of the units portrays a combination of centralized and decentralized control by the Russian state.

The "Margellis" Airborne Forces
Post-war Soviet Airborne Forces owing much to the efforts of Army General Vasily Margelov. Abbreviation of VDV in the Airborne Forces is sometimes interpreted as "Войска дяди Васи" or "Uncle Vasya's Troops"

76th Guards Air Assault Division
A BN of which is opposing the 1-24th Mechanized BDE. Previous clash occurred in 2014 in which the Russian Airborne BN suffered heavy casualties.

Mechanized Brigade "Prizrak" or Prizrak Brigade
(Russian: Бригада «Призрак», meaning "Ghost Brigade") A mechanized infantry brigade that is commanded by Yuri Shevchenko. The group keeps its distance from the LPR authorities and is based in Alchevsk and the surrounding district. BDE located 22km southeast of Frunze

Don Cossack National Guard
An international organization that recruits volunteers from Ukraine & Russia. Elements located vicinity Antratsyt (south Luhansk) and Perevalsk (North Luhansk Sector 27km SE Frunze)

The Chechens
Death Battalion (Russian: Батальон «Смерть»)

Figure 5.2.   Various intermediaries observed in Luhansk by 1-24 UKR BDE, 2016[51]

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[51] This information was provided to the author while conducting a congressional appropriations oversight visit to Yavoriv, Ukraine in June 2016.

By 2018, the situation was much that same as it was in the spring/summer of 2014 or the 2016 account highlighted above – frozen battle lines through episodes of cease-fire and conflict. For perspective, even by 2020, the longest period a cease fire held during period of 27 July – 10 August was three days (OSCE, 2020). However, from an intermediary perspective only the pro-Russian separatists remained in earnest. Wagner made a return at one point in 2017, but their presence was short lived (Sukhankin, 2019c).

In summary, Russian employment of intermediaries in the Donbass occurred near simultaneously to their employment in Crimea, however the approach was much different between the two cases. In the Donbass, militias emerged as more of a grass roots movement on the coattails of Crimea and were later coopted by the RSA and employed as intermediaries that remained through 2018 and beyond. Structurally this case is not all that different from observations in Lebanon or Iraq where various groups were consolidated by the revisionist state for strategic use, but RSA engagement in the Donbass appears more out of necessity than opportunity. The initial deployment of the Vostok battalion and Cossack elements to gain control of separatist ambition was followed by similar, more aggressive behavior of the newly formed Wagner group. Separatist ambition was forcefully centralized for strategic effect. Once separatist ambition was contained, the unified intermediary force defeated the Ukrainian army in February 2015, forcing the Minsk II agreement which provided Russia with promises of Donbass autonomy – their objective for the region. The following section will apply the theory to the Donbass case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are the same as Crimea – 2014 when intermediaries were first employed in Eastern Ukraine and 2018 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution for Russia to withdraw its armed forces.

Attribution

Russia openly denied participation in the Donbass and refused to acknowledge relations with any intermediary throughout both time periods. Upon the execution of the referendum, Russian funding and resources provided to intermediaries slowly ramped up and much was funneled through local Ukrainian elites who served as

key brokers in the pro-Russian informal networks (Kofman et al., 2017). By the end of the first time period, burials of Russian soldiers were conducted in secret near the towns where they were based, likely to avoid domestic retribution. When two investigative reporters visited one such cemetery, their memory cards were erased and they were threatened with death (BBC News, 2014a). Russia consistently referred to those in the conflict throughout both time periods as "volunteers" (*dobrovotsi*) or "People's Militia" (*Narodnoye Opolcheniye*) to reinforce the narrative of historical volunteer participation and non-attribution.

Analysis of the intermediaries in the Donbass indicate that it is very possible Russia was not linked in any way to their actions during the initial part of the first time period. Slowly, Russia became more involved – first passively, then actively. Action by the separatists and Chechens/Cossacks were fairly ad hoc, although Russian guidance was likely disseminated with a focus on more centralized disruption. As the situation became more unstable, Russia took steps that resulted in more overt attribution. As a result, plausible deniability became implausible deniability. First, the employment of remnants of the disbanded Chechen Vostok battalion and then the employment of Wagner emerged as a means to exert control and reverse inefficiencies. In summary, attribution between Russia and the DNR/LNR separatists during the first time period can be rated as low (covert) wherein the link between the revisionist state and the intermediary is unknown. Attribution between Russia and all other intermediaries during the first time period can be rated as leaning covert. By the second time period, attribution between Russia and all pro-Russian separatists is rated as overt.

Level of State Control

During the first time period, empirics indicate control over domestic intermediaries was decentralized. A unique consortium of Ukrainian elites and former Russian officials operated with different agendas and without a unified command structure (Kofman et al., 2017, p. 60). A disparate coagulation of intermediaries ranging from 26 different Ukrainian separatists to the ideologically motivated Serbian Chetniks emerged in the Donbass in April-May of 2014 to support separatist intentions. As stated by Kofman et al. (2018), the separatists were overconfident they would receive Russian support after

what they witnessed in Crimea. A substantial amount of infighting between the pro-Russian forces existed and was likely viewed as a risk by Russia. The recently disbanded Chechen Vostok (East) battalion, which previously served as a formal special operations unit under the GRU, was on the ground in the early part of the first time period and encouraged to assist with the consolidation of various separatist groups in an effort to centralize control and prevent counterproductive efforts, such as fratricide.[52] Later, the Wagner group was used as a precision weapon by Russia to take control of pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas toward the end of the first time period to reduce infighting and direct utilization of various groups (Marten, 2020). Wagner was specifically employed in Luhansk to, "…stir and further destabilize the situation," (Sukhankin, 2019c, p. 7). There is also evidence that both the Chechens and Wagner were used to assassinate political and intermediary leaders who refused to acquiesce to Russian centralization efforts (Kofman et al., 2017; Matsuzato, 2017; Sukhankin, 2019c).

The haphazard employment of external intermediaries may be due, at least partially, to competition between the Russian FSB and GRU. There is empirical support that the FSB was given responsibility of Donetsk and the GRU was given responsibility of Luhansk (Sukhankin, 2019c).[53] Nonetheless, by the end of the first time period, the strategy for Wagner utilization became clear. Wagner was employed initially in much the same fashion the Cossacks and Chechens were employed – to centralize control and coalesce disparate factions. In some cases, this meant the elimination of rogue commanders or disarmament of insubordinate units. Next, Wagner intermediaries were used as "shock troops" that enabled pro-Russian separatists to achieve critical victories over Ukrainian military forces. In February 2015 this led to the Minsk II agreement that, among other things, gave Donetsk and Luhansk the ability to essentially self-govern as autonomous republics. Finally, the employment of Wagner in the Donbass validated and reinforced Russian notions of centralizing and professionalizing intermediary employment abroad. Control of Wagner can be rated as centralized during the first time period.

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[52] During the First Battle of Donetsk in May 2014, the Vostok battalion accidentally killed several separatists through friendly fire in the first Battle of Donetsk Airport (Kofman et al., 2017, p. 43).

[53] This raises a point of concern that different Russian agencies may have built relationships with or cultivated their own intermediaries to compete for relevancy for the Russian state.

By the second time period, the separatists remained as the only relevant intermediary and were more representative of a centrally controlled Russian Battalion Tactical Group than the disparate coagulation of separatist groups they once were. Some argue this organizational structure and centralization was more a symptom of the material support provided by Russia than desire to centralize control (McDermott, 2015). However, the strategic replacement of DNR/LNR government officials and separatist leaders by the Chechens/Cossacks and Wagner were a clear indication of Russian desire for centralized control. The centralization of control and allegiance of various separatist organizations enabled Russia to free valuable intermediaries for employment in theaters outside Ukraine. By the second time period, the level of state control is rated as centralized. The following table summarizes measures for attribution and level of state control (DV).

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
The Donbass	2014	Russia US	Separatists	NA → Covert	Decentralized
			Chech/Cossacks	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
			Chetniks	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
			Mil Vols	Lean Covert	Centralized
			Wagner	Lean Covert	Centralized
	2018	Russia US	Separatists	Overt	Centralized

Table 5.5.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: The Donbass

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Antecedent conditions in the Donbass were much the same as with the remainder of Ukraine discussed in the Crimea case. To reiterate, the WGI indicators and key economic indicators are among the strongest of any case in this project, with the greatest weaknesses in political stability and violence. Domestic institutions were

relatively robust, but popular resistance was also strong. Political factionalization and elite corruption were prevalent in the region due to the industrial economy and elite ties to the black markets and criminal enterprise. The industrial structure was formally integrated in the region with four thousand directors of industrial enterprise, which streamlined conformist political thought and cooperation on mutually beneficial policy (Matsuzato, 2017). Traditional cultural structures limited independent thought and subordinate loyalty supported the positions of their superiors (Matsuzato, 2017). The formation of self-declared autonomous governing structures in Donetsk and Luhansk added legitimacy to the separatist movement, at least during the first time period. Lastly, socio-ethnic divides between the Donbass and Kyiv were notable and Ukrainians in the east were often perceived by those in the west as lower class (Matsuzato, 2017; Matveeva, 2018). However, within the Donbass, the high number of opportunistic actors representing 26 separatist groups challenged resistance strength.

By the second time period, antecedent conditions in the country remained permissive. Ukraine reduced dependency on Russia and took measures to address the illicit economy, however the ongoing occupation of the Donbass (and Crimea) weakened the integrity of the target state. Further, Ukraine found it easier to govern without Crimean and Donbass opposition (Matsuzato, 2017). Motivations to spill blood and treasure to regain remnants of political opposition became increasingly undesirable among political elites. Antecedent conditions are rated as permissive for both time periods.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Within the first time period, U.S. (and European) interests in Ukraine spiked after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Putin's objectives in Crimea were obtained by April at the latest and he had little interest in further provoking the international community. Russian objectives were to force Ukraine to federalize the country, specifically so the eastern and southern regions (where Russia possessed the highest levels of informal access) held more autonomy. As a byproduct, the international perception of weakened sovereignty could challenge NATO aspirations. During the first time period, U.S. resources flooded to Ukraine. The U.S. established a joint, multinational training element in Eastern Ukraine and provided the Ukrainian military with substantial weaponry and survivability

equipment. It could be argued that Putin perceived a symmetry of interests, which activated the covert deployment of intermediaries, but that is not reflected in the indicators used for this project. Lastly, as noted in the Crimea section – by the second time period, there was a substantial net shift in commercial value (over $3 billion in favor of the U.S.) – although final figures remained in Russia's favor.

Interests between Russia and the U.S. remained asymmetric over both time periods, as with the Crimea case. As a point of differentiation, it is important to point out that the Donbass was the industrial center of Ukraine, and prior to 1991, a main industrial center of the Soviet Union (De Wall, 2018). During the Soviet era, many Russians were incentivized to move to the Donbass region to facilitate industrialization. Following Ukrainian independence in 1991, some Russians felt abandoned in a foreign country (Matveeva, 2018). By the first time period, the Donbass accounted for over one quarter of Ukraine's total exports. Among other resources, the Donbass was the center of Ukraine's coal industry, which was the major source of power for Ukraine's electricity infrastructure. By the second time period, the Ukrainian government blockaded the separatist regions, cutting off their coal supply and other resources. Strangely, Ukraine addressed the coal shortage by importing more coal from Russia (Kofman et al., 2017). However, Russia was actually exporting coal from the Donbass and perhaps selling it back to Ukraine. This is not reflected in the distinctions of commercial value covered in the Crimea case, but worth noting with regard to Eastern Ukraine.[54]

By the second time period, interests between Russia and the U.S. were notably more symmetric. The shift in interests is the most pronounced of any case in this project, with the differential moving from 6:1 to 5:3. However, based on measurements used in this study for geographic proximity, alliances/historical ties and commercial value, interests between the RSA and status quo power remained asymmetric in Russia's favor for both time periods.

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[54] However, there are those who argue the Donbass does not compliment the modern Russian economy that oriented on tech and innovation rather than the former industrial structure. See Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," in Demokratizatsiya, 25:2, 2017.

Informal Access (IV3)

> Donbas never considered itself the real Ukraine. Historically, it had many Cossack settlements. When we got up one day [when the USSR ended] and were told that we now live in Ukraine, many despaired that the border would unnaturally divide us from Russia (Matveeva, 2018, p. 74).

As evidenced by the quote above, socio-cultural proximity with regard to Ukraine, and the Donbass region in particular, can be rated strongly as similar. Many in the Donbass self-identify as Russian. The same linguistic, religious and other cultural characteristics exist in the Donbass as mentioned in the Crimea case. Upon the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders and the Russian populace felt that Ukrainian independence was temporary. Due to the high percentage of ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine, many felt the region would petition for absorption by Russia in the early 1990s (Stewart, 1997). Compounding such sentiment was the social distance the Donbass perceived from Kyiv (Matveeva, 2018). However, over 83-percent of the population from Donetsk and Luhansk supported Ukrainian independence from Russia in 1991 (De Wall, 2018). By 2016, a slim majority still favored being a part of Ukraine, even if under special autonomous status. The autonomous status is exactly what was agreed to under Minsk II and promoted by Russia.

Informal networks played a paramount role in the initial mobilization of pro-Russian separatists and providing access to resources for this case. In the early stages of mobilization, groups such as the Paratroopers Veteran Union served as conduits through which information and mobilization leadership emerged (Kofman et al., 2017). Elite businessmen with shady connections to criminal enterprise, former Russian intelligence personnel, and networks of combat veterans all shaped the landscape in the Donbass for Russian influence. Formal network analysis would reveal a dense network of strong ties both within the Donbass and with Russia, indicating high socio-cultural proximity. As stated in a 2018 RAND study on the crisis, "…Moscow sought entry into Ukraine through existing informal networks and linkages among elites," (Kofman et al., 2017).This access enabled intermediary non-attribution.

One socio-cultural factor that distinguishes the Donbass from Crimea is the absence of a clear ethnic or socio-cultural divide. As a peninsula, Crimea had both a geographic and cultural boundary that Russia reinforced over centuries. In the Donbass,

the DNR and LNR created an artificial line that was developed through combat and that separated families, businesses and communities that were all from the same socio-cultural makeup. While informal access writ large can be rated as high, this internal division is perhaps counterproductive to long-term objectives for Russia and represents vulnerability.

During the first time period, ideological convergence was not as significant a factor. More than two dozen separatists varied considerably in terms of ideological motivations and personal aspirations for power (Kofman et al., 2017). Ideological convergence was, however, strong between the Cossacks and Russia. The Cossack Wolves' Head Battalion, in particular, deployed to Eastern Ukraine for, "…ideological reasons and defend Russian Orthodoxy," (U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2016). No doubt the provision of Russian money and material to the fighters likely helped propel ideological motivation. The Donbass region is also considered home to many Cossacks and since the 1990s, many Cossacks from Luhansk refused to swear loyalty to Ukraine (Matveeva, 2018). The convergence of ideological conviction and protection of the homeland were appealing motivators to the Cossacks during both time periods.

Strategic convergence was present in the Eastern Ukraine case during both time periods. This element most clearly manifested through intermediaries that benefited through increased Russian presence and influence. Strategic convergence was the main driving factor behind the rise of pro-Russian separatist groups, although they wrongly perceived strategic convergence as a given from the start. Although informal access was not used by the Russians as a strategic means through which to incite separatist behavior at onset, pro-Russian groups were soon coopted as intermediaries and control was centralized within months, for strategic objectives. In fact, analysis of this case indicates the Russians were compelled to acknowledge the Donbass perspective to regional order as the alignment of strategic interests slowly converged with the separatists.

Target Summary

Analysis of the Donbass case reveals that Russians were initially reticent to employ intermediaries as part of a planned operation. Rather, the emergence of pro-Russian separatists was a byproduct of Euromaiden (poor domestic governance) and the Russian annexation of Crimea. Prefacing an RSA's employment of intermediaries was the objective

of avoiding conflict escalation to the point where they were forced to deploy conventional forces. The situation in the Donbass was tenuous in this regard and Russia was hesitant to invest too heavily for fear of escalation. While informal access was incredibly high for Russia, international interests threatened to be increasingly symmetric due to the annexation of Crimea. Additionally, although the Donbass was contiguous with Russia, there was no clear dividing line between pro-Russian separatists and the remainder of the population. There was also no natural geographic barrier to isolate the separatist region such as existed in Crimea.

The initial employment of intermediaries in the Donbass can be characterized as ad hoc. Russia eventually engaged through the more targeted employment of intermediaries, but the engagement was opportunistic and maximized the economy of resources rather than as part of a deliberate strategy as observed in Crimea. Efforts were clearly taken to centralize control of the 26 domestic intermediaries in the DNR and LNR by relying upon trusted veteran intermediaries and a new contractually bound intermediary. We observed the same pattern of behavior in Iraq and Syria with regard to Iran, where they relied upon more experienced, veteran intermediaries to train, advise and assist domestic belligerents. The summary of Russian employment of intermediaries in the Donbass is reflected in the table below.

The Donbass: Summary Evaluations				
	Time Period 1: ***2014***		*Time Period 2:* ***2018***	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation	Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***		***Semi-Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.278	Weak-Mod	0.455	Moderate (+)
Resist. Strength	1	Strong	1	Strong
Symmetry of Interests				
Russia	6	***Asymmetric***	5	***Asymmetric***
U.S.	1		2	
Informal Access	1	***High***	1	***High***
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Separatists	***NA→Covert***	Separatists	***Overt***
	Chech/Coss.	***Lean Covert***		
	Chetniks	***Lean Covert***		
	Mil Vols	***Lean Covert***		
	Wagner	***Lean Covert***		
Level of State Control	Separatists	***Decentralized***	Separatists	***Centralized***
	Chech/Coss.	***Lean Decent***		
	Chetniks	***Lean Decent***		
	Mil Vols	***Centralized***		
	Wagner	***Centralized***		

Table 5.6.   Russian employment of intermediaries in the Donbass, 2014-2018

According to the theory, based on the permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests, we should expect to observe the overt, centralized employment of intermediaries during both time periods (Hypothesis 2). However, we find support for this characterization of employment only during the second time period. There is support for the contention that the initiation of the Donbass case on the coattails of Crimea forced Russia to initially engage hesitantly in a covert fashion. The Crimea operation was resource intensive and initial international response may have given Russia the perception that the status quo power's level of interest was growing quickly – which it was. As demonstrated in this section, Russia did not desire a military escalation and concern for such a result was a factor in determining the nature of involvement in the Donbass. Within a very short period of time, U.S. military personnel were stationed in Ukraine and training the Ukrainian army.

Investments improved and legitimate governance was fostered by the international community. Despite these improvements, Russia was able to employ intermediaries in such a way that compelled Ukrainian acquiescence of the reality of a loss of control in Eastern Ukraine, providing the separatists with autonomy. Considering this justification, it could be argued the theory operates as expected during the first time period, supporting covert, decentralized (hypothesis 3) and covert, centralized (hypothesis 4) employment. However, based on definitions for measurement, I cannot draw that conclusion here.

Russia was able to achieve their ultimate objective with Ukraine, which was forced federalization and the prevention of their membership in NATO. By using intermediaries to first stir public discontent, then ignite tensions, and gain territorial control, Ukraine was not in a position to compete for membership. By further consolidating control with Wagner through the systemized centralization of political structures and separatists, Russia was able to emplace a level of permanency in Ukraine's inability to govern comprehensively. The situation in the Donbass remains frozen. The following section will evaluate the next observation of Wagner's utilization in Syria.

Syria

Russian involvement in Syria was accompanied by intermediary participation essentially from the beginning their intervention in September 2015, however utilization evolved somewhat over time. Initially utilization was tactical, designed to retake Syrian territory from both ISIS and anti-Assad rebels. Intermediaries were also used during this time to protect Russian and pro-Assad bases. As territorial gains were made, intermediary use transitioned to the security of key infrastructure (mostly petrol) and supporting pro-Russian business interests. The Russian employment of intermediaries in Syria fell almost exclusively within two groups: quasi-private companies and the Chechens.[55] The Syrian operation provided Russia with a permissive environment to further refine the integration of centrally controlled intermediaries across multidimensional objectives.

This case is used to evaluate the explanatory power of my theory in an area outside the Near Abroad, where Russian penetration into informal structures is not as strong. With this case, I am able to interrogate whether intermediary deployment strategies for Russia vary based on geo-cultural proximity. I find the theory operates as expected in this case with the deployment of intermediaries occurring in an overt, centralized fashion across both time periods. I also find Russia recognizes the importance of informal access with this case and takes strides to enhance such access. The following section provides context on the utility of key actors and events that shaped intermediary deployment in Syria.

The Wagner group is the most prominent example of Russia's quasi-private companies and was deployed by Russia first in 2015. By the spring of 2016, they were utilized purely as a military force (as opposed to infrastructure protection or support) in operations to retake Palmyra, Latakia and Aleppo. These operations were coordinated by the GRU and FSB against weak opposition, therefore tactical successes were substantial (Sukhankin, 2018b). Wagner leader, Dmitry Utkin, even received a medal for bravery at the Kremlin in December 2016, before disappearing permanently a short time later (Marten, 2020; Sukhankin, 2018a). Wagner was later (2017-2018) responsible for the capture and security of the critical Syrian oil infrastructure. This was likely in response to

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[55] Interestingly, the 2020 CRS analysis of the Syrian situation does not mention Russian intermediaries under "non-state actors" or under Russia as a state actor.

the fact that one of the main financiers of Wagner, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, gained control of 25-percent of Syria's oil and natural gas extraction business in 2016 – 2017 with his company Evro Polis (Marten, 2019b; Nakashima et al., 2018; Sukhankin, 2018b). Scholars, such as Marten (2020), have pointed out that Prigozhin's state sponsorship likely shifted during this time from the Russian Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Energy. The U.S. decimation of Wagner forces in February 2018, as they were attempting to take control of a Conoco gas plant near Deir ez-Zour is likely a result of Prigozhin's (and Russia's) business interests.

Other quasi-private companies that operated in Syria more recently include Patriot and Shchit. They are much smaller than Wagner and apparently not used in direct military participation (Marten, 2019b; Sukhankin, 2018c, 2019b). Rather, they are purely focused on infrastructure protection and personnel security – similar to western style PMCs. They do however, possess the same informal links to oligarchs and former military and/or intelligence organizations as Wagner.

In mid-December 2016, Russia and Turkey, who backed opposing sides in the conflict, brokered a ceasefire during the battle of Aleppo to allow civilians and remaining rebels to withdraw. Up to this point, the Russians primarily served in a support role, providing air support to Syrian and Iranian tactical formations and augmenting those formations with the Wagner group. When Russia worked with Turkey to negotiate a ceasefire, the Syrians and Iranians became enraged at the prospect of allowing anti-Assad rebels to flee and, through Hezbollah and other intermediaries, broke the terms of the ceasefire to force Russia's hand toward continued conflict (Hauer, 2017; Shaheen, 2016). In some cases, civilians and rebels were permitted through Russian controlled checkpoints, but once they left Aleppo, they were stopped at checkpoints manned by Iranian intermediaries and denied passage (Bertrand, 2016; Middle East Eye and agencies, 2016). A political officer in the Free Syrian Army at the time stated:

> "…because the Russians don't have fighters in Aleppo, like the Iranians do through their proxies, they cannot apply the cease-fire deal on the ground, in practice…they have to deal with the Iranians because it's their militias who are controlling the checkpoints and largely directing the pro-Assad forces in Aleppo," (Bertrand, 2016).

This incident was an inflection point for Russia and indicative of a loss of leverage. Russia realized they were dependent upon others (Syria, Iran and Turkey) to manage ground operations and infiltrate the informal structures and power bases of Syrian society. Further, Syria indicated they were not entirely dependent on Russia for security needs. The Chechens were deployed within weeks of this incident. Within six months, about 1,000 Muslim intermediaries from Russia were on the ground in Syria (Hauer, 2017).

The Muslim elements deployed by Russia consisted of both Chechen and Ingush[56] elements. These elements were deployed as "military police" tasked with protection of Russian airfields in Syria, but in reality, they served in a variety of functions including everything from frontline combat to working at checkpoints, distributing aid, and coordinating base defense with Syrian nationals (Hauer, 2017). It was reported that in some cases, Chechens refused to deploy but were coerced by the state with threats to remove veteran benefits, such as housing (Caucasian Knot, 2016). The deployment of Muslim elements loyal to the Russian state provided Russia with immediate cultural flexibility in Syria. Such action by Russia signaled a desire to reduce dependency on Syria and Iran.

In summary, the intermediaries deployed to Syria fell in to two camps: quasi-private security corporations and Muslims. Both elements provided Moscow with an ability to influence outcomes on the ground in Syria. The deployment of Muslim intermediaries at the end of 2016 occurred within weeks of Russia's failure to guarantee the terms of the mid-December ceasefire. The following section will apply the theory to this case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for this analysis are 2015 when we first observe Russian intermediaries in Syria and 2018 when the most recent governance indicator data is available.

Attribution

None of the private company intermediaries involved in Syria had a direct, overt link with the Russian state. As with other cases, Russia directly denied a relationship

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[56] The Ingush, mentioned earlier in the chapter, are Sunni Muslims and related to their neighboring Chechens. Previous GRU sponsored Muslim Chechen battalions likely included Ingush in their formations.

the private companies in Syria. Putin stated at one point that private security companies were present in Syria, but they had nothing to do with the Russian state or the Russian army (Interfax.RU, 2019). This reference was not to Wagner as many would expect, but to yet another company called Shchit. The emergence of Shchit in Syria was denied by Putin as means of the Russian state, however, similar to Wagner, the company was originally created as a part of the Russian 45th Spetsnaz Airborne Brigade (Sukhankin, 2019b).

The most astonishing example of attempted non-attribution with Wagner came in February 2018 when as many as 200 Wagner personnel were decimated by U.S. and Kurdish forces in Deir ez-Zour. U.S. military commanders communicated with Russian officials in real time, via a deconfliction station in Qatar, and the Russian government reassured the U.S. they had no forces in the area (Marten, 2020; E. Watkins, 2018). Prigozhin was allegedly in contact with both Russian and Syrian officials ahead of the attack with promises of a "surprise" but did not reveal the specifics of the potentially lucrative opportunity, likely related to the seizure of the Conoco oil field (Nakashima et al., 2018). Once reports emerged of dead Russians in Syria, the Russian government immediately distanced themselves from any knowledge of the incident or relationship with those involved. Russian officials specifically stated Russian service members were not involved and Russian military equipment was not used, but Russian citizens who traveled to Syria, "…of their own free will…" were possibly involved (Nakashima et al., 2018).

The maturation of security companies to execute security objectives for the benefit of business with ambiguous ties to the state is obvious with the case in Syria. The leadership or founders of intermediary groups are all closely linked to Putin himself, or elements of state security or intelligence structures. The Wagner group alone operated in Syria with close ties with Russian MoD from 2015-2016 and the Russian Ministry of Energy from 2017-2018 (Marten, 2020). Previously, Putin stated amidst criticism that Wagner had the right to pursue business interests anywhere they desired, as long as they did not violate Russia's domestic laws and regulations (Sukhankin, 2019b). Although several attempts (denial of deaths, front companies/leadership, layers of ownership, rebranding, etc.) were made throughout both time periods to mask attribution, the relationships are quite clear. Attribution can be rated as leaning overt for Wagner's involvement in Syria during both time periods.

Attribution regarding the Chechens and Ingush during the second time period is more difficult to ascertain. Their initial deployment in December 2016 was not widely acknowledged or announced by the state. However, the units were provided with red berets, military police arm bands and matching uniforms (RFE/RL, 2016). Cultural guides provided to the Muslim intermediaries referenced a national guard unit (64th Separate Special Purpose Brigade) that did not exist (Ramm & Nikolay, 2016). Further, the Vostok and Zapad units that were comprised of Chechens during previous Russian conflicts were disbanded in 2008, however this is exactly how they were referenced in Russian news (Ramm & Nikolay, 2016). There also exists some uncertainty with whether the Putin had authority to deploy the Chechens/Ingush to Syria. According to Russian law, national guard units are not authorized to be deployed outside Russia unless the destination is within the countries included in the Collective Security Treaty (Milashina, 2017). Syria is not part of the CST (former Soviet republics), however, the unit to which the Chechens and Ingush now belong to apparently does fall under the national guard. Finally, while attribution based on the uniforms and publicity surrounding the Chechen/Ingush deployment could be rated as overt, the actual operations of Russian Muslim forces on the ground may not be so clearly overt. For the Chechens and Ingush, Russia did not try to conceal the connection to the state. It is possible, however, that Russia attempted to conceal the full extent of their mission or role. The relationship between Russian and the Chechen/Ingush element can be rated as leaning overt for the second time period.

Level of State Control

There are several characteristics of the intermediary participation in Syria that indicate control by the Russian state leans centralized. The first characteristic is relational. Ownership, leadership, and financing of the intermediaries exists through trusted oligarchs or former government officials. Dmitry Utkin was a former GRU Lieutenant Colonel, Prigozhin's head of security, and member of the Wagner predecessor, Slovanic Corps. Founders of the parent company, Moran security group, have similar ties to the Kremlin and military/intelligence establishments (Sukhankin, 2019a). Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, is also fiercely loyal to Putin and served as a Muslim emissary abroad with high ranking international leaders on Putin's behalf.

Second, the capabilities of the intermediary companies were controlled through a deliberate sponsorship and training program. Wagner conducted training at Krasnodar alongside the GRU and 10th Spetsnaz during both time periods. Similarly, Shchit was created under the 45th Spetsnaz Airborne Brigade (Sukhankin, 2019b). Finally, the Chechens have a history of sponsorship as a part of GRU Spetsnaz prior to their disbandment in 2008. Many authors and journalists contend that Wagner, and some other military companies that followed, were creations of the GRU and/or FSB. There are examples of the Russian state demonstrating the extent of their control on occasion. After Wagner completed the tactical portion of their Syrian mission in 2016, many of their 2,000-2,500 intermediaries redeployed. When some returned to Syria in 2017, their mission shifted to gaining control of gas and oil fields – in which, Prigozhin gained an economic interest. At this point, Marten (2019) reports state sponsorship of Wagner shifted to the Russian Ministry of Energy. When the chaos ensued in February 2018, the lack of an MoD response in first, informing Wagner of the pending onslaught by U.S. forces and second, refusing to assist with medical evacuation, is perhaps indicative of more than plausible deniability. It may be evidence of Moscow exercising a degree of control and dissatisfaction or at the very least, the Ministry of Defense.

The third characteristic consists of how the military companies recruit. Preference was given to veteran fighters, especially those with Spetsnaz experience. Wagner specifically appeared interested in recruiting from former battlefields where experience was shared. For example, in Syria, distinct units within Wagner consisted of Cossacks and Ukrainians (Vesna and Karpaty) (Marten, 2019b; Sukhankin, 2019c). Those with prior experience and understanding were perhaps easier to control.

Fourth, the organizational structure of Wagner was nearly identical to the Russian military (Sukhankin, 2018b). This was beneficial from an organizational efficiency perspective, but also from a "plug and play" perspective where Wagner could be instantaneously attached to or led by regular military or Spetsnaz units. Control could be strategically toggled to suit needs of the situation.

Finally, centrality of state control is evidenced logistically. Both Wagner and Shchit use the same weapons as the Russian military. Additionally, all three

intermediary elements mentioned in this case deploy predominately through the logistics hub of Rostov-on-Don. Prigozhin also owns a company called Concord (and in Syria "RestoranServis Plus") from which the conventional Russian military almost exclusively receives provisions (Berg, 2017; Marten, 2019b). The utilization of the same logistics footprint for all intermediaries adds a layer of control over the actions and organizational structure of intermediaries. In summary, Russia centralized control over all intermediaries through both time periods from leadership, training, recruiting, organizational and logistics standpoints. The following table summarizes analysis of the DV and the next section will assess the explanatory power of the theory for this case.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Syria	2015	Russia US	Wagner	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
	2018	Russia US	Wagner Chech/Ingush	Lean Overt Lean Overt	Lean Cent. Centralized

Table 5.7.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Syria

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

During the first time period, domestic governing structures in Syria were incredibly weak. World governance indicators averaged 0.18 and the Syrian regime was dependent upon Russia and Iran for security and economic means. Syria was subject to U.S. economic sanctions since 2004 and, in 2008, further sanctions prevented U.S. companies from business in the petroleum sector. Subsequent sanctions in 2011, 2012 and November 2018 further constrained Syria's domestic economy and increased Syria's dependence on Russia and Iran, as well as international aid from organizations such as the

World Bank. Iran supplied Syria with around 60,000 bpd of crude oil in 2017, which was not even enough to meet demand (The World Bank Group, 2017). Between 2011 and 2016, the overall Syrian economy shrunk by 63-percent and the oil GDP declined by 93-percent (The World Bank Group, 2017). Unemployment during the first time period was around 50-percent, with substantial portions of the labor force fleeing the country as refugees (Bolton, 2020).

By the second time period, governing structures and external dependency remained poor. Assad regained control of Western Syria, with the help of Russia and Iran, but a mix of sub-state and international actors remained in control of large portions of the country. World governance indicators dropped further yet, to one of the lowest levels in this project (0.105 average). External assistance remained high. Iran provided $5.6 billion worth of supplies between the two time periods, although sanctions in November 2018 drastically reduced this assistance (Eaton et al., 2019). Unemployment, however, improved from the first time period and by 2018 stood around 30-percent, however the size of the labor force also dropped considerably (Bolton, 2020) The very high number of Syrian refugees led to a substantially reduced workforce and the lack of control by the Syrian government over territory, compounded by the persistent threat of armed opposition limited the ability of the government to make economic gains. Finally, the toll of war left large portions of the economic infrastructure in disrepair. Domestic institutional strength is rated as weak during both time periods.

Popular Resistance.

As stated in the Iran chapter, non-Alawites in Syria had little opportunity to contribute to the political process. Assad built a structure of loyalists to insulate the government from domestic opposition. He maintained a dialogue with regional power brokers to balance popular ambition in regions outside the capital. As the civil war ensued, Assad's grasp on power deteriorated and likely would have collapsed completely but for the assistance of Russia and Iran. The presence of ISIS and loss of economic infrastructure due to the war perpetuated the illicit economy and strengthened socio-ethnic divides. Ethno-religious cleavages were present during both time periods and the strength of these divides are one source of continued violence across the country.

Estimations of the illicit economy were not incredibly prolific during the first time period. Estimates for the shadow economy of Syria in 2014 and 2015 hover around 20-percent of GDP, around half of those in former Soviet republics (Medina & Schneider, 2018). However, some estimates put ISIS production of oil as high as 40,000 bpd which made the oil industry a war sustaining activity for ISIS (The World Bank Group, 2017). During the first time period, the Syrian state only retained control of 8-percent of all oil resources. By the second time period, although ISIS was largely destroyed, the shadow economy continued to flourish due to the lack of basic government services throughout the vast majority of the country, where the Assad regime did not have control (The World Bank Group, 2017). Additionally, war economy activities became an important source of revenue generation for rebels and criminals. An important sector of the informal economy that supported the sustenance of resistance elements included the hawala system, which is used by most Syrians outside government controlled areas due to the collapse of the banking system (Eaton et al., 2019). Overall, the illicit economy still existed, but improved by the second time period as violence reduced and the Assad regime's grasp on control stabilized.

In summary, antecedent conditions for Syria were strongly permissive during both time periods. An open invitation by the Syrian government for Russia to participate in their affairs increased the degree to which antecedent conditions were permissive. The level of desperation by Assad was exhibited in the contract with Prigozhin's Evro Polis, where the Syrian government conceded the forfeiture of 25-percent of total revenue for intermediary security. The next section will evaluate the symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and status quo power.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Geographically, Syria is rated as far for both the U.S. and Russia. Russia was able to re-build proximate presence through the stationing of military personnel in Tartus and Latakia in 2007, however presence was quite minimal.

Historical ties between Russia and Syria are long-standing. The Soviet Union first provided Syria with military assistance in 1956 and followed with economic aid in 1957 (Sharp, 2008). Russia was the main supplier of military weapons to the Syrian

military[57] and Soviet advisors traveled to Syria soon after the coup that brought Hafez al Assad to power (Sharp, 2008). By the mid-1970s Syria was home to more Soviet military advisors than any other country (Sharap et al., 2019). Following Syria's participation in the Lebanese 1982 fight against Israel, the Soviets provided Syria with an entire air force (Sharp, 2008). Russia announced plans to reoccupy naval bases in Tartus and Latakia in 2007, which were vacated in 1991 as the Soviet Union collapsed (Sharp, 2008).

Prior to 2015, the Russian naval facility at Tartus existed as a small support and maintenance facility. When Russia made the decision to intervene in 2015, the facilities were upgraded substantially by dredging the port and extending the berth (Sharap et al., 2019). Ties between the Russians and Syrians (and Iranians) grew considerably stronger between the two time periods. The Russians (and Iranians) assisted the Syrians, in large part through their intermediaries, to turn the tide to prevent the collapse of the Assad government. As the U.S. military began to retrograde during the second time period, the Russians exploited the opportunity by occupying U.S. bases and further entrenching their ties with the Syrian state from both military and economic perspectives.

U.S. historical relations with Syria, on the contrary, consist of very few points of cooperation since WWII. Syria has been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism since the list emerged in 1979 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). The U.S. was, however, the largest single donor of humanitarian assistance ($10.6 billion) to Syria since 2012 (U.S. Department of State, 2020). The U.S. vacated the embassy in Damascus in 2012 and closed the Syrian embassy in Washington in 2014. U.S. historical ties are assessed as non-existent during both periods.

The commercial value of Syria to Russia was low. Total exports to Syria during the first time period only amounted to just over $186.5 million, or 0.05-percent of total Russian exports. By the second time period, Russia exports to Syria increased slightly, but still totaled only around $400 million, or 0.08-percent of total exports. The commercial value of Syria to the U.S. is negligible, at just over $3 million during the first time period and $50 million during the second time period, mostly due to long-standing sanctions. Finally, the investment of Russian energy firms (Evro Polis) in the security of Syria's oil

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[57] 90% of all Syrian arms imports during the 1970s – 1980s came from the Soviet Union.

and natural gas infrastructure motivates economic interest for Russia (Marten, 2020). In 2017, the Russian Energy Ministry and the Syrian state owned General Petroleum Corporation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), allowing the Russian firm Evro Polis (owned by Prigozhin) to "…liberate oil and gas fields, plants and other infrastructure captured by enemies of the regime and then guard them…" (Marten, 2020; Sukhankin, 2018a). Evro Polis collects 25-percent of total output over five years, in addition to security costs, for their efforts. Although the official figures are not incredibly substantive, consideration of recent economic interests, such as oil field liberation, demonstrate commercial value is higher for Russia than the U.S. during both time periods.

In summary, interests between Russia and the U.S. regarding Syria were asymmetric over both time periods. The greatest asymmetry resides within the strong military alliances and historical ties that reference back to Russia's peak in superpower status and geopolitical reach. Through the expansion of military basing and security of Syrian oil infrastructure by semi-private companies, and simultaneous retrograde of U.S. forces, Russian interests are increasingly asymmetric in Syria.

Informal Access (IV3)

Socio-cultural proximity for Russia and Syria is assessed as related. Two factors pull the proximity into the related category, vice dissimilar. First, the long history of military, political and economic partnership resulted in embedded cultural familiarity. Many high-ranking Syrian military personnel attended Russian military academies and/or were trained by Russian advisors during the Cold War. As a result, the Russian language is spoken by many Syrian military leaders and Russian military equipment and tactics are familiar to the Syrians. For example, when Russian General Valery Gerasimov coordinated initial support for Syria, he spoke in Russian with his counterpart, who attended a military academy in Moscow (Sharap et al., 2019). Outside military formations, less cultural familiarity exists.

The second factor contributing to socio-cultural similarity resides with Russia's Muslim population. Moscow is home to the largest Muslim community of any city in Europe and 20 million Muslims call Russia home (Hauer, 2017; Hill, 2016). The deployment of Chechens and the Ingush to Syria was clearly an attempt to maximize

similarities in this regard. Muslim intermediaries were directed to use Islamic words to build friendly relations with the public. In one case, Russia broadly publicized the conversion of an ethnic Russian to Sunni Islam in a ceremony conducted by Chechnya's grand mufti in Aleppo (Hauer, 2017; Moscow Islam News, 2017). Russia used Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, on more than one occasion to make state visits to Muslim nations on behalf of Putin (Hauer, 2017). Efforts at bridging cultural similarity existed in the education realm as well. Damascus University announced in 2017 plans to open a local branch in Chechnya (Gavriolova, 2017). Socio-cultural proximity between Russia and Syria can be assessed as related.

Based on the above, it is clear Russia attempted to facilitate ideological convergence through the deployment of Muslim intermediaries. This project defines ideological convergence as the level of ideological alignment and corresponding loyalty it generates. Russia attempted to create ideological convergence by deploying Chechen and Ingush intermediaries directly after a disagreement with Syria and Iran over a ceasefire. However, based on the definition, I argue ideological convergence was not present during either time period between Russia, their intermediaries, and Syria. Ideological alignment that existed in the near abroad and was catalyzed by the Orthodox religion did not exist in Syria. Loyalty and motivation with intermediaries in Syria did not manifest through ideological means.

Strategic convergence, however, is present during both time period. The alignment of vision and interests is clearly present between the groups. Wagner and the Muslim intermediaries were reinforced through mutual financial benefit. Further, the employment of Russian intermediaries came at the invitation of the Syrian regime – which also benefited economically through their participation. The interests of Assad and Putin were nearly identical throughout both time periods – which were predominately focused on the survival of the regime, elimination of opposition and rebuilding of the economy. There were a few minor incidents where Syrian (and Iranian) interests differed from Russia, such as the cease fire brokered by Russia in December 2016 which Iran deliberately violated. However, strategic convergence is clearly present and generally strong.

In summary, informal access is rated as moderate for this case. Socio-cultural proximity is assessed as related, ideological convergence is absent, but strategic convergence is strongly present. The next section will summarize the findings of this case.

Target Summary

Syria represents the only case in this project where intermediary participation was requested and encouraged by the target state. Syria even paid for Wagner to secure and guard oil facilities. The ad hoc mixture of numerous intermediary groups observed in previous Russian cases was not present in this case, nor was the ideological component of *Russkiy Mir*. There appears to be a clear progression in Russia's strategy for employment, or the lack of ideological motivation eliminated many of the intermediaries that participated in previous conflicts closer to home. Nonetheless, Russia's approach to the employment of intermediaries in Syria was generally more overt and more centralized.

Syria: Summary Evaluations					
	Time Period 1: ***2015***			*Time Period 2:* ***2018***	
Variables	Indicator	Evaluation		Indicator	Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		***Permissive***			***Semi-Permissive***
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.059	Weak		0.035	Weak
Resist. Strength	0.333	Weak-Mod		0.333	Weak-Mod
Symmetry of Interests					
Russia	4	***Asymmetric***		4	***Asymmetric***
U.S.	1			1	
Informal Access	0.5	***Moderate***		0.5	***Moderate***
	Intermediary			*Intermediary*	
Attribution	Wagner	***Lean Overt***		Wagner	***Lean Overt***
				Chech/Ingush	***Lean Overt***
Level of State Control	Wagner	***Lean Cent.***		Wagner	***Lean Cent.***
				Chech/Ingush	***Centralized***

Table 5.8.   Russian employment of intermediaries in Syria, 2015-2018

With the Syria case, I find support for the theory. Strongly permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests result in the outcome of overt, centralized intermediary employment, supporting hypothesis 2 (overt/centralized) over both time periods. There are indications, as mentioned throughout this case, that the Russian state may have lost a certain amount of centralized control with Wagner – especially when the company shifted to support economic interests and Dmitry Utkin disappeared. Prior to analysis, I expected to find support for Wagner falling into hypothesis 5 (overt/decentralized). However, several mechanisms remained in place that kept the company in the centralized category. Due to the lack of reliable data on the relationship between Wagner and the Russian state, the degree of control is difficult to ascertain. Lastly, there is justification for why hypothesis 4 (covert/centralized) is not supported with the deployment of the Chechens/Ingush. While the Russians may have recognized weakness with informal access, the deployment of Muslim forces remained overt due to the incredibly permissive antecedent conditions fostered by an invitation for deployment by the target state. In the event antecedent conditions were less permissive, the deployment may have been more covert. The following case evaluates Russia's employment of intermediaries in Libya.

Libya

Between 2014-2020 Libya degenerated into the target of proxy on proxy conflict. By September 2019 as Libyan National Army (LNA) opposition leader, General Khalifa Haftar, made his assault on Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj and his Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, fighters from several other countries were widely visible. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia all supported the deployment of intermediaries from Syria, Sudan, Chad, and Russia.[58] This case presents a unique look at a situation where regional power states made the decision to employ sub-state level forces to avoid the costs of formal state intervention. What follows is an isolated analysis of the employment of Russian intermediaries in Libya.

This case is used once again to evaluate the characteristics of Russian intermediary employment in an area external to the Near Abroad. Analysis of this case is useful to assess whether alternative explanations can account for the characteristics of employment. The first time period for this case is 2016 amidst a civil war and massive international intervention. The second time period is 2019 when the most recent data was available, however this conflict is ongoing. I do not find support for the theory with this case, but the theory does help with the understanding of how domestic concerns might shape intermediary employment based on geo-political factors. This case is also useful in identification of elements that could enhance the explanatory power of the theory. The following section provides a contextual summary of key events and factors that frame Russia's deployment of intermediaries in Libya.

As a caveat for this section, it is impossible to analyze Russian influence in Libya without consideration of partnership with Egypt and simultaneous involvement in Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). Libya is one piece of the broader African puzzle where Russia perceives an asymmetry of interests with the U.S. and tremendous potential to generate synergistic political, military and economic gains. Three primary themes emerged in the research for this case. First, Russian companies invested heavily in natural

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[58] The UN recognized the threat of proxy employment in Libya in 2011. The UNSC drafted Resolution 1973 in an effort to prohibit the employment of "...armed mercenary personnel..." due to the harm they cause to de-escalation and stability efforts. The resolution did not dissuade intermediary employment.

resources for all three countries during the time periods considered (Marten, 2019a; Meyer et al., 2018; Narayanan, 2019; Ramani, 2019; Warsaw Institute, 2019). This enabled the use of energy and resources as political weapons, in addition to subsidizing conflict. The companies most involved were owned or influenced by Prigozhin (M-invest, Wagner, etc) and Prigozhin was often present with Russian government officials for international negotiations. The second theme is power projection (Felgenhauer, 2017; Iddon, 2017; Mezran & Miller, 2017; Narayanan, 2019; Ramani, 2019). Negotiations and discussions between Russia and African countries almost always included basing agreements. Egypt, Libya and Sudan offer access to the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Agreements in Egypt and Sudan include air bases. The third theme is the courting of regional allies (Narayanan, 2019; Ramani, 2019). In nearly all African target countries, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt share interests with Russia. Some of these regional powers were previously believed to be strong allies of the U.S. The confluence of the three themes above paint a clear picture of Russian intent on the African continent. Once again, the use of intermediaries is but one means used to attain Russian foreign policy objectives in Africa.

With Libya, Russia found itself able to play both sides of the conflict, and even provide support for a third party – Muammar Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam Qadhafi (McGregor, 2019). While Russian intermediaries clearly supported Haftar and the LNA, the Russian state officially maintained support for the UN peace negotiations and the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, even offering to serve as a mediator in the absence of Western involvement. The first Russian intermediary involved in Libya was the RSB Group. The Russian Security Systems (*Rossiskie System Bezopasnosti*) (RSB) Group stated they were operating in the area of Benghazi under "official contract," (Felgenhauer, 2017). The RSB Group entered Libya at some point in 2016 to remove mines from an industrial facility near Benghazi (Tsvetkova, 2017). They departed in February 2017 after completion of their contract, but were observed again in 2020 according to a UN report (Lederer, 2020). Notably, the director general of RSB Group, Oleg Krinitsyn, is a retired FSB operative. Some (Bristow, 2019; Felgenhauer, 2017) argue the Russian government possessed informal leverage over the company and unlikely RSB was only in Libya to clear mines (Bristow, 2019). Russian special forces were observed near

simultaneously just across the Libyan border operating drones at the Egyptian Sidi Barrani airbase, close to Haftar's stronghold at the city of Tobruk (Felgenhauer, 2017).

The Wagner group was also a key intermediary in Libya. According to independent UN observers, the first observation of the Wagner group in Libya was in October 2018 (Lederer, 2020).[59] Between September and December 2019, Wagner was involved in heavy fighting in and around Tripoli with specific deployments consisting of snipers and drones. Several other reports of Wagner involvement in Libya include infrastructure security and assistance with the seizure of Libyan National Oil Company export terminals. Early 2020 estimates of Wagner personnel in Libya were around 2,000 (Schenker, 2020a).

Lastly, by the first quarter of 2020, Russia deployed Syrians in the Libyan fight. The DoD Inspector General and U.S. AFRICOM state that as of March 2020, Russia deployed 300-400 Syrians, with some estimates closer to 1,000 (O'Donnell, 2020). The Syrians were specifically from Quneitra in Southwest Syria and Deir ez-Zour in Eastern Syria. They were incentivized to deploy to Libya in exchange for modest payment and, more importantly, clemency for infractions against the Assad regime (O'Donnell, 2020). Media reports indicated additional Syrian fighters were deployed in late June 2020, when eleven Russian aircraft landed at the airport in Sirte (Hewitt, 2020). It is very likely, though unconfirmed, Russia via Wagner also deployed Sudanese fighters in Libya (Kirkpatrick, 2020). Finally, other Russian groups, such as Shchit, were reported in Libya by 2020, however, their purpose or relation to the Russia state is unknown.

It is important to note that substantial numbers of intermediaries were deployed simultaneously by Turkey and the UAE by 2020. As of April 2020, over 3,500 Syrian intermediaries were deployed by Turkey in support of the GNA according to AFRICOM (O'Donnell, 2020). Additionally, a UAE company, Black Shield, was involved in the deployment of at least 2,000 Sudanese fighters in support of Haftar's operations near Benghazi, Tripoli and southern Libya in 2019-2020 (Burke & Salih, 2019; Majumdar Roy Choudhury et al., 2019). Lastly, several hundred fighters from Chad are also present in

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[59] It is difficult to find a reliable source on when exactly Wagner arrived. At the very latest, we know they were on the ground by September 2019 for the Tripoli offensive. Independent UN observers report Wagner was on the ground as early as October 2018.

Libya, mostly in support of the GNA (Majumdar Roy Choudhury et al., 2019). The following section will apply the theory to the Libyan case.

DV Analysis and Classification

The two time periods for the analysis are 2016 when the RSB Group first operated in Libya and 2019 when the latest reliable data is available. The details of this case continue to evolve, therefore, acknowledgement and description of intermediary activity in 2020 is also included.

Attribution

As with other cases, Russia denies any official relationship with all intermediaries used in the Libya case. During the first time period, both military and government officials stated they were unaware of the RSB Group's operations in Libya (Tsvetkova, 2017). The owner of the company stated he did not work with the Russian defense ministry, but was consulting with the Russian Foreign Ministry (Tsvetkova, 2017). Additionally, the RSB Group's demining operations occurred within the area of operations known at the time to be under the control of General Haftar. Russia's support of Haftar increased substantially by 2019. Were RSB Group's operations in support of the GNA, Russia's deniability would be more plausible.

However, the RSB Group went to great lengths to distance themselves from the Russian state and enhance their corporate legitimacy. RSB presented an image purely focused on capitalism and spoke openly with the media about their desire to simply earn money and win contracts – even in the West (Bristow, 2019). They also state on their website that their weapons are purchased and stored on a ship outside Russia and they follow all international laws and UN Security Council regulations. Finally, RSB Group advertises their "official partner" status as a supplier of security services for the United Nations (RSB Group, 2020). At this point, the significance of a connection between the RSB Group and Moscow is difficult to discern, but indicators are strong. Therefore, if a relationship does exist, it can be rated as covert.

Similarly, the Russian government never confirmed the presence of Wagner inside any of the African countries and denied the firm acted on Moscow's orders (Schreck,

2018). At a joint press conference in January 2020, when asked about the use of proxies, Putin stated, "If there are Russian citizens there [in Libya], they are not representing the interests of the Russian state and do not get any money from the Russian State," (Dettmer, 2020). In a similar fashion to strategies used later in the Syrian campaign, the Wagner group operated in Libya under the guise of protecting oil fields. However, it is clear through ballistics reports – as one example, that Wagner snipers were present in the conflict in support of General Haftar (Kirkpatrick, 2019; Wehrey, 2019). Between September-December 2019, it was widely reported that at least 2,000 Wagner forces helped drive the GNA back in Tripoli. Prigozhin was also present at high-level meetings during the Russia Africa summit in Sochi in October and Moscow in December 2019 (Marten, 2019a; RFE/RL's Russian Service, 2018). His history in previous conflicts is well known and U.S. sanctions on Prigozhin and his companies link his actions with the Russian state, making deniability implausible. Despite denials to the contrary, attribution between Russia and Wagner can be rated as leaning overt.

Finally, Wagner's recruitment and deployment of Syrians to Libya in 2019 and 2020 remains completely unacknowledged by the Russian state. The use of Wagner to conduct recruitment and deployment adds yet another level of ambiguity for Russia. General Hafter openly denied the recruitment of Syrians (Maclean & Collett-White, 2020). However, the use of more than a dozen Wagner affiliated aircraft to transport Syrian personnel and equipment between Russia, Syria and Libya was well documented by independent UN sanctions monitors (Maclean & Collett-White, 2020; Nichols, 2020). Due to degrees of separation, attribution between Russia and Syrian intermediaries in Libya during the second time period is rated as covert.

Level of State Control

The only intermediary known to be present in Libya during the first time period was the RSB Group, although it is possible others existed. We also know Russian special forces supported operations in Libya from the Egyptian border. The stated relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates some level communication and it was reported that RSB Group was in Libya after a request for support to Russia from General Haftar (Tsvetkova, 2017; Warsaw Institute, 2019). However, without more

detailed information, it appears state control over the RSB Group during the first time period was decentralized.

In late December 2019, Wagner's presence in Libya visibly dropped. In early January 2020, Russia and Turkey hosted the UN backed GNA government and the LNA opposition leader, Haftar, in Moscow where Russia attempted to broker a peace deal. According to some, (Harchaoui, 2020; Herszenhorn, 2020; Stronski, 2020) the timing of these events were indicative of Moscow's control over Wagner. Turkish President Recep Erdogan accused Russia of, "…managing the conflict in Libya at the highest level…" in February 2020 just as Turkey ramped up their deployment of Syrian intermediaries (Berkhead, 2020). Additionally, in June 2020, U.S. AFRICOM released satellite photos of Russian military aircraft that arrived from Syria with paint covering their official identification markings (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 2020). Reporting by independent UN monitors conveys the aircraft were flown by Wagner personnel. The provision of military equipment is perhaps indicative of some desire to centralize control by the Russian state.

However, the unwillingness of Russia to employ military personnel indicates hesitation to insert too much control over that outcomes of either side of the Libyan conflict. Russian state presence was noticeably absent in the recruitment, operations and training of intermediaries employed in Libya. Instead, Wagner conducted the majority of these tasks. Russian state control over Wagner during the second time period is rated as leaning decentralized.

Finally, during the second time period, Wagner recruited Syrians from specific, anti-Assad regions of Syria. The Syrian intermediaries were flown to Libya and trained by Wagner (Fahim & Zakaria, 2020; O'Donnell, 2020; Sukhankin, 2020). Next, they were deployed within Libya for specific missions ranging from infrastructure protection to combat operations under Wagner's control. Wagner's control over the Syrian intermediaries was centralized. For the first time in the assessment of Russia's intermediary operations, we observe the delegation of control to an intermediary with this case. Through this delegation, Russia obtained the benefit of an additional layer of deniability. While

control of Syrian intermediaries is centralized by Wagner, the separation equates to decentralized control for Russia.

In summary, the Libya case is somewhat unique in the reflection of a desire by Russia to deploy intermediaries in a purely decentralized fashion. Whereas the employment of Wagner in other cases of this chapter include Russian military elements and proponency, Wagner's participation in Libya (and all of Africa) occurs with no confirmed presence of Russian military and no clearly identifiable link to the Russian state. Clearly, we know Yevgeny Prigozhin is closely aligned with Putin and operated on Russia's behalf in the past. However, for this case, the connections are more effectively layered for ambiguity by Russia. The following section will assess the explanatory power of antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access in shaping intermediary employment.

Target	Year	RSA SQ Power	Intermediary	Attribution	Level of State Control
Libya	2016	Russia US	RSB Group	Covert	Decentralized
	2019	Russia US	Wagner Syrians	Lean Overt Covert	Decentralized Decentralized

Table 5.9.   DV Summary of Attribution and State Control: Libya

IV Analysis and Classification

Antecedent Conditions (IV1)

Domestic Institutions.

During both time periods, Libyan domestic institutions were incredibly weak. Qadhafi cultivated a country absent strong domestic institutions ever since his assumption of power through a bloodless coup in 1969. Instead power was

localized and regionalized through tribal authority structures (Jebnoun, 2015). Prior to Qadhafi's ouster, localized dissent was met by fierce repression, which further segmented and aggrieved the Libyan society. The new Libyan state lost control over the country in February 2011 and major security setbacks in 2014 and 2017 left Libya as a failed state. Worse yet, an unrecognized, or shadow government led by Haftar, established itself in Eastern Libya in April 2020 to further challenge the central government's authority. World governance indicators are reflective of these failed state realities, with averages among the lowest of all cases in this project – closest to indicators for Syria and Yemen. Average governance indicators did worsen slightly between the two time periods (0.123 to 0.119).[60]

The massive scale of foreign intervention in Libya since 2011 presents a complex array of dependencies that revolve in large part around security, oil and Islam. The GNA is dependent most significantly on Turkey for security and the UN for a negotiated solution. Without the Syrian intermediaries deployed by Turkey in late 2019 and early 2020, it is likely Haftar would already control Tripoli. Additionally, the GNA is dependent on external actors, such as the United States, to keep al Qaeda and ISIS militants at bay. Air strikes by the U.S. and allies decimated ISIS resurgence during the second time period (Cristiani, 2019). External dependencies are prevalent for the GNA across all sectors of governance.

The Libyan economy is shaped by their top export: oil. After sanctions were first imposed on Libya by the U.S. in 1986, the domestic economy struggled considerably. The oil reserves are vast – the tenth largest in the world. However, General Haftar prioritized competition over many of Libya's oil fields during both time periods. As a result, by the second time period, Libya's oil production was one-tenth of levels prior to 2014. By the end of 2019, oil production was reduced from 1.2 million to 72,000 barrels per day (Guterres, 2020). Oil is the primary export for Libya and the loss in production equates to over $4 billion in lost revenue. Prior to Haftar's intervention, 96-percent of Libyan revenue was derived from the export of oil and gas (Eaton et al., 2019). Therefore, the licit economy is incredibly vulnerable to both external and internal shocks to the

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[60] WGI indicators were not available for the second time period (2019). The second value is from 2018. However due to persistent conflict, I expect values to be even worse, thus not influencing the outcome.

petroleum industry. Finally, inflation stood around 18-percent for the second time period, up from 14-percent in 2010 and unemployment was at 18.6-percent (World Bank Development Research Group, 2020). Overall, domestic governing structures are assessed as incredibly weak during both time periods.

<u>Popular Resistance.</u>

Political factionalization was substantial during both time periods, however political opportunities were not available to large segments of the population. Libyan society is fragmented across tribal lines that were never incorporated effectively into the central government (Jebnoun, 2015). The re-emergence of General Haftar in Libya and subsequent raid on the GNA accumulated several tribal alliances and coopted allegiances, rather than inclusive governmental progress on both sides of the conflict.

Poor economic conditions plagued the lower levels of Libyan societies and incentivized the illicit economy for decades. The illicit economy was certainly present in this case, which did lead to self-sufficiency of tribal segments of Libyan society – especially in the South where cross border activities were prevalent. In the period since 2010, the estimated size of the illicit economy grew by more than 10-percent of GDP, remaining relatively stable around 38-percent (Medina & Schneider, 2018). In fact about one-third of refined fuels were diverted and sold on the black market during the first time period, costing the Libyan state over $3 billion in revenue (Eaton et al., 2019). Finally, during the first time period, human smuggling from Libya amounted to an estimated $1 billion in illicit revenue (Eaton et al., 2019). Illicit benefits from refined fuel and human smuggling both dropped considerably by the second time period, due to the closure of state-run refineries and the crackdown on Mediterranean crossings. While the illicit economy is prevalent in Libya, intermediaries are not entirely dependent upon illicit revenue sources since intermediaries are largely employed by external state actors. To boot, General Haftar was the recipient of millions of dollars' worth of Libyan currency, printed by Russia, that subsidized his operations (Kirkpatrick, 2019; Majumdar Roy Choudhury et al., 2019).

While the illicit economy was present in abundance during both time periods, intermediary operations in Libya were not dependent upon the shadow economy for revenue.[61]

Since the Qadhafi regime never modernized governing structures to be inclusive of tribal representation and needs, substantial socio-ethnic divides existed during both time periods. Libyan society remained segmented and during the time periods of this analysis, coalitions remained heterogeneous, tied together only through short-term strategic objectives. The gravity of the failed Libyan state during both time periods prevented effective representation and the UN recognized GNA government only controled the territory in and around the capital city of Tripoli. Simultaneously, Haftar coopted several informal power brokers through payoffs financed, in part, by Russian printed currency. Overall, popular resistance strength was weak for both time periods.

In summary, antecedent conditions are rated as permissive during both time periods. Libya's position as a failed state in the wake of the Qadhafi regime generated conditions that were favorable to intermediary employment. However, the resistance strength of Libyan society was also weak. The lack of political opportunity and heterogenous socio-ethnic divides limited the ability of sub-state informal structures to coalesce around common objectives. Additionally, competition over the abundant illicit economy created incentives for competition at the sub-state level, rather than coordination. The following section will assess the symmetry of interests between the revisionist state and status quo power.

Symmetry of Interests (IV2)

Geographic proximity between Russia and Libya is rated as far. However, the Russians possessed proximate presence at the Egyptian Sidi Barrani airbase during both time periods. Egypt agreed to allow Russia to use the airbase and nearby ports in 2017 for a period of fifty years (Iddon, 2017). The Sidi Barrani base is just across the Libyan border from the port city of Tobruk where Haftar held a base of operations and elements of Wagner conducted rear area operations in 2019 (Felgenhauer, 2017). Although geographic

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[61] There are, however, reports of Haftar's inability to pay intermediaries as promised. This may lead to an increase in illicit activity of intermediaries in the future.

proximity is far for Russia, the power projection initiatives by Russia provide the revisionist state with proximate presence. U.S. geographic proximity is also rated as far, and unlike the Russians, the U.S. did not have enduring presence in Libya, nor proximate presence. Since the closure of the U.S. embassy in Tripoli in 2014, all diplomatic relations occurred from neighboring Tunisia.

Russia has strong historical ties to Libya and across Africa. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was a primary exporter of weapons and security assistance to Africa. The Soviet presence in Libya in particular, was substantial, although motivations were more ideological than geopolitical or geoeconomic. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, around 5,000 Soviet military advisors remained in Libya and continued to work for Qadhafi (Sukhankin, 2019d). Between 1991-2015, Russian involvement in Libya was essentially absent until the Russian military established a presence at the Sidi Barrani air base on the Egyptian side of the border. Between 2015-2018, Russia returned in earnest to Africa and signed more than 20 military cooperation deals – many of which accompany purchase contracts for Russian military equipment or Russian basing (Sukhankin, 2019d; Warsaw Institute, 2019). In Libya, Russia's return was most pronounced between 2017-2020. In October 2019, Russia inserted itself as arbiter and hosted both sides of the Libyan conflict for peace talks in Sochi. Interestingly, during this peace conference, Wagner intermediaries actively supported Haftar forces in the offensive assault on Tripoli.

In contrast, U.S. ties to Libya are weak. The U.S. actively supported the UN sponsored GNA and the desire for negotiated peace. U.S. relations with Libya prior to the 2011 Libyan civil war were adversarial. However, since the fall of Qadhafi, total U.S. investments in recovery, reconstruction and humanitarian efforts amount to more than $700 million (Schenker, 2020a). The U.S. also has a strange relationship with Haftar – who was a Virginia resident and requested approval for the assault on Tripoli in 2019 from former National Security Advisor, John Bolton (Kirkpatrick, 2020). Historical ties and alliances between Russia and Libya are clearly stronger than those with the U.S. and Libya.

Africa is a lucrative market for Russia – specifically in terms of military hardware and oil. Across the African continent, exports of military weapons and equipment amounted to $4.6 billion per year as of 2019 (Warsaw Institute, 2019). NATO's 2011

targeting of Qadhafi amounted to a total loss of $4 billion in arms sales and related contracts for Russia (Trenin, 2012). In early 2017, Russian oil firm Rosneft signed a deal with Libya's National Oil Corporation on exploration and production (Wintour, 2017). The majority of Libya's oil fields are located in Eastern Libya, which is the area controlled by Haftar. This reality demonstrates an incentive for Russia to support both sides of the conflict and motivation to keep oil production operational. Overall, the commercial value of Libya for Russia is low. During the first time period, exports were only 0.02-percent, which eclipse U.S. exports to the country. By the second time period, exports for Russia increased by more than $153 million, but still only amounted to just half of one-percent of total exports. Nonetheless, commercial value for Russia is significantly greater than that of the U.S. for both time periods. Further, potential commercial value for oil production and security provision is substantial. The following section will evaluate Russia's level of informal access to Libya.

Informal Access (IV3)

Across Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet military instructors had a huge problem understanding local cultural intricacies – particularly in Libya (Sukhankin, 2019d). The deeper they went in local affairs, the worse the results. According to Sergey Sukhankin, a Jamestown Foundation fellow with a focus on Russian proxies, several Russian scholars argued at the end of 2019 the Russian state should not involve itself in African affairs because there's zero understanding of local cultural dynamics. Sukhankin argues in Africa, "…there's zero understanding of the local environment [by Russia]…fighting in Ukraine is a totally different ballgame than fighting in a tribal environment…" (Sukhankin, 2019d). Russia, however, understood previous weaknesses and developed a reflective strategy with the deployment of culturally similar Syrian intermediaries.

Socio-cultural proximity between Russia and Libya is rated as dissimilar. Russia had no access to the local, Sunni Arab tribal structures in the north, or the African tribal structures in the south. However, Russia bridged the socio-cultural gap through the deployment of thousands of Syrian intermediaries and by using Wagner to train partner nation intermediaries from Sudan and Chad in Libya. The deployment of Syrians by both

Russia and Turkey is indicative of acknowledgement of the importance of informal power structures. Although state level socio-cultural proximity is rated as dissimilar, many of the intermediaries they deployed were at least related.

To reiterate, ideological convergence is the level of ideological alignment between the RSA and intermediary, and the corresponding loyalty it generates. With a domestic (target state) intermediary, this indicator is easy to evaluate. In the assessment of the relationship between Russia and the intermediaries they employed, ideological convergence was not present. Ideological convergence was, however, present between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the intermediaries they employed, which coalesced around the prevention of politicized Islam (Mezran & Miller, 2017). For Russia, this manifests in terms of strategic convergence and is covered below.

The Libya case is challenging to assess from an informal access standpoint because the target state was essentially a minority actor due to the high level of international involvement. Strategic convergence was, however, visible in Libya between General Haftar and Russia during both time periods. Strategic convergence is indicated by the level of alignment in vision of regional order, perception of threats and strategies to address those threats. Strategic convergence manifests in this case in two ways. First, strategic convergence was observed between regional powers and subsequent intermediary employment through state-level convergence. Second, strategic convergence was visible during the second time period with the Wagner group and Syrian intermediaries. These two points are expanded below.

Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE found themselves on the same side of conflicts and objectives not only in Libya, but also in Sudan and the Central African Republic. Russia nurtured these relationships, which in Libya resulted in the bolstering of Haftar's forces by Sudanese intermediaries employed by Black Shield, a company similar to Wagner, that is owned by the Crown Prince of the UAE (Walsh, 2020). For the block of Muslim countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE), convergence was ideological. But the convergence between Russia and the Muslim countries was purely strategic. Russia's interests are driven by geoeconomics and military power projection on the southern flank of NATO (Mezran & Miller, 2017). Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are concerned about

Muslim Brotherhood remnants within Tripoli and the GNA, and motivated by the prevention of politicized Islam. These state actors find convergence in the promotion of Haftar. Although this strategic convergence is not representative of convergence with the target society, the outcomes were observable within the target state. Strategies for Russia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE converged throughout both time periods.

Of note, Turkish intermediaries fighting in Libya were offered citizenship and monetary compensation – similar to Iranian incentives for intermediaries (O'Donnell, 2020). Syrians fighting for Russia were instead offered immunity for crimes committed against the Syrian state and Bashar al Assad (Pritchard, 2020). As opposed to the "take it or leave it" model utilized by Turkey, the Russian model for Syrian recruitment was compulsory. Those Syrians who Russia coerced into service were presented with an ultimatum: jail (or death), or a deployment to Africa with moderate compensation. With Syria, Russia discovered a way to create and compel strategic convergence in Libya. In summary, even with strong strategic convergence, dissimilar cultural proximity and no ideological convergence result in low informal access.

Target Summary

The Russian employment of intermediaries in Libya was much different than the employment of intermediaries in Syria. In Syria, much like earlier cases in former Soviet Republics, intermediaries complimented more overt efforts by the Russian state. In Libya, the Russian state was not really overtly (or covertly) involved – other than hosting peace talks and supporting the UN process on the GNA side. There were media reports that elements of the Spetsnaz were on the ground in small numbers during the September-December 2019 Tripoli offensive, but apparently in a support role to coordinate artillery and close air support.

Rather, Wagner and other intermediaries were given considerably more flexibility and decentralized control of operations, while maintaining a high level of non-attribution. In addition to the provision of tactical security forces, Wagner also played a substantial role in the dissemination of propaganda, disinformation and political

engineering (Weiss & Vaux, 2019).[62] Additionally, the scalability of intermediaries such as Wagner is evident in this case. Between September and December 2019, Wagner was precisely injected in offensive operations against the GNA in Tripoli with devastating effect. The precision tactical capabilities subsequently evaporated, as military objectives were obtained. Wagner was able to achieve this precision without Russian military personnel on the ground in Tripoli centrally controlling their operations in pursuit of higher-level strategy.

If the RSB Group was operating covertly for Russia, this demonstrates Russia has the ability to scale attribution and control as the target/situation requires. We know the desire for this eventuality exists. The danger is as capabilities mature and multiply, the international community will be increasingly less informed of the intent of revisionist states until outcomes are achieved. Under such a scenario, uncertainty over both the present and the future for the international community worsens. The summary of Russian employment of intermediaries in Libya is reflected in the table below.

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[62] As one example, members of the LNA used paper copies of Russian license plates on their vehicles to create the perception of greater Russian support.

Libya: Summary Evaluations

Variables	Time Period 1: *2016* Indicator	Time Period 1: *2016* Evaluation	Time Period 2: *2019* Indicator	Time Period 2: *2019* Evaluation
Antecedent Conditions		*Permissive*		*Permissive*
Dom. Inst. Strength	0.041	Weak	0.040	Weak
Resist. Strength	0.333	Weak-Mod	0.333	Weak-Mod
Symmetry of Interests				
Russia	3	*Asymmetric*	4	*Asymmetric*
U.S.	1		1	
Informal Access	0.25	*Moderate*	0.25	*Moderate*
	Intermediary		*Intermediary*	
Attribution	RSB Group	*Covert*	Wagner Syrians	*Lean Overt Covert*
Level of State Control	RSB Group	*Decentralized*	Wagner Syrians	*Decentralized Decentralized*

Table 5.10.   Russian employment of intermediaries in Libya, 2016-2019

Based on the theory, we should expect to observe the overt, centralized deployment of intermediaries due to permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests – as in Syria. Syria and Libya were both external to the Near Abroad, with permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests, however, intermediary deployment varied between the two cases. A key difference, resides in Russia's long-standing relations with Syria. The strength of Russian interests was greater in Syria than it was in Libya. As such, and in combination with Assad's request for assistance, Russia possessed more maneuverability from a domestic politics standpoint. In Libya, I argue domestic costs for Russian participation external to the "near abroad" constrained Russia's ability to take advantage of the interest asymmetry with overt, centralized intermediaries.[63] Instead, Russia was compelled to deploy trusted, decentralized intermediaries and cultivate informal access – in this case, from Syria.

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[63] In other words, outside the "near abroad" geographic and cultural proximity are constraining factors.

With consideration of the domestic constraints mentioned above, I could find support for hypotheses 4 and 5. Once Russia decided to support Haftar (likely around 2016), Wagner was occupied in Syria. Once Wagner became available, they were deployed in a major offensive campaign (Sep-Dec 2019) and then used to recruit and deploy Syrians. Syrians provided two benefits: 1) They served as front line cannon fodder without repercussion; 2) They were mostly Sunni Arab Muslims who could gain informal access to the population.

This case is indicative of Russia's intent across broader Africa. Here, Russia appears willing to assume risk in terms of control in order to minimize attribution. Wagner was increasingly given a role like that of Hezbollah for Iran, as an intermediary broker. By trusting Wagner (and perhaps other companies) with recruitment and deployment of intermediaries in foreign conflicts, Russia is able to further distance itself from malign, gray zone activity. Russia discovered it most lucrative to outsource intermediary deployment under gray zone conditions.

Finally, the intermediary strategy in Libya is clearly distinguishable from strategies used in the Near Abroad. Ideology was not a factor in incentivizing intermediaries and Russia did little to cultivate influence with the Libyan people (on the ground). Rather, they relied upon their prime intermediary broker, Wagner, to recruit, train and deploy the Syrians. The following section will compare analysis across the Russian cases of intermediary employment.

Comparison of Russian Cases

Overall, analysis of Russia's employment of intermediaries is useful for evaluation of the validity of my theory. It is clear through empirical analysis that Russia placed a premium on centralized control to maximize influence over outcomes. On occasion, the desire for centralized control resulted in considerable risk regarding attribution. Collectively, these cases reveal that learning occurred with regard to intermediary employment. Whereas initial employments were ad hoc and opportunistic, by 2019 I find intermediary employment was precisely injected to strategically influence outcomes. The maturation of employment is indicative of strategic intent. There were also elements of Russian employment that can be used to strengthen the theory through future research, thereby enhancing explanatory power.

This chapter exhibited the employment of 31 intermediaries by Russia across five target locations. I found support for the theory in four out of the five cases, where asymmetric conditions were assessed as permissive and interests between the revisionist state and status quo power were evaluated as asymmetric. Three of the five cases occurred within the Near Abroad, where Russia possessed high informal access. The Syrian and Libyan cases were outside the Near Abroad, however the strategy for deployment of intermediaries differed across these cases. For the first three cases that occurred within the Near Abroad, the number of intermediaries was drastically reduced between the first and second time periods. In these cases, as with Syria, Russia appears to have used intermediaries to establish favorable conditions prior to handing over overt, centralized control to the Russian military.

Notably, I did not find support for my theory during the first time period in the Donbass case, or with the Libya case. Within the first time period in the Donbass, a few factors are highlighted by the theory that pushed intermediary deployment into the covert, decentralized realm. First, the intensity of international attention increased substantially after Russia's Crimea intervention and it is plausible Putin perceived symmetric interests which constrained deployment in the Donbass. Second, the resistance strength was so disjointed across 26 different separatist organizations that efforts to centralize control to achieve favorable outcomes required substantial resources, and apparently undesirable

methods (i.e. assassination). The theory does help describe these outcomes, but they are not reflected in the measurable data. As discussed in the Libya case, the theory also is useful in describing the nature of intermediary employment across both time periods, but also not reflected through the measurable data. Here, domestic political constraints due to the location being outside the Near Abroad plausibly pushed intermediary employment from overt, centralized as predicted by the theory to the more covert, decentralized employment found through empirical analysis. With minor adjustments to the theory, there is significant potential to enhance the explanatory power. I will discuss these adjustments in the conclusion of this project. The results of this chapter are summarized in the table below.

Target	Year	Intermediary	Observed DV	Expected DV	Support for Hyp.
Georgia	1992	Abkhazia/Ossetia	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	2008	Abkhazia/Ossetia	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
Crimea	2014	LGM	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		SDF	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Cossacks	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Chetniks	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Night Wolves	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Ukrainian Choice	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
	2018	LGM	Not Employed	--------	
		SDF	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Cossacks	Not Employed	--------	
		Chetniks	Not Employed	--------	
		Night Wolves	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Ukrainian Choice	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2

Donbass	2014	Separatists	NA→Covert/Decent	Overt/Centralized	--
		Chechens/Cossacks	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
		Chetniks	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
		Mil. Volunteers	Covert/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	--
		Wagner	Covert/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	2018	Separatists	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Chechens/Cossacks	Not Employed	--------	
		Chetniks	Not Employed	--------	
		Mil. Volunteers	Not Employed	--------	
		Wagner	Not Employed	--------	
Syria	2015	Wagner	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Chechen/Ingush	Not Employed	--------	
	2018	Wagner	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
		Chechen/Ingush	Overt/Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
Libya	2016	RSB Group	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
	2019	Wagner	Overt/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--
		Syrians	Covert/Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--

Table 5.11.   Summary of Russia observations and support for hypotheses

As with the Iran case, there are a few patterns with the Russian employment of intermediaries revealed through interrogation of the theory that are worth noting. The first pattern consists of how Russia exerts control over intermediaries. In nearly every case, the Russians attempted to minimize attribution with intermediaries while maximizing state control through the use of former or retired Russian military or intelligence personnel to coordinate the efforts of intermediaries.[64] This goes all the way back to Russian involvement in Transnistria where retired Russian Colonel Victor Ratiev assumed command over the volunteers (Sukhankin, 2019a). Centralized control under a single

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[64] This pattern is nearly identical to that of Iran.

vozhd, or boss, is a stated objective amongst the Russian general staff. One such officer stated just prior to the Crimea invasion, "in modern war, the issue is not just the speed of decision-making, it is about the necessity for a single decision-making point that controls all operational assets, military and non-military," (Galeotti, 2016, p. 293). With a greater number of actors, this becomes even more important and challenging. Through repetition, the relationships between the state and intermediaries became more structured over time. Wagner and the RSB Group, for example, are led by retired GRU or FSB individuals with the majority of their forces comprised of former military or intelligence personnel. Additionally, the interplay between special operations, conventional forces and intermediaries is an element that clearly varies through Russia's participation in the conflicts covered in this analysis. Conventional forces were the main effort in the Georgian conflict, with intermediaries used primarily as shaping and auxiliary forces. In Crimea, the mixture looked much different and nearly all forces used had an element of non-attribution. Outside the near abroad, intermediaries operate as the main effort with a high degree of decentralization. Intermediary application is scalable for Russia, with utility in both offensive and defensive sectors. The most recent Russian intermediary structures are adaptive with the ability to absorb local or transplanted talent quickly to achieve influence over outcomes.

Regarding attribution, a theme of brokerage emerged in this chapter. There are a few organizations that Russia prefers to use to broker intermediary employment or influence. The Orthodox Church was used heavily in the Near Abroad, and more recently in Montenegro (Conley and Melino, 2019). GRU, FSB and Spetsnaz veterans or volunteers were also commonly cited as key brokers (Carpenter, 2019). Informal coordination and influence often emanated from veteran groups, or associations. Such is the case between Prigozhin and Evgeny Kodotov's operations in the CAR where the two individuals are connected informally through a St. Petersburg veterans group (Marten, 2020). Additionally, the routing of resources and information through oligarch networks, as demonstrated in Ukraine, adds layers of deniability to Russian efforts.

Another pattern of Russian intermediary employment is domestic institution sponsorship. As an added layer of ambiguity, the Russians appear to sponsor intermediary organizations for different periods of time through different ministries. Over different time

periods, the Ministries of Defense, Energy and Foreign Affairs have all served in some capacity as the sponsor of an intermediary. In the Donbass, there were even indications of rivalry between institutions (GRU vs. FSB) as they competed for resources and favorable outcomes. The influence of these revisionist state institutions over the actions of intermediaries was clear in several observations of employment.

The fourth pattern of Russian intermediary employment is recognition of the value of informal access and targeted attempts to enhance access. Russia first cultivated the Chechen battalions to gain informal access within Russia during the Second Chechen War. As opportunities arose in Muslim countries, Russia again found utility in Chechen deployment. It is very likely, though unconfirmed, that Chechens were part of the 2,000+ personnel Wagner deployed to Libya, but they were not deployed as a stand-alone unit as they were in Syria. For Africa, Wagner and Russia turned to a model built more on strategic convergence by offering those Syrians who opposed Assad a chance to repent. Syrians are also notably not Russian, so in the event of their death in Libya, potential Russian or Chechen domestic retribution was completely removed. The same concept applies for the likely Russian brokered employment of Sudanese by the UAE firm Black Shield. The UAE's (along with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco) motivations revolve more around the prevention of politicized Islam that manifests mostly through the Muslim Brotherhood, but through strategic convergence, currently finds them on the same side as Russia. Finally, Russia manipulates informal access through the training of youth – especially in the near abroad. Wagner, the Cossacks and GONGOs, like the Night Wolves, all operated youth training camps with funding in some form from the Russian state.

Finally, the Russian case highlights a pattern of multidimensional dependency manipulation. Security sector intermediaries almost always compliment reinforcing efforts in the economic and political domains. In Africa especially, there is a reoccurring trend of the placement of officials linked to intermediaries through brokers like Prigozhin, in local governments and businesses (Marten, 2020). Russia differs from Iran on this point. Whereas Iran often coopts existing political structures to enhance political influence, Russian empirical examples indicate a desire to establish a shadow government to challenge target state government authority. These efforts were resourced simultaneously with political and economic means. The same techniques were used in all cases except

Syria. Many of the patterns of behavior observed by the Russian employment of intermediaries were also observed with the Iranian employment of intermediaries. These observations will be discussed more thoroughly in the conclusion chapter.

Summary

In this chapter, I used five cases of Russia's deployment of intermediaries, both internal and external to the Near Abroad, to assess the validity of my theory. With these cases, I was able to isolate the operationalization of each of my independent variables to assess their explanatory power. Although the theory operated expected in four out of five cases and provided some level of explanatory power in describing the outcomes of cases that were not predicted by the theory, assessment of Russian employment was also useful in highlighting areas for theoretical improvement.

Analysis of the Russian deployment of intermediaries is unique when compared to the Iranian deployment. This chapter also indicated significant within case variation, where intermediary capabilities were toggled to achieve different outcomes. One of the most important findings of this chapter is that Russia is not constrained by the Near Abroad, rather their intermediary composition is simply adjusted to achieve influence over outcomes. This is different from the approach employed by the Iranians. The next chapter will assess variation in the approaches by Iran and Russia, identify potential vulnerabilities in the approaches, thus revealing potential opportunities for deterrence. Finally, it will discuss ways in which the explanatory power of the theory can be enhanced and potential for future research.

6   Findings, Implications and Recommendations

What is the strategic choice set available to revisionist state actors for the employment of intermediary actors? What conditions dictate if and how intermediaries are deployed? This dissertation set out to investigate these questions by examining the conditions under which and how intermediaries are (or are not) deployed by revisionist state actors under gray zone conditions.

The primary objective stated at the beginning of this project was to understand the causes of variation in attribution and the level of state control regarding intermediary employment. Additionally, I stated interest in determining whether variation occurs symmetrically (i.e. covert/decentralized becomes overt/centralized), or if variation is based on unique conditions at the target. These objectives were framed by the assumption that revisionist states develop strategies for intermediary employment under gray zone conditions in such a way so as to minimize probability of escalation by those states that hold veto power (target state and status quo power).

The primary claim I make in this dissertation is that intermediary employment varies based on revisionist state perceptions of antecedent conditions, symmetry of interests and informal access. This claim was premised by several analytical steps. First, I distinguished gray zone competition from ordinary conflict by situating the concept within the realm of opportunities through which states achieve strategic adjustment. I argued the contemporary nature of international politics forces states seeking a revision to the status quo to operate in the gray space between western notions of peace and war. I then framed the concept of gray zone competition according to shaping conditions, actors and mechanisms. Under mechanisms of gray zone competition, the employment of intermediary actors emerged as a primary means through which revisionist states seek to achieve zero-sum gains over status quo powers.

After situating the employment of intermediary actors within the realm of gray zone competition, I developed a theory of intermediary employment to analyze how revisionist states approach opportunities to adjust the status quo. With the theory, I identified three mechanisms that influence *if* and *how* intermediaries are deployed: antecedent conditions,

symmetry of interests, and informal access. Through the interactive nature of the mechanisms, I developed six predictions that were testable through empirical analysis.

To analyze the utility and explanatory power of the theory, I conducted detailed empirical analysis on the employment of intermediaries across time and space by two revisionist states: Iran and Russia. With the two empirical chapters, I combine process tracing with cross-case comparisons to reveal the strength of causal mechanisms. In total, the empirical chapters covered 12 cases consisting of 52 observations of employment or non-employment. Overall, I generally find support for the mechanisms advanced by the theory in describing intermediary employment outcomes.

Theoretical Expectations and Summary of Findings

In the development of my theory, I argued the most significant constraint for the employment of intermediaries by a revisionist state is the anticipated probability of escalation. In order for revisionists to mitigate this constraint, I stated the target state antecedent conditions must be permissive to employment. Second, I argued the probability of escalation is higher if the relative interest of the status quo power and revisionist state are symmetric. I found the interaction of these two conditions highly reflected a revisionist state's decision in whether or not to deploy intermediaries. In fact, all 23 observations of Russian employment included these characteristics and 19 of 29 Iranian observations also included permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests. Further, the two cases of non-employment exhibited in the Iran analysis strengthen this finding. In cases where antecedent conditions were resistant and/or where interests were strongly symmetric or asymmetric against the revisionist state, intermediary employment was less likely to occur. In summary, I find the variables of antecedent conditions and symmetry of interests demonstrate strong explanatory power in the prediction of *if* intermediaries are employed.

In the observations where interests were symmetric, based on the theory I expected to find operationalization of the informal access variable. Given symmetric interests, I expected the revisionist state to employ intermediaries in such a way that maximized the utility of informal structures. Of those cases where intermediaries were employed under permissive antecedent conditions and symmetric interests, I found the theory operated as expected in five out of six observations, at a rate of 83-percent. Unfortunately, the number

of observations in this regard were comparably low. Of note, however, minor adjustments to the symmetry of interests variable would lend further support to this finding with 21 additional observations where informal access could be operationalized. I cover this adjustment to symmetry of interests variable in the theoretical adjustments section below. In summary, when antecedent conditions were permissive and interests were symmetric, informal access (IV3) accurately predicted *how* intermediaries were employed.

In the theory chapter, I discussed how analysis of variation within cases assists with understanding strategic intent of revisionist states regarding intermediary employment. With the analysis of both revisionist actors in this project, I expected to find longitudinal variation. In other words, I expected to observe trends in employment by each revisionist state that indicated strategic intent for utilization. I found indication of this strategic intent in a few ways. The first is regarding the maturation of the intermediary force. With both revisionist states, analysis indicates the expansion of intermediaries employed over time. For example, initial Iranian employment was focused solely on Hezbollah in Iran. Similarly, Russian employment began with the Cossack and Chechen intermediaries in Georgia. By 2014, the employment by both revisionist states included multiple intermediaries with a range of attribution and control. This provides the revisionist states with options for influence. The ability to use both covert and overt means with centralized and decentralized control enables the revisionist state to strategically toggle employment to dynamically suit their needs at a particular target. These findings are important for a few reasons. First, they reveal recognition by revisionist states that intermediary actors are a lucrative means through which to achieve strategic gains. Second, approaches to intermediary employment are becoming more complex. The employment of multiple intermediaries (across domains) present increasingly difficult challenges regarding deterrence. At the very least, this analysis makes crystal clear the point that revisionist states find tremendous value in intermediary employment and such tactics will remain a constant undertone of a return to great power competition.

Finally, there are a few comparative points of interest between the two revisionist states analyzed in this project that are worth mentioning here. First, Iran and Russia differ in their approach to building intermediary capacity. Iran's approach is carefully cultivated to build from within a target state's society in order to grow and strategically harness

allegiance. The approach does not appear to consist of as much centralized control from a process tracing point of view because the cultivated organism is expected and encouraged to take on a life of its own. However, once the organism grows to maturity, the embedded control mechanisms reveal a high degree of centrality. Iran really takes an irregular warfare position on the growth of their surrogates. They encourage political opportunity and weave together multiple strands of informal access to enhance influence within the political and social sectors of society. Through this process, they are able to gain legitimacy and lend credence to any operations they desire to conduct. Russia does not employ intermediaries in the same fashion, as far as can be deduced from this research. There is less effort expended to penetrate the social fabric of target societies, with a couple notable exceptions. There is also little to no effort to build a political opportunity component for the intermediaries they employ. Perhaps this is why they tend to deploy domestic intermediaries (i.e. Cossacks, Chechens, Wagner, etc.) – because gaining informal access is costly and time consuming.

Iran's history of intermediary cultivation is characterized in large part by using the IRGC to encourage splits within existing groups. This technique was observable in nearly every instance of employment. Conversely, Russia tends to target secessionist enclaves or operate through businesses (i.e. Wagner) in order to bypass the investment required at the target to build domestic intermediary capabilities. Second, both Iran and Russia enhance control over intermediaries through the placement of special operations forces or covert conventional force personnel within the ranks of intermediary organizations. As Hezbollah has matured, Iran now relies on them to perform this function as an extension of the IRGC. Finally, with the maturation of intermediaries comes a greater ability of the organizations to self-finance operations. With Iran, this is often through the illicit economy or through formal governing structures at the target state. With Russia, the financing increasingly comes through the mask of business. The business conglomerates of individual power brokers, like Yevgeny Prigozhin, are able to generate legitimate contracts for security provision and infrastructure protection that generate income and mask the influence of the revisionist state. The ability of the RSA to erase the money trail further blurs attribution and complicates efforts by the status quo to deter activity.

Policy Implications and Potential for Intermediary Deterrence

> "Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both."
> - Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1994

Gray zone competition and intermediary employment are a threat to the international status quo. These threats are not existential, they are gradual. However gradual, they continuously erode power differentials seemingly unhindered. The Brzezinski quote above is equally applicable to China and Iran. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy redirected the focus of national security policy back toward great power competition. The specific "great powers" addressed as threatening to U.S. interests are all employing strategies that fall under gray zone competition below the threshold of war. China, Russia and Iran all utilize intermediary actors toward this end. Without greater recognition by U.S. leaders on how to tackle gray zone means of strategic adjustment, such as intermediary employment, efforts to deter such action will remain non-existent.

What is the risk of continuing to allow RSAs to employ intermediaries unabated?

What is the risk of continued inaction and allowing revisionist states to employ intermediaries unabated? In short, faulty signaling through the misrepresentation of state intent and unintended conflict escalation. There exists a substantial amount of risk in the theoretical and policy linkage between the revisionist state and the intermediary. As stated by Iran foreign relations expert, Dina Esfandiary, "No matter how calculating Iran is in its military strategy, proxies can't always be counted on to remain in complete lockstep with their patron country," (Anderson, 2020). Iran in particular has created a scenario where they are assuming a greater degree of responsibility (or increase in attribution) of Hezbollah and others. This can lead to an outcome where signals from the intermediary misrepresent the intent of the revisionist state to status quo powers, leading to confrontation.

In line with the most likely scenario outlined above, there is a most dangerous scenario where transnational multidimensional intermediaries are task organized to attain timely, synchronous gains. Even worse would be a multi-national, multidimensional intermediary package – say between China and Iran. Although less likely, perhaps such a scenario is not so unrealistic.

What is being done to deter activity in the gray zone or intermediary actor realm?

The international community has taken some action in an effort to deter aggression comparable with that observed through Russia's annexation of Crimea. The omnipresent existence of sanctions, dependency reduction (energy, etc), the degradation of disinformation, education efforts are all worthwhile efforts (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2018). However, these efforts only marginally influence revisionist states, at best. The U.S. Treasury did not sanction Wagner financier Yevgeny Prigozhin until the fall of 2019. Between January 2017 and February 2020, 321 Russian individuals or organizations were sanctioned due to some level of gray zone activity (Schenker, 2020a). Meanwhile, Russian intermediaries continue to operate in earnest across Africa. Some claim the sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea had little to no effect whatsoever on the growth of the Russian economy (Kholodilin & Netšunajev, 2019). In some cases, international institutions work against the interests of the status quo powers who created them. For example, in Libya those, "individuals or organizations who violate the arm embargo…are subject to designation under the Libya sanctions regime. However, designations of individuals or entities that violate the arms embargo can be blocked by a single member of the U.N. Sanctions Committee," to which Russia belongs (Schenker, 2020b, pp. 29–30). Institutional membership benefits Russia's gray zone activities in this case, and likely others as well.

One great example of efforts designed to deter future manipulation, by Russia in this case, is the Countering Malign Kremlin Influence Development Framework (CMKI). The CMKI is a USAID framework designed to strengthen the economic and democratic self-reliance of partner nations in Europe and Eurasia (Hale, 2019). The framework specifically targets key sectors of domestic institutions, which I have shown through this project plays a role on whether revisionist states employ intermediaries.

What else can be done? Where can we enhance deterrence?

The international community must increase the risk to revisionist states of escalation and perception of target or status quo power escalation dominance where possible. Simple right? Unfortunately, this requires recognition by executive and legislative leadership that gray zone competition and intermediary employment present a

considerable threat to U.S. interests. Given such recognition, the first requirement would be a thorough analysis by the whole of government to determine those areas most at risk for intermediary employment based on permissive antecedent conditions and asymmetric interests between revisionist states and the status quo power. As demonstrated through this project, the combination of resistant antecedent conditions and perceived symmetric interests strongly limits intermediary involvement.

Second, within the component of antecedent conditions, strong governance capacity and weakened resistance strength in revisionist areas of interest stand a strong chance of deterring intermediary employment. If antecedent conditions are resistant (and separatist enclaves are degraded), chances of intermediary employment are low. Enhanced target state political efficiency, coupled with the degradation of illicit economies and socio-economic divides will remove sources of strength for resistance organizations that are vulnerable to cooption or coercion in support of revisionist states. SEE SENATE CFR (2018).

Third, the U.S. should endeavor to make interests more symmetric in areas of concern or where we cannot afford for adversaries to enhance their own influence. Proximate presence is important in this regard and it is a not a purely U.S. burden to bear. For example, according to the theory, Saudi Arabia's strong presence in Yemen is a primary reason Iran has not employed intermediaries in support of the Houthis. NATO expenditures and U.S. Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) should include specific caveats that are nested within such a counter-gray zone competition framework. These efforts could be compounded with clear signaling and enforcement of redlines by the U.S. and allies.

Fourth, efforts designed to counter intermediary activity must address both the revisionist state and the intermediary actor. A military strike or signal conveyed to the revisionist state does not equate to the receipt of the message by the intermediary actor. For example, consider the execution of Qasem Soleimani and Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis in January 2020. Policymakers likely calculated an anticipated response by Iran due to the death of Soleimani similar to the missile strike that occurred. But what about the execution of Muhandis? Consideration of potential counterattacks by Ka'taib Hezbollah and the

Hashd al-Shaabi (PMU) should also be calculated separately from the revisionist state. Similarly, efforts to bifurcate the relationship (whether known or perceived) between the revisionist state and the intermediary may yield tangible results. The easiest way to sever these relationships would be with those where strategic convergence is a primary factor – such as with Iran and the Mashhad Taliban in Afghanistan. Strategic convergence is temporary and vulnerable. Removal of the mutual benefit as an incentive for cooperation exists as something tangible that can be addressed by the status quo immediately.

Additionally, there is some utility regarding the execution of intermediary leadership. In the cases of Soleimani, Muhandis and Imad Mughniyeh (in 2008), the organizations they represented demonstrated a willingness to make attribution more overt. The result of Soleimani and Muhandis' executions were evidenced in Chapter 4 when the IRGC posed before the flags of intermediaries in the commitment of retribution. Hezbollah's response to Mughniyeh's death in 2008 was similar. It is difficult to determine how long the increase in overt status survives as new opportunities arise, but leadership execution does illicit a targetable response from intermediary organizations.

Lastly, it is somewhat cliché, but the establishment of an interagency task force or fusion cell that specifically targets malign influence below the threshold of war should be established within the U.S. DoD. The nature of this type of international competition requires a dedicated approach due to specific requirements. Such a fusion cell would bridge efforts focused on peaceful international competition on the one side and the full spectrum of conflict on the other. Information and cyber efforts would be a major part of such a cell. This idea is not original, it was proposed at least once by the minority staff on the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2018 (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2018).

Theoretical Adjustments and Potential for Future Research

There are a few ways in which the explanatory power of the theory can be improved for future analysis. First, symmetry of interests are not fully captured through the indicators used in this assessment. Regional presence of the status quo power's forces, and spending power of those forces, are likely major factors that contribute to the respective state's level of interest that are not captured through the indicators in this project. Similarly, the theory

does not include an option for an RSA to elect not to employ intermediaries based on evaluation of symmetry of interests alone. For example, the main reason Houthis have not been engaged by Iran more significantly is largely due to the overwhelming asymmetry of interests in Saudi Arabia's (SQ power) favor. This was also a major consideration in not employing the Hazarajat.

Second, the theory evaluates employment based on binary indicators. In other words, antecedent conditions are resistant or permissive; interests are symmetric or asymmetric; and informal access is high or low. There are clearly measures in between these extremes that are not represented in the theory. The theory was designed in such a manner to simplify indicator values. However, this reality translates to elements of each variable operating simultaneously through empirical examples that do not matriculate in the theory's sequential flow. As a result, it is difficult to envision through the theory how gains in informal access may be cultivated even when antecedent conditions are resistant.

Third, analysis of intermediary employment in this project indicates that employment is not sequential, as depicted by the model. While asymmetric interests open up intermediary options that are not otherwise available, asymmetric interests do not preclude a revisionist state from pursuing simultaneous options that are more conducive when interests are symmetric. Based on the empirical examples evaluated in this project, it appears as a given that revisionist states almost always pursue some element of informal access. Restructuring the model from the perspective of maximum utility, rather than sequential, would likely strengthen explanatory power. Integration of the above-mentioned theoretical adjustments would enhance the explanatory value of the theory – especially with regard to the variable of informal access.

Finally, one variable I did not consider in this analysis that is important for revisionist state calculations regarding the probability of escalation is the target state military strength. For example, in Ukraine, the military of Ukraine outnumbered Russian military personnel for about 10 days. Russia accepted this risk due to the low quality of Ukraine's armed forces and Russia was successful in deliberately coopting and recruiting several Ukrainian military officials (McDermott, 2015). One could argue the analysis of domestic institutions takes this into account, but only to a limited degree. In most cases

analyzed for this project, the target state security forces were weak and often demoralized. There were exceptions, but future research on intermediary employment might more specifically take into account the strength of target state security forces.

Concluding Points

This dissertation made the case that gray zone competition and intermediary employment present a risk to international order and the status quo. It also makes clear the point that revisionist states are actively using intermediaries as a means to attain zero-sum gains below the threshold of conflict. Through intermediary employment, revisionist states are also able to achieve disruptive effects without committing to the outcomes. This project advances a theory on intermediary employment to systematically interrogate instances of gray zone manipulation. Through the empirical analysis of revisionist states Iran and Russia, we were able to draw out implications to enhance our understanding of the conditions under which intermediaries are employed and how they are employed. Such analysis emphasizes the need for dedicated policy attention and future dedicated research. Looming great power competition will not occur on major battlefields where the U.S. maintains a competitive advantage. Revisionist adversaries will instead eat away at power differentials through tenacious gray zone competition imbued in ambiguity and uncertainty.

Appendices

Appendix A: Tabulated Findings

A.1.   Overall Findings: Iran, 1982-2019

Target	RSA SQ Power	Year	Antecedent Conditions	Symmetry of Interests	Informal Access	Intermediary	Attribution (Observed)	Level State Cntl (Observed)	Attribution/LVL Cntl (Expected)	Support for Hypotheses
Lebanon	Iran / US	1982	Permissive	Symmetric	High	Hezbollah	Covert	Lean Dec.	Covert/Decentralized	3
	Iran / US	2006	Permissive	Symmetric	High	Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Dec.	Covert/Decentralized	---
Afghanistan: Hazarajat	Iran / Soviet Union	1979	Resistant	Symmetric	Low	Hazarajat	Not Employ	---	Not Employ	1
	Iran / Soviet Union	1989	Resistant	Symmetric	Low	Hazarajat	Not Employ	---	Not Employ	1
Afghanistan: Taliban	Iran / US	2007	Permissive	Asymmetric	Moderate	Mashhad Taliban	Covert	Lean Dec.	Overt/Centralized	---
	Iran / US	2018	Semi-Permissive	Symmetric	Moderate	Mashhad Taliban	Lean Covert	Lean Cent	Covert/Centralized	4
Iraq	Iran	2003	Permissive	Symmetric	High	Sciri/Badr	Covert	Lean Dec.	Covert/Decentralized	3
						Dawa	Covert	Decentralized		3
						JAM	Lean Covert	Decentralized		3
	US	2011	Permissive	Asymmetric	High	SCIRI/Badr	Covert	Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	---
						Dawa	Covert	Decentralized		---
						Spec Grps	Covert	Centralized		---
Syria	Iran	2011	Permissive	Asymmetric	Moderate	NDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
						Hezbollah	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.		---
						Zainab/Fatema	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.		2
						Iraq Interm	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
	US	2018	Permissive	Asymmetric	Mod-High	LDF	Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
						NDF	Overt	Lean Dec.		---
						Hezbollah	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.		---
						Zainab/Fatema	Overt	Centralized		2
Iraq	Iran	2014	Permissive	Asymmetric	High	Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
						Badr	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.		---
						Sadr	NA --> Covert	Decentralized		---
	US	2019	Permissive	Asymmetric	High	New Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
						Old Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
						Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Cent.		2
						Sadr	Lean Covert	Decentralized		---
Yemen	Iran / Saudi Arabia	2014	Semi-Permissive	Asymmetric (against)	Moderate	Houthis	Not Employ	---	Not Employ	6
	Iran / Saudi Arabia	2018	Semi-Permissive	Asymmetric (against)	Moderate	Houthis	Not Employ	---	Not Employ	6

Iran

A.2. Overall Findings: Russia, 1992-2019

Target	RSA SQ Power	Year	Antecedent Conditions	Symmetry of Interests	Informal Access	Intermediary	Attribution	Level State Cntl	Attribution/LVL Cntl	Support for Hypotheses
			Explanatory Variables				**Observed DV**		**Expected DV**	
Georgia	Russia / US	1992	Permissive	Asymmetric	Mod-High	Various	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.	Overt/Centralized	---
	Russia / US	2008	Permissive	Asymmetric	Mod-High	Various	Lean Overt	Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
Crimea	Russia	2014	Permissive	Asymmetric	High	LGM	Overt	Centralized		2
						SDF	Lean Overt	Centralized		2
						Cossacks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
						Chetniks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
						Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
						Ukr. Choice	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
	Russia / US	2018	Semi-Permissive	Asymmetric	High	SDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
						Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
						Ukr. Choice	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.		2
The Donbass	Russia / US	2014	Permissive	Asymmetric	High	Separatists / Chech/Cossacks	NA-->Covert / Lean Covert	Decentralized / Lean Dec.	Overt/Centralized	--- / ---
	Russia / US	2018	Semi-Permissive	Asymmetric	High	Separatists	Overt	Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2
Syria	Russia / US	2015	Permissive	Asymmetric	Moderate	Wagner	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.	Overt/Centralized	2
	Russia / US	2018	Permissive	Asymmetric	Moderate	Wagner / Chech/Ingush	Lean Overt / Lean Overt	Lean Cent. / Centralized	Overt/Centralized	2 / 2
Libya	Russia / US	2016	Permissive	Asymmetric	Low	RSB Group	Covert	Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	---
	Russia / US	2019	Permissive	Asymmetric	Low	Wagner / Syrians	Lean Overt / Covert	Decentralized / Decentralized	Overt/Centralized	--- / ---

Russia

A.3.   DV Summary, Iran

Target	RSA SQ Power	Year	Intermediary	Attribution	Level State Cntl
Lebanon	Iran US	1982	Hezbollah	Covert	Lean Dec.
	Iran US	2006	Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Dec.
Afghanistan: Hazarajat	Iran Soviet Union	1979	Hazarajat	Not Employ	--------
	Iran Soviet Union	1989	Hazarajat	Not Employ	--------
Afghanistan: Taliban	Iran US	2007	Mashhad Taliban	Covert	Lean Dec.
	Iran US	2018	Mashhad Taliban	Lean Covert	Lean Cent
Iraq	Iran	2003	Sciri/Badr	Covert	Lean Dec.
			Dawa	Covert	Decentralized
	US		JAM	Lean Covert	Decentralized
	Iran	2011	SCIRI/Badr	Covert	Decentralized
			Dawa	Covert	Decentralized
	US		Spec Grps	Covert	Centralized
Syria	Iran	2011	NDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Hezbollah	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.
			Zainab/Fatema	Lean Covert	Lean Cent.
	US		Iraq Interm	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			LDF	Overt	Lean Cent.
	Iran	2018	NDF	Overt	Lean Dec.
			Hezbollah	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.
	US		Zainab/Fatema	Overt	Centralized
Iraq	Iran	2014	Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Badr	Lean Overt	Lean Dec.
	US		Sadr	NA --> Covert	Decentralized
			New Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Centralized
	Iran	2019	Old Spec Grps	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
			Hezbollah	Overt	Lean Cent.
	US		Sadr	Lean Covert	Decentralized
Yemen	Iran Saudi Arabia	2014	Houthis	Not Employ	--------
	Iran Saudi Arabia	2018	Houthis	Not Employ	--------

A.4. DV Summary, Russia

Target		RSA SQ Power	Year	Intermediary	Attribution	Level State Cntl
Russia	Georgia	Russia US	1992	Separatists and volunteers	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
		Russia US	2008	Separatists, Cossacks, Chech	Lean Overt	Centralized
	Crimea	Russia	2014	LGM	Overt	Centralized
				SDF	Lean Overt	Centralized
				Cossacks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		US		Chetniks	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
				Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		Russia	2018	SDF	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
				Night Wolves	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		US		Ukr. Choice	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
	The Donbass	Russia	2014	Separatists	NA-->Covert	Decentralized
				Chech/Cossacks	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
		US		Chetniks	Lean Covert	Lean Dec.
				Mil Vols	Lean Covert	Centralized
		Russia US	2018	Separatists	Overt	Centralized
	Syria	Russia US	2015	Wagner	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		Russia	2018	Wagner	Lean Overt	Lean Cent.
		US		Chech/Ingush	Lean Overt	Centralized
	Libya	Russia US	2016	RSB Group	Covert	Decentralized
		Russia	2019	Wagner	Lean Overt	Decentralized
		US		Syrians	Covert	Decentralized

A.5.   Detailed IV Summary, Iran and Russia

Iran

Target	Year	RSA	SQ Power	V&A	Pol Stab &	Govt Effect	Reg Quality	Rule of Law	Corrupt	AVG	Ext Depend	Licit Econ	Sum	(Sum/Total)	AC Evaluation	Pol	Econ	Social	Total	AVG	Resistance Strength	Overall Eval	Geo Prox	Hist Ties	Comm Value	State Interest	Symmetry	Socio-Cult Conv	Ideol Conv	Strat Conv	Sum	Score	Informal Eval
Lebanon	1982	Iran	US	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	0	0	0	0	Weak	0	1	1	2	0.667	Strong	Permissive	1/1	1/1	0/1	2/3	Symmetric	1	1	1	3	0.75	Mod-High
Lebanon	2006	Iran	US	0.422	0.138	0.45	0.458	0.372	0.312	0.358	0	0	0.36	0.119	weak/mod.	1	1	1	3	1	Strong	Permissive	1/1	1/1	0/0	2/3	Symmetric	1	1	1	3	0.75	Mod-High
Afghanistan: Hazarajat	1979	Iran	Soviet Union	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	0	0	0	0	weak	0	0	0	0	0	weak	Resistant	3/3	1/2	0/1	4/5	Symmetric	1	0	0	1	0.25	Low
Afghanistan: Hazarajat	1989	Iran	Soviet Union	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	0	0	0	0	weak	0	0	0	0	0	weak	Resistant	3/2	1/1	0/0	5/4	Symmetric	1	0	0	1	0.25	Low
Afghanistan: Taliban	2007	Iran	US	0.288	0.018	0.22	0.162	0.134	0.182	0.167	0	0	0.17	0.056	weak	0	1	1	2	0.667	strong	Permissive	3/1	1/1	1/0	5/2	Asymmetric	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Afghanistan: Taliban	2018	Iran	US	0.302	-0.05	0.21	0.274	0.166	0.2	0.183	0	0	0.18	0.061	weak	0	1	0	1	0.333	mod-weak	Semi-Permissive	1/1	1/2	1/0	5/3	Symmetric	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Iraq	2003	Iran	US	0.2	0.022	0.16	0.218	0.172	0.258	0.172	0	0	0.17	0.057	weak	1	1	0.5	2.5	0.833	strong	Permissive	3/1	1/2	1/0	5/3	Symmetric	2	0.5	1	3.5	0.88	High
Iraq	2011	Iran	US	0.286	0.13	0.27	0.282	0.21	0.266	0.241	0	0.5	0.74	0.247	weak/mod.	1	1	0.5	2.5	0.833	strong	Permissive	3/1	1/2	1/0	6/3	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
Syria	2011	Iran	US	0.138	0.098	0.4	0.31	0.344	0.282	0.262	0	1	1.26	0.421	moderate	0	1	1	2	0.667	strong	Permissive	2/2	2/0	0/0	5/1	Asymmetric	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Syria	2018	Iran	US	0.108	-0.048	0.17	0.14	0.09	0.174	0.105	0	0	0.11	0.035	weak	0	1	1	2	0.667	strong	Permissive	2/1	2/0	0/0	5/1	Asymmetric	1	1	1	3	0.75	Mod-High
Iraq	2014	Iran	US	0.272	0.004	0.28	0.25	0.234	0.234	0.212	0	0	0.21	0.071	weak	1	1	0.5	2.5	0.833	strong	Permissive	3/1	2/2	0/0	6/3	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
Iraq	2019	Iran	US	0.302	-0.012	0.24	0.256	0.148	0.22	0.192	0	0.5	0.69	0.231	weak/mod.	1	1	0.5	2.5	0.833	strong	Permissive	3/1	2/2	1/0	6/3	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
Yemen	2014	Iran	Saudi Arabia	0.24	-0.034	0.22	0.322	0.26	0.188	0.199	0	0	0.2	0.066	weak	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.333	weak-mod	Semi-Permissive	1/3	1/1	1/0	5/2	Asymmetric (against)	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Yemen	2018	Iran	Saudi Arabia	0.15	-0.1	0.05	0.192	0.142	0.172	0.101	0	0	0.1	0.034	weak	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.333	weak-mod	Semi-Permissive	3/1	1/0	1/0	5/2	Asymmetric (against)	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate

Russia

Target	Year	RSA	SQ Power	V&A	Pol Stab &	Govt Effect	Reg Quality	Rule of Law	Corrupt	AVG	Ext Depend	Licit Econ	Sum	(Sum/Total)	AC Evaluation	Pol	Econ	Social	Total	AVG	Resistance Strength	Overall Eval	Geo Prox	Hist Ties	Comm Value	State Interest	Symmetry	Socio-Cult Conv	Ideol Conv	Strat Conv	Sum	Score	Informal Eval
Georgia	1992	Russia	US	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	0	0	0	0	weak	1	1	1	3	1	Strong	Permissive	3/3	2/0	1/0	6/1	Asymmetric	1	1	1	3	0.75	Mod-High
Georgia	2008	Russia	US	0.448	0.316	0.44	0.596	0.446	0.478	0.454	0	0	0.45	0.151	weak/mod	1	1	1	3	1	Strong	Permissive	3/2	2/0	1/0	6/2	Asymmetric	1	1	1	3	0.75	Mod-High
Crimea	2014	Russia	US	0.472	0.096	0.42	0.374	0.342	0.302	0.334	0	0.5	0.83	0.278	weak/mod	1	1	1	3	1	strong	Permissive	3/1	2/0	1/0	6/2	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
Crimea	2018	Russia	US	0.498	0.134	0.42	0.456	0.356	0.326	0.364	0.5	0.5	1.36	0.455	moderate (+)	1	1	1	3	1	strong	Semi-Permissive	3/1	1/1	1/0	5/2	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
The Donbass	2014	Russia	US	0.472	0.096	0.42	0.374	0.342	0.302	0.334	0	0.5	0.83	0.278	weak/mod	1	1	1	3	1	mod-strong	Permissive	3/2	2/0	1/0	6/2	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
The Donbass	2018	Russia	US	0.498	0.134	0.42	0.456	0.356	0.326	0.364	0.5	0.5	1.36	0.455	moderate (+)	1	1	1	3	1	strong	Semi-Permissive	3/1	1/1	1/0	5/2	Asymmetric	2	1	1	4	1	High
Syria	2015	Russia	US	0.116	-0.094	0.47	0.172	0.216	0.19	0.178	0	0	0.18	0.059	weak	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.333	mod-weak	Permissive	1/2	2/0	1/0	4/1	Asymmetric	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Syria	2018	Russia	US	0.108	-0.048	0.17	0.14	0.09	0.174	0.105	0	0	0.11	0.035	weak	0.5	0.5	1	1	0.333	mod-weak	Permissive	1/1	2/0	1/0	4/1	Asymmetric	1	0	1	2	0.5	Moderate
Libya	2016	Russia	US	0.214	0.044	0.12	0.046	0.136	0.174	0.123	0	0	0.12	0.041	weak	0	1	0	1	0.333	mod-weak	Permissive	1/1	1/1	1/0	3/1	Asymmetric	0	0	1	1	0.25	Low
Libya	2019	Russia	US	0.196	0.012	0.13	0.044	0.142	0.19	0.119	0	0	0.12	0.04	weak	0	1	0	1	0.333	mod-weak	Permissive	1/1	2/1	1/0	4/1	Asymmetric	0	0	1	1	0.25	Low

Appendix B: Measurement and Coding

This appendix outlines the metrics I used to measure the indicators for my dependent and independent variables.

Dependent Variable

Attribution

Attribution is the measure of acknowledgement of the link between the revisionist state and the intermediary. The measures here are high (Overt), medium (Lean Overt or Lean Covert) and low (Covert). Covert attribution is where a state manages intermediary activity with the intention of concealing their role and avoiding acknowledgement of any connection (Carson, 2018). Attribution is conveyed through a number of sources. It can be formally declared that an RSA has a relationship with an intermediary (such as Iran after the death of Soleimani), or it may be an "open secret," such as the Little Green Men in Crimea who were physically attributed to Russia through their uniforms, weapons and language. High (overt) attribution constitutes attribution that is confirmed during the period in question. Medium attribution is that which is suspected, but not confirmed. Low attribution is where the link between the revisionist state and intermediary is unknown during the time period in question.

Level of State Control

The level of state control ranges from centralized to decentralized. State control is centralized when the state has a direct role in the organization, strategy and employment of the intermediary and the intermediary essentially constitutes an extension of the state. Observations of high state control would demonstrate a linkage between state direction and intermediary execution in a timely fashion. Participation of numerous state operatives in intermediary operations would also be indicative of high state control. A medium level of state control can Lean Centralized or Lean Decentralized based on the state operative participation and adherence to state issued directives. Decentralized state control is where the intermediary operates seemingly independent of state authority.

Independent Variables

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent conditions are the socio-political-economic conditions at the target state that can serve as a catalyst or deterrent to intermediary employment by a revisionist state. These range from resistant to permissive and are comprised of two primary indicators: strength of domestic institutions and strength of popular resistance. The strength of domestic institutions consists of governing structures, external dependencies and the licit economy. The strength of popular resistance consists of the significance of popular mobilizing structures, ungoverned or under-governed economy and the significance of popular grievances.

Strength of Domestic Institutions

Target state governance capacity is an important factor in the consideration of whether a state is vulnerable to the employment of intermediaries by an external state. Weak antecedent conditions at the target that may prove vulnerable to intermediary employment. Ideally, this project would use the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) to measure this the strength of domestic institutions. The World Bank governance indicators are comprised of six dimensions: Voice and Accountability; Political Stability and Absence of Violence; Government Effectiveness; Regulatory Quality; Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. Unfortunately, the indicators do not pre-date 1996, so I cannot use them for every observation. I will however use the definitions of each indicator provided by the World Bank to estimate the presence or absence of each indicator. For example, voice and accountability is defined by the world bank as, "…the perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media," (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2020). I will look for evidence of citizen participation and freedom of expression for observations that occur prior to 1996 where the WGI are unavailable. Obviously, there will exist gradations of the presence of such indicators. I will justify my coding qualitatively in these cases. These scores will be normalized from 0-1.

In addition to the WGI, I will look for the presence or absence of high external dependency. High dependency of a state on another state in the military or

economic realm is indicative of the vulnerability of domestic institutions. If the absence of such resources would disable the functionality of the state, the dependency is assessed as high. The measures here are high or low.

Finally, the WGI do not specifically address the strength of the economy. It is captured marginally under the indicator of Regulatory Quality, but criteria such as income inequality, unemployment and inflation are underrepresented. These indicators are important in evaluating the strength of governing institutions. I will specifically look for evidence of income inequality, unemployment and inflation and evaluate each observation as weak or strong.

Collectively, I capture the measurement of each observation in a database and aggregate the measures to inform an overall assessment of institutional strength. The range of for the strength of domestic institutions is weak to strong.

Strength of Popular Resistance

This indicator is measured by looking for the presence or absence of political, economic and social components of a target society. Tarrow (1998) categorizes mobilizing structures according to leadership structures, connective structures and social embeddedness. I assess the strength of popular resistance within the political, economic and social realms to operationalize Tarrow's mobilizing structure framework. For the political component, I look for evidence of strong factionalization within an inefficient government, and for evidence of the participation of a resistance organization in the government, which will enable political opportunity that could add to the legitimacy of the resistance and serve as a mechanism for change. Economically, I look for the presence or absence of an illicit economy can lead to resource generation and self-sufficiency. Socially, I look at the strength of socio-ethnic divides with robust, homogenous networks can lead to strong resiliency and resistance potential. I evaluate the overall strength of popular resistance according to the presence, partial presence or absence of these indicators. The strength of popular resistance can range from weak to strong. Indicator values range from 0, 0.5, or 1.

Collectively, weak institutional strength and strong popular resistance qualifies as permissive antecedent conditions.

Symmetry of Interests

In the evaluation of state interests in a target state, there may exist little reason to influence the target based on economic or political incentives, but there may exist great importance from historical or cultural perspectives. I evaluate the measurement of this sub-variable based on three primary indicators: geographic proximity, alliances/historical ties, and commercial value. Interests between the state seeking a revision to the status quo and the status quo power can range from Symmetric to Asymmetric. An explanation of each of the indicators is provided below.

Geographic Proximity

Geographic distance between states is a variable that is prevalent in international relations. Geography is a central consideration of opportunities and constraints that influence foreign policy decisions. Territorial contiguity is a common component of research seeking to understand the likelihood of conflict potential and duration (Starr, 2002, 2005). There is also the concept of relational importance. This is the idea that, "Areas close to home, and especially those bordering one's homeland, will be viewed as more vital to security interests than those much further away," (Goertz & Diehl, 2002, p. 17). Numerous factors in the consideration of intermediary employment are influenced by geographic proximity, to include logistics, political will, and communication. Many states incorporate the importance of geographic proximity into their national security plans by forward positioning forces or capabilities to reduce uncertainty and reaction time. Measures for this indicator can get very complicated, very fast. To capture the basic concept of relational importance, I will measure geographic proximity as Contiguous, Near and Far. For the purposes of this research, "Near" constitutes secondary neighbors (neighbors of contiguous states), and Far consists of anything greater.

Alliances/Historical Ties

Similar to geographic proximity, states may have historical ties or shared experiences that strengthen respective interests. Russian regional influence at the height of

the Cold War was extensive. Historically, Ukraine and Crimea, in particular, were perceived as an integral part of Russia by Russians and Ukrainians alike. The loss of Russian authority in Ukraine after the end of the Cold War did not erase the historical ties. I will measure this temporally derived indicator qualitatively as Strong, Weak or Non-existent. Strong ties consist of multiple alliances and/or previous historical ties in which one state possessed some level of authority over another. Weak ties consist of few alliances or historical ties. Finally, alliances or historical ties may be non-existent. These are coded with values of 0, 1 or 2.

Commercial Value

For the purpose of this indicator, I determine the relative symmetry between the RSA's stake in the target's economy versus the status quo power's stake in the target's economy. In other words, would a disruption in the target state demand a response by the status quo power based on the relative commercial value of the target? I measure this indicator based on the percentage of total exports. I used data from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) database by the World Bank on total exports (World Bank, 2020). The state with a higher percentage of total exports to a target country will perceive the target as having higher commercial value. I code the country with higher commercial value with a 1 and the other country with a value of 0.

Collectively, the range of possible scores for symmetry of interests is from a score of 1 to a score of 6. I define state interests as symmetric if they are within forty-percent of each other. For example, a ratio of 5:3 is considered symmetric.

Informal Access

This variable is measured by evaluating the existence and strength of informal ties between the RSA and the society of a target state. There exist socio-cultural features which can be evaluated to determine similarity, but the presence of such features alone does not guarantee access. Access is permitted through the presence or absence of "ties."

Socio-Cultural Proximity, Ties and Bridges

"Similarity breeds connection," (McPherson et al., 2001). Socio-cultural proximity or similarity between the societies and cultures of two states are indicative of informal access. States that share common socio-cultural factors, such as ethnicity, religion, or language present more pathways for information, resources and personnel to travel. Ties between non-similar individuals dissolve at a higher rate than those between similar individuals. Homophily is the principle that contact between similar individuals occurs at a higher rate than those who are dissimilar (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 416). Viewed from network analysis perspective, this principle implies there exist more and stronger connections between similar individuals than between nonsimilar individuals. The nature of ties between individuals also demonstrates functional utility. "Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle, but strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available," (Granovetter, 1983, p. 209). In other words, both weak and strong ties are important. One densely knit clump consisting of strong ties can be connected by another, somewhat different, densely knit clump through a weak tie that serves as a bridge between two relatively heterogenous networks. This logic can be elevated to the state level, where marriages, friendships, informational transfers, shared ethnicities, religions, occupations, educations and other cultural commonalities shape experiences and perspectives. The stronger the socio-cultural proximity a revisionist state has to a target state, the more access the respective state will have into the informal conduits of the target. This indicator is measured as Similar, Related, or Dissimilar. Similar cultural proximity means the two states are nearly identical in key socio-cultural components (i.e. familial, tribal, religious, ethnic, language, etc.). Related socio-cultural proximity means the two states have many cultural traits in common. Dissimilar socio-cultural proximity means the two states have almost no socio-cultural traits in common.

Ideological Convergence (More likely to consist of convergence through strong ties.)

Ideological convergence is defined by IISS (2019) as, "The level of ideological alignment and the corresponding loyalty it generates," (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019, p. 9). The concept of ideology is centered around ideas or

beliefs that serve as the basis for policy or action. Ideology has much to do with how individuals and groups self-identify and how they frame ideological issues for collective action. For example, during the cultivation of Hezbollah the IRGC fostered the adoption of Velayat-e Faqih as a founding principal, where Ayatollah Khomeini was recognized as the Jurist Theologian. This does not simply convey similarity of cultures or religion (like the previous indicator); it represents the convergence of ideologies under conditions of corresponding loyalty. This research treats ideology as distinct from culture, however the two are closely related. Ideological Convergence is assessed as present or absent.

Strategic Convergence (More likely to consist of convergence through weak ties.)

This indicator is measured by assessing the convergence between the revisionist state, intermediaries, and the target society in terms of their vision of regional order, perception of threats and strategies to address those threats. The alignment of vision and interests in addressing threats indicates high strategic convergence. For this indicator, I will look for the presence or absence of ties based on alignment of strategic vision and interests. This indicator is assessed as present or absent.

Collectively, informal access can range from a total score of zero to four. Low informal access is classified as zero. Moderate informal access is classified by a score of 1-2. High informal access is classified by a score of 3-4.

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