

# Intervention and Secrecy in International Politics

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INTERVENTION AND SECRECY IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates why states turn to covert action or overt military force when intervening abroad as a window into the dynamics of secrecy in international politics. The first task is to identify when leaders will be most attracted to covert tools of statecraft. I argue that the kinds of actions examined here — interventions to overthrow or rescue foreign regimes — introduce unique reputational concerns that often render secrecy tempting. Such concerns are not adequately captured by alternative accounts, which tend to focus on escalation and domestic-political constraints. While this step is important, a leader's desire for deniability is not perfectly correlated with the decision to actually authorize secret missions. The reason is that covert operations typically require sacrifices in effectiveness. In short, they are more likely than overt action to fail. In order to understand how leaders make these trade-offs, I draw on insights from loss aversion in psychology. When pursuing gains-seeking goals like regime change, leaders tend to be more concerned about the risks from overt action than the risks of failure. As such, they will often opt for covert action even when doing so decreases the chances of mission success. Conversely, leaders pursuing loss-preventing goals like regime rescue tend to be more concerned with the risks of failure than the risks from overt action. The result is a greater willingness to act overtly, even when doing so increases the odds of incurring costs.

I test my argument against five interventions spanning two great powers throughout the Cold War. The empirical core of my project examines two cases of U.S.-sponsored regime change and two cases of U.S.-sponsored regime rescue. Each pair contains one episode of covert action and one of overt action. Together, these cases hold constant a number of possible confounders, including the intervener, the geographic location of the target, the ideological makeup of the relevant actors, geopolitical tensions, and, in some cases, the party of the president. As an external validity check, the penultimate chapter investigates the Soviet Union's decision to first intervene covertly in Afghanistan in 1979 to rescue an ailing client and, later in the year, to intervene overtly. The existence of within-case variation makes it possible to examine the same intervener led by the same group of decision-makers intervening in the same country in the same year. Each case utilizes a mixture of secondary materials as well as a wide range of declassified documents from a variety of sources.

This project contributes to the scholarly literature on secrecy in several different ways. First, I showcase the important role that different kinds of reputational concerns play in motivating leaders to seek out quiet solutions. Second, I demonstrate that the actual decision to authorize covert operations is a function of both the incentives leaders have to pursue (plausible) deniability as well as the nature of the objective they are after. Given covert action's inherent limitations, whether leaders are pursuing gains-seeking or loss-avoiding policy goals matters a great deal in their decision to actually authorize these missions. In short, this project shines a bright light on the difficult trade-offs leaders face, particularly between deniability and effectiveness, when contemplating whether and how to intervene abroad.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1 The Puzzle

January 1, 1959 was no ordinary day for the United States. After a six-year struggle, Fidel Castro's 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement finally managed to wrest power from Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista, ushering in an era of uninterrupted communist rule that persists to this day. Among America's many bizarre ploys to remove Castro throughout the 1960s — e.g. poisoning a box of his favorite cigars, placing thallium salts in his shoes to induce hair loss — the botched invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 stands out as particularly infamous.<sup>1</sup> The Bay of Pigs was a plan hatched under the Eisenhower administration, and carried out by the Kennedy administration, to secretly train a cadre of exiles to storm the beaches of Cuba, facilitate a mass uprising, and overthrow the Castro regime, returning the Caribbean nation to the panoply of U.S. client states in Latin America. The primary objective of the operation, to prevent the emergence of a Soviet client 90 miles off the coast of Florida, was straightforward. Despite their intense desire to remove Castro, however, decision-makers settled on a covert invasion plan fully aware of its limited prospects of success.

While America's basic motives for intervening against Castro will be familiar to students of the Cold War, the decision to intervene covertly is puzzling. First, the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup>Jones (2008, 12).

was operating within its sphere of influence as widely understood at the time. That decision-makers felt constrained from pursuing a more open and forceful intervention is at odds with this fact.<sup>2</sup> Relatedly, the spheres of influence system meant that the two superpowers were reticent to become too directly involved in the other's backyard.<sup>3</sup> A memo from Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Kennedy's special assistant, observed that "the Soviets are surprised that we haven't done away with Castro already."<sup>4</sup> Why policymakers privileged deniability at the expense of greater effectiveness cannot readily be explained by fears of escalation. Finally, the U.S. very publicly occupied the Dominican Republic four years later to confront a similar, albeit less potent, ideological threat. Hans Morgenthau describes the issue starkly:

As concerns the intervention in the Dominican Republic, even if one takes at face value the official assessment that the revolution of April 1965 was controlled by Cuban communists, it appears incongruous that we intervened massively in the Dominican Republic, whose revolution was, according to our government's assessment of the facts, a mere symptom of the disease, while the disease itself—Cuban communism—is exempt from intervention altogether.<sup>5</sup>

The failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs points to a familiar, but ill-theorized, phenomenon in international politics: Leaders often exploit secrecy and deception in pursuit of important foreign policy objectives.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, decision-makers may even accept a higher chance of failure if it means concealing or otherwise denying their complicity. In this dissertation, I set out to understand the sources of secrecy in international politics by investigating why leaders hide their efforts to depose or rescue regimes in some instances but not in others.

The first step in this process is to identify the conditions under which leaders will

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<sup>2</sup>Lake (2009).

<sup>3</sup>Finnemore (2003).

<sup>4</sup>Blight and Kornbluh (1998, 62).

<sup>5</sup>Morgenthau (1967, 433).

<sup>6</sup>Some prominent exceptions include: Axelrod (1979); Baum (2004); Brown and Marcum (2011); Carson (2016); Gibbs (1995); O'Rourke (2013); Slantchev (2010); Stasavage (2004); Tarar and Lev-entoglu (2009); Yarhi-Milo (2013).

find secrecy most tempting. I find that reputational concerns generate incentives for secrecy more often than the threat of escalation or concerns about domestic politics, the two most commonly referenced drivers of covert action.<sup>7</sup> Which reputations leaders care about and why are dealt with in Chapter 2. Although understanding when secrecy will be most appealing is important, it is only half the story. Unfortunately for leaders, there is no free lunch in the covert sphere. By virtue of their emphasis on deception and deniability, covert operations are, *ceteris paribus*, more likely than their overt counterparts to fail. A complete theory of why leaders actually authorize covert missions must therefore provide an explanation of how decision-makers weigh these trade-offs. Exclusively focusing on incentives is simply not enough.

In brief, I argue that leaders are willing to accept a higher chance of failure by intervening secretly when the objective is regime change. This is particularly true when the risks from overt action are high. Leaders are much less willing to accept mission failure when rescuing regimes, even when the costs from acting publicly are high. The premise underlying these behavioral expectations is a simple yet powerful one: Losing hurts more than gaining gratifies. The implication is that individuals will take more risks, act more resolutely, and incur greater costs to prevent losses than they will to secure new gains. If we conceive of regime rescue as an act of loss prevention and regime change as an attempt to secure new gains, as I do here, we can exploit some of loss aversion's most powerful insights to shed new light on how leaders balance the risks and rewards of covert and overt intervention.

## 2 Defining the Terms

Because the two key concepts under consideration — intervention and secrecy — mean many things to many different people, it is important to explicitly define our

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<sup>7</sup>Anderson (1998); Brown (2014a); Carson (2016); Gibbs (1995).

terms at the outset. I will begin by defining forcible regime promotion as a unique subset of interstate intervention and describing the various features that comprise it. I will then draw a distinction between the use of secrecy as a tool of denial (covert operations) and the use of secrecy as a tool of tactical advantage and surprise (clandestine operations); my dissertation focuses exclusively on the former. After walking through each of these two components separately, I will put them together to form the dependent variable of interest: *A leader's decision to conceal or disclose their efforts to overthrow or rescue a regime.*

## 2.1 Forcible Regime Promotion

The term “intervention” has been invoked to describe a wide range of activities, including humanitarian operations, nation-building, and sovereign debt collection.<sup>8</sup> Here, I focus exclusively on a subset of intervention known as *forcible regime promotion*. By forcible regime promotion, I mean any effort by State A to change or preserve the domestic authority structures of State B by using or threatening lethal force.<sup>9</sup> Three features of this definition are worth highlighting. First, forcible regime promotion encompasses regime change *and* regime rescue. Recent work on regime promotion has tended to emphasize the former while downplaying the latter.<sup>10</sup> Rigid distinctions between the two, however, are neither necessary nor desirable. To the contrary, regime change and rescue are best thought of as opposite sides of a single coin: Interference in a foreign country’s domestic authority structures with the aim of promoting friendly regimes abroad.<sup>11</sup> Once we recognize that both variants of regime promotion entail the same ultimate end, if not the same means, the rationale for

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<sup>8</sup>Bull (1984); Finnemore (2003); Rosenau (1969).

<sup>9</sup>Owen (2002, 377, 406).

<sup>10</sup>Downes and Monten (2013); O’Rourke (2013); Peic and Reiter (2011).

<sup>11</sup>Barnett and Duvall (2005); Krasner (2011).

grouping both actions under a single heading becomes much more apparent.<sup>12</sup>

A second key feature of forcible regime promotion is that it privileges the changing and propping up of *regimes* rather than individual *leaders*.<sup>13</sup> Opting for a regime-centric rather than a leader-centric conception of regime promotion has non-trivial consequences for how we classify particular interventions. Consider a covert operation intended to support a particular leader and his or her party in a democratic election. If we adopted a leader-centric approach, we might be tempted to code this as an act of regime change since the goal is to replace one leader or party with another.<sup>14</sup> However, unless the supported leader had designs to dismantle the democratic regime — and the intervener knew this at the time — this coding would be inappropriate. By using a regime-centric approach, we would more appropriately categorize this as something akin to regime rescue or maintenance.

Lyndon Johnson’s support for Eduardo Frei and the Christian Democrats against Salvador Allende’s leftist coalition in Chile’s 1964 presidential election nicely captures this logic. Johnson’s key objective throughout the 1960s was to preserve Chile’s democratic institutions, not to undermine them.<sup>15</sup> Truman’s covert efforts to back non-communist politicians and political parties in the 1948 Italian elections fall into the same category.<sup>16</sup> In short, not only does the regime-centric approach more faithfully capture an intervention’s objectives, but it also ensures that we only code as regime change interventions intended to alter all three elements of a regime, including its “institutions, operational rules of the game, and ideologies.”<sup>17</sup> Swapping out

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<sup>12</sup>Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath (2013); Berger, Corvalan, Easterly and Satyanath (2013); Owen (2002, 2010).

<sup>13</sup>Many who work on forcible regime change treat both leadership and regime change as the same phenomenon, e.g. Downes and Montén (2013); O’Rourke (2013).

<sup>14</sup>O’Rourke (2013) adopts this view of regime change in her dissertation on U.S.-sponsored regime change.

<sup>15</sup>Poznansky (2015). Of course, Nixon’s decision in September 1970 to facilitate Allende’s downfall by supporting and encouraging a military coup is a clear case of regime change.

<sup>16</sup>Owen (2010, 184).

<sup>17</sup>Easton, Gunnell and Stein (1995, 8-9).

one leader for another does not typically involve alterations along all three of these dimensions; replacing a democracy with a military dictatorship would.

While the distinction between leadership and regime change is reasonably straightforward most of the time, there do exist cases in which deposing leaders qualifies as regime change. It is here where the differences between democracies and autocracies are perhaps the starkest. In the vast majority of cases involving democracies, replacing one elected leader with another is unlikely to produce substantial alterations in the underlying regime. The story in autocratic regimes is more complex. In some authoritarian systems, leadership change is not coterminous with regime change. The Soviet Union, for example, saw numerous instances in which the reigning premier was replaced without significant changes to the central governing apparatus of the Communist regime. The transition from Nikita Khrushchev to Leonid Brezhnev in 1964, for instance, was a change of leadership, not of regime. Sometimes however, leadership and regime change are effectively one and the same. In highly personalist regimes such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq or Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, removal of the leader ostensibly means the death of the regime.<sup>18</sup> In short, although leadership change may sometimes qualify as regime change, it is important that we not conflate the two at the outset.

Finally, forcible regime promotion intentionally excludes interventions that seek to overturn or support regimes using non-forcible means. There are a number of good reasons for restricting our focus in this way. The use of force as a tool of statecraft occupies a privileged space in the study of international politics.<sup>19</sup> States interested in overthrowing governments or conquering territory overwhelmingly rely on lethal means to achieve these ends. Diplomacy and economic statecraft typically only play a

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<sup>18</sup>Geddes (2003, 53); Weeks (2008, 46-47).

<sup>19</sup>Copeland (2000); Mearsheimer (2001); Waltz (1979).

supporting role in such endeavors.<sup>20</sup> The process underlying the decision to use force to promote regimes is also likely different from that governing the decision to use diplomatic or economic tools. A state that decides to wield force against a regime or in support of one assumes much greater risks, both domestically and internationally, than they would from these less intense forms of intervention. Better understanding the conditions under which states will wield force secretly or openly to promote regimes is thus an important first step. Exploring these processes for non-forcible statecraft is an obvious area for future research.

## 2.2 Secrecy As a Tool of Deniability

Far from being the stuff of spy novels, secrecy figures prominently in international politics. States commonly exploit secrecy when engaging in bargaining of various kinds, whether it be conflictual<sup>21</sup> or cooperative.<sup>22</sup> States may also use it as a means of surprising opponents,<sup>23</sup> negotiating controversial military basing agreements,<sup>24</sup> goading adversaries into war,<sup>25</sup> circumventing domestic audiences,<sup>26</sup> reducing the likelihood of escalation,<sup>27</sup> and intervening against fellow democracies.<sup>28</sup> While all forms of secrecy are bound together by an emphasis on concealment of some kind, the precise thing being concealed varies in important ways across cases. Here, I break secrecy down into one of two types according to the overarching purpose of concealment: (1) Operational secrecy and (2) Political secrecy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For an argument against the efficacy of economic sanctions as a tool of accomplishing foreign policy objectives, see Pape (1997).

<sup>21</sup>Baum (2004); Brown and Marcum (2011); Kurizaki (2007); Tarar and Leventoglu (2009); Yarhi-Milo (2013).

<sup>22</sup>Stasavage (2004).

<sup>23</sup>Axelrod (1979); Slantchev (2010).

<sup>24</sup>Brown (2014a).

<sup>25</sup>Reiter (2012).

<sup>26</sup>Gibbs (1995).

<sup>27</sup>Carson (2013, 2016); O'Rourke (2013).

<sup>28</sup>Forsythe (1992); Downes (2010); Poznansky (2015).

<sup>29</sup>Within the literature on secrecy are many additional ways to conceive of the subject. Some, for example, focus on the different elements of state secrecy including intelligence, counter-intelligence,



Operational secrecy is used by states to achieve some strategic or tactical advantage over a rival, usually by exploiting the element of surprise.<sup>30</sup> In its purest form, operational secrecy does not require that the intervener hide the fact that they have sponsored some act, at least not once it has been carried out. Instead, the objective is simply to conceal the act itself. These are what the U.S. military calls *clandestine operations*.<sup>31</sup> During the early stages of the Korean War, the Chinese hid the movement of roughly 300,000 “crack troops into North Korea,” lulling the Americans into the false belief that China might remain neutral as the U.S. pressed beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel toward the Yalu River.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of Chinese secrecy was to obtain a tactical advantage vis-à-vis U.S. forces in the event that war broke out, not to deny their role once the fighting had begun.<sup>33</sup> The U.S. Special Forces raid on Osama Bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan — codenamed Operation Neptune Spear — was also kept secret during the planning and execution phases. Obama’s public remarks to the American people afterwards betray the operational function of secrecy.<sup>34</sup>

States may also wield secrecy as a political tool to outright deny their involvement in, or sponsorship of, some act. Political secrecy takes us out of the realm of clandestinity and into the covert sphere. Broadly speaking, covert operations can be thought of as “special activities conducted in support of national foreign policy objectives abroad which are planned and executed so that the role of the ... [intervener] is not apparent or acknowledged publicly.”<sup>35</sup> The purpose of secrecy during a covert operation is to deceive one or more audiences into believing that someone else has

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and covert action, e.g., Daugherty (2004). Others distinguish between secrets that are *known* to be secrets—i.e. overt secrecy—and secrets that are meant to be concealed—i.e. covert secrecy (Kirpichevsky 2009).

<sup>30</sup>Axelrod (1979); Brown (2014a).

<sup>31</sup>Department of Defense (N.d.).

<sup>32</sup>Slantchev (2010, 358).

<sup>33</sup>On the other hand, Soviet intervention in the Korea War *was* carried out in such a way that they could plausibly deny their involvement (Carson 2016).

<sup>34</sup>Schmidle (2011).

<sup>35</sup>Daugherty (2004, 13).

taken an action. At best, the hand of the sponsor is completely hidden. A second-best outcome is plausible deniability.

Covert action encompasses a wide range of behaviors, including propaganda, the provision of funds to political parties, disinformation campaigns, and so forth.<sup>36</sup> The focus of this dissertation, however, is on lethal covert operations, which include activities such as assassinations, coup d'états, and paramilitary operations.<sup>37</sup> The potential audiences being deceived in the course of a covert operation are many. States may wish to hide from their own public, for example, fearing punishment for pursuing unpopular policies.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, powerful adversaries may be the target of deception for states hoping to stymie unwanted security dilemmas.<sup>39</sup> States may also use covert action to avoid opprobrium from international observers for pursuing normatively questionable policies.<sup>40</sup> Theorizing the audiences from whom sponsors are hiding and why is the focus of the next chapter. For now, it will be enough to simply point out that the primary function of secrecy during a covert operation is political in nature rather than tactical.

### **Covert Action and the Myth of Cost Effectiveness**

At this point, it will be useful to debunk one of the most popularly accepted myths surrounding the attractiveness of covert action, namely, that it is a means by which policymakers can pursue the national interest “on the cheap.”<sup>41</sup> The view that covert action is always more cost effective than overt action is misleading. Covert action is certainly cheaper when comparing the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 to America’s secret support for Kurdish dissidents in Iraq in the early- to mid-1970s.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Johnson (1992, 286); Treverton (1987, 12-28).

<sup>37</sup>Carson (2016); Daugherty (2004); Gibbs (1995); O’Rourke (2013).

<sup>38</sup>Russett (1993, 124).

<sup>39</sup>Anderson (1998); Carson (2016).

<sup>40</sup>O’Rourke (2013).

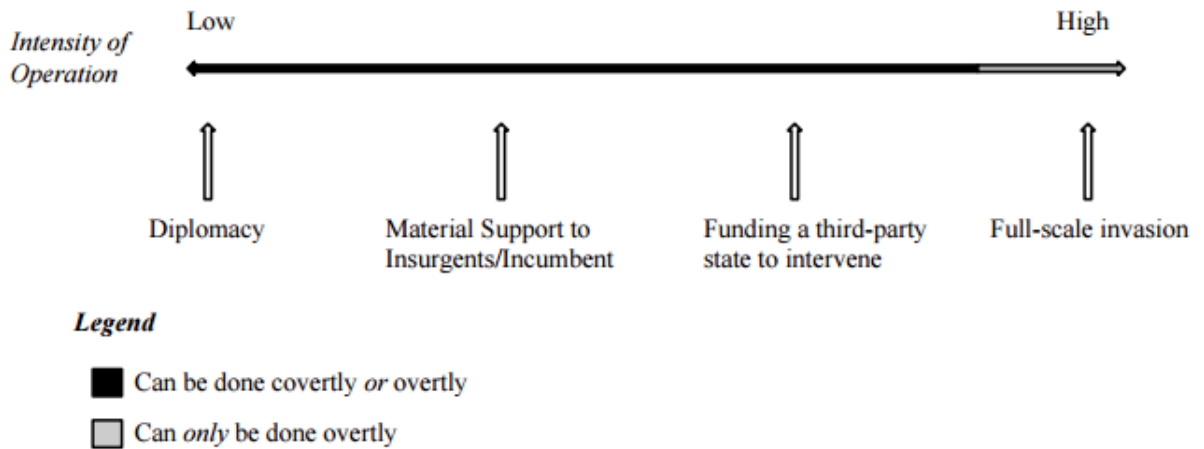
<sup>41</sup>Daugherty (2004, 21); O’Rourke (2013, 5).

<sup>42</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 80)

However, short of full-scale invasions, where there may well be no covert analog, nearly any action that can be undertaken covertly can also be undertaken overtly (Figure 1.1). A great power wishing to provide military aid to an insurgency, for instance, can either claim responsibility for the assistance (overt) or deny it (covert). States may openly or secretly provide monetary support to one or more political parties competing in a democratic election beyond their borders.

What varies in these scenarios is not the material cost of the action but rather the degree of attribution accruing to the sponsor.<sup>43</sup> We should thus be careful not to mistake the ability to conduct a range of actions in secret or in public with the desire to do so. In some cases, leaders will indeed decide that a limited covert operation that hides their hand is preferable to a large-scale military operation that automatically exposes it. I am making a theoretical bet, however, that we ought to treat the decision to disclose an operation as analytically distinct from how intensely leaders choose to intervene since the two do not perfectly covary.

**Figure 1.1.** Continuum of Intervention



<sup>43</sup>This conceptualization is consistent with how the U.S. military conceives of unconventional warfare, which may or may not be carried in such a way that America's role is plausibly deniable.

## 2.3 Overt and Covert Forcible Regime Promotion

With both components of the dependent variable defined, it is now possible to provide complete definitions of overt and covert forcible regime promotion. The definition of overt forcible regime promotion is a slightly modified version of the more general definition provided above: *Any effort by State A to alter or preserve the domestic authority structures of State B by using or threatening lethal force in which the identity of the intervener is publicly acknowledged at the time of the intervention.* The range of behaviors that qualify as overt forcible regime promotion are broad, including ground invasions, naval blockades, and aerial campaigns using one's own military forces. Overt regime promotion also encompasses so-called "outsourcing operations" in which the intervener provides military advisors, logistical support, or matériel to an incumbent combating an insurgency, an insurgency vying for control of the central government, or a third-party involved in either of these two objectives. The unifying theme of these actions is that they are geared towards publicly and forcibly promoting a regime wherein the sponsor intentionally discloses their involvement.

Covert forcible regime promotion refers to *any effort by State A to alter or preserve the domestic authority structures of State B by using or threatening lethal force in which the identity of the sponsor is intentionally hidden.* Like its overt counterpart, the range of actions qualifying as covert forcible regime promotion are broad. They include directly stimulating — or actively working against — coup d'états, revolutions, and uprisings using one's own personnel. More common, however, are covert outsourcing operations, wherein an intervener provides secret assistance such as arms, military hardware, or technical and logistical support to an incumbent regime combating an insurgency, an insurgency taking on an incumbent regime, or a third-party that is itself directly intervening in pursuit of one of these two objectives. It is important to reiterate that short of full-scale invasions, the intensity of an operation is

not the distinguishing feature separating covert and overt regime promotion (see Figure 1.1 above). Rather, the degree of attribution accruing to the intervener — that is, whether the sponsor of an intervention intentionally conceals or discloses their efforts to forcibly promote regimes — is the relevant dimension. Table 1.1 below summarizes the four possible values of the dependent variable.

**Table 1.1.** Four Values of the Dependent Variable

<i>Type of Promotion</i>	<i>Definition</i>
1. Overt Regime Change	Intervention to depose a foreign regime in which the intervener willingly acknowledges sponsorship;
2. Covert Regime Change	Intervention to depose a foreign regime in which the intervener attempts to conceal their role;
3. Overt Regime Rescue	Intervention to rescue a foreign regime in which the intervener willingly acknowledges sponsorship;
4. Covert Regime Rescue	Intervention to rescue a foreign regime in which the intervener attempts to conceal their role;

### 3 Intervention in World Politics

Despite its prominence as an empirical phenomenon, scholars and policymakers alike have few tools with which to understand why leaders opt to conceal their efforts to forcibly promote regimes in some cases but not in others. One obvious place to begin looking for answers is the large literature on intervention in world politics. As we will soon see, however, the majority of theories pertaining to the intervention decisions of states are largely inadequate for explaining the variation of interest here. This section explores some of the most prominent theories of intervention from the international relations and civil wars literature. For ease of presentation, I categorize arguments into one of six categories according to their primary causal logic: (1)

geopolitical competition (2) ideology, (3) economic interests, (4) psychological biases, (5) individual leadership, and (6) norms and reputation. After outlining each family of explanations, I highlight their shortcomings when it comes to explaining patterns of secrecy and openness in the context of forcible regime promotion.

### 3.1 What We Know About Intervention

One of the most robust explanations for great power intervention comes from the well-worn tradition of power politics. The most straightforward version of this argument is that the combination of geopolitical competition between adversaries and basic drives for security generate powerful incentives for intervention. During much of the latter half of the twentieth century, for example, competition between the Soviet Union and the United States incentivized the two superpowers to intervene as a means of limiting the influence of the other and maintaining a favorable balance of power.<sup>44</sup> In a quantitative analysis of U.S. interventions during the Cold War, Yoon finds that intervention by the Soviet Union or one of its allies in a given country acts as a strong predictor of U.S. intervention.<sup>45</sup> Findley and Teo posit that previous interventions by an ally or a rival in a civil war help to determine whether a state will intervene in support of the rebels or the incumbent regime.<sup>46</sup> Modeling the strategic interactions between states contemplating an intervention, Gent argues that “a major power is more likely to join or counter an intervention the farther its preferences are from the intervening power.”<sup>47</sup> Geopolitical competition thus appears to serve as a powerful incentive for states to intervene beyond their borders.

A second set of explanations turns to the role of ideological competition as a motivator of intervention.<sup>48</sup> According to Owen, when the international system is po-

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<sup>44</sup>Morgenthau (1967), Feste (2003, 3), Greentree (2009, 23).

<sup>45</sup>Yoon (1997, 594).

<sup>46</sup>Findley and Teo (2006).

<sup>47</sup>Gent (2007, 1090).

<sup>48</sup>Rosenau (1969, 168), Mullenbach and Matthews (2008, 30).

larized between two or more competing ideologies, the prevalence of forcible regime promotion rises dramatically.<sup>49</sup> States will intervene to prevent the emergence of ideologically hostile regimes and, in many cases, expend precious resources installing ideologically friendly regimes. Owen tests the ideological-competition hypothesis on a wide swathe of historical cases, ranging from the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries to the battle between republicanism and monarchism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and fascism, communism, and liberal democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup>. Alternative variants of the ideology thesis focus on the unique intervention dynamics of democracies.<sup>50</sup> Peceny, for instance, argues that democratic interveners often promote democracy “at the point of bayonets” with the belief that the spread of liberal regimes will enhance their long-term security.<sup>51</sup> In a slightly different vein, Monten contends that the emergence of vindicationism in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century — the belief that the U.S. can and should promote democracy abroad — generated strong incentives for intervention.<sup>52</sup>

A third set of explanations looks to economics as a cause of interstate intervention.<sup>53</sup> Drawing on the commercial variant of liberalism,<sup>54</sup> Aydin argues that economic interests provide powerful incentives for states to undertake intervention in the context of ongoing intrastate disputes. Prospective interveners are more likely to get militarily involved in countries with which they already have high levels of trade, significant financial investments, or preferential trade agreements.<sup>55</sup> Alternative variants on this general premise look to the indirect role that economic interests play in the decision of states to intervene abroad. Fordham holds that, “[t]he United States has

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<sup>49</sup>Owen (2002, 2010).

<sup>50</sup>Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006); Downes and Lilley (2010); Downes and Monten (2013); Forsythe (1992).

<sup>51</sup>Peceny (1999).

<sup>52</sup>Monten (2005).

<sup>53</sup>Kinzer (2006).

<sup>54</sup>Moravcsik (1997).

<sup>55</sup>Aydin (2012, 63-66).

been more likely to extend security guarantees to important trading partners than to less economically significant states.” While many interventions may thus appear to be driven strictly by alliance considerations rather than economics, the role that economic interests play in the production of security guarantees suggests a supporting role for trade and other forms of interdependence in a state’s decision to use force on behalf of its friends and allies.<sup>56</sup>

Psychological explanations constitute a fourth type of explanation. In *Balancing Risks*, Taliaferro sets out to explain why great powers initiate risky interventions in areas of peripheral strategic importance and why they persist in these ventures once it becomes clear that they are failing. The resulting theoretical account, what he terms *balance-of-risk theory*, “holds that great powers ... pursue risky intervention strategies in the periphery to avert perceived losses. The desire to forestall losses in material power, status, or reputation weighs more heavily in the calculations of leaders than the prospect of gains in those commodities.”<sup>57</sup> When states find themselves in a domain of gains, the behavioral predictions are reversed: Decision-makers are less likely to embark on risky interventions in the periphery and more likely to cut their losses and extricate themselves from failing interventions.

In a recent string of publications, Saunders draws attention to the role that individual leaders and their causal beliefs play in shaping a host of decisions pertaining to intervention.<sup>58</sup> Internally-focused leaders, argues Saunders, “see a causal connection between the threatening or aggressive foreign and security policies and the international organization of states.” Conversely, “externally-focused leaders diagnose threats directly from the foreign and security policies of other states regardless of domestic institutions.”<sup>59</sup> These causal beliefs influence intervention decisions in two

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<sup>56</sup>Fordham (2008, 738).

<sup>57</sup>Taliaferro (2004, 14).

<sup>58</sup>Saunders (2011).

<sup>59</sup>Saunders (2011, 5).



major ways. First, they determine the value that leaders place on transforming the domestic institutions of states abroad. Internally-focused leaders are more likely to engage in institutional engineering; externally-focused leaders are less likely to do so. Second, these beliefs affect how leaders allocate scarce national security resources once in office, which in turn affects the likelihood of foreign intervention.

A final set of explanations focus on norms and reputation. According to Finnemore, understanding why states intervene abroad requires that we grapple with the normative context in which these interventions occur. As “state understandings about the purposes to which they can and should use force” evolves, argues Finnemore, so too should patterns of military intervention.<sup>60</sup> In another variant of the norms-based argument, Michael Butler argues that considerations of Just War principles such as right authority and just cause often determined when and where the U.S. intervened abroad. Recent monikers used to describe U.S. military operations such as “Operation Enduring Freedom” are just one manifestation of these dynamics.<sup>61</sup> In a recent dissertation, O’Rourke argues that covert action provides one avenue through which states can behave hypocritically and violate “norms of justified intervention,” thereby lowering potential costs to their reputation.<sup>62</sup> U.S. decision-makers’ concerns about norm violations were particularly salient for interventions conducted in the Western Hemisphere. Only when there was a high probability of success, strong public support, and short time horizons, argues O’Rourke, has the U.S. opted to intervene openly.<sup>63</sup>

### **3.2 The Limits of the Intervention Literature**

While the theories described above contribute to our understanding of intervention in important ways, the vast majority are ill-suited for explaining the variation under

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<sup>60</sup>Finnemore (2003, 3).

<sup>61</sup>Butler (2003).

<sup>62</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 34).

<sup>63</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 87-91).

consideration. The first three sets of theories — geopolitical competition, ideology, and economics — are the least equipped to deal with the sources of secrecy. One need only glance at the historical record to see why. Even if we were to accept that some mixture of ideology and geopolitics motivated the Reagan administration to intervene in both Nicaragua and Grenada in the early 1980s, for example, we would still have to account for why the U.S. role was concealed in the former but not the latter. We can tell a similar story about the covert intervention against Cuba in 1961 and the open occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965. Given that geopolitical, ideological, and economic incentives for intervention can readily be found across cases involving both visible and hidden uses of force, understanding this variation necessitates that we look elsewhere for an explanation.

In their current form, psychological arguments also fall short as an explanation for variation in the visibility of interventions. Balance-of-risk theory's claim that leaders will select the "riskier" intervention option when faced with losses fails to specify which risks, including mission failure, escalation concerns, and so forth are most salient for decision-makers. Without providing *ex ante* expectations of which risks leaders will find most relevant and when, balance-of-risk theory cannot tell us why leaders might choose to intervene secretly in some cases but not in others. The theory is simply indeterminate in this regard. Furthermore, because balance-of-risk theory does not distinguish between the reasons that states initiate interventions from the reasons they persist in them, it is possible that different causal logics are at play at each of the different stages in the decision-making process.

Arguments for intervention that emphasize individual leaders and their causal beliefs are similarly lacking when it comes to explaining the determinants of secret meddling. In a brief nod to covert action, Saunders brackets the issue by arguing that:

A covert operation is usually much less costly, and if it remain secret, involves no audience costs. Even externally focused leaders may be tempted

to use covert operations to meddle in other states' internal affairs because they offer the promise of a quick, relatively low-cost way to effect change. Thus the causal process that governs decisions to intervene covertly is theoretically very different from that governing the decision to intervene overtly.<sup>64</sup>

My primary contention with this statement is the assertion that there is necessarily a different decision-making process governing these two forms of intervention. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, leaders contemplating how to intervene are constantly weighing the risks and benefits of acting openly versus acting in secret. Providing a theoretical framework that can explain how leaders choose between these various options is therefore important if we are to make sense of this variation. Positing that covert and overt action are necessarily governed by very different processes assumes away what we can otherwise be explaining.

The norms and reputation-based arguments come closest to explaining the variation of interest. Nonetheless, each has its own set of limitations. Finnemore hints at an explanation for secrecy by arguing that the “tension between perceived ideological threats (justifying intervention) and self-determination norms (undermining its result) shaped much of the intervention behavior of the superpowers and other intervening states during the cold war”; the result was many covert operations.<sup>65</sup> What this argument cannot explain, however, is why states like the U.S. often violated norms of self-determination in very public ways, a reasonably frequent occurrence throughout the Cold War and beyond. Butler’s argument faces the opposite problem: The U.S. frequently violated Just War principles, albeit in secret.

Finally, O’Rourke’s argument that states like the U.S. violated liberal norms — e.g. supporting brutal autocrats, toppling elected regimes — in secret as means of reducing the reputational costs is plausible.<sup>66</sup> What is unclear from the argument in

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<sup>64</sup>Saunders (2011, 22).

<sup>65</sup>Finnemore (2003, 128).

<sup>66</sup>O’Rourke (2013).

its current form, however, is what reputation the U.S. was trying to cultivate and why the prospect of incurring reputational costs mattered.<sup>67</sup> At various points, O'Rourke invokes reputation to represent something other than a concern for norms, including a reputation for power and the credibility of commitments.<sup>68</sup> This is not to say that states cannot worry about multiple reputations simultaneously. To the contrary, the point is that we must be careful to identify the specific reputation states care most about when intervening secretly and why. The theory I develop in the next chapter resolves this ambiguity by highlighting the distinct reputational concerns across the two primary forms of regime promotion — change and rescue — and specifying the various reasons why these reputations matter to great powers in the first place.

## 4 Overview of the Argument

As noted at the outset, the first step in constructing a theory of secrecy is identifying the reasons why leaders might be tempted to hide some action in the first place. The existing literature contains some important leads in this regard. Leaders who fear that overt action might trigger an escalatory spiral with a powerful adversary<sup>69</sup> or invite domestic-political costs<sup>70</sup> may find covert action enticing. While each of these considerations undoubtedly render secrecy attractive in a range of cases, I argue that the precise nature of the subject matter we are dealing with — interventions to overthrow or rescue regimes by way of force — introduce unique reputational concerns not captured by existing accounts.

Consider interventions to overthrow regimes. At least since 1945, intervening to forcibly depose a regime conflicts directly with the widely-accepted and formally-codified non-intervention principle. Because of this, states conducting regime change

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<sup>67</sup>See [Huth \(1997, 75\)](#).

<sup>68</sup>[O'Rourke \(2013, 49\)](#).

<sup>69</sup>[Carson \(2016\)](#).

<sup>70</sup>[O'Rourke \(2013\)](#); [Russett \(1993\)](#); [Poznansky \(2015\)](#).

in the postwar era run the risk of acquiring what I will call a *reputation for rule-breaking*. For states that care, such as great powers with a vested interest in the perpetuation of the extant international order, the desire to avoid acquiring such a reputation should generate powerful incentives for secrecy.

Unlike regime change, regime rescue enjoys a comfortable relationship with the non-intervention principle. Under international law, sovereign regimes can legally invite external powers in, rendering reputations for rule-breaking much less relevant. Nonetheless, intervening to prop up clients and allies still constitutes interference in the process of self-determination. As such, rescuing regimes with force, particularly in the context of an ongoing civil war, may impose what I will call a *reputation for clientism* on the target. Being seen as the lackey of a great-power patron can undermine a regime's internal legitimacy, making it harder for them to remain in power once an intervener has withdrawn her forces. The desire to avoid imposing reputations for clientism on target states in order to preserve their appearance of autonomy should also generate powerful incentives for secrecy.

Though important, identifying the conditions under which leaders may want to intervene secretly is only part of the story. The primary downside of covert operations is that they are more likely than overt missions to fail.<sup>71</sup> The result is that leaders are often forced to make a painful trade-off. By intervening covertly, leaders may avoid acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking or imposing reputations for clientism on target regimes but they are also decreasing the chances that a mission will succeed. Of course, leaders can dramatically increase the chances of successfully deposing a hostile regime or saving a friendly one by intervening overtly. In so doing, however, they are exposing themselves to the many risks associated with acting publicly. The core question for any theory of secrecy worth its salt, then, is this: What are the conditions under which leaders will privilege deniability over effectiveness and vice

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<sup>71</sup>(O'Rourke 2013, 5).

versa when intervening abroad?

In brief, I argue that whether leaders worry more about the risks of failure or the risks from overt action in any given scenario depends heavily on whether the purpose of an intervention is to prevent a loss or to secure a new gain. The argument that people respond different to losses than they do to gains comes out of the large literature on loss aversion. One of the most significant implications of loss aversion for our purposes is that people exhibit risk-acceptant behavior when pursuing goals that we would categorize as loss-avoiding and risk-averse behavior when pursuing gains-seeking goals. The reason in its simplest form is that losing hurts more than gaining gratifies. These expectations, which enjoy strong theoretical and empirical foundations, promise to shed new light on our understanding of how leaders weigh the various risks and rewards of covert and overt action.

Applying loss aversion's core insights to decision-making in the covert sphere yields the following predictions. When attempting to prevent the loss of a friendly client or ally, leaders will be more sensitive to the risks of failure than they will be to the risks from overt action. Unless there exists a covert option that is expected to work, leaders should intervene overtly and pay whatever costs they have to in an effort to raise the chances of mission success. The logic is reversed when leaders are seeking to make gains by replacing a hostile regime with a friendly one. Here, leaders should be more sensitive to the risks from overt action than to the risks of failed action. The result is that leaders may prove willing to go covert even when the chances of failure are high if it means avoiding the risks from overt action. Finally, I expect risk tolerance to be least relevant when the risks from overt action are low. When the threat of escalation, incurring domestic-political costs, and acquiring a negative reputation are low or non-existent, leaders are likely to capitalize on the ability to intervene openly at low cost.

## 5 What's So Special About Secrecy?

Although secrecy plays an important role in most facets of world politics, it has only recently begun to garner significant attention by students of international relations. This is especially true of the scholarship on intervention. As one scholar has noted,<sup>72</sup> there exists a significant disconnect in the extant literature, which tends to focus overwhelmingly on large-scale, overt episodes of interstate intervention,<sup>73</sup> and the historical record, which is replete with numerous instances of leaders using lethal covert action and other forms of secrecy to meddle in the affairs of countries beyond their borders. The result of this neglect is a widespread publicity bias in favor of very visible state actions. Understanding the role that secrecy plays in the context of military interventions and international politics more broadly, however, is important for a variety of different reasons. Below, I take up a handful of what I believe to be the most essential among them.

One reason why scholars must take secrecy seriously, particularly those interested in intervention, turns on its implications for conventional explanations of foreign meddling. While most theories of intervention are well-equipped to explain the *willingness* of states to use force beyond their borders, or the “why” of intervention, they are often lacking when it comes to explaining variation in the *modalities* of intervention, or the “how.”<sup>74</sup> As I argued earlier, even if we hold constant some of the most prominent causes of intervention, including ideological competition, geopolitical threat, and economic interests, there is still significant variation in how visibly leaders choose to wield force abroad. By placing covert operations and other forms of secrecy front and center, this dissertation seeks to “enhance our understanding of institutional promotion” by developing a novel theoretical framework with which to make sense of this

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<sup>72</sup>O’Rourke (2013).

<sup>73</sup>Aydin (2012); Feste (2003); Finnemore (2003); Owen (2010); Regan (2000); Saunders (2011); Sullivan and Koch (2009).

<sup>74</sup>Saunders (2011, 25).

oft-neglected aspect of interstate intervention.<sup>75</sup>

A second reason to care about secrecy has to do with the issue of constraints. As already alluded to, covert operations place significant restrictions on a leader's ability to match the intensity of an intervention to the difficulty of the mission. One can only provide so many arms and train so many operators before it becomes impossible to deny sponsorship of an operation. Relatedly, because covert action relies heavily on the assistance of local allies and other indigenous forces, interveners must cede direct control over key aspects of an operation.<sup>76</sup> Many, if not all, of these constraints are rendered inoperable when acting in the open. An overt intervention that begins at a low level of intensity, for instance, can be ratcheted up as needed. The ceiling on escalation is determined by capabilities and resolve rather than concerns for plausible deniability. Acting overtly also enables interveners to utilize their own military assets, markedly increasing decision-makers' control over the fate of an operation. Identifying the conditions under which leaders will exploit covert action, especially given its operational constraints, should tell us something important about how leaders balance their desire to achieve particular policy goals against the costs that might be involved in order to ensure success.

When the consequences of mission failure in a given case are fairly benign, opting for a covert operation that has a lower chance of success given the aforementioned constraints rather than a more efficient and effective overt operation may not be all that worrying. When the stakes are high, however, the consequences of intervening covertly and risking failure can be much more dire. One of the most dangerous events on the historical record — the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 — was facilitated in no small part by the failure of the Kennedy administration to forcibly depose Fidel Castro just one year earlier.<sup>77</sup> Although the Bay of Pigs operation was by no

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<sup>75</sup>Owen (2002, 406).

<sup>76</sup>Daugherty (2004, 13); Treverton (1987, 118).

<sup>77</sup>Paterson (1994, 260).



means the sole contributing factor to the Cuban Missile Crisis, it undoubtedly made such an event more likely by driving Castro closer into the arms of the Soviet Union and increasing his desire to obtain a credible deterrent against future attacks from his northern neighbor. Assuming that the “do nothing” option vis-à-vis Cuba was off the table in 1960-1961, it is critically important that we understand why the U.S. opted to act in secret rather than pursuing a more public intervention strategy which arguably would have had a much greater chance of successfully removing Castro.<sup>78</sup>

The issue of accountability constitutes another reason for studying secrecy in international politics. We know from the existing literature that interventions of all stripes often entail negative consequences for the targets. Intervention has been shown to reduce the prospects for democracy, wreak large-scale destruction on entire populations, and more.<sup>79</sup> Because covert action enables leaders to pursue policies they might otherwise be reluctant to pursue in public, however, the consequences of secret operations may be particularly egregious for target states. America’s record of covert operations during the Cold War lends some ready examples. The ouster of Mossadegh, Iran’s first democratically elected leader, ushered in twenty seven more years of dictatorial rule by the Pahlavi Dynasty. The overthrow of Árbenz in Guatemala sparked a decades-long civil war that claimed the lives of tens of thousands. Intervention against Allende in Chile brought Augusto Pinochet to power, where he would rule through terror and repression for the next seventeen years.

Drawing attention to the negative consequences of a select number of covert operations does not mean that overt action is somehow a panacea. America’s recent troubles in Afghanistan and Iraq illustrate the risks of very overt, and very lengthy, operations.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, the shadowy nature of covert operations renders interven-

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<sup>78</sup>Grappling with whether the “no intervention” option would have been more prudent is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, the framework developed here seeks to understand how and why leaders intervene as they do given that the decision to intervene has already been made.

<sup>79</sup>Berger, Corvalan, Easterly and Satyanath (2013, 23).

<sup>80</sup>Biddle, Friedman and Long (2012); Edelstein (2004).

ers less accountable and thus less responsible for the well-being of target states in the aftermath of an intervention. In short, covert action may grant interveners an exemption from what some high-level officials have aptly called the “Pottery Barn rule: You break it, you own it.”<sup>81</sup>

A fourth reason to worry about secrecy is methodological in nature. The fact that covert operations constitute such a large share of the total number of interventions on the historical record means that scholarly analysis cannot afford to ignore them. Owen, for example, identifies roughly fourteen cases in which the U.S. installed or propped up regimes by way of overt force since the end of World War II.<sup>82</sup> In stark contrast, Berger et al. find that during the Cold War alone, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) successfully installed and/or supported 51 leaders.<sup>83</sup> O’Rourke identifies 63 cases in which the U.S. attempted to change foreign regimes using some variant of covert action.<sup>84</sup> By restricting our focus to the cases we can “see,” scholars only capture a small slice of the total universe of interventions. Explicitly accounting for the selection process into a covert or an overt intervention more faithfully captures the data generating process underlying interventions in world politics.<sup>85</sup>

The study of covert action also has significant ethical implications, particularly for democracies. First and foremost, the fact that covert operations rely on secrecy and deception runs counter in many ways to democratic norms of transparency and accountability.<sup>86</sup> This is particularly relevant for the world’s premier exporter of covert operations: The United States. Despite numerous restrictions placed on the use of covert operations over the years, American presidents still enjoy significant leeway when conducting operations beyond public scrutiny. The very availability of a “quiet

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<sup>81</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 81); Woodward (2004, 150).

<sup>82</sup>Owen (2010).

<sup>83</sup>Berger, Easterly, Nunn and Satyanath (2013, 868).

<sup>84</sup>O’Rourke (2013).

<sup>85</sup>King (1998).

<sup>86</sup>Beitz (1989, 57-58), Colaresi (2014); Rovner (2011); Zegart (2011).

option” may also enable decision-makers to ignore, or at least downplay, diplomatic solutions to crises, especially when the use of overt force is deemed infeasible.<sup>87</sup> As Charles Beitz puts it, the “low-risk, quick-fix aspect of covert action almost certainly encourages decision makers to commit national power more widely than they would otherwise find it advisable to do.”<sup>88</sup> Although the purpose of this dissertation is not to adjudicate the ethical implications of covert conduct directly, my hope is to provide practitioners with a much clearer sense of the stakes involved in opting for secrecy by laying bare the implications of such a decision. In the conclusion, I will say a bit more about the ethical and moral implications of secrecy in world politics.

## 5.1 The Stakes for Theory and Practice

The previous section described the importance of understanding secrecy as a tool of statecraft for its own sake. Both the theoretical account developed in Chapter 2 and the various empirical investigations that succeed it, however, also have significant implications for the scholarly and policymaking communities. Most immediately, my project contributes to the growing literature on secrecy in international relations. As already noted, scholars have begun the important work of exploring the dynamics of secrecy and deception in a wide range of contexts, including military basing agreements,<sup>89</sup> intelligence policy,<sup>90</sup> crisis bargaining,<sup>91</sup> limited wars,<sup>92</sup> and foreign imposed regime change.<sup>93</sup>

My project builds on these debates in a variety of ways. First, I show that states sometimes have strong incentives to exploit secrecy even when concerns about esca-

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<sup>87</sup>Beitz (1989, 52).

<sup>88</sup>Beitz (1989, 53).

<sup>89</sup>Brown and Marcum (2011); Brown (2014a).

<sup>90</sup>Rovner (2011); Zegart (2011).

<sup>91</sup>Baum (2004); Tarar and Leventoglu (2009); Yarhi-Milo (2013).

<sup>92</sup>Carson (2016); Downes and Lilley (2010); Poznansky (2015).

<sup>93</sup>O’Rourke (2013).

lation management are low.<sup>94</sup> Covert interventions in one's own sphere of influence is a prime example of this. Second, while I find that reputational concerns do indeed provide a potent motivation for secrecy across many cases as some have previously argued,<sup>95</sup> the reputation at stake varies according to the objective being pursued.<sup>96</sup> When deposing regimes, preserving a reputation for rule-following is most influential. Preventing targets from acquiring reputations for clientism dominates regime-rescuing operations. Third, by breaking the two variants of regime promotion down into promote and preventive policy goals, we gain a better understanding of when leaders are most likely to opt for secrecy based on their attitudes toward risk.

For students of international politics steeped in the tradition of power politics, my argument challenges the conventional wisdom that great powers are free to do as they please with weaker states whenever it suits their interests.<sup>97</sup> The popular dictum that the logic of consequences always trumps the logic of appropriateness fails to capture important nuances in state behavior.<sup>98</sup> For example, whenever leaders interested in changing regimes were unable to locate or invent a credible fig leaf for intervention that could lower the costs from overt action, they were willing to rely on covert operations known to have a higher likelihood of failure. While norms and rules may not prevent great powers from pursuing their interests *writ large*, they do have a significant impact on how they pursue them. In the realm of regime rescue, I demonstrate that great powers are often reticent to come to the aid of clients at the first sign of trouble simply because they have the material capacity to do so. Patrons must remain attentive to the fact that their assistance can undermine an incumbent regime's hold on power, creating an image that they are a foreign lackey. While interveners are willing to risk more to save friendly regimes than they are to depose hostile ones, the

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<sup>94</sup>Carson (2013).

<sup>95</sup>O'Rourke (2013).

<sup>96</sup>Huth (1997).

<sup>97</sup>Copeland (2000); Mearsheimer (2001); Waltz (1979).

<sup>98</sup>Krasner (1999, 6).

optics of regime rescue have largely been neglected in the literature.

For scholars interested in international order, my dissertation spotlights the influential role that rules and norms have on state behavior.<sup>99</sup> Consistent with the literature on liberal internationalism, I find that great powers such as the U.S. do indeed strategically restrain themselves in important ways, especially when undertaking regime change operations.<sup>100</sup> As I argue more fully below, however, this restraint does not extend to the covert sphere where leaders are more likely to break rules. Sensitivity to public rule violations is also not confined to “liberal doves.” Even leaders known for their *realpolitik* notions of international politics behaved similarly.<sup>101</sup> Internalization of liberal norms and rule-following is thus not a necessary condition for these constraints to operate.<sup>102</sup> The result is a mixed bag for liberal internationalists. On the one hand, international rules and norms appear to matter insofar as the great powers that promote them work hard to avoid violating them publicly. On the other hand, the pull of the national interest sometimes drives great power rule-makers underground, conducting operations beyond the purview of third-party audiences. International society is held together by both restraint *and* hypocrisy.<sup>103</sup>

This dissertation should also be of obvious interest to students of intervention in world politics. My research joins a small but growing literature focusing on the “how” of intervention,<sup>104</sup> explaining the conduct of forcible regime promotion rather than simply its causes<sup>105</sup> or its consequences.<sup>106</sup> Most striking, however, is the fact that the existing literature on intervention conduct has little to say about a state’s decision to conceal or disclose their role in intervention. The limited literature that does exist on

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<sup>99</sup>Bull (1977).

<sup>100</sup>Ikenberry (2001, 2011).

<sup>101</sup>Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger come to mind as examples of leaders who espoused a commitment to *realpolitik* while working diligently to conceal rule violations.

<sup>102</sup>Thanks to Dale Copeland for pointing this out.

<sup>103</sup>Bull (1977); Elster (1989).

<sup>104</sup>O’Rourke (2013); Regan (2000); Saunders (2011); Yoon (1997).

<sup>105</sup>e.g. Owen (2010).

<sup>106</sup>e.g. Downes and Monten (2013).

the causes of covert action in this regard focuses strictly on regime change, thereby ignoring the other half of forcible regime promotion, interventions intended to rescue regimes.<sup>107</sup> My project fills this void by devising a theoretical framework that helps to account for both faces of the forcible regime promotion coin. To my knowledge, then, this dissertation is the first study to examine the dynamics of secrecy in the context of both regime change and regime rescue.

By incorporating insights from political psychology and behavioral decision theory, my theoretical framework also provides unique insights into the microfoundations that shape foreign policy decisions in the covert sphere. Rather than relying strictly on macro-level variables, my project builds on a large literature that investigates how individual leaders think and act on the basis of cognitive processes.<sup>108</sup> I attempt to avoid some of the major pitfalls associated with frameworks like prospect theory, however, by focusing less on how different leaders might frame the same problem in hard-to-measure ways,<sup>109</sup> looking instead to the nature of the actual policy being pursued, specifically, whether it is promotive or preventive. This conceptual move has enabled scholars to more readily incorporate robust findings from highly-controlled experimental environments into observational settings.<sup>110</sup>

## 6 The Road Ahead

The remainder of this dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 constitutes the theoretical core of my project. The argument unfolds in two main parts. Part I identifies the major drivers of secrecy in world politics. After briefly outlining some of the most popular explanations, I turn to the role that reputation plays in tempting leaders to seek out secrecy. It is here where I develop the concept of reputations for

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<sup>107</sup>O'Rourke (2013).

<sup>108</sup>e.g. Jervis (1992); Levy (1992); McDermott, Fowler and Smirnov (2008); Saunders (2011).

<sup>109</sup>Levy (1992, 1997).

<sup>110</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013).

rule-breaking and clientism in the context of regime change and rescue, respectively. Part I concludes by spotlighting the trade-off leaders are often forced to make in the covert sphere between deniability and effectiveness. In Part II, I draw on the insights from the literature on loss aversion to make sense of how leaders grapple with this thorny trade-off. I argue that leaders will be more sensitive to the risks of failure than the risks from overt action when rescuing regimes and vice versa when changing regimes. The result is a greater tendency to reach for covert action to depose hostile governments and a greater willingness to go overt to save friendly ones. I conclude the chapter by discussing a handful of potential objections to my argument, devising alternative explanations, and discussing my research design.

Chapter 3 is the first of two case study chapters exploring U.S.-sponsored regime promotion during the Cold War. In this chapter, I compare Eisenhower and Kennedy's efforts to covertly depose Fidel Castro in Cuba in 1960–1961 to Reagan's overt invasion of Grenada in 1983. In the lead up to the Bay of Pigs fiasco, decision-makers worried greatly that openly intervening to depose Castro would threaten America's reputation as a rule-follower. Thus, notwithstanding an intense desire to see Castro go by the wayside, the United States settled on a covert action plan that, at least relative to any of the relevant overt options, was much more likely to fail. Conversely, the availability of fig leaves for overt action in Grenada greatly reduced the Reagan administration's concerns about reputations for rule-breaking. The result was a very visible intervention to depose a regime deemed geopolitically and ideologically threatening to U.S. interests.

Chapter 4 turns away from regime change and toward regime rescue, comparing Nixon's decision to secretly outsource intervention to Israel during the Jordanian Civil War in 1970 to Eisenhower's decision to openly invade Lebanon in 1958 under the aegis of the Eisenhower Doctrine. In both cases, there were deep-seated concerns that acts of overt regime rescue would undermine the legitimacy of the supported regime

by rendering them lackeys of the West and damage America's image as an anti-colonial power. That the United States enjoyed a feasible quiet option in the form of an Israeli-led, but American-supported, operation in 1970 meant that the Nixon administration could save King Hussein while avoiding reputational costs to patron and client alike. The absence of a feasible quiet option in Lebanon drove the Eisenhower administration to openly deploy forces to rescue Camille Chamoun notwithstanding the significant reputational risks involved. Taken together, these cases provide significant insight into the key drivers of secrecy in world politics for one of the world's premier exporters of covert operations over the last seventy years.

Chapter 5 moves beyond U.S. interventions, focusing on Soviet-sponsored regime promotion during the Cold War. I begin by outlining the two pillars of the Soviet-led international order — self-determination/anti-imperialism and the proliferation of communism — describing how these tenets combined to shape Soviet decision-makers' intervention behavior during the Cold War. I then rely on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 to understand the various decisions made in the lead up to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan over the course of 1979. After attempting to resolve a simmering civil conflict with a limited covert commitment in the spring and summer, Soviet leaders eventually decided to deploy tens of thousands of troops in December. Concerns about what an open intervention might do to the legitimacy of the pro-Soviet Afghan regime and the Soviets' image as the champion of the Third World were constant across both periods. What changed from the first period to the second was the magnitude of threat facing the communist regime. The inability to resolve the crisis using covert action interacted with leaders' tendencies toward risk-acceptance to produce a risky overt occupation. Although archival materials are harder to come by than in the U.S. cases, available evidence strongly supports my theoretical claims.

The first part of Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, briefly summarizes the main



theoretical and empirical takeaways of my dissertation. After summarizing the key points, I turn to a (re)examination of some of the major implications of my study for both the scholarly community as well as policymakers. In this spirit, I also investigate what my argument has to say about decisions pertaining to intervention in the modern era. This is particularly important given the advent of new rules and norms governing intervention behavior, including the responsibility to protect doctrine and the Bush administration's attempts to redefine the meaning of preemptive war. The chapter concludes by identifying a number of exciting areas for future research in the secrecy domain, including the renaissance in novel covert technologies and the dynamics of deniability in areas not involving the use of force.

## Chapter 2

# The Logic of Secrecy and Intervention

In this chapter I set out to explain why leaders sometimes turn to covert action and other forms of secrecy when forcibly promoting regimes abroad. The first step in answering this question is to identify the major drivers of secrecy. That is, what incentives do leaders have to conceal their sponsorship of a regime-promoting intervention? The small but growing literature on covert action provides some clues, ranging from fears of escalation with powerful rivals to domestic-political considerations. While these concerns undoubtedly generate potent incentives for secrecy, interventions to depose or save regimes often entail unique reputational costs, both for the state doing the intervening and for the target regime. One of the primary contributions of this dissertation is to showcase the powerful role that reputational considerations play in determining why leaders might find deniability attractive.

Identifying the drivers of secrecy is the first step in understanding when leaders will actually authorize covert missions. The issue is that wielding force secretly is not wholly without costs. One of the primary downside of covert operations, particularly

in the realm of regime promotion, is that they are more likely to fail than overt operations.<sup>1</sup> This is true in at least two respects. First, in order to successfully hide their hand, interveners are forced to make decisions that can limit the efficacy of an operation, including a greater reliance on local actors, concealing transport routes of materiel, and so on. Second, plausible deniability — the *sine qua non* of covert action — imposes a ceiling on how far interveners can go before exposing their involvement. Neither limitation applies to interventions conducted openly.

As a result of these limitations, leaders interested in forcibly promoting regimes must make a hard choice. They can go covert and potentially avoid the risks from overt action but increase the chances of failure or they can go overt, thereby increasing the chances of a successful mission while exposing themselves to the various risks associated with wielding force openly. A straightforward cost-benefit model would likely predict that leaders simply choose the option that maximizes their expected utility: When the costs of failure outweigh the costs from overt action, leaders will go public; otherwise, they will go covert.

My approach is different. I argue that how leaders balance the risks and rewards of covert and overt action depends to a large extent on whether the objective of an intervention is to prevent losses, as in regime rescue, or to secure new gains, as in regime change. The claim that leaders respond differently to gains than they do to losses comes out of the large literature on loss aversion. In its simplest form, loss aversion refers to the idea that “a loss of \$X is more aversive than a gain of \$X is attractive”<sup>2</sup> or, to borrow a popular saying, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

If we treat target regimes as assets to be acquired or protected, loss aversion can tell us quite a lot about whether leaders are likely to be deterred from going overt

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<sup>1</sup>Treverton (1987, 11).

<sup>2</sup>Kahneman and Tversky (1984).

when the incentives for secrecy are high and when they might be undeterred from doing so. Because leaders interested in rescuing regimes are attempting to protect current assets in the form of friendly clients and allies, the risks of failure — which means losing the asset — looms larger than the risks from overt action, conceived of here as the costs a leader would have to pay in order to ensure a policy success. Conversely, leaders interested in regime change are attempting to gain a new asset by deposing a hostile regime and installing a friendly one in its place. The result is that leaders are likely to worry less about the risks of failure — which means failing to acquire the asset — and much more about the risks from overt action.

Taken together, these various pieces yield new and important insights into the dynamics of covert action. The first part of the discussion tells us when leaders will *want* secrecy the most. The second part, informed by loss aversion, tells us when leaders will heed the incentives for secrecy even when doing so increases the odds of failure and when they will hold their nose and accept the risks from overt action in order to ensure mission success. When the risks from overt action are high and the goal is regime change, leaders are much more likely to go covert even when doing so raises the risks of failure. When the risks from overt action are high and the goal is regime rescue, leaders will tolerate secrecy only if there exists a feasible quiet option. Otherwise, they are willing to go overt should it prove necessary to the success of the mission. When the risks from overt action are low, leader behavior for both variants of regime promotion converges. Whether the goal is to save a regime or to depose one, leaders able to deploy forces overtly at relatively low risk will likely jump at the opportunity. Doing so greatly increases the chances of mission success.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. The next section walks through the major drivers of secrecy, including those found in the existing literature as well as some novel reputational drivers unique to forcible regime promotion. I round out this part of the discussion by drawing attention to the key trade off leaders often face

in the covert sphere between efficacy and deniability. The subsequent section draws on the logic of loss aversion to generate novel hypotheses about the conditions under which leaders will privilege one set of concerns over another. The chapter concludes by discussing some potential objections to my theoretical framework and outlining the research design used to test my hypotheses.

## **1 Part I: Identifying the Drivers of Secrecy**

The first step toward developing a coherent theory of secrecy is to specify the conditions under which leaders will find deniability most appealing. Intuitively, we might expect that the incentives for deniability are strongest when the risks from overt action are high. Even this basic insight, however, tells us little about the range of possible risks from overt action and how secrecy might reduce these risks. Fortunately, the literature on secrecy and covert action in international relations provides some useful insights. Though useful as a first cut, the nature of the subject matter we are dealing with — forcibly propping up and overthrowing regimes — introduces a unique set of risks not adequately captured by existing accounts. Interventions to change or rescue a regime pose significant reputational risks to the intervening state, to the target regime, or both. As I hope will become clear throughout the empirical chapters, these reputational concerns generate potent incentives for secrecy much more often than fears of escalation or domestic-political costs.

One of the major strengths of the loss aversion framework developed in Part II is that it can accommodate almost any of the major drivers of secrecy. Key to this part of the argument is simply that a leader's willingness to incur the risks from overt action, whatever those risks might be, are greatest for regime rescue and lowest for regime change. Yet, ignoring the distinct reputational costs associated with publicly promoting regimes by way of force is to overlook some of the most salient drivers

of secrecy in the realm of forcible regime promotion. Because this set of risks have been under-explored, I will spend the vast majority of this section working through the different kinds of reputational concerns associated with the two main variants of regime promotion. In the interest of completeness, however, I will begin by articulating some of the most prominent drivers of secrecy found in the existing literature.

## 1.1 Escalation and Domestic Politics

Identifying the drivers of secrecy — the first of my two main independent variables — requires that we get our arms around the plausible set of conditions under which overt intervention might be deemed risky. Having specified these conditions, we can better understand why covert operations, which ideally decouple the intervener from the controversial action, can help to reduce these risks in different ways. The existing literature focuses primarily on two major sources of risk when it comes to overt operations: Escalation and domestic politics. Let us take each of these in turn.

There are myriad reasons why overtly intervening to topple foreign regimes or to prop them up might lead to escalation. Publicly meddling in the internal affairs of states located on the doorstep of an adversary is a prime example.<sup>3</sup> NSC-68, the famous directive outlining America’s strategy of containment during the Cold War, recognized as much: “Proposed operations directed at the satellites [of the Soviet Union] must consequently be measured against the kind and degree of retaliation which they are likely to provoke from the Kremlin.”<sup>4</sup> Overt interventions against an adversary’s allies and trading partners, or rescue operations in geopolitically contested regions, are also plausible candidates for escalation. Secrecy should be particularly alluring in these scenarios as a means of pursuing controversial objectives without provoking retaliation from powerful rivals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Brown (2014a, 411-412); O’Rourke (2013, 54-55).

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in O’Rourke (2013, 106).

<sup>5</sup>Anderson (1998); Brown (2014a, 411-412); O’Rourke (2013, 78-79).

The foregoing implicitly presumes that covert action reduces the prospects for escalation by deceiving rivals into thinking someone else, such as local or regional actors, has undertaken a controversial action. In a recent article, Carson shows that covert action can also help to put the lid on escalation even when rivals have knowledge of secret meddling. The primary reason is that covert operations create a so-called *back stage* where adversaries can privately jockey for influence without publicly violating the roles of limited war, which “requires each side to avoid exploiting the other side’s restraint to achieve decisive victory that substantially alters the status quo.”<sup>6</sup> By acting covertly on the back stage, interveners can reduce domestic and allied pressures on an adversary to counter-intervene, creating an opportunity for them to refrain from responding without losing face.<sup>7</sup> In sum, secrecy’s potential to reduce escalation by successfully deceiving powerful rivals or at least enabling them to exercise restraint while saving face often renders covert action attractive.

Fear of escalation is just one possible driver of secrecy. Domestic politics is another. While the domestic-level drivers of secrecy are many and varied, we can group them into the two most likely sources: Those stemming from the public and those stemming from institutions. To begin, overt action may upset domestic constituencies for a variety of reasons, generating powerful incentives for secrecy.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars argue that publics tend to be both casualty and defeat phobic.<sup>9</sup> Should leaders prove unable to credibly deflect blame onto an adversary, especially when conflict is expected to require lots of blood and treasure,<sup>10</sup> the quiet option may be the only option. Whether or not covert action would actually work in such scenarios is an important, but analytically separate, question. The key takeaway is simply that leaders may find secrecy

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<sup>6</sup>Carson (2016, 113).

<sup>7</sup>Carson also notes that covert operations generate uncertainty about the intervening state’s commitment to the target, reducing the importance that third-party observers attach to the outcome and, in turn, lowering the stakes of failure for the intervener.

<sup>8</sup>Baum (2004); Kurizaki (2007); Yarhi-Milo (2013).

<sup>9</sup>Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler (2006); Schuessler (2010).

<sup>10</sup>Schuessler (2010).

rather tempting in such a scenario.

Domestic-level constraints on overt action stemming from the public extend beyond phobias of high casualties and defeat. Whenever leaders wish to engage in unsavory activities like supporting brutal autocrats or assassinating foreign leaders, they may choose to do so covertly as a means of avoiding punishment at the polls from audiences who find such actions distasteful. Democratic interveners intent on toppling other democracies may also turn to covert action. Because liberal publics can use the free press, public rallies, and other outlets to “agitate against war with fellow liberal democracies,”<sup>11</sup> leaders of democratic regimes may find their ability to undertake overt action hard, if not entirely impossible. These leaders might also find it impossible to convince their publics that another democracy represents an existential threat to their own security.<sup>12</sup> Faced with these constraints, leaders may view covert action as the only plausible means by which to intervene against other democracies.<sup>13</sup>

The second major source of domestic-level constraints on the use of overt action are institutional in nature. At least in the United States, covert operations are, *ceteris paribus*, easier to undertake than overt military force. This was especially true from the time the CIA was created in 1947 through the mid- to late-1970s before more serious rules and restrictions on the use of covert action were introduced.<sup>14</sup> However, even after the passage of the Hughes-Ryan Amendment in 1974, requiring presidents to issue “Findings” before authorizing secret missions, or the many reforms to come out of the Church Committee, executives still enjoyed significant leeway in authorizing secret operations free from Congressional constraints.<sup>15</sup> Presidents wishing to intervene without building large pro-war coalitions or securing Congressional approval may thus view secrecy as an attractive alternative.

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<sup>11</sup>Owen (1994, 100-101).

<sup>12</sup>Hayes (2013).

<sup>13</sup>Downes and Lilley (2010); Forsythe (1992); Poznansky (2015).

<sup>14</sup>Daugherty (2004, 98).

<sup>15</sup>Lester (2015, 126).



## 1.2 Reputation and Regime Promotion

The main thrust of this section is that the unique nature of the subject matter we are dealing with—interventions to overthrow or prop up regimes—introduces a range of reputational considerations not adequately captured by a strict focus on escalation and domestic politics, the two most common drivers of secrecy found in the literature. I am certainly not the first to draw attention to the importance of concerns over reputation in a leader’s decision to authorize secret operations.<sup>16</sup> In a recent dissertation, O’Rourke outlines the influential relationship between a leader’s decision for secrecy and their concern for reputation:

“States incur reputational costs when they act against their preexisting commitments. They can do this by violating norms of justified intervention, by breaking their treaty commitments or by failing to back up their coercive threats. However, covert conduct allows states to avoid audience costs. In short, it lets states act hypocritically. They can uphold one position publicly, while private undermining it.”<sup>17</sup>

Turning specifically to the United States, O’Rourke argues that a number of America’s preexisting normative commitments rendered “operations to overthrow a fellow democracy, to rig elections, or to install autocratic leaders” particularly risky.

My goal here is to expand our understanding of the role that reputation plays in decisions for secrecy and publicity. As Paul Huth cautioned over twenty years ago, “analysts employing the concept of reputation should be explicit in specifying what behaviors and actions a reputation refers to.”<sup>18</sup> This is a crucial point and one that is far too often overlooked. Reputations can either be good or bad and may refer to a wide range of disparate behaviors and actions. States can gain reputations for being resolved or irresolute,<sup>19</sup> honest or dishonest,<sup>20</sup> and trustworthy or untrustworthy

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<sup>16</sup>Farrell and Finnemore (2013).

<sup>17</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 81-82).

<sup>18</sup>Huth (1997, 77).

<sup>19</sup>Schelling (1966); Sechser (2016).

<sup>20</sup>Sartori (2005).

debtors<sup>21</sup> to name just a few examples.

In the context of our current discussion, we would expect the incentives for secrecy to be strongest in cases in which overt action would impose a negative reputation on the intervener, the target regime, or both. I am making a theoretical bet, however, that the precise reputation leaders worry most about when forcibly promoting regimes varies in interesting ways based on the objective. When engaging in regime change, leaders worry most about acquiring a *reputation for rule-breaking*. Conversely, leaders worry most about unwittingly imposing a *reputation for clientism* on the target state when conducting regime rescue. The reason for this variation turns on the fact that the two main variants of regime promotion bear on slightly different sets of rules and norms. Regime change directly violates the non-intervention principle, hence the fears about reputations for rule-breaking. Self-determination, nationalism, and anti-colonial norms dominate regime rescue, raising concerns that these interventions will introduce reputations for clientism.

The remainder of this discussion proceeds in two sections. First, I will provide a rationale for why the United States, the chief exporter of covert operations during the Cold War, might reasonably worry about acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking when changing regimes. Second, I will make the case that interventions to rescue regimes, particularly during civil wars, introduces the possibility that the target regime will acquire a reputation for clientism.

### **Reputations for Rule-Breaking and Why They Matter**

States run the risk of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking anytime they flout international rules and norms. While violating formally codified norms is perhaps the fastest route to a reputation for rule-breaking, violating informal but widely accepted norms may also do the trick. Apart from being inhumane, Saddam Hussein's use of

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<sup>21</sup>Tomz (2007).

chemical weapons against the Kurds at the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War demonstrated a blatant disregard for longstanding proscriptions on such behavior.<sup>22</sup> North Korea’s persistent violations of, and eventual withdrawal from, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty similarly demonstrated antipathy for international rules and norms. In both cases, it is safe to say that Iraq and North Korea had cultivated a reputation for rule-breaking. Of course, not all states care. Some, particularly revisionist powers, may embrace their status as pariahs.<sup>23</sup> For states that do care about forming reputations for rule-breaking, however, the incentives to conceal rule violations by turning to covert action and other forms of secrecy may be strong.

Reputations for rule-breaking can form in myriad, potentially infinite, ways. However, only one of these pathways in particular — intervening to depose a regime in the absence of a legitimate justification — concerns us here. Leaders interested in changing regimes while avoiding reputations for rule-breaking face powerful incentives to exploit covert action. In order to see why, we need answers to three questions. First, why does regime change constitute a violation of extant rules and norms? Second, what kinds of states care most about acquiring such a reputation and why? Finally, are there conditions under which reputational concerns of this sort are less salient? I will take each of these items in turn.

Since 1945, interventions to overthrow regimes have been explicitly proscribed by the non-intervention principle. Although it has existed since the advent of the Westphalian system, the non-intervention principle assumed a new level importance following its formal codification in the charters of various international and regional organizations in the years after World War II.<sup>24</sup> Article 2 of the very first chapter of the UN Charter, for example, states that, “All Members shall refrain in their in-

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<sup>22</sup>The most obvious proscription on such behavior comes from the Chemical Weapons Convention, which Iraq eventually signed in 2009.

<sup>23</sup>Schweller (1994).

<sup>24</sup>In her work on state death, Fazal (2007) describes a related concept in the form of a norm against conquest.

ternational relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”<sup>25</sup> Chapter 4, Article 19 of the Charter of the Organization of American States puts the point even more forcefully:

“No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic, and cultural elements.”<sup>26</sup>

The formal codification and widespread acceptance of the non-intervention principle marked a sea change in how the international community conceived of Westphalian sovereignty, or “independence of outside authorities.”<sup>27</sup> Non-interference was now an *objective* right belonging to every state rather than one reserved for, and interpreted by, the great powers.<sup>28</sup>

A significant consequence of this development was that any state interested in doing regime change after 1945 typically found themselves in direct violation of a widely accepted and formally codified principle, a marked change from previous eras in which deposing foreign governments was acceptable if not outright legal. Now, not only do states have to worry that regime change would trigger escalation or invite domestic-political costs but they also have to worry about acquiring a reputation for

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<sup>25</sup>United Nations (1945).

<sup>26</sup>Organization of American States (1948). The Caracas Declaration of Solidarity, which was put into effect on March 28, 1954, similarly recognizes that while the goal of stopping the spread of communism was important, “[t]his declaration of foreign policy made by the American republics in relation to dangers originating outside this hemisphere is designed to protect and not to impair the inalienable right of each American State freely to choose its own form of government and economic system and to live its own social and cultural life.” See: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/intam10.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam10.asp).

<sup>27</sup>Bull (1977, 8); Krasner (1999, 9). It is worth noting that Bull (1977, 8) provides another definition of sovereignty — *internal sovereignty* — which refers to “supremacy over all other authorities within that territory and population.” This definition closely mirrors the definition of *domestic sovereignty* found in Krasner (1999, 9).

<sup>28</sup>Thanks to Emile Simpson for pointing this out. See Philpott (2000); Zacher (2001).

flouting international rules and norms. As I will demonstrate empirically, the prospect of acquiring such a reputation drove decision-makers to seek a quiet option much more than the threat of escalation or audience costs.

While reputations for rule-breaking can form irrespective of a state's attitude toward the rules, the prospect of acquiring such a reputation is only likely to function as a driver of secrecy for states that care. The most likely candidates in this regard are great powers with a vested interest in the continuation of the extant global order. To see why, consider the environment in which they operate. The great powers responsible for propagating global rules and norms — let us call them the “rule-makers” — occupy a privileged position in the international food chain as the actor(s) most responsible for upholding the extant order.<sup>29</sup> Owing to their status, these great power rule-makers frequently concern themselves with the opinions that smaller powers, especially those that currently subscribe to the existing order (the “rule-takers”), have of them. This, however, raises an important question: Why, given their preponderance in military, economic, and potential power<sup>30</sup> should great powers care? What are the consequences of apathy toward the rule-takers?

The reason why the rule-makers worry what the rule-takers think of them turns on the dynamics of international leadership and the responsibility of hegemony. In order to lead effectively, great powers must enjoy the willing participation of the rule-takers, or at least a majority of them.<sup>31</sup> As Lake puts it, “[t]he power to write rules has long been recognized as an awesome power, and it may be one of the most important benefits of being an authority.”<sup>32</sup> According to Hurd, however, “[a]ll social systems must confront what we might call the problem of social control—that is, how

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<sup>29</sup>Brown (2014a, 410); Drezner (2007). There are, of course, actors other than great powers that engage in important forms of global governance. For an example, see Avant, Finnemore and Sell (2010).

<sup>30</sup>According to Copeland (2000, 5–6), potential power include factors such as territorial size and population.

<sup>31</sup>Cronin (2001, 113); Reus-Smit (2004, 102).

<sup>32</sup>Lake (2009, 34).

to get actors to comply with society’s rules—but the problem is particularly acute for international relations, because the international social system does not possess an overarching center of political power to enforce rules.”<sup>33</sup>

One of the key mechanisms by which the rule-makers ensure continued compliance by adherents to the extant international order is by following the rules themselves, even when doing so cuts against their self-interest.<sup>34</sup> In the “rule-based order” that was created in the wake of World War II, the U.S. chose to engage in what Ikenberry calls *strategic restraint*, in which they “acknowledg[ed] that there will be limits on the way in which it can exercise power.”<sup>35</sup> Strategic restraint has been the bedrock of the American-led international system.

The foregoing helps explain why great powers like the U.S. might worry about forming a reputation for rule-breaking by conducting regime change in contravention of the non-intervention principle. Great powers with reputations for rule-breaking should have a much harder time convincing the rule-takers that they are committed to strategic restraint. If the United States is willing to flagrantly violate one set of rules, the rule-takers might ask, what’s to stop them from doing so again and in other contexts?<sup>36</sup> With their confidence broken, small and medium-sized powers may feel tempted to defect from the extant international order and join an adversary’s camp. At the very least, they may declare neutrality.<sup>37</sup>

The desire to avoid acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking in the course of a

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<sup>33</sup>Hurd (1999, 379).

<sup>34</sup>Lake (2009, 111). The benefits of convincing subordinates that one follows the rules is not a novel concept. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli (2005, 62) describes the importance of appearances: “Therefore, a prince must be very careful never to let anything fall from his lips that is not imbued with the five qualities mentioned above; to those seeing and hearing him, he should appear to be all mercy, all faithfulness, all integrity, all humanity, and all religion. And there is nothing more necessary than to seem to possess this last quality. Men in general judge more by their eyes than their hands: everyone can see, but few can feel.”

<sup>35</sup>Ikenberry (2011, 105).

<sup>36</sup>Farrell and Finnemore (2013).

<sup>37</sup>For some U.S. policymakers during the Cold War, neutrality was almost as bad as an outright affiliation with the Soviet Union.

regime change operation can generate potent incentives for secrecy. A successful covert operation holds the promise of simultaneously accomplishing the objective of replacing a hostile regime with a friendly one while preserving the great power's public image as a state committed to the rules. As with the more general reputation debate, one could reasonably argue about whether a great power's past violations of rules and norms truly affects other states' assessments of their future behavior in this regard.<sup>38</sup> Most important for my argument is simply that leaders believe that investing in a reputation for rule-following, either by refraining from rule and norm violations altogether or by violating them in secret, is a worthwhile goal.

The non-intervention principle, like most things in life, is not absolute. There exists a set of conditions in which states can legally and legitimately break with non-intervention. The two exceptions identified by the UN Charter appear in Chapter VII, Article 51:

“Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.”<sup>39</sup>

There also exist a handful of exceptions to the non-intervention principle that we might point to above and beyond acting in self-defense or with the blessing of the UN Security Council. The most prominent among them is the use of force “by states to protect the lives and property of their nationals abroad.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>See the debate, for instance, between [Press \(2005\)](#) and [Schelling \(1966\)](#).

<sup>39</sup>[United Nations \(1945\)](#).

<sup>40</sup>[Lillich \(1969, 208\)](#). *See also* [Ronzitti \(2006, 354\)](#). During the Cold War, Reagan used this rationale to invade Grenada, Johnson used it to occupy the Dominican Republic, and Bush used it to invade Panama. Protecting nationals as a rationale for intervention continues to enjoy relevance in

States who undertake regime change operations under the auspices of an accepted exception to the non-intervention principle are at a reduced risk of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. Practically speaking, the incentives for secrecy stemming from reputational concerns should be at their lowest when states can appeal to one of these exceptions *even when such justifications are used as pretexts*. According to Bull:

“The state which at least alleges a just cause, even where belief in the existence of a just cause has played no part in its decision, offers less of a threat to international order than one which does not. The state which alleges a just cause, even one it does not believe in, is at least acknowledging that it owes other states an explanation of its conduct, in terms of rules they accept.”<sup>41</sup>

Contrary to conventional wisdom,<sup>42</sup> however, I will demonstrate that pretexts which can be used to lower the reputational costs of overt intervention are actually few and far between. That is, leaders cannot simply pull pretexts out of a hat whenever it suits their interest.

### **Reputations for Clientism and Why They Matter**

Reputations for rule-breaking are much less relevant when intervening to rescue regimes. The primary reason is that interventions undertaken at the request of an incumbent regime, also known as “intervention by invitation,” conform fairly comfortably with existing international law. During a high-profile legal battle between Nicaragua and the United States over the Reagan Administration’s funding of the Contras, the International Court of Justice drew attention to the compatibility between the non-intervention principle and the right of sovereign regimes to request

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the current system. One of Vladimir Putin’s primary justifications for annexing Crimea in 2014 was that ethnic Russians residing there were being materially threatened and thus required assistance. That critics largely challenged Putin’s sincerity rather than the validity of his justification is telling (Conant 2014).

<sup>41</sup>Bull (1977, 43).

<sup>42</sup>Krasner (1999).



outside support: “[I]t is difficult to see what would remain of the principle of non-intervention in international law if intervention, *which is already allowable at the request of the government of a State*, were also to be allowed at the request of the opposition.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, unless rescue operations are undertaken without the implicit or explicit consent of the target regime — an unlikely proposition — such interventions do not break any international rules and, as a result, do not impose reputations for rule-breaking on the intervening state.

Rather than worrying about reputations for rule-breaking in the course of rescuing a regime, leaders must worry that the target will develop a *reputation for clientism*. Reputations for clientism form whenever a state is seen as subservient to, and excessively dependent on, an external patron for their survival and well-being. There are many possible pathways by which reputations for clientism might form, including the decision to host a controversial foreign military base, willing participation in a patron’s unpopular military ventures, and so forth. If any of the foregoing behaviors afford audiences a small peek at the cozy relationship between a patron and a client, regime rescue is likely to blow the door wide open. The use of force to prop up a target regime, whether direct or indirect, shines a bright light on the dependency of a weaker regime on their more powerful patron. This is especially true of regime rescue operations intended to help friendly regimes confront domestic threats.

It is not particularly important to my argument that target regimes care about reputations for clientism. There is likely to be significant variation in this regard. On one end of the spectrum, some states may willingly embrace their status as clients. According to David Lake, for example, the Dominican Republic “has eagerly and consistently sought to subordinate itself to a foreign protector” since the “time it was first ceded by Spain to France in 1795.”<sup>44</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are states

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in [Nolte \(2010\)](#), emphasis added).

<sup>44</sup>[Lake \(2009, 4\)](#).

who would strongly prefer to keep their dependency on an outside power quiet and under wraps.

Whether or not target states and the leaders that govern them care deeply about reputations for clientism, acquiring such a reputation entails at least two significant downsides. First and foremost, states viewed as clients of powerful patrons are likely to lack legitimacy in the eyes of their own populations. One reason for this turns on the widespread acceptance of the norm of self-determination. The right of peoples to determine their own form of governments can be traced at least as far back as Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points, issued on January 8, 1918.<sup>45</sup> This norm reached a fevered pitch, however, with the creation of the United Nations and the codification of self-determination norms in Chapter 1, Article 1 of the founding Charter: “To develop friendly relations among nations *based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples*, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.”<sup>46</sup> Interventions to prop up ailing regimes, particularly those beset by internal conflict, constitutes obvious interference in the process of self-determination and may erode the supported regime’s internal legitimacy.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to self-determination norms, two other related developments — nationalism and anticolonial norms — contributed to the downsides of having a reputation for clientism, particularly as it relates to a regime’s domestic legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> According to Downes:

“Foreign military intervention in the age of nationalism is a risky proposition because it taints rule by foreigners as illegitimate and may galvanize the target population against the interveners ... Extended occupation by

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<sup>45</sup>[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp).

<sup>46</sup>United Nations (1945, emphasis added).

<sup>47</sup>Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson and Morrow (2003, 410); Fukuyama (2005, 85); Gitelson (1974).

<sup>48</sup>Finnemore (1996). On nationalism more generally, see Anderson (1983). Pape (2003, 348) has shown how nationalist tendencies can incentivize individuals to engage in suicide terrorism to expel an occupying power.

foreign troops may also trigger nationalist opposition.”<sup>49</sup>

Widespread decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century also rendered populations leery of significant external influences in their internal affairs, increasing the risks facing regimes deemed as clients. In short, the interaction of nationalism, the codification of self-determination norms, and the process of decolonization, greatly increased the prospect that a reputation for clientism developed in response to a regime-rescuing intervention would undermine the supported regime’s internal legitimacy.

Perhaps the single greatest reason why interveners must care about imposing reputations for clientism on supported regimes is that the concomitant loss of internal legitimacy can make it much harder for their client to remain in power. Writing in the context of regime change, Peic and Reiter outline the many benefits accruing to regimes that enjoy domestic legitimacy:

“Some have argued that legitimacy boosts state infrastructural power. Legitimacy makes it easier for a state to use physical and human infrastructures to exert its presence throughout and upon society, for tax collectors to enter villages, for individuals to co-operate with police and let them walk the streets, for families to send their children to state-run schools, and for individuals to use state-sanctioned means of political participation rather than engage in political violence. If imposed institutional change undermines legitimacy, this may then make the exercise of infrastructural power more difficult.”<sup>50</sup>

These same processes should apply with full force to incumbents that rely heavily on outside support for their survival. Even if a great power patron manages to successfully rescue a regime in jeopardy of crumbling in the short-term, the resulting loss of legitimacy that follows may generate significant challenges once the intervener’s forces have left, reducing their ability to deter coups, govern effectively, and other-

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<sup>49</sup>Downes (2010, 12). On the negative effects of occupation, see Edelstein (2004, 58).

<sup>50</sup>Peic and Reiter (2011, 459).

wise survive.<sup>51</sup> By undermining a client's internal legitimacy, thereby making it harder for them to remain in power, regime rescue may contribute to the very thing it was intended to prevent or forestall in the first place.

One major advantage of rescuing regimes secretly is that it may preserve the supported government's legitimacy by enabling them to retain some semblance of autonomy. If we think about reputations for clientism a bit more expansively, we can also identify another reason why interveners might want to hide their efforts to forcibly prop up regimes: The desire to avoid appearing imperialistic. In many respects, this reflects the other side of the clientism coin. If regimes propped up by powerful patrons are at risk of losing legitimacy owing to nationalism, self-determination, and anticolonialism, then the state doing the intervening may also be chastised for contributing to the process. Whenever an external power forcibly rescues an ailing regime from mass protests, insurgencies, and related domestic threats, they are effectively picking winners and losers à la imperialism. To the extent that the intervening state cares about this, the incentives for secrecy should be strong.

If regime rescue threatens to impose reputations for clientism on targets, undermining the supported regime's internal legitimacy and making interveners appear imperialistic, why do states so often enter into hierarchical relationships in the first place? The answer, in short, is security. Although the condition of anarchy has long been viewed as the main pillar of international politics,<sup>52</sup> hierarchies are legion. Lake defines international hierarchies in terms of relational authority, in which subordinate states confer legitimacy to a dominant power in exchange for protection and economic perks.<sup>53</sup> One of the most significant features of hierarchical relationships is the abil-

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<sup>51</sup>Chiozza and Goemans (2011, 28).

<sup>52</sup>Mearsheimer (2001); Waltz (1979).

<sup>53</sup>Lake (2009, 40-43). As one might expect, hierarchies vary along a number of different dimensions. Lake identifies two dimensions in particular: security and economic. The security continuum ranges from relative anarchy (diplomacy) to relative hierarchy (protectorate). The economic continuum also ranges from relative anarchy (market exchange) to hierarchy (dependency) (Lake 2009, 53).

ity of dominant powers to use force on behalf of clients in need on the basis of the authority that has been conferred to them.<sup>54</sup> Speaking about patron-client relations at the sub-state level, James C. Scott writes:

*The patron-client relationship—and exchange relationship between roles—may be defined as a special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.*<sup>55</sup>

So it is in international politics. The protection afforded by a patron state is one of the primary benefits enjoyed by client regimes. Support for, and participation in, the patron's international endeavors is often the client's fee for such services.

Although hierarchy has received growing attention,<sup>56</sup> the optics of regime rescue have not been rigorously interrogated. Simply because states have the legal right to request external support to help them address domestic threats does not mean it is costless for them to do so. It is one thing for states to be seen as dependent for their well-being on some types of external support such as alliances, international organizations, and foreign trade. It is another thing, I argue, for a state to be seen as dependent on an outside power for their very survival. Requesting or accepting external support as a means of staying in power, particularly when the threat is internal in nature, is especially likely to impose costly reputations for clientism on the target. To be sure, the populations living in client regimes are in all likelihood acutely aware of their government's dependent status. Nonetheless, overt regime rescue serves as a stark reminder of that dependency and may trigger mass mobilization in order to reduce it. As David Lake acknowledges in the preface to *Hierarchy*:

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<sup>54</sup>Another feature of Lake's argument is that dominant states, by virtue of their position as a legitimate authority, possess the ability to actually punish a subordinate state. See [Lake \(2009, 18\)](#).

<sup>55</sup>[Scott \(1972, 92; emphasis in original\)](#).

<sup>56</sup>[Lake \(2009, 2013\); Owen and Poznansky \(2014\)](#).

“It may be politically difficult for states to acknowledge publicly their subordination.... Hierarchy today is cloaked, submerged, and itself undisciplined because both dominant and subordinate states prefer not to acknowledge its existence. Revealing now-hidden hierarchy exposes it to debate and analysis within both dominant and subordinate states.”<sup>57</sup>

Part of the contribution I am making here is thus to draw attention to the various costs associated with reputations for clientism and how the desire to avoid these costs generates potent incentives for interveners to act secretly when rescuing regimes.

As with reputations for rule-breaking, the dynamics outlined thus far are not absolute. Reputations for clientism are least likely to form when interveners are rescuing regimes from *external* threats. When intervening to save a regime from outside invasion, many members of the population within the target state may actually welcome the intervener’s presence. Save for any irredentist elements, most members of the population will accept intervention by an outside power if it means retaining their sovereignty and eliminating the threat posed by an external aggressor. The legitimacy of overt rescue is forged by the recognition that a temporary intrusion to expel an aggressor is preferable to potential domination, or even annexation, by a hostile power. As Edelstein notes, “When an occupied population perceives that another country poses a threat to its future security, it will welcome an occupying power that is both willing and able to protect it from that threat.”<sup>58</sup> Writing in the context of military bases, Holmes notes that the elimination of a hostile external threat can reduce the perceived need and legitimacy of a foreign presence.<sup>59</sup> Under these conditions, the incentives for secrecy may be weak. At the very least, reputations for clientism will not be particularly relevant as a driver of secrecy.

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<sup>57</sup>Lake (2009, xiii).

<sup>58</sup>Edelstein (2008, 28).

<sup>59</sup>Holmes (2014, 24).

### 1.3 The Limitations of Secrecy

My objectives in this section were two-fold. First, I sought to uncover the major drivers of secrecy in world politics by identifying the many reasons why overt action might be deemed risky. The existing literature provided some important clues in this regard, ranging from concerns over escalation to the desire to avoid domestic-political costs. The second overarching objective was to enhance our understanding of the important role that reputation plays in generating incentives for secrecy. Rather than treating reputation monolithically, I looked to the unique dynamics associated with each variant of regime promotion to understand which reputational concerns should matter most and why. During regime change operations, leaders worry about cultivating a reputation for rule-breaking. Reputations for clientism were most relevant during regime rescue operations. Table 2.1 summarizes this discussion. The left-hand column contains the four major risks from overt action. The right-hand column identifies the ways in which secrecy might reduce some of these risks.

**Table 2.1.** The Major Drivers of Secrecy

<i>Risk from Overt Action</i>	<i>Advantages of Covert Action</i>
1. Escalation	Avoid detection & prevent spirals; Collude with rivals & contain conflict
2. Domestic-political costs	Avoid involvement in protracted conflict; Pursue normatively distasteful policies; Reduce institutional constraints on use of force
3. Reputation for Rule-Breaking	Hide violations of non-intervention principle; Preserve reputation for rule-following
4. Reputation for Clientism	Hide interference in self-determination; Preserve target's image of autonomy; Preserve own image as non-imperialist power

From the vantage point of a national security executive, secrecy has many virtues. But it is not without drawbacks. Perhaps the most significant downside of covert operations is that they are more likely to fail relative to overt action.<sup>60</sup> To begin with, covert action imposes a ceiling on how far interveners can go before exposing their involvement. As O’Rourke notes, “[w]hen conducting a covert mission, states face a fundamental tradeoff between wielding resources and plausibly denying their role. In short, they must choose between size and secrecy.”<sup>61</sup> When acting overtly, states can calibrate how intensely they wish to intervene at any given point in time based on the operational environment. Covert operations, on the other hand, can only get so big before the hand of the sponsor is revealed and plausible deniability is compromised. Covert action also typically requires interveners to rely heavily on local actors as opposed to their own personnel in an effort to keep their role hidden. The issue here is that local actors are unlikely to be as well-trained as the intervener’s own forces and may have divergent preferences, introducing principal-agent problems that undermine the chances of success.<sup>62</sup>

To be sure, there may exist scenarios in which the usual disadvantages of covert action are not all that relevant. When a mission does not require significant quantities of force to succeed and/or there exists highly capable local actors whose interests align closely with the intervening state’s, covert action may be just as likely as overt action to succeed. Though possible, this should be exceedingly rare. Richard Bissell, one of the chief architects of the Bay of Pigs operation, describes the difficult tradeoffs decision-makers often face between secrecy and efficacy in the following way: “If complete deniability had been consistent with maximum effectiveness, there would theoretically have remained no conflict of goals but in fact this could not be (and

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<sup>60</sup>In some cases, such as particular forms of military cooperation (e.g. basing agreements), secrecy may actually increase the prospects of success; see [Brown \(2014b\)](#).

<sup>61</sup>[O’Rourke \(2013, 82\)](#).

<sup>62</sup>[Beitz \(1989, 49-50\)](#); [Treverton \(1987, 118\)](#).



never is) the case.”<sup>63</sup> The choice between deniability and effectiveness should be especially relevant when the proposed intervention entails forcibly removing or propping up entire regimes, the primary focus of this dissertation.

What are we to make of all of this? On the one hand, we know that leaders frequently face powerful incentives to go covert owing to the many risks from overt action. On the other hand, by acting covertly, leaders are often making an important sacrifice in terms of the chances that a mission will succeed. The question that remains to be answered is how leaders decide which of these sets of risks should take precedence. The standard story found in the literature is that leaders tend to care more about reducing the costs of intervention than they do about increasing the chances of success. The result is that decision-makers are much more likely to opt for covert intervention except under very rare circumstances.<sup>64</sup>

Although useful as a starting point, I take a different approach informed by the logic of loss aversion. In its simplest form, loss aversion refers to the idea that losing hurts more than gaining gratifies. If we treat the allegiances of foreign regimes as assets to be gained or lost, loss aversion can tell us quite a lot about a leader’s decision to pursue secrecy or openness in the course of an intervention. During regime rescue operations, leaders are ostensibly trying to protect a current asset in the form of a friendly client or ally. As such, the prospect of failed action — which means losing that asset — should loom larger than any costs a leader might have to pay by going overt, such as the possibility of imposing a reputation for clientism on the target. Effectively, we would expect leaders to be less likely to opt for covert action if doing so means accepting a higher chance of failure when saving regimes.

The story is different for regime change. Here, leaders are attempting to acquire a new asset by replacing a hostile regime with a friendly one. As such, the prospect

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<sup>63</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 141).

<sup>64</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 6-7).

of failure — which means tolerating a continuation of the status quo — should be less worrisome than the costs a leader might have to pay by acting overtly in order to ensure victory, including the possibility of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. The implication here is that leaders will be more likely to accept failure by going covert when overthrowing regimes if it means that they can avoid the risks from overt action. The next section will elaborate on these various insights and develop a number of testable hypotheses.

## 2 Part II: The Role of Risk Attitudes

The premise from which this portion of my framework begins is a fairly simple one: People care more about losing their possessions than they do about gaining new ones. Adapted to our current discussion, I anticipate that leaders care more about losing a current ally than they do about gaining a new one. Because of this, we should expect risk-acceptant behavior when the goal is to save regimes (protecting assets) and risk-averse behavior when the goal is to depose them (acquiring assets). What this means in practice is that leaders should turn more readily to overt action when rescuing regimes, even when the associated costs are high, if it means successfully preventing the fall of a client or ally. Leaders should prove much more willing to rely on secrecy when overthrowing regimes, particularly when the costs from overt action are high, even if it means accepting a greater chance of mission failure.

Two clarifications are in order before proceeding. First, when I use terms like risk-acceptance and risk-aversion, I am doing so “in the way that psychologists tend to think about it...”<sup>65</sup> In this spirit, to say that leaders are risk-acceptant is to refer to actors who are “more likely to make choices in which high costs as well as high

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<sup>65</sup>Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015, 29). The alternative way in which to think about risk is the economic conception. According to Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015, 29), “[e]conomists think of an individual’s preference for risk fundamentally as the preference for the outcome of a hypothetical gamble.”

potential gains are at stake in situations where others would hesitate to act.”<sup>66</sup> Risk-acceptant activities include, but are not limited to, “sensation seeking, aggression, and impulsivity.”<sup>67</sup> More germane to our discussion would be leaders willing to wield military force overtly in order to ensure foreign policy successes irrespective of the relevant costs. Rather than conceiving of risk-acceptance and aversion as attributes that vary across individuals, however, I am making an assumption that decision-makers’ appetite for risk is dictated by the policy objective being pursued.<sup>68</sup> That is, I expect all leaders to exhibit risk-acceptant behavior in certain situations (regime rescue) and risk-averse behavior in others (regime rescue).

The second caveat concerns individual versus group-level decision-making. Some scholars have raised legitimate concerns about whether we can apply psychological concepts like prospect theory and loss aversion to groups, especially since the results from which many of these studies are derived center on individual decision-making. As Jack Levy notes, “[t]he concepts of loss aversion, the reflection of risk-orientations, and framing were developed for individual decision making and tested on individuals, not on groups, and we cannot automatically assume that these concepts and hypotheses apply equally well at the collective level.”<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein, “Eldar Shafir argues that prospect theory ‘is based on specific assumptions regarding people’s anticipated pleasure over gains as compared to their pain over losses .... All this may be significantly different for groups of individuals.’”<sup>70</sup>

Applying psychological models like loss aversion to groups is defensible for several reasons. First, and as noted by Taliaferro, “there is increasing experimental and empirical evidence that prospect theory provides a descriptive model for organizational

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<sup>66</sup>Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015, 29).

<sup>67</sup>Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015, 29).

<sup>68</sup>The former is the approach taken by Horowitz, Stam and Ellis (2015).

<sup>69</sup>Levy (1997, 102).

<sup>70</sup>Shafir (1992, 313) quoted in Taliaferro (2004, 32).

and group decision-making.”<sup>71</sup> Second, because my argument is that the *objective* of an intervention induces loss aversion rather than an individual’s framing, there is no theoretical reason to suppose that some decision-makers will somehow be immune to these psychological biases. Finally, to the extent that the decisions explored in the empirical chapters deviate from what we would expect from standard models based on expected utility calculations and conform more readily to the expectations from loss aversion, we will have greater confidence in our ability to apply psychological concepts to the actors comprising the national security establishment.

The remainder of this section proceeds in three stages. First, I will define the concept of loss aversion as an independent phenomenon and explore one of its key implications, namely, that individuals will incur greater risks, pay higher costs, and act more resolutely, to prevent a loss than they will to secure a gain. Second, I will make the case that we should be thinking about the two main variants of regime promotion — regime change and rescue — as gains-seeking and loss-avoiding policy objectives, respectively. Finally, I will combine the insights from the first and second stages to construct hypotheses about a leader’s propensity to authorize covert action or overt military force when intervening to depose or save regimes.

## 2.1 What is Loss Aversion?

In its most general form, loss aversion refers to the idea that “the disutility of giving up an object is greater than the utility associated with acquiring it.”<sup>72</sup> Loss aversion is typically represented by a value function in which the “slope for losses is steeper” than the slope for gains.<sup>73</sup> Informally, we can think of loss aversion as the idea that “[l]osing ten dollars ... annoys us more than gaining ten dollars gratifies

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<sup>71</sup>Taliaferro (2004, 33). See also Boettcher (2004, 334).

<sup>72</sup>Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (1991, 194).

<sup>73</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 651). See also Kahneman and Tversky (1984, 342).

us.”<sup>74</sup> The notion that people act in ways consistent with loss aversion comes out of a series of experimental findings in behavioral decision theory and has been repeatedly validated by myriad studies.<sup>75</sup>

For our purposes, the most relevant behavioral implication of loss aversion is that individuals may be willing to bear greater costs to prevent losses, what I will refer to here as risk-acceptance, than they are willing to bear in order to secure a comparable gain, or risk-aversion. This feature of loss aversion is nicely illustrated by the phenomenon of cover-ups following an act of wrongdoing:

“If a person has committed a nontrivial transgression, she may devote significant resources to trying to cover it up even though doing so exposes her to much greater penalties if the activities are later discovered. Knowledge of the Watergate break-in would not have cost Nixon his presidency; even sponsorship of it might not have. It was the cover-up that destroyed him.”<sup>76</sup>

According to Berejikian and Early, “[c]ognitive science has convincingly demonstrated that individuals tend to strive harder and take more risks to avoid losses than they will to achieve similar gains.”<sup>77</sup> These insights have been used by a number of scholars to make sense of otherwise puzzling phenomena in international relations.<sup>78</sup> McDermott, for example, relies on loss aversion to explain the Carter administration’s decision to embark on a militarily and politically risky hostage rescue mission in Iran in 1980.<sup>79</sup> Taliaferro uses it to explain why great powers often persist in peripheral military interventions long after the cost-benefit ratio has shifted in favor of withdrawal.<sup>80</sup> Berejikian and Early invoke loss aversion as a means of explaining foreign policy re-

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<sup>74</sup>Jervis (1992, 187). See also Mercer (2005, 11).

<sup>75</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 650).

<sup>76</sup>Jervis (1992, 190).

<sup>77</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 650).

<sup>78</sup>Farnham (1994); Mercer (2005); Schaub (2004). For an application of loss aversion to the realm of elections in the U.S. context, see Patty (2006).

<sup>79</sup>McDermott (1992).

<sup>80</sup>Taliaferro (2004). See also Taliaferro (2001).

solve in the context of U.S.-initiated Section 301 trade disputes.<sup>81</sup>

Those readers already familiar with these concepts are doubtless wondering why prospect theory, a popular model of decision making under risk, has not been mentioned so far. The reason is that my theoretical framework utilizes “loss aversion as an independent phenomenon” rather than “adopt[ing] all of the assumptions and attendant complexities of prospect theory.”<sup>82</sup> Prospect theory’s central insight “is that individuals making decisions in the domain of losses tend to be more risk acceptant, while they tend to be more risk averse in the domain of gains.”<sup>83</sup>

There are a number of unique threats to validity one must grapple with when utilizing prospect theory. Chief among these is the lack of a theory of framing.<sup>84</sup> Put differently, how do we know *ex ante* the precise conditions in which leaders will perceive themselves as in a domain of gains or losses? In a laboratory setting where researchers can dictate the content of individual frames, the absence of a theory of framing is less problematic. In the complex world of international relations in which observational data is the norm, specifying how and why leaders frame choices as they do is not only necessary, but also notoriously challenging.

Invoking loss aversion as an independent phenomenon rather than tethering it directly to prospect theory has important advantages. First, it is more parsimonious. That is, we can adopt loss aversion’s core insights, many of which are also found in prospect theory, without relying on the potentially idiosyncratic ways in which people frame choices in the real world. Consider the endowment effect, one of the many manifestations of loss aversion. The endowment effect refers to the idea “that people often demand much more to give up an object than they would be willing to pay to acquire it.”<sup>85</sup> The logic is nicely captured in an example from the opening pages of

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<sup>81</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013).

<sup>82</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 652). See also Copeland (2001, 216-220).

<sup>83</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 651).

<sup>84</sup>Levy (1992, 1997).

<sup>85</sup>Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (1991, 194).

an article written by Kahneman et al.:

“A wine-loving economist we know purchased some nice Bordeaux wines years ago at low prices. The wines have greatly appreciated in value, so that a bottle that cost only \$10 when purchased would now fetch \$200 at auction. This economist now drinks some of this wine occasionally, but would neither be willing to sell the wine at the auction price nor buy an additional bottle at that price.”<sup>86</sup>

Unlike some concepts in prospect theory, the main piece of information required by the endowment effect is whether or not someone possesses a good at time  $t$ ; how individuals conceive of possession is not particularly relevant. Conceiving of regimes as endowments to be protected or acquired allows us to hypothesize about the costs leaders might be willing to “pay” during an intervention without saying much, if anything, about perceptions.

Second and relatedly, “[m]ost foreign policy objectives ... can be classified as either gains seeking or loss avoiding” without opening the black box of individual-level framing.<sup>87</sup> Berejikian and Early, for instance, define foreign policy objectives as either *promotive* or *preventive* policies based on the ends being sought. Specifically, the authors:

“...define promotive foreign policies as those that are gains seeking. Such policies are predominantly designed to secure new benefits above and beyond the status quo. This could include territorial expansion, undermining the position of rivals, and opening new markets for export .... [P]reventive policies [are] loss avoiding. Preventive policies are primarily driven by the desire to mitigate an erosion of current assets. Examples here include protecting existing territorial holdings, preventing the loss of alliance partners, and supporting existing legal agreements — to the extent they are beneficial.”

For their part, Berejikian and Early’s empirical focus is on U.S.–initiated Section 301 trade disputes. As they argue, “investigations launched in response to a breached

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<sup>86</sup>Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler (1991, 194).

<sup>87</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 654).

trade agreement versus those intended to open up new markets provides a means of distinguishing between cases with preventive and promotive objectives.”<sup>88</sup> As I will show in the next section, regime change and rescue can also be classified as promotive and preventive policies, respectively.

## 2.2 Risk Attitudes and Regime Promotion

In the previous section, I used the psychological concept known as loss aversion to defend the claim that individuals will incur greater risk to preserve current assets than they will to secure new ones. The next step is to relate this discussion to regime promotion. First, I will articulate the reasons why we should think of regime change and rescue in terms of gains and losses, respectively. Once we have made this conceptual move, we can leverage risk attitudes to explain why leaders might authorize covert missions in some cases but not in others.

### Regime Change as a Promotive Policy

Leaders contemplating regime change face two choices: Live with the status quo and tolerate the continued existence of a hostile regime or alter the status quo in their favor by replacing the hostile regime with a friendly one. Conceived of in this way, regime change is a fundamentally promotive, or gains-seeking, policy objective. Of course, the intensity with which leaders want to replace particular regimes can vary for a host of reasons. Saunders, for example, argues that a leader’s causal beliefs render some more interested in changing regimes (e.g. President Kennedy) than others (e.g. President Johnson).<sup>89</sup> Owen contends that as the intensity of ideological competition goes up, so too does the importance of knocking over regimes that align with one’s competitor.<sup>90</sup> The bottom line, however, is that swapping out an antagonistic

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<sup>88</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013, 656).

<sup>89</sup>Saunders (2011).

<sup>90</sup>Owen (2010).



regime with a more pliable one constitutes a positive deviation from the status quo irrespective of how badly leaders may want the change.

One might reasonably ask, however, whether it is appropriate to conceive of regime change as a promotive policy without delving into the ways in which leaders themselves frame such decisions. For example, it is possible that decision-makers interested in regime change operate according to an *aspirational* reference point such as the status quo before a hostile regime came to power; Cuba before Castro or Iran before the 1979 revolution both come to mind as plausible examples. To the extent that this is true, assuming that regime change approximates a promotive policy would potentially bias our findings in important ways. Decision-makers working from an aspirational reference point might well exhibit the opposite behavior than I predict, namely, risk-acceptance in the context of regime change.

There are at least two reasons why this concern, though reasonable, should not pose major issues for my argument. First, cases in which leaders use a reference point such as the status quo before a hostile regime replaced a friendly one are likely to be rare occurrences and, in most instances, “selected out” of the universe of possible cases. The reason is that friendly regimes in need of saving will likely receive support well before they are replaced by a new and less pliable regime. When states do refrain from saving a client or ally, this typically signifies a deterioration in relations between the two countries.<sup>91</sup> Adjusting to a new status quo in which a hostile regime has taken power should prove much less painful when the regime being replaced was already on the outs with the prospective intervener.<sup>92</sup>

Second, the nature of this concern ultimately boils down to the question of renormalization, or “the length of time it takes for actors to adjust to a new status quo.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Owen and Poznansky (2014).

<sup>92</sup>The one obvious exception to this rationale pertains to cases in which interveners tried to save a regime but ultimately failed. In these cases, we might expect leaders to exhibit a strong affinity for the status quo *ante* and thus to engage in riskier interventions than is predicted by my theory.

<sup>93</sup>Jervis (1992, 199).

Although it is conceivable that leaders will find it too difficult to adjust to a status quo in which a hostile regime has replaced a friendly one, there is no *ex ante* reason to privilege this possibility over its opposite. The question of renormalization, then, is largely an empirical one. To the extent that I am able to show that leaders behave in ways that are consistent with my hypotheses, our confidence in the decision to treat regime change as promotive will be increased. Risk-seeking behavior in the realm of regime change would not only serve as disconfirmatory evidence for my theory, but would also cast doubt on the assumption that we can code policies as promotive or preventive on the basis of the ends being sought.

### **Regime Rescue as a Preventive Policy**

Although the ultimate aims of regime change and regime rescue are the same — to promote friendly regimes abroad — the dynamics of the latter are the inverse of the former. Leaders interested in rescuing a friendly regime from internal rebellion or external invasion face two choices: Come to the aid of an ailing client or ally to prevent them from falling or allow them to be replaced by a less pliable, and potentially more hostile, regime. In this way, regime rescue is fundamentally a preventive, or loss-avoiding, policy objective. As we know from the historical record, of course, not all friendly regimes are deemed worthy of saving.<sup>94</sup> For those clients and allies that do enjoy a close relationship with a great power patron, however, the logic articulated here should apply with full force.<sup>95</sup> Figure 2.1 below compares the two faces of regime promotion, change and rescue, to the prevailing status quo.

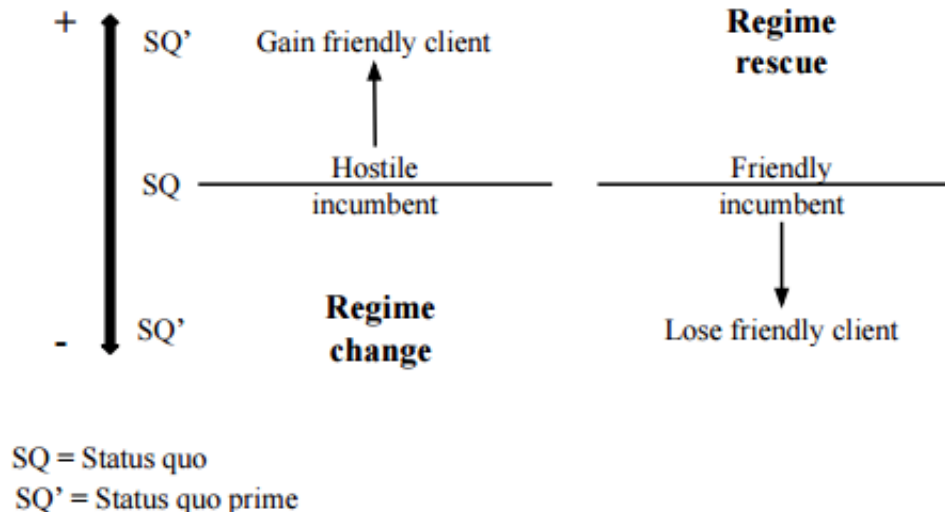
As with our discussion of regime change, one might reasonably worry that invoking the status quo as the baseline from which leaders evaluate their decisions about whether to rescue a regime is untenable. It is possible, for example, that decision-

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<sup>94</sup>Owen and Poznansky (2014).

<sup>95</sup>By “close relations,” I mean the presence of either a formal security guarantee (e.g. an alliance) or an informal commitment (e.g. the stationing of a military base).

**Figure 2.1.** Regime Promotion Under Risk



makers considering whether to rescue a regime will invoke a reference point other than the status quo, such as expectations of souring relations with the client. If true, assuming a general tendency toward risk-acceptant behavior for regime rescue would yield misleading results. Depending on the reference point, we might expect leaders to exercise much more caution in response to the potential loss of a client or ally than my theoretical account would predict.

As before, such a concern should not pose significant problems for my argument. First, scholars working on loss aversion have long recognized that individuals generate powerful psychological attachments to the goods they possess. For our purposes, we can think of a friendly client or ally, especially one that has obtained a formal commitment of support from a patron, as a “possessed good.” Consistent with the endowment effect, nonchalantly parting with these goods by failing to furnish the necessary support should thus be a relatively rare occurrence. Second, whenever leaders begin to waver in their support for a regime, which suggests reduced levels of attachment, there should be traces of these developments on the historical record that allow us to test for the strength of the patron’s commitment and thus the plausibility of

using the status quo as our reference point.<sup>96</sup> Should this hold, my theory still renders a clear prediction: The more “distance” there is between a client and its patron, the less willing the patron will be to assume risks rescuing them.

## 2.3 Putting It All Together

We have finally reached the stage where we can combine the insights developed in Part I, which identified the drivers as well as the limitations of secrecy, with those developed in this section. Figure 2.2 captures the relevant dimensions of my theoretical framework. The X-axis tells us whether the various risks from overt intervention are high or low. The incentives for secrecy are at their strongest when the risks from overt action are high, whether due to concerns about escalation, domestic-politics, or reputation. Actually measuring whether the risks from overt action are high or low in any given case is largely an empirical question; the specifics will likely vary on a case-by-case basis. That said, our prior discussion of the drivers of secrecy — especially that related to reputation — has a measurement strategy baked into it. In the context of regime change, for instance, I expect the reputational risks from overt action to be high in the absence of a credible pretext for intervention. In the context of regime rescue, I expect the reputational risks from overt action to be high in the absence of a significant external threat to the supported regime.

One of the key components of my argument is that the drivers of secrecy are not perfectly correlated with a leader’s decision to actually authorize covert missions. Rather, we must also account for the nature of the objective being sought after. In this spirit, the Y-axis tells us whether the goal of an intervention is promotive or preventive and, consequently, whether leaders are likely to weigh the risks of failed action or the risks from overt action more heavily. Although I classify regime change and rescue as promotive and preventive policy goals, respectively, I opted to keep the

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<sup>96</sup>Owen and Poznansky (2014).

labels as general as possible to signify that my framework should apply to any foreign policy objective that can be coded as gains-seeking or loss-avoiding. Consistent with the logic of loss aversion, the risks of failed action should loom larger than the risks from overt action during regime rescue. The opposite should hold when regime change is the goal of an intervention.

When the risks from overt action are high and the goal of an intervention is regime change, leaders are likely to go covert even when secrecy raises the odds of failure. The reason, as alluded to earlier, is that individuals tend to be risk-averse when pursuing promotive policy goals. Even when leaders know that they are dramatically reducing the chances of successfully replacing a hostile regime with a friendly one by turning to secrecy, the prospect of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking, triggering escalation, or incurring domestic-political costs, should disincentivize the use of overt military force. Put differently, leaders are willing to pursue an intervention strategy that they know to be less efficacious if it means they can avoid paying the costs from overt action, particularly when these costs are high. Although this is largely simpatico with conventional accounts, the logic of loss aversion provides a theoretically-grounded rationale as to why leaders care more about reducing costs than they do about mission success when it comes to regime change.

The expectation changes dramatically when the goal is to rescue regimes. While the presence of high risks from overt action should still generate an overall *desire* for secrecy, it may not be enough to dissuade leaders from going overt should it prove necessary to the success of a mission. While leaders may seek out quiet intervention strategies where feasible, they should be willing to pay significant costs, including imposing a reputation for clientism on a target, if it means preventing the fall of a friendly regime. As before, the overarching rationale for this expectation comes out of loss aversion, which stipulates that individuals should be risk-acceptant when undertaking preventive policy goals. The fact that the risks of failed action entail the

loss of a current asset in the form of a faithful client helps to explain why failure is less acceptable than the risks associated with overt action.

**Figure 2.2.** A Model of Risk Balancing

<b>Type of Intervention (Risk Balance)</b>	<b>Risks from Overt Action</b>	
	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Promotive</i> (risks from overt action > risks of failure/inaction)	Covert action likely; failure tolerated	Overt action likely
<i>Preventive</i> (risks of failure/inaction > risks from overt action)	Covert action when feasible; overt action when necessary	Overt action likely

\*Note: The “>” symbol translates to: “are weighted more heavily than”

When the risks from overt action are low, leader behavior should converge across both variants of regime promotion. We can readily imagine many scenarios in which the risks from overt action might be low, including the availability of a legitimate pretext for intervention (as in regime change) or the presence of a foreign aggressor in the country of a friendly state (as in regime rescue). Whatever the specific reason, leaders are likely to seize any opportunity to intervene overtly at low cost. This is mainly because overt action enables interveners to calibrate the intensity of an operation to the needs of the situation and rely more heavily on their own personnel, all of which serves to raise the chances of success. It is not that risk-aversion or acceptance somehow disappears when the risks from overt action are low. Rather, it is simply that risk attitudes are much less relevant to decisions about secrecy under these conditions. Out of this discussion comes two main hypotheses as well as

a number of observable implications that we can more readily subject to empirical testing.

- $H_1$ : *Leaders pursuing promotive interventions are more likely to exhibit behavior consistent with risk-aversion.*
  - $H_{1a}$ : *Leaders are more likely to intervene covertly when the risks from overt action are high;*
  - $H_{1b}$ : *Leaders facing a failing covert operation are less likely to turn to public force when the risks from overt action are high;*
  - $H_{1c}$ : *Leaders are more likely to wield force openly when the risks from overt action are low.*
  
- $H_2$ : *Leaders pursuing preventive interventions are more likely to exhibit behavior consistent with risk-acceptance.*
  - $H_{2a}$ : *Leaders are more likely to attempt covert action when the risks from overt action are high;*
  - $H_{2b}$ : *Leaders facing a failing covert operation are more likely to turn to public force even when the risks from overt action are high;*
  - $H_{2c}$ : *Leaders are more likely to wield force openly when the risks from overt action are low.*

### 3 Potential Objections

This section takes up a number of potential objections to the argument laid out above. One possible objection to my risk-based framework is that the same phenomenon could be more easily explained using a straightforward cost-benefit calculation. A leader's decision whether to utilize covert or overt action, so the argument

would go, is simply a function of whether the benefits of overthrowing or rescuing a regime outweigh the costs associated with doing so publicly. According to this logic, my argument could be reinterpreted as follows: Decision-makers often view the benefits of saving regimes as greater than the costs associated with overt action, hence the tendency toward publicity. Conversely, because the benefits of deposing regimes are often not worth the costs associated with acting overtly, covert operations, even those that are likely to fail, are frequently the result.

There are actually greater similarities between the straightforward cost-benefit framework and the risk-based framework I am proposing than initially meet the eye. Recall from earlier my argument that individuals will take more risks to preserve current assets than they will to acquire new ones. In some sense, then, I *am* arguing that leaders view the benefits of saving regimes as worth the costs they might have to pay to ensure success, something which is not true of interventions to change regimes. The advantage of invoking loss aversion, however, is that it provides theoretical grounding for this observation. To reinterpret my argument with a simple cost-benefit framework is to ignore the psychological foundations on which the claim that regime rescue is in some sense valued more than regime change ultimately rests.

A second potential objection is that the sponsors of covert operations are often revealed, potentially erasing the benefits of secrecy. There are at least two responses to this critique. First, the logic developed here focuses specifically on what decision-makers thought *at the time the decision to overthrow or rescue a regime covertly or overtly was made*. While there is no guarantee that covert operations will remain hidden, I am most interested in why leaders sought to conceal their role in the first place. Of course, my argument hinges on leaders calculating that the risks of exposure, at least in the short-run, are sufficiently low to warrant an attempt at covert action; disclosure in the long-run is less of a concern. Second, some scholars have noted that the very act of concealment signifies to observers a recognition of wrongdoing. As Jon



Elster put it, “to violate a norm in public shows a disdain for public opinion that is often more severely disapproved of than the norm itself. Conversely, by hiding the violation, one respects and upholds the norm. In the limit, the norm may be respected even though everybody knows that nobody pays more than lip service to it.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, it is also possible that an exposed covert operation is less detrimental than an analogous overt action since the former at least implies a recognition of wrongdoing.<sup>98</sup>

A third possible criticism pertaining to my argument about reputations for rule-breaking in cases of regime change is that it ignores the problem of “clever lawyers,” or the idea that states can simply generate pretexts whenever it suits their interests.<sup>99</sup> In some cases, states *can* simply fabricate pretexts to justify the use of force; Lyndon Johnson arguably did this twice in the lead up to Vietnam.<sup>100</sup> However, it is important that we interrogate how often leaders are actually able to generate credible pretexts where one does not already exist. The answer, I argue, is not very often. The most preferable scenario for leaders is the existence of some exogenous event that can be exploited as a fig leaf for intervention. Absent an exploitable event, leaders should find it exceedingly difficult to create a fig leaf of their own. One of the main cases examined here, the Bay of Pigs, saw decision-makers constantly looking for ways to fabricate a pretext for intervention, including a staged takeover of Guantanamo Bay by Castro and his cronies, to reduce the risks from overt action.<sup>101</sup> The difficulty of ex-

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<sup>97</sup>Elster (1989, 109).

<sup>98</sup>It is also possible, of course, that exposed covert operations entail additional costs for an intervener for, say, acting duplicitously. This, however, is largely an empirical question and beyond the scope of the present argument.

<sup>99</sup>My thanks to John Owen for pointing this out.

<sup>100</sup>The first drummed up pretext was the Gulf of Tonkin incident in which Johnson fabricated a North Vietnamese attack on a destroyer known as the USS Maddox. The result was congressional authorization for increased use of force against Vietnam. The second was an incident at Pleiku, Vietnam, in which the barracks of 23,000 American military advisers was shelled by the North. The result here was Operation Rolling Thunder, a three-year long bombing campaign against the North that resulted in the death of tens of thousands Vietnamese. Highlighting the incident at Pleiku as a pretext for a more sustained intervention, Johnson’s National Security Advisor at the time, McGeorge Bundy, famously proclaimed: “Pleikus are like streetcars,” meaning that “one is sure to come along sooner or later, and you can hop aboard.” See Perlstein (2011).

<sup>101</sup>Jones (2008).

ecuting such an operation and then persuading international observers of its validity constrains the ability of interveners to pave their own path to legitimate intervention.

One might still wonder why, if fig leaves are so hard to come by, has the notion that states have an infinite well of pretexts from which to draw taken on the status of conventional wisdom?<sup>102</sup> The most plausible explanation turns on the issue of selection effects.<sup>103</sup> Because the existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on overt displays of force, it has ignored the ways in which covert operations factor into the decision-making calculus. Once we incorporate the quiet option into our analyses, the entire manner in which we understand pretexts changes. It is precisely those scenarios in which leaders *have* pretexts that we are most likely to see overt acts of regime change. Without a pretext, leaders are much more likely to select out of overt intervention and into covert intervention. By accounting for a broader range of intervention strategies, my dissertation presents a more complete picture of the process underlying the decision to overthrow regimes in public or in secret.

## 4 Competing Arguments

In order to properly assess the validity of my theory, it is important to determine whether factors other than the ones I have identified are driving a state's decision to use covert intervention. If the causes of covert operations over the past half-century are simply reducible to the idiosyncratic whims of clandestine organizations, for example, there would be little need for a new theoretical framework. In this vein, one popular explanation for the widespread prevalence of covert action, at least for U.S. behavior throughout the Cold War, is that clandestine organizations like the CIA act beyond the control of the president. This explanation was made popular by Senator Frank Church during a congressional investigation into U.S. covert operations in which he

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<sup>102</sup>e.g. [Krasner \(1999\)](#); [Mearsheimer \(2011\)](#).

<sup>103</sup>[Fearon \(2002\)](#).

likened the CIA to a “rogue elephant.”

Notwithstanding the popularity of the rogue elephant thesis, most experts roundly reject it as a plausible explanation for covert action. According to Daugherty, nearly every significant covert operation undertaken by the CIA during the Cold War had direct approval—sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit—of the president.<sup>104</sup> Otis Pike, a Democratic Representative from New York and vocal critic of the Agency, reluctantly acknowledged the same: “One thing I really disagreed with [Senator Frank] Church on was his characterization of the CIA as a ‘rogue elephant.’ The CIA never did anything the White House didn’t want. Sometimes they didn’t want to do what they did.”<sup>105</sup> The rogue elephant metaphor itself is also notorious for having been taken out of context. Rather than agreeing with the general sentiment, the main conclusions drawn by the Church Committee were unambiguous. The White House was directly engaged in all major covert operations.<sup>106</sup>

Given the inherent weakness of the rogue elephant thesis, we must look elsewhere for plausible alternative explanations as to why leaders might conceal or disclose their intervention efforts. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, the existing literature identifies numerous reasons why leaders might be attracted to secrecy. Carson, for example, argues that leaders are likely to turn to covert action when the threat of escalation is high.<sup>107</sup> Others look to domestic politics, noting that covert action is most likely when leaders want to pursue normatively unpopular policies such as supporting human rights violators, targeting fellow democracies, and so on.<sup>108</sup> After walking through these explanations in Part I, I made the case that particular kinds of reputational concerns — reputations for rule-breaking and clientism — should be especially relevant as drivers of secrecy. To the extent that concerns related to

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<sup>104</sup>Daugherty (2004, 91-111).

<sup>105</sup>Haines (1998).

<sup>106</sup>United States Senate (1975).

<sup>107</sup>Carson (2016).

<sup>108</sup>O’Rourke (2013, 87); Russett (1993, 124).

escalation or domestic politics motivate leaders' decisions for secrecy more often than the reputational concerns I identified, my argument would be weakened.

It is worth pointing out that although I have hung my hat on a particular set of concerns as the most potent drivers of secrecy, the risk-based framework outlined in Part II of this chapter can actually accommodate a much wider range of risks from overt action than reputation. Even in cases in which the threat of escalation or domestic politics predominate, the most crucial element to my framework is that a leader's willingness to incur these various risks is greater in the realm of regime rescue than it is in the realm of regime change. Put differently, it is possible for my argument to fail one set of tests — which risks from overt action are most influential in determining the desire for secrecy — while passing another — whether the risks of failed action or the risks from overt action loom larger in a particular intervention scenario. Risk-seeking behavior in the realm of regime change or risk-averse behavior in the realm of regime rescue would, however, violate the expectations of my risk-based framework and lend credence to more standard expected utility models.

## 5 Research Design

Understanding why great powers choose to topple or rescue regimes in secret or in public is complicated by a number of challenges. Perhaps most obviously, the study of covert intervention, and hidden statecraft more generally, is plagued by one very simple fact: Covert operations are planned and executed so as to remain secret. It is well within the realm of possibility that the interventions we do observe vary systematically from those that remain hidden from public consciousness. I attempt to mitigate at least some of the major threats to validity associated with studying secrecy in international politics by focusing primarily on the chief exporter of covert operations over the past seventy years, the United States.

Emphasizing U.S. interventions helps to attenuate some of the most prominent issues associated with studying secrecy in international politics. This is especially true of U.S. interventions that transpired during the Cold War. The combination of Congressional investigations, declassification procedures, and intensive investigative journalism have worked to make public many of America's covert operations over the past several decades. While we most likely lack access to the full universe of U.S.-sponsored covert operations, it is plausible that we at least have a representative sample.<sup>109</sup> The major liability associated with strictly studying the United States is, of course, external validity. That is, can my argument account for the intervention behavior of other actors? In Chapter 5, I confront this issue head on by exploring the determinants of secrecy and openness in the lead up to the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan over the course of 1979.

## 5.1 Case Selection and Process Tracing

The universe from which I selected my cases were all episodes of U.S. interventions during the Cold War in which the main objective was to change or rescue a regime by way of force, either directly or via outsourcing. The first set of cases I examine are Eisenhower's, and later Kennedy's, efforts to covertly oust Fidel Castro in 1961 and Reagan's very public invasion of Grenada in 1983. Taken together, these two cases exhibit significant variation on the dependent variable.<sup>110</sup> The Bay of Pigs was an explicit attempt by U.S. decision-makers to conceal their role in Castro's ouster. Conversely, the invasion of Grenada represents a very public attempt to oust General Hudson Austin and the New Jewel Movement. This pair of cases approximates a most-similar research design,<sup>111</sup> holding constant a number of potential confounders, including the identity of the intervening state, a period of heightened tensions be-

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<sup>109</sup>Berger, Easterly, Numm and Satyanath (2013); O'Rourke (2013).

<sup>110</sup>King, Keohane and Verba (1994, 141-142).

<sup>111</sup>Przeworski and Tuene (1970).

tween the Soviet Union and the United States, the geographic region of the target, and the nature of the threat at issue (e.g. communist elements).

The second set of cases I examine are Nixon's decision to secretly outsource intervention to Israel during the Black September crisis in Jordan in 1970 and Eisenhower's overt rescue efforts during the Lebanese Civil War in 1958. Like the two instances of regime change, these cases exhibit significant variation on the dependent variable. Covert support for King Hussein via Israel represents an attempt by the U.S. to rescue the Jordanian monarch without showing the hand of the United States. The invasion of Lebanon was a very public attempt to rescue Camille Chamoun from falling to the Nasserites. These cases hold constant similar confounders to those identified above including geographic region, the party of the president, a period of heightened tensions between the Soviets and the U.S. (i.e. pre-détente), and the nature of the threat (e.g. Arab nationalism).

The two secret interventions analyzed here also represent hard cases for my theory. Consider first the case of U.S. intervention in Cuba. As mentioned numerous times, there are a variety of reasons why we might have expected Eisenhower and Kennedy to pursue overt intervention against Castro: Cuba was situated comfortably within America's "backyard"; the odds of a meaningful Soviet response in the form of a counter-intervention were thought to be extremely low; and there would likely have been widespread domestic support for openly using force against Castro. The situation was thus ripe for overt action. That decision-makers opted for a covert operation anyway is puzzling.

Nixon's use of secrecy during Black September is also puzzling. Early on in the crisis, the *fedayeen* hijacked four TWA airplanes, each of which contained a large number of passengers, at least some of which held American passports. Given that U.S. decision-makers have used the pretext of saving nationals in cases of regime change, it seems odd that Nixon opted *not* to invoke such a justification to rescue

King Hussein. Furthermore, America’s previous incursions into the region to prop up friendly clients, including the invasion of Lebanon in 1958, renders it is even more strange that we do not see the U.S. capitalizing on this opportunity by pursuing an overt intervention in 1970. The theory developed here, which explored different types of reputational concerns, helps explain why. A full treatment of why I chose to examine the Soviet Union’s intervention into Afghanistan appears in Chapter 5.

The primary tool I use to test my theory against alternative arguments is process tracing, or “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator.”<sup>112</sup> Process tracing is useful for substantiating the casual mechanisms posited by a theory.<sup>113</sup> My main goal in utilizing process tracing methods is what Mahoney calls a “*theory testing task*,” in which researchers set out to assess “whether a particular *X*” or set of *X*s — in this case, the combination of the risks from overt action and the relationship of the policy goal to the status quo — “was a cause of *Y*” — the decision to authorize either a covert or an overt operation — “in case *Z*.”<sup>114</sup>

In the interest of transparency and falsifiability, it will be useful to briefly articulate the kind of evidence I would expect to find if my argument is correct. Let us begin with the case of regime change. In cases in which leaders authorized covert action to depose a foreign regime, I would expect decision-makers to explicitly articulate concerns over acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. Because regime change approximates a promotive policy, I would also expect leaders to persist in their decision to rely on covert action — *even when they anticipate a high chance of mission failure* — if it means avoiding these reputational risks. Even better for my argument

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<sup>112</sup>Collier (2011, 823). See also, Beach and Pedersen (2013); George and Bennett (2005); Waldner (2014).

<sup>113</sup>Beach and Pedersen (2013); George and Bennett (2005).

<sup>114</sup>Mahoney (2015, 202; emphasis in original). The alternative to a theory testing task is what Mahoney calls a “*theory construction task*” in which analysts seek “to identify the possible *X*s that might have caused *Y* in case *Z*.”

would be some articulation of the conditions under which leaders would have authorized overt action, ideally with some reference to one or more of the pretexts identified above. Discussions of this kind would come close to providing smoking gun evidence for my theory.<sup>115</sup> As noted earlier, however, the set of pretexts from which leaders can draw is fairly circumscribed, making it difficult to invent one at will. Feasible pretexts include clear-cut cases of self-defense or authorization from either the United Nations Security Council or, in some instances, analogous international institutions.

The evidence we would expect to find in cases of overt regime change should differ in important ways. In cases in which leaders authorized the use of overt force to depose a hostile regime, we would expect to find the existence of one or more of the aforementioned pretexts available to decision-makers. The presence of one or more pretexts would reasonably constitute hoop test evidence in support of my theory. At a minimum, we would expect leaders to leverage any available fig leaves in order to demonstrate the conformity of their action with extant international rules and norms. In an ideal world, we would also like to see some evidence that leaders *would have opted for covert action* to avoid reputational risks had they not had pretexts available to them. Unfortunately, smoking gun evidence of this sort will be much harder to come by in these cases. Because my theory predicts that leaders will only authorize overt action to change regimes *with* a pretext, we are far less likely to find credible evidence that could be used to support a clear counterfactual.

Episodes in which leaders use secrecy during regime rescue are important for substantiating my argument. Such acts run contrary to theories that view decision-makers as relatively unconstrained when it comes to helping out clients and allies, free to intervene overtly whenever they see fit. To begin with, we would first expect to see leaders exhibiting concerns that intervening to prop up a friendly government beset

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<sup>115</sup>Mahoney (2015, 210-212). For further discussion on the four process tracing tests (i.e. smoking guns, hoop tests, straw in the wind, doubly decisive), see Collier (2011); Van Evera (1997).



by civil conflict would tarnish the regime as a stooge of the intervening power and would also harm the intervener's own reputation as a defender of self-determination. Because regime rescue approximates a preventive goal, however, we would only expect interveners to use secrecy if there exists a feasible quiet option. Ideal evidence for my argument would be deliberations in which decision-makers articulated a willingness to eschew secrecy and go overt should it become necessary to the success of the mission. Taken as a whole, this would approximate smoking gun evidence.

The evidence we would expect to see in cases in which leaders authorized the use of overt military force to rescue a regime, particularly when the crisis is internal in nature, mirrors the foregoing in important ways, albeit with some key differences. As before, we would expect leaders to worry about reputations for clientism as it pertains to both the target and the intervener themselves. Here, however, we would also expect to find evidence that decision-makers potentially tried, and failed, to resolve the crisis quietly. Owing to the dynamics of loss aversion, then, the absence of a feasible covert alternative combined with the prospect of losing a client or ally should have induced decision-makers to act overtly, reputational risks notwithstanding. Of course, in all four of these scenarios, we would expect concerns over escalation or domestic politics to either be absent from the historical record or, alternatively, to actually point in the opposite direction of what we would expect.

The case study chapters also make extensive use of declassified materials from both the United States and the Soviet Union. These materials were collected from a number of sources, including the Ronald Reagan presidential library, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* database, the *Digital National Security Archives*, and the *Wilson Center Digital Archive*. Declassified materials are particularly well suited for recreating the decision-making process surrounding an intervention episode to determine whether leaders thought, spoke, and acted in ways consistent with my theoretical predictions. Supplementing primary documents with the rich secondary

accounts of these different intervention episodes helps to place these materials in their proper context.

As will become clear over the course of the next three empirical chapters, the two major drivers of secrecy, at least in the context of forcible regime promotion, are first, whether the objective being sought after is gains-seeking or loss-avoiding and second, whether the risks from overt action are high or low. In nearly every case, the theoretical account developed in this chapter outperforms alternative explanations. The resulting implications, which are examined in detail in the conclusion, are significant.

## Chapter 3

# Bumpy Roads and Urgent Fury

In this chapter, I will assess whether my theory of secrecy and intervention can explain two high-profile episodes of U.S.-sponsored regime change, one covert and one overt: The Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the invasion of Grenada in 1983, respectively. As noted at the end of the previous chapter, these interventions hold constant a number of potential confounders to ensure greater comparability. In both cases, the U.S. intervened in the internal affairs of a Caribbean nation in order to oust a left-leaning regime. Both interventions transpired during tense periods of the Cold War by a superpower (the U.S.) trying to limit the influence of its major adversary (the Soviet Union). I begin each case by providing some historical context and briefly exploring the general causes of intervention. Having laid this foundation, I leverage a wide range of primary and secondary materials to shed light on the mechanisms by which decisions for secrecy or publicity were made.

Before delving into the cases, it will be helpful to identify the type of case-specific evidence we would expect to see if my argument is correct. In the Bay of Pigs case, we would first want to know whether decision-makers assessed the chances of a successful covert mission as low, at least compared to any available overt options. Next, and

consistent with my hypothesis that leaders will exhibit risk-averse behavior when pursuing gains, we would want to see decision-makers in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations persisting in their quest for secrecy notwithstanding the higher chance of failure. Leaders vocalizing concerns that overtly deposing Castro would violate America's commitment to the non-intervention principle, thereby undermining their leadership position in the hemisphere and beyond, would support my argument that the desire to avoid reputations for rule-breaking acts as a powerful driver of secrecy. Even better would be an enumeration of the conditions under which the U.S. would have opted for overt regime change against Castro with some reference to the pretexts articulated in Chapter 2. Evidence of this kind would serve as a useful counterfactual. Finally, we would expect fears of escalation or domestic-political considerations to be less consequential than reputational concerns in motivating decision-makers to privilege deniability over effectiveness.

The evidence we would expect to find in the lead up to the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983 should differ in important ways. First, we would expect to find evidence of a clearly defined pretext, or set of pretexts, used by the Reagan administration to justify the decision to overtly use force against General Hudson Austin and the New Jewel Movement. Feasible pretexts include the need to save American nationals residing on the island, legitimate claims to self-defense, UNSC authorization, and so forth. It would also be a boon to my argument if decision-makers explicitly articulated the ways in which intervention in the presence these fig leaves conformed to extant international rules and norms. Because there actually were pretexts available in the lead up to the invasion, we are less likely to find evidence that could be used to support a clear counterfactual, specifically, whether the U.S. would have opted for covert action absent the available fig leaves. We can, however, use the evidence from the Bay of Pigs to get as close to a counterfactual as possible; the similarities across the two cases provide a partial, albeit imperfect, means of making such an inference.

# 1 Operation Bumpy Road

America’s intervention against Cuba in 1961 — codenamed “Operation Bumpy Road” — was a plan hatched by the Eisenhower administration, and carried out by the Kennedy administration, to covertly unseat Castro. The role of the United States was intended to be shrouded in secrecy.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding the year-long preparation, Operation Bumpy Road turned out to be a humiliating defeat for the newly-elected Kennedy administration. To this day, the invasion at the Bay of Pigs remains a major point of contention between the U.S. and Cuba.<sup>2</sup> Much ink has been spilled over the years examining the various reasons why the mission ultimately failed, ranging from Kennedy’s decision to cancel air support for the Cuban exiles at the last minute to obfuscation by top-level decision-makers and bureaucrats.<sup>3</sup> What existing scholarship has largely failed to grapple with directly, however, is why the mission was covert at all. Although secondary accounts provide some important clues about the decision for secrecy, there exists no systematic analysis of the U.S. decision to pursue covert action rather than an overt operation. This chapter fills that void.

## 1.1 Historical Background

Whatever America’s interests in Cuba were throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its engagement in the country, and the region more generally, increased markedly in 1898.<sup>4</sup> After assisting Cuba in their struggle for independence against Spain during the Spanish American War, the United States quickly imposed a set of harsh restrictions on Cuban autonomy. According to Rabe, the “Cubans paid a

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<sup>1</sup>As we will see shortly, the various attempts by the Kennedy administration to keep the operation hidden were, by and large, failures. As noted in Chapter 2, however, most important for our purposes is *why* the U.S. preferred covert to overt action rather than how well plausible deniability actually worked in any given case.

<sup>2</sup>DeYoung and Miroff (2015).

<sup>3</sup>e.g. Blight and Kornbluh (1998); Jones (2008); Kornbluh (1998).

<sup>4</sup>Monten (2005).

price for the U.S. aid. The United States forced Cuba to attach to its new constitution the Platt Amendment, which gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuba's internal affairs."<sup>5</sup> More specifically, the Platt Amendment granted the United States "the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty...."<sup>6</sup> For the next several decades, the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba was dictated primarily by the contours of Platt. An overt intervention in 1906 to quell an incipient rebellion was just one of many stark reminders.<sup>7</sup>

Following several tumultuous decades fraught with civil strife and foreign intervention, Cuba finally managed to transition to a new constitution in 1940, ushering in twelve years of representative rule. The country's short-lived experiment with democracy came to an abrupt end in 1952 after Cuba's sitting president, Fulgencio Batista, staged a military coup following an unsuccessful bid for a second non-consecutive term in office.<sup>8</sup> U.S. support for the new regime was automatic. According to Howard Jones:

Throughout the 1950s the Eisenhower administration sought to maintain economic and political stability in Cuba as a means for promoting both U.S. commerce and security in the Caribbean World. To facilitate these objectives, the White House supported Fulgencio Batista's iron rule by providing arms and military advisors through the Mutual Security Program until congressional pressure cut off military assistance in the latter part of the decade.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, the new dictator's brutality came at a price. Just seven years after taking power, Batista was forcibly ousted by a young and charismatic revolutionary named Fidel Castro.

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<sup>5</sup>Rabe (2006, 50).

<sup>6</sup>Library of Congress (2011).

<sup>7</sup>Bonsal (1967, 261–262).

<sup>8</sup>Dominguez (1978).

<sup>9</sup>Jones (2008, 9).

Castro's first attempt to oust Batista occurred on July 26, 1953. Though unsuccessful, the attempt gave the insurgents their symbolic name: "The 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement." Finally, on New Year's Day in 1959, "Castro's forces drove Batista into exile and ... seized control of the government. The Eisenhower administration quickly extended recognition to the fledgling regime, praising its assurances of democratic elections and fundamental freedoms."<sup>10</sup> The honeymoon period between the two nations was short-lived. Just two weeks after taking power, Castro declared his intention to set Cuba on a new path, asserting that the Platt Amendment would no longer govern relations between the two nations. "By the end of 1959," argues Jones, "the White House had escalated its efforts, now determined to remove Castro either by covert means or, perhaps, by assassination. In December the CIA considered two programs intended to prepare Cubans for paramilitary operations aimed at overthrowing the regime."<sup>11</sup> The rivalry that emerged in 1959 dictated U.S.-Cuban relations for the next half-century. Only very recently have relations between the two countries begun to normalize.

### **The Drivers of Intervention in Cuba**

Although my goal is not to theorize the conditions under which states will pursue regime change in general, no analysis of the Bay of Pigs would be complete without briefly identifying the key factors motivating the U.S. to oust Castro forcibly. As noted, Fidel Castro's successful revolution in 1959 represented a watershed in U.S.-Cuban relations. Perhaps the most immediate reason why policymakers wanted Castro gone was the perceived geopolitical threat he seemed to pose to U.S. interests in Cuba and the hemisphere more broadly.<sup>12</sup> One such concern was the future of the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>13</sup> As Jones notes, "[f]rom the moment Castro

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<sup>10</sup>Jones (2008, 10).

<sup>11</sup>Jones (2008, 13).

<sup>12</sup>Morgenthau (1967).

<sup>13</sup>Jones (2008, 16).

came to power, the United States feared that he would try to nullify or renounce the 1903 treaty granting America's hold on that small piece of land.”<sup>14</sup>

Though important, decision-makers in Washington were concerned with far more than simply losing access to Guantanamo Bay. Indeed, there was a palpable sense among many that allowing Castro to run Cuba effectively meant living with a Soviet satellite 90 miles off the coast of Florida.<sup>15</sup> The main concern was less that Cuba would pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland and more that the country might serve as a launching pad for Soviet-sponsored subversion in the region. A declassified document from February 17, 1961 reads:

“Cuba will, of course, never present a direct military threat to the United States and it is unlikely that Cuba would attempt open invasion of any other Latin American country since the U.S. could and almost certainly would enter the conflict on the side of the invaded country. Nevertheless, as Castro further stabilizes his regime, obtains more sophisticated weapons, and further trains the militia, Cuba will provide an effective and solidly defended base for Soviet operations and expansion of influence in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>16</sup>

Contributing to this threat perception was Castro's affinity for communism.<sup>17</sup> On January 27, 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in which they cautioned: “Unless the United States takes immediate and forceful action, there is a great and present danger that Cuba will become permanently established as a part of the Communist Bloc, with disastrous consequences to the security of the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>18</sup> Owing to these developments, “The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe[d] that the primary objective of the United States in Cuba should be the speedy overthrow of the Castro Government, followed by the establishment of a pro-U.S. Government which, with U.S. support, will accomplish

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<sup>14</sup>Jones (2008, 31).

<sup>15</sup>Jones (2008); Morgenthau (1967).

<sup>16</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 111).

<sup>17</sup>Jones (2008, 12), Wyden (1979).

<sup>18</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff (1961).



the desired objectives for the Cuban people.”<sup>19</sup> Castro’s charismatic leadership style and the enthusiasm he drew from the masses only contributed to decision-makers’ desire to see him gone.<sup>20</sup>

A reasonable question to ask at this point is whether U.S. decision-makers’ perceptions of the Castro regime as a material threat to America’s security and interests were reasonable given the available information or whether they were driven by an irrational fear and hatred of any left-leaning leader espousing anti-U.S. rhetoric, a common criticism of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War.<sup>21</sup> Evidence taken from the time suggests that these perceptions were indeed rooted in reality.<sup>22</sup> According to Jones, “the final bits of proof of Castro’s Communist allegiance fell into place in February 1960 when, shortly after extending recognition to the People’s Republic of China, he signed a treaty with the Soviet Union.”<sup>23</sup> Historian Peter Wyden writes that, “During the week [in September 1959], Castro participated by telephone in a meeting of his Cabinet in Havana, which recognized Communist China and North Korea. Cuba was the first nation in the Western Hemisphere to do so. While Fidel was many things, he was hardly, as a congressman had said the year before, a *nuevo amigo*.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, the combination of ideological and geopolitical threat led then-Vice President Nixon to conclude “that his patience with Castro was over; it was time to eradicate this ‘cancer’ from the American hemisphere ‘to prevent further Soviet penetration.’”<sup>25</sup> The seeds of intervention had been sown.

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<sup>19</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff (1961).

<sup>20</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 6).

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, a recent exchange between Poznansky (2015) and Barkawi (2015). On threat perceptions more generally, see Farnham (2003)

<sup>22</sup>It is worth noting that I am emphatically not taking a stand on whether the U.S. *ought* to have intervened in Cuba. Rather, my point is simply that decision-makers’ rhetoric about Castro as a threat to U.S. national security and interests had an empirical basis, owing primarily to the geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union. This same caveat applies to the remainder of the cases.

<sup>23</sup>Jones (2008, 17).

<sup>24</sup>Wyden (1979, 43).

<sup>25</sup>Wyden (1979, 66).

## 1.2 The Appeal of Secrecy

As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, a dangerous brew of ideological competition and geopolitical threat combined to incentivize U.S. decision-makers to seek the forcible removal of Fidel Castro. Yet, ideology and geopolitics alone cannot tell us why Eisenhower, and later Kennedy, ultimately opted for a covert solution. While easy answers are hard to come by, my argument in this dissertation is that great power interveners like the U.S. seek out secret solutions when they are unable to legitimize overt regime change and reduce the chances that they will acquire a reputation for rule-breaking. Furthermore, because leaders are more sensitive to the risks from overt action than they are to the risks of failure when pursuing promotive foreign policy goals like regime change, they should even prove willing to adopt strategies that lower the former set of risks at the expense of increasing the latter.

Drawing on a wide range of declassified documents and secondary sources, the remainder of this section will make three key points in support of this argument: (1) The U.S. went to extreme lengths to conceal their complicity in the overthrow of Castro, risking a failed operation in the process; (2) The threat of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking not only drove leaders underground but also resulted in operational decisions that reduced the efficacy of the proposed covert operation; and (3) The U.S. unsuccessfully searched for, and even discussed fabricating, pretexts that might have enabled overt action under the guise of justified intervention, lending credence to an important counterfactual, that the Bay of Pigs might have been overt had a fig leaf existed that could have lowered the reputational risks from overt regime change.

### **Privileging Deniability Over Effectiveness**

The first task before us is to understand how U.S. decision-makers thought about the various intervention strategies available to them in their quest to unseat Castro. Straightforwardly, the intense desire for secrecy and plausible deniability motivated

officials to bend over backwards trying to hide the role of the U.S. in the regime change operation. During a top secret meeting at the White House on March 17, 1960, just one day after the initial covert action plan was authorized, Eisenhower acknowledged that “he knows of no better plan for dealing with this situation.”<sup>26</sup> “The great problem,” noted Eisenhower, “is leakage and breach of security. *Everyone must be prepared to swear that he has not heard of it.*”<sup>27</sup> After numerous revisions, policymakers finally settled on a action plan that entailed secretly training Cuban exiles in Guatemala to land at Bahía de Cochinos (the Bay of Pigs), establishing a beachhead, and inciting an uprising that could challenge the Castro regime.<sup>28</sup> Nearly all decision-makers involved in the planning process were acutely aware that the proposed covert operation plan severely limited the chances of successfully overthrowing Castro. As we will see, those most directly involved in the plans to overthrow Castro openly discussed the tradeoffs between operational efficacy and the possibility of denying complicity. In the end, policymakers privileged the latter.

The desire to avoid being tied to Castro’s overthrow spanned the gamut of potential overt actions, from most intense to least. A paper prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency on February 17, 1961, notes: “For reasons which require no elaboration the overt use of U.S. military forces to mount an invasion of Cuba has been excluded as a practical alternative.”<sup>29</sup> This basic desire to avoid publicity went far beyond ruling out a full-scale invasion. The decision to equip the Cuban exiles with outdated World War II-era bombers is instructive in this regard. According to Wyden, “American sponsorship was supposed to be deniable.... [It was] decided that World War II-vintage B-26 bombers would be the operation’s work horses because they had

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<sup>26</sup>Brigadier General USA (1960).

<sup>27</sup>Brigadier General USA (1960, emphasis mine).

<sup>28</sup>Wyden (1979, 100). See also Goodpaster (1960).

<sup>29</sup>Central Intelligence Agency (1961c). Parenthetically, of course, this does indeed require elaboration. While the concerns about publicity might have been obvious to military and government officials at the time, such concerns have often been missed by historical accounts of the episode.

been sold as surplus all over the world.”<sup>30</sup> Wyden continues that “[t]he fleet of retired Air Force planes mothballed outside Tucson, Arizona, contained more B-26s than anybody could ever use, and CIA technicians were ready to ‘sanitize’ them — that is, remove all identifying numbers and insignia.”<sup>31</sup> Use of the B-26 bomber nicely captures policymakers’ willingness to trade efficacy for deniability. According to Peter Kornbluh, “the use of obsolete and inadequate B-26 aircraft, instead of the more efficient A-5s originally requested, was a concession to non-attributability which hampered the operation severely.”<sup>32</sup>

In the course of their planning, policymakers also discussed whether to furnish the exiles with direct U.S. air support to grant them enough time to establish a secure beachhead and prevent, or at least delay, direct contact with Castro’s forces in the initial stages of the operation. While air strikes may have markedly increased the prospects of a successful landing — indeed, their absence is sometimes credited with the mission’s failure — they would have seriously jeopardized Kennedy’s ability to deny American complicity in the invasion. As Jones put it, “[i]f you are going to have United States air cover, you might as well have a complete United States commitment, which would have meant a full-fledged invasion by the United States. That was not the policy of the United States in April 1961.’ Thus did [Kennedy] maintain the fiction that the Cuba project was not an American enterprise.”<sup>33</sup> Each of these various decisions made by the U.S. in the planning stages of the Bay of Pigs illustrate the intensity with which policymakers wished to deny complicity in the operation.

Contrary to the way in which the Bay of Pigs is sometimes portrayed, policymakers were well aware that they were making non-trivial sacrifices in terms of operational efficacy by opting for the covert action plan they eventually settled on. Howard

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<sup>30</sup>Wyden (1979, 70).

<sup>31</sup>Wyden (1979, 70–71).

<sup>32</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 56).

<sup>33</sup>Jones (2008, 94).

Jones describes the situation this way: “President Kennedy confronted a monumental dilemma. Infiltration might conceal the American hand, but it lacked dramatic flair and was less likely to stir up a general uprising so vital to Castro’s fall. Invasion offered a greater prospect for military success, but it left little hope for a popular uprising and greatly reduced the chances of plausible deniability.”<sup>34</sup> Richard Bissell, the Deputy Director of Plans at the Central Intelligence Agency and one of the chief architects of the Bay of Pigs invasion, couched the problem in these terms:

“One objective was that, mainly throughout the various activities comprised in this project, the Castro regime should be overthrown. The other was that the political and moral posture of the United States before the world at large should not be impaired ... Overthrowing Castro ‘in such a manner that the official responsibility of the U.S. government could be disclaimed’ was the chosen solution, but at the cost of ‘maximum effectiveness’ ... ‘If complete deniability had been consistent with maximum effectiveness, there would theoretically have remained no conflict of goals *but in fact this could not be (and never is) the case*’.”<sup>35</sup>

As should be clear, top-level decision-makers were well aware that in order to have a shot at plausible deniability, they would have to make serious operational sacrifices, sacrifices which dramatically reduced the probability of mission success.

Assessments of the proposed operation’s chances of success in the lead-up to the invasion lend credence to Bissell’s appraisal. McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy’s National Security Advisor, penned a memo summarizing a high-level discussion of Cuba on January 28, 1961 in which he noted that, “The present estimate of the Department of Defense is that no course of action currently authorized by the United States Government will be effective in reaching the agreed national goal of overthrowing the Castro regime.”<sup>36</sup> The iteration of the plan to which Bundy was referring contained “a number of covert measures against Castro, including propaganda, sabotage, political

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<sup>34</sup>Jones (2008, 62).

<sup>35</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 141; *emphasis mine*).

<sup>36</sup>Bundy (1961*a*).

action, and direct assistance to anti-Castro Cubans in military training.”<sup>37</sup> Lyman Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, echoed similar doubts about the efficacy of the existing covert operation on January 28, “offer[ing] a personal opinion that in view of the strong forces Castro now had that the Cubans would have very little chance of success.”<sup>38</sup> As the actual operation was collapsing in mid-April, Dean Acheson wryly told Kennedy that “[i]t doesn’t take Price Waterhouse to tell you that 1,500 Cubans aren’t as good as 25,000.”<sup>39</sup>

It is worth noting that at least some agencies appear not to have shared in the pessimism about the utility of the ongoing covert operation.<sup>40</sup> The CIA, for example, held a more sanguine view of “the [Cuban] exile force’s ability to land and hold a beach head.”<sup>41</sup> As Jones usefully points out, however, “[t]he CIA appeared less interested in destroying the Cuban air force than in leaving an impression that the assaults had originated in Cuba.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, even where assessments of the operation’s efficacy aired on the side of optimism, this appears to have had less to do with estimates of the likelihood of successfully removing Castro and more to do with faith in the ability to conceal America’s hand. In sum, the fact that the U.S. pursued covert action fully aware of its limited prospects for success suggests that the risks of publicity were too simply great for policymakers to stomach. The next section will analyze the precise risks from overt action that decision-makers were working so hard to avoid.

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<sup>37</sup>Bundy (1961*a*).

<sup>38</sup>Bundy (1961*a*).

<sup>39</sup>Kornbluh (1998, 2).

<sup>40</sup>Some, such as Treverton (1987, 89-96), go beyond this to make the case that there was actually widespread optimism among top-level decision-makers — including CIA Director Dulles — about the chances of mission success. Although the quotes provided above cast doubt on the veracity of such claims, it is important to note that even if Treverton is right, the fact that the Kennedy administration opted not to go overt and provide air cover once it became patently obvious that the mission was failing is consistent with what we would expect given the tenets of loss aversion, i.e. an unwillingness to go overt given the inherent risks in doing so.

<sup>41</sup>Bundy (1961*a*).

<sup>42</sup>Jones (2008, 51).

## Concerns About Reputations for Rule-Breaking

We know from the previous section that U.S. decision-makers intensely clung to the prospect of deniability during the Bay of Pigs at the expense of enhancing the operation's efficacy. Put differently, the risks of mission failure for the proposed covert operation were known to be high. What remains to be addressed, however, is why leaders were so worried about publicity. In what follows, I will show that leaders thought about the risks from overt action in the ways described in Chapter 2. Specifically, officials were worried that publicly overthrowing Castro would severely harm America's reputation as a rule-follower and ultimately threaten the stability of international order. That policymakers stuck with covert action notwithstanding their intense desire to depose Castro is consistent with the logic of loss aversion.

Declassified documents taken from the Eisenhower period reveal widespread concern that the risks from overt action in Cuba were high owing to reputational concerns. On February 26, 1960, several weeks before the first document outlining the covert action plan against Cuba was formally penned, Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations, sent a letter to Livingston T. Merchant, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, outlining the pros and cons of the different proposals for unseating Castro. Most interesting for our purposes is Burke's enumeration of the disadvantages of unilateral overt action:

- (a) It would violate our OAS commitments to seek settlement by peaceful means.
- (b) It would lead to charges of aggression against the U.S., both in the OAS and in the United Nations, with the resulting possibility of UN and OAS action against the U.S.
- (c) It would prove that the U.S. is not willing to abide by its treaties if U.S. interests dictate otherwise.
- (d) It could isolate the U.S. from the other American States.
- (e) It would violate the principle of non-intervention.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Burke (1960).

One day later, Burke's conclusions were "endorsed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for submission as a proposal to the National Security Council."<sup>44</sup> That a top military official in the Eisenhower administration focused so intently on reputational concerns rooted in America's commitment to non-intervention is significant. Of course, Burke was well-aware of the possible benefits of covert action: "If carried out successfully," he wrote, "[the] Free World and Latin American opinion would be favorable to the U.S." and the "U.S. would not be charged with aggression."<sup>45</sup> The key disadvantage of secrecy, however, was that "[t]here [was] no certainty of success" and "[t]he effort might well come too late."<sup>46</sup> Burke's comments turned out to be quite prescient.

Admiral Burke and, by endorsement, the Joint Chiefs, were far from the only officials in the Eisenhower administration to see overt action against Castro as involving significant reputational risks akin to those described in the previous chapter. On March 8, roughly one week before the first version of the covert action plan was authorized, the Planning Board of the National Security Council convened to discuss the ongoing issue in Cuba. An Editorial Note in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series usefully describes the general contours of the meeting:

"In these circumstances, the question was posed to the Planning Board: Must we continue to tolerate the Castro government in view of the effect its policies are having on our interests? The Planning Board concluded that no overt action against the Castro regime would, at the present time, be in U.S. interests (a) because of the absence of any apparent alternative to the present government, (b) it would tend to solidify Castro's support—indeed, Castro may be trying to provoke such action, (c) the obligations we have to the OAS and the need of having its support for any measures taken, and (d) because of the effect on world opinion."<sup>47</sup>

While the Planning Board's list of concerns are admittedly more expansive than Burke's, many of the core issues regarding overt intervention, including the effect it

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<sup>44</sup>Rubottom (1960).

<sup>45</sup>Burke (1960).

<sup>46</sup>Burke (1960).

<sup>47</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States* (N.d.c).



would have on America's image as a rule-bound power, remained the same.

From the moment Kennedy took office, key decision-makers in his administration set out to assess how a public operation to unseat Castro would play out in Latin America and across the globe more broadly. Just two days after the inauguration on January 20, 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk expressed serious reservations about overt regime change in Cuba. A declassified memorandum, dated January 22, nicely encapsulates the thrust of Rusk's concerns: "An estimate should be made of the effects of overt U.S. action in Cuba on the rest of the world with particular reference to the rest of Latin America, the OAS, close NATO allies and possible Soviet and ChiCom moves in other parts of the world, e.g., Berlin, Laos, Korea, and possibly the Congo."<sup>48</sup> Even from this short quote we can see that the Kennedy team quickly adopted the Eisenhower administration's objective of removing Castro as well as the concerns over what an open intervention would mean for America's reputation.

Based on the evidence presented so far, we can say with a high degree of confidence that there was consensus in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations that overtly toppling Castro would be risky. One of the key reasons turned on the perceived reputational consequences of going against widely accepted proscriptions on such behavior; repeated reference to America's prior commitments to the OAS indicate as much. Concerns about reputations for rule-breaking, however, were not limited to the most intense form of intervention in the form of a U.S.-led invasion. To the contrary, many decision-makers registered concerns about any operation that threatened to expose U.S. complicity for the same reasons enumerated above. On February 15, 1961, for example, Assistant Secretary of State Tom Mann expressed reservations about the so-called "March 1960" plan developed under the Eisenhower administration and initially adopted by the Kennedy administration. The plan involved:

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<sup>48</sup>Barnes (1961*a*).

“[T]he landing of a brigade of approximately 800 men from bases in Guatemala and Nicaragua, supported by an air strike from the same bases either simultaneously with the landing or 24 hours preceding it. Naval craft, with some ‘contracted’ United States nationals aboard, would transport the brigade and supply logistic support. It is planned that the brigade, if unopposed and if surprise were achieved, would be able to consolidate their position and hold a beachhead for a limited number of days. If internal support does not materialize, it is planned that the brigade could either march directly to nearby mountains or be withdrawn from the beach to other nearby beaches from whence they could move into the mountains. Once in the mountains they would operate as a guerrilla unit.”<sup>49</sup>

Most troublesome to Mann was that he believed the operation in its current form would not only fail but that the size and scope of it would inevitably expose America’s hand in the process. The precise nature of his concerns are worth quoting at length:

“Execution of the proposed plan would be in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4, and Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Articles 18 and 25 of the Charter of the Organization of American States, and Article 1 of the Rio Treaty, which, in general, proscribe the use of armed force with the sole exception of the right of self-defense ‘if an armed attack occurs’.... *Since the proposal comes closer to being a military invasion than a covert operation of the Guatemala type*, account must be taken of the possibility that the execution of this proposal would attract to Castro additional support within Cuba. More important, a majority of the people of Latin America would oppose the operation, and we would expect that the Communists and Castroites would organize and lead demonstrations designed to bring about the overthrow of governments friendly to us. At best, our moral posture throughout the hemisphere would be impaired. At worst, the effect on our position of hemispheric leadership would be catastrophic.”<sup>50</sup>

It is important that we carefully analyze what Mann is and is not saying here. Mann’s direct reference to the successful CIA-sponsored operation against Árbenz in Guatemala in 1954 suggests that he did not, as a general matter of principle, object to the U.S. deposing foreign regimes when America’s hand could be hidden.

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<sup>49</sup>Mann (1961).

<sup>50</sup>Mann (1961, emphasis mine).

Rather, it appears as though his primary concern was that the covert operation as conceived was too large to credibly hide American sponsorship, exposing the U.S. to all of the same risks that incentivized the turn to secrecy in the first place.

Assistant Secretary of State Mann was one of many officials to perceive the risks from overt action as high, whether from a full-scale invasion or a “loud” covert operation. In a top-level meeting on March 11, 1961, Richard Bissell pitched a reformulated intervention strategy involving “an amphibious/airborne assault at Trinidad with concurrent (but no prior) tactical air support; seizure of a beachhead contiguous to terrain suitable for guerrilla operations if necessary; landing of a provisional government as soon as the beachhead was secured.”<sup>51</sup> Kennedy was skeptical, seeing the invasion as “too spectacular” and “too much like a World War II invasion.” Instead, the president “preferred a ‘quiet’ landing, preferably at night, with no basis for any American military intervention.”<sup>52</sup>

During this same meeting on March 11, Mann echoed Kennedy’s concerns about conducting an operation that threatened to expose the U.S. hand. “To avoid anti-American reaction in the United Nations and Latin America,” notes Wyden, “[Mann] wanted American sponsorship thoroughly concealed. He particularly opposed Trinidad because its airstrip could not handle B-26s; there would be no way to maintain the fiction that the planes had operated from Cuban bases.”<sup>53</sup> As before, concerns about the implications of being affiliated with regime change against Castro fundamentally affected how the covert action plan developed.

Four days later on March 15, Kennedy’s National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy, expressed by-now familiar sentiments about the desire for, and benefits of, deniability. According to Bundy:

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<sup>51</sup>Wyden (1979, 100).

<sup>52</sup>Wyden (1979, 100).

<sup>53</sup>Wyden (1979, 100).

“A group of patriotic airplanes flying from Nicaraguan bases might knock out Castro’s Air Force in a single day without anyone knowing (for some time) where they came from, and with nothing to prove that it was not an interior rebellion by the Cuban Air Force, which has been of very doubtful loyalty in the past; the pilots will in fact be members of the Cuban Air Force who went into the opposition some time ago. *Then the invasion could come as a separate enterprise, and neither the air strike nor the quiet landing of patriots would in itself give Castro anything to take to the United Nations.*”<sup>54</sup>

Like Bundy, “[t]he State Department ... wanted to be in a position to deny that the attacks had come from either the United States, Guatemala, or Nicaragua, and it did not want to alienate other Latin American nations by directly assaulting a fellow OAS member.”<sup>55</sup> It is worthwhile to point out that none of the foregoing quotes reveal disagreement about the overarching goal of overthrowing Castro or the fact that being held accountable entailed significant risks. Where there did exist slight disagreements, these typically turned on whether or not the proposed covert action plan would thoroughly conceal U.S. complicity.

This last point is nicely bolstered by a memo penned by Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles to Secretary Rusk on March 31, 1961, just a couple of weeks prior to the start of the failed invasion. At one point, Bowles tells Rusk that:

“In considerable degree, my concern stems from a deep personal conviction that our national interests are poorly served by a covert operation of this kind at a time when our new President is effectively appealing to world opinion on the basis of high principle.... 1. In sponsoring the Cuban operation, for instance, we would be deliberately violating the fundamental obligations we assumed in the Act of Bogota establishing the Organization of American States ... More generally, the United States is the leading force in and substantial beneficiary of a network of treaties and alliances stretching around the world. That these treaty obligations should be recognized as binding in law and conscience is the condition not only of a lawful and orderly world, but of the mobilization of our own power. We

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<sup>54</sup>Bundy (1961c, emphasis mine).

<sup>55</sup>Jones (2008, 51).

cannot expect the benefits of this regime of treaties if we are unwilling to accept the limitations it imposes upon our freedom to act.”<sup>56</sup>

At first blush, Bowles appears critical of any operation against Castro, not simply an overt one. Upon closer inspection, however, Bowles’ main reservations are actually remarkably similar to Mann’s. “If the operation appears to be a failure in its early stages,” Bowles argued, “the pressure on us to scrap our self-imposed restriction on direct American involvement will be difficult to resist, and our own responsibility correspondingly increased.”<sup>57</sup> The primary concern here thus seems to have had less to do with the actual goal of removing Castro and more to do with the anticipated costs that the U.S. would pay for going public in the event that the covert operation proved to be a failure, something which Bowles perceived as likely.<sup>58</sup>

One of the most vocal opponents to intervention against Castro without a credible pretext — particularly with regard to any operation that held the possibility of being attributable to the United States — was Kennedy’s Special Assistant and official historian, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. At one point, Schlesinger cautioned that “‘Cuba will become our Hungary.’ ... Many observers would consider the invasion a reversion to economic imperialism of the pre-World War I, Platt-Amendment, big-stick, gunboat-diplomacy kind’.”<sup>59</sup> Schlesinger continued by arguing that most nations would perceive the act as “*calculated aggression against a small nation in defiance both of treaty obligations and of the international standards we have repeatedly asserted against the Communist World.*”<sup>60</sup> Just one week before the invasion on April 10, he again com-

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<sup>56</sup>Bowles (1961).

<sup>57</sup>Bowles (1961).

<sup>58</sup>It is certainly possible that both Mann and Bowles did indeed object to the actual goal of removing Castro but opted to couch their opposition in terms of mission feasibility. This would be particularly likely if they believed that complete opposition to regime change would not hold any real weight in the administration. Although plausible, substantiating this conjecture would require us to get into the heads of both officials to assess what they were truly thinking when they made this respective claims, an impossible task.

<sup>59</sup>Jones (2008, 67).

<sup>60</sup>Jones (2008, 67); emphasis in original.

municated apprehension to Kennedy, noting that:

“The first stage in this will be the fomenting of riots and demonstrations. American Embassies will be attacked and American diplomats (and other American personnel) mobbed. The underdeveloped countries will be urged in the United Nations to defend their own future freedom of action by defending Castro; we can expect to be placed on the defensive in the U.N. for some time and to be subjected to a series of harassing debates and resolutions. Ex-colonial nations everywhere will be called on to identify their own problems with those of Castro.”<sup>61</sup>

One of Schlesinger’s main concerns was that deniability was all but implausible: “In the first place, however ‘Cuban’ the operation will seem to be, the U.S. will be held accountable for it before the bar of world opinion: our own press has seen to that.”<sup>62</sup> Based on this quote, we can reasonably infer that Schlesinger’s opposition to the operation was based on his belief that the U.S. would be seen as responsible for the operation and, as a result, would incur the many reputational risks described above.

In sum, decision-makers’ primary concerns with either a full-blown overt operation against Castro or a covert operation that risked exposing U.S. complicity turned on its implications for the U.S.-led order and America’s role as a leader in the Western hemisphere. Perhaps most interestingly, nearly all decision-makers, hawks and doves alike, seemed to agree with the idea that removing Castro would be a boon to U.S. national security. The biggest disagreement came in the form of whether and to what extent the various iterations of the covert plan would both work and keep U.S. sponsorship concealed. Aversion to the risks of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking resulted in an inefficient operation that all but promised failure.

### **The Counterfactual Fig Leaf**

This section treads the oft-dangerous waters of counterfactual reasoning to make a case that the U.S. likely would have opted for overt intervention against Castro

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<sup>61</sup>Schlesinger Jr. (1961c).

<sup>62</sup>Schlesinger Jr. (1961c).

had they found, or been able to fabricate, a pretext to justify defection from the non-intervention principle. A fig leaf might have reduced the risks from overt action to such a degree that removing Castro either by a direct invasion or by openly supporting a force of Cuban exiles with direct air support would have been considered more seriously. In what follows, I explore a series of conversations between policymakers describing a range of scenarios in which they seemingly would have contemplated using force overtly, a marked contrast to what we saw in the previous section.

As early as 1959, decision-makers openly discussed the different ways in which they might legitimize the use of overt force to unseat the Castro regime, reducing the reputational risks at stake. In one of the earlier conversations, some officials expressed hopes that individuals more vocally associated with communism might replace Fidel and Raúl Castro, rendering intervention more palatable to Latin American states. As Wyden notes, “Mr. Dulles felt that this might not be disadvantageous because it would facilitate multilateral action by the Organization of American States.”<sup>63</sup> Although this quote leaves much to be desired in terms of specificity, it is still possible to read between the lines: OAS-sanctioned intervention would have met the criteria of justified intervention, facilitating the use of overt force against Castro at low risk.

Discussions about the conditions under which the OAS might be moved to support American intervention in Cuba, thereby reducing the reputational risks from overt action, carried into the following year. During a meeting with Eisenhower on March 17, 1960, Gordon Gray, the president’s National Security Advisor, “asked whether OAS support [would] only be forthcoming if the Cubans actually attack Americans on the island.”<sup>64</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Roy Rubottom:

“Thought that the OAS might be brought to act prior to such an attack on the basis of Castro being tied up with international communism. The

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<sup>63</sup>Wyden (1979, 25).

<sup>64</sup>Brigadier General USA (1960).

President asked whether we have to base it on the word ‘communism’ or whether we couldn’t base it on dictatorship, confiscation, threats to life, etc. Mr. Nixon said he thought the Caracas Resolution was based on the term ‘international communism.’”<sup>65</sup>

The absence of any mention about the risks from overt action here is noteworthy. One reasonable explanation as to why decision-makers downplayed reputational concerns, I would argue, is that overt intervention supported by a pretext would have ameliorated such risks. Securing a formal invitation from the OAS for intervention against Castro was one possible means by which to accomplish this task.

Discussion about the conditions under which the U.S. might be able to intervene overtly at relatively low risk also continued into 1961. In a memo dated January 3, several weeks before Kennedy’s inauguration, C. Tracy Barnes, a high-level official at the CIA, stated that “[t]he tone of the meeting was clearly in support of overt introduction of U.S. forces if any steps were taken by the Cubans either to harm American citizens or to attack or damage official U.S. property (e.g. Guantanamo).”<sup>66</sup> Ten days later on January 13, Ambassador Whiting Willauer affirmed these sentiments, noting “that there is one military contingency plan which will have to be ready for use if Castro should start slaughtering Americans. This would be a purely military plan and would include military occupation.”<sup>67</sup> According to Jones, Eisenhower “authorized military preparations in the event of either a Cuban attack on Guantanamo or a threat to American citizens on the island.”<sup>68</sup>

One of the more fascinating aspects of these discussions was when decision-makers discussed actually fabricating a pretext for intervention rather than simply exploiting an exogenous event. Such discussions permeated the national security establishment, ranging from the CIA, to the Joint Chiefs and the State Department:

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<sup>65</sup>Brigadier General USA (1960).

<sup>66</sup>Barnes (1961*b*).

<sup>67</sup>Department of State (1961*a*).

<sup>68</sup>Jones (2008, 40).



“Some Washington officials pushed for direct American military intervention, even if it entailed manufacturing an incident as justification. The CIA and the Joint Chiefs met in early January [1960] to establish a task force drawn from the Joint Chiefs, the CIA, and the State and Defense departments, which would draft contingency plans based on the use of U.S. force. In response to a State Department request, the Defense Department prepared a study of possible military actions, including a fabricated Cuban attack on Guantanamo that required an appropriate U.S. response. Propaganda could manipulate world opinion or make the facts so ‘muddled’ that U.S. forces could hit the island under the guise of self-defense.”<sup>69</sup>

A Staff Study prepared in the Department of Defense, whose purpose was “[t]o evaluate possible military courses of action to overthrow the Castro Government in Cuba in the event currently planned political and paramilitary operations are determined to be inadequate,”<sup>70</sup> similarly notes that overt action:

“[C]ould also be justified if Castro attacked Guantanamo Bay or if such an attack were ‘staged’. With prior propaganda effort by the U.S., Free World opinion could be sufficiently swayed, or the facts sufficiently ‘muddled’, that U.S. unilateral action in response to such an attack, actual or ‘staged’ would have less impact on U.S. prestige in the Free World.”<sup>71</sup>

Two features of this quote worth highlighting. First, there was an obvious recognition of the need for some sort of a fig leaf to mitigate the damage that would follow from an unprovoked, unilateral military invasion. Second, there was explicit discussion of actually fabricating a pretext by staging a takeover of America’s naval base in Cuba. That U.S. decision-makers contemplated, and ultimately opted against, such a course of action speaks to the difficulties inherent in creating a credible fig leaf where one does not already exist. Had it been easy to do so, they likely would have.

Another interesting facet of these discussions is that there was some talk of providing the Cuban exiles with enough support so that they could establish a provisional

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<sup>69</sup>Jones (2008, 43).

<sup>70</sup>Central Intelligence Agency (1961a).

<sup>71</sup>Central Intelligence Agency (1961a).

government on the island, after which the U.S. could recognize them as the legitimate authority in Cuba.<sup>72</sup> An internal CIA meeting on January 4, 1961 notes that:

“[T]he lodgement established by our force can be used as the site for establishment of a provisional government which can be recognized by the United States, and hopefully by other American states, and given overt military assistance. The way will then be paved for United States military intervention aimed at pacification of Cuba, and this will result in the prompt overthrow of the Castro Government.”<sup>73</sup>

Two and a half weeks later, Secretary Rusk stated that, “[w]hat [the administration] needed was a ‘fig leaf.’ A Cuban provisional government on the Isle of Pines, for example, could sink Soviet ships carrying supplies to Castro with less danger than would be the case with direct involvement of U.S. forces.”<sup>74</sup> While Rusk appreciated “the enormous implications of putting U.S. forces ashore in Cuba and said we should consider everything short of this, including rough stuff, before doing so,” he was clearly a proponent of overt action if a pretext were available. As was noted in a CIA meeting on January 26, 1961, “Under these conditions and assuming that the provisional government had been recognized by the United States, there would appear to be a basis for an overt, open U.S. initiative to institute a military occupation of the island by a composite OAS force in order to put a stop to the civil war.”<sup>75</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that the desire to locate or fabricate a pretext was not limited to hard-line members of the U.S. national security establishment. Even Schlesinger, one of the most dovish members of the administration, reasoned in a similar fashion.<sup>76</sup> During an illustrative memo written to President Kennedy on February 11, 1961, Schlesinger wrote:

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<sup>72</sup>Bundy (1961*b*).

<sup>73</sup>Hawkins (1961).

<sup>74</sup>Department of State (1961*b*).

<sup>75</sup>Central Intelligence Agency (1961*b*).

<sup>76</sup>Jones (2008, 53).

“Would it not be possible to induce Castro to take offensive action first? He has already launched expeditions against Panama and against the Dominican Republic. One can conceive a black operation in, say, Haiti which might in time lure Castro into sending a few boatloads of men on to a Haitian beach in what could be portrayed as an effort to overthrow the Haitian regime. *If only Castro could be induced to commit an offensive act, then the moral issue would be clouded, and the anti-US campaign would be hobbled from the start.*”<sup>77</sup>

Schlesinger followed up by asking, “Could we not bring down Castro and Trujillo at the same time? If the fall of the Castro regime could be accompanied or preceded by the fall of the Trujillo regime, it would show that we have a principled concern for human freedom and do not object only to left-wing dictators.”<sup>78</sup> As is clear, Schelinger’s primary concern was not intervention *per se*, but rather an unprovoked intervention that would have jeopardized America’s standing in the Western hemisphere and painted the U.S. as a rule-breaker. A pretext held the promise of alleviating many of his, and his counterparts’, concerns.

### 1.3 Competing Arguments

With my argument laid-out, we can now take up alternative accounts to see how my theory fares against competitors. It is relatively easy at the outset to dismiss the simple “rogue elephant” thesis. From the very beginning of planning to overthrow Castro, the Bay of Pigs operation had direct authorization from the President of the United States. Eisenhower’s initial authorization of the covert program in March 1960 was reaffirmed with the inauguration of Kennedy, wherein he approved the continuation of the covert operation plan to unseat Castro. The notion that a rogue Central Intelligence Agency running roughshod over the president resulted in covert action in Cuba cannot be sustained.

It is certainly possible that bureaucratic pathologies contributed to the ultimate

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<sup>77</sup>Schlesinger Jr. (1961*a*, emphasis mine).

<sup>78</sup>Schlesinger Jr. (1961*a*).

failure of the covert operation. The existing scholarship outlining processes of group-think in the Bay of Pigs is one such example of this.<sup>79</sup> My main contention, however, is that the initial decision for secrecy was predicated on factors external to the idiosyncrasies of the national security establishment. Furthermore, and as I argued above, most of the decisions that contributed to the covert operation's failure turned on concerns about ensuring that the U.S. could retain plausible deniability and avoid acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking.

Another form of alternative arguments to what I have presented here turns on the most relevant drivers of secrecy. It is possible, for example, that fears of escalation with the Soviet Union rather than reputational concerns motivated leaders to act covertly.<sup>80</sup> Although it is somewhat difficult to assess the validity of this argument in light of the superpower showdown that transpired just one year later in the form of the Cuban Missile Crisis, it is crucial to recognize that the Cuban-Soviet relationship deepened *as a result* of the Bay of Pigs. A Soviet specialist on Cuba at the time of the operation, Oleg Daroussenkov, confirmed these views by noting that, "in reality, the real cooperation of the Soviet military with Cuba begins after the Bay of Pigs. In a way, the Bay of Pigs invasion speeded up everything immensely. There was a big hurry to arm the Cubans before the Americans invaded."<sup>81</sup> While this tells us that the Soviets saw the operation in this way, we still need evidence that U.S. decision-makers did as well. The historical record supports this contention.

A Special National Intelligence estimate dated March 22, 1960 concluded: "Should the Castro regime be threatened, the USSR would probably do what it could to support it. However, the USSR would not hesitate to write off the Castro regime before involving itself in a direct military confrontation with the US over Cuba, or, at least

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<sup>79</sup>Janis and Mann (1976).

<sup>80</sup>For a synopsis of the escalation argument, see Carson (2016).

<sup>81</sup>Blight and Kornbluh (1998, 37).

during the present state of Soviet policy, in a major diplomatic crisis with the US.”<sup>82</sup> Such assessments persisted right up through the invasion. On April 5, 1961, Arthur Schlesinger noted: “I must say, however, that I question the view that this operation would have serious substantive effect on Soviet policy, in Laos or elsewhere. My guess is that the Soviet Union regards Cuba as in our domain and is rather surprised that we have not taken action before this to rid ourselves of Castro.”<sup>83</sup> In short, concerns about escalation did not seem to be foremost on the minds of U.S. decision-makers at the time the decision to use covert action against Castro was made.

Domestic politics provide another possible driver of secrecy. If, for instance, decision-makers anticipated a hostile domestic reaction to an overt intervention against Castro, they might have viewed secrecy as an attractive means of intervening without incurring costs at home. Although this argument is more difficult to directly refute than the escalation argument, there is reason to believe that concerns about a hostile reaction from domestic audiences were not driving the decision for secrecy. To begin with, the biggest concern expressed by U.S. decision-makers throughout the planning phase of the operation centered on *foreign audiences*. The many pretexts discussed by policymakers, and the reasons why these pretexts were deemed as so valuable, were precisely to convince states in Latin America and the world more broadly that the U.S. was acting in conformity with longstanding rules and norms. One way in which to rebut the idea that domestic-politics was the main driver of secrecy is by the absence of direct references to such concerns.

In addition to the absence of concrete evidence pertaining to concerns about a negative domestic reaction to an invasion against Castro are more tangible, albeit circumstantial, clues suggesting that the public was not a driving concern in the decision for secrecy. In a study of public opinion on a host of issues throughout the 1960s,

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<sup>82</sup>Department of State (1960).

<sup>83</sup>Schlesinger Jr. (1961*b*).

Rogers et al. found that a majority of those surveyed in a general poll supported Kennedy's decision to use force in the Bay of Pigs. The question, which read — “Do you approve or disapprove of the way the United States government has dealt with Fidel Castro and his government in Cuba?” — elicited 55% support from those polled; 28% disapproved and 17% had no opinion.<sup>84</sup> Obviously, this cannot tell us whether Kennedy *expected* a hostile reaction from the U.S. public for an overt invasion and thus acted secretly to circumvent these costs. Neither can it tell us whether the public would have supported a full-blown invasion against Castro. What the evidence does suggest, however, is that a majority of Americans supported the U.S. approach to Cuba. It would be curious for support to have been lower prior to the failed invasion.

It will also be helpful at this point to clarify how my argument relates to existing accounts of covert and overt intervention that focus on reputations, norms, and the like. In this vein, one of O'Rourke's main contentions is that covert interventions undertaken by the U.S. in the Western hemisphere, what she terms “hegemonic operations,” were carried out in secret primarily to avoid reputational costs of various kinds:

“Most hegemonic regime changes violated norms of justified intervention. Some operations supported leaders known to have committed human rights abuses. Other missions targeted democracies, thus violating liberal norms for mutual respect between democracies. Covert conduct, however, allowed the U.S. to maintain moral authority in situations that were likely to be perceived as hypocritical by foreign and domestic audiences.”<sup>85</sup>

My argument, and the evidence leveraged in the Bay of Pigs case, refines this logic in a number of ways. First, I demonstrated *which norm* the U.S. cared about violating and *why*. The norms the U.S. worried about were not related to interventions against

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<sup>84</sup>Rogers, Stuhler and Koenig (1967, 248). It is worth noting as well that a panel of “‘experts’ — educators, business and professional people, organization leaders, journalists, ministers, and political leaders” overwhelmingly disapproved of the operation at 73% (248)

<sup>85</sup>O'Rourke (2013, 87).

democracies or human rights abusers. Rather, the norm the U.S. cared about violating was the principle of non-intervention, a principle they themselves had helped to codify in a number of international fora. Additionally, the audiences the U.S. cared about were not *both* foreign and domestic, but rather almost exclusively foreign. Within the set of relevant foreign audiences, states that subscribe to the extant order were deemed most important.

A second difference is the relevant counterfactual each of our arguments poses in the case of the Bay of Pigs. For O'Rourke, states are likely to pursue overt interventions under three conditions: "First, when policymakers believe they can secure a quick and decisive military victory without risking full-fledged conventional or nuclear war; second, when they believe that the public supports their intervention; and third, when the intervention must occur rapidly to succeed."<sup>86</sup> Contrary to this view, I argue that the U.S. is most likely to pursue overt intervention when they can locate a credible pretext that would justify the use of force, the converse of my argument for secrecy. The primary and secondary evidence presented in the previous section, which showed decision-makers eagerly searching for fig leaves, strongly supports this contention. More importantly, all three of O'Rourke's conditions for overt action were reasonably met in the lead up to the Bay Pigs. That decision-makers pursued covert action in spite of this lends further credence to my argument.

There is a final, case-specific alternative hypothesis that might explain the decision to attempt a covert operation in Cuba, particularly Eisenhower's initial decision for secrecy. This argument — what might usefully be called the "learning thesis" — is fairly straightforward: Decision-makers learned that secrecy works based on earlier efforts at covert regime change throughout the 1950s, particularly the operations against Mossadegh in Iran in 1953 and Árbenz in Guatemala in 1954.<sup>87</sup> Emboldened

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<sup>86</sup>O'Rourke (2013, 87).

<sup>87</sup>My thanks to Sean Lynn-Jones for pointing this out.

by these successes, so the argument goes, top-level officials in the Eisenhower administration thought they could exploit covert action for the same purposes in Cuba against Castro with relative ease.

The learning thesis certainly provides a plausible explanation as to why decision-makers might have been initially attracted to covert action. As the evidence presented above shows, however, officials were well-aware that they were making tremendous sacrifices in efficacy and efficiency by opting for secrecy. Unlike in Iran and Guatemala, Castro and those in his immediate inner circle had come to power via a popular revolution, rendering it almost impossible to remove him short of a full-scale invasion; decision-makers openly recognized as much. Based on the available documents, it also appears as though decision-makers' intense desire for plausible deniability was driven more by concerns about preserving America's reputation and the health of international order and less by the view that covert action would be an easy, "quick fix" solution to a thorny problem.

## 2 Operation Urgent Fury

Ronald Reagan's decision to land U.S. troops on the island of Grenada in 1983 — codenamed "Operation Urgent Fury" — stands out as one of the rare instances throughout the Cold War in which the United States openly used force in pursuit of regime change. The seeming ease and rapidity with which the U.S. military ousted the short-lived government of General Hudson Austin, however, should not blind us to the informative deliberations in the lead up to Reagan's decision to use overt force against the tiny Caribbean island.

My argument in this section is that the availability of two pretexts enabled the Reagan administration to use force publicly in pursuit of regime change without acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. Without a formal request for intervention



from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States or the ability to point to large numbers of American nationals enrolled in medical school on the island in need of rescuing,<sup>88</sup> Reagan likely would have refrained from openly deploying U.S. soldiers to the Caribbean nation. Simply because regime change might have been seen as relatively easy owing to the massive power asymmetry between the U.S. and Grenada is orthogonal to the question of what the reputational stakes associated with open intervention were. Operation Urgent Fury can usefully be thought of as a foil to the Bay of Pigs invasion. In Cuba, the absence of a pretext drove the U.S. underground to avoid acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. In Grenada, the availability of pretexts made it possible to wield military force overtly at relatively low risk.

## 2.1 Historical Background

Unlike Cuba, which was under the thumb of the United States for the better part of sixty years, Grenada had been a British colony since 1783. After nearly 200 years of colonial rule, Britain finally granted the tiny island-nation formal independence in 1974. Eric Gairy, the country's first prime minister, ruled through fear, brutality, and corruption. As a result of his repressive policies, Gairy was overthrown in a bloodless coup on March 13, 1979 by Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement (NJM).<sup>89</sup> Bishop and the NJM quickly embarked on a plan to introduce socialist economic policies and strengthen relations with the communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union and Cuba. Although the new regime was initially met with great enthusiasm by the Grenadian public, the gradual turn toward authoritarianism and corruption alienated many of their initial supporters.<sup>90</sup>

By 1983, just four years after taking power, factional strife emerged within the New

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<sup>88</sup>Whether the students enrolled in St. George's Medical School were in any real danger is a legitimate question and one that is up for debate. I explore this question in a bit more detail below.

<sup>89</sup>Burrowes (1988, xi-xii).

<sup>90</sup>Western (2005, 97).

Jewel Movement between Bishop, a moderate socialist, and the hard-line, Marxist-Leninist members of the party. On October 13, 1983, “Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop was placed under house arrest by a dissident faction within his People’s Revolutionary Guard (PRG). Bishop’s forced confinement, followed only six days later by his murder on ‘Bloody Wednesday,’ would set the stage for President Reagan’s decision to launch the invasion of Grenada.”<sup>91</sup> Thirteen days after Bishop’s untimely execution, Ronald Reagan authorized the landing of over 7,000 marines in Grenada with the publicly stated aim of rescuing American medical students and restoring law and order to the island.<sup>92</sup> Within a matter of days, the military junta was deposed. Most interesting for purposes are the factors that facilitated Reagan’s decision to use *overt* force against Grenada in pursuit of regime change. Before turning to this question, however, it will be useful to briefly identify the administration’s rationale for intervening in the first place.

### **The Drivers of Intervention in Grenada**

Relations between Grenada and the United States in the years leading up to the invasion were not particularly congenial. When Bishop and the NJM deposed Gairy and took the reigns of power in 1979, the initial reaction in the U.S. was cool, though not outright hostile. As Robert Beck notes, “the Carter administration harbored serious reservations about the Grenadian premier: [Gairy] seemed ‘a blemish not only on the face of Grenada, but also on the Caribbean.’ Accordingly, when [he] was removed from power by the New Jewel Movement, the Carter administration’s reaction was initially ambivalent.”<sup>93</sup> How, then, did the U.S. move from a position of ambivalence to one of outright hostility? The primary reason turns on the perceived geopolitical and ideological implications of allowing Grenada to continue on its drift

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<sup>91</sup>Beck (1993, 11).

<sup>92</sup>Beck (1993, 197).

<sup>93</sup>Beck (1993, 25).

toward the communist bloc, especially under the hard-line regime that replaced by Bishop in late-1983.

The first major motivator for regime change in Grenada was a belief among U.S. policymakers that the island-nation would function as a Cuban and Soviet satellite in America's sphere of influence if the NJM were to remain in power. According to Western:

“Of particular concern to the United States was the new government's anti-American rhetoric and direct solicitation of material support, arms, and training from Cuba and other Soviet bloc states. In late 1979, Bishop and Cuba's leader, Fidel Castro, concluded a deal whereby Cuba began providing skilled labor and financial resources to construct a new international airport, at Port Salinas. Six months later, Bishop welcomed a Soviet fleet to Grenada and established formal relations with Moscow. At the time, Grenada's People's Revolutionary Army was largely trained by Cuban advisors and armed with Cuban weapons.”<sup>94</sup>

Decision-makers within the United States viewed these and other developments through the prism of Cold War competition for the allegiance of countries around the globe. Of obvious concern for the U.S. was the threat of communist subversion in the Western Hemisphere. During one of his campaign speeches in March 1980, Reagan described the situation in dire terms: “Must we let Grenada, Nicaragua, El Salvador, all become additional ‘Cubas,’ new outposts for Soviet combat brigades?”<sup>95</sup>

Evidence drawn from the historical record indicates that these beliefs were reasonable given the evidence available to decision-makers at the time. As Beck notes of the regime, “[i]t was not, as has sometimes been asserted, merely a misunderstood third world leftist regime: during its brief tenure, the Bishop government had suspended elections, ended freedom of the press and other freedoms, and embarked on an intensive militarization of Grenada – all in support of its self-consciously Leninist ends.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Western (2005, 97-98).

<sup>95</sup>Quoted in Western (2005, 108).

<sup>96</sup>Beck (1993, 32).

In the aftermath of the invasion, the U.S. military captured numerous documents detailing a number of formal and informal agreements concluded between Grenada and the Soviet Union, Cuba, and North Korea as well as evidence of the new leadership's strong commitment to Leninist principles.<sup>97</sup> In a memo entitled "The Strategic Importance of Cuban Activities on Grenada," Jonathan T. Howe, an official at the State Department, reported that:

"We have recovered five original signed treaties between Grenada and the Soviet Union (3), North Korea (1) and Cuba (1)...They provide for the supply of large amounts of materiel and training and cover a period from 1980–1985. They provide detailed listings of equipment type, quantity and delivery schedules. Of key importance are the quantities, the secrecy of all the agreements, and the fact that the Soviets and the North Koreans were so deeply involved."<sup>98</sup>

The belief among U.S. decision-makers that Grenada was heading rapidly into the arms of various Communist countries appears to have been supported by tangible evidence.

Another factor contributing to concerns about the NJM was what the U.S. believed to be the militarization of the island via the construction of a 10,000 foot airstrip. "The evidence of a 10,000 foot runway under construction at the new Port Salinas airport, in conjunction with the Grenadan [sic] New Jewel Movement's stated Marxist-Leninist principles and open support from Moscow and Havana," notes Western, "were clear indications of Soviet and Cuban attempts to expand international communism in the Caribbean," especially for the hard-liners in the administration.<sup>99</sup> Notwithstanding the regime's public reassurances that the airstrip was intended solely to facilitate tourism, the Reagan administration was unconvinced. "Prominently displayed behind the president" during a speech delivered in March 1983 "was an aerial photograph of

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<sup>97</sup>Beck (1993, 12).

<sup>98</sup>Howe (1983, 5).

<sup>99</sup>Western (2005, 96).

a new airport under construction in Grenada; Reagan used this as an ominous sign that Grenada was preparing to let Cuba or the Soviet Union land military aircraft for military invasions in the Caribbean.”<sup>100</sup> A declassified memo dated October 29, 1983, just four days after the invasion, states that:

“A base on Grenada could also have been used to fuel Cuban aircraft flying to Angola. Conversely, Libyan aircraft could use the airfield to refuel on trips to Nicaragua... Finally, the Cubans could obviously use the Grenada site as a base from which to stage and resupply their ongoing revolutionary activities in East Caribbean and South American countries.”<sup>101</sup>

While the validity of these fears has been a source of contention,<sup>102</sup> the empirical record suggests that these concerns were very real to U.S. decision-makers.

A third concern was the potential threat that a hostile Grenada posed to America’s economic interests in the region. The declassified memo referenced above observed:

“Grenada straddles key sea lanes for oil flow and would be a valuable jumping-off point for subversion of Venezuela and the islands that control access to the Caribbean. We now have evidence that the Soviet Union and its allies were turning Grenada into a fortified base that would threaten those oil lanes and countries in the area”<sup>103</sup>

In a section of that same memo entitled, “Grenada’s Geographic Importance to U.S. Security,” the analysis goes on to describe these economic concerns in more detail:

“Located about 900 miles from Cuba, Grenada is roughly 90 miles off the northeastern coast of Venezuela. Cuba attempted armed subversion of Venezuela in the mid-1960s, but was thwarted. Venezuela’s oil now makes it even a more important target and Grenada would be a perfect base for such subversion. The size of the arms caches on the island suggest such subversion may have been planned”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Quigley (1992, 198).

<sup>101</sup>Howe (1983, 2).

<sup>102</sup>Burrowes (1988, 34–38).

<sup>103</sup>Howe (1983, 1).

<sup>104</sup>Howe (1983, 1).

Theories of intervention predicated on economic interests thus seem to provide at least partial explanations for Reagan’s decision to intervene in Grenada in 1983.<sup>105</sup>

Based on the evidence presented so far, it appears as though Reagan’s decision to invade Grenada on October 25, 1983 was driven by a cocktail of factors including geopolitical threat, ideological competition, and economic interests. Burrowes’ account of Reagan’s remarks just days after the invasion are illustrative in this regard: “A few days after his televised address [announcing the invasion] President Reagan returned to the subject in a speech to the National Association of Manufacturers. He again asserted, ‘It is not nutmeg that is at stake in the Caribbean and Central America, it is the United States’ national security’.”<sup>106</sup> As with the Bay of Pigs, however, none of these factors prescribed a particular intervention strategy, including whether to pursue regime change overtly or covertly.

## 2.2 Putting Overt Action on the Table

Now that we have a clearer sense of the major causes of intervention in Grenada, we can investigate the factors that made it possible for Reagan to pursue regime change overtly rather than covertly. My primary argument is that the administration’s ability to locate two credible pretexts reduced the prospect that overt regime change would impose a reputation for rule-breaking on the United States. Grenada thus represents a rare instance in which the U.S. was able to pursue foreign-imposed regime change — a promotive policy objective — overtly without jeopardizing their own image as a great power committed to international rules and norms. This contrasts sharply with what we saw in the Bay of Pigs, wherein the absence of a fig leaf rendered overt intervention a high-risk undertaking.

Because of the way in which the invasion of Grenada transpired, the structure

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<sup>105</sup>Aydin (2012); Kinzer (2006).

<sup>106</sup>Burrowes (1988, 43).

of this case study differs in important ways from our previous analysis. In the Bay of Pigs, the decision-making process leading up to the decision for covert action left in its wake a number of clues about how decision-makers were thinking about risk and what they were so concerned about. In Grenada, the immediate availability of pretexts means that declassified documents and secondary sources are dominated by discussions about how to use them to the advantage of the U.S. As such, our main focus will turn to the substance of these pretexts. Discussions pertaining to secrecy, I would argue, are most likely absent because they were deemed unnecessary. The primary task of the Reagan administration was to justify their actions on the basis of available fig leaves. While it is impossible to explicitly validate the implied counterfactual, that Reagan would have opted for a covert intervention without these pretexts, the documentary evidence reveals serious concern for how best to couch these pretexts, providing a useful contrast to the covert invasion of Cuba.

Before investigating the two pretexts in detail, it will be helpful to present Reagan's public justification for the invasion of Grenada to get a sense of how the administration framed the intervention publicly. Western's account of the administration's rationale is worth quote at length:

“On the morning of October 25, 1983, President Ronald Reagan stepped before the microphones at a hastily gathered press conference in the White House and announced: Ladies and gentlemen, on Sunday October 23, the U.S. received an urgent formal request from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States to assist in a joint effort to restore order and democracy on the island of Grenada. We acceded to the request to become part of a multinational effort with contingents from Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the United States. I might add that two of those, Barbados and Jamaica, are not members of the organization but were first approached, as we later were, by the OESC and asked to join in that undertaking. And then all of them joined unanimously in asking us to participate. *When I received reports that a large number of our citizens were seeking to escape the island, thereby exposing themselves to great danger, and after receiving a formal request for help, a unanimous request from our neighboring states, I concluded that the United States had*

*no choice but to act strongly and decisively.”*<sup>107</sup>

From this quote, we can see that the administration leaned heavily on two justifications in order to legitimize the use of overt military force in Grenada: (1) The threat posed to American citizens attending medical school on the island and (2) A formal request by the recently created Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. In what follows, I will delve into each of these justifications, respectively, drawing specific attention to the various ways in which these fig leaves plausibly reduced the reputational risks from overt action.<sup>108</sup>

### **The First Pretext: Rescuing Medical Students**

The first of the two pretexts that figured prominently in Reagan’s decision to openly invade Grenada was the threat posed to medical students currently enrolled in St. George’s Medical School, particularly those that were American citizens. The school, which was located on the island, housed somewhere between 600 to 800 U.S. nationals at the time of the intervention. The presence of Americans in Grenada in the midst of the ongoing turmoil of late-1983 provided Reagan with a legal rationale for some form of intervention under the guise of saving nationals.<sup>109</sup> While my purpose here is not to cast doubt on the Reagan administration’s actual concern for the safety of the medical students, it is evident from the record that their presence was seen as a prime opportunity to use overt action against the Grenadian regime; conversations from the highest echelons of government indicate as much.

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<sup>107</sup>Western (2005, 94–95; emphasis mine).

<sup>108</sup>By labeling these justifications “pretexts” or “fig leaves,” I am effectively making the case that the Reagan administration intervened in Grenada for reasons other than any perceived threat to American citizens or the formal OESC request. In other words, my argument is that these justifications provided cover for the administration to intervene to address geopolitical, ideological, and economic concerns under the guise of legitimate action. This is not to say that either or both of these developments played zero role in convincing the administration to act. Rather, I am simply arguing that their primary function in this case was to reduce the risks that the United States would acquire a reputation for rule-breaking by intervening overtly to unseat the Grenadian regime.

<sup>109</sup>Western (2005, 96).



One of the most ardent supporters of exploiting the presence of American medical students in Grenada as an opportunity to use force overtly was Milan Bish, the U.S. Ambassador in the Caribbean. In a cable from October 17, 1983, Bish first acknowledged the possibility of real danger to the students and the potential need for evacuation:

“There does not appear to be an immediate threat to American citizen interests, but the situation could change, and we should be prepared to evacuate a maximum of 800-1000 citizens, 600 of them at the St. George’s University School of Medicine campuses at Grand Anse and True Blue. Without intending to sound a premature alarm, I would recommend that we review our contingency plans and perhaps tentatively identify the military assets that would be called upon should an evacuation become necessary.”<sup>110</sup>

After assessing the magnitude of the potential threat, Bish went on to highlight the opportunity posed by the recent troubles on the island:

“It occurs to me, as it doubtlessly has to you, that the political turmoil on Grenada moq [sic] an opportunity as well as a problem. The confused situation of divided loyalties poses an opportunity for a third force representing democracy and freedom. If we ever entertained the option of supporting, covertly or otherwise, such a force, now would seem to be the time to act.”<sup>111</sup>

Bish’s initial assessments lend plausibility to the idea that rescuing Americans was seen by decision-makers as a fig leaf for intervention against the NJM.

Three days later on October 20, Bish penned a memo that more explicitly articulated the idea of exploiting the danger to American nationals as a pretext for intervention. The memo clarifies that the strategy Bish had in mind was a military operation of some kind:

“American lives are at stake in the turmoil in Grenada 500 to 1000 of them. Their safety is paramount. They could be taken hostage, as in

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<sup>110</sup>Bish (1983e, 1).

<sup>111</sup>Bish (1983e, 1).

Iran; they could get caught in the crossfire. I know there are formidable difficulties, but whatever we have to do to assure the safety of American citizens, I urge that we set in motion now. *In the process we could well rid the hemisphere of an obnoxious and unwanted regime ...* I do not believe the region can carry the burden alone. Help from us will be necessary. How and in what form to provide it will soon become obvious. A military solution seems to me to be a conceivable possibility. We should be prepared for it.”<sup>112</sup>

In a declassified memorandum outlining the legal rationale in the wake of the invasion, Secretary of State Shultz drew attention to the legitimacy that saving American nationals conferred to the military operation: “One purpose of U.S. participation in this force is to ensure the safety of U.S. citizens. *Such humanitarian action is justified under well-established principles of international law.*”<sup>113</sup> Although this quote is necessarily circumstantial since it comes from after the invasion had already occurred, the fact that a top U.S. official could invoke a concrete rationale for intervention, one that is widely accepted by the international community, lends credence to the risk-reducing properties of certain pretexts.

Decision-makers in the U.S. were not alone in viewing the presence of Americans on the island as a potential fig leaf for intervention. The Revolutionary Military Council that deposed Bishop saw it in these terms as well. A declassified cable from October 21 reads:

“Per Radio ‘Free’ Grenada at 11:00, it was reported that the Revolutionary Military Council (RMC) has ‘received word from the U.S. that administration officials are saying that American citizens in danger.’ ‘The RMC wishes to make it very clear that all U.S. citizens in Grenada are absolutely safe. Not one AMCIT [American citizen] has been harmed. *The RMC will not tolerate any such lie being used as a pretext for a military landing in Grenada.*”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Bish (1983a, 1; emphasis mine).

<sup>113</sup>Shultz (1983c, 2; emphasis mine).

<sup>114</sup>Bish (1983d, 2; emphasis mine).

Recognizing the possibility that American leaders might attempt to exploit the danger posed to U.S. medical students as a pretext for intervention, General Hudson Austin, the head of the RMC, reached out to the U.S. with the express purpose of allaying these precise concerns. As Adkin notes, “Austin was solicitous of the students’ welfare and was anxious to agree to arrangements for their evacuation. His motive was self-preservation; he desperately sought to avoid giving the United States a pretext to invade.”<sup>115</sup>

One might reasonably wonder whether U.S. nationals were in any real danger or if the Reagan administration simply fabricated the threat to legitimize the invasion. The evidence suggests that concern for the medical students’ safety was not baseless. Notwithstanding the assurances of Austin and others in the regime, U.S. decision-makers expressed skepticism that the medical students would actually be safe if permitted to remain on the island. In a cable dated October 21, 1983, Bish reacted to reports of claims on Grenadian radio that the American citizens were safe by noting that, “[i]t is believed that statements from the Grenadian RMC must be taken with a large grain of salt. It is obvious that the Caribbean leftist camp is talking a very well defined party line of psyops in an attempt to obviate [sic] the need for a foreign intervention. It is also very evident that there are in fact life-threatening situations in Grenada.”<sup>116</sup> Secretary Shultz echoed these sentiments in his discussion of the legal authority for intervention, noting that:

“The deteriorating conditions on Grenada, amply reported by the press, posed a serious threat to the continued safety of the approximately 1,000 U.S. citizens there. The military council on the island did not fulfill its promises to reopen the airport. A number of U.S. citizens had sought to leave at great risk without waiting for an organized evacuation. The U.S. watched events with increasing concern.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>Adkin (1989, 108).

<sup>116</sup>Bish (1983f, 2).

<sup>117</sup>Shultz (1983c, 2).

The strict curfew imposed by the military regime and the harsh treatment of political opposition further contributed to concerns that U.S. citizens might actually be in danger.<sup>118</sup>

While rescuing American medical students from St. George's provided a fig leaf for intervention — and one that was absent in the Bay of Pigs case examined above — it was seen by many U.S. decision-makers as a partial, but ultimately incomplete, pretext. They wanted something more robust. Even by October 20, notes Beck, “[t]he fear for American lives and the absence of a legitimate government were simply not enough: the group seems to have been reluctant to ‘say that the administration had just decided to violate international law.’ Hence a decision on a military operation would be delayed until at least Saturday.”<sup>119</sup>

As we saw in the lead up to the Bay of Pigs, the primary concern on decision-makers' minds in October 1983 was “how ... invading another country [would] square with U.S. obligations under the U.N. Charter and the Organization of American States treaty, which categorically condemns interference in any country's internal affairs....”<sup>120</sup> In this regard, at least, saving American medical students was not deemed as wholly sufficient:

“The president was anxious to have as strong a case as possible to argue in the international forum afterward. First and foremost was the need to protect U.S. citizens. This would certainly justify some sort of intervention involving the military, if only for transportation or as escorts, but would it stretch to justifying an assault with the aim of taking over the whole island? Hardly — particularly because initially many students did not see themselves in danger and wished to remain. Some better legal arguments were essential.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Shultz (1983*a*, 1).

<sup>119</sup>Beck (1993, 107).

<sup>120</sup>Adkin (1989, 112).

<sup>121</sup>Adkin (1989, 112-113). At first, this quote — which indicates that the medical students in residence on the island did not seem themselves as being in danger — appears to cut against the argument I made above to the contrary. There are at least two possible reasons for the apparent disagreement between the administration and the students regarding the nature of the threat. First,

Two things are worth noting here. First, it appears as though the U.S. was deeply concerned about providing a compelling rationale that would convince foreign audiences of the legitimacy of the intervention. Second, the Reagan administration seemed worried that saving U.S. citizens would not sufficiently reduce the legitimacy costs of overt intervention to such a degree that he would be willing to authorize an invasion. At the very least, such evidence lends some credence to the notion that Reagan's perceived ability to use force openly hinged on the degree to which he could reduce the risks from overt action to an acceptable level. Fortunately for the administration, an additional pretext came in the form of a formal invitation from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

### **The Second Pretext: The OECS Invitation**

On October 21, 1983, the National Security Council convened a team of legal experts headed by the State Department to contemplate a number of issues surrounding the foreign and domestic implications of U.S. intervention in Grenada. During their meetings, the lawyers posed a series of questions pertaining to the legality and legitimacy of intervention:

“Could the United States deploy a large contingent of American combat forces into a hostile situation in Grenada in a way that was consistent with Grenada's claim of international sovereignty? Could it do so in a way that was consistent with the 1973 War Powers Act? What additional domestic and international legal or political challenges might the administration face if it chose to intervene in Grenada?”<sup>122</sup>

Among the feasible circumstances the lawyers believed might justify a policy of overt regime change against Grenada was a formal invitation by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States to intervene in the name of regional self-defense. A formal request

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it is entirely possible that the Reagan administration was privy to information about the regime's intentions that the students were not. Second, it is also possible that the students' trust in the regime's reassurances was higher than that of the administration's.

<sup>122</sup>Western (2005, 119).

for intervention by the OECS, they reasoned, would render regime change consistent with international law.<sup>123</sup> As Beck notes of the consensus among legal experts, “[i]f the United States were to undertake any action beyond a simple evacuation of its citizens — a full-scale invasion of Grenada, for example — it would need an invitation of greater legal plausibility.”<sup>124</sup>

In the early stages of the crisis, U.S. decision-makers contemplated both the feasibility as well as the implications of an OECS request. According to Ambassador Bish:

“The democratic leaders of the region — Adams of Barbados, Charles of Dominica, Cato of St. Vincent, Bird of Antigua, Compton of St. Lucia — all agree wholeheartedly that action to prevent further bloodshed in Grenada and to restore that island to democracy and independence must be taken, and in my judgment their people are like-minded. The Eastern Caribbean nations will support us materially and morally in whatever we resolve to do, now and after the fact. In the last hour I have spoken personally with all the prime ministers. They are unanimously horrified and outraged at the barbarity (Tom Adams’ word) of those who have seized Grenada.”<sup>125</sup>

Bish’s expectation of support from leaders in the region was not simply wishful thinking. There was a growing expectation that regional support for a U.S. invasion would manifest itself in the form of a formal invitation. Bish went on to argue that:

“If it comes to it, in my judgment, such an action [i.e. an invasion] would meet overwhelming approval in the commonwealth Caribbean. I believe that sentiment in Eastern Caribbean for action is now so strong that it might be possible to elicit a public invitation from the region’s collective leadership to the U.S. to act for the sake of human decency and human rights. Friendly non-members, such as Barbados and Jamaica, would almost certainly join in.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Western (2005, 119).

<sup>124</sup>Beck (1993, 111).

<sup>125</sup>Bish (1983*a*, 1-2).

<sup>126</sup>Bish (1983*a*, 2).

America's top diplomat in the Caribbean thus believed strongly that the circumstances surrounding the current regime in Grenada — and the prospect of a formal invitation from the OECS — was not only forthcoming, but would also generate broad acceptance, especially in the region, for intervention by the United States.

Luckily for the Reagan administration, a formal request from the OECS was on its way. On October 21, “the U.S. representatives to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States secretly participated in the OESC deliberations on its collective response to the events in Grenada.”<sup>127</sup> The next day, October 22, the Special Situations Group was able to report that an informal request had been made to the U.S. to intervene in Grenada.<sup>128</sup> That same evening, “the chairman of the OECS countries, Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica, and Mr. Adams met Prime Minister Edward Seaga of Jamaica, who was in Barbados en route to the Trinidad meeting. Together the three ‘formally invited the participation of the USA through its ambassador.’”<sup>129</sup> There is some speculation “that the draft letter of invitation was actually prepared in Washington D.C., and relayed to Barbados, where it was signed and then presented back to the U.S. government.”<sup>130</sup> Irrespective of whether the request was issued independently or at the prodding of the U.S., the Reagan administration was able to tout an OECS invitation requesting American intervention in Grenada.

Evidence suggests that decision-makers leaned heavily on the OECS invitation, believing that it provided them with a legal rationale for overtly deploying U.S. forces to Grenada. In a similar fashion to his remarks about the justifiability of rescuing American nationals, Secretary Shultz noted that “[a] formal request for United States support ... constituted a lawful basis for U.S. intervention.”<sup>131</sup> According to Beck, “[a] review of the administration's conduct from Thursday evening, October 20, though

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<sup>127</sup>Western (2005, 119).

<sup>128</sup>Beck (1993, 133).

<sup>129</sup>Burrowes (1988, 66).

<sup>130</sup>Burrowes (1988, 66).

<sup>131</sup>Beck (1993, 99).

[sic] Sunday evening, October 23, clearly establishes that the administration accorded the OECS invitation great significance.”<sup>132</sup>

The general enthusiasm surrounding the invitation lends further credence to the notion that both the U.S., as well as key figures in various Caribbean states, saw the request as an opportunity to reduce the anticipated damage to America’s image for engaging in overt regime change. Ambassador Bish’s message to Secretary Shultz is revealing:

“Barbados Prime Minister Tom Adams called me to see him again today at noon. Adams said that a political/military intervention in Grenada is now more urgent than ever.... Adams emphasized repeatedly the deep underlying public support for such a move. To quote him directly: ‘There will be enormous private as well as public disappointment throughout the region if the U.S. does not act forcefully to save Grenada.’... He believes that a U.S.-mounted military intervention could be done under the aegis of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. He believes this organization would be unanimously in favor of an intervention.”<sup>133</sup>

Similar sentiments were registered broadly in the region. The government of St. Christopher/Nevis expressed to a U.S. embassy official, “that U.S. military intervention in Grenada is ‘not only acceptable to my government, but is absolutely the only way to put the situation right.’”<sup>134</sup> In addition to, or perhaps because of, the formal OECS request for intervention, the United States enjoyed very vocal support for action from neighboring states in the region.

In the days following the invasion, the U.S. went to great lengths to demonstrate that the OESC invitation provided a legal basis for overt intervention in Grenada. In declassified meeting notes outlining Secretary Shultz’s talking points during his upcoming meetings with various Congressional committees, themes of legality under the OECS invitation were pervasive. The memo begins by noting that “[t]he murders and

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<sup>132</sup>Beck (1993, 203).

<sup>133</sup>Bish (1983*b*, 1).

<sup>134</sup>Bish (1983*c*, 1).



breakdown of governmental order shocked, repelled, and alarmed leaders throughout the Caribbean.”<sup>135</sup> In the section outlining U.S. objectives, Shultz was to note that, “[t]he President’s orders to the U.S. military forces are to cooperate with the OECS in entering Grenada and working with the people of Grenada to restore order, and to facilitate the departure of all US and foreign nationals who wish to leave. U.S. support of the OECS military action will be for these two purposes only.”<sup>136</sup> Finally, the memorandum contains a contingency talking point in the event that the Secretary was directly asked about the legal rationale for U.S. action: “The U.S. is responding to an urgent appeal by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States for assistance. The OECS is taking action under the Treaty creating that Organization consistent with its provisions on collective security.”<sup>137</sup> Although the timing of these statements, as before, renders this evidence somewhat circumstantial, it is significant that officials could appeal to a formal request for intervention by a regional body to legitimize their actions.

The administration also went to great pains to explicitly draw attention to the compatibility between the OECS request and the OAS and UN Charters. Secretary Shultz’s description of the legal rationale for intervention in this regard is revealing:

“With regard to the OAS Charter, the OECS decision is a ‘(m) easure ( ) adopted for the maintenance of peace and security in accordance with (an) existing treat(y),’ as contemplated by Article 22 of the OAS Charter. In addition, the OECS members were, in the words of Article 28 of the OAS Charter, confronted by a situation that might endanger the peace of America,’ and took action consistent with a special treat(y) on the subject.”<sup>138</sup>

Shultz continued by turning away from the OAS Charter, and focusing on the compatibility of the request with the UN Charter:

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<sup>135</sup>Shultz (1983b, 3 ).

<sup>136</sup>Shultz (1983b, 6).

<sup>137</sup>Shultz (1983b, 8-9).

<sup>138</sup>Shultz (1983c, 3).

“Regional collective security measures are expressly contemplated by Article 52 of the UN Charter. Paragraph 1 of that Article provides for Regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations’.”<sup>139</sup>

The OECS invitation was thus pitched not only as a legal rationale for an open U.S. invasion on its own, but also as an action that fit comfortably within the confines of international law, enshrined in the charters of regional and global organizations alike.

There did exist some concern among policymakers that using the OECS request as a rationale for action would give the impression that the U.S. was attempting to create a new precedent for intervention. A declassified memorandum drafted at the same time overt intervention was being contemplated highlighted a desire to dispel such concerns:

“It will be important to emphasize in the OAS and elsewhere the unique nature of the situation to which we are responding, in order to minimize concerns that we would be establishing a sweeping precedent for intervention by regional groupings. We are likely to be faced in the OAS with charges that we have acted contrary to Article 20 of the OAS Charter which states that the territory of a state may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or other measures of force taken by another state, directly or indirectly, on any grounds whatever.’ In this regard we can point out that the OAS Charter has never been interpreted literally to preclude military presence at the invitation of a government or pursuant to OAS action (e.g., the Dominican Republic).”<sup>140</sup>

On the one hand, it appears from this discussion that policymakers wanted to make clear that regime change in Grenada was not intended to establish a new, sweeping precedent that would dictate all future interventions. On the other hand, they wanted to draw attention to the set of feasible justifications for the use of force

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<sup>139</sup>Shultz (1983c, 3).

<sup>140</sup>Department of State (1983a, 4-5).

against a sovereign regime notwithstanding proscriptions in existing charters against intervention of any kind.

Administration officials also sought to distinguish what the U.S. was doing from what the Soviet Union had done elsewhere in the world. The same memo referenced above states:

“We will wish to be extremely careful in developing our rationale not to give credence to theories of preemptive self defense\* or of collective rights to maintain the political or constitutional structure of nations, such as those advanced by the Soviet Union in their justification of their invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. For these reasons, we will wish to emphasize the asserted competence of the OECS members to act pursuant to a treaty to which Grenada is a party, and the unique circumstances of the elimination of one government, without the emergence of any effective successive governmental authority. We should avoid stating our objectives in terms of restoring ‘democracy’ or ‘constitutional government,’ which are analogous to Soviet justifications of maintaining socialist constitutional order. Rather, we should emphasize the goal of restoring conditions of law and order, and governmental institutions (without regard to their character).”<sup>141</sup>

While the U.S. thus enjoyed — and perhaps even facilitated — an OECS invitation, decision-makers were careful to highlight the limited and targeted nature of their operation. This quote in particular provides a window into the ways in which U.S. administrations publicly justify the use of force. Contrary to some accounts of American intervention, decision-makers were reticent to appeal to foreign-imposed democratization as a staple of U.S. foreign policy,<sup>142</sup> preferring instead to frame their actions as consistent with well-established international rules and norms related to collective security.

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<sup>141</sup>Department of State (1983*a*, 8-9; punctuation in original).

<sup>142</sup>Downes and Monten (2013); Peceny (1999).

## A Third Pretext? The Role of the Governor-General

A final piece to understanding the rationale underlying Reagan's decision to pursue overt regime change centers on an invitation by the Governor-General of Grenada, Paul Scoon. Scoon, who had been appointed Governor-General by Queen Elizabeth II just one year before Bishop took power, was an ardent supporter of the American invasion. Notwithstanding the availability of two acceptable pretexts — rescuing American medical students and a formal invitation from the OECS — policymakers welcomed the possibility of a third. A memo describing the legal rationale for intervention stated that “[i]f the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is successful in obtaining the concurrence of the Governor-General of Grenada to their proposed actions before the fact, this will provide perhaps the strongest possible justification for our actions.”<sup>143</sup> More informally, “[t]he invitation by the Grenadian Governor-General provided a ‘nice legal justification’ for American action.”<sup>144</sup>

The invitation from Governor-General Scoon was not, however, as straightforward as the other two pretexts. The memo referenced in the previous paragraph strikes a note of caution:

“How convincing this argument will be will depend in part on the legal rationale developed by the OECS for considering the Constitution to be in effect (it was suspended’ by the Bishop Government in 1979). They may argue that the purported suspension was null and void, or that it should be treated as a state of emergency under the Constitution which may be terminated by the Governor-General.”<sup>145</sup>

While policymakers undoubtedly hoped that a third pretext would bolster the credibility of overt action against Grenada, there was some uncertainty as to how persuasive it would be as a justification for intervention. According to Beck, “[a]s the Grenadian Head of State, the Reagan administration would later maintain, Scoon

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<sup>143</sup>Department of State (1983*a*, 1).

<sup>144</sup>Beck (1993, 157).

<sup>145</sup>Department of State (1983*a*, 2).

had invited American action. Should he be killed, the American legal justification for its action would be significantly undermined.”<sup>146</sup> Finally, it is worth pointing out that the invitation from Scoon came *after* the OECS request, further demonstrating its role as a credibility booster rather than a credibility creator.<sup>147</sup>

## The World Reacts

Based on the discussion so far, we know that the Reagan administration relied heavily on a series of pretexts to justify its decision for overt regime change in Grenada. An important question to pursue before turning to possible counter-arguments is how well these justifications actually stood up. At best, reactions to the U.S. invasion were mixed. Many were sharply critical of the operation. “At the United Nations,” notes Quigley, “the General Assembly called the assault on Grenada a ‘flagrant violation of international law,’ and a denigration of Grenada’s ‘independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.’”<sup>148</sup> Such a characterization was hardly a ringing endorsement for the Reagan Administration.

Even many of America’s allies were critical of the invasion. A number of Western European countries, for example, publicly criticized the way in which the Reagan administration handled the invasion. According to Burrowes:

“European condemnation of the invasion itself was almost unanimous. French president Francois Mitterand saw it as a surprising action in relation to international law.’ West German chancellor Helmut Kohl issued an uncharacteristically blunt statement, saying in part: If we had been consulted, we would have advised against it.’ Italian prime minister Bettino Craxi noted that U.S. intervention has dangerous precedents and also establishes another dangerous precedent’.”<sup>149</sup>

Among the Reagan administration’s closest allies, the Prime Minister of the United

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<sup>146</sup>Beck (1993, 33).

<sup>147</sup>Beck (1993, 157).

<sup>148</sup>Quigley (1992, 199).

<sup>149</sup>Burrowes (1988, 90).

Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, was perhaps the most incensed by the operation:

“As soon as [Reagan] heard [Thatcher’s] voice, [he] knew she was very angry. She said she had just learned about the impending operation ... and asked me in the strongest language to call off the operation. Grenada, she reminded me, was part of the British Commonwealth, and the United States had no business interfering in its affairs.”<sup>150</sup>

Reagan responded to Thatcher by reiterating the legality of the operation, drawing special attention to the OESC request. In short, although the U.S. enjoyed the two pretexts described above, the reaction among U.S. allies was far from enthusiastic.

While many nations were highly critical of the U.S. invasion, we must still pose the counterfactual: Would the reaction to the invasion have been the same in the absence of the two (potentially three) pretexts used to justify the action? The answer, at least according to the theoretical framework I am putting forward, is “no.” In fact, I would argue that the global reaction to the invasion *would have been much worse*, involving far graver consequences than a rhetorical slap on the wrist, had the U.S. opted for an overt intervention absent the pretexts they ultimately relied upon. My theory suggests that without the availability of fig leaves, the probability that Reagan would have turned to secrecy would have gone up dramatically. That the administration was able to point explicitly to two credible justifications for intervention is significant in this regard. Although it is ultimately impossible to substantiate this counterfactual, there is reason to believe that the pretexts reduced the reputational costs that would have otherwise accrued to the U.S. At the very least — and what is central to my argument — is that Reagan believed this to be the case.

One further piece of evidence lends credence to the foregoing counterfactual. On May 8, 1979, roughly two months after Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement took power, President Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, penned a memo to then-CIA Director Stansfield Turner “expressing the President’s

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<sup>150</sup>Beck (1993, 164).

concern about the growing Cuban presence on Grenada and suggesting a covert effort to focus international press attention on it.”<sup>151</sup> According to Robert Gates:

“Turner responded on May 14 with a political action program going beyond Brzezinski’s suggestion and intended to counter the Cubans on the island. Carter signed a ‘finding’ on July 3, 1979, that authorized a covert effort to promote the democratic process on Grenada and also to support resistance to the Marxist government there.”<sup>152</sup>

According to Gates, Congress’ stark opposition induced the CIA to relent and cancel the mission.

Although details are sparse, it is significant that Carter, a vocal critic of covert action and the CIA more generally, signed a Finding to support resistance to Bishop and the NJM. Unfortunately, the historical record does not provide evidence one way or the other about Reagan’s interest in covert action in Grenada from the time he was inaugurated in 1981 through the time of the invasion in 1983. The fact that his predecessor seriously contemplated covert action against the Grenadian regime in the absence of the two pretexts available four years later, however, provides strong correlational support for my argument.

## 2.3 Competing Arguments

The final step in this case is to assess how my argument fares against alternative explanations.<sup>153</sup> One possible counterargument to consider is whether the decision to go overt was made possible in part by a general lack of concern that intervention would trigger an escalatory spiral. Although it is difficult to repudiate this point with complete certainty, available evidence casts doubt on its validity as a credible alternative explanation. To begin with, the number of treaties and military aid exchanged

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<sup>151</sup>Gates (1996, 143).

<sup>152</sup>Gates (1996, 143).

<sup>153</sup>The “rogue elephant” thesis does not work particularly well for the Grenada invasion. In its current form, the rogue elephant thesis has largely been conceived of as an explanation strictly for an adventurous CIA. It is generally silent on the determinants of overt military force.

between Grenada and various Communist bloc countries was significant. According to a memo penned by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research on November 1, 1983:

“Documents captured thus far by US forces in Grenada show that Soviet, Cuban and North Korean involvement in the militarization of the island was on a relatively large scale. The three Soviet agreements — covering the period 1980-1985 — provided for delivery of \$25.8 million in weapons, ammunition, uniforms, trucks, and other logistical equipment. Another \$12 million in war materiel was to be supplied per an agreement with North Korea, signed in April.”<sup>154</sup>

While such evidence alone cannot tell us whether policymakers viewed the ties between Grenada and the Eastern Bloc as making open intervention more risky, it is plausible that they might have considered some form of a counter-response within the realm of possibility. It is certainly true that many scholars have drawn attention to the limited capacity of the Soviet Union to counter a U.S. invasion in Grenada in 1983.<sup>155</sup> Regardless, the documentary evidence surrounding the intervention decision contains little discussion about escalation concerns one way or the other, reducing our confidence that the *lack* of concern over triggering a security dilemma put overt action on the table.

There does exist an alternative version of the escalation thesis that might account for why the Reagan administration acted overtly in Grenada while the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations opted for secrecy in Cuba. If we conceive of escalation more broadly than whether a counter-intervention will occur in the specific target state to include counter-responses elsewhere in the world, the thesis may have legs. In 1960–1961, for instance, the prospect that the Soviets would respond to a U.S. invasion of Cuba by intervening in places like Berlin was more salient than it was in the lead up to the invasion of Grenada. Although I sought to demonstrate that the primary concern on U.S. decision-makers’ minds during the Bay of Pigs was avoiding

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<sup>154</sup>Department of State (1983b, 1).

<sup>155</sup>Adkin (1989, 92).



reputations for rule-breaking rather than escalation of any sort, the disappearance of at least some of these potential geopolitical flashpoints might partially account for why Reagan viewed the risks from overt action in 1983 as low.

A second counterargument is that the use of pretexts was intended to placate domestic, rather than foreign, audiences as my argument suggests. Although the Reagan administration may have seen these justifications as able to placate both audiences, neither Congress nor the U.S. public figure especially prominently in the evidence presented here. First, Reagan successfully hid the invasion plans from most of Congress and the press in the days leading up to the invasion.<sup>156</sup> While some members of Congress were certainly briefed, details about the invasion were not shared with the full legislative body where the intervention could have been blocked.<sup>157</sup> Second, the administration did not believe that the War Powers Resolution — a 1973 piece of legislation imposing new restrictions on presidential uses of force — had any real bearing on the decision for an invasion. In his recounting of a top-level meeting on Grenada, Beck notes that “the War Powers Resolution was briefly discussed. The legislation did not appear to pose any serious difficulties, however. With any luck, the Grenada mission would be completed long before Congress could question the action’s conformity with the resolution.”<sup>158</sup> In short, domestic politics does not appear to have mattered much in the decision to use force overtly.

A final counterargument, that the invasion was the result of America’s need to demonstrate its continued capacity to use military power, is specific to the case at hand. There are a number of reasons why the invasion might be attributable to such a concern. First, on October 23, 1983, just two days before the invasion of Grenada began, a suicide bomber targeted military barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing over 240 U.S. marines. The pressure for a military response *somewhere* may have been

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<sup>156</sup>Western (2005, 120-121).

<sup>157</sup>Beck (1993, 163-4).

<sup>158</sup>Beck (1993, 134).

extremely strong.<sup>159</sup> In addition to the tragedy in Lebanon, Reagan was a hawk operating in a post-Vietnam world in which the use of large-scale force was viewed skeptically by many. The failure to “do something” in the wake of the tragedy in Lebanon combined with the need (desire?) to demonstrate America’s power after a long spell of cynicism regarding the use of military force may have generated the conditions necessary for an overt invasion of a tiny country as a means of reinvigorating U.S. resolve at relatively low cost to the United States.<sup>160</sup>

While both of these dynamics undoubtedly weighed on the minds of decision-makers within the Reagan administration at the time of the invasion, at least one of them — the barracks bombing in Lebanon — is best seen as a reinforcing rather than a propelling factor for overt intervention.<sup>161</sup> The strongest rationale for this is timing. The planning for an overt invasion of Grenada transpired many days prior to the incident in Beirut. Although the sudden and unexpected death of hundreds of U.S. marines may have motivated the Reagan administration to push ahead with the invasion, it cannot have been causally related to the initial decision to undertake an overt regime change operation in Grenada. While the desire to rid the U.S. of the post-Vietnam syndrome may also have increased Reagan’s desire to undertake regime change in Grenada, it is unlikely that he would have pursued overt action in the absence of the available pretexts owing to the significant risks involved in doing so. The importance U.S. decision-makers accord to having one or more pretexts for intervention before authorizing overt military force, as demonstrated in the Bay of Pigs case, is non-trivial.

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<sup>159</sup>Beck (1993, 146), Western (2005, 123).

<sup>160</sup>Adkin (1989, 112).

<sup>161</sup>Copeland (2015, 73).

### 3 Discussion

This chapter tested the theoretical account developed in Chapter 2 against two prominent cases of U.S. regime change during the Cold War: Operation Bumpy Road (Cuba) and Operation Urgent Fury (Grenada). I sought to demonstrate that decision-makers will be risk-averse when it comes to undermining an existing regime and replacing it with a friendly one. Because the potential for acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking and undermining the stability of international order are high during such operations, leaders are reticent to pursue overt regime change without a pretext. We saw this dynamic play out in Cuba. Not only did the U.S. want to intervene overtly, but they discussed a series of eventualities that would enable them to do so in a way that mitigated reputational risks to an acceptable degree, including staging a takeover of Guantanamo Bay. The failure to locate or fabricate a pretext yielded a risk-averse policy in the form of a covert action that decision-makers knew had a much greater chance of failure than any of the available overt options.<sup>162</sup>

Many, if not all, of the concerns surrounding a potential overt intervention in Cuba were absent, or at least significantly attenuated, in the lead up to the invasion of Grenada in 1983. Unlike the Bay of Pigs, Operation Urgent Fury came replete with two fig leaves: A perceived threat to American medical students residing on the island and a formal request for intervention from the OECS. Both of these pretexts, I argue, enabled the Reagan administration to do what the Kennedy administration was unable to: Intervene overtly in such a way that the risks of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking were significantly attenuated. Unfortunately for the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, there was neither a formal request from a regional organization akin to the OECS nor an opportunity to claim that American citizens were

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<sup>162</sup>Recall that my use of “riskiness” is different than some similar studies on the subject, e.g. [Taliaferro \(2004\)](#). For my purposes, risk refers not to the likelihood that the actual intervention will succeed, but rather the potential costs leaders will endure for pursuing a particular objective.

in danger like the medical students at St. George's in the lead up to intervention in Cuba. While we can only guess at whether Reagan would have intervened covertly without these two pretexts, the comparison with the Bay of Pigs is striking.

## Chapter 4

# Blue Bats and Black September

In this chapter, we will turn away from regime change and focus directly on the drivers of secrecy and openness for the second half of forcible regime promotion: Regime rescue. Specifically, I will investigate why the Nixon administration opted for secrecy during the Black September Crisis while the Eisenhower administration chose publicity during the first Lebanese Civil War. Like the chapter on regime change, these two cases hold constant a number of possible confounders. In both cases, the U.S. was intervening in a Middle Eastern country in order to combat left-leaning, Arab-nationalist movements. Both interventions took place prior to détente and were authorized by Republican presidents. After situating the cases in their historical context and identifying the drivers of intervention, I draw on declassified and secondary materials to explain how leaders balance the risks of failure against the risks from overt action. In each case, decision-makers feared that overtly rescuing the respective regime would introduce reputations for clientism, delegitimizing the target and making the U.S. look imperialistic. My theory helps to explain why, notwithstanding these similarities, we still see variation in the openness of intervention.

As before, it will be helpful to first identify the kind of evidence we would ideally

like to see if my argument is correct. During the Jordanian Civil War, we would expect decision-makers to vocalize concerns about the risks of openly intervening in support of King Hussein. Such risks include fears of delegitimizing the King, growing the ranks of the insurgency, making the U.S. look imperialistic, and so forth. Because the U.S. secretly outsourced intervention to Israel, we would also expect to see evidence that policymakers believed in the efficacy of the quiet option, rendering overt intervention to rescue Hussein from the threat posed by the *fedayeen* unnecessary. Even stronger evidence for my argument would be explicit recognition by policymakers that they would have intervened openly in Jordan if the quiet option had proven unlikely to succeed notwithstanding the high risks from overt action.

The evidence we would expect to see in the Lebanese Civil War should mirror the case of Jordan in important ways, albeit with some key differences. Since the crisis in Lebanon was also internal in nature, we would expect the risks from overt action to look nearly identical to those mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Because Eisenhower ultimately intervened overtly, however, we would also expect to see a lack of alternative options, including a feasible covert operation. Evidence that the U.S. even considered quieter alternatives to overt force, including secret support to Chamoun, but found them infeasible would provide strong support for my risk-balancing thesis. In some respects, the absence of a workable covert alternative in this case can be seen as a foil to the Bay of Pigs invasion: While leaders may be willing to attempt secrecy and let it fail during promotive interventions, risk-acceptance dictates that they should prove unwilling to do so when rescuing friendly regimes.

## 1 Black September

During the Jordanian Civil War, otherwise known as “Black September,” the United States secretly encouraged and materially supported Israeli intervention in

an effort to save King Hussein from falling to the *fedayeen* and, later, the Syrians. Because the use of secrecy to rescue friendly regimes is anomalous for theories that simply say “if the goal is regime rescue, go overt,” Black September represents an important test case for my argument. Deliberations during the civil war reveal that the Nixon administration’s primary incentives for acting quietly turned on the anticipated impact a U.S.-sponsored rescue attempt would have on the King’s legitimacy at home and on America’s image in Jordan and the region more broadly. Decision-makers felt that Israel would be able to more readily justify the use of military force as an action taken in the name of self-defense. The evidence also suggests, however, that the U.S. likely would have acted overtly had the Israel option been unavailable.

Before turning to the case itself, it is important to confront the potential criticism that America’s involvement in Black September is too different from the more traditional CIA-sponsored operations that many are used to; covert action in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Chile in 1970–1973, and Nicaragua in the 1980s come to mind. Although the lion’s share of secret operations are indeed conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency, nothing in my theory requires that this be true in all cases. To reiterate a point made earlier, my main goal is to explain why states conceal their complicity in the course of an intervention. Variation in the precise tools interveners use in pursuit of these ends, though interesting, are less important. Examining covert operations undertaken by entities other than the CIA has the potential to expand our understanding of secret statecraft. While CIA-sponsored operations are doubtless the most common, great powers have many tools at their disposal for conducting secret operations. America’s decision to quietly outsource intervention to an interested third-party in the form of Israel is just one example of this broader phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Notwithstanding these conceptual similarities, there are obviously institutional differences in the two types of operations. The more traditional covert operations alluded to in this paragraph, for instance, would now require Presidential Findings whereas the Black September operation may not.

## 1.1 Historical Background

“Present-day Jordan,” writes Douglas Little, “is one of the few remaining monuments to British empire-building in the Middle East after the first World War.”<sup>2</sup> After decades of living under British colonial rule, the country formerly known as Transjordan achieved its independence in 1946.<sup>3</sup> In its first few years as a sovereign state, Jordan experienced two leadership turnovers in relatively quick succession. King Abdullah I, the first monarch of an independent Jordanian state, was assassinated by a Palestinian gunman while visiting a mosque in Jerusalem in July 1951. Following his murder, Abdullah’s eldest son, Talal, took over as king. Just thirteen months after assuming the reins of power, Talal was forced to abdicate owing to an undisclosed mental illness. Talal’s son, Hussein, rose to take his place in 1952 where he would go on to rule for the next four decades.<sup>4</sup>

The primary source of opposition in the years leading up to the Black September Crisis was a collection of Palestinian groups under the unifying umbrella of the *fedayeen*. Although King Hussein and the *fedayeen* had fought alongside one another during the so-called “Six-Day War” against Israel in 1967,<sup>5</sup> rifts between the two over the future trajectory of Jordan emerged soon afterwards.<sup>6</sup> What had started out as low-level resistance from the *fedayeen* had grown into full-blown rebellion against the King by March 1970. Jordan’s immediate neighbors were split in their allegiances, with the Syrians and the Iraqis expressing open support for the Palestinians and the Egyptians under Nasser largely remaining largely neutral.<sup>7</sup>

On September 15, 1970, King Hussein announced a full-scale assault to break the

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<sup>2</sup>Little (1995, 514).

<sup>3</sup>Little (1995, 514).

<sup>4</sup>Shlaim (2007, 57).

<sup>5</sup>Egypt and Syria also fought alongside Jordan. The 1967 War also marks the date that Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel.

<sup>6</sup>Lucas (2008, 283).

<sup>7</sup>Abu-Odeh (1999, 176).



back of the PLO resistance.<sup>8</sup> Three days later, on September 18, the Syrian army launched a limited offensive in the northern part of Jordan in support of the *fedayeen* fighters. The military venture was extremely short-lived. By September 22, “the Syrians’ progress was stopped, after suffering many casualties and severe damage to their armored forces. On the following day, Syria withdrew and cleared the territory of Jordan.”<sup>9</sup> The combined efforts of the Jordanian army and the threat of an Israeli counter-response ultimately contributed to the Syrian withdrawal and the eventual defeat of the *fedayeen*. Although the conflict would not formally come to an end until July of the following year, the initial phases of the conflict proved most severe and hence will constitute our main temporal focus.

### **The Drivers of Intervention in Jordan**

From the time he first came to power, Hussein’s relationship with the U.S. was congenial. According to Douglas Little, “[f]ew Americans realize ... that from 1953 to 1970, the king’s survival frequently depended on US help, both overt and covert.”<sup>10</sup> The first significant show of support for Hussein manifested itself during a crisis in early 1957 in which “Suleiman al-Nabulsi, [the] appointed Prime Minister of Jordan in late 1956, encouraged a call by nationalists to overthrow King Hussein and enter a federation with Syria and Egypt.”<sup>11</sup> The U.S. provided millions of dollars to Hussein to combat the threat, largely in an effort to prevent any radical alterations in Jordan’s foreign allegiances. Although Hussein appreciated the support and welcomed the American presence in the region, he was careful to manage the visibility of his relationship with the United States. At one point, for example, Hussein told Special Assistant James P. Richards that while he supported America’s policy of resisting communism in the Middle East, he wanted to retain some distance “to avoid stimu-

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<sup>8</sup>Kissinger (1970a).

<sup>9</sup>Fruchter-Ronen (2008).

<sup>10</sup>Little (1995, 513).

<sup>11</sup>Hahn (2006, 42).

lating a nationalist backlash against his throne.”<sup>12</sup>

The main motivation underlying America’s rescue efforts during the Black September Crisis was the same as it was in previous years: Prevent the fall of a pro-U.S. monarch to ensure that Jordan did not tilt toward Syria, the Soviets, and other states deemed hostile to American interests.<sup>13</sup> In this same vein, Pedatzur argues that a key “concern of the US administration was that the Hashemite regime would be replaced by a regime closely linked to Moscow.”<sup>14</sup> In his memoirs, Nixon describes the importance of ensuring that Jordan remain friendly to the U.S. in stark terms: “We could not allow Hussein to be overthrown by Soviet-inspired insurrection... If it succeeded, the entire Middle East might erupt in war... it was like a ghastly game of dominoes, with a nuclear war waiting at the end.”<sup>15</sup>

Contributing to these concerns was the ideological orientation of the groups opposed to Hussein. Although some factions of the fairly heterogeneous *fedayeen* were deemed moderate, the hard-line factions were seen as particularly worrying for a number of reasons:

“Whereas the less ideological groups focus on Israel and could make common cause with the government, the radicals are at least as dedicated to the overthrow of traditional regimes as to the destruction of the Zionist state. Although it is difficult to know exactly what the balance within the collection of fedayeen movements is, it seems relatively clear that the most active challenge to Hussein’s regime comes from the radical fringe—the elements, for instance, responsible for the hijacking [of four TWA airplanes].”<sup>16</sup>

Part of the problem with the more radical groups was that they were strongly opposed to any form of peaceful resolution to the ongoing Palestinian issue. In a memo to President Nixon dated September 16, 1970, Kissinger noted: “The outcome [of

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<sup>12</sup>Hahn (2006, 40).

<sup>13</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970b).

<sup>14</sup>Pedatzur (2008, 302).

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Pedatzur (2008, 300).

<sup>16</sup>Kissinger (1970b).

the civil war] will determine whether there is a stable base for peace negotiations. The future political nature of Jordan will determine whether a Palestine settlement is possible or continuing war is inevitable.”<sup>17</sup>

The desire to ensure that Jordan remain comfortably within the West’s orbit interacted with concerns about radical elements of the *fedayeen* taking power and stymieing all hopes for a Palestinian settlement to generate powerful incentives for intervention in support of Hussein. There was, however, another event that required the attention of the Nixon administration. On September 6, 1970, the PFLP, one of the militant Marxist-Leninist factions of the *fedayeen*, hijacked four international airliners with 425 passengers and crew, flying three of the planes to a desert airstrip at Dawson’s Field in Jordan. At least some of the hostages on board were American citizens. Although Fatah, the more moderate wing of the PLO under the leadership of Yaser Aarafat was somewhat uncomfortable with the hijackings, they ultimately saw no choice but to reluctantly endorse the act.<sup>18</sup> While top officials in the Nixon administration went to great lengths to decouple any American response to the hostage crisis from its broader efforts to rescue the King, the hijackings certainly increased decision-makers’ desire to achieve a swift resolution to the crisis.

## 1.2 The Appeal of Secrecy

We saw in the previous section that America’s intervention during the Black September Crisis was driven by a combination of factors, including a fear that King Hussein, a staunchly pro-American client, would be replaced by a more hostile regime. There was also concern that his successors might put an end to the possibility of peaceful resolution to the Palestinian issue in the region. Although each of the aforementioned factors are crucially important for understanding what motivated the U.S.

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<sup>17</sup>Kissinger (1970b).

<sup>18</sup>Robins (2004, 130).

to act, none can tell us why the Nixon administration settled on a rescue plan that involved secretly outsourcing intervention to Israel. The theoretical account developed in Chapter 2 provides such an answer.

Because the use of secrecy in this case differs in some key ways from more traditional covert operations, I will begin by outlining the broad contours of the Nixon administration's efforts to quietly outsource intervention to Israel. Contrary to what we might expect, Israel moved almost entirely at the behest of, and with support from, the U.S. Having outlined the nature of U.S. involvement, I will make the case that the reason why the Nixon administration was attracted to secrecy turned on the belief that a public, American-sponsored rescue attempt would delegitimize the King and make the U.S. appear imperialistic. Finally, I will show that the only reason why Nixon accepted the quiet option was because it was seen as viable. Had secrecy entailed a high risk of failure, we might well have seen a public response notwithstanding the significant reputational costs involved in such an undertaking.

### **In Search of a Quiet Solution**

In order to understand why the U.S. opted for secrecy during Black September, we must first understand the nature of American involvement. The intervention strategy of choice throughout most of the crisis was to secretly encourage and support Israeli efforts to assist Hussein. While most decision-makers preferred to use American forces for the purposes of saving hostages if the need arose, there was a general preference for using Israeli forces for the purposes of regime rescue. In a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) and the Review Group on September 9, 1970, Kissinger remarked that, “[a]s a preliminary judg[me]nt, then, we can undertake a military evacuation, and would prefer to use US forces for this purpose if Jordanian forces are not adequate. For a defense of the King against the Fedayeen and Iraq, however, we would prefer to use Israeli forces.” He then posed the question: “Is that

a fair statement?”<sup>19</sup> “All agreed” to the query.<sup>20</sup>

The nature of U.S. support for Israeli intervention in Jordan came in one of three main varieties. The first was a promise of various aid packages to fund an Israeli air campaign or, in the most extreme scenarios, a ground invasion. During the same meeting of the WSAG referenced above, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were tasked with preparing “an estimate of the kind of arms package we would have to provide Israel if it should undertake the operation to prop up King Hussein.”<sup>21</sup> David Packard, an NSC Staffer, responded that “[t]he Israelis have requested delivery of our equipment by ship by September 22. We could get it there by air in five days, but they have asked for it by ship, in case we should be accused of being unresponsive on quick deliveries.”<sup>22</sup> During deliberations the next day on September 10, the WSAG discussed the possibility of increased involvement by the Iraqis or the Egyptians in the ongoing crisis. The resulting conversation describes planned support to Israel:

“Mr. Packard: Basically, they could do it with what they have—or we could go as high as \$100 million a month.

Dr. Kissinger: Is \$100 million a month the only alternative to doing nothing?

Mr. Packard: We could do anything in between on a graduated basis.

Dr. Kissinger: We should be able to make some realistic assumptions in between—what the Egyptians would do, what the Iraqis would do.

Admiral Moorer: Israel would in effect be fighting on two fronts. Against the Iraqis, they would be using 500-pound bombs and ground type ammunition. They have a stockpile of these things, which we would probably have to replenish. The \$100 million a month would be for a sustained war of attrition including the missiles in Egypt. This would not necessarily happen right away.

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<sup>19</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

<sup>20</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970). This assessment contrasts with what some have written about the crisis. Pedatzur (2008, 305), for instance, writes that Nixon first changed his preference for Israeli over U.S. intervention on September 20th. As the quote from above illustrates, consensus by the majority of decision-makers, including Kissinger, had been reached much earlier. Evidence does suggest, however, that Nixon held a weak preference for U.S. over Israeli intervention as late as September 17th (Washington Special Actions Group 1970b).

<sup>21</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

<sup>22</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

Dr. Kissinger: I might put my Program Analysis people on it and pull something together, which you could critique.”<sup>23</sup>

Twelve days later on September 22, as the already-limited Syrian offensive in northern Jordan was receding, U.S. decision-makers again discussed the contents of different aid packages to Israel. In the course of the conversation, Kissinger noted:

“We put a package together for Jordan last week, without a Jordanian request, to give us an idea as to what they might need in various contingencies. We need the same thing for Israel today. We won’t show it to anybody. I thought Mr. Pranger and the Israelis were supposed to get together on this. We have two separate problems here: one, to put together an anti-SAM [surface-to-air] package in response to Mrs. Meir’s conversations with the President; the second, to get a package for Israel if their military activity should make it necessary for us to move to augment their capability. This second package was to be discussed by Mr. Pranger with the Israelis. I would have no objection if we want to do it unilaterally. Can we get it today?”<sup>24</sup>

Packard replied to Kissinger’s inquiry affirmatively. As is clear from the discussion so far, U.S. willingness to provide significant material support to Israel in the preparations phase for Israeli intervention was fairly extensive.

The second form of support for Israeli intervention during Black September was close coordination between the U.S. and Israel on the timing and nature of a possible military campaign. As early as April 15, 1970, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was quoted as saying that Israel would be ready to aid Jordan in the event that American military forces either failed or were deemed impractical. Dayan affirmed, however, that “Israel will not operate [in Jordan] without the blessing and the support of the United States.”<sup>25</sup> When the Black September Crisis finally erupted, coordination between the two nations was immediate. On September 22, 1970, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Sisco and Israeli Ambassador Rabin met to discuss the

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<sup>23</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*a*).

<sup>24</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*f*).

<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Pedatzur (2008, 299).

details of a potential military operation, covering a range of different aspects of the proposed intervention. At times, the level of coordination between the two actors came down to very fine-grained decisions. During the exchange between Sisco and Rabin on September 22, for example, the Israeli ambassador:

“Discussed topography and strategy, noting that perhaps best route would be direct across Jordan River south of Lake Tiberius. It was possible a strike to the north from Golan Heights would by threatening Syrian supply lines force Syrian units to withdraw from Jordan, but he doubted this. If this did not result in Syrian withdrawal, then Israelis would have to go south to strike at them.”<sup>26</sup>

“At [the] end of conversation after discussing other subjects,” noted Secretary Rogers in his telegram to the U.S. Embassy in Israel, “Rabin commented there [are] really three options; i.e., direct thrust at Irbid/Ramtha, or sweeping movement from north out of Golan or combination of two. Pursuant to Sisco’s request, Rabin agreed to query Jerusalem re alternative option calling for Israeli move into Syria. Chargé should follow up.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, in addition to material support, there was also close planning between the U.S. and Israel about specific aspects of the operation in the event that Israeli intervention became necessary.

The final form of U.S. support for Israeli intervention were explicit assurances against possible Soviet reprisals. In the declassified minutes of a WSAG meeting held on September 21, U. Alexis Johnson, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs at the State Department, asked: “If we say we will not intervene if the Soviets don’t intervene, doesn’t this lead to our saying that we will intervene if the Soviets intervene? Won’t this create problems with Congress and the public?”<sup>28</sup> Admiral Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations, replied that “[w]e could say if they do, we would consider positive counteraction, or some such phrase. We would evaluate the

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<sup>26</sup>Rogers (1970*a*).

<sup>27</sup>Rogers (1970*a*).

<sup>28</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

situation and reach a decision.”<sup>29</sup> Johnson expressed concern that “[w]e would be making a commitment to Israel.” Kissinger retorted by stating that “[w]e made a commitment yesterday. Israel believes we have promised to protect them against Soviet retaliation. We are committed. The question is whether we say it.”<sup>30</sup>

America’s promise to defend against a possible Soviet counter-response was, as Kissinger intimated, communicated directly to Israel. A memo from Secretary Rogers containing the “text of questions and answers delivered to Israeli Minister Argov at 10:30 EDT September 21” contains important information in this regard.<sup>31</sup> The following exchange is particularly illustrative:

“Q. How will the U.S. act to prevent Soviet participation or involvement?

A. On September 20 the U.S. Government called upon the Soviet Government to take appropriate steps in Damascus to bring about withdrawal of Syrian forces from Jordan. Secretary Rogers made a public statement to this effect on September 20. We have and will continue to make clear to the Soviets our support for Israel’s security and integrity and its right to live within defensible borders. In the present crisis, the U.S. has augmented the Sixth Fleet; it has also taken other readiness measures. These clearly imply a decision not to permit Soviet intervention against Israel in the conditions under discussion. As for specific measures the U.S. may take to prevent Soviet intervention, these would depend on the circumstances and the situation that exists at the time. We have contingency plans for these eventualities.”<sup>32</sup>

The evidence presented so far makes clear that U.S. support for Israeli intervention in Jordan came in many forms, including military aid, operational coordination, and assurances of protection against Soviet reprisals. In the end, the crisis broke in Hussein’s favor before Israeli intervention, supported quietly by the United States, became necessary.

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<sup>29</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

<sup>30</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

<sup>31</sup>Rogers (1970*b*).

<sup>32</sup>Rogers (1970*b*).



Evidence drawn from declassified documents at the time of the crisis indicate that America's sponsorship of Israeli intervention, particularly the aid and coordination, was meant to be quiet. When discussing how much the administration ought to disclose in Congressional briefings, Kissinger described the importance of keeping U.S. sponsorship of Israel a secret:

*“From the diplomatic point of view, both Israel and the US might prefer not to be so closely coupled. It is not in our or Israel's interest for Israel to appear as an agent of American imperialism. It would be better for Israel to act to protect its national security. Although this is unpalatable to the Arabs, they have lived with it for twenty years. If Israel is protecting its own security and also running errands for the US, it would be most unpleasant. We should have minimal formal association with Israel from the point of view of the Arab world. Also, we would not be needed with the Arabs if Israel goes in in [sic] a major effort. We would be needed to keep the Soviets out. We don't have to couple our intentions with those of Israel. We could take the position that Israel is acting in its own interest, and we will prevent Soviet military intervention in the Middle East.”*<sup>33</sup>

During that same meeting, Kissinger asked, “Does anyone think we should publicly avow joint planning with Israel? If no one does, what degree of prior knowledge can we admit?”<sup>34</sup> He continued by noting that, “[w]ith regard to public posture, in the meeting of the principals this afternoon, I intend to sum up our general philosophy, but we have left open what we should say about Israel's actions. Should we say we knew beforehand? That we were generally informed?”<sup>35</sup> The resulting exchange is illuminating:

Mr. Packard: It would be hard not to say at least that.

Mr. Seelye: The Arabs will assume collusion. We have to give them the least possible justification.

Mr. Kissinger: What is the least possible justification?

Mr. Seelye: That we didn't know.

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<sup>33</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*); emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

<sup>35</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

Mr. Johnson: Israel won't let us get away with that.

Admiral Moorer: And no one would believe it.

Mr. Johnson: We could say we knew of their concern over the situation.

Mr. Kissinger: We could say we knew in a general way if things got to a certain stage, the Israelis would probably feel compelled to move. This is why we have been urgently pleading with others to stay out; why we told the Soviets they should try to get the Syrians to withdraw. After three days of a Syrian advance, we understand why Israel felt it had to take action.<sup>36</sup>

While it is clear that decision-makers were willing to convey the most basic knowledge of the likelihood of Israeli intervention, they were certainly not willing to acknowledge the material and logistical support for the operation described above.

The decision to keep cooperation between the U.S. and Israel quiet extended all the way up to President Nixon himself. Declassified minutes of an NSC meeting held at 8:45 a.m. on September 21, a meeting at which Nixon himself was present, indicate as much. As the short-lived Syrian incursions into Jordan intensified, Israeli Ambassador Rabin reached out to Kissinger to gauge the United States' position on the matter. Although the Israelis believed "that the King could maintain his position for at least another day or more," they were preparing for the possibility that an intervention might be necessary. After a general discussion about the overall implications of military action, "The President then stated that the question at hand is what we do."<sup>37</sup> Secretary Rogers argued that:

"It would be far better if the King could do the job himself. If he had to call on Israel, it was likely that he would be doomed in any event. Secretary Rogers also raised the question of U.S. motivations for encouraging Israeli intervention and asked whether this was not really benefitting [sic] the Israelis more than anyone else. He judged that Israel had probably not made up its own mind yet with respect to intervention. Finally, he cautioned, it was most important that we know exactly what course of action the U.S. should pursue with respect to the Soviets. He stated: 'I

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<sup>36</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*d*).

<sup>37</sup>National Security Council (1970*a*).

am relaxed about the situation, but for God's sake, let's know what we are going to do. I am relieved to learn that we have a little more time.”<sup>38</sup>

The Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, “stated that we should not give the Israelis a go-ahead at this time, but that we should tell them to be prepared to move.”<sup>39</sup>

One of the more interesting aspects of this particular NSC meeting for our purposes turns on the ways in which decision-makers talked about collusion with Israel. “Secretary Rogers asked how we should play Israeli intervention. Should we suggest that the Israelis initiated this action on their own with U.S. knowledge or in fact with U.S. encouragement?” Nixon responded “that this would have to be resolved and that it was equally important that we know precisely how we would act with the Congress and that the Congress was even a more important consideration.”<sup>40</sup> Although Kissinger worried “that it would be most difficult to specifically inform the Congress that we were working in collaboration with the Israelis,” he also noted that the U.S. “might keep ... consultation in the most general terms with some emphasis on the fact that it might be necessary to use U.S. military forces short of intervention and that before using these forces we would consult.”<sup>41</sup> After some further deliberation, Nixon finally:

“[S]tated that it might be that we would not wish to make the King's request public because it would certainly be damaging to him. Therefore, opening up the whole issue of Israeli intervention with the Congress posed great difficulties. Assistant Secretary Sisco said that if we say ‘yes, we have consulted with the Israelis’, this is tantamount to collusion. Maybe we would be much better off just suggesting benevolent acquiescence. *The President stated that should the question arise, we should state that we were aware of the possibility of Israeli intervention, but deny that we were working with them actively on this possibility.* And finally, we should add that we understand the reasons for their action.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>National Security Council (1970a).

<sup>39</sup>National Security Council (1970a).

<sup>40</sup>National Security Council (1970a).

<sup>41</sup>National Security Council (1970a).

<sup>42</sup>National Security Council (1970a, emphasis mine).

Toward the end of the meeting, “Kissinger added that it was very important that no one suspect that we have been moving jointly with the Israelis on this issue. The President agreed stating that all we need say is that we were aware of the Israeli plans and had discussed them but nothing further.”<sup>43</sup> This was, to put it mildly, not representative of the truth.

Discussions about concealment continued even as the need for Israeli intervention dwindled with the recession of the Syrian threat. CIA Director Richard Helms cautioned his colleagues about calling off the possibility of Israeli intervention altogether, warning that, “the situation is far from solved. And, in either event, the Israelis may decide to move at some point. Should they do so, much will depend on how the U.S. acts. *We must avoid having a record which confirms that we put them up to it* and then, when it occurs, be in a position in which the Russians can split us away from the Israelis and isolate them.”<sup>44</sup> Although the desire to keep American collusion with Israel quiet was powerful, Nixon was quick to point out that “the U.S. must keep in mind that the Israelis are doing our work, that they moved in at our request, and that we have gotten the benefits from their action.”<sup>45</sup> In short, top-level U.S. officials consistently made clear that America’s encouragement of, and support for, Israeli intervention should be kept under wraps.

### **Concerns About Reputations for Clientism**

Understanding why the Nixon administration sought to hide their support for Israeli intervention in Jordan, particularly in light of the hypothesized tendency toward risk-acceptance during regime-rescuing operations, necessitates that we look at two factors: (1) The perceived risks from overt action and (2) The perceived risks of mission failure. More specifically, we first need to know what specific factors incentivized

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<sup>43</sup>National Security Council (1970*a*).

<sup>44</sup>National Security Council (1970*c*); emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup>National Security Council (1970*c*).

the Nixon administration to pursue secrecy. Second, we need to know whether the U.S. only accepted the quiet option because they believed that the risks of failure were low — which would imply that they could indulge their desire to act secretly without trading effectiveness for deniability — or whether they tolerated secrecy for some other reason. This section will tackle the drivers of secrecy during Black September; the subsequent section will address the risks of failure.

The main risks from overt action discussed by decision-makers relate closely to my conception of reputations for clientism. First, leaders worried that overt intervention would undermine Hussein’s legitimacy at home and in the region more broadly. Although concerns over regional legitimacy is more expansive than our prior discussion, which focused primarily on the domestic effects of regime rescue, it is consistent with the notion that most states in the post-colonial era view with skepticism outside intervention into another state’s internal affairs, even when that state is a neighbor. Second, decision-makers also expressed concern that intervening in an internal conflict would make the U.S. appear imperialistic. From the researcher’s standpoint, the main drawback of the evidence presented here is that decision-makers rarely provide smoking gun evidence linking their concerns about clientism or imperialism to factors such as self-determination, nationalism, and anti-colonial norms. Nonetheless, quotes such as this — “Any direct involvement supporting King Hussein, officials generally felt, could be *politically embarrassing* for the monarch...”<sup>46</sup> — taken from an article in the *New York Times* during the crisis are highly suggestive, if imperfect.

With this disclaimer in mind, declassified documents taken from the time of the crisis lend fairly strong support to my argument that overt intervention was deemed risky owing to the reputational concerns I have identified. In a memo to President Nixon dated September 16, 1970, Kissinger reasoned that while an American intervention might “prevent—at least as long as U.S. troops are present—dominance by

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<sup>46</sup>Smith (1970, 1).

a group that would offer almost no hope of a Palestine settlement” and “demonstrate support for responsible regimes,” the mission would be fraught with risk. “The argument against such intervention,” said Kissinger:

“Is that if Hussein is too weak to stand up against domestic opposition, outside intervention can only save his regime for a limited period of time. *Attempting to bolster it in the absence of sufficient internal strength could put whoever intervenes into a position of supporting a minority cause against effective majority guerrilla opposition in a country without access to the Mediterranean where the U.S. would have a difficult time supporting sustained military operations.* Intervention could cause a fedayeen reaction against U.S. installations elsewhere in the Mid-East”<sup>47</sup>

In other words, there was a belief that getting openly involved in the civil war would only contribute to instability by further emboldening the insurgency and necessitate further intervention down the road. While Kissinger ultimately felt that “a risky intervention would be preferable to the certainty of radical control over the situation”<sup>48</sup> — a nice example of the tendency toward risk-acceptance — it is clear that the risks involved in an overt intervention were high.

Deliberations the next day about whether the U.S. or Israel should intervene captures decision-makers’ beliefs that the risks from overt action were high owing to concerns about clientism. The exchange, which transpired during a WSAG meeting on September 17 between the hours of 7:32 A.M. and 8:50 A.M., contains sustained discussion about the benefits and risks of these various intervention options:

“Adm. Moorer: It is important that we don’t use both US and Israeli air. If the President should decide to use US air, we shouldn’t also use Israeli air.

Dr. Kissinger: If US aircraft go in and, for some reason, can’t hack it in a sustained operation, and the Israelis come in, we are then in maximum danger of a charge of collusion.

Mr. Packard: And it would make the US look silly.

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<sup>47</sup>Kissinger (1970b, emphasis mine).

<sup>48</sup>Kissinger (1970b).

Dr. Kissinger: One of the arguments for using US air is that maybe the time has come to show US strength in the area, even in the context of our peace initiative. A US show of force might even fuel the peace initiative when things settle down. On the other hand, Israeli involvement has the danger of a reopening of general hostilities and the end of the cease-fire.

Mr. Sisco: Any Israeli show of force or a successful Israeli operation will be played as a US show of force, though not to the same degree.

Dr. Kissinger: The counter-argument is that *once US forces intervene in support of Hussein and succeed, the King becomes a Western lackey and his long-term position will be weakened. An Israeli move would be more easily understood.*

Mr. Sisco: *An Israeli move would be taken as being in the Israeli national interest—not just as support of Hussein.*<sup>49</sup>

Toward the end of this particular part of the discussion, Richard Helms added that, “if the US intervenes, we must make it crystal clear that it is against Iraq and Syria, not the Fedayeen. The Fedayeen are the darlings of the Arab world. If we put ourselves in the position of defending Hussein against the Fedayeen, that would tear it.”<sup>50</sup>

The foregoing exchange touches on many of the themes described in Chapter 2. Concerns about Hussein becoming a “Western lackey” signifies awareness on the part of decision-makers about the ramifications of exposing the King’s dependency on outside powers by overtly intervening to prop him up. It is hard to tell from this evidence whether the primary concern with the King appearing as a stooge of the West had more to do with his legitimacy at home or in the region more broadly. In all likelihood, leaders were worried about both. Most important for our purposes is simply that there exists clear evidence that the U.S. was concerned about exposing the hierarchical relationship between the two nations by overtly intervening. Indeed, this is precisely why Israeli intervention was seen as so attractive: Israel could simultaneously attack the *fedayeen*, thereby helping King Hussein address his most significant threat while justifying the action as a being in their own self-defense.

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<sup>49</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*b*, emphasis mine). See also, Kissinger and Rogers (1970).

<sup>50</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*b*).

Officials believed that this option might help preserve the King's image of autonomy.

During a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Secretary of State Rogers on September 17 at 9:20 A.M., just 30 minutes after the WSAG meeting concluded, the two men again expressed concerns regarding an overt U.S. intervention on Hussein's legitimacy. The precise language of this particular exchange is illuminating:

"K: The only thing I wanted to check out was between U.S. and Israeli air intervention, what is your judgment as to which would be preferable.

R: I am in favor of the Israelis doing it. In fact its almost commanding the reasons are so strong. It would be in line with their national interests, it would help in preventing the Iraqis from having a hand in the government of Jordan. *The King can give as the reason the Israelis are on his soil is because of the acts of the Fedayeen.* Third, if we are going to have any peace, Jordan and Israel will have to work together anyway.

K: Thats right. *No matter how we slice it the question would be what are we doing there.*"<sup>51</sup>

This exchange further clarifies a point made earlier, that top officials in the Nixon administration thought an Israeli intervention secretly supported by the United States would be easier for King Hussein to justify than direct intervention by the U.S. During a WSAG meeting later that afternoon from 3:20 P.M. to 3:45 P.M., Kissinger made clear that his concern was not with "who is better" in terms of the relative efficacy of an Israeli versus an American military operation but rather "who has the better reason for doing it—foreign intervention for the U.S. as opposed to a national security issue for the Israelis."<sup>52</sup>

An interesting aspect of the Black September Crisis turns on an initial disagreement between the vast majority of decision-makers in the national security establishment, almost all of whom preferred Israeli intervention, and Nixon who (initially) preferred to use U.S. troops. In the morning session of the WSAG meeting referenced above, Kissinger warned his colleagues that "I should tell you that the President leans

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<sup>51</sup>Kissinger and Rogers (1970, emphasis mine).

<sup>52</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970c).



toward use of US rather than Israeli air, although he hasn't precluded further discussion."<sup>53</sup> Kissinger's follow-up phone conversation with Rogers reiterates this point: "You and I have to stay closely in touch on this. The President's instincts are the other way, but hes not adamant."<sup>54</sup>

An undated telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger captures the source of the President's initial concerns with Israeli intervention, as well as Kissinger's efforts to change the president's mind. The exchange between the two is worth quoting at length:

P: Well, the difficulty there, Henry, though is that while that may cool the immediate situation, it certainly puts the other Arab countries (and not just Nasser) unjustly have to line up with Syria in that case, don't they?

K: That's right. On the other hand, if we come in, there are two problems from that point of view. There are two advantages to our coming in—the one you gave and the one that the Russians are less likely to take us on than the Israelis. That is the advantage of our going in. The advantage of the Israelis going in is that they can follow it up and they can escalate it more easily than we.

P: Oh yes, there is no question that the Israelis going in is good, due to the fact that they not only have the air but they have got a helluva good ground punch, they could just put them in there and clean them out.

K: That's right. They have more air and more ground and therefore they might deter a purely Arab response more easily than we; *and, secondly, hated as they are, they are at least recognized to have a local interest in the thing while we, coming from thousands of miles away fighting the Syrians, have a serious problem and the Arabs might unite against us too. We would be the Imperialists coming in.*<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, Kissinger's position won out and Nixon came around to the idea that it would be best for the King if Israel rather than the United States intervened.

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<sup>53</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970b).

<sup>54</sup>Kissinger and Rogers (1970).

<sup>55</sup>Nixon and Kissinger (1970, emphasis mine). Later in the conversation, Kissinger seems to side with the president that U.S. forces may be preferable to Israeli forces under some conditions; telling Nixon one thing and the WSAG members another is a common trait of Kissinger's throughout this ordeal.

Furthermore, and consistent with a broader interpretation of reputations for clientism, Kissinger expressed concern that an open intervention by the U.S. would make them look imperialistic.

Nixon's remarks from an NSC meeting at 6:00 P.M. on September 21 reflect his changed attitude about who ought to intervene to help Hussein should intervention become necessary:

*“The President stated that he felt that Israeli action against Syria would give King Hussein the best break. It would be easy for the Israelis to move in and act quickly, cut off the Syrian rear, and accomplish the same thing without jeopardizing the King's position in the Arab world as a result of his having brought Israeli forces into Jordan. For all these reasons, the President stated, I believe it would be best to have the Israelis attack Syria. If we are unsuccessful in doing that, in light of Israeli reservations, then air action alone would probably be best.”*<sup>56</sup>

In a conversation with Kissinger just one day later, Sisco reiterated the President's key concerns: “The Jordanian point of view and from our point of view, we are trying to get the King to do this by himself. If not by himself, in order for the Israelis to be responsive in order to be helpful to the King and yet with the least possible adverse repercussions to him.”<sup>57</sup> The desire to preserve the King's legitimacy at home — and throughout the Arab world more generally — was palpable throughout these discussions.

It is worth noting that U.S. decision-makers certainly did not conceive of Israeli intervention as wholly without risk. While the main concern about U.S. intervention was to avoid delegitimizing the King and appearing imperialistic themselves, the main concern with Israeli intervention turned on the nature and the scope of the operation. In the minutes of a WSAG meeting dated September 21, Kissinger discusses the possibility of altering the Israeli intervention plans to further reduce risk:

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<sup>56</sup>National Security Council (1970*b*, emphasis mine).

<sup>57</sup>Kissinger and Sisco (1970).

“The President has ordered that we explore with Rabin the possibility of encouraging the Israelis to move into Syria after all—the course which we rejected yesterday. I realize we were all united against this yesterday on political grounds, but I would like to present some of the President’s reasoning. Israeli ground intervention will be very tough on Hussein. An attack on Syria will be less dangerous to him than if it were directed against his territory. Also, it would be easier to get Israel to withdraw from Syrian territory than from Jordanian territory. If the situation unravels in Jordan, Israel could use it as a pretext to stay in. Also, it might give some help to the moderates, if there are any left in the Arab world, who could blame the Syrians for having brought on the fighting. Sisco is exploring this with Rabin.”<sup>58</sup>

As is clear from these minutes, decision-makers considered the possibility that Israeli intervention directly into Jordan, at least in the form of a ground invasion as opposed to the originally-planned aerial strikes, might have a similarly negative effect on Hussein’s legitimacy as U.S. intervention, hence the desire to potentially direct Israel into Syria instead.

Even as the U.S. weighed the pros and cons of direct Israeli intervention into Syria versus Jordan, the desire to conceal their hand in the operation remained constant. At one point during an afternoon meeting of the WSAG on September 21, Kissinger inquired of his colleagues: “If Israel moves into Syria, can we condemn Israel in the SC [UN Security Council]?”<sup>59</sup> Talcott Seelye at the State Department replied that “[w]e wouldn’t have to. We would just say everyone should get back to his own territory.”<sup>60</sup> It is interesting to note what is happening here. Decision-makers were seemingly so worried about revealing that the U.S. was behind an Israeli incursion into Syria that they actually contemplated the possibility of condemning Israel at the United Nations for carrying out plans they actively encouraged!

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<sup>58</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970e).

<sup>59</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970e).

<sup>60</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970e).

## Low Risks of Mission Failure

Why did the Nixon administration tolerate secrecy during Black September notwithstanding the hypothesized tendency toward risk-acceptance in the realm of regime rescue? The answer, I argue, is actually fairly straightforward: The risks of failure were deemed low. Put differently, decision-makers did not exhibit risk-acceptant behavior because there was no need. In order to substantiate this argument, I will make several points. First, the U.S. believed that Hussein would only require a substantial outside commitment under a select number of scenarios. Second, that if Hussein did need external assistance, Israeli intervention, supported secretly by the U.S., would be sufficient. Finally, I will make the case that the U.S. likely *would have* opted for overt intervention and incurred the concomitant risks if the foregoing turned out to be misguided. The case of Lebanon, examined below, nicely illustrates what this might have looked like in practice.

The first point to make is that U.S. decision-makers were fairly confident that King Hussein could, under some contingencies, successfully combat the *fedayeen* on his own. In response to a question about whether the Jordanian army could handle the current threat, Helms argued: “Yes, if they will do it. They don’t need help to handle the Fedayeen.”<sup>61</sup> One day after Hussein’s announcement that he would form a military government and was “moving ... to an all or nothing showdown with the fedayeen in order to ‘establish law and order,’”<sup>62</sup> Kissinger relayed a message to Nixon that was optimistic about the King’s prospects for survival if the conflict remained between the Crown and the *fedayeen*:

“It seems generally agreed in the intelligence community and in the U.S. Embassy in Amman that the Jordanian army can manage the situation as long as only the fedayeen—and not outside troops—are ranged against

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<sup>61</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

<sup>62</sup>Kissinger (1970a).

the regime. It is possible in this situation that Jordanian forces might need some materiel support.”<sup>63</sup>

Faith in Hussein’s ability to survive absent significant involvement by hostile third-parties was echoed elsewhere in the national security establishment. Admiral Moorer observed, “[t]he King has made reasonable progress in Amman. Assuming he succeeds there, the Syrians withdraw, the Iraqis do not move, and Hussein takes the cities he would be okay.”<sup>64</sup>

Evidence suggests that King Hussein’s own beliefs in his ability to come out victorious without outside help were predicated on what Syria and Iraq would do. An NSC memo dated September 16 reads: “The King’s concern centers on possible intervention by Syria and the more remote possibility of intervention by the Iraqi forces. In this regard, the Jordanians are considering their contingency plans and wonder about possible air support from either the U.S. or the Israelis if their Arab neighbors intervene.”<sup>65</sup> Based on the foregoing, it is reasonably clear that both the U.S. and King Hussein believed in Jordan’s ability to handle the threat from the *fedayeen* on their own. As we know, however, the Syrians did eventually become militarily involved, albeit in a limited way; the Iraqis stayed out. Fortunately for the U.S., there was widespread consensus that Israeli intervention would do the trick.

The belief that Israeli intervention supported by the United States would be sufficient to save Hussein is evident in the declassified documents surrounding the intervention. A telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger captures this sentiment:

K: And curiously enough, we might get more support if the Israelis do it. My major worry is if it doesn’t work and another little country ... It will work if we are determined enough, but these Syrians are the craziest of the lot.

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<sup>63</sup>Kissinger (1970b).

<sup>64</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970d).

<sup>65</sup>Hoskinson (1970).

P: Yeah, they might fight a long time. Well, when we are quite confident it will work with the Israelis ...

K: Nobody has any question about that.

P: Because they are there.

K: Well, and they've [the Israelis] beat them [the Syrians] to a pulp once before and they haven't improved that much. Of course, it may still be that the Jordanian armor can defeat the Syrians. The original estimate of CIA was that the King could handle the Syrians and the Fedayeen simultaneously. The situation in Amman from the health point of view is very bad; many people killed and there seems to be a cholera epidemic.<sup>66</sup>

During an NSC meeting on September 21, one day before Syria eventually withdrew from northern Jordan, policymakers discussed the implications of Israel moving gradually into Jordan rather than rushing in. Responding to Defense Secretary Laird's "suggest[ion] that it was actually to Israel's advantage to move slowly," Kissinger concurred by noting that "it would be to Israel's advantage to keep out of Jordan until the King fell. Then, both the Jordanians and the Syrians would be weaker, their move would be somewhat simplified, and they would have a freer hand in the post-hostility situation."<sup>67</sup> During that same meeting, "Secretary Rogers stated then if we feel that the King is about to fall it is probably better to let the Israelis move."<sup>68</sup> It is clear from the foregoing that there was general consensus that Israel had the capacity to save Hussein in the event that it became necessary.<sup>69</sup>

An interesting implication of my theoretical framework is that leaders will only undertake regime rescue secretly if the risks of mission failure are low. The reason is that leaders should, *ceteris paribus*, be attracted to the idea of conducting operations covertly when the risks from overt action are high and there exists a feasible quiet option. The difference between regime rescue and change, however, is that leaders should be willing to tolerate failure in the latter — attempting covert action even when

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<sup>66</sup>Nixon and Kissinger (1970).

<sup>67</sup>National Security Council (1970*b*).

<sup>68</sup>National Security Council (1970*b*).

<sup>69</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*f*).

its prospects for success are low — but not in the former. The implicit counterfactual baked into my argument for the Black September Crisis is as follows: Were the Israeli option unavailable or deemed insufficient for the task, the U.S. would have intervened overtly and risked imposing a reputation for clientism on Hussein in order to prevent his downfall. Such behavior describes the logic of risk-acceptance.

Although it is impossible to substantiate counterfactuals with complete certainty, deliberations from the time of the crisis are extremely suggestive. The first piece of evidence in this regard turns on fact that the U.S. actually considered sending in U.S. troops to prop up Hussein, notwithstanding the reputational risks involved in doing so. During a WSAG meeting on September 10, Kissinger asked:

“Can we discuss the second operation—to support Hussein. I’m aware of the argument that it wouldn’t do Hussein any permanent good and it would be better if the Israelis did it, *but we had better have a plan on the off chance we have to do it*. There is one additional alternative. The President wants us to consider using aircraft against the Fedayeen—not necessarily ground forces. If the King should ask for help, we should consider providing air support.”<sup>70</sup>

In a memo to Nixon six days later, Kissinger again raised the possibility of U.S. intervention. His language — which contains a nod both to the benefits of intervention (also quoted above) as well as the risks — supports the idea of risk-acceptance in the realm of rescue:

“The principal arguments for such intervention are: It would prevent — at least as long as U.S. troops are present — dominance by a group that would offer almost no hope of a Palestine settlement. It might still be possible that stability could be rescued with the help of the army. It is also important for the U.S. to demonstrate its support for responsible regimes. In short, *a risky intervention would be preferable to the certainty of radical control over the situation.*”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970a).

<sup>71</sup>Kissinger (1970b, emphasis mine).

One of the most illuminating displays of risk-acceptance came early on in the crisis. During a meeting of the WSAG and Review Group between 11:40 a.m. and 12:35 p.m. on September 9, Admiral Moorer discussed the possibility of putting four U.S. brigades (12,000-20,000 troops)<sup>72</sup> into Jordan in support of Hussein. In response, CIA Director Helms asked, “Would that mean we had no strategic reserve left in the US? That scares the hell out of me.” Admiral Moorer replied: “That’s right. That would be everything we’ve got.”<sup>73</sup> Lieutenant General Melvin Zais followed up by noting that “There is no other existing unit in the US. We would have to reforge a unit to go to Europe to replace the brigade. Also, the 82nd is not in great shape. It is C2, meaning it is at about 85 percent personnel strength.”<sup>74</sup> Admiral Moorer chimed in, “We would send it anyway.” Although the U.S. never had to send the four brigades to Jordan, the fact that decision-makers were even willing to consider depleting U.S. strategic reserves at the height of the Vietnam War in order to prevent the loss of a friendly client is powerful evidence of risk-acceptance.

Before turning to the alternative arguments, it is also worth noting that not every contingency for the direct use of U.S. military forces was deemed as substantially risky in the ways described above. Consistent with the discussion from Chapter 2, decision-makers’ thinking reflected the idea that intervening on behalf of Hussein to combat a substantial third-party presence would confer the necessary legitimacy to the operation, dramatically reducing the risks of introducing reputations for clientism. In a memo to Nixon from September 16, Kissinger noted:

“The argument for [U.S. intervention] is that—in addition to the basic objective of trying to save a regime that offers some hope of the stability necessary for peace—the U.S. would be supporting a responsible government against a threat from foreign forces (e.g. Iraqi troops). Such a stand

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<sup>72</sup> See <http://www.army.mil/info/organization/unitsandcommands/oud/>.

<sup>73</sup> Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

<sup>74</sup> Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).



is a necessary part of the U.S. posture. *It would be possible to justify this as an in-and-out operation.*<sup>75</sup>

As mentioned above, the presence of foreign forces during Black September was very limited. The Iraqis ultimately refrained from intervening entirely while the Syrian incursions into the north of the country were brief. Had Hussein faced a significant foreign threat, I would expect that many of the risks associated with open U.S. intervention identified in the previous section, including delegitimizing the King and tarnishing the U.S. as imperialistic, would have been lower, if not absent entirely.

When all was said and done, the Black September Crisis was resolved without the need for Israeli action or an open U.S. response. Nixon's memoirs described the crisis this way:

“We decided to pursue a very hard but very quiet line. I authorized Kissinger to call Ambassador Rabin and suggest that he inform his government that we would be fully in support of Israeli air strikes on Syrian forces in Jordan if this became necessary to avoid a Jordanian defeat. I decided to put 20,000 American troops on alert and moved additional naval forces into the Mediterranean.

In the end, Jordan under Hussein's courageous leadership saved itself. By the morning of September 22, the Syrian tanks were once again heading back toward the border. Rabin called early in the afternoon to confirm that the tanks had left Jordan and that the rebel forces were in disarray. He ascribed Hussein's victory to the tough American position, the Israeli threat, and the superb fighting by Hussein's troops.”<sup>76</sup>

Although we will never know what would have happened had the threat to the King been more significant or if the Israeli option did not exist, it is relatively clear that the Nixon administration would not have simply let Hussein fall on their watch.

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<sup>75</sup>Kissinger (1970b, emphasis mine).

<sup>76</sup>Nixon (1978, 485).

### 1.3 Competing Arguments

Now that my argument for secrecy during the Jordanian Civil War has been laid out we can turn to counter-arguments. As already mentioned, Black September does not qualify as a classic CIA-sponsored operation in any meaningful sense of the term. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly considering the extent to which bureaucrats in the national security establishment influenced the decision for secrecy á la the rogue elephant thesis. In brief, the evidence above suggests that this argument does not hold water. Although there were mild disagreements about what the best course of action would be, all major players were consistently involved in the deliberations. Far from being a rogue strategy of the CIA (or the Joint Chiefs, the Defense Department, etc.), the decision to secretly support Israel was advocated for, and authorized, at the highest levels of government, all the way up to and including the president.

One of the most popular explanations for when leaders will find secrecy most attractive — the escalation thesis — fails in this case. The reason is simple: Officials believed that an Israeli intervention was *more likely* to provoke escalation with the Soviets than U.S. intervention. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, an NSC staffer, wrote to Kissinger on September 18 that, “[o]n balance, it seems that the Soviets would probably conclude they had little choice but to let the US get away with a limited intervention, as long as Israeli forces were not involved in attacks against the forces of Arab governments.”<sup>77</sup> Just one day later, Sonnenfeldt wrote, “American intervention could be dealt with in the Great Power context, and, from the Soviet viewpoint, somehow managed. But Israeli intervention raises new questions and above all, the risks that the whole area will lapse into unrestrained warfare, bringing into play Soviet commitments and the probable involvement of Soviet personnel in the UAR.”<sup>78</sup> From the vantage point of the escalation thesis, it is curious that decision-makers pursued a

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<sup>77</sup>Sonnenfeldt (1970a).

<sup>78</sup>Sonnenfeldt (1970b).

strategy that they knew would increase, rather than mitigate, the likelihood of triggering a security dilemma. By honing in on reputations for clientism — which included the prospect of delegitimizing the King and making the U.S. appear imperialistic — my argument provides a better accounting of the risks driving decision-makers underground.

A second alternative argument that might explain the U.S. decision for secrecy is domestic politics. The evidence in this regard is mixed. It is true that decision-makers readily discussed using force openly to rescue hostages as a means of placating domestic audiences. When discussing the possibility that the *fedayeen* might blow up the hijacked planes, for instance, Kissinger stated that “we might have to do something [i.e. use U.S. forces to evacuate Americans from Jordan] for domestic reasons.”<sup>79</sup> As shown above, however, policymakers were reticent to use U.S. forces for the purposes of actually propping up the King owing to its implications for Hussein’s legitimacy and America’s image in the region. Fear of a negative domestic backlash for pursuing an overt intervention Jordan did not seem to play a determinative role in the Nixon administration’s decision to pursue secrecy in this case. Rather, the key drivers of secrecy were external to U.S. domestic politics.

While domestic politics appear not to have been a major driver of secrecy, there were some explicit references to Congress in some of the evidence cited above. One possible reading of these references is that the the Nixon administration was worried that informing Congress about the joint operation with Israel would generate unwanted publicity, particularly about the collusion between the U.S. and Israel, that could ultimately be harmful to King Hussein.<sup>80</sup> Although plausible, there are limits to how confident we can be in such claims. The evidence does not allow us to say with complete certainty, for example, whether the administration worried that consulting

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<sup>79</sup>Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group (1970).

<sup>80</sup>National Security Council (1970a).

Congress would have negative consequences for the mission because of possible leaks to the media, cessation of funding for the operation, or something else. Based on the available documents, we can at least say with a high degree of confidence that an expectation of Congressional disapproval regarding an overt action in Jordan was not the reason Nixon and his team sought to act quietly in the first place.

A third alternative, based loosely on O'Rourke's theory of covert action, also focuses on norms and reputation. In its current form, this framework has difficulties explaining the use of secrecy in the Black September Crisis. According to the logic of O'Rourke's argument, the fact that the U.S. was operating in the Middle East and not in the Western hemisphere means that normative concerns should have taken a backseat to security or economic considerations. Given that the U.S. worried greatly about being perceived as an imperialist power and delegitimizing Hussein serve to weaken this argument. The evidence presented above demonstrating the importance U.S. policymakers accorded to norms of anti-imperialism and self-determination strongly suggests that the dynamics of international order and hierarchy extend far beyond the sphere of a particular great power. That these reputational concerns took precedence over concerns about escalation further serves to support my argument.

There is a final, case-specific, alternative argument that should also be considered. Specifically, one could make the case that the Israelis actually wanted to intervene independently of American prodding as a means of ensuring that the *fedayeen* was not able to successfully wrest power from Hussein. If true, it may perhaps be unsurprising that the Nixon administration capitalized on this opportunity. Although I have sought to demonstrate otherwise, the possibility that Israel might have intervened absent encouragement and support by the U.S. is not, however, inherently incompatible with my argument. Most important for my theory is that the U.S. was driven to search for a secret solution owing to their belief that the risks from overt action were high and that they would have gone overt were it deemed necessary to

save the King. The fact that there was an available quiet option in the form of a willing partner would have simply been serendipitous.

## 2 Operation Blue Bat

In the midst of the Black September Crisis on September 24, 1970, Kissinger inquired of his colleagues during a meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group, “If we have a civil war in Lebanon resulting from Palestinian action, and Lebanon asks for intervention, what would be our view?”<sup>81</sup> U. Alexis Johnson decried that “We can’t repeat 1958.” CIA Director Helms agreed: “The imagination boggles. It was bad enough in 1958, but now, with the fedayeen as a complicating factor!”<sup>82</sup> The crisis to which Kissinger and his colleagues were referring is the first Lebanese Civil War in 1958, a crisis that saw the deployment of over 14,000 U.S. troops tasked with stabilizing the regime of Camille Chamoun.

In this section, I set out to demonstrate that Eisenhower’s decision to overtly rescue Chamoun in 1958 was an exercise in risk-acceptance. In sharp contrast to the Black September crisis, the decision to openly send troops into Lebanon was driven by a belief that the regime would collapse without a public commitment. Covert alternatives and other forms of outsourcing were deemed impractical. That the U.S. was aware of, and openly discussed, the high risks associated with overt action yet proceeded anyway lends strong support to my argument. This case is particularly informative in that the source of threat facing the regime was largely confined to internal elements, rendering the issue of self-determination and related norms especially salient. The fact that Lebanon was a parliamentary democracy at the time of intervention further increased the salience of these dynamics.

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<sup>81</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*g*).

<sup>82</sup>Washington Special Actions Group (1970*g*).

## 2.1 Historical Background

According to the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, “[t]he Suez Crisis, which had resulted in military mobilization by Great Britain, France, and Israel—as well as United Nations action—against Egypt, had encouraged pan-Arab sentiment in the Middle East, and elevated the popularity and influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.”<sup>83</sup> Fearful of these developments, Eisenhower issued what has come to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine just one year later. The Eisenhower Doctrine publicly committed U.S. forces “to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.”<sup>84</sup>

This declaration constituted a significant turning point in the United States’ relationships with the Middle East, marking the beginning of America’s role as a significant player in the region. Among the doctrine’s many supporters was Lebanon, an important ally in America’s fight to contain the influence of the Soviet Union, Nasser’s Egypt, and others. Internal divisions within Lebanon in the late 1950s between Christians, represented by Camille Chamoun, and the Muslim opposition were a microcosm of these trends. Owing in large part to these dynamics, the Lebanese regime’s warm embrace of the Eisenhower Doctrine exacerbated their relations with Muslim and leftist elements of society.<sup>85</sup>

Substantive opposition to the Chamoun regime grew markedly in 1957. The primary catalyst was a number of changes to Lebanon’s electoral laws in advance of parliamentary elections. One such change was an increase in the number of seats allocated to Chamoun’s political party. A second was the redrawing of electoral districts.<sup>86</sup> Perhaps the most incendiary incident, though, was Chamoun’s attempt “to

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<sup>83</sup>Milestones: 1953 - 1960 (N.d.). See also Alin (1994, 3).

<sup>84</sup>Milestones: 1953 - 1960 (N.d.).

<sup>85</sup>Dowty (1984, 41).

<sup>86</sup>Alin (1994, 56).

amend the constitution (with the two-thirds majority that he now had in parliament) and seek re-election.”<sup>87</sup> Opposition grew in intensity such that by mid-May in 1958, Lebanon descended into a full-blown civil war.

By the middle of July, discussions about intervention within the U.S. national security establishment turned into action.<sup>88</sup> The operational concept of the invasion was detailed as early as May 16, 1958: “The plan, which took 17 pages to develop, was given the code named ‘Blue Bat.’”<sup>89</sup> The key objective “was to support or, if necessary, to reestablish the authority of the Lebanese Government. A subsidiary mission was to protect U.S. and British nationals and national interests.”<sup>90</sup> Authorization for the initial landing force of roughly 1,500 Marines was officially communicated at 5:23 P.M. on July 14, 1958. The message read: “Land Marines at 1500 Bravo time 15 July. Do not notify Lebanese you are landing prior 1200 Bravo time but notify Alusna prior to this if you desire. Join your flagship now. Sail all Sixth Fleet eastward earliest.”<sup>91</sup> At 9 A.M. on the morning of the invasion, “President Eisenhower released a statement to reporters at the White House, timed to coincide with the landing of the first elements of the Marine units at Beirut, which announced and explained the basis for the U.S. military intervention in Lebanon.”<sup>92</sup> Not long after the first wave of troops arrived in Lebanon, an additional 12,500 Marines were deployed to save Chamoun.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Drivers of Intervention in Lebanon**

The U.S. had many motivations for intervening in Lebanon in 1958. The overarching objective “of the Middle East policies of U.S. administrations during this

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<sup>87</sup>Attié (2003, 148).

<sup>88</sup>Quandt (1978); Saunders (2011, 79-80).

<sup>89</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States (N.d.b).

<sup>90</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States (N.d.b).

<sup>91</sup>Burke (1958).

<sup>92</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States (N.d.a).

<sup>93</sup>Little (1996, 27).

period centered on preserving access for the Western alliance to the Middle East's oil resources and strategic assets, containing and possibly diminishing Soviet and communist regional influence, and resolving or at least ameliorating the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict."<sup>94</sup> Maintaining a robust network of client states and friendly regimes in the region was one of the primary pathways by which the U.S. sought to realize each of these goals. As a result, watching Lebanon, one of the Eisenhower Doctrine's most ardent supporters, descend into civil war was undoubtedly troubling for decision-makers in the U.S. Bearing this overarching concern in mind, the major drivers of intervention can be broken down into three major factors: Geopolitical dynamics; economic interests; and concerns about credibility.

One of the biggest driver of America's rescue efforts in Lebanon in 1958 turned on the geopolitical implications of losing an important client in the Middle East. According to Alin, "[the U.S.] feared that a major consequence of the crisis would be a reduction of Western influence in the Lebanese government, including the potentially violent overthrow of President Chamoun, and the coming to power of a more neutralist and pro-Arab nationalist leadership in Beirut which would result in a re-orientation of Lebanon's foreign policy."<sup>95</sup> A now-declassified top secret NSC briefing dated May 29, 1958 confirms this assessment: "If [the] situation continues to deteriorate and US does not intervene: A. Chamoun will probably be forced out. B. Any successor govt likely more toward an accommodation with Nassir."<sup>96</sup> In short, the prospect of Lebanon shifting foreign policy allegiances was a significant concern for decision-makers, creating a potent incentive for intervention.<sup>97</sup>

A second cause of U.S. intervention centers on economics. "Lebanon," notes Alin, "with its strategic location along the eastern Mediterranean, by the 1950s had emerged

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<sup>94</sup>Alin (1994, 2).

<sup>95</sup>Alin (1994, 5).

<sup>96</sup>United States. Central Intelligence Agency. (1958).

<sup>97</sup>Alin (1994, 56).



as a center for regional commerce and trade with the West and as an important base of operations for U.S. government and commercial interests in the Middle East.”<sup>98</sup> During a meeting between Eisenhower and various Congressional leaders at 2:35 p.m. on July 14, just one day before the start of the invasion, Senator Russell stated that “[h]e thought that control of the Middle Eastern oil is of determining effect on the free world’s future. If the Middle East goes, all of Africa immediately goes as well.”<sup>99</sup> While fear of a realignment in Lebanon’s allegiances was undoubtedly one of the more significant factors in the U.S. decision for intervention, concerns about commerce and oil were also important to the intervention decision.

Finally, there was also significant concern over what inaction, which in this case meant allowing a client of the United States to fall without first attempting to furnish support, would mean for the credibility of American commitments. According to Alin, “[t]he primary objective of the intervention was to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to defending its regional and international allies in the Cold War by responding to a request for assistance from Lebanon’s pro-Western government.”<sup>100</sup> As we will see, although Eisenhower was far from eager about the prospects of intervening, he “concurred with the credibility argument, noting that if intervention were necessary, the United States ‘should attempt to bolster the Lebanese army as soon as possible, so that our forces could withdraw quickly.’”<sup>101</sup> In the NSC memo from May 29 referenced above, concerns that “US prestige in area will suffer seriously” were registered in response to the possibility of taking no action.<sup>102</sup>

The parallels here to the Black September Crisis are striking. In both cases, the United States worried deeply about the consequences of sitting on their hands in the face of a civil war that threatened their clients’ survivability. The absence of a quiet

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<sup>98</sup>Alin (1994, 5).

<sup>99</sup>Goodpaster (1958).

<sup>100</sup>Alin (1994, 3).

<sup>101</sup>Saunders (2011, 81).

<sup>102</sup>United States. Central Intelligence Agency. (1958).

option in Lebanon, however, meant that decision-makers were forced to choose between overt action and doing nothing, bringing issues of credibility to the fore. Had the Israel option been unavailable during the Jordanian Civil War, it is likely that we would have seen much more sustained discussions about the credibility costs of failing to rescue a friendly client regime as well.

## **2.2 Forced Into the Limelight**

As is clear, the decision to intervene in Lebanon was motivated by a number of factors. What is less obvious, however, is why the Eisenhower administration chose to intervene openly rather than pursuing a covert operation akin to what Nixon did in Jordan twelve years later. Were we to investigate this intervention episode in isolation, we might come to the conclusion that Eisenhower's decision to introduce 14,000 Marines into Lebanon is relatively obvious owing to the considerations identified above. The problem, however, is that such an argument fails to consider analogous instances in which the U.S. faced similar incentives for intervention but chose the quiet option instead. This is particularly important when we consider that overtly invading Lebanon in 1958 entailed significant reputational risks. Indeed, the risks from overt action in this case, which mirrored the risks present during Black September, militated strongly against an open commitment to Chamoun.

The details of the overt operation into Lebanon, described briefly above, are fairly straightforward. As such, I will focus my attention in this section on two main points in support of my argument. First, and perhaps most significantly, I will demonstrate that the risks from overtly intervening in Lebanon were high. The desire to avoid imposing a reputation for clientism on Chamoun and appearing imperialistic in the course of an intervention rendered decision-makers in the Eisenhower administration leery of openly deploying forces to Lebanon. That they intervened in spite of these risks is broadly consistent with what we would expect from loss aversion. The second

point I will make is necessarily more speculative, but important nonetheless. I will suggest that the reason why Eisenhower was willing to face the risks from overt action is due in large part to the absence of a feasible covert alternative. The implied counterfactual is thus that had such an option existed, the U.S. would have capitalized on it owing to the significant risks involved in acting overtly.

### **Concerns About Reputations for Clientism**

The crisis in Lebanon, like the Jordanian Civil War, was primarily an internal affair. Although the opposition to Chamoun did enjoy limited support from outside actors, there was no significant external presence in the form of a full-scale invasion by a hostile third-party. As such, my theory predicts that the risks from overt action should have been high owing largely to reputational concerns. They were. First, and consistent with the logic of reputations for clientism, decision-makers worried that overtly rescuing Chamoun would undermine his internal legitimacy. Second, officials worried that openly deploying forces to Lebanon would make the U.S. appear imperialistic. Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, there was also concern that overt rescue would negatively impact allies of the U.S. *other than* Lebanon, the primary target of intervention. I will take each of these in turn.

The first major risk related to overt regime rescue turned on fears of exacerbating an already-tenuous relationship between Christians and Muslims, irreparably damaging Chamoun's legitimacy and, consequently, compromising his ability to remain in power. At a basic level, the Eisenhower administration fully appreciated:

“The contribution of domestic political circumstances unique to Lebanon to the crisis. These circumstances included the country's delicate confessional political balance between Christians, who held the country's presidency, and Muslims as well as the perception among Lebanese Muslims that President Chamoun was jeopardizing the future of his balance by attempting to extend his presidential tenure beyond its constitutional ex-

piration.”<sup>103</sup>

Declassified documents from the time of intervention reveal concern that overtly propping up Chamoun in light of the foregoing internal dynamics would make him look like a stooge of the West. On January 30, 1958, Lebanon’s foreign minister, Charles Malik, asked Robert McClintock, the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, about America’s stance toward Lebanon. McClintock stated that, “surely neither he nor Chamoun wanted US to land a regimental combat team which would give substance to charge by opposition that Chamoun was an American puppet.”<sup>104</sup> As the crisis progressed into May, Malik again queried McClintock as to whether the U.S. might consider landing marines in the country in the event that Syrian and Egyptian support for the opposition became more public. McClintock did not mince words: “I said my instant reaction was that nothing could be more harmful to Chamoun than that. Malik then backed off and stressed this was most tentative sort of thinking.”<sup>105</sup>

An interesting wrinkle in this case is that U.S. officials and Chamoun actually disagreed somewhat about how harmful overt action would be for the regime’s legitimacy; the former were much less sanguine than the latter. In a telegram sent at noon on May 12, 1958, McClintock discussed the possible contingencies for intervention should Chamoun request it: “Department will no doubt have already considered best means of responding to such appeal, including UN (with certainty of Soviet veto) action under Eisenhower Doctrine (which probably does not apply in view of absence of overt Communist aggression) or by simple and legally justified landing of forces in response to request by friendly government.” While members of the administration were well aware of the risks associated with the second option (see above), McClintock went on to note that “Chamoun ha[d] already long discounted propaganda stigma of

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<sup>103</sup>Alin (1994, 7).

<sup>104</sup>McClintock (1958*f*).

<sup>105</sup>McClintock (1958*c*).

being called ‘US stooge’ and would prefer to take that rather than what to him is more imminent and tangible peril of Syrian military operations against Lebanon.”<sup>106</sup>

Even if Chamoun had accepted his image as an American lackey by May 1958, however, U.S. decision-makers still worried a great deal about the risks from an overt rescue attempt. A memo of a briefing at the National Security Council on May 29 confirmed U.S. fears:

“US intervention would enable Chamoun to survive but would bring serious problems. A. Introduction of U.S. troops might intensify Christian-Moslem tension and further demoralize an already unreliable army. B. Serious incidents and real clashes likely between elements in populace and US troops. C. Difficult to restore order. US might face choice of staying indefinitely or withdrawing before situation stabilized.”<sup>107</sup>

Many of these concerns turn on the dynamics associated with reputations for clientism outlined in Chapter 2, including the possibility of exacerbating an already-tenuous domestic situation by introducing a foreign presence.<sup>108</sup>

One month before the invasion, decision-makers discussed whether Chamoun might be able to muster parliamentary approval for outside intervention, mitigating some of the damage that an overt rescue operation would have on his legitimacy. The prospects were bleak. A Special National Intelligence Estimate dated June 14, 1958, notes:

“President Chamoun could probably get Cabinet approval for a request to the Western powers to intervene, in view of the recent elimination of several Cabinet members who were opposed to it. It is doubtful that he could get parliamentary approval for such a measure, and it is extremely

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<sup>106</sup>McClintock (1958*d*).

<sup>107</sup>United States. Central Intelligence Agency. (1958, 2-3).

<sup>108</sup>One might also interpret some of these concerns — e.g. demoralizing the army — as unrelated to reputations for clientism as I have described them. Even if one were to opt for this interpretation, however, the evidence presented in the preceding paragraphs would still lend support to the kinds of reputational concerns I outlined in Chapter 2. At worst, then, there were multiple risks associated with overt intervention, at least some of which had to do with reputations for clientism. I thank Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl for drawing my attention to this possibility.

unlikely that he would try to do so. The request would almost certainly not have wide political or popular support, whether or not it were supported by General Chehab. While General Chehab has not committed himself on the matter, the indications are that he would not favor such a request.”<sup>109</sup>

Absent parliamentary approval — and perhaps even with it — the risks from overt action seen as high. “If the US were to intervene pursuant to a request supported only by Chamoun and his Cabinet,” notes the National Intelligence Estimate, “*the intervention would almost certainly be regarded with hostility by a majority of Lebanese, including nearly all of the Moslems and perhaps as many as half of the Christians.*”<sup>110</sup> Consistent with the logic of reputations for clientism outlined in Chapter 2, one of the major risks associated with overt military force, even with the blessing of Chamoun, was that it would be regarded as illegitimate by large swathes of the population, further fanning the flames of the ongoing insurgency.

The NIE referenced in the preceding paragraph goes on to note that, “[w]e do not believe that the consequences of intervention would be appreciably different if the measure were justified as one to protect US lives and property, unless it were limited to a rapid operation to effect the evacuation of US personnel.”<sup>111</sup> This quote nicely captures the key difference in the reputational risks across cases of regime change and rescue. In order to reduce the risks of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking during regime change, interveners need a widely accepted fig leaf to justify defection from the non-intervention principle; rescuing nationals provides one such pretext.<sup>112</sup> Because regime rescue bears on a different set of norms, including self-determination, nationalism, and anti-colonialism, the pretexts that reduce reputational risks during regime change are much less relevant in these scenarios.

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<sup>109</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*e*).

<sup>110</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*e*, emphasis mine).

<sup>111</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*e*).

<sup>112</sup>Recall, however, that the Reagan administration, prior to their intervention in Grenada, did not view this pretext as wholly sufficient as a means of justifying an act of overt regime change. Rather, it was the addition of the OECS invitation that tipped the scales.

On June 30, 1958, two weeks after the publication of the Special NIE, Secretary Dulles again raised the legitimacy issue following his meeting with Foreign Minister Malik:

“The Secretary said *there is concern about the innumerable difficulties and issues which intervention would precipitate*. The Secretary recalled how the US opposed the intervention of the UK and France and Israel in 1956. While the Lebanese situation is no parallel, *the man in the street sees no real difference and intervention would undoubtedly be misrepresented in the Middle East*. It is easy to get into Lebanon but it is hard to get out without promoting strong anti-Western feeling and anti-Americanism. *A government sustained by bayonets is not a good situation*. While intervention may be a lesser of two great evils, the Secretary thought we must use all our resources and imagination to avoid it. The Secretary also made it clear that he considered the greater evil to be that the appeal of a small country go unheeded and Lebanon thereby lose its independence.”<sup>113</sup>

This quote is revealing in two ways. First, we can see that one of the major risks from overt action turned on the implications of intervention for Chamoun’s legitimacy vis-à-vis the populace; concerns about stoking anti-American sentiments, discussed in more detail below, were also present. Second, while decision-makers explicitly recognized that these risks were significant, they felt that it was more important to prevent the fall of a friendly client than it was to avoid these risks. This kind of thinking contrasts sharply with what we saw in the Bay of Pigs case, providing further support for the risk-based framework I am defending.

A second major risk associated with overt action turned on the effects of intervention for America’s image and influence. These concerns are consistent with a more expansive view of reputations for clientism that include both the risks to the client’s image as well as the intervener’s. At the most general level, decision-makers worried that openly deploying forces in the midst of an ongoing civil war in the Middle East would negatively impact how America was perceived in the region. In a letter dated

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<sup>113</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*b*, emphasis mine).

February 6, 1958 to Robert Murphy, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, John Irwin, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs, relayed the top brass's concern with premature disclosure of contingency plans for a U.S. invasion. The Joint Chiefs, noted Irwin, worried that if the administration's invasion plans leaked, it would "jeopardize the U.S. position both in the United Nations and with the remainder of the Arab World."<sup>114</sup>

There was also very serious concern that open intervention would smack of imperialism, compromising America's image as a "different power" than the former colonial powers. In a cable dated May 13, 1958, McClintock wrote that "there is a sufficient basis of genuine Lebanon antipathy for Chamoun's second tenure of office to provide a fertile seed bed for charges Western 'imperialist' powers are intervening in favor of one local politician against what would be represented as an authentic will of the people."<sup>115</sup> A memorandum of a conversation at the White House that same day contained the following exchange:

"The President recalled our former so-called 'gun boat policy' and asked by what authority we had sent such missions to South American countries. The Secretary responded that this policy in the world today no longer represented an acceptable practice, unless the forces went in at the invitation of the host government."<sup>116</sup>

Also at this meeting, Secretary Dulles described "the implications of the introduction of American forces" even with an invitation from the Lebanese regime:

"Once our forces were in, it would not be easy to establish a basis upon which they could retire and leave behind an acceptable situation; *the move might create a wave of anti-Western feeling in the Arab world comparable to that associated with the British and French military operation against Egypt, even though the circumstances were quite different...*"<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Irwin (1958).

<sup>115</sup>McClintock (1958e). See also (Alin 1994, 77-78).

<sup>116</sup>United States. White House. (1958b). See also Gendzier (2006, 248).

<sup>117</sup>United States. White House. (1958b, emphasis mine).



Taken as a whole, these quotes highlight some of the major themes discussed in Chapter 2. First, McClintock's invocation of the "will of the people" is a clear nod to the risks of interfering in the process of self-determination. Second, Dulles' response to Eisenhower that America's earlier intervention behavior "no longer represented an acceptable practice" signifies the important ways in which changing norms can affect the reputational risks of intervention over time. Finally, there was concern that overtly rescuing Chamoun would appear too similar to Britain and France's quasi-imperial behavior during the Suez Crisis two years earlier, an event that resulted in widespread international opprobrium.

Concerns about looking like an imperialist power remained salient in the subsequent weeks leading up to the intervention. A declassified memo summarizing a high-level meeting that took place at Secretary Dulles' office on June 17, 1958 reads:

"There was considerable discussion of the political and military consequences of U.S. intervention in Lebanon and of U.S. nonintervention if the Government of Lebanon requests it. The military orders are three: to protect U.S. property, to assist the Lebanese authorities in maintaining their position, and to restore those authorities if they are overthrown. *The first of these may in large part provide a U.S. constitutional basis for intervention but it involves the dilemma that intervention for this purpose smacks of imperialism.*"<sup>118</sup>

Again, this quote shows that the factors most relevant for reducing risk in the course of regime change, including the protection of U.S. nationals, are not particularly relevant when it comes to reducing risks in the context of regime rescue. Participating in this meeting were officials from the State Department, the Defense Department, and the CIA, suggesting that these concerns were registered widely across the national security establishment.

A conversation at the White House between 5:10 P.M. and 6:45 P.M. on June 15 lends further credence to the claim that the internal nature of the conflict was a key

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<sup>118</sup>Greene (1958, emphasis mine).

factor underpinning U.S. concerns about appearing imperialistic. During the meeting, Eisenhower:

“Recalled that our Middle East doctrine had been directed *only against external aggression*. The President wondered, therefore, what possible future there would be if we intervened except to remain indefinitely. He felt, in this regard, that the arguments which we had advanced to the British and French against their intervention in Suez might be pertinent also in this instance — particularly the question: Where would it lead; where would it end?”<sup>119</sup>

In line with the theoretical account I am defending, the prospect of interfering in an ongoing civil war to prop up a foreign regime, particularly in the absence of an aggressive third-party presence, greatly worried top-level decision-makers, including the president himself.

In a letter to Secretary Dulles dated June 23, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, relayed significant concerns about managing the optics of intervention should overt force become necessary. Lodge suggested that the U.S. preempt a series of questions:

“How are we going to get our troops out once we have got them in?  
How long shall they remain?  
What will the formula be for getting them out?  
What will the formula be for holding elections in Lebanon while our troops are there?  
What happens if the elections should go definitely against us?  
If no elections occur for a long time, what will the policy be concerning meetings of the Parliament and votes in Parliament?  
And what if the votes in Parliament turn strongly against the United States troops?”<sup>120</sup>

In the event that “intervention in Lebanon by U.S. troops [became] unavoidable,” noted Lodge, “it would be very much better for U.S. troops to go in alone. The

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<sup>119</sup>United States. White House. (1958*d*, emphasis mine).

<sup>120</sup>Lodge (1958).

world sees us in an entirely different light than it sees the U.K. and France.”<sup>121</sup> Lodge concluded his memo by declaring that “[i]f do it we must, let us leave no stone unturned to *present* it properly.”<sup>122</sup> Lodge’s memo contains two important insights. First, there was at least some sense that who intervened — e.g. the U.S. versus the U.K. or France — was important in shaping the regional and global perception of the action. Second, it was clear that the U.S. ought to be ready to answer a series of questions related to its future role in Lebanon’s domestic politics, highlighting the uncomfortable relationship between regime rescue and self-determination.

A significant part of what concerned decision-makers about openly rescuing Chamoun and appearing imperialistic in the process turned on the tangible ramifications associated with having such a reputation. During the conversation at the White House from May 13, 1958 referenced earlier, Dulles described the potential fallout of an American-sponsored intervention on behalf of Chamoun: “It was probable that oil pipelines would be cut in Syria; action by Egypt in connection with the Suez Canal was not predictable, but at least there was a strong possibility that the Canal would be closed to American and British shipping; the action might result in a new and major oil crisis.”<sup>123</sup> Just as reputations for clientism can damage an incumbent’s domestic legitimacy and jeopardize their ability to remain in power, looking like an imperialist power may entail costs of its own for the intervening state.

A conversation at the White House on the morning of July 14, just one day before the intervention, further buttresses the potential physical damage associated with overt intervention. Vice President Nixon “asked what public reason will be given for our intervention, and Mr. Dulles said it would be to protect American lives and property at the request of Lebanon. The President added as a further reason, because

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<sup>121</sup>Lodge (1958).

<sup>122</sup>Lodge (1958); emphasis in original.

<sup>123</sup>United States. White House. (1958b).

of the increasing danger to the West from these developments.”<sup>124</sup> Nixon went on to strike a note of caution, warning that “the[r]e may be mob violence against American embassies and Americans throughout the whole Middle East. In a way this is our greatest risk — as to what the mobs will do.” Eisenhower responded by stating:

“That the situation is clear to him — to lose this area by inaction would be far worse than the loss in China, because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East. In further discussion the President commented that the most strategic move would be to attack Cairo in the present circumstances, but of course this cannot be done. Mr. Dulles commented many will say we are simply doing what we stopped the British and the French from doing at the time of the Suez crisis. Although there are differences, they will be hard to put across.”<sup>125</sup>

Combining both sets of concerns related to reputations for clientism, Dulles feared that intervention might “set into train indigenous trends toward Lebanon’s ultimate territorial partition or truncation. Lebanon’s integrity would be assured only as long as foreign forces remained on Lebanese soil. Moreover, intervention could and probably would lead to solidification of opposition throughout Moslem world not only to Christians in Lebanon but to the West in general.”<sup>126</sup>

One final risk associated with overt intervention in Lebanon turned on the perceived consequences for friendly regime in the region. Although I have only described the potential consequences of reputations for clientism for the target regime and the intervening state, the following makes clear that overt action can also have deleterious consequences for proximate friendly regimes. During the May 13<sup>th</sup> meeting at the White House, Secretary Dulles observed “[a]nother important consideration was that while we might get support initially from the Iraqi and Jordanian Governments, such support might lead to pressure upon them which could result in their collapse.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>United States. White House. (1958*a*).

<sup>125</sup>United States. White House. (1958*a*).

<sup>126</sup>Gendzier (2006, 278).

<sup>127</sup>United States. White House. (1958*b*).

The resulting exchange between Eisenhower and Dulles captures the risks to other regimes of U.S. intervention in support of Camille Chamoun:

“The President thought that if it became necessary to move forces in, we should have our Ambassadors call on the various governments and explain that we had no intent other than helping a friendly government to maintain its sovereignty and independence; that the move was not in any way directed toward legitimate interests of other nations. The Secretary said that most of the Arab governments to which such representation might be [made?] had in fact asked us to give all necessary support to Chamoun. *However, there was a problem in this case, that often arose in such matters, that the governments were prepared to say helpful things privately but not publicly.*”<sup>128</sup>

In a memo to McClintock outlining talking points to be relayed to Chamoun, Dulles wrote: “There is a grave danger if not certainty that reaction in the Near Eastern area to intervention would represent a victory for Nasser in that there would be aroused strong popular feeling which could well sweep away regimes of pro-Western Arab leaders in other countries.”<sup>129</sup> Reputations for clientism can have regional reverberations.

During a meeting at the Department of State on June 23, Dulles again raised the possibility that an overt rescue attempt might threaten the survival of regimes allied with the U.S. in the region: “If we did send troops, the repercussions elsewhere in the Arab world would be extremely serious and the position of our friends in other countries in the Middle East would be jeopardized. Our move would be supported by a number of the governments of these states but it would not be popular with large portions of their populations.”<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, then, the same dynamics that rendered reputations for clientism so risky for the actual target of intervention — stoking nationalist sentiments and generally angering domestic constituencies by interfering in the process of self-determination — can also have spillover effects on regimes currently allied with the intervening state.

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<sup>128</sup>United States. White House. (1958*b*, emphasis mine).

<sup>129</sup>Dulles (1958*b*).

<sup>130</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*a*).

## The Inadequacy of Secrecy

As I hope is clear from the discussion so far, the Eisenhower administration certainly did not intervene overtly in Lebanon because it was deemed “low-risk.” To the contrary, there were deep-seated concerns that an overt rescue attempt would undermine Chamoun’s legitimacy and render the U.S. imperialistic. The theoretical account developed in Chapter 2 provides an explanation for why Eisenhower proceeded anyway. Given the logic of loss aversion, we would expect decision-makers to have accepted the risks from overt action owing to the absence of a quiet alternative. The implied counter-factual is that Eisenhower, as Nixon did in Jordan, would have pursued secrecy had there been a feasible option to do so.

Although it will not be possible to “prove” the implied counter-factual, available evidence suggests that decision-makers did at one point, very early on in the crisis, search for a secret means of saving the regime, albeit unsuccessfully. In a closed-door meeting with a number of senators on June 23, 1958, Secretary of State Dulles “was asked whether we had any ability through CIA to organize our own indigenous forces which could be used to combat the insurrectionists. It was suggested that many Turks and others from the area looked like Lebanese and could perhaps be infiltrated as counter forces.” In response, Secretary Dulles:

“Did not give a direct answer to this question, although he did mention that consideration had been given sometime ago to the formation of a freedom corps made up of nationalities which could be used for occasions such as this. *He also made reference to the difficulties of this kind of covert activity*, citing the humiliating experience which King Saud had recently undergone when an operation of his backfired.”<sup>131</sup>

One way in which to interpret Dulles’ statement is that the absence of any serious discussion regarding covert action in Lebanon throughout most of the crisis was the direct result of much earlier conversations regarding the difficulties involved with such

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<sup>131</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*a*, emphasis mine).

an enterprise. Unfortunately, the historical record does not provide definitive evidence one way or the other. At the very least, however, the conversation does seem to suggest that decision-makers might have contemplated some form of a covert operation were it at all feasible to do so.

While it seems clear that U.S. decision-makers entertained, and ultimately rejected, plans to covertly form a local force that could counter the threat facing Chamoun, there did exist some quiet actions — albeit non-forcible efforts — to shore up Chamoun’s hold on power prior to the invasion. One such effort was covert support during the ongoing elections. In a memo to the Department of State, dated May 7, Ambassador McClintock noted:

“Having in mind Secretary’s comment (Dulte 10) on backing Chamoun wholeheartedly, I injected an extra dose of vitamins into representation authorized Deptel 4173. I also pointed out that so far back as early March (Embtel 2964) I had recommended we support Chamoun, and was glad three governments were now in agreement on this issue. *At same time, I stressed need for utmost discretion in manner of manifesting our support. Chamoun said it would be fatal if our backing were overt.*”<sup>132</sup>

Later on in the memo, McClintock stated that:

“As for other measures of covert assistance, President mentioned possibility of our speaking to the Edde brothers (cf paragraph 7C Embtel 3673). He then mentioned venal press of Beirut and extent to which it was bought up by Egyptian and Soviet money. He regretted western powers usually attempted to purchase papers already in Egyptian pay, neglecting more honest but poverty stricken papers which had refused to sell out to foreign influence. However, I pointed out need now was to secure foreign press support for Chamoun which would have maximum impact. President laughed ruefully.”<sup>133</sup>

At least two months before the invasion began, U.S. decision-makers were hard at work trying to covertly manipulate the political situation in Lebanon.

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<sup>132</sup>McClintock (1958b, emphasis mine).

<sup>133</sup>McClintock (1958b).

Quiet, non-forcible attempts to stabilize the political situation continued as late as one month prior to the invasion. During a meeting between top officials in the U.S. and the U.K. at the White House on June 9, Secretary Dulles “pointed out that we have aid for Lebanon reasonably well in hand.”<sup>134</sup> Assistant Secretary of State William Rountree:

“Confirmed this statement with regard to the present situation, but pointed out that just prior to the present hostilities Lebanon had announced the intention of asking for \$170 million in aid over a period of six years. He said that we have recently offered Lebanon an attractive package composed of development loan fund help, technical assistance and aid under Public Law 480, designed to meet political as well as economic needs. He pointed out, however, that we can not progress much further with this until the present situation in Lebanon is clarified. As regards the immediate problem of help to the government in its crisis, Mr. Rountree believed that *we were progressing well on the covert side where greater flexibility is required in the use of money.*”<sup>135</sup>

Although these covert attempts to stabilize the situation in Lebanon ultimately proved unsuccessful, they do at least suggest that the U.S. made a non-trivial effort to resolve the ongoing crisis quietly.

### **The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back**

The absence of a viable covert alternative forced decision-makers in the Eisenhower administration to make a tough choice. They could refrain from intervention and allow Chamoun to fall, thereby avoiding the many risks from overt action, or they could launch an overt rescue operation. During the early stages of the crisis, it looked as though decision-makers might not have to choose between these unsavory alternatives. If Chamoun could weather the crisis on his own, a risky overt action might prove unnecessary. Unfortunately for decision-makers, things were not so easy. On July 14, a close ally of the United States, King Faisal II of Iraq, was unexpectedly ousted

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<sup>134</sup>United States. White House. (1958c).

<sup>135</sup>United States. White House. (1958c).



in a military coup.<sup>136</sup> Prior to Faisal’s ouster, “the remaining constraint” on overt intervention “was the belief that the Lebanese government could still cope with the threat.”<sup>137</sup> “Should this view change,” notes Dowty, “it was clear that the door was open for direct U.S. military action.”<sup>138</sup> Upon receiving word of what happened in Iraq, “the US now feared that an army coup in Lebanon was all but imminent and that an immediate response was required.”<sup>139</sup>

Consistent with the logic of loss aversion, decision-makers ultimately proved more sensitive to the risks of failure or inaction than they did to the various risks from overt action. A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) dated June 5, 1958, captures the ways in which the United States was thinking about implications of allowing a friendly client regime to fall without coming to their aid:

“Most politically conscious elements in the Middle East identify Chamoun with the US. They probably believe that the US is committed to the preservation of a Western-oriented regime in Lebanon if not to the continuation of Chamoun himself in office. In these circumstances, if Chamoun’s government or a pro-Western successor government collapsed under the onslaught of anti-Western opposition elements, friends and enemies of the West alike would believe — *irrespective of whether any formal request for help had in fact been made* — that the US had proved itself unwilling to come to the aid of its declared ally and friend, and that it had capitulated to Nasser. The governments of Middle East countries disposed toward cooperation with the West would be strongly influenced to revise their policies.”<sup>140</sup>

A second NIE from June 14 further outlined the consequences of a failure to rescue a friendly client, noting that this “would be widely regarded as a victory for Nasser and a defeat for the West, and would be exploited as such by the USSR.”<sup>141</sup> After concerns that Chamoun would fall without an open U.S. commitment spiked in the

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<sup>136</sup>Alin (1994, 105-107), McClintock (1958*a*); Attié (2003, 197).

<sup>137</sup>Dowty (1984, 45).

<sup>138</sup>Dowty (1984, 45).

<sup>139</sup>Dowty (1984, 52).

<sup>140</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*d*, emphasis mine).

<sup>141</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958*e*).

wake of Faisal's unexpected ouster in Iraq, the Eisenhower administration opted for an overt rescue attempt, risks and all.

## 2.3 Competing Arguments

Alternative theories have difficulties explaining the variation under consideration. Perhaps the weakest alternative explanation in this case is the escalation thesis. Rather than shying away from the risks that an intervention in Lebanon might trigger a general war with the Soviets, the Eisenhower administration openly recognized, and ultimately embraced, such a possibility. During a meeting at the Department of State on July 14 — the day before the invasion began — Secretary of State Dulles and Loy Henderson, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration, “agreed ... that intervention involves the risk of general war.” Although “intervention involve[d] the risk of general war” noted Henderson, he “felt that we would face the risk now as well as any time although he noted that at least in the beginning part of the non-Communist world would be unfriendly to us.”<sup>142</sup> Secretary Dulles concurred with Henderson's assessment, arguing that “[i]f we do not accept the risk now, they will probably decide that we will never accept risk and will push harder than ever, and border countries will submit to them.”<sup>143</sup> That the U.S. proceeded with an overt rescue attempt armed with this knowledge runs counter to the notion that decision-makers will opt for covert action when the threat of escalation is high, especially with a rival superpower.

Interestingly, the fact that we saw overt intervention despite the high risk of escalation actually provides strong support to my argument. Although I have consistently emphasized that the major drivers of secrecy in most cases turn on reputational concerns, including reputations for rule-breaking and clientism, my risk-based framework

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<sup>142</sup>United States. Department of State. (1958c).

<sup>143</sup>United States. White House. (1958a).

can accommodate a host of alternative costs. As already noted, the risks from overt action in this case were high largely as a result of the belief that open intervention would undermine Chamoun's legitimacy and damage America's image as an anti-colonial power. The previous paragraph, though, also indicated that the risks from overt action were also high owing to the threat of escalation. That the Eisenhower administration was willing to run the risk of escalation with the Soviets *and* face the prospect of painting Chamoun as a lackey lends powerful support to the claim that leaders will exhibit risk-acceptant behavior when pursuing preventive goals.

Theories focused on domestic politics also have difficulties explaining Eisenhower's decision to go overt in Lebanon. To begin with, it is relatively clear from the documents that domestic politics, and Congress in particular, were at best a secondary consideration in the decision-making process. Consider a memo sent by Secretary Dulles to the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon in which he raised the possibility of using force to "(a) [Protect] American life and property and (b) [Assist] the GOL in its military program for the preservation of the independence and integrity of Lebanon."<sup>144</sup> Dulles explicitly downplayed the constraining role of Congress, noting that "these two courses are clearly within the President's constitutional authority without further Congressional action."<sup>145</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, some members of Congress were actually enthusiastic about overt intervention, a sharp contrast with how the administration perceived the situation. A memorandum of conversation from a high-level White House meeting on May 13 notes:

"The President was aware of considerable Congressional excitement over the Lebanese issue and what the United States proposed to do to help its friends in the Middle East. Senator Knowland in particular had raised this matter with him. He felt that resolute action should be taken as necessary to preserve the situation."<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Dulles (1958a).

<sup>145</sup>Dulles (1958a).

<sup>146</sup>United States. White House. (1958b).

Had the president simply taken Congress' pulse and acted accordingly, he would have gladly opted for intervention from the very beginning. If the evidence presented above demonstrates anything, it is that the administration reluctantly intervened openly in Lebanon, fully aware that they were incurring significant risks in the process.

Finally, extant theories emphasizing norms and reputation fare worse than the theoretical account I am defending. Norms-based theories would likely place a great deal of emphasis on the formal invitation from a legitimate head of state as a powerful rationale for overt intervention. To the extent that this argument holds, the risks of intervening in Lebanon in 1958 should have been low, rendering an overt rescue attempt unsurprising. In a narrow sense, the notion that saving an incumbent regime from ruin is less normatively costly, especially vis-à-vis the non-intervention principle, is undoubtedly true but also misleading.

The main issue with conventional norms arguments is that decision-makers took no great solace in the ability of Chamoun's formal invitation for intervention to reduce the kinds of reputational risks they most worried about. The reason why turns on the unique dynamics of regime rescue, particularly in the context of ongoing civil war. A formal invitation would do little to guard against the possibility that overt intervention would delegitimize Chamoun, make America appear imperialistic, and destabilize friendly regimes. Had there been a significant external threat, many of the risks from overt action that were present in this case would most likely have been absent, with or without a formal invitation for intervention from Chamoun. By highlighting the differences between the two faces of regime promotion, my argument can help to make sense of these unique dynamics.

### 3 Discussion

In this chapter, I turned away from regime change and tested the theoretical account developed in Chapter 2 against two important cases of American-sponsored regime rescue throughout the Cold War: The Black September Crisis in 1970 and the invasion of Lebanon in 1958. I set out to demonstrate that decision-makers would exhibit behavior consistent with loss aversion owing to the preventive nature of regime rescue operations. While the risks from overt action were significant in both cases — there was concern that an open rescue attempt would impose a reputation for clientism on the target and damage the intervener’s image — leaders expressed a willingness to incur them when necessary. The Eisenhower administration repeatedly discussed the many risks from overt action, including the problems it would cause for Chamoun in terms of his legitimacy at home, exacerbating sectarian conflicts within the country, portraying the U.S. as an imperial power, and so on. Nonetheless, the absence of a workable covert option and the belief that doing nothing would irreparably damage America’s credibility as a stalwart ally forced the decision to go public.

Although the case of Lebanon clearly shows U.S. decision-makers’ willingness to go overt if it is the only feasible option, one of the additional implications of my theory is that leaders will pursue secrecy when the risks from overt action are high and there exists a feasible quiet option. This is precisely what happened during the Black September Crisis. It is interesting to note that the risks from overt intervention in Jordan were largely analogous to what we saw in Lebanon. What made secrecy acceptable during the Jordanian Civil War, however, was that decision-makers had a quiet option available to them. Secretly outsourcing intervention to Israel was advantageous for a number of reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, Israel was a willing and capable partner. Second, because the *fedayeen* posed a mutual threat to both Jordan and Israel, the operation could be pitched as an act of self-defense, reduc-

ing the chances that Hussein would appear as a lackey of the West. While an Israeli intervention ultimately proved unnecessary, understanding why the U.S. embarked on a plan to secretly outsource intervention in the first place, particularly given the hypothesized tendency toward risk-acceptance, is an important undertaking.

The patterns of secrecy and openness explored in this chapter have significant implications for our understanding of great power intervention. The importance of examining the full spectrum of forcible regime promotion by accounting for regime rescue in addition to regime change should be evident. The risks that decision-makers were willing to incur in the course of a rescue operation (e.g. Lebanon, 1958) contrast sharply with cases in which leaders shied away from risks during episodes of regime change (e.g. Cuba, 1961). Only by examining the two pairs of cases explored in Chapters 3 and 4 can we fully appreciate the distribution of different reputational risks across these two faces of regime promotion as well as the different ways in which leaders weigh the risks of failure against the risks from overt action depending on the policy objective at hand.

## Chapter 5

# The Soviet Union's "Vietnam": Afghanistan, 1979

The two main variables used to predict a leader's decision for secrecy or openness outlined in Chapter 2, the risks from overt action (high/low) and the objectives of intervention (promotive/preventive), are general enough so as to apply to most great powers in most instantiations of international order. Only one of these variables, however — the risks from overt action — required us to specify the precise rules, norms, and principles surrounding interventions for a given great power in a given time period; this was the primary focus of Part I in Chapter 2. The second variable, whether the objective of intervention is gains-seeking or loss-avoiding, should be relatively stable across space and time. Put differently, I am assuming that we can conceive of regime change and rescue in terms of gains and losses, respectively, regardless of which power is doing the intervening in any given time period.

Unlike the objective of an intervention, the risks from overt action, particularly those related to reputational considerations, are subject to change over time. Consider the intervener examined in this dissertation so far. For over 100 years, from

the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 to the announcement of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Policy” in 1933, the United States adhered to very few proscriptions on its right to intervene in the internal affairs of countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Between 1901 and 1933 alone, the U.S. publicly intervened in Latin America roughly thirty-five times.<sup>1</sup> After Good Neighbor was introduced, that number dropped to three. Although there are many possible explanations for this dramatic reduction in the number of overt interventions, one important factor was the formal codification of the non-intervention principle, written into the charters of various international organizations, including the Organization of American States and the UN. While the actual nature of regime change and rescue remained unchanged — that is, such operations were still promotive and preventive, respectively — the risks from pursuing these ends overtly grew dramatically. As my argument would predict, the frequency of covert interventions also rose in this period.

Variation in the risks associated with overt action for a single great power over time is just one of the ways in which this particular variable can vary. Multiple great powers operating in the same time period, especially when they each subscribe to different rules and norms from one another, may also experience differences in the risks from overt action.<sup>2</sup> A modern-day example might be the United States and China today. Historical examples include Great Britain and Austria during the Concert of Europe or the U.S. and the Soviet Union during much of the Cold War. While my basic argument is still that all great power interveners choose to intervene secretly or openly depending on both the objective being pursued and the relevant risks from overt action, the reasons why some opportunities are deemed “high risk” can vary quite dramatically, even for different powers operating in the same period.

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<sup>1</sup>Rabe (2006, 50).

<sup>2</sup>In many ways, this phenomenon mirrors the distinction made by some scholars between status quo and revisionist states, e.g. Schweller (1994). Importantly, however, revisionist states need not oppose *all* of the rules and norms promoted by the leading status quo power, but simply some of them.



In this chapter, I examine the Soviet Union's covert and overt involvement in Afghanistan over the course of 1979 as a window into the dynamics of secrecy for a great power other than the United States. As before, I will assume that key decision-makers in the Soviet Union conceive of regime change and rescue in terms of gains and losses, respectively. At least some of the rules and norms comprising the Soviet-led order, however, are distinct from what we have seen in many of the episodes of intervention examined thus far. The Soviets' commitment to promoting communist regimes, one of its most significant guiding principles, butted up against the United States' commitment to thwarting them.

Notwithstanding some significant differences in the superpowers' visions of international order, Soviet and American decision-makers actually exhibited rather similar concerns regarding the risks associated with the use of overt force to promote regimes. Nowhere is this clearer than during cases of intervention to prop up regimes not directly threatened by an outside power. The reason, as I describe in greater detail below, is that the Soviet Union, much like the U.S., saw itself as a champion of anti-imperialism and self-determination. Perhaps surprisingly, then, the Soviet Union's shift from covert to overt action in Afghanistan over the course of 1979 mirrors the patterns of secrecy and openness we saw in the two cases of U.S.-sponsored regime rescue in Chapter 4. By exploring two sets of norms, one of which motivated the Soviets to intervene in support of friendly communist regimes and one of which served as a constraint on such behavior, we will gain important insights into the interplay of intervention and secrecy for the other superpower during the Cold War.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by outlining the two major tenets of the Soviet-led order, which included a steadfast commitment to promoting communism and a strong identification with anti-imperialism. Having described these tenets, I examine the origins of one of the most consequential interventions of the entire Cold War: The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This case is informa-

tive for at least three reasons. First, and most importantly, it contains within-case variation on the dependent variable, beginning with limited covert involvement in the spring and summer of 1979 and concluding with a full-scale, public invasion by Christmas. Second, this episode is often credited as one of the key contributors to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its importance as a historical case should be self-evident. Third and finally, this case demonstrates that the dynamics of loss aversion outlined in Chapter 2 apply with equal force to great powers other than the United States, lending credence to the generalizability of the theoretical framework developed here.

## 1 The Soviet-Led International Order

Existing studies of international order, with some notable exceptions, tend to focus overwhelmingly on the United States.<sup>3</sup> There is good reason for this. The American-led order created in the wake of the Second World War was without historical precedent. According to Ikenberry, what set Pax Americana apart from previous instantiations of international order was not simply the power disparity between the U.S. and other great powers. Rather, it was the combination of America's preponderance in both the economic and military domains *and* its democratic character that facilitated the construction of the first-ever constitutional order.<sup>4</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, underpinning this entire project was the exercise of strategic restraint.<sup>5</sup> One of the central objectives of U.S. decision-makers, notes Ikenberry, was to "giv[e] up some opportunities to use its power to gain immediate returns on its power," instead "settl[ing] for fewer gains at the initial moment of rule creation by operating within institutional rules and obligations than it could otherwise achieve with its brute power."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>E.g. Brooks and Wohlforth (2008); Katzenstein (2005); Ikenberry (2001, 2011); Lake (2009). For exceptions, see Finnemore (2003); Lake (1996); Legro (2005).

<sup>4</sup>Ikenberry (2001, 5).

<sup>5</sup>Ikenberry (2011, 105).

<sup>6</sup>Ikenberry (2011, 105).

Notwithstanding some important challenges, the continued durability of Pax Americana is testament to the robustness of the American-led international order.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, none, or very few, of the factors contributing to America's ability and incentives to construct a constitutional order are present when considering the Soviet Union. To begin with, the Soviet Union's economic and military might, although significant enough to render it a superpower, fell behind that of the United States,<sup>8</sup> eliminating one of Ikenberry's key preconditions for international order building. Second, the character of the Soviet regime differed dramatically from the liberal-democratic institutions comprising the U.S. system. The Soviet Union was an authoritarian state headed by a Communist Party (CPSU). Although decision-makers, especially Khrushchev, frequently paid lip-service to the notion that all states within the communist orbit were equal in their status,<sup>9</sup> the Soviet Union's commitment to genuine multilateralism left much to be desired.

Despite these differences, there exist important affinities between the Soviet and the American projects that are germane to our assessment of the conditions under which decision-makers within the Soviet Union would be driven to covert action and other forms of secrecy when intervening abroad. "Like the United States," notes Westad:

"The Soviet state was founded on ideas and plans for the betterment of humanity, rather than on concepts of identity and nation. Both were envisaged by their founders to be grand experiments, on the success of which the future of humankind depended. As states, both [the Soviet Union and the United States] were universalist in their approaches to the world and the majority of their leaders believed that friends or enemies on the international stage were defined by proximity or nonproximity to the specific ideological premises on which each of these Powers had been founded."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Brooks and Wohlforth (2008).

<sup>8</sup>Westad (2000, 554).

<sup>9</sup>Haas (2005, 162).

<sup>10</sup>Westad (2005, 39).

The U.S. was thus not alone in believing that its postwar mission was central to the advancement of progress and history. The Soviet Union held similar beliefs about its own enterprise. Although the content of the Soviet project differed in key ways from America's — the Soviet order was predicated on imperialism, the American order on alliances<sup>11</sup> — both superpowers cared deeply about propagating their respective visions of international order.

Because the Soviet project has received far less attention in the literature than America's, I will spend some time outlining its contours. The most relevant aspect for our purposes is how the various tenets shaped the Soviet Union's intervention behavior. First, I will make the case that the contents of the Soviet project provided important guidance about the kinds of interventions the Soviet Union ought to pursue. Regime rescue was deemed far more important, for example, than regime change. In this regard, the Soviet Union's intervention behavior differed from what we saw with the United States. Second, I will argue that one tenet of the Soviet project, particularly the professed commitment to anti-imperialism, rendered decision-makers just as reluctant to wield overt military force in the service of forcibly propping up regimes owing to reputational concerns as their American counterparts. The story of secrecy as it relates to Soviet interventions is thus one of surprising continuity. The remainder of this section will expound on each of these points.

## 1.1 The Pillars of the Soviet Project

As with the American-led international order, one could feasibly identify myriad pillars of the Soviet project. I will focus on two. The first, and perhaps most defining, feature of the Soviet-led international order was a strong commitment to the advancement and promotion of communist ideology. The precise ways in which communist ideology shaped patterns of Soviet intervention will be explored below. For

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<sup>11</sup>Lake (1996, 23-25).

now, it will be sufficient to note that while the Soviets' ideological principles, much like the United States', often generated powerful incentives for intervention, it did not prescribe how visible those interventions ought to be. The second major tenet of the Soviet-led international order was the Soviet Union's commitment to its image as a champion of states in the periphery and anti-imperialism more generally. As we will see from the case study presented below, decision-makers' deep-seated concern with preserving this image generated powerful incentives for secrecy.

### **Communist Ideology and the Appeal of Regime Rescue**

Among the many guiding principles of the Soviet Union, none has received greater attention than the commitment to the promotion of communism around the globe.<sup>12</sup> The leaders of the Soviet Union were deeply wedded to the belief that history was on an inexorable march that would lead to the end of capitalism and the triumph of Marxism-Leninism. They were not, however, passive observers of events. Soviet decision-makers believed that they had an obligation to "prepare the ground for other revolutionaries to come."<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest efforts to facilitate the spread of communism was the establishment of the Comintern. "In order to assist and promote such revolutions," writes Westad, "the Bolsheviks in 1919 set up the Communist International, or Comintern, a world-wide organization headquartered in Moscow, to which all workers' parties were invited as members."<sup>14</sup> Though the organization was dissolved in the midst of World War II, the Soviet Union retained strong affinities with communist regimes and opposition movements for many decades afterwards.

While perhaps tempting to write off the commitment to the spread of communism as disingenuous rhetoric,<sup>15</sup> there is good reason to believe that at least some of these

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<sup>12</sup>Owen (2010).

<sup>13</sup>Westad (2005, 49).

<sup>14</sup>Westad (2005, 49).

<sup>15</sup>One could, of course, levy an analogous criticism of America's commitment to promoting democracy given the many cases on the historical record of U.S. decision-makers either subverting elected

sentiments were authentic, both among members of the reigning elite as well as many citizens residing in the Soviet Union. As Leffler notes of the Leonid Brezhnev era:

“Although much has been written about the complacency and stagnation of [this period], the general secretary and his comrades took their communism seriously. So did the Soviet people, even when their everyday practices transgressed official ideology. ‘For great numbers of Soviet citizens,’ writes the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, ‘many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life ... were of genuine importance.’ Communists were creating ‘a new society,’ Brezhnev liked to say, ‘the likes of which mankind [had] never known before.’”<sup>16</sup>

The Soviet Union’s deep-seated commitment to the spread of communism also went beyond rhetoric to include diplomatic, economic, and sometimes military support to movements that shared in their ideological sympathies.

Most relevant for our purposes is how communist and socialist ideology shaped the Soviets’ intervention behavior. On a general level, the commitment to spreading communism served to incentivize intervention abroad. “During the Cold War,” writes Owen, “the Soviets used force to promote particular institutions in targets in northeast Asia, central Europe, the Middle East, and central Asia.”<sup>17</sup> Much of the impetus for promoting communist regimes abroad was driven by the ongoing ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, which spanned from roughly 1947 to 1989.

There were very pragmatic reasons why the two superpowers were so concerned about the spread of regimes that were ideologically sympathetic to their rival. As Haas has shown, the relative proximity of two regimes’ guiding ideologies — their “ideological distance” — goes a long way in explaining the perceived threat other regimes pose to one’s security.<sup>18</sup> Although Haas uses the concept of ideological distance to explain

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leaders or, at the very least, steadfastly supporting dictators. See [Barkawi \(2015\)](#); [Downes \(2010\)](#); [Owen and Poznansky \(2014\)](#); [Poznansky \(2015\)](#).

<sup>16</sup>[Leffler \(2007, 255\)](#).

<sup>17</sup>[Owen \(2002, 387\)](#).

<sup>18</sup>[Haas \(2005\)](#).

threat perception, we can readily extend this logic to the domain of interventions. If states perceive ideologically proximate regimes as less threatening, it follows that these states should express an interest in helping to ensure that such regimes are in places of power abroad. The more ideologically proximate regimes there are, the less threatening the international environment. As we have seen, ideology proved to be one of the major causes of intervention in Chapters 3 and 4.

One interesting caveat to the foregoing discussion is that, notwithstanding their desire to see the proliferation of ideologically sympathetic regimes sprout up across the globe, Soviet decision-makers did surprisingly little to realize this vision. Soviet leaders refrained from actively participating in regime change, especially when it came to using their own forces. As I will discuss shortly, the Soviets did install friendly regimes in Eastern Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II, providing some clear exceptions to this claim. By and large, however, there are no obvious analogs from the Cold War period of the Soviet Union doing what the United States did in Cuba, Grenada, Panama, and elsewhere. In order to understand the reticence to forcibly install communist regimes abroad, it is important that we look at the actual content of communism as an ideology.

Communism is predicated on a materialistic view of social change and revolution. As such, it is necessarily a bottom-up phenomenon. Revolution must begin with the people. External actors imposing a communist or socialist regime from above is largely antithetical to this process. None of this should be taken to mean that the Soviet Union saw no role for itself in facilitating the emergence of like-minded regimes abroad. Financial support for Salvador Allende's election as president of Chile in 1970 is just of many examples of efforts to aid ideologically sympathetic actors. It does mean, however, that Soviet leaders were extremely reticent to impose their preferred regimes by way of force. According to Garthoff:

“In broadest terms the Soviet leaders can be taken at their word when they say they do not believe in or practice the export of revolution, but only oppose the export of counterrevolution (Western intervention against revolutionary change). To the extent they believed their ideology—and the record of history and experience—revolution could not successfully be exported, as it must have indigenous roots and a base.”<sup>19</sup>

As intimated above, however, the Soviets did not see their hands as completely tied:

“The Soviet leaders of the 1970s did not ... conceive of their own role as passive and did not preclude an active role when the correlation of forces made that seem prudent. The Soviet role might be limited to verbal or moral support or extend to economic assistance, political and diplomatic support, supply of arms, or to Soviet-supported socialist (for example, Cuban), or even direct Soviet military assistance of various kinds. Angola and Ethiopia were the outstanding examples.”<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting, however, that in both Angola and Ethiopia — Garthoff’s two main examples of the Soviets using “direct ... military assistance of various kinds”<sup>21</sup> — the objective was to *rescue* friendly communist regimes from falling. Intervening militarily to depose non-communist regimes and install communist ones à la regime change was simply not done.

Because scholars writing on the role of ideology as a motivator for intervention have not drawn bright lines between regime change and rescue, the aforementioned differences between Soviet and American interventions is often missed.<sup>22</sup> The overarching strategy throughout most of the Cold War for the United States was to promote democracy where feasible, and, failing that, to support anti-communist dictators.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Garthoff (1994).

<sup>20</sup>Garthoff (1994, 746).

<sup>21</sup>Garthoff (1994, 746).

<sup>22</sup>While scholars such as Owen (2010) usefully examine both regime change and rescue, the main objective is usually not to theorize the differences between these two distinct types of interventions. Others, such as Downes and Monten (2013), focus exclusively on regime change.

<sup>23</sup>Owen and Poznansky (2014). Arthur Schlesinger’s recounting of Kennedy’s views on the Dominican Republic situation in the early 1960s captures this sentiment well: “There are three possibilities ... in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime or a Castro regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can’t renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid the third” (Schlesinger Jr. 2002, 769).



It is at least theoretically possible to bring about both of these outcomes from the “outside-in,” or top-down by way of foreign intervention. Deposing a hostile autocratic regime and installing a democratic one in its place by facilitating the holding of elections, to say nothing of how stable the resulting system will be, is within the intervener’s ability. It is also possible, and probably easier, to unseat an incumbent regime and replace it with a friendly dictator that has the “right” ideology.

For the Soviet Union, foreign-imposed regime change was much less likely to lead to the emergence of the regimes it wanted for all of the reasons listed above. Because communism is a bottom-up ideology that starts with the people, imposing it from the top down is an exceedingly challenging task. “Soviet political doctrine,” writes Garthoff, “has continued to deny a Soviet military role to stimulate or even support revolution in the third world ...”<sup>24</sup> Even the oft-cited Brezhnev Doctrine “asserted the responsibility of the socialist commonwealth (the Soviet-led bloc) to *prevent the reversal* of a socialist revolution.”<sup>25</sup> Installing communist regimes from without fell outside the scope of such proclamations. One of the most plausible reason for why the Soviet Union refrained from engaging in regime change in the same fashion as the United States, I would argue, turns on the differences in the ideological composition of the kinds of regimes each superpower intended to support.

Apart from ideology, there is another plausible reason for the relatively small number of Soviet-sponsored regime change operations: They simply lacked the resources to engage in large-scale, sustained efforts to forcibly install friendly regimes. According to Westad, “[w]hile Soviet foreign policy was no less fueled by its key ideas or its understanding of what made the world tick [than the U.S. was], the crucial difference is that at most times Soviet leaders were acutely aware of their *lack* of international hegemony and the *weakness* (relative to the United States and its allies) of Soviet

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<sup>24</sup>Garthoff (1994, 754).

<sup>25</sup>Garthoff (1994, 755; emphasis mine).

or Communist power.”<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was somehow preordained. It is worth remembering that at some moments throughout the Cold War, the Soviet economy was rising at a more rapid pace than the U.S. economy.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the Soviets’ material inferiority undoubtedly played a role in tamping down the assessment of their own ability to actively engage in regime change abroad.

A cursory glance at the historical record lends credence to the idea that the content of communist ideology combined with the Soviets’ limited power projection capabilities resulted in many more interventions to save regimes than to overthrow them. Two of the most repressive and brutal interventions of the Cold War — Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 — were intended to crush popular uprisings and to prevent pro-Soviet communist regimes from falling.<sup>28</sup> According to the definitions used here, these were clear cases of regime rescue operations. Other prominent interventions in East Germany, Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan were also undertaken with the purpose of shoring up existing communist regimes. To reiterate, I am emphatically not arguing that the Soviets were somehow uninterested in fostering the emergence of communist regimes where they did not already exist; economic and diplomatic support for communist movements and leaders around the world demonstrate conclusively that they were.<sup>29</sup> What I am arguing, however, is that communism’s core focus on bottom-up revolutions combined with the Soviet Union’s limited power projection capabilities severely restricted efforts at *forcible* regime change.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the foregoing argument about the Soviet Union’s reticence to conduct regime change is tempered by some of the early

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<sup>26</sup>Westad (2000, 554; emphasis in original).

<sup>27</sup>Although the Soviet economy never succeeded in actually overtaking the U.S. economy; see Owen and Poznansky (2014, 1086).

<sup>28</sup>Owen (2002, 394).

<sup>29</sup>See Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005).

postwar interventions.<sup>30</sup> In the five-year period from the end of World War II to roughly 1950, the Soviet Union installed a series of friendly pro-Communist regimes across Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>31</sup> On the surface, such interventions appear inconsistent with my argument that the Soviets were unwilling to actively bring about Communist regimes by way of force. A more likely story, however, is that the Soviet Union, having occupied much of this territory in the wake of World War II, simply installed friendly regimes as a fairly easy means of solidifying territorial gains made during the war.<sup>32</sup> The actual costs to the Soviet Union of installing friendly regimes in these countries were manageable: “Closer to its occupied territories, less attentive to local needs, and more willing to use coercion as a substitute for voluntary compliance, the costs to the Soviet Union of its informal empire were relatively low in the early postwar years—taking the form mostly of low paid occupation troops.”<sup>33</sup> After Stalin’s death in 1953, however, the Soviets did not engage in any large-scale, militarized efforts to depose hostile regimes and install friendly, communist ones in their place akin to what they did in Eastern Europe after World War II.

### **Anti-Imperialism, Self-Determination, and Reputations for Clientism**

If communist ideology helped generate powerful incentives for some kinds of intervention (regime rescue) and to disincentivize others (regime change), the Soviet Union’s self-designated role as a bulwark against imperialism served to dramatically increase the risks for overtly interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Recall from Chapter 2 that many of the key pillars of the U.S.-led international order worked to raise the risks from overt intervention. America’s commitment to non-intervention as a core tenet of international order, for instance, meant that openly deposing regimes

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<sup>30</sup>My thanks to both John Owen and Arne Westad for pointing this out.

<sup>31</sup>The Soviets, under the direction of Stalin, also covertly assisted North Korea in their efforts to overthrow the South Korean regime during the Korean War. *See Carson (2016)*.

<sup>32</sup>Owen (2002, 387, ft. 41).

<sup>33</sup>Lake (1996, 27).

and acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking was costly. These same dynamics held true for the Soviet Union. Although often overlooked, Soviet decision-makers cared a great deal about their image as a new great power, one that shunned imperialism and vociferously supported self-determination. According to my theoretical framework, then, the Soviets often intervened to shore up friendly regimes *in spite* of their well-publicized commitment to anti-imperialism. Loss aversion helps to explain why. The remainder of this section will outline this tenet of the Soviet-led order and describe how it raised the reputational risks associated with overtly rescuing regimes.<sup>34</sup>

Although the Soviet Union was for all intents and purposes a dictatorship, decision-makers still viewed themselves as strong champions of the rights of all nations, particularly weaker states and especially those in the so-called periphery. Vladimir Lenin, “[t]he leader of the Bolsheviks ... stressed their enmity toward Russification and the oppression of minorities: ‘Complete equality of rights for all nations; the right of nations to self-determination; the unity of the workers of all nations’ were among the slogans Lenin put forward on the eve of the outbreak of World War I....”<sup>35</sup> How much of this language represented the truth and how much of it was propaganda is debatable.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, the principles and norms espoused by the main founder of the Soviet Union were propagated long after his death.

Both Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, the first and second leaders of a postwar-Soviet Union, respectively, retained Lenin’s public commitment to anti-imperialism and self-determination. “Ever since the 1920s,” writes Leffer:

“Stalin had ruminated about a ‘coalition between the proletariat revolution in Europe and the colonial revolution in the East ... against the

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<sup>34</sup>The other major risk of openly supporting regimes — i.e. delegitimizing the government being supported by making them appear as a lackey of a foreign patron — is still very much relevant in the Soviet cases as well. Because this risk is more of a function of decolonization and the rise of nationalism rather than anything having to do with the Soviet Union, the current discussion does not re-describe this phenomenon.

<sup>35</sup>Westad (2005, 46).

<sup>36</sup>Westad (2005, 46).

world front of imperialism.’ ... [I]n late 1947 and early 1948, Stalin returned to this theme with greater emphasis than ever before. He told a special session of the Politburo, on 14 March 1948, ‘we should energetically support the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples of the dependent and colonial countries against the imperialism of America, England, and France.’<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding Khrushchev’s efforts to distance himself from the erratic and brutal behavior of his predecessor, the twin themes of anti-imperialism and self-determination remained. At the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Central Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, Khrushchev stated:

“The new period that Lenin predicted in world history when peoples of the East take an active part in settling the destinies of the whole world and become a new, powerful factor in international relations has arrived ... In order to create an independent national economy and to raise the living standards of their peoples, these countries, though not part of the world socialist system, can benefit by its achievements. They now have no need to go begging their former oppressors for modern equipment. They can obtain such equipment in the socialist countries.”<sup>38</sup>

As is clear, an overarching theme from Lenin to Khrushchev and beyond was to verbally attack colonialism and to stand as a champion of Third World states, even if their actions in parts of Europe and elsewhere often belied this rhetoric.

Based on the discussion contained in Part I of Chapter 2, we would expect the Soviet Union’s professed commitment to anti-imperialism and self-determination over the course of several decades to affect the risks from overt action in familiar ways. Because forcibly propping up regimes, particularly those beset by internal conflict, constitutes interference in the process of self-determination, interveners run the risk of imposing reputations for clientism on the target and appearing imperialistic themselves. While all interveners might worry about the costs of undermining a friendly regime’s legitimacy, especially if it jeopardizes that regime’s ability to retain power,

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<sup>37</sup>Leffler (2007, 67).

<sup>38</sup>Westad (2005, 68).

only interveners that worry about their reputation as champions of anti-imperialism should worry about the costs of looking imperialistic. As shown in the preceding paragraphs, the Soviet Union reasonably qualifies as such a state.

If the foregoing logic is correct, we would expect Soviet decision-makers to exhibit similar concerns as U.S. officials about trying to avoid the reputational risks associated with overtly rescuing regimes, especially those beset by civil war, whenever possible. In the language of Chapter 2, the prospect of appearing like an imperial power should serve as a powerful driver of secrecy for Soviet decision-makers. Where a workable quiet option to rescue a friendly regime exists, we would expect decision-makers in the Soviet Union to capitalize on it just as the Nixon administration did during Black September. The decision-making calculus should change dramatically, however, when covert action is infeasible. Because individuals tend to exhibit risk-acceptant behavior when faced with potential loss, we would expect Soviet decision-makers to intervene openly to save a friendly regime even when doing so entails significant reputational risks of the sort described above. Loss aversion thus provides an explanation for why, notwithstanding numerous proclamations railing against imperialism, the Soviet Union often acted in ways that openly contradicted these stances.

## **2 The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**

This section takes my theory of secrecy to the Soviet context by exploring one of the most consequential interventions during the Cold War: The occupation of Afghanistan. Perhaps surprisingly, Soviet decision-makers expressed remarkably similar concerns throughout 1979 as did U.S. leaders prior to analogous rescue attempts. Far from being enthusiastic about the prospect of getting involved in Afghanistan, decision-makers were fully aware that overtly introducing Soviet military forces to resolve what was at that point a domestic dispute entailed great risks. These included

significant damage to the Soviets' image as the champion of Third World states and severe costs to the legitimacy of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, the reigning pro-Soviet regime. Indeed, decision-makers initially denied Afghan requests for direct Soviet assistance, opting instead for a limited covert commitment in the form of small KGB detachments and a disguised parachute battalion. Only once it became clear that the prospects for a continued Communist regime in Afghanistan were severely threatened did the Soviets decide to intervene openly in Afghanistan notwithstanding the widely recognized risks of doing so.

## 2.1 Why Focus on Afghanistan?

The invasion of Afghanistan represents a useful case study for a number of reasons. First, the events that precipitated the full-scale intervention in December of 1979 were preceded by a series of smaller crises throughout the spring and summer that resulted in the Soviets intervening covertly in an effort to shore up key assets in Afghanistan. Although Soviet leaders went to great lengths to keep their initial involvement secret, candid discussions about the pros and cons of an overt military commitment provide significant insights into the rationale underlying their decision. By the fall and winter, the Soviets' numerous covert attempts to bolster the regime proved unsuccessful. The result was the deployment of tens of thousands of Soviet troops into Afghanistan, replacing the current head of state, Amin, with another Communist leader, Karmal. The existence of within-case variation on the dependent variable makes it possible to hold constant a number of potentially confounding factors that might influence the decision for secrecy or publicity by examining the same country over time with the same Soviet leaders making decisions during both time periods.<sup>39</sup>

A second reason why the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan represents a useful case is its historical significance. According to Charles Cogan, “[t]here is no question

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<sup>39</sup>Carson (2013, 323).

that the Afghan War, as the most significant of the regional conflicts of the 1980s, figures centrally in the debate over what led to the end of the Cold War.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, David Gibbs notes that “[t]he [Soviet] invasion and the occupation of Afghanistan constituted the largest Soviet military action since World War II, while US support for the anti-Soviet resistance was the principal paramilitary operation of the Reagan Doctrine.”<sup>41</sup> Understanding the process that led the Soviet Union to move from a limited covert commitment in the spring and summer of 1979 to the fateful decision to embark on a full-scale invasion by the end of year provides important insights into the sources of secrecy and intervention for a great power other than the United States in one of the most consequential episodes of the entire Cold War.

A third reason for studying the Soviets’ intervention in Afghanistan in depth is the relative availability of primary documents. While many of the documents surrounding U.S. interventions, even during the Cold War, still remain shrouded in secrecy, the amount of declassified materials documenting America’s many interventions over the last 70 years dwarfs that which are available for the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> Out of the many Soviet-led interventions throughout the Cold War period, however, the occupation of Afghanistan stands out as being among the most heavily studied and well-documented cases. Thanks to the efforts of historians and other Sovietologists to translate and disseminate previously-classified documents, we are able to get a rare glimpse into the thought process of key decision-makers in the lead up to such a consequential historical episode. Even more fortunately, many of these documents are readily available to scholars through the Wilson Center’s Digital Archives.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is a useful case study for all of the reasons stated above, it is also crucial that we recognize some limitations. Perhaps

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<sup>40</sup>Cogan (1993, 73).

<sup>41</sup>Gibbs (2000, 233).

<sup>42</sup>The availability of declassified documents pertaining to Russia’s foreign policy ventures since 1991 is, to put it mildly, even more limited.

<sup>43</sup>Available at [www.http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/](http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/).



most importantly, analyzing the dynamics of secrecy and openness in the case of Afghanistan provides no real leverage for understanding the dynamics of secrecy in the realm of regime change, the other face of the forcible regime promotion coin. The reasons for focusing exclusively on a prominent case of regime rescue, however, have been described in detail above. Simply put, the Soviet Union rarely, if ever,<sup>44</sup> embarked on a significant regime change operation — whether overt or covert — during the Cold War owing to the combination of communist ideology, which proscribed this kind of interference, and constraints on their power projection capabilities. While there exists some evidence that the Soviets supported communist insurgencies at various stages with economic, logistical, and sometimes military aid, there is simply no comparable set of Soviet-sponsored regime change cases to the U.S. cases.<sup>45</sup>

## 2.2 Historical Background

Relative to the great powers that have intervened in its internal affairs over the course of the last century or more (e.g. Great Britain, Russia, the United States), Afghanistan is a relatively young sovereign country. Yet, great power and imperial politics played a crucial role in the country’s evolution: “Afghanistan, a unified country only since the late eighteenth century, from early in the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth owed its continuing existence to its role as a buffer between the Russian and British empires.”<sup>46</sup> From the time it achieved independence in 1919 to well into the latter stages of the Cold War, however, Afghanistan followed a foreign policy of relative neutrality toward the prevailing great powers of the day.

One of the most significant development to transpire in Afghanistan for our purposes “was the establishment of a communist party (though the term was abjured),

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<sup>44</sup>As noted above, prominent exceptions include the early occupations of Eastern European countries in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the covert involvement in the Korean War on the side of North Korea.

<sup>45</sup>For a full-length treatment of American and Soviet approaches to client states, see [Odom \(1992\)](#).

<sup>46</sup>[Garthoff \(1994, 977\)](#).

the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1965; Nur Mohammed Taraki served as its secretary general."<sup>47</sup> The PDPA was comprised of two main factions: the *Khalqs* ("The Masses") and the *Parchams* ("The Banner"). Taraki, the General Secretary, was a member of the Khalq faction. Babrak Karmal, who would later go on to become president of Afghanistan in December of 1979, headed the Parcham faction of the PDPA. Although they first emerged onto the scene as early as 1965, Afghan communists would not actually assume control over the country until 1978 when they overthrew the reigning president, Mohammed Daoud.

Daoud, who took power in a bloodless coup in 1973, initially worked closely with the Parcham faction of the PDPA. The Khalqs largely stayed on the sidelines, attracting more radical members to their ranks. By the spring of 1978, however, Daoud embarked on a series of policies that placed the survival of his regime in jeopardy, including purges of members of the Parcham faction from government, visits to China and the United States, and a proposed policy of moving Afghanistan toward a stated policy non-alignment.<sup>48</sup> On April 27, 1978, Daoud was deposed and killed in a military coup. Three days later, Taraki was named as the Prime Minister of Afghanistan. Amin, another member of the Khalqs, and Karmal were each named Deputy Prime Ministers. Sustained cooperation between the two major factions was short-lived. By November, the Khalqs began removing Parchams from power.<sup>49</sup>

One of the major sources of the growing crisis in Afghanistan, which came to a head in 1979, turned on the political, economic, and social reforms undertaken by the PDPA. Many of these reforms, including the introduction of a new national flag, secular education for men and women, and the overall policy of communization, drew the ire of the large Muslim population.<sup>50</sup> In March 1979, a rebellion broke out in

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<sup>47</sup>Garthoff (1994, 982).

<sup>48</sup>Garthoff (1994, 983–4).

<sup>49</sup>Garthoff (1994, 984–6); Westad (1994, 54).

<sup>50</sup>Garthoff (1994, 990). See also Cogan (1993, 75-6).

Herat, one of Afghanistan's major cities. During the incident, significant numbers of the 17<sup>th</sup> Division of the Afghan Army defected to the rebels. While the military eventually quelled the rebellion with limited assistance from the Soviets, growing dissatisfaction with the regime continued throughout the year. Conditions grew even worse after Amin placed Taraki under house arrest on September 16 and declared himself Secretary General of the PDPA. A few weeks later on October 8, Taraki was killed on Amin's orders.<sup>51</sup> A little over two months after Taraki's assassination, Soviet decision-makers deployed tens of thousands of its own troops in order to ensure that the PDPA remained in power and loyal to the Soviet Union.

### 2.3 Why Intervene?

Before investigating why decision-makers chose to intervene in a limited, covert manner from the Herat uprisings through the summer of 1979 and then in an extremely visible way in the form of an occupation in December 1979, it is important that we understand what was at stake for the Soviet Union. Contrary to sometimes-popular accounts, Soviet decision-makers were far from eager to get significantly involved in Afghanistan. It is not true, as some have argued, that the Soviet Union "*welcomed* the opportunity to occupy Afghanistan..."<sup>52</sup> Based on new evidence, there is a strong case to be made that "Soviet officials were, in fact, reluctant to intervene."<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding their reluctance, however, the Soviets ultimately did intervene in Afghanistan, with great cost in blood and treasure. The question, then, is why?

Perhaps the main driver of intervention of intervention into Afghanistan at both stages was a desire to ensure that the PDPA, a staunchly pro-Soviet regime, retained their grip on power. According to Mendelson, "the Soviet leaders did not see their decision to intervene militarily as an opportune option but as a serious imperative; not

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<sup>51</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1005). See also, Cogan (1993, 76).

<sup>52</sup>Quoted in Gibbs (2000, 234; emphasis in original).

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Gibbs (2000, 234).

as an opportunity for expansion but *as a reluctant necessity to hold on.*"<sup>54</sup> The crisis in Herat, which triggered the defection of non-trivial numbers of the Afghan military to the rebels and resulted in the killing of Soviet advisors, "jarred the Soviet leaders into their first real consideration of the possibility of a more direct military role in support of the Taraki–Amin government."<sup>55</sup> Although the Soviets did not intervene in a serious way until December, fearing the "the potential costs and liabilities of directly committing Soviet military forces beyond advisers[,] [t]he security situation in the country ... continued to deteriorate throughout the year."<sup>56</sup>

Declassified meeting notes taken from the time of the Herat Uprising capture the nature of Soviet leaders' concerns. During a high-level meeting of the Politburo in the midst of the crisis on March 17, 1979, Soviet decision-makers expressed their concerns about losing Afghanistan. Andrei Gromyko, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was among the most vocal:

"In my opinion, we must proceed from a fundamental proposition in considering the question of aid to Afghanistan, namely: *under no circumstances may we lose Afghanistan.* For 60 years now we have lived with Afghanistan in peace and friendship. And if we lose Afghanistan now and it turns against the Soviet Union, this will result in a sharp setback to our foreign policy."<sup>57</sup>

Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin echoed Gromyko's sentiments, noting that "[a]ll of us agree - we must not surrender Afghanistan. From this point, we have to work out first of all a political document, to use all political means in order to help the Afghan leadership to strengthen itself, to provide the support which we've already planned, and to leave as a last resort the use of force."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Garthoff (1994), quoted in Mendelson (1998, 42; emphasis mine).

<sup>55</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1024).

<sup>56</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1024).

<sup>57</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979, emphasis mine).

<sup>58</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979).

Kosygin's quote in particular demonstrates two key points. First, there was relative consensus on the importance of maintaining a friendly Afghanistan for Soviet security. Second, the deployment of Soviet troops to Afghanistan was seen as an option that would be used only if other strategies proved unsuccessful. The desire to prevent the loss of a friendly client, coupled with deteriorating conditions in the country, did eventually push the Soviets to "overc[o]me their reluctance to provide large amounts of military assistance early in 1979, owing to the threat to the regime's survival and to events in Iran."<sup>59</sup> Decision-makers conceived of the eventual decision to intervene in Afghanistan "not as something they were free to do but as something they were regrettably bound to do. It was a decision forced by events, not an opportunity created by them."<sup>60</sup> Each of the two major phases of intervention in Afghanistan — the initial covert commitment in the spring and summer and the subsequent decision to deploy tens of thousands of troops by December — were driven by the perceived costs to Soviet interests of allowing a pro-Soviet, communist regime to fall.

Whether the Soviets' fear of losing a friendly client state was strictly a function of security considerations or whether shared affinities of communism played a more consequential role in their decision to intervene is a point of contention among students of the occupation. According to Cogan, the latter was most consequential:

"What took place in Afghanistan in 1979 was the last gasp of the Soviet empire as it overextended itself. It stumbled into an Afghan civil war more out of ideological inertia than real conviction, feeling compelled to invoke the Brezhnev Doctrine as the Kabul government was losing control of the country. The Soviets believed that they could not let a Communist government fall, especially one with a border contiguous to the Soviet Union."<sup>61</sup>

Garthoff's interpretation of Soviet decision-makers' main motivation for intervention

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<sup>59</sup>Westad (1994). Note that the crisis in Afghanistan coincided with the Iranian Revolution.

<sup>60</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1040).

<sup>61</sup>Cogan (1993, 80–81).

differs slightly from Cogan's: "Soviet decisions on direct intervention were made on the basis of national security requirements, including political but not ideological ones. The governing considerations were interests, costs, and risks, not doctrine."<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, whether decision-makers' incentives for intervening in Afghanistan were driven strictly by security considerations, ideological affinities, or some combination of the two is orthogonal to the discussion at hand. The reality is probably somewhere in between, wherein security *and* ideology drove the Soviets into Afghanistan in 1979. What is central to my argument, however, is that neither of these two factors alone or in conjunction influenced the decision to use covert action or overt military force to rescue the ailing PDPA. In the discussion that follows, I will show that the factors incentivizing the use of secrecy in the first period were still present in the second. What changed was the inability to save the regime using covert action. Owing to loss aversion, then, the Soviets eventually overcame their reticence to get publicly involved, embarking on a full-scale occupation in late-December.

## 2.4 Secrecy as First Resort

The previous discussion analyzed the key incentives motivating Soviet decision-makers to intervene in Afghanistan. With this foundation in place, we can now evaluate the primary question of interest: Why did the Soviet Union intervene covertly in the spring and summer of 1979 and shift to a strategy of overt intervention in December of that same year? I will begin by first establishing the existence of covert interference by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Having described the basic contours of this secret meddling, we will turn to an examination of what motivated the decision for secrecy. The following section will explore the decision for overt intervention. While the concerns of Soviet decision-makers were remarkably similar across both time periods, the availability of a quiet option in the first phase of the crisis created

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<sup>62</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1038).

an opportunity for covert involvement. The absence of one in the second phase pushed the Soviets to go overt and confront the reputational costs of public involvement. That decision-makers were willing to incur these risks in the hopes of preventing a friendly client from falling provides strong support for my theoretical account.

### **Early (Covert) Involvement**

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in the spring and summer of 1979 took two primary forms. The first was a political strategy intended to try and remedy the many problems ailing the PDPA-led regime. Although this does not qualify in any meaningful way as “forcible regime promotion” — the primary focus of this dissertation — it still signifies that the Soviets well understood that the problem in Afghanistan was largely political and that if they did not do something to resolve it while there was a possibility of doing so, the only available option would be to resort force. Unfortunately for Soviet leaders, this is eventually what happened. The second form of involvement, and the one that is most relevant to the argument I am defending, was a limited covert commitment. I will discuss each of these strategies in turn.

Soviet leaders viewed Afghanistan’s problems as a symptom of the discontent with the PDPA’s basic approach to governing. The Herat Uprising was emblematic of the population’s dissatisfaction with the regime. To begin with, the PDPA’s attempts to impose communist-inspired policies — social, economic, and political — in a predominantly Muslim country met stiff resistance. Additionally, the Khalqs’ exclusion of Parchams from government did little to endear them to one of two main factions in the PDPA. During a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) on March 17, Prime Minister Kosygin stated: “It seems to me that we must speak to Taraki and Amin about the mistakes that they have permitted to occur during this time .... [T]hey have continued to execute people that do not agree with them; they have killed almost all of the leaders - not only the top

leaders, but also those of the middle ranks - of the 'Parcham' party."<sup>63</sup>

In response to their growing concerns about the ways in which the PDPA was governing and, consequently, contributing to their own instability, Soviet leaders embarked on a political solution intended to stabilize the situation:

"The approach called for cooler and more careful action by the Afghan leadership, a broadening of the leadership of the party and the government (curtailing, and if possible reversing, the purge of the Parcham wing of the party and also bringing in nonparty, apolitical bureaucrats), broadening public support by less radical programs, and attempting to crush those insurgents who would not desist."<sup>64</sup>

In the CC CPSU document from March 17 referenced above, Andrei Kirilenko, a high-ranking member of the Politburo, reiterated that:

Taraki must be instructed to change his tactics. Executions, torture and so forth cannot be applied on a massive scale. Religious questions, the relationship with religious communities, with religion generally and with religious leaders take on special meaning for them. This is a major policy issue. And here Taraki must ensure, with all decisiveness, that no illicit measures whatsoever are undertaken by them."<sup>65</sup>

The first of the Soviets' two-pronged approach to stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan in early 1979 thus involved efforts to address part of the problem at its source, reestablishing trust between the two major factions of the PDPA and encouraging the regime to build a broader coalition among the population.

More relevant for our purposes than the Soviets' political strategy was the decision to interfere, albeit in a limited way, using covert methods. In order to "formulate proposals and co-ordinate actions' on Afghanistan," top officials established a commission "composed of Andropov, Gromyko, Defense Minister Ustinov (all full members of the Politburo), and the head of the Central Committee's International Department,

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<sup>63</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979).

<sup>64</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1024). See also Westad (1994, 59).

<sup>65</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979).



Boris Ponomarev (as a non-voting candidate member)” right around the time of the Herat Uprising.<sup>66</sup> It was this commission that would first authorize the limited covert commitment in Afghanistan and, later in the year, the overt deployment of tens of thousands of troops to try and rescue the PDPA.

Although the scope of the Soviet Union’s covert efforts in the aftermath of the Herat Uprisings was small in scale,<sup>67</sup> these actions still constituted a marked increase in Soviet involvement in the ongoing turmoil brewing in the country.<sup>68</sup> There are at least two recorded episodes of explicit covert involvement. First, “[t]o provide security and defense for the Soviet air squadrons at the Bagram airfield, [the Soviet Union was to] send to the [Afghanistan], with the agreement of the Afghan side, a parachute battalion disguised in the uniform (overalls) of an aviation-technical maintenance team.”<sup>69</sup> The parachute battalion, which “had been alerted in March following the grisly uprising in Herat and the suggestions of deployment by Puzanov and Ivanov of troops to Bagram,” had several purposes.<sup>70</sup> Most significantly, the division was tasked with “protect[ing] Soviet air squadrons at the Bagram airbase”<sup>71</sup> and, in the event that conditions got worse, helping evacuate Soviet personnel on the base.<sup>72</sup> Numerous Soviet personnel were already at Bagram helping to “train Afghans to use their new air weapons.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 392).

<sup>67</sup>There are snippets of evidence that Soviet military leaders, often at the request of the PDPA leadership, contemplated doing more. To take just one example, Amin and Taraki at one point “requested that [the Soviets] send to Kabul some 15-20 combat helicopters with ammunition and Soviet crews so that, if the situation in the outlying and central regions deteriorates, they can be used against bands of rebels and terrorists who are being infiltrated from Pakistan” (Gorelov 1979). The Soviet military advisor who received the request, Lt. Gen. Lev Gorelov, assured Afghan leaders that the shipment of helicopters and “the use of Soviet crews will be kept secret....” (Mendelson 1998, 46). Although only spotty, the evidence suggests that the request was denied; See Gorelov (1979).

<sup>68</sup>Carson (2013, 304).

<sup>69</sup>Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov and Ponomarev (1979a).

<sup>70</sup>Mendelson (1998, 47).

<sup>71</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 392–93); Carson (2013, 301–03); Garthoff (1994, 1001–02).

<sup>72</sup>Mendelson (1998, 45).

<sup>73</sup>Mendelson (1998, 47, ft. 30).

The second of the two notable instances of covert involvement was more limited in scale than the 600-man parachute battalion. The same memorandum referenced above, which ordered the parachute battalion to deploy to Bagram airbase, also ordered “a special detachment of the KGB USSR (125-150 men), disguised as Embassy service personnel” to be deployed in defense of the Soviet Embassy should conditions in the country deteriorate.<sup>74</sup> The memorandum authorizing both of these actions, dated June 28, 1979, was signed by some of the highest ranking elites in the decision-making apparatus, including Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev.

Soviet decision-makers likely hoped that the combination of these two secret actions, combined with the political strategy outlined above, would be enough to weather the crisis and stabilize the PDPA’s grip on power. One question that remains to be answered, however, is why the Soviets initially sought to avoid acting overtly in the first place, opting instead for a cocktail of political solutions and limited covert actions. The primary reason, I argue, turns on the interaction of two factors. First, there was an expectation that overt action would impose a reputation for clientism on the PDPA and make the Soviet Union look imperialistic. Second, decision-makers believed that the quiet option would effectively stabilize the situation.

### **Concerns About Reputations for Clientism**

As noted above, the key catalyst pushing Soviet decision-makers to first seriously consider the need for action in Afghanistan was the Herat Uprising.<sup>75</sup> However, “as the Politburo deliberations in March show,” writes Garthoff, “the Soviet leaders were well aware of the potential costs and liabilities of directly committing Soviet military forces beyond advisers.”<sup>76</sup> A conversation between Ambassador Vasily Safronchuk, a Soviet special advisor, and Bruce Amstutz, the American chargé d’affaires, affirms

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<sup>74</sup>Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov and Ponomarev (1979a). See also Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 392–93); Carson (2013, 301–03); Garthoff (1994, 1001–02).

<sup>75</sup>Cogan (1993, 75–6).

<sup>76</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1024).

that the Soviets appreciated the high risks associated with overtly intervening in Afghanistan. Safronchuk relayed that he “was well aware that an alternative or fall-back might be to seek a military solution through the introduction of Soviet troops ... (to help deal with the insurgency) ... [and that such an action] would have had bad repercussions internationally and internally in Afghanistan.”<sup>77</sup> Safronchuk’s remarks provide preliminary evidence that key Soviet decision-makers feared that an overt intervention to rescue the Afghan regime would be costly for a host of reasons.

Now-declassified documents from the spring and summer of 1979 paint a fuller picture of these concerns. A few days into the Herat Uprising on March 17, 1979, Kosygin had a telephone conversation with Taraki to discuss developments in the ongoing crisis. Early on in the conversation, Kosygin inquired: “Do you have support among the workers, city dwellers, the petty bourgeoisie, and the white collar workers in Herat? Is there still anyone on your side?” Taraki’s answer was far from optimistic: “There is no active support on the part of the population. It is almost wholly under the influence of Shiite slogans — follow not the heathens, but follow us. The propaganda is underpinned by this.”<sup>78</sup> Concerned by the Afghan Army’s apparent inability to quell the uprising, Taraki directly appealed to Kosygin for help:

Taraki: We ask that you extend practical and technical assistance, involving people and arms.

Kosygin: It is a very complex matter.

Taraki: Iran and Pakistan are working against us, according to the same plan. Hence, if you now launch a decisive attack on Herat, it will be possible to save the revolution.

Kosygin: The whole world will immediately get to know this. The rebels have portable radio transmitters and will report it directly.”<sup>79</sup>

Undeterred by Kosygin’s reticence to support the regime in its efforts to confront the

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<sup>77</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1024).

<sup>78</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979).

<sup>79</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979).

uprising, Taraki suggested that the Soviets “place Afghan markings on your tanks and aircraft and no one will be any the wiser. Your troops could advance from the direction of Kushka and from the direction of Kabul. In our view, no one will be any the wiser. They will think these are Government troops.”<sup>80</sup> Taraki’s language suggests that the Afghan leadership clearly appreciated the Soviets’ reticence to use their own troops in support of the PDPA, hence the suggestion to rely on deception.

A key reason why decision-makers denied Taraki’s suggestion that the Soviet military disguise their tanks and aircraft appear to have had more to do with practicality than a general unwillingness to assist. Kosygin’s response to Taraki suggests as much: “I do not want to disappoint you, but it will not be possible to conceal this. Two hours later the whole world will know about this. Everyone will begin to shout that the Soviet Union’s intervention in Afghanistan has begun.”<sup>81</sup> “Why,” asked Taraki, “can’t the Soviet Union send Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens in civilian clothing? No one will recognize them. We want you to send them. They could drive tanks, because we have all these nationalities in Afghanistan. Let them don Afghan costume and wear Afghan badges and no one will recognize them. It is very easy work, in our view.”<sup>82</sup> Unimpressed, Kosygin retorted that “[y]ou are, of course, oversimplifying the issue. It is a complex political and international issue, but, irrespective of this, we will hold consultations again and will get back to you.”<sup>83</sup>

The foregoing exchange reveals that top-level Soviet leaders were deeply worried about getting involved in Afghanistan, even covertly, given the inherent difficulties of ensuring that they would be able to hide their complicity. During a private discussion among the Soviet leadership, also on March 17, Yuri Andropov — the head of the KGB and one of the primary advocates of overt intervention in December —

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<sup>80</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979).

<sup>81</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979).

<sup>82</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979). Also quoted in Carson (2013, 302).

<sup>83</sup>Kosygin and Taraki (1979).

emphasized some of the potential ramifications of a Soviet-sponsored intervention:

“Comrades, I have considered all these issues in depth and arrived at the conclusion that we must consider very, very seriously, the question of whose cause we will be supporting if we deploy forces into Afghanistan. It’s completely clear to us that Afghanistan is not ready at this time to resolve all of the issues it faces through socialism. The economy is backward, the Islamic religion predominates, and nearly all of the rural population is illiterate. We know Lenin’s teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation.”<sup>84</sup>

Andropov fretted, “We can suppress a revolution in Afghanistan only with the aid of our bayonets, and that is for us entirely inadmissible. We cannot take such a risk.”<sup>85</sup>

Andrei Gromyko’s lengthy concurrence is worth quoting in full:

“I completely support Comrade Andropov’s proposal to rule out such a measure as the deployment of our troops into Afghanistan. The army there is unreliable. Thus our army, when it arrives in Afghanistan, will be the aggressor. *Against whom will it fight? Against the Afghan people first of all, and it will have to shoot at them.* Comrade Andropov correctly noted that indeed the situation in Afghanistan is not ripe for a revolution. And all that we have done in recent years with such effort in terms of detente, arms reduction, and much more - all that would be thrown back. China, of course, would be given a nice present. All the nonaligned countries will be against us. In a word, serious consequences are to be expected from such an action. There will no longer be any question of a meeting of Leonid Ilych with Carter, and the visit of [French President] Giscard d’Estang at the end of March will be placed in question. One must ask, and what would we gain? Afghanistan with its present government, with a backward economy, with inconsequential weight in international affairs. *On the other side, we must keep in mind that from a legal point of view too we would not be justified in sending troops. According to the UN Charter a country can appeal for assistance, and we could send troops, in case it is subject to external aggression. Afghanistan has not been subject to any aggression. This is its internal affair, a revolutionary internal conflict, a battle of one group of the population against another.* Incidentally, the Afghans haven’t officially addressed us on bringing in troops.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979).

<sup>85</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979).

<sup>86</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979, emphasis added).

To this, Andropov added that, “as far as the deployment of troops is concerned, it would not behoove us to make such a determination. *To deploy our troops would mean to wage war against the people, to crush the people, to shoot at the people. We will look like aggressors, and we cannot permit that to occur.*”<sup>87</sup>

The foregoing nicely captures each of the two major costs the Soviets expected to incur for openly intervening in Afghanistan in support of Taraki and Amin. The first key issue turned on the implications of Soviet soldiers firing on members of the Afghan population in the course of their intervention. Consistent with the argument made above, Soviet leaders were deeply worried that their presence would further exacerbate the ongoing crisis and undermine the authority of the PDPA.<sup>88</sup> Second, and perhaps surprisingly, the Soviet Union explicitly invoked the norms of the UN Charter as one of the major constraints on their ability to act overtly without cost. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Soviet leaders did care about publicly respecting the principles of self-determination and, by and large, abiding by the dictates of the UN Charter. Even if these concerns stemmed less from a genuine commitment to the liberal international order and more from their desire to maintain an image as an anti-imperialist great power, that such concerns were expressed at all is notable.

On March 20, Taraki participated in another meeting with high-level Soviet officials who reiterated their concerns about acting overtly in Afghanistan. Kosygin opened by stating that the Soviet leadership had “carefully discussed the situation which has developed in your country ... [and] looked for ways to assist you which would best serve the interests of our friendship and your relations with other countries.”<sup>89</sup> Kosygin was careful to point out that while:

“There may be various ways of solving the problems which have developed in your country ... *the best way is that which would preserve the authority*

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<sup>87</sup>CPSU CC Politburo (1979, emphasis mine).

<sup>88</sup>Mendelson (1998, 45).

<sup>89</sup>Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov, Ponomarev and Taraki (1979).

*of your government in the eyes of the people, not spoil relations between Afghanistan and neighboring countries, and not injure the international prestige of your country. We must not allow the situation to seem as if you were not able to deal with your own problems and invited foreign troops to assist you.”*<sup>90</sup>

Kosygin later noted that the top decision-makers in the Soviet Union “came to the conclusion that if our troops were introduced, the situation in your country would not only not improve, but would worsen. One cannot deny that our troops would have to fight not only with foreign aggressors, but also with a certain number of your people. And people do not forgive such things.”<sup>91</sup> Consistent with my description of the risks associated with reputations for clientism, decision-makers were well aware that introducing Soviet troops into Afghanistan would likely delegitimize the PDPA and worsen the regime’s already-poor relations with the populace.

At one point during the crisis, Kosygin likened the situation in Afghanistan to the Vietnamese Civil War, an ironic analogy given what we know about the eventual quagmire that would consume the Soviets’ attention for the bulk of the 1980s:

“I would like to use the example of Vietnam. The Vietnamese people withstood a difficult war with the USA and are now fighting against Chinese aggression, but no one can accuse the Vietnamese of using foreign troops. The Vietnamese are bravely defending by themselves their homeland against aggressive encroachments. We believe that there are enough forces in your country to stand up to counter-revolutionary raids.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition to these domestic considerations, decision-makers continued to express concerns about the damage an overt intervention might do to the Soviets’ reputation. According to Cogan, “Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin told the Afghan president in Moscow on March 20” that “[t]he entry of our troops into Afghanistan...would outrage

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<sup>90</sup>Kosygin et al. (1979, emphasis mine).

<sup>91</sup>Kosygin et al. (1979). See also Garthoff (1994, 993).

<sup>92</sup>Kosygin et al. (1979). See also Westad (1994, 57–58).

the international community, triggering a string of extremely negative consequences in many different areas.”<sup>93</sup>

On Sunday, April 1, the Secretary of the CC CPSU penned a top secret document entitled, “Memo on Protocol #149 of the Politburo, ‘Our Future Policy in Connection with the Situation in Afghanistan’.” The memo, which was endorsed by the special committee convened to deal with Afghanistan, represents one of the most forceful statements available on the precise nature of the Soviets’ concern with any form of public intervention to rescue the PDPA in the context of the Herat Uprisings and general unrest transpiring in the country. The precise concerns outlined in the document track closely with our previous discussion of reputations for clientism:

*“It is clear that due to the internal nature of the antigovernmental opposition, the use of Soviet troops in repressing the Afghan counterrevolution would seriously damage the international authority of the USSR and would set back the process of disarmament. In addition, the use of Soviet troops would reveal the weakness of the Taraki government and would widen the scope of the counterrevolution both domestically and abroad, bringing the attack of antigovernmental forces to a much higher level.”*<sup>94</sup>

Even Carson, whose theoretical framework centers on the role of escalation dynamics in states’ decisions regarding covert action (see below), concedes the important role of international norms and image-management in the Soviets’ decision for secrecy in this case:

“Soviet concerns about international reactions to an overt intervention included more than crisis escalation scenarios. While Soviet leaders specifically cited the risk of unraveling détente with an overt intervention, Soviet concern about being branded an ‘aggressor’ was likely also driven by a desire not to jeopardize its image in the ‘periphery’ as the international ally of popular revolutions.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Cogan (1993, 73).

<sup>94</sup>Gromyko, Ustinov, Andropov and Ponomarev (1979, emphasis mine). See also Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 391–2).

<sup>95</sup>Carson (2013, 310).



In short, far more important than concerns over escalation, I would argue, were concerns about the damage overt intervention might do to the legitimacy of the PDPA and the authority of the Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup>

Before turning to the overt phase of intervention, it is worth reiterating that the key reason why Soviet decision-makers believed that the risks from overt action were high was because they were dealing with an *internal* crisis. Available evidence suggests that things would have looked much different had Afghanistan been invaded. During the March 20 meeting with Soviet leaders, for example, Taraki inquired how the USSR would respond if Afghanistan was attacked by an outside power. Consistent with my theory, Kosygin reassured the Afghan leader that “[i]f an armed invasion of your country takes place, then it will be a completely different situation. But right now we are doing everything to insure that such an invasion does not occur. And I think that we will be able to achieve this.”<sup>97</sup> Taraki responded by noting that the main reason for his asking turned on concerns about outside interference in Afghanistan by China and Pakistan. In response, Kosygin reiterated:

“When aggression takes place, then a completely different situation arises. The Chinese became convinced of this through the example of Vietnam and are wringing their hands now, so to speak. As for Afghanistan, we have already taken measures to guard it from aggression. I have already said that we have sent corresponding messages to the president of Pakistan, Khomeini, and the prime-minister of Iran.”<sup>98</sup>

Although impossible to fully substantiate, we are left with something of a counterfactual. Were the reputational risks from overt action lower — e.g. had China, Pakistan, or any other state intervened in a significant way in Afghanistan — the Soviets would have readily provided overt support owing to a reduced concern for the many liabilities referenced above.

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<sup>96</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 391).

<sup>97</sup>Kosygin et al. (1979).

<sup>98</sup>Kosygin et al. (1979).

## 2.5 Public Invasion as Last Resort

In the previous section, I argued that the primary reason why the Soviets intervened covertly in Afghanistan was due to their fears of what an open commitment would entail, both for the Soviet Union's image as a champion of anti-imperialism and for the domestic legitimacy of the PDPA. As we know, however, the Soviet Union did ultimately intervene openly in Afghanistan starting on Christmas Eve in 1979, where Soviet troops would remain for the next nine years. Why, given that the concerns expressed throughout the spring and summer had not dissipated, did Soviet decision-makers decide to publicly occupy Afghanistan, something they had staunchly refused to do earlier? My main argument in this regard is that there was no other feasible means of saving the regime. As a result, the Soviets willingly, albeit unenthusiastically, faced the high risks from overt action in order to prevent a loss in Afghanistan. After briefly outlining the events that precipitated the intervention, I will turn to an explanation of what the Soviets did militarily and why they did it.

### **The Prospects for the PDPA: From Bad to Worse**

The first thing to note is that the key concern driving Soviet decision-makers to act in the spring and summer of 1979 — to prevent a friendly client from falling — was still very much relevant in the fall and winter of that same year. Eventually, however, the possibility that the PDPA would succumb to insurgents was compounded by a new problem: There was now palpable concern that Amin would move Afghanistan into the U.S. camp if left to his own devices.<sup>99</sup> Amin's alleged connections with American intelligence,<sup>100</sup> and the assassination of Taraki in October under his direct orders, deeply colored Soviet perceptions.

In a personal memorandum from Andropov to Brezhnev dated December 1, just

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<sup>99</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 394); Garthoff (1994, 1000-01, 1011, 1027); Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov and Ponomarev (1979b).

<sup>100</sup>Gibbs (2000, 235).

eleven days before the official decision to invade was made, the KGB chief communicated his pessimism about recent developments in Afghanistan. After referencing Amin's coup against Taraki, Andropov cautioned that "[t]he situation in the party, the army and the government apparatus has become more acute, as they were essentially destroyed as a result of the mass repressions carried out by Amin."<sup>101</sup> Andropov went on to describe some of the intelligence regarding "Amin's secret activities," which portended a "possible political shift to the West."<sup>102</sup> Information about Amin's shifting political allegiances included: "Contacts with an American agent about issues which are kept secret from us. Promises to tribal leaders to shift away from USSR and to adopt a 'policy of neutrality.' Closed meetings in which attacks were made against Soviet policy and the activities of our specialists. The practical removal of our headquarters in Kabul .... "<sup>103</sup> Not only were insurgent attacks picking up in tempo, but there was also palpable concern that the PDPA under Amin's leadership would move toward the West anyway should they survive the civil war.

In the same memorandum from December 1, Andropov informed Brezhnev that high-ranking members of the previously-persecuted Parcham wing of the PDPA — including the soon-to-be leader, Babrak Karmal — relayed to him "that they have worked out a plan for opposing Amin and creating new party and state organs."<sup>104</sup> At the time, the Soviets had "two battalions stationed in Kabul," both of which, Andropov noted, could be used to assist the Parcham leaders in their efforts to assume control of the central government. The Soviets believed that "[t]he implementation of the given operation would allow us to decide the question of defending the gains of the April revolution, establishing Leninist principals in the party and state leadership of Afghanistan, and securing our positions in this country."<sup>105</sup> Although the

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<sup>101</sup> Andropov (1979).

<sup>102</sup> Andropov (1979).

<sup>103</sup> Andropov (1979).

<sup>104</sup> Andropov (1979).

<sup>105</sup> Andropov (1979).

main goal here was to swap out one faction (the Khalqs headed by Amin) for another (the Parchams headed by Karmal), the overarching objective, to preserve a friendly communist government in Kabul, was still very much an exercise in regime rescue.<sup>106</sup>

Decision-makers' fears about the possibility of losing Afghanistan to the United States and its allies were rooted in the perceived implications such a shift would have for the Soviets' security. On December 8, just four days before the decision to invade Afghanistan was made, the CC CPSU outlined their concerns of such an eventuality happening: "[I]n the case of stationing of the American missiles of the 'Pershing' type in Afghanistan, they would threaten many vital Soviet objects, including the space center Baikonur."<sup>107</sup> Related concerns included "the danger that the Afghan uranium deposits could be used by Pakistan and Iraq for building nuclear weapons" and the possible "establishment of opposition regimes in the Northern areas of Afghanistan and annexation of that region by Pakistan."<sup>108</sup> The perceived ramifications of standing idly by and allowing Afghanistan to become a U.S. ally were exacerbated by the close proximity of Afghanistan to the Soviet Union.

Garthoff's analysis of Soviet decision-makers' motivations for acting in December of 1979 provides a nice summary of the foregoing discussion.

"The real Soviet fear was that Amin was neither reliable as a partner nor subject to Soviet guidance, and at the same time was ineffective in controlling the growing resistance. In desperation Amin might turn to the United States as Egyptian President Sadat and Somali General Siad had done. Alternatively, he would likely be swept away by a popular Islamic nationalist movement. In either case the Soviet Union would lose all its cumulative investment in Afghanistan—strategic, political, ideological, and economic. And in either case there was a substantial risk that the United States might to some degree displace the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, acquiring new strategic assets and coming closer to completing a geostrategic encirclement of the Soviet Union, ranging in the west from Norway

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<sup>106</sup>Such actions approximate America's efforts in 1963 to remove Ngo Dinh Diem as a means of maintaining a friendly anti-Communist regime in Vietnam.

<sup>107</sup>Lyakhovskiy (1979).

<sup>108</sup>Lyakhovskiy (1979).

through Turkey and in the east from Alaska through Japan and China to Pakistan. Politically and ideologically, the loss of socialist Afghanistan on the very border of the Soviet Union itself could not be accepted with the same equanimity as was, for example, the overthrow of Salvador Allende in distant Chile. Afghanistan, which had never been aligned with the West, was, after all, in the Soviet backyard. And the Soviet Union, immediately adjacent, was in a position to intervene readily.”<sup>109</sup>

In sum, the two key drivers of intervention in this stage of the crisis were the desire to prevent the fall of a friendly client in the Soviet sphere of influence to the Islamic insurgents and to prevent American encroachments in the region by allowing Amin to remain in charge of the PDPA. Neither of these factors, however, can tell us why intervention in this period was done openly rather than covertly, particularly since the Soviets’ earlier involvement was quiet owing to reputational considerations, none of which had appreciably declined. The next two sections will describe the nature of the Soviets’ overt involvement and the rationale for publicity, respectively.

### **Assassination and Occupation**

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan involved two decisions, both related to the overall goal of ensuring that a friendly communist regime remained in power. One decision was to deploy tens of thousands of soldiers to Afghanistan as a means of quelling the unrest and providing Babrak Karmal, the designated successor to Amin, with some relief. The first significant deployment of Soviet troops to Afghanistan arrived on December 25. “In the early morning hours of Christmas day in 1979,” notes Carson, “the first of many Soviet airlifts landed in and around Kabul. They brought the leading edge of an overt invasion force.”<sup>110</sup> Over the course of the next several weeks, the Soviets continued to pour troops into Afghanistan. By January 1980, “the total invasion force of four-plus divisions placed 80,000 Soviet boots on the ground in

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<sup>109</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1031).

<sup>110</sup>Carson (2013, 320).

all major urban areas in Afghanistan.”<sup>111</sup>

The second significant component of the occupation was the decision to assassinate Amin. “Operation Storm,” writes Garthoff, “was the code name for the Soviet covert assault on the Tajbeg Palace and elimination of Amin.”<sup>112</sup> As intimated above, the rationale for assassinating Amin was to remove one of the perceived obstacles to the continued stability of a pro-Communist regime in Afghanistan and to replace him with Babrak Karmal, a more reliable client. On December 27, just two days after the official invasion began on December 25 at 3pm, “700 KGB agents, dressed in Afghan uniforms and driving in Afghan military vehicles, stormed the Darulaman palace and killed Amin and his family.”<sup>113</sup> Decision-makers hoped that Karmal could formally request Soviet assistance immediately following Amin’s assassination to lend an air of legitimacy to the introduction of troops into the country.<sup>114</sup>

Given the nature of Operation Storm, it might prove useful to reiterate my rationale for coding the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as regime rescue, particularly since one of the two key decisions involved the assassination of an incumbent leader. Recall from Chapter 1 that an intervention only qualifies as regime change if the extant governing apparatus is replaced with a new one. In some cases, removing a single leader effectively does this. The key objective of the Soviet occupation, to swap Amin and the Khalqs with Karmal and the Parchams, does not clear this threshold. The goal here was to *maintain* the PDPA’s grip on power. Ultimately, this is much closer to U.S. efforts to remove Diem in Vietnam in 1963 to ensure the continuation of a pro-American regime than it is to the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Both of the key decisions comprising the Soviet occupation were made with extreme levels of secrecy.<sup>115</sup> According to Andrew and Mitrokhin:

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<sup>111</sup>Carson (2013, 320).

<sup>112</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1019).

<sup>113</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 402).

<sup>114</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 400).

<sup>115</sup>CC CPSU Politburo (1979).

“On 12 December, gathering in Brezhnev’s office before a Politburo meeting, the members of the Afghanistan Commission — Andropov, Ustinov, Gromyko, and Ponomarev — obtained the General Secretary’s support for Soviet military intervention ... the whole affair was treated with such extraordinary secrecy that the document recording this decision was handwritten to avoid informing the Politburo typists, euphemistically entitled ‘Concerning the Situation in ’A’, and even more euphemistically phrased without any explicit reference to Afghanistan or to troops.”<sup>116</sup>

“Even more secret than the preparations for military intervention,” write Andrew and Mitrokhin, “was the plan to assassinate Amin drawn up by December 8.”<sup>117</sup> The assassination plot was so secret that Amin actually welcomed the invasion force on December 25. According to Garthoff, “[c]ontrary to the prevailing Western impression, the plans for bringing in Soviet troops were not concealed from Amin. To the contrary, he was fully informed and agreed.”<sup>118</sup> Ironically, Amin saw the invasion force “as a sign that Moscow had finally relented to his requests for combat deployments.”<sup>119</sup>

### **Overt Action as Last Resort**

The first point to make about this phase of the intervention is that there exists no obvious indication that the concerns exhibited by Soviet decision-makers in the spring and summer of 1979 — fear that an open intervention would damage the Soviet image as a bulwark against imperialism, exacerbate the ongoing civil conflict, and irreparably damage the legitimacy of the PDPA — had somehow dissipated in the lead-up to the overt occupation in December. Because the deliberations that resulted in the decision for overt intervention were intentionally shrouded in extreme secrecy, however, it is impossible to substantiate this point with complete certainty. Nonetheless, since we are dealing with a fixed set of decision-makers contemplating

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<sup>116</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 400). See also Mendelson (1998, 43).

<sup>117</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 400). Although the assassination was done secretly via the KGB, the occupation is still coded as *overt* regime rescue. The reason for this turns on the notion that we should code forcible regime promotions according to the most visible component of an operation.

<sup>118</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1017).

<sup>119</sup>Carson (2013, 322).

intervention in the same country within the span of only several months, there is good reason to doubt that the risks from overt action had markedly changed, either objectively or in the minds of the decision-makers themselves.

Yet, if the reputational risks were constant across both periods, how can we account for decision-makers' willingness to overcome their earlier reticence to get openly involved in Afghanistan? The answer, in short, is that the lack of feasible quiet alternatives and the desire to prevent the loss of a friendly client created the conditions necessary for a risky overt intervention. During the Herat Uprising and its immediate aftermath, the Soviet regime could work *with* the PDPA on a covert basis, providing such support as the disguised parachute battalion at Bagram airbase and supplying the regime with the requisite supplies necessary to combat the insurgency. By the end of the year, no comparable option to resolve the ever-growing crisis existed.

The murder of Taraki and concerns about Amin's allegiances precluded the ability to provide covert support with the assistance of the Afghan regime in large part because Amin himself was now part of the problem.<sup>120</sup> According to Carson, "[t]he urgency of the local security environment — specifically, Amin's September coup and subsequent actions — played a critical role in boosting support for some kind of overt intervention."<sup>121</sup> "Only by a Soviet invasion," argue Andrew and Mitrokhin, "did it seem that Afghanistan could be kept within the Soviet sphere of influence."<sup>122</sup> Consistent with my theoretical framework, the impracticality of options other than the overt use of force as a means of saving the regime interacted with risk-acceptance to generate the decision to openly deploy forces to Afghanistan.

One of the foremost experts on Soviet foreign policy, Raymond Garthoff, buttresses my theoretical claim that Soviet decision-makers accepted the necessity of overt action because there were no feasible substitutes. According to Garthoff:

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<sup>120</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1009).

<sup>121</sup>Carson (2013, 325–26).

<sup>122</sup>Andrew and Mitrokhin (2005, 397).



“The strongest argument for intervention (even if not sufficient rational basis for believing it would work) was the absence of an acceptable alternative. The alternative envisaged was seeing a budding socialist Afghanistan succumb either to defection or disintegration. Amin was seen as unscrupulous, unreliable, and hostile, and it was believed that if he retained power, he would eliminate Soviet sympathizers while preparing to reverse alliances. If he did not retain power, a fundamentalist religious-nationalist anti-Soviet regime would probably succeed him. Either of these cases threatened to provide opportunities for the United States and China—increasingly seen as acting in collusion—to inject their own presence and influence.”<sup>123</sup>

The inability to protect their “long-standing investments in Afghanistan,” which included political, economic, and military assets, short of overt action thus pushed Soviet leaders to accept the associated reputational risks. “The risks of inaction,” argues Garthoff, “must have seemed at least as great as the risks of action.”<sup>124</sup> To this I would add that the reputational risks that came with intervening overtly and saving the regime were deemed less worrisome than attempting another round of covert interference given the high likelihood that any such attempt would fail. Loss aversion helps us account for this weighting of the various risks at play.

Although Soviet leaders ultimately opted for overt action in the form of an occupation, evidence that some form of covert intervention was considered and ultimately rejected would lend further support to my theoretical account. Declassified meeting notes taken from the crisis suggests that they actually might have.<sup>125</sup> Alexander Lyakhovskiy’s recounting of the “Decision of the CC CPSU decision to send troops to Afghanistan” dated December 8 shows that Soviet leaders initially “decided, as a preliminary plan, to develop two options: (1) to remove H. Amin by the hands of KGB special agents, and to put Babrak Karmal in his place; (2) to send some number of Soviet troops on the territory of Afghanistan for the same purposes.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1036).

<sup>124</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1036).

<sup>125</sup>Lyakhovskiy (1979).

<sup>126</sup>Lyakhovskiy (1979).

Unfortunately, Lyakhovskiy’s meeting notes do not explicitly specify whether the first option — to secretly remove Amin and install Karmal in his place — entailed any semblance of a visible Soviet presence alongside the deployment of KGB agents. When read in conjunction with the second option, which does explicitly mention the use of Soviet troops, it is reasonable to interpret the first proposal as a strictly covert operation. That the Soviets seem to have considered, and rejected, this first option — that is, they ultimately chose the combined strategy of a public occupation and a secret assassination mission — lends credence to the important role that risk-acceptance plays in shaping how leaders act when confronted with loss-avoiding policy goals.

Much like the U.S. in the immediate aftermath of the intervention in Grenada, Soviet leaders did their best to soften some of the criticism and issues their occupation would raise. On December 27, just two days after the first contingent of troops landed in Afghanistan, the Soviet Foreign Ministry circulated a document to all Soviet ambassadors describing the nature of the situation.<sup>127</sup> Among the many justifications provided in the document, the description pertaining to the intervention’s legitimacy and legality is most pertinent:

“The Soviet Union, proceeding from a commonality of interests between Afghanistan and our country on security issues which has also been recorded in the 1978 Treaty of Friendship, Neighborliness, and Cooperation, and in the interest of preserving of peace in the region, has responded to this request of the Afghan leadership with approval and has decided to send a limited military contingent to Afghanistan to carry out missions requested by the Afghan government. The Soviet Union thereby proceeds from the corresponding articles of the UN Charter, in particular Article 51, which stipulate the right of states to individual and collective self-defense to repel aggression and restore peace.”<sup>128</sup>

Of course, there is good reason to doubt the legitimacy of many of these claims, including the existence of significant outside intervention (i.e. “to repeal aggression”).

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<sup>127</sup>Soviet Foreign Ministry (1979).

<sup>128</sup>Soviet Foreign Ministry (1979).

Nonetheless, at least two components of this statement are noteworthy. First, the Soviets were careful to emphasize that the intervention was requested by Babrak Karmal, the new leader of the PDPA. Second, decision-makers attempted to tether their actions to extant international rules surrounding intervention into the affairs of sovereign states, noting the action's conformity with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Whether or not the Soviets truly believed that the occupation conformed with international law, or whether they themselves cared, is obviously an interesting question but one that is ultimately irrelevant for our purposes. What is most important is that the Soviets payed lip service to it, indicating at least some concern with how external audiences would perceive their actions.

As should be clear from the evidence presented above, Soviet decision-makers viewed the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan as much more dire in the September to December period than they did in the March to August period of 1979. Consistent with my theoretical logic, the key difference according to the available evidence was not a marked change in the perceived risks from overt action. There is good reason to believe that the reputational risks associated with overt action were constant across both periods. What did change, however, was the exigency of the threat facing the PDPA and the inability to resolve the crisis by covert means. As a result, the Soviets decided to do in December what they were unwilling to do in the prior months: Deploy tens of thousands of Soviet troops to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan and shore up the PDPA by replacing Amin with Karmal.

Although only circumstantial, it is also worth pointing out that the high perceived costs of overt intervention exhibited in the spring and summer of 1979 proved to be mostly correct. Notwithstanding "Soviet and Karmalist Afghan insistence that Amin had been overthrown, tried, and executed by the Afghan themselves ... [t]he concurrent introduction of several Soviet divisions in the eyes of the world constituted a

visible Soviet invasion.”<sup>129</sup> According to Garthoff, “while the military elimination of Amin and the occupation were quite successful, the political measures intended to manage a transition from Amin to Karmal and to provide legitimacy for the dispatch of Soviet military forces had been handled very badly.”<sup>130</sup>

Garthoff’s description of the Soviets’ objectives — and their failure to achieve them over the next nine years — usefully illustrates the potential costs of overt intervention when the risks of introducing reputations for clientism are high:

“The Soviets leaders believed that a new political reconciliation of good Khalqs—those in the Taraki tradition rather than Amin’s—and the return and release of the Parcham leaders and military men would provide a basis, along with liberalized policies, for encouraging a political renewal. Meanwhile, braced by the presence of 75,000 Soviet soldiers in the background (later raised to a maximum of 108,800 in 1985), the Afghan Army could deal with the insurgency. And the insurgents would be cowed by the presence and availability of the Soviet army.”<sup>131</sup>

Nearly all of these assumptions turned out to be wishful thinking. The Khalqs and Parchams remained extremely suspicious of one another. Karmal’s public attempts at religious reconciliation by appearing in public with a handful of mullahs were ineffective. Perhaps most significantly, “[t]he insurgency soon grew enormously over what it had been, as did a mass exodus to Pakistan and Iran, which rose from 100,000–200,000 to 2–3 million in a few years.”<sup>132</sup> The combination of significant defections within the Afghan military and the swelling insurgency eventually pushed the Soviets to embark on “active participation in mounting combat operations against the insurgents” in early February 1980. Nine years later, the Soviets were forced to accept defeat and withdraw their troops from the country entirely.

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<sup>129</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1021).

<sup>130</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1021).

<sup>131</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1021).

<sup>132</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1021–22).

## 2.6 Competing Arguments

Alternative theories that might plausibly explain the transition from covert support for the Afghan regime in the spring and summer of 1979 to the decision to introduce troops in December enjoy mixed support. One of the most powerful alternative explanations is that the Soviets' intervention behavior tracked with their concerns about escalation. There is reason to believe that the key decision-makers were concerned, at least in part, with the prospect of damaging relations with the U.S. prior to each of their intervention decisions. In the midst of the Herat uprising, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko stated as much: "All that we have done in recent years with such effort in terms of a *détente* in international tensions, arms reductions, and much more — all that would be thrown back."<sup>133</sup> Carson, the main proponent of the escalation thesis, notes that the Soviets' willingness to intervene overtly in December but not earlier was due in large part to perceived changes in the United States' commitment to *détente* throughout 1979, including their shifting position on arms control.<sup>134</sup> Once it became clear that the Americans were not committed to *détente*, so the argument goes, the incentives to avoid openly intervening in Afghanistan washed away.

The foregoing argument, that decision-makers proved willing to intervene overtly in late-December owing to reduced concerns about undermining *détente* with the U.S., is not inherently incompatible with my theory. Although I have emphasized the role that various reputational considerations play in pushing leaders to act in secret, it is clear that alternative risks, including those related to escalation, often matter as well. If we examined the escalation thesis independently of these other concerns, we might posit that because the risks from overt action were lower in December than they were earlier in the year, the incentives to act secretly, which might have raised the risks of failure, were absent, rendering overt action likely. This would be consistent with my

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<sup>133</sup>Quoted in Carson (2013, 308).

<sup>134</sup>Carson (2013, 327).

earlier claims that when the risks from overt action are low, leaders are more likely to choose publicity. However, the fact that the Soviets intervened openly *in spite* of the high reputational risks is also consistent with my argument. Thus, whichever risks from overt action one sees as most relevant in this case, the theoretical framework I developed in Chapter 2 can account for the relevant outcomes.

Another alternative argument that might plausibly explain the transition from a limited covert commitment to overt intervention in Afghanistan is O'Rourke's theory of covert and overt intervention. Although O'Rourke focuses exclusively on U.S.-sponsored regime change, we can fairly easily extend the key insights to the case of Soviet-sponsored regime rescue. To begin with, it is plausible that O'Rourke would categorize the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a "hegemonic operation" owing to Afghanistan's geographical proximity to the Soviet Union; America's interventions in Latin America were coded as hegemonic for similar reasons.<sup>135</sup> To the extent that this coding is appropriate, we would expect two things to be true based on the theory's predictions. First, covert involvement in the spring and summer was motivated by reputational concerns of some kind. Second, the decision to go overt in December was driven by three factors that were absent earlier in the year: The belief that a "quick and decisive victory" was possible "without risking full-fledged conventional or nuclear war," a belief that the Soviet public would support the action, and that the "intervention must [have] occur[red] rapidly to succeed."<sup>136</sup> Since the Soviet Union was an autocratic regime in which the public had little to no influence over Soviet foreign policy, the second condition is not particularly relevant in this case.

The extension of O'Rourke's theory to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan finds partial support. As already noted, the Soviets were undoubtedly concerned with their image in the periphery. That these concerns were shown to have motivated the use of

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<sup>135</sup>O'Rourke (2013, 56).

<sup>136</sup>O'Rourke (2013, 87).

secrecy in the spring and summer is largely consistent with both my theory as well as O'Rourke's. Additional concerns over the implications of an overt occupation for the *Afghan government's* legitimacy, however, is uniquely predicted by my theory. When it comes to the initial decision for covert support to the Afghan regime, my argument outperforms this alternative by capturing both of the relevant considerations driving Soviet decision-makers' turn to secrecy. That my theory also predicts the specific content of the reputational risks at stake is a further boon to my argument.

In terms of the eventual decision to overtly deploy troops to Afghanistan, two of O'Rourke's conditions were met. Specifically, top officials thought they could intervene without risking war with the U.S. and felt that deteriorating security conditions required action. Regarding the first condition, Garthoff makes the case that "there was little concern over possible *American* intervention" prior to the Soviets' decision to authorize military force in December.<sup>137</sup> He goes on that "the frank Soviet (and presumably Soviet-authorized East German) acknowledgments to the U.S. chargé d'affaires of Soviet dissatisfaction with the desire to remove Amin could only have been intended to prepare the United States to understand and accept the need for that change in the interests of stabilizing the internal situation in Afghanistan."<sup>138</sup> O'Rourke's third condition is satisfied by the fact that Soviet decision-makers felt that if they did not act to do something about Amin, they risked tolerating an American client or risking the collapse of the PDPA. The main problem for O'Rourke's argument, however, is that we might still want an explanation as to why the reputational risks from overt action drove Soviet decision-makers underground in the first period but did not deter them from intervening openly in the second. My theoretical framework provides such an explanation.

A final alternative explanation is unique to the Soviet Union and possibly to the

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<sup>137</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1025).

<sup>138</sup>Garthoff (1994, 1025).

specific composition of the decision-making body responsible for authorizing the introduction of troops into Afghanistan. According to Mendelson, “[n]ew evidence suggests that the increase in Soviet involvement in Afghanistan stemmed mainly from the ways that certain decision makers bargained among themselves about the costs of inaction.”<sup>139</sup> Regarding the issue to escalate in December, Mendelson looks explicitly to the internal dynamics within the Soviet Union at that time: “To explore options with the military and the KGB but not regional experts testifies to the fact that the decision to escalate was ultimately based on factors independent of the regional situation in Afghanistan. Advice from regional experts were not considered salient, and experts were not provided access to the leadership.”<sup>140</sup> Mendelson continues that “[f]our men — Ustinov, Andropov, Gromyko, and Brezhnev — made the decision to escalate Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. At least three of them understood the potentially adverse effects of this action but decided that escalation was necessary.”<sup>141</sup>

The question that remains to be answered is whether the composition of the decision-making structure rather than circumstances external to the Soviet Union — including the growing insurgency, concerns about Amin’s allegiances, and the eventual lack of a feasible quiet option — drove variation in the openness of intervention. Put differently, was “Soviet escalation in Afghanistan ... the result of a domestic political balance of power that favored traditional notions of empire and commitments to client states” as Mendelson argues,<sup>142</sup> or was the decision driven by decision-makers’ tendencies toward risk-acceptance owing to what seemed like a certain loss if they failed to act openly? Would incorporating regional experts and other members of the Politburo have dissuaded the Soviets from occupying Afghanistan in December 1979?

While Mendelson is right to point out that the decision to invade Afghanistan

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<sup>139</sup>Mendelson (1998, 40).

<sup>140</sup>Mendelson (1998, 55).

<sup>141</sup>Mendelson (1998, 55).

<sup>142</sup>Mendelson (1998, 62).



was made by an unusually small number of Soviet decision-makers, there is reason to doubt that bureaucratic configurations can explain the transition from secrecy to publicity. Almost all of the same players that authorized overt intervention at the end of 1979 expressed significance reluctance to openly commit Soviet forces just a few months earlier. Both Andropov and Gromyko — two of the biggest advocates for openly intervening in Afghanistan by December — had previously relayed concerns about the implications of overt intervention, both for the Soviets’ image and for the legitimacy of the PDPA. Mendelson’s recognition that these decision-makers understood the prospective costs associated with intervention, coupled with their earlier reluctance to send Soviet troops into the country, lends credence to the idea that the decision for overt intervention in December was driven more by a “last resort” mentality rather than delusion or ignorance. Even if regional experts and other members of the Politburo had piled on to their understanding of the risks of intervention, the fact that these decision-makers went ahead with occupation fully aware of the risks associated with doing approximates behavior consistent with risk-acceptance.

### **3 Discussion**

In this chapter, I turned away from the predominant focus on the United States and its various interventions, focusing instead on the dynamics of Soviet-sponsored regime promotions. Because the norms and principles espoused by the Soviet Union differed somewhat from those associated with the U.S., it was necessary to first outline the contents of the Soviet-led international order. The two major tenets of the Soviet project — the desire to promote communist regimes globally and the professed commitment to anti-imperialism and self-determination – shaped their intervention behavior in a number of different ways.

On the one hand, the Soviets were deeply committed to supporting, by force if nec-

essary, beleaguered communist governments. On the other hand, communist ideology dictates that revolution must spring up indigenously from below, ideally at a certain stage of development. Because imposing communism from above was antithetical to these principles, the Soviets rarely, if ever, conducted a visible regime change operation akin to what the U.S. attempted in Grenada, Panama, and elsewhere. Another plausible contributing factor to the Soviets' seeming reticent to conduct large-scale regime change operations was their military and economic inferiority vis-à-vis the U.S., curtailing their ability to project power on a global scale.

More pertinent to the discussion at hand is the Soviets' desire to maintain their image as a champion of anti-imperialism and a steadfast supporter of self-determination. Concerns over their image in the periphery meant that overt interventions, particularly in the context of an ongoing civil war, were risky. This is precisely the dynamic we saw play out in the early stages of the crisis in Afghanistan in 1979. Without credible evidence of external involvement by the United States, China, or others, Soviet decision-makers kept their commitment to limited covert support, fearing the damage an overt intervention would do to their image as a champion of anti-imperialism and the internal legitimacy of the PDPA. By the end of the year, however, it appeared that covert support was no longer a feasible means of saving the regime. Facing no other alternatives, Soviets leaders embarked on a large-scale overt rescue operation notwithstanding the reputational risks at stake. Their willingness to incur these costs is a function of the objective at hand: Preventing the fall of a friendly regime.

This chapter has demonstrated that the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 travels to great powers other than the United States, significantly bolstering its external validity. While the lion's share of the literature on international order has focused on the American project,<sup>143</sup> this chapter makes clear that great powers competing to establish a counter-order feel similarly constrained when it comes to

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<sup>143</sup>e.g. [Lake \(2009\)](#); [Ikenberry \(2011\)](#).

using overt force whenever it suits their strategic interests. When the Soviets felt that an open commitment to one of its client states violated their publicly stated principles and a covert solution was available, they acted quietly. Overt intervention, by contrast, was seen as an option of last resort.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

Whether we are talking about the leaders of powerful countries or the average citizen, individuals of all stripes frequently face strong incentives to conduct some pursuits in secret. The precise reasons why people turn to secrecy are many and varied. Some desire it because they are engaging in an illegal act. Others pursue secrecy because the behavior in question, though possibly legal, is deemed morally and ethically questionable. The list goes on. My primary purpose in writing this dissertation was to investigate why leaders forcibly promote regimes covertly or overtly as a window into the broader dynamics of secrecy in international politics. This chapter will summarize the key findings of this project and explore its many implications for international relations theory, policy, and the role of secrecy in today's world.

### 1 What Have We Learned?

It is impossible to construct a theory of secrecy without first identifying why states might want to hide some action in the first place. The existing literature offered some important insights into this question. Some scholars make the case that leaders are most likely to turn to covert operations when the threat of escalation with a power-

ful rival is high.<sup>1</sup> One prominent alternative to the escalation thesis are arguments rooted in domestic politics.<sup>2</sup> For instance, whenever leaders want to pursue a policy that might invite backlash from domestic constituencies, such as targeting a fellow democracy, installing a brutal autocrat, or other forms of illegal activity, the incentives for secrecy should be strong.<sup>3</sup>

Concerns about escalation and domestic politics undoubtedly render secrecy attractive in many cases. The empirics presented in the previous chapters are testament to this. Nonetheless, I made the case that the subject matter we are dealing with — interventions to overthrow or prop up regimes — introduces unique reputational concerns not adequately captured by these accounts. I am certainly not the first to make the case that concerns over reputation might incentivize leaders to pursue covert action.<sup>4</sup> Many of the precise reputational concerns outlined in Chapter 2, however, have either been under-explored or overlooked entirely in the literature. Owing to the relationship between regime change and international rules, I argued that interveners worried about acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking when deposing sovereign regimes. The prospect of imposing a reputation for clientism on targets and appearing imperialistic themselves color interveners' concerns about overt regime rescue. Identifying the precise reputation leaders worried most about during different kinds of interventions allowed us to hone in on some of the major drivers of secrecy.

While identifying the reasons why leaders often find secrecy tempting is an integral part of explaining the decision to authorize covert missions, this alone cannot tell us how decision-makers grapple with the very real trade-off that often exists between de-

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson (1998); Carson (2016).

<sup>2</sup>Recall from Chapter 1 that my main objective in this dissertation was to identify the sources of *political* secrecy, or covert action. Expanding this focus to include the use of secrecy for the purposes of tactical advantage or surprise — known as clandestine operations — would likely introduce additional drivers of secrecy. For an early and a recent example on this use of secrecy, respectively, see Axelrod (1979) and Slantchev (2010).

<sup>3</sup>Gibbs (1995); Downes and Lilley (2010); O'Rourke (2013); Poznansky (2015).

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, O'Rourke (2013).

niability and effectiveness. The standard story found in the literature approximates something akin to a straightforward cost-benefit calculation: Leaders tend to care more about reducing costs than they do about maximizing their chances of success. The result is that covert operations, which promise plausible deniability but increase the chances of mission failure, have been far more numerous than overt operations.<sup>5</sup>

I chose to take a different approach by drawing on insights from loss aversion, a psychological model of decision-making with impressive theoretical and empirical foundations.<sup>6</sup> The core premise of loss aversion — that losing hurts more than gaining gratifies — is straightforward. This simple but powerful insight is what allowed us to hypothesize that the risks of failed action should loom larger than the risks from overt action during regime rescue and vice versa during regime change. As a result, we should expect leaders to overtly save regimes, even when the risks from doing so are high, if it means increasing the chances of succeeding. Conversely, we should expect leaders to stick with covert action, even when doing so increases the chances of failure, if it means they can avoid the risks from overt action. Loss aversion is least relevant when the risks from overt action are low. Under these conditions, nearly all leaders will capitalize on the ability to wield force publicly at relatively low cost.

In order to determine whether decision-makers thought, spoke, and acted in ways consistent with my theory, I turned to qualitative analysis. In Chapter 3, I demonstrated that both the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administrations were deeply concerned about the threat of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking in the lead up to the Bay of Pigs, so much so that they settled on a covert action plan with a high chance of failure. Only when the threat of acquiring reputations for rule-breaking are low, as was the case with the Reagan Administration in the lead-up to the invasion of Grenada in 1983, will decision-makers prove willing to pursue regime change overtly.

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<sup>5</sup>O'Rourke (2013, 6).

<sup>6</sup>Berejikian and Early (2013); Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984); McDermott (1998).

In Chapter 4, I turned away from foreign-imposed regime change and focused instead on regime rescue. During both the Black September Crisis and the Lebanese Civil War, the Nixon and Eisenhower administrations, respectively, worried a great deal about reputations for clientism. Specifically, there were deep-seated concerns that an act of overt regime rescue would serve to delegitimize the supported government and make the United States appear imperialistic. The reason why Nixon was willing to settle for secrecy in Jordan while Eisenhower accepted publicity in Lebanon has less to do, I would argue, with variation in the anticipated risks from overt action — which were high in both cases — and more to do with the availability of a feasible quiet option in the form of an Israeli intervention. Evidence suggests that had this option been unavailable, the United States might well have intervened openly in Jordan in 1970 in order to prevent the fall of King Hussein.

In Chapter 2, I justified the dissertation's overwhelming focus on the United States on both methodological and practical grounds. The widespread availability of declassified documents in the U.S. made it possible to act as a proverbial fly-on-the-wall during some of the most consequential intervention decisions of the Cold War period. The main problem with a strict focus on the U.S., however, is the question of external validity. That is, does my argument extend to other countries and time periods? Chapter 5 sought to allay some of these concerns by examining the Soviets' intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. The similarities to the U.S. cases were striking. Owing to concerns about delegitimizing their ailing client and damaging their own image as a bastion of anti-imperialism, decision-makers provided covert support in the spring and summer of 1979. Once it became clear that there was no chance of saving the PDPA short of overt action, the Soviets proved willing to bite the bullet and intervene openly. The fateful nine-year occupation began on Christmas Day in 1979.

## 2 Implications

Better understanding the major drivers of, and constraints on, the use of secrecy has significant implications for the study and practice of international relations. Although some of these implications were outlined in the introduction, I will revisit a handful of them here and introduce some new ones as well. I will begin by exploring how my dissertation relates to the scholarly literature on secrecy and intervention. Next, I will highlight some of the lessons policymakers might draw from the argument and evidence. I will conclude this section by touching on a subject I have intentionally side-stepped until now: The ethical implications of secrecy as a general phenomenon and its relationship to a democratic society.

### 2.1 The Scholarly Literature

My dissertation contributes to the emerging literature on secrecy in international relations in at least two significant ways. First, I have identified two novel drivers of secrecy, neither of which have been explicitly identified in the existing literature to date. As the cases showed, the fear of acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking or imposing a reputation for clientism on target regimes created powerful incentives for secrecy far more often than concerns over escalation or domestic-political costs, the two most popular explanations for covert action. Of course, I owe a large intellectual debt to scholars who have drawn attention to the relationship between secrecy, reputation, and hypocrisy.<sup>7</sup> My main point of departure from these studies, however, is to identify the specific reputational considerations at play during different kinds of interventions and why decision-makers in the intervening state might actually care.

A second contribution I make to the literature on secrecy in international relations is to provide a framework for understanding how and why leaders balance deniability

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<sup>7</sup>See, for example, [Farrell and Finnemore \(2013\)](#) and [O'Rourke \(2013\)](#).



and effectiveness as they do in the covert sphere. Following a long line of scholars who have taken psychological concepts with powerful theoretical and empirical foundations to the realm of international politics,<sup>8</sup> I investigated whether decision-makers behave in ways consistent with loss aversion. The upshot of assessing decision-making through a psychological lens is that we are better able to understand why, for instance, leaders might be more sensitive to the prospect of losing a friendly client or ally than they do about the prospect of gaining a new one. Scholars may understandably be tempted to avoid the sometimes-messy methodological challenges that come with testing psychological models on observational data, settling instead for a straightforward rationalist logic. To do so, however, would be to ignore the theoretical underpinnings of how we might have reached some of our conclusions in the first place.

In addition to the literature on secrecy, my project also enhances our understanding of intervention in world politics. As noted in Chapter 1, existing theories of intervention largely proved deficient in explaining the “how” of intervention. Factors like geopolitics, ideology, economics, and the like do a much better job of explaining the causes of intervention than the conduct. This is not all that surprising. Scholars writing on substitution in the foreign policy arena have long recognized that leaders often swap out one tool for another in pursuit of similar aims.<sup>9</sup> The reason why leaders engage in *substitution*, therefore, may be different than the reasons for acting in the first place. Declaring at the outset that “the decision to intervene covertly may be governed by a different causal process than decisions to intervene overtly,”<sup>10</sup> however, sidesteps the important task of theorizing why leaders choose different strategies in response to similar stimuli, whether geopolitics or ideological threat. My goal here was to uncover the ways in which this dynamic manifests itself in a range of scenarios.

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<sup>8</sup>For a few notable examples, see [Berejikian and Early \(2013\)](#); [Horowitz, Stam and Ellis \(2015\)](#); [Jervis \(1992\)](#); [Levy \(1992, 1997\)](#); [McDermott \(1992, 1998, 2004\)](#); [Schaub \(2004\)](#); [Taliaferro \(2001, 2004\)](#).

<sup>9</sup>[Most and Starr \(1984\)](#); [Clark and Reed \(2005\)](#).

<sup>10</sup>[Saunders \(2011\)](#).

My dissertation also makes a number of contributions to international relations theory more broadly. For students steeped in the tradition of *realpolitik*, I have sought to show that decision-makers take rules and norms seriously when deciding whether and how to wield military force abroad. In some cases, decision-makers were willing to accept mission failure if it meant avoiding reputations for rule-breaking. This is a far cry from the standard portrait of great powers willing to throw norms out the window whenever it suits their core strategic interests. At other times, decision-makers intervened knowing full-well that their actions would undermine the target's legitimacy, rendering it harder for them to remain in power. Although geopolitics was not absent from my story — indeed, such considerations motivated leaders to act in nearly every case — the role of reputational concerns stemming from extant rules and norms consistently influenced how these interventions were conducted.

My argument also has implications for theories of international order and hierarchy. Proponents of liberal internationalism are right to point out that great powers like the United States care about maintaining an image of rule-obeyance.<sup>11</sup> The main issue is that while decision-makers worked hard to tie their hands in public, especially when pursuing promotive policy goals, they exploited covert action to break the very rules they helped create. Proponents of international hierarchy are right to draw attention to the dependent relationships that exist between powerful patrons and their weaker clients. The optics of these relationships, however, have largely been overlooked. Here I have sought to draw attention to the ways in which patron states may use secrecy to fulfill their security obligations to client states without undermining the supported regime's legitimacy and looking like imperialists themselves. This was as true for the Soviet Union as it was for the United States. While patrons often proved willing to switch to overt action if it meant preventing a friendly regime from crumbling, they typically did so only reluctantly and fully aware of the consequences.

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<sup>11</sup>[Ikenberry \(2001\)](#).

## 2.2 Policy Relevance

The theoretical framework and empirical tests presented here also have non-trivial implications for policymakers tasked with making decisions about how, and perhaps even whether, to intervene when the foreign alignments of a target state are in play. On a basic level, having a greater awareness of the role that psychological biases might be playing in decision-making should help leaders make smarter, potentially more “rational,” policy choices. Take, for example, the relationship between loss aversion and regime rescue. Recall from earlier my argument that leaders tend to worry more about the risks of failure than the risks from overt action when saving regimes. If I am right, there may exist cases in which decision-makers expended significant resources attempting to overtly rescue regimes when it might have been wise not to do so, particularly in light of the associated costs. One need look no further than the Vietnam War to get a sense of how this might play out in practice.<sup>12</sup> The enormous resources the United States has devoted to ensuring that the Afghan and Iraqi regimes remain in power may also be explicable by leaders’ aversion to seeing friendly regimes fall. History will ultimately reveal whether the juice was worth the squeeze.

The claim that leaders sometimes expend greater resources and incur more costs saving regimes than might have been prudent is not terribly controversial. More controversial, however, is a second policy implication stemming from my argument, namely, that loss aversion may induce leaders to refrain from expending the necessary resources to depose regimes when doing so might have actually been strategically beneficial. A reasonable observer with the benefit of hindsight might posit, for instance, that Eisenhower and Kennedy should have openly deployed forces to remove Castro in 1960–1961 notwithstanding the associated costs, particularly if doing so would have avoided the Cuban Missile Crisis. Knowing what we now know about the rami-

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<sup>12</sup>Taliaferro (2004).

fications of failure, either president might well have done just that. Nevertheless, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion gave us one of the most dangerous episodes of nuclear brinkmanship on record and over sixty years of tension between the U.S. and Cuba.

This implication may also help to explain in part the Obama administration's reluctance to get too directly involved in the Syrian Civil War. The gap between when President Obama first explicitly called on the Assad regime to step down in August 2011 and when he first authorized direct shipment of military equipment to the Syrian opposition in the spring of 2013 is noteworthy.<sup>13</sup> Although there are many intricacies to the war that I will not get into here, suffice it to say that the discovery of evidence that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons against its own people in the town of Ghouta paved the way for the U.S. to take a more active and open role in the conflict.<sup>14</sup> The timing fits the basic story I am telling here quite well: The Obama administration first got serious about openly supporting the Syrian opposition once there was a pretext for intervention in the form of an illegal chemical weapons attack. Although we cannot say for certain, it is plausible that an earlier response by the U.S. might have prevented, or at least stunted, the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS).

Before preceding, an important caveat is in order. Pointing out that leaders may sometimes prove too reluctant to topple regimes when it may be warranted by the consequences of doing nothing or failing with a covert operation should not be taken to mean that decision-makers ought to start knocking over any and all governments deemed hostile to the U.S. Even in the case of the Bay of Pigs or the Syrian Civil War, U.S. decision-makers might well have been wise to avoid going overt *given the information available to them at the time*. Furthermore, nothing in what I have written here is intended to free leaders from their obligation to think long and hard about whether the threat posed by a hostile regime outweighs the costs from acting. These

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<sup>13</sup>Kaphle (2014).

<sup>14</sup>BBC (2016).

include the possibility of doing severe reputational damage, triggering escalation, inviting a domestic backlash, and risking the death of soldiers and innocent civilians alike. My point is simply to note that by bringing these sometimes-implicit psychological biases to the fore, leaders should be better able to weigh the costs and benefits of intervention free from — or at least with an appreciation of — these tendencies.

### **Secrecy, Morality, and Democracy**

We have now reached a point where it is appropriate to grapple with an aspect of my argument that has largely been neglected up until this point. I am talking, of course, about the ethical and moral dimensions of secrecy, particularly in democratic societies like the United States. Although moral and ethical issues fall beyond the scope of what I was trying to accomplish here, their importance to the decision-makers responsible for authorizing covert operations necessitates that I touch on them, even if only briefly. One of the more superficial criticisms of covert action, that it is inherently immoral, nefarious, and has no place in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit, is difficult to sustain. Part of my motivation in writing a dissertation on secrecy was to bring this hidden tool of statecraft out of the shadows and into the light. In so doing, we were not only able to dispel with some of the mystique surrounding covert operations but we were also able to get a much clearer sense of how leaders choose from among a menu of options when intervening to topple or rescue foreign regimes.

One of the serious moral critiques associated with covert operations is that the mere availability of a so-called quiet option “almost certainly encourages decision makers to commit national power more widely than they would otherwise find advisable to do.”<sup>15</sup> Were decision-makers forced to choose between diplomacy and overt military force without having anything resembling a covert option available to them, notes Beitz, leaders might be much more amenable to solutions involving compromise.

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<sup>15</sup>Beitz (1989, 53).

Beitz is certainly onto something. It is also within the realm of possibility, however, that the opposite of what he predicts would occur. In the absence of a covert option decision-makers might become more “trigger happy” by resorting to overt action much more readily. If true, covert action would actually *reduce* the frequency of large-scale, overt meddling overseas. Because covert operations do exist as an option, there is no way to resolve this disagreement. Whether covert action incentivizes leaders to ignore diplomacy, as Beitz suggests, or reduces the prevalence of overt action, as I have suggested, thus remains an open, and potentially unanswerable, question.

A second moral issue associated with covert action, and one that is particularly important to policymaking, turns on whether secrecy and democracy are ever truly compatible. Skeptics of such a proposition include Gregory Treverton, who notes that the very idea of “secret operations in a democracy” is paradoxical.<sup>16</sup> On the issue of secrecy more generally, Sissela Bok addresses a related problem in similar terms: “[S]ince military secrets have to be kept from the state’s own citizens in order not to read its enemies, citizens lose ordinary democratic checks on precisely those matters that can affect them most strongly.”<sup>17</sup> The skepticism surrounding the compatibility of covert action in a democratic society ultimately boils down to the uncomfortable relationship between the secrecy built into such operations and norms of transparency and public debate so often associated with democratic government.

It is important to point out, though, that not all scholars writing on secrecy see these same incompatibilities between covert action and democracy. “As a philosophical matter,” argues Beitz, this skepticism “reflects an understanding of democracy that is much too brittle.”<sup>18</sup> Beitz goes on to note:

“Democracy is not some sort of mechanical device designed to harness individual political decision to the popular will, so that any decision not

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<sup>16</sup>Treverton (1987, 222).

<sup>17</sup>Bok (1983, 191).

<sup>18</sup>Beitz (1989, 58).

approved by the people must be suspect. The democratic idea is more complicated. Democratic institutions are means for ensuring the responsiveness of policy to the interests of the people, and for deterring the unauthorized use of power by those who hold public office. There is no reason to deny that democratic citizens could have good reasons for removing certain categories of decisions from popular control or even popular review.”<sup>19</sup>

The core issue for Beitz, then, “is not whether we make a logical or conceptual mistake in thinking that covert action is compatible with democracy” but rather “whether there are ways to organize the planning and execution of covert operations so that they serve rather than subvert the aims of democratic government.”<sup>20</sup> Although he does not specify, it is possible that the reforms instituted in the 1970s like the Hughes-Ryan Act, which required presidents to issue “Findings” prior to authorizing covert operations, might approximate the spirit of what Beitz is getting at. The creation of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees may also serve as such an example.

Any respectable attempt to resolve the debate regarding the compatibility between secrecy and democracy would require much longer treatment than what I have given it here. My aim in highlighting these two competing perspectives is simply to lay bare some of the key issues and concerns decision-makers tasked with using this tool of statecraft must confront. If the argument and evidence presented throughout has touched on any of these issues, it has done so only by accident. My dissertation has very little to say, for example, about issues pertaining to oversight and accountability.<sup>21</sup> For those like Treverton who accept that covert action may sometimes be justified by national security imperatives, my argument may shed more light.

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<sup>19</sup>Beitz (1989, 58).

<sup>20</sup>Beitz (1989, 58).

<sup>21</sup>For a recent treatment of the subject, see Lester (2015), especially pp. 126–139.

### 3 Intervention After the Cold War

The empirical investigations contained in this dissertation focused exclusively on U.S. interventions during the Cold War and, in the penultimate chapter, on Soviet interventions. As I have noted throughout, focusing on the postwar period makes good sense. Although the United States has conducted secret operations since its founding,<sup>22</sup> the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947 marked a sea change in America's capacity and perhaps willingness to conduct secret operations around the globe.<sup>23</sup> The availability of declassified documents detailing U.S.-sponsored covert operations and, to a lesser extent, Soviet-sponsored covert operations, is also much greater during the Cold War period than at any other historical moment.

One downside of limiting my focus in this way is that a lot has happened since 1991, the unambiguous end of the Cold War. Among the most prominent developments have been the emergence of new rules and norms governing intervention behavior. The first significant norm that emerged in the years after the Cold War is the so-called responsibility to protect standard. A second intervention norm — America's right to wield force unilaterally and “preemptively” — was outlined in the controversial 2002 National Security Strategy. To the extent that these new rules and norms altered the risks from overt action by changing the reputational consequences of openly wielding force, they have significant bearing on what my theoretical account says about the relationship between secrecy and intervention moving forward. The next two sections will explore each of these new intervention norms, respectively.

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<sup>22</sup>See [Andrew \(1995\)](#); [Knott \(1996\)](#).

<sup>23</sup>The CIA was the *de facto* successor to the Office of Strategic Service (OSS), an organization forged in the midst of World War II.



### 3.1 The Responsibility to Protect

The responsibility to protect standard, also known as R2P, was created as a reaction to the failure of the genocide standard to generate meaningful state responses to humanitarian disasters. The concept of R2P was first formally introduced in 2001 in a report drafted by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).<sup>24</sup> The report called on the “the international community to intervene whenever ‘a population is suffering serious harm’ and to assume the responsibility for achieving” a range of objectives, including the prevention and cessation of genocide and other forms of crimes against humanity and to help rebuild societies once hostilities have subsided.<sup>25</sup> As Robert Pape notes, “[t]he R2P movement reflects the idea that states have responsibilities to the welfare of their citizens that go beyond ensuring the protection of targeted groups.”<sup>26</sup>

Since the concept of R2P first burst onto the scene, there has been widespread discussion about both its legitimacy as well as its efficacy.<sup>27</sup> My purpose here is not to take sides in this debate. Rather, my objective is to explore what the implications might be for intervention conduct moving forward if R2P becomes a widely-accepted justification for the use of military force. A speech delivered in 2012 by Kofi Annan provided some important clues: “It also means that, as a last resort, the international community will be prepared to take collective action, including military force, through the Security Council to protect populations from these crimes.”<sup>28</sup> If R2P becomes the standard, what changes, if any, might we expect to the ways in which leaders weigh the risks stemming from overt action and, consequently, the dynamics of covert action?

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<sup>24</sup>International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) (2001).

<sup>25</sup>Pape (2012, 50-51).

<sup>26</sup>Pape (2012, 51).

<sup>27</sup>For a recent critique of R2P, see Pape (2012).

<sup>28</sup>Annan (2012).

The most likely impact of a robust R2P norm would be an increase in the use of overt military force relative to covert action, particularly in the realm of regime change. The reason turns on the relationship between overt intervention and reputation. Recall from earlier that one of the main drivers of secrecy when toppling hostile regimes was a state's desire to avoid acquiring a reputation for rule-breaking. Except under a rare set of conditions (e.g. acting in self-defense), regime change conflicted directly with the non-intervention principle. In many respects, R2P might change that. Because overt interventions undertaken in response to mass killings by a government against their own people — or even the *threat* of mass killings — would conform quite comfortably with R2P, the likelihood that an overt intervention would yield a reputation for rule-breaking would be greatly diminished. By expanding the conditions under which states can legitimately wield overt military force without violating well-established proscriptions on such behavior, the likelihood of leaders turning to covert action in order to achieve deniability may drop dramatically.

The foregoing shines a light on some of the adverse consequences that may follow from the adoption of a well-intentioned standard of intervention. On the one hand, one would be hard-pressed to take issue with the claim that the fewer acts of genocide and crimes against humanity there are, the better off we will be. To the extent that R2P represents the beginning of a serious conversation about how best to realize this vision, it is a good thing. As alluded to in the preceding paragraph, however, one issue is that R2P may make it easier (read: less costly) for states to openly wield military force to depose regimes under the guise of a humanitarian intervention. To be sure, concerns over escalation or domestic-political costs would still exist as drivers of secrecy. Even still, should R2P become a (the?) legitimate standard for intervention, there is reason to expect that leaders will be far more interventionist, particularly in an overt sense, than the purveyors of the norm perhaps wanted or intended.

### 3.2 Wars of Necessity versus Wars of Choice

The second norm that emerged in the post-Cold War era and, more specifically, in the post-9/11 era, is much more nebulous than the responsibility to protect standard. I am referring here to the United States' declaration of its intention to wield force unilaterally in cases in which allies and other members of the international community proved unwilling to ascent to a particular venture. The controversial 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) provides perhaps the clearest statement of this new policy.<sup>29</sup> Page six of the now-infamous NSS states that “[w]hile the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively...”<sup>30</sup> This dictum applied both to terrorists networks themselves as well as to sovereign states that afforded safe havens to terrorist organizations.

In addition to declaring its intention to act alone if necessary, the 2002 NSS also sought to articulate new standards for the use of force centered on preemption.<sup>31</sup> On page 15, for example, the NSS notes that, “[f]or centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack.”<sup>32</sup> The document goes on to note that while “imminent” has historically referred to “visible mobilization of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack,” the U.S. “must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries.”<sup>33</sup> A large part of the reason why this was so controversial turns on the fact that it seemed as though the Bush administration was attempting to redefine what

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<sup>29</sup>Bush (2002).

<sup>30</sup>Bush (2002, 6).

<sup>31</sup>The Bush administration’s use of “preemption” rather than “prevention” was undoubtedly very purposeful. The former, sometimes referred to as “wars of necessity,” represents a justified use of force in international law. The latter, or “wars of choice,” does not. For a summary of these issues, see [Council on Foreign Relations \(2004\)](#).

<sup>32</sup>Bush (2002, 15).

<sup>33</sup>Bush (2002, 15).

it meant to use force preemptively. Based on the language contained in the NSS, the United States could now wield force in ways that looked preventive — which is illegal under international law — under the guise of preemption.

Regardless of one's view on the 2002 National Security Strategy, it is important to take the document for what it is: An explicit attempt by the Bush administration to redefine, or at least renegotiate, the rules of justifiable intervention. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the first real test case of this new policy.<sup>34</sup> The precise causes of the Iraq War and the various players involved has been detailed elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Most important for our purposes is that the Bush administration utilized the newly formulated policy of preemption and unilateralism as grounds for invading Iraq. Undeterred by the failure to garner UN Security Council authorization for an invasion, the Bush administration invoked the precepts laid out in the 2002 NSS — supported by now-debunked claims of an ongoing WMD program and a connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11 — as justification for the use of force.

When analyzed outside the context of the 2002 NSS document and any related proclamations, the Iraq War appears somewhat anomalous for my theory. The argument would go something like this: The United States embarked on what was ostensibly a preventive war to overthrow a sovereign regime against the wishes of the UN and the international community *writ large*, risking the prospect of a reputation for rule-breaking in the process. When analyzed in light of the 2002 NSS, however, the intervention fits more comfortably within my theoretical framework. What the Bush administration was attempting to do was to set new rules for what qualified as a justifiable intervention, thereby lowering the reputational costs to the U.S. for wielding military force overtly to overthrow foreign regimes. They failed. That Bush in his second term and the Obama administration from the beginning attempted to walk

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<sup>34</sup>The invasion of Afghanistan, which enjoyed broad domestic and international support, predated NSS 2002.

<sup>35</sup>For a comprehensive and impartial account, see [Woodward \(2004\)](#).

back from these policies signifies some recognition of the reputational consequences associated with the Iraq War and an attempt to go back to the status quo *ante*.<sup>36</sup>

This section has examined two prominent developments related to the norms and rules governing intervention during the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In one of these instances — the responsibility to protect standard — the jury is still out on whether or not this norm will proliferate and harden or whether it will wither on the vine. Conversely, the 2002 National Security Strategy, which sought to increase the legitimacy of unilateralism and to redefine prevention as preemption, represents a decisively failed attempt to bend the rules in the United States' favor. Obviously, I have not provided an exhaustive list of the ways in which the rules and norms governing intervention behavior has changed since the end of the Cold War. Surely there are others. I have said even less about the ways in which such rules and norms might change in the future. The main lesson, however, is that if we are to have any hope of making sense of contemporary patterns of intervention conduct and possibly predicting future behavior, it is imperative that we understand how the drivers of secrecy have changed or might change sometime in the not-too-distant future.

## 4 New Frontiers in Secrecy Research

As noted at various points throughout this dissertation, secrecy is a crucial component of international politics. States use deception and deniability for a wide range of purposes. They use it to hide painful concessions during crisis bargaining,<sup>37</sup> to establish foreign military bases,<sup>38</sup> to target fellow democracies,<sup>39</sup> and so forth. In an effort to keep the discussion tractable, I have limited the focus of this project to the

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<sup>36</sup>There exists some debate in the literature as to whether the United States actually suffered any costs in terms of the legitimacy of the extant international order. Some, like [Ikenberry \(2011, 329-331\)](#), say yes. Others, like [Brooks and Wohlforth \(2008, 198-199\)](#), are more skeptical.

<sup>37</sup>[Yarhi-Milo \(2013\)](#).

<sup>38</sup>[Brown \(2014a\)](#).

<sup>39</sup>[Downes \(2010\)](#); [Poznansky \(2015\)](#).

sources and dynamics of secrecy in a very particular realm of international politics: Interventions intended to overthrow or prop up foreign regimes. Although useful as a first cut, there are a number of issues pertaining to both secrecy and intervention left unexamined, creating exciting opportunities for future research. This section will touch on a number of these areas. Subjects include the renaissance in covert tools available to states, particularly cyberspace operations and unmanned aerial vehicles, and the dynamics of secrecy in arenas other than forcible regime promotion.

## **4.1 Secrecy and Technology**

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a renaissance of sorts in the kinds of covert tools available to states and, in some cases, non-state actors as well. The rapid advancement of cyber capabilities and remotely piloted platforms have made it easier for states to achieve a range of foreign policy objectives while simultaneously concealing their role in the process. Although it is unlikely that either of these new tools could take down or prop up a foreign regime — certainly not when used in isolation — it is important to briefly discuss their relationship with secrecy since they are only likely to become more important as time goes on.

### **Cyberspace Operations**

The cyber domain is among the most rapidly growing areas for research in international politics. For obvious reasons, scholars and policymakers alike have sought to better understand the various dimensions of cyberspace operations. The most relevant aspect of the current thinking on cyber for our purposes is the intimate relationship between cyberspace operations and secrecy. To begin with, cyberspace operations typically require the perpetrators of intrusions and attacks to act clandestinely during the initial stages. Announcing the nature and timing of an operation before it occurs will more often than not compromise the chances of success by affording the victim

an opportunity to bolster their defenses.<sup>40</sup>

An initial observation that bears on our discussion is that the clandestinity requirement during the planning and execution stages renders cyber operations distinct from the kinds of operations examined here. One of the core tensions leaders grapple with when contemplating regime-promoting interventions is the trade-off between deniability and effectiveness. Covert operations promise the former while decreasing the latter. The opposite is true in the cyber realm. Here, acting overtly — at least during the initial stages of an attack or intrusion — undercuts effectiveness.<sup>41</sup> This observation has produced a wave of scholarship examining the so-called “attribution problem” in cyberspace, wherein “the victims of cyber attacks must utilize an array of complex yet imperfect tools to identify their adversaries.”<sup>42</sup>

In a recent contribution to *War on the Rocks*, Poznansky and Perkoski argue that the existing literature on cyber war ignored crucial distinctions between secrecy at the initial phases of an operation — where acting clandestinely is a *de facto* requirement — and the decision to claim credit for an attack once it has been carried out. This latter decision centers squarely on the central question explored in this dissertation, namely, whether to proclaim sponsorship of an operation or deny it.<sup>43</sup> For certain types of operations, claiming credit for an attack may be counter-productive. When the purposes of an operation do not require target compliance of any kind — e.g. espionage, intellectual property theft — credit-claiming is at best unnecessary and potentially even harmful.

For operations that do require target compliance, as is the case during cyber coercion, credit-claiming may be necessary to achieve success. Poznansky and Perkoski make the case that states may face powerful incentives to claim credit for past attacks

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<sup>40</sup>Rid and Buchanan (2015).

<sup>41</sup>Gartzke (2013); Gartzke and Lindsay (2015); Libicki (2009).

<sup>42</sup>Poznansky and Perkoski (2016). For a comprehensive summary of the attribution problem in cyberspace, see Rid and Buchanan (2015).

<sup>43</sup>Poznansky and Perkoski (2016).

in order to cultivate a reputation for capabilities, rendering future attempts at cyber coercion more credible.<sup>44</sup> What remains to be explored, however, are the risks from acting overtly in cyberspace. If claiming credit for past attacks is likely to trigger escalation with the target, the incentives to act covertly should be high. It is worth noting as well as that escalation can occur across domains, including retaliatory cyber attacks, the imposition of economic sanctions, and a kinetic military response. Because the rules and norms governing legitimate cyber behavior are much less crystallized than they are for intervention, concerns over reputations for rule-breaking and the like should be much less salient for the foreseeable future. However, exploring how rules and norms are developing in cyberspace, and their potential impact on the risks from claiming credit for an attack, is an obvious area for future research.

While identifying the drivers of secrecy in cyberspace is important, it would also be useful to theorize the conditions under which actors will assume the potential risks from acting overtly by claiming credit for attacks. As before, a straightforward cost-benefit calculation would lead us to posit that when the value of the policy objective exceeds the costs of trying to achieve that objective overtly – assuming, of course, that publicity would increase the chances of success — credit-claiming is most likely. This is certainly plausible. It is also possible, however, that the nature of the objectives at stake — whether they are gains-seeking or loss-avoiding — will determine the risks leaders are willing to run to accomplish their goals. Identifying the range of goals leaders might pursue in cyberspace and what costs they are likely to bear to achieve them is an important task for future research.

## **Drone Technology**

The proliferation of drones, also known in the literature as unmanned aerial vehicles, constitutes a second area in which technology is providing new pathways for

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<sup>44</sup>Poznansky and Perkoski (2016).



states to pursue foreign policy objectives covertly.<sup>45</sup> Although this platform has existed for centuries, the drone technology of today is more sophisticated and capable than ever. Drones have many functions, including intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance as well as close air support on the battlefield.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the drones debate, however, centers on the targeted killings carried out by the United States under authority of both the CIA and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), a special forces unit housed within the Department of Defense.<sup>47</sup> Targeted killings carried out by the CIA “are classified as Title 50 covert actions,” and hence are intended to be plausibly deniable. Those carried out by JSOC fall under “Title 10 ‘armed forces’ operations and a publicly available military doctrine”; plausible deniability is not a central component of JSOC-sponsored operations.<sup>48</sup>

One of the most novel aspects of drones is that they make it much easier for decision-makers to carry out particular kinds of operations quickly and quietly.<sup>49</sup> This is especially true when the goal is something like the assassination of actual and suspected terrorists, wherein states may wish to operate clandestinely in the interest of maintaining the element of surprise.<sup>50</sup> However, we should be careful not to conflate the ease with which states are able to carry out operations clandestinely from the political decision leaders must still make about whether to conceal their sponsorship or not, particularly once an operation has been successfully carried out.

Unlike the cyber domain where norms and rules are fairly nebulous, drones are often used for missions that directly implicate existing domestic and international law. Leaders have used drones to kill U.S. citizens living abroad — as was the case

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<sup>45</sup>The most accurate description of this technology is probably “remotely piloted vehicles.” Here, I have opted to keep with the conventional nomenclature found in much of the literature.

<sup>46</sup>Gilli and Gilli (2016, 67).

<sup>47</sup>Morgan (2015).

<sup>48</sup>Zenko (2013, 1).

<sup>49</sup>Horowitz, Kreps and Fuhrmann (2016).

<sup>50</sup>Axelrod (1979).

with Anwar al-Awlaki — and assassinate known terrorists in countries where the U.S. has not formally designated as a war zone, including Yemen and Pakistan. In certain ways, then, at least some of the major drivers of secrecy in this case should be obvious: States will wield drone technology covertly when they want to break existing domestic or international law free from repercussions. Another possible reason for covert action in this space is that the use of drones can facilitate quiet cooperation between a host country and an intervener in ways that lowers the reputational costs to both entities. In such an arrangement, host governments can claim responsibility for operations carried out by the external power, thereby concealing sovereignty violations and preserving the host’s legitimacy and image as an autonomous actor.

Finally, it is important for scholars interested in the intersection of drone warfare and secret operations to think through the ways in which leaders might weigh the risks and rewards of covert and overt action for a range of different foreign policy objectives. To the extent that leaders view the potential costs from publicity as too high — either because of concern over norms, domestic-political considerations, and so on — Title 50 covert operations are unlikely to go anywhere anytime soon. For those areas in which leaders can stomach the costs of being associated with missions, we might see JSOC and the Pentagon conducting a larger share of these operations. Whether we evaluate the decision to use secrecy from a rationalist baseline or via the risk balancing model proposed here thus has non-trivial implications for our assessment of the future of drone warfare, both in terms of what kind of missions we are likely to observe and who will have the authority to carry them out.

## **4.2 Non-Lethal Uses of Secrecy**

The renaissance in covert technologies, particularly when it comes to cyberspace operations and unmanned aerial vehicles, provides a number of exciting opportunities for researchers interested in pushing the boundaries of our understanding of secrecy

in world politics. There is also an opportunity, however, for scholars to study the dynamics of secrecy in new foreign policy domains, particularly those not involving uses of force. Scholars writing on these issues over the past two decades have already begun this important work by investigating the role that secrecy plays in the context of domestic and international bargaining,<sup>51</sup> negotiations over military bases,<sup>52</sup> and the like. Of note, the lion's share of the literature on cyberspace operations also fits under the umbrella of non-lethal uses of secrecy.<sup>53</sup>

Bearing in mind the important progress that has been made already, there remain a number of subjects involving non-lethal foreign policy objectives that scholars interested in secrecy might consider examining. One area that has received little to no attention in debates about secrecy and covert action, particularly in the international relations arena, is economic warfare. There exists a sizable literature on the causes and efficacy of economic sanctions.<sup>54</sup> Leaders interested in pursuing some objective through economic statecraft, however, have many tools available to them. In some cases, one of these tools will be covert economic sabotage. Understanding how and why leaders choose to target another country's economy with visible economic sanctions rather than exerting economic pressure and pain covertly is an understudied question. Nixon's use of covert economic sabotage against Chile starting in 1970, wherein he tasked then-CIA director Richard Helms to "make the economy scream," is among the most prominent examples of covert economic statecraft.

A second non-lethal foreign policy area that scholars interested in secrecy might consider exploring is the use of positive inducements to alter state behavior. Leaders interested in accomplishing some objective by altering the incentives of both allies

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<sup>51</sup>Stasavage (2004); Yarhi-Milo (2013).

<sup>52</sup>Brown (2014a).

<sup>53</sup>There are some exceptions to this, although they are mostly hypothetical. A cyber attack that took down the power in a city or a hospital, leading to actual deaths, would probably qualify as lethal. The use of cyber in conjunction with kinetic military force might constitute another scenario.

<sup>54</sup>Baldwin (1985); Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott (1990); Pape (1997).

and adversaries have numerous tools at their disposal by which to accomplish these aims. One thing leaders can do is to provide public inducements in the form of foreign aid, humanitarian relief, and so forth. It is also possible, however, to operate in the proverbial smoke-filled room, bribing fellow leaders in secret to accomplish a given objective. How and why leaders choose one form of inducements over another is an area of research that has been neglected in the existing literature. To the extent that these choices shed light on the dynamics of cooperation between friends and foes alike, understanding this behavior is a worthy enterprise.

For far too long, the international relations literature has suffered from a “publicity bias,” in which scholars only examined state behaviors that were visible, transparent, and public. My dissertation joins a growing chorus of voices seeking to make the previously invisible visible by examining secrecy in world politics. Although I have confined my focus to the use of covert action to overthrow or prop up regimes, these interventions provided a broader window into the dynamics of secrecy. Exploring why leaders chose to intervene covertly in some cases and overtly in others provided insights into the kinds of things decision-makers worry about when wielding force on the international stage. It also told us how leaders weigh the risks and rewards of these various intervention strategies by appealing to psychological models of decision-making. Far from being the last word on the subject, my hope is that scholars interested in secrecy, deniability, and deception will expand upon and refine the insights developed here and by others. Doing so promises to shed light on a neglected but essential component of the everyday workings of international politics.

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