Security Studies

ISSN: 0963-6412 (Print) 1556-1852 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fsst20

The Strategic Logic of Covert Regime Change: US-Backed Regime Change Campaigns during the Cold War

Lindsey A. O'Rourke

To cite this article: Lindsey A. O'Rourke (2020) The Strategic Logic of Covert Regime Change: US-Backed Regime Change Campaigns during the Cold War, Security Studies, 29:1, 92-127, DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2020.1693620

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1693620

SECURITY STUDIES
2020, VOL. 29, NO. 1, 92–127
https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1693620

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Strategic Logic of Covert Regime Change: US-Backed Regime Change Campaigns during the Cold War

Lindsey A. O'Rourke

ABSTRACT

Covert regime change is a common instrument of statecraft states use to promote their national security interests abroad. This study employs an original dataset of all US-backed covert regime change attempts during the Cold War. It shows that the United States attempted far more regime changes than is commonly known because Washington intervened covertly—as opposed to overtly—ten times more frequently during these missions: sixty-four covert regime change attempts versus six overt. Building upon extensive archival research, the article then theorizes why the United States launched its Cold War regime changes, which types of international disputes are most likely to spark an intervention, and why American policymakers overwhelmingly preferred to intervene covertly during their regime-change operations. The results challenge existing theories of regime change and offer timely new insights into US foreign policy decision making.

Between Russia's covert meddling in the 2016 US presidential election and Washington's covert attempts to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, recent headlines have been filled with stories of states attempting to covertly influence the domestic politics of their rivals. Despite the influential role covert regime changes play in international politics, however, existing research on regime change has focused heavily on overt cases, which overlooks the variety of covert ways states attempt to determine the political leadership of their rivals—such as by sponsoring coups, assassinating foreign leaders, covertly meddling in foreign elections, or secretly aiding dissident groups in their attempts to overthrow a foreign government.[1]

Because, by definition, states conceal their role in covert actions, reliable data on covert regime change is difficult to acquire. Fortunately, however, US government declassification rules allow us to analyze an expansive

Lindsey A. O'Rourke is an assistant professor of Political Science at Boston College.

[1]This article includes data and summarizes theoretical arguments previously developed in chaps. 1–3 of Lindsey A. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

sample of the covert regime changes backed by a great power. Based upon extensive archival research, this study employs an original dataset of US-backed covert regime change campaigns during the Cold War (1947–89). The dataset shows the United States attempted ten times as many regime changes via covert (rather than overt) action during the Cold War—64 covert regime change campaigns compared to 6 overt ones. American-backed forces assumed power in 25 covert campaigns, whereas the remaining 39 covert missions failed in that goal. Washington's proclivity for covert regime change was not limited to either political party. Each administration during the Cold War engaged in at least 3 covert campaigns to replace the political leadership of another state at some point in their respective presidencies, and numerous covert operations continued across administrations.

The extent of America's Cold War covert interventions and the nature of the governments targeted raise important questions for the existing international relations literature on regime change. Covert cases provide a set of observations not part of the formulation of the existing theories but presumably should fall within their purview.[2] Yet, can these theories explain Washington's covert behavior? To investigate that possibility, this article asks three questions: First, what political objectives were US policymakers trying to accomplish during their covert regime changes? Second, why did policymakers attempt regime change—rather than use another foreign policy tool—to secure these objectives? And third, why did the United States choose to intervene covertly—as opposed to overtly—during its regime change attempts?

Four principal findings follow. First, I argue most existing studies of regime change overlook covert cases and therefore do not adequately explain the causes of covert regime change. The reigning explanations are incomplete. Disconfirming covert cases pose a challenge to many existing ideological, normative, and economic accounts. In contrast to what these theories would suggest, Washington did not disproportionately target authoritarian governments for regime change, and only 12.5 percent of America's covert Cold War interventions sought to promote a democratic transition in an authoritarian state. Washington also did not have a strong economic motivation for intervention in most cases, and US policymakers repeatedly violated norms of justified intervention—including liberal norms

[2]The existing literature on the causes of regime change is not monolithic. Some studies do not discuss covert interventions at all; others suggest states pursue overt and covert interventions for similar reasons. Because this article seeks to explain the motives for covert interventions and employs a dataset of covert cases, it poses a challenge to the generalizability of the former category to covert cases, but it does not necessarily challenge these theories' causal explanations for overt regime change because states may have different reasons for intervening covertly versus overtly. Where this study disagrees with the latter category, however, it poses a challenge to their generalizability and underlying causal explanations.

governing the treatment of fellow democracies—during America's covert regime change campaigns.

Second, the United States pursued covert regime change primarily to protect its national security and increase its relative military power. This article aims to provide a comprehensive account of America's motives for covert regime change during the Cold War, drawing together Washington's various security-oriented rationales for intervention. I argue that three types of security interests drove the United States to intervene: Offensive regime changes targeted existing military adversaries and their allies. During the Cold War, these missions corresponded to the strategy of "rollback," and Washington attempted 23 covert and 2 overt offensive operations against the Soviet Union and its allies. Preventive regime changes aimed to stop a foreign government from taking an action—like joining a rival alliance or increasing its military capacity—that would create a more significant military threat in the future. During the Cold War, these efforts corresponded to the strategy of "containment," and the United States pursued 25 covert operations and one overt intervention toward this end against nonaligned and allied governments US policymakers feared were in danger of defecting to the Soviet camp. Hegemonic regime changes sought to keep target governments politically subordinate as part of the intervening state's bid to acquire or maintain regional hegemony over a certain geographic region. The United States conducted 18 covert and 3 overt hegemonic interventions in the Western Hemisphere during the Cold War, although these operations did not reflect a specific Cold War strategy, but rather Washington's broader drive for regional hegemony, which has been a cornerstone of American foreign policy since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.

Third, policymakers considered regime change to be a unique and desirable foreign policy tool. By its nature, regime change allows a state to install a foreign government that shares its policy preferences, meaning the target regime will then act in the intervening state's interests without being told to do so. In theory, this method allows the intervening state to secure its current interests and avoid future disputes with the target government, thereby transforming a contentious relationship into a cooperative one. Regime changes are therefore most likely to occur in response to chronic security-based interstate disputes where the intervening state believes it can identify a plausible political alternative to the existing regime that shares its foreign policy preferences and possesses enough capacity to rule the target state.

Finally, states have strong incentives to conduct their regime changes covertly, rather than overtly, to minimize the material, economic, and reputational cost of intervention. In particular, I argue that US leaders preferred covert conduct because it entailed "plausible deniability" deflected blame

onto others. This lowered operational costs, allowed the United States to break norms of justified intervention, and decreased the probability that the targeted regime would retaliate militarily. At the same time, however, covert regime changes were less likely than overt missions to successfully overthrow their targets. Nonetheless, American policymakers seemed to believe that because the costs of covert operations are typically very low, they are worth attempting even if they are unlikely to succeed. The result was ten times more covert regime change campaigns than overt ones.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, I define regime change and discuss this project's data-collection methods and scope. Second, I review the existing literature on the causes of foreign-imposed regime change. From the existing accounts, I derive predictions about how the United States should have behaved during its covert regime changes and compare these predictions to the historical record. Third, I present a security-oriented theory of why the United States pursued covert regime change and provide a historical overview of Washington's Cold War covert interventions. Fourth, I explain why the United States preferred to intervene covertly as opposed to overtly during its regime-change campaigns. Finally, the conclusion addresses the question of whether this theory can be generalized beyond the US Cold War context.

Defining Regime Change

For this project, "regime" is defined as a state's political leadership or its political processes and institutional arrangements.[3] "Regime change" is defined as "an operation to replace another state's effective political leadership by significantly altering the composition of that state's ruling elite, its administrative apparatus, or its institutional structure."[4] This definition includes instances where the target state's regime type remains the same before and after the regime change (for example, replacing one dictator with another), instances where the target state's regime type is altered by the intervention (for example, replacing a dictatorship with a democracy), and cases where the United States supported a secessionist movement's bid for independence from a foreign country.[5] Although all regime changes violate the de facto sovereignty of their targets, this definition excludes cases where the United States did not intend for the target state to retain

[3]David Easton, John G. Gunnell, and Michael B. Stein, *Regime and Discipline: Democracy and the Development of Political Science* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 8–9. See O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 14–18, for more on defining regime change.

[4]O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 14.

[5]Because the term "regime" can refer to either the political leadership of a state or its regime type, academic studies have defined "regime change" differently. Some studies do not consider an intervention to have been a regime change if the regime type of the targeted state remained the same. When this project's definition of regime change is more expansive than another study's, it poses a challenge to their generalizability.

its de jure sovereignty, such as cases of colonization, conquest, and annexation. In other words, US policymakers did not expect to directly rule the targeted state following any of the interventions in this study.[6]

Covert regime change denotes "an operation to replace the political leadership of another state, where the intervening state does not acknowledge its role publicly."[7] During the Cold War, the United States employed five main covert tactics to this end: assassinating foreign leaders; sponsoring coups d'état; covertly meddling in foreign elections; aiding, funding, and arming anti-government dissident groups; and attempting to incite popular revolutions. National Security Council Directive (NSC) 10/2 first laid out the US government's classification of covert operations in 1948:

> The National Security Council … has determined that, in the interests of world peace and U.S. national security, the overt foreign activities of the U.S. Government must be supplemented by covert operations … so planned and executed that any U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and if uncovered the U.S. Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them. Specifically, such actions shall include covert activities related to propaganda; economic warfare; preventative direct actions, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition, and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerillas, and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world.[8]

One methodological challenge that faced this project is that the concept of covert regime change is undeniably broad and ambiguous, and scholars have invoked the term to refer to a wide variety of behavior.[9] For the purposes of this project, I excluded covert actions not explicitly aimed at replacing a foreign government's political leadership, such as espionage, diplomacy, or propaganda. I also excluded covert "regime maintenance" efforts to prop up a state's authoritarian allies through publicly unacknowledged financial or military aid because these actions sought to maintain the status quo rather than revise it.[10] Covert efforts to meddle in foreign

[6]On the distinction between judicial and de facto sovereignty, see Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[7]O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 14. Two types of operations can be described as "covert": (1) operations designed to remain secretive during planning and after completion; and (2) operations designed to maintain operational security and/or enable a surprise attack, but for which the state does not try to conceal its role after completion. This project only concerns itself with the former category.

[8]National Security Council (NSC) Directive 10/2, "National Security Council Directive on Office of Special Projects," 18 June 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*], *1945–1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office [GPO], 1996), doc. 292.

[9]On the variety of different behaviors that are described as "covert action" by the US government, see Loch K. Johnson, "Covert Action and Accountability: Decision-Making for America's Secret Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (March 1989): 81–109.

[10]On the theoretical differences between regime change and regime promotion, see: John M. Owen IV and Robert G. Herbert, "Intervention and Regime Change," in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable and Linkable Resource*, ed. Robert A. Scott and Marlis C. Buchmann (Somerset, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

elections posed a related definitional dilemma because these operations could support the electoral bids of opposition or ruling parties. Operations supporting opposition forces did not pose a definitional challenge for this project because they aimed to revise the status quo (that is, they sought to change the party in power). Operations supporting the electoral bids of the ruling party, however, could arguably be excluded as more akin to regime maintenance. Nevertheless, I decided to include both types of covert interventions into foreign elections based on the rationale that democratic elections are, by their nature, prescheduled opportunities for regime change.[11]

Overt regime change includes operations involving the direct and publicly acknowledged use of military force to replace the political leadership of another state. This definition includes wars for the purpose of regime change and more limited military actions designed to bring about a change in government, such as air strikes aimed at leadership decapitation or limited invasions to remove foreign leaders.

Data Collection and Scope

This project analyzes all known US-backed regime change attempts during the Cold War. This sample was selected for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, the modern understanding of "regime change" is premised on the idea of Westphalian sovereignty, or that "states exist in specific territories, within which domestic political authorities are the sole arbiters of legitimate behavior."[12] Prior to the modern era, however, great powers did not extend this understanding of sovereignty to their colonies or conquered territories. I, therefore, would not expect colonial-era regime changes to have the same objectives or dynamics as modern interventions. Practically, a reliable international sample of covert regime changes is currently unobtainable because most states do not declassify internal documents on covert interventions. Fortunately, however, data on America's covert regime changes during the Cold War can be acquired due to the US government's declassification requirements, thus offering researchers a rare opportunity to analyze a representative sample of a state's covert regime change attempts.

Because the concept of covert regime change is often ambiguous and the United States took an active role in the domestic political affairs of many states throughout the Cold War, at times it was difficult to determine whether Washington's meddling into the political affairs of a target state should be considered a covert regime change attempt. To be included in the dataset, I required at least three primary source US governmental

[11]See O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 15–16, for additional reasons.
[12]Krasner, *Sovereignty*, 20.

documents indicating the intervention's goal was to replace the political leadership of the target state, and that the operation entailed Washington taking some direct action—beyond propaganda—to bring about that result.[13] One benefit of limiting the sample to cases where policymakers explicitly stated their objective of regime change is that it minimizes the chances of false positives—cases where Washington has been falsely accused of intervening as well as covert operations where the United States did not desire to replace the target government. A disadvantage of this method is that it potentially undercounts the total number of US-backed covert regime changes because primary source documents explicitly verifying the operation's objectives were unavailable (or because I failed to locate these documents during my archival research).

Establishing the motives for America's covert interventions proved another crucial methodological challenge. Toward that end, I obtained declassified US governmental documents for each covert campaign, listened to recordings of policymaking deliberations made available through the White House tapes, and consulted secondary works on the cases when available. Fortunately, NSC, State Department, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) memoranda relating to covert interventions routinely follow similar formats, clearly stating the international problem facing US policymakers and the mission's objectives. One representative document, a 1949 CIA memorandum on Albania, for instance, states: "The Objective: Current United States policy toward Albania contemplates the restoration of Albanian independence by overthrowing the present Moscow-controlled regime, and replacing it by an enlightened government acceptable to the people of Albania, and with aims and objectives harmonious with those of the United States in that area."[14]

This dataset offers two benefits compared to those in existing studies of regime change. First, most existing datasets look only at overt cases, whereas my dataset contains both covert and overt cases.[15] Second, other

[13]Although many propaganda campaigns seek to undermine the political authority of foreign governments, I excluded purely propaganda operations from my dataset unless the operation involved additional direct efforts to replace the regime. Anticommunist propaganda was so ubiquitous during the Cold War that including these cases stretched the conception of "regime change" beyond what I considered its commonly accepted meaning. Upon publication, replication data will be made available at https://sites.google.com/site/lindseyorourke/Publications.

[14]Central Intelligence Agency, "PW Annex to Project BGFIEND," 7 October 1949, CIA Electronic Reading Room, CREST no. 519a2b76993294098d50f3d8.

[15]For examples of datasets focusing on overt regime changes, see Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 90–131. Based on their coding rules, Downes and Monten include five successful covert cases; John M. Owen IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510–2010* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). See 165–68 for Owen's discussion of America's Cold War interventions; Nigel Lo, Barry Hashimoto, and Dan Reiter, "Ensuring Peace: Foreign-Imposed Regime Change and Postwar Peace Duration, 1914–2001," *International Organization* 62, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 717–36; Tanisha Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Suzanne Werner, "Absolute and Limited War: The

studies of regime change look only at successful interventions. My dataset includes both successful and failed attempts at regime change. This is advantageous because there may be systematic reasons why certain covert regime changes succeed or fail.[16] Omitting failed attempts could bias the argument regarding the causes of regime change by missing these cases.

The dataset uses target countries rather than individual operations as the unit of analysis. Thus, many of the "cases" can be thought of as regime change "campaigns" that involve multiple attempts to replace the target regime. For example, in the 1960s, the United States pursued multiple assassination plots against Fidel Castro as part of a plan known as Operation Mongoose in addition to the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs paramilitary invasion by Cuban exiles. Similarly, the United States covertly intervened in Chilean presidential elections in 1964 and 1970 to prevent Socialist candidate Salvador Allende from winning. Rather than counting these operations individually, I group each country's operations together as a single ongoing covert campaign. Analyzing campaigns rather than independent missions is preferable because states frequently launch more than one covert operation simultaneously that each share similar motives.

Existing Explanations: What Do We Know about Regime Change?

A large international relations literature investigates the causes of regime change. Many of these studies are built upon analyses of overt regime changes during wartime and can be grouped into five main categories depending on their main variable of interest. Do these theories regarding the causes of overt regime change hold for covert interventions as well? To investigate that possibility, this section outlines five major explanations and compares their predictions to America's record of covert regime changes during the Cold War. I find that none of these accounts adequately explains US behavior. Theories that perform quite well when only compared to overt cases cannot account for Washington's covert interventions,

Possibility of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change," *International Interactions* 22, no. 1 (1996): 67–88. The major exception is from Daniel Berger et al., whose 2013 dataset includes 51 cases of "CIA interventions" during the Cold War. However, this project's dataset differs from their dataset in two ways. First, their dataset includes 35 covert efforts to "support an existing regime" and 26 covert efforts to "install and support" a new government, whereas this study is only concerned with the latter category. Second, I have come to different conclusions regarding their coding for 8 of their 26 covert operations to install leaders. Daniel Berger, et. al, "Commercial Imperialism? Political Influence and Trade during the Cold War," *American Economic Review* 103, no. 2 (April 2013): 863–96. Data on the categorization of their cases is from Berger et al., "Documentation for CIA Intervention Dataset for 'Commercial Imperialism: US Influence and Trade during the Cold War,'" http://scholar.harvard.edu/nunn/pages/data-0.

[16]On why covert regime changes succeed or fail, see O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, chap. 4. On the reasons why covert electoral interventions by great powers succeed or fail, see Dov H. Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 2016): 189–202.

Table 1. Regime type of target states: difference of proportions test.

	US-Backed Covert Regime Change Attempts		Country-Years by Regime Type	
	Number	Percentage of Total	Number	Percentage of Total
Democracy	18	28.1	1608	34.1
Monarchy	0	0**	431	9.1**
Personal	11	17.2	648	13.7
Single-Party	27	42.2	1580	33.6
Military	8	12.5	451	9.6
Total	64	100	4718	100

**=5% significance.

suggesting that a regime change's political objections may influence policymakers' preferred conduct.

Regime-Type Theories

The first set of explanations investigates how regime type influences a state's decision to launch regime changes. Within this avenue of research, scholars have made three predictions regarding the type of regime changes that the United States—as a liberal democracy—should pursue. One prediction holds that the United States should disproportionately target authoritarian governments for regime change. Suzanne Werner, for instance, maintains that the greater the difference in two states' political systems, the more likely they will fear one another and attempt regime change as a result.[17] A related argument maintains that personalist regimes are the most likely targets of regime change due to their difficulty credibly committing to international agreements.[18] To test this hypothesis, Table 1 compares the regime type of every state targeted by the United States for covert regime change against the proportion of states in the international system by regime type (measured in country-years) during the Cold War.[19] A difference of proportions test on this data shows that although the United States targeted democracies 6 percent less often than what random chance

[17]Werner, "Absolute and Limited War."

[18]Alexander B. Downes, "The Causes of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change in Interstate Wars" (paper presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston MA, 28–31 August 2008); Mark Peceny, Caroline C. Beer, and Shannon Sanchez-Terry, "Dictatorial Peace?" *American Journal of Political Science* 96, no. 1 (March 2002): 15–26.

[19]Table also appears in O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 29. Regime type code from Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2014): 313–31. Regime type is coded based upon the first year of the US intervention. The dataset has been adapted in several places to test this hypothesis: (1) the dataset omits democracies, which I have added; (2) the dataset includes several subsets of party-based and military regimes, which I have collapsed into two categories according to rules suggested in their codebook; (3) operations in Dominican Republic (1961–62, 1965–68) and Portugal (1974) were coded as democratic, rather than authoritarian, because Washington's covert actions were designed to influence prescheduled upcoming elections during an authoritarian transition; (4) Iran (1953) is coded as a democracy, although Iran was a constitutional monarchy at the time because America's covert actions targeted its democratically elected prime minister, rather than the Shah; and (5) Guyana and Suriname are omitted from their dataset because of their small population size. I coded them as a democracy and military regime, respectively.

would dictate and personal regimes 4 percent more often than chance, these differences were not statistically significant, which suggests factors beyond the regime type of the target state are necessary to explain Washington's decision to intervene.[20]

A second regime-type argument predicts the United States should use regime change to promote liberalism abroad. John M. Owen IV, for instance, argues that states use regime change to spread their preferred system of government throughout the international system to combat external and internal threats from ideological opponents.[21] Other scholars note that liberal states often turn conflicts with nonliberal adversaries into "crusades."[22] Looking specifically at the United States, several authors have argued that a cornerstone of American foreign policy since World War I has been promoting democracy abroad, as evidenced by US efforts in Japan and Germany following World War II, Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (2003).[23] Tony Smith, for instance, argues US foreign policy has long been guided by the belief that promoting democracy abroad serves US security interests by creating a stable and safer international order.[24] Citing examples like US support for Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s, Joshua Muravchik extends this line of reasoning to include covert cases.[25] Taken together, these theories predict the United States should install democracies during its interventions.

Nevertheless, Washington's Cold War behavior suggests a desire to promote democracy has not always been a major factor driving US foreign policy. During this period, Washington supported authoritarian forces in 44 out of its 64 covert interventions, and only 8 cases (12.5 percent) aimed to promote a democratic revolution within an authoritarian state. Quantitative analyses of the impact of America's covert Cold War interventions on the subsequent level of democratization of the targeted states

[20]The only statistically significant finding from the difference of proportions tests was that the United States targeted monarchies less often than chance would dictate. Considering that democracies and monarchies have very different political systems, this finding contradicts the prediction of the regime-type theorists.

[21]Owen, *Clash of Ideas in World Politics*. This project concurs with Owen regarding the underlying security motives for intervention; it disagrees with Owen regarding the extent to which American policymakers promoted democracy to secure those ends.

[22]Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs, Part 2," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 323–53; Nils Petter Gleditsch and Håvard Hegre, "Peace and Democracy: Three Levels of Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 2 (April 1997): 283–310; Arvid Rakernud and Håvard Hegre, "The Hazard of War: Reassessing the Evidence for the Democratic Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 4 (1997): 385–404.

[23]Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Susan B. Epstein, Nina M. Serafino, and Francis T. Miko, "Democracy Promotion: Cornerstone of U.S. Foreign Policy?" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 26 December 2007).

[24]Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Tony Smith "National Security Liberalism and American Foreign Policy" in *American Democracy Promotion*, eds., Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi, 85–102.

[25]Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1992), 20.

support this argument. One study, for instance, found that countries covertly overthrown by the United States during the Cold War showed an average decrease of 0.79 points in their Polity score in the ten years following intervention.[26] Similarly, Daniel Berger et al.'s analysis of America's covert interventions—which in their sample included both regime change and regime maintenance operations—determined that Washington's covert interventions decreased the likelihood that a targeted state would become a democracy roughly 30 percent over the next twenty years.[27] Analyzing partisan electoral interventions by the United States and the USSR/Russia (1946–2000), Dov H. Levin found that covert meddling into a state's democratic elections significantly increased the likelihood that state would experience a democratic breakdown.[28] At the overt level as well, multiple quantitative studies confirm Washington's poor record for democracy promotion throughout the twentieth century.[29]

Finally, a third group of scholars have arrived at the opposite prediction regarding the type of regimes the United States should install during its regime changes. According to proponents of selectorate theory, victorious states have an incentive to install authoritarian regimes in losing states following interstate wars because authoritarian leaders are better able to impose the type of unpopular policies typically involved in postwar settlements without losing power.[30] Of the three regime-type theories, this prediction fits the historical record best: the United States promoted authoritarian leaders in nearly 70 percent of its covert interventions and half of its overt regime changes during the Cold War. Nevertheless, the fact that the United States did not promote autocratic regimes in 30 percent of its covert cases and half of its overt cases suggest other factors influenced Washington's decision making. Furthermore, selectorate theory seeks to explain the types of regimes that states will install following war to combat

[26]O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, 90.

[27]Daniel Berger et al., "Do Superpower Interventions Have Short and Long Term Consequences for Democracy?" *Journal of Comparative Economics* 41, no. 1 (February 2013): 22–34.

[28]Dov H. Levin, "A Vote for Freedom: The Effects of Partisan Electoral Interventions on Regime Type," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 4 (April 2019): 839–68.

[29]See, for example, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs, "Intervention and Democracy," *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 627–49; James Meernik, "United States Military Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy," *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 4 (November 1996): 391–402; Margaret G. Hermann and Charles W. Kegley Jr., "The U.S. Use of Military Intervention to Promote Democracy: Evaluating the Record," *International Interactions* 24, no. 2 (June 1998): 91–114; Mark Peceny, "Forcing Them to Be Free," *Political Research Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1999): 549–82; Scott Walker and Federic S. Pearson, "Should We Really 'Force Them to Be Free?' An Empirical Examination of Peceny's Liberalizing Intervention Hypothesis," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24, no. 1 (2007): 37–53; Downes and Monten, "Forced to be Free?"

[30]James D. Morrow et al., "Section Institutions and War Aims," *Economics of Governance* 7, no. 1 (January 2006): 31–52; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 4 (December 1999): 791–807. Melissa Willard-Foster makes a similar argument about the type of regimes that states will install during periods of great-power rivalry. Melissa Willard-Foster, "A Peace Too Costly to Keep: Why Major Powers Overthrow Foreign Governments" (paper presented at the 2012 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, 30 August–2 September 2012).

the commitment problems inherent in postwar settlements; however, most covert regime changes are pursued as an alternative to war, meaning selectorate theory's causal mechanism of implementing postwar settlements is not present in these cases.

Normative Accounts

A second set of explanations asks how norms legitimatize different forms of regime change. According to these accounts, different norms have emerged throughout history that constrains the types of military interventions states will consider legitimate for them to undertake. Considering the United States during the Cold War period, these theories suggest Washington should not intervene to promote leaders likely to perpetuate crimes against humanity, to enforce the contractual obligations of private parties or collect public debts, to conduct interstate political assassinations, or for the purposes of annexation, conquest, or preventive war.[31]

The record of US Cold War interventions suggests norms are important, but not in the way these authors describe. Contrary to the predictions of many existing normative accounts, I found international norms did not restrain US policymakers from attempting regime change. Norms only constrained Washington from conducting overt regime changes. When American policymakers wanted to act in contravention of international norms, they did so covertly to hide their involvement.[32] During its covert Cold War operations, for instance, Washington violated norms of justified intervention in many ways, such as overthrowing democracies and installing leaders known to have committed human rights abuses. Washington did not appear constrained from violating norms of justified intervention if policymakers believed they could keep their role secret. The Doolittle Report of 1954 reflects this disregard of normative concerns: "It is now

[31]See, for example, Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Krasner, *Sovereignty*; Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ward Thomas, "Norms and Security: The Case of International Assassination," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 105–33; Fazal, *State Death*; Scott A. Silverstone, *Preventive War and American Democracy* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012).

[32]On the incentive for covert action to avoid charges of hypocrisy, see: Stephen Van Evera, "The Case Against Intervention," *Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 1 (July 1990): 72–80; David P. Forsythe, "Democracy, War, and Covert Action," *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 4 (November 1992): 385–95; Patrick James and Glenn E. Mitchell II, "Targets of Covert Pressure: The Hidden Victims of the Democratic Peace," *International Interactions* 21, no. 1 (1995): 85–107; Krasner, *Sovereignty*; Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, eds., *Democracy, Liberalism and War: Rethinking the Democratic Peace Debate* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (November 2003): 585–602; Jaechun Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War: A Case Study of the U.S. Covert War in Chile," *Journal of International and Area Studies* (June 2005): 25–47; Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilley, "Overt Peace, Covert War? Covert Intervention and the Democratic Peace," *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (April–June 2010): 266–306; Michael Poznansky, "Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law," *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (March 2019): 72–84.

clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed objective is world domination by whatever means and at whatever costs. There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply."[33]

Democratic Peace Theory

Proponents of democratic peace theory (DPT) maintain that democracies are more peaceful in their interactions with one another. Studies finding empirical support for DPT have focused on overt interactions between democracies—such as wars, militarized interstate disputes, and trade—but do these peaceful relations extend to covert regime changes as well?

Broadly speaking, DPT theories can be split into two categories depending on their main causal mechanism: institutional versus normative.[34] Institutional accounts maintain that democratic institutions—such as regular elections, transparent policymaking processes, multiparty systems, and the rule of law—constrain democratic leaders from engaging in military conflicts against other democracies.[35] Because the policymaking process for covert actions is different than the policymaking process for wars, however, covert regime changes that target democracies do not necessarily conflict with institutional accounts of DPT.[36] Normative accounts, by contrast, maintain that democracies avoid wars with one another because they share a deep respect for liberal values and common norms that govern their political interactions.[37] Some scholars maintain that because democratic leaders are more accustomed to political negotiation, they are more likely to compromise with fellow democracies and avoid conflict.[38] Others suggest democracies embrace norms of nonviolent conflict resolution and respect

[33]Central Intelligence Agency, "Report on the Covert Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency [Doolittle Report]," 1954, 2, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86B00269R000100040001-5.pdf.

[34]Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory."

[35]Institutional variants of DPT are too numerous to summarize here. For a summary, see: Dan Reiter, "Democratic Peace Theory," *Oxford Bibliographies: Political Science*, ed. Richard Valelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 25 October 2012).

[36]Johnson, "Covert Action and Accountability." Some have argued that policymakers may decide to conduct a regime change covertly precisely to avoid these institutional constraints. David N. Gibbs "Secrecy and International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 2 (May 1995): 213–28; Downes and Lilley, "Overt Peace, Covert War?"; John J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[37]Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs, Part 1" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 205–35; John Owen, "How Liberalism Produces the Democratic Peace," in *Debating the Democratic Peace: An International Security Reader*, ed. Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1996); Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[38]William J. Dixon and Paul D. Senese, "Democracy, Disputes, and Negotiated Settlements," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 4 (August 2002): 547–51; Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War: Why Democracies Will Not Fight One Another* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

for the law.[39] Still others claim democracies are more peaceful because they have internalized norms of individual freedom.[40] Unlike institutional accounts, covert regime changes pose a challenge to normative variants of DPT. According to Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, "The normative theory in straightforward terms forecasts that democracies would not use any means, overt or covert, to subvert or overthrow another democratically elected government, as such action would clearly be a violation of democratic norms."[41]

Contrary to what normative variants of DPT would predict, 28 percent of America's covert regime changes during the Cold War targeted a democracy. Some campaigns aimed to covertly influence foreign elections so America's preferred leader or party would come to power, whereas others aimed to topple democratic governments in favor of pro-American autocrats. Both scenarios involved actions that undermined the core liberal principles and norms, such as self-determination and respect for international law. Nevertheless, although American officials may not have been restrained from targeting democracies, they certainly did not want to be caught doing so. For instance, while deliberating whether the United States should encourage a Chilean coup in 1970, Secretary of State William Rogers remarked to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger: "My feeling—and I think it coincides with the President's—is that we should … do so discretely so that it doesn't backfire." In response, Kissinger asked, "The only question is how one defines 'backfire.'" "Getting caught doing something," Rogers replied. "After all we've said about elections, if the first time a communist wins the U.S. tries to prevent the constitutional process from coming into play we will look very bad."[42] Other studies concur with this assessment of America's incentive to conduct regime changes in democracies covertly and its willingness to do so.[43] In a careful study of US covert actions in Chile, for instance, Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilley determined that "U.S. security concerns about Chile possibly becoming a communist outpost in the Western Hemisphere, as well as the deleterious effect on U.S. credibility that would follow, clearly trumped any

[39]Kurt Taylor Gaubatz, "Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations," *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 109–39; Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986" *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (September 1993): 624–38; Gregory A. Raymond, "Democracies, Disputes, and Third-Party Intermediaries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 1 (March 1994): 24–42.

[40]Owen, "How Liberalism Produces the Democratic Peace"; Vesna Danilovic and Joe Clare, "The Kantian Liberal Peace (Revisited)," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (April 2007): 397–414.

[41]Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, 160.

[42]Transcript of a telephone conversation between Secretary of State Rogers and the president's assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 14 September 1970, *FRUS, 1969–1976,* vol. 21, *Chile, 1969–1973* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2014), doc. 88.

[43]Forsythe, "Democracy, War, and Covert Action"; James and Mitchell, "Targets of Covert Pressure"; Barkawi and Laffey, *Democracy, Liberalism and War*; Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*; Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace"; Kim, "Democratic Peace and Covert War."

normative restraints on toppling a democratic regime."[44] Likewise, Levin found that the United States covertly or overtly intervened into eighty-one foreign elections between 1946 and 2000.[45]

DPT proponents have responded to the challenge posed by covert cases in several ways. Consistent with the theories developed here, some DPT proponents, such as Bruce Russett, have argued that "the normative restraints of democracy were sufficient to drive the operations underground amid circumstances when the administration otherwise might well have undertaken an overt intervention."[46] Others maintain that the democracies targeted during America's covert interventions "did not meet the threshold conditions for complete liberalism" and thus Washington was not restrained from targeting them.[47] One problem with this argument is it creates a higher standard for being considered a democracy than is typically employed by the quantitative studies supporting DPT. Another problem, as Sebastian Rosato notes, is that "although the target states may not have been fully democratic, they were more democratic than the regimes that preceded and succeeded them and were democratizing further."[48] Reconciling DPT with Washington's covert record of overthrowing democracies, Michael Poznansky argues that "when democracies expect another state's democratic character to break down, or decay, they prove more willing to engage in covert forcible regime change."[49] In a rebuttal, however, Tarak Barkawi counters, "Poznansky has written a 'get out jail free card' for the Democratic Peace. If before they conduct an operation against an elected government, US policymakers reason that their actions ultimately further democracy, then political scientists can rest assured that these actions do not invalidate the Democratic Peace. Putting the matter in this way makes evident the circularity between the mindsets of officials and the categories of democratic-peace theory."[50]

Economic Interests

A fourth set of explanations asks how economic interests motivate regime change. One variant argues that states have used covert regime change to protect the interests of powerful multinational corporations. Proponents have focused on three particular American historical cases: the 1953 joint

[44]Downes and Lilly, "Overt Peace, Covert War?," 270.
[45]Levin employs different criteria for being considered a covert electoral intervention than this study. See Dov H. Levin, "Partisan Electoral Interventions by the Great Powers: Introducing the PEIG Dataset," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36, no. 1 (January 2019): 88–106.
[46]Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, 124.
[47]Forsythe, "Democracy, War, and Covert Action," 393. See also Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, 120–214.
[48]Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of the Democratic Peace," 591.
[49]Michael Poznansky, Stasis or Decay? Reconciling Covert War and the Democratic Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 2015): 815–26.
[50]Tarak Barkawi, "Scientific Decay," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 2015): 827–29.

Anglo-American operation to oust Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh allegedly for having nationalized the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; the 1954 US-backed coup in Guatemala allegedly at the behest of a powerful American company, the United Fruit Corporation; and US covert actions in Chile (1964–73) allegedly to promote the interests of an American corporation, International Telephone and Telegraph.[51] Quantitative support for this argument comes from Arindrajit Dube, Ethan Kaplan, and Suresh Naidu, who show that US-backed coups and coup authorizations increased the stock returns of partially nationalized US corporations on at least five occasions.[52]

A second economic argument maintains that the United States uses regime change to promote its position as head of a global capitalist order.[53] The strongest empirical support for this argument comes from Daniel Berger et al., who show that CIA interventions to covertly install or prop up a foreign leader led to an increase in US exports to that country in industries where the United States had a comparative disadvantage.[54] If correct, we should see Washington targeting states where the US government or American corporations have significant economic interests.

How do economic theories compare to America's Cold War record? At first blush, it is possible to make a case that a handful of US covert interventions were driven, at least in small part, by the desire to protect American corporate interests. Moreover, the United States—like all states—continually tries to increase its economic strength to raise its population's standard of living and because wealth is a prerequisite for military power.[55] Thus, on some level, economic interests always motivate US foreign policy. Nevertheless, existing economic accounts suffer from four main shortcomings. First, the salience of economic interests during US policymaking deliberations varies widely by case. It is hard to find an economic rationale for many missions in countries where the United States did not have significant preexisting economic interests and/or where the country's small

[51]Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006); Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (Times Books: New York, 2006).

[52]Arindrajit Dube, Ethan Kaplan, and Suresh Naidu, "Coups, Corporations and Classified Information," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 3 (August 2011): 1375–409. The authors do not claim, however, that these economic incentives were the decisive factor driving US policymakers to intervene.

[53]Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004); Michael J. Sullivan III, *American Adventurism Abroad: Invasions, Interventions and Regime Changes since World War II* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, the Movements and the Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[54]Berger et al., "Commercial Imperialism?"

[55]On wealth as the basis for military power: Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

population suggested comparatively little potential for market growth.[56] Second, detailed qualitative analyses of cases like Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and Chile (1964–73) show economic interests did not play a decisive role in US policymaking.[57] Third, if nationalizing or threatening to nationalize US assets is what led to regime changes in places like Guatemala and Chile, one would expect similar actions to spark regime changes elsewhere. However, foreign governments expropriated the assets of US firms in many instances without sparking an intervention, suggesting these actions are an insufficient condition for regime change.[58] Finally, if US interventions were designed to extend its capitalist influence, one might expect to see an increase in bilateral trade between the countries targeted for regime change and the United States. However, Paul Zachery, Kathleen Deloughery, and Downes found successful US regime changes in Latin America decreased bilateral trade with a targeted country by 37.5 percent.[59]

National Security Interests

A final set of explanations asks how national security concerns influence regime change. Although many historical accounts of the Cold War have described the national security interests motivating the superpowers, within the political science literature on regime change existing studies have identified two security-oriented motives.[60] First, Clifford Carrubba, Dan Reiter, and Scott Wolford find that states are more likely to seek regime change after the war when they fear their adversary cannot credibly commit to adhere to a postwar agreement.[61] Supporting this line of reasoning, Werner

[56]Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 185.

[57]Francis J. Gavin, "Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950–1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 56–89; Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions*.

[58]Jorge I. Domínguez, "US-Latin American Relations during the Cold War and Its Aftermath," in *The United States and Latin America: The New Agenda*, ed. Victor Bulmer-Thomas and James Dunkerley (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1999), 33–50.

[59]Paul Zachary, Kathleen Deloughery, and Alexander B. Downes, "No Business Like FIRC Business: Foreign-Imposed Regime Change and Bilateral Trade," *British Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (October 2017): 749–82.

[60]Historical accounts focusing on national security concerns include: Thomas Bodenheimer and Robert Gould, *Rollback! Right-Wing Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989); John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Interventions from World War II through the Persian Gulf* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001); William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2004); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); James Callanan, *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Policy, Intelligence and CIA Operations* (New York: IB Tauris, 2009).

[61]Scott Wolford, Dan Reiter, and Clifford J. Carrubba, "Information, Commitment, and War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 4 (August 2011): 556–79.

found regime change increases the durability of postwar peace.[62] Second, Tanisha Fazal argues powerful states have an incentive to pursue regime change against "buffer" states located in strategically valuable territory between themselves and other great power.[63]

While accepting that the United States pursued regime change during the Cold War to further its national security, other political scientists have theorized variation in the willingness and ability of different presidents to covertly intervene in pursuit of these security objectives. Loch K. Johnson, for instance, analyzed oversight of America's covert interventions during the Cold War and showed congressional oversight made it more difficult for the executive branch to unilaterally intervene after the mid-1970s.[64] Elizabeth N. Saunders illustrated that each US president conceived of foreign threats differently and that variation in leaders' threat perceptions influenced each administration's decision to intervene and whether they sought to transform the political institutions of the target state.[65]

While these accounts provide persuasive explanations for multiple cases, by design they do not attempt to provide a comprehensive theory of why states pursue (covert or overt) regime change. Some theories explain when states will impose a regime change after victory in war, but they do not attempt to explain when states go to war or when they will intervene covertly for the purposes of regime change. Second, the existing security-based theories—whether focusing on capabilities or territory—can not explain missions against states of little geostrategic importance, such as weak states with flimsy or nonexistent ties to a great power rival. Yet, most of America's covert Cold War interventions were located outside buffer zones, many targeted states had weak ties to Moscow, and more than a third were US allies.

In sum, neither regime-type nor normative arguments hold up once covert regime changes are considered, and I find limited support for the existing economic and security rationales. Although each helps to explain a subset of cases, neither provides a persuasive explanation for the majority of America's regime changes.

Why Did the United States Pursue Regime Change?

If the existing theories of regime change cannot explain America's covert interventions, why did the United States attempt these operations? What political objectives were US policymakers trying to achieve? And why did

[62]Werner, "Absolute and Limited War."
[63]Fazal, *State Death*; Downes, "The Causes of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change in Interstate Wars."
[64]Johnson, "Covert Action and Accountability."
[65]Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

policymakers believe covert regime change—as opposed to another foreign policy tactic—was the best way to secure these objectives? To answer these questions, I compiled and analyzed primary source declassified documents relating to the planning and implementation of US-backed covert and overt regime change attempts during the Cold War. From these documents, consistent patterns emerge regarding American interests and behavior during these campaigns. Based on this data, this section introduces my theory regarding the strategic logic of covert regime change.

Overall, I found America's interventions shared a common objective of protecting US national security and increasing America's relative military power within the international system. As with the causes of war, there was no single motive driving the United States to intervene and some covert campaigns had overlapping motives. Nevertheless, America's interventions fell into three broad categories: offensive, preventive, and hegemonic, depending on the primary political objective of the campaign.

Offensive regime changes aimed to overthrow a current military rival or break up a rival alliance. In the Cold War context, US leaders attempted twenty-three covert and two overt offensive regime changes against the Soviet Union and its allies as a part of a strategy known as "rollback."[66] American leaders hoped, by replacing adversarial regimes in Soviet-aligned states with leaders more favorable to the West, they would fracture the Soviet alliance bloc and potentially gain a new ally for themselves, thereby shifting the balance of power in their favor. As Table 2 illustrates, Washington's offensive regime changes came in two waves. The first wave, in the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, sought to "encourage and assist the satellite peoples in resistance to their Soviet-dominated regimes."[67] Toward this end, Washington covertly provided aid and arms to several anti-Soviet secessionist movements within the Soviet Union as well as anti-Soviet dissident groups in the Eastern European countries that the USSR had come to dominate as a result of World War II.[68] A 1949 NSC memo explained America's goal: "Our over-all aim with respect to the satellite states should be the gradual reduction and eventual elimination of preponderant power from Eastern Europe without resort to war."[69] The first wave of interventions ended in the mid-1950s after Washington realized the Soviet Union's crackdown on its domestic opponents had successfully

[66]For more on rollback, see: Grose, *Operation Rollback*; Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*; Bodenheimer and Gould, *Rollback!*; Scott, *Deciding to Intervene*; Chester Pach, "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1 March 2006): 75–88.

[67]NSC 174, "Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe," 11 December 1953, *FRUS, 1952–54, Eastern Europe; Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, vol. 8 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998), doc. 51.

[68]For an overview of these operations, see: Grose, *Operation Rollback*; Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*.

[69]NSC, "NSC-58 on Policy Toward Eastern Europe," 5 October 1949, National Security Archive [NSA], "Soviet Flashpoints" Collection, http://www.fransamaltingvongeusau.com/documents/dl1/h5/1.5.13.pdf.

Table 2. US-backed offensive covert regime change attempts during the Cold War.

Date	Target State	Target Government(s)	Tactics
1949–56	Albania	Single-party: Hoxha	Dissidents
1949–56	Belarusian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1949–56	Bulgaria	Single-party: Dimitrov and Cherenkov	Dissidents
1949–68	China	Single-party: Mao	Dissidents
1949–56	Czechoslovakia	Single-party: Gottwaldov and Zapotocky	Dissidents
1949–56	East Germany	Single-party: Pieck	Dissidents
1949–56	Estonian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1949–56	Hungary	Single-party: Rakosi	Dissidents
1949–56	Latvian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1949–56	Lithuanian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1949–56	Poland	Single-party: Bierut and Zawadzki	Dissidents
1949–56	Romania	Single-party Personal: Gheorghiu-Dej	Dissidents
1949–59	Soviet Union/Russian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1949–56	Ukrainian SSR	Single-party: Stalin and Khrushchev	Dissidents
1950–53	North Korea	Single-party Personal: Kim	Dissidents
1958–68	Tibet	Single-party: Mao	Dissidents
1961–64	North Vietnam	Single-party: Ho	Dissidents
1961–68	Cuba[a]	Single-party Personal: Castro	Assassination, dissidents
1979–89	Afghanistan	Soviet-occupied: Karmal and Najibullah	Dissidents
1980–89	Nicaragua[b]	Single-party: Ortega	Democracy promotion, dissidents
1981–89	Poland	Single-party: Jaruzelski	Democracy promotion
1982–89	Cambodia	Single-party: Samrin	Dissidents
1982–89	Libya	Personal: Gaddafi	Coup, dissidents

[a]Classified as a hegemonic operation until 1961, when Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union was solidified.
[b]Classified as a hegemonic operation until 1980, when Nicaragua's alliance with the Soviet Union was solidified

eliminated all plausible challengers to its rule within Eastern Europe.[70] Washington largely abstained from offensive regime change for the next twenty-five years until the reemergence of powerful anti-Soviet movements with the Soviet bloc again provided the United States with plausible groups to support. The second wave of offensive operations began under President Jimmy Carter, who initiated limited covert campaigns in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Nicaragua.[71] Ronald Reagan expanded these operations, unsuccessfully tried to destabilize Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya, and initiated a covert effort to support the Solidarity movement in Poland. NSC 75, in 1983, explained the objective of these efforts: "To contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism by competing effectively on a sustained

[70]NSC 174, Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council on United States Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe."

[71]On Afghanistan, see White House, "Findings Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, Concerning Operations in Foreign Countries Other Than Those Intended Solely for the Purpose of Intelligence Collection," 3 July 1979, NARA, https://drive.google.com/open?id=1DIL2a9gA1dCttKn5rJjN7Leja_d_s-Sg; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (London: Penguin, 2004). On Cambodia, see: White House, "National Security Decision Directive 158: United States Policy in Southeast Asia (The Kampuchea Problem)," 9 January 1985, Ronald Reagan Library [hereafter RRL]; White House, "National Security Decision Directive 319: United States Policy towards Indochina," 14 November 1988, Federation of American Scientists [hereafter FAS], https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-319.htm. On Nicaragua, see: White House, "Findings Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961," 19 September 1983, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/1-Reagan%20Finding%209-19-83%20(IC%2000203).pdf; Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne, ed., *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York: The New Press, 1993); Lisa Klobuchar, *The Iran-Contra Affair: Political Scandal Uncovered* (Mankato, MN: Capstone, 2008).

basis with the Soviet Union in all international arenas … US polices should seek wherever possible to encourage Soviet allies to distance themselves from Moscow in foreign policy and to move toward democratization domestically."[72]

While offensive operations target current military adversaries, preventive regime changes attempt to stop a government from taking certain actions—like increasing their military capabilities or joining a rival alliance—that may make their state more of a threat in the future. By installing a leader who will not take those actions, Washington hoped to maintain the status quo and minimize its future security threats. The logic behind preventive regime change is similar to the logic of preventive war: the intervening state hopes to prevent a change in the status quo it fears will weaken its current military position.[73] In many Cold War cases, the United States was not particularly concerned about a direct shift in the relative balance of power toward the target state, which often was weak and nonthreatening on its own. Instead, US policymakers feared that if the target government were to ally with Moscow, the Soviet alliance network would gain in power compared to the American-led alliance network. To prevent this from happening, Washington attempted to install a foreign leader who would ally with the United States instead, thereby eliminating a future threat, decreasing the military power of the Soviet alliance network, and bolstering the American alliance network's relative power.

As Table 3 illustrates, Washington's launched twenty-five covert and one overt preventive regime changes during the Cold War as part of its strategy of "containment."[74] The goal of these operations, as laid out in NSC 10/2, was to provide "assistance to underground resistance organizations, guerillas and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world."[75] US policymakers feared that if they did not act, the state would ally with the Soviet Union, increasing the relative power of the Soviet bloc and paving the way for additional defections.[76] As Table 3 shows, the location of these missions shifted over time as the superpowers fought for influence within different geographic regions. The earliest covert preventive operations followed shortly after World War II, as the Truman administration sought to

[72]On Poland, see: "National Security Decision Directive 75: U.S. Relations with the U.S.S.R.," 17 January 1983, FAS, https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf.

[73]Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (October 1987): 82–107; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 379–414; Silverstone, *Preventive War and American Democracy*.

[74]On the emergence of containment as US policy, see Marc Trachtenberg, "Making Grand Strategy: The Early Cold War Experience in Retrospect," *SAIS Review* 19, no. 1 (Winter–Spring 1999): 33–40; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 322–27; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Callanan, *Covert Action in the Cold War*, chap. 1.

[75]NSC Directive 10/2, Draft Report by the National Security Council, 12 May 1948.

[76]This belief was compounded by widespread acceptance of domino theory. Jerome Slater, "Dominos in Central America: Will They Fall? Does It Matter?" *International Security* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 105–34.

Table 3. US-Backed preventive covert regime change attempts during the Cold War.

Date	State	Target Government(s)	Tactics
1947–52	France	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1947–68	Italy	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1952–53	Iran	Democracy/monarchy: Mossadegh	Coup
1952–68	Japan	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1954–58	Indonesia	Democracy/personal: Sukarno & pro-Sukarno parties	Coup, dissidents, election interference
1955–57	Syria	Democracy: Multiple targets	Assassination, coup
1957–58	Lebanon	Democracy: Leftist and Arab parties	Election interference
1959–73	Laos	Democracy/personal/warlord	Dissidents, election interference
1960	Congo	Democracy: Lumumba	Assassination, coup
1963	South Vietnam	Personal: Diem	Coup
1964–72	Angola	Leftists forces/Colonial authorities	Dissidents
1964–68	Mozambique	Leftists forces/Colonial authorities	Dissidents
1964–67	Somalia	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1965–69	Thailand	Military-personal: Leftist parties	Election interference
1967–71	South Vietnam	Military: Leftist parties	Election interference
1972–75	Iraq	Single-party personal: Hussein	Dissidents
1972–73	Italy	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1974–75	Portugal	Provisional: Leftist parties	Election interference
1975–76	Angola	Single-party: Neto	Dissidents
1979–80	South Yemen	Single-party: Ismail	Dissidents
1981–82	Chad	Warlord: Libyan-backed forces	Dissidents
1981–83	Ethiopia	Military-personal: Mengistu	Dissidents
1983–88	Liberia	Personal: Doe	Democracy promotion
1984–86	Philippines	Personal: Marcos	Democracy promotion
1986–88	Angola	Single-party: Dos Santos	Dissidents

consolidate anticommunist strongholds in Italy, France, and Japan. Dwight D. Eisenhower later expanded America's covert operations into the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to provide "support for indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world."[77] NSC 162/2 warned in 1953 that if the United States failed to take action in these states, "their vast manpower, their essential raw materials, and their potential for growth are such that their absorption within the Soviet camp would greatly, perhaps decisively, alter the world balance of power to our detriment."[78]

A third type of regime change, hegemonic interventions, are designed to help the intervening state acquire or maintain hegemony over a geographic region it considers its sphere of influence. Toward this end, hegemonic operations aim to create or maintain a hierarchical political relationship between the intervening and target states. According to David A. Lake, "Hierarchy exists when one actor, the dominant state, possesses authority over another actor, the subordinate state."[79] The strength of a hierarchical

[77]NSC, Directive 5412: Note from Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay) to the National Security Council, 15 March 1954, *FRUS, 1950–1955, The Intelligence Community 1950–1955* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2007), doc. 171.

[78]NSC, "NSC 162/2: Basic National Security Policy," 30 October 1953, FAS, https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-162-2.pdf.

[79]David Lake, "Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 56.

relationship can be measured by determining how many of the weaker state's actions the dominant state can effectively regulate.[80] Hegemonic operations seek to maintain or increase this relationship. They can be either offensive in nature—as an aspiring hegemon works to achieve regional hegemony—or preventive in nature—as an established hegemon aims to prevent defections from an existing hierarchical interstate order. Unlike the preceding two categories, however, hegemonic operations do not require that the target state necessarily pose a current or future military threat to the target state. Nor do they require that the target state be in danger of allying with an adversarial great power. Instead, the unifying characteristic of hegemonic operations is that the intervening state hopes to install a foreign leader who will acquiesce to a hierarchical relationship with their state as part of the intervener's effort to achieve regional hegemony.

Scholars have outlined a variety of military, political, and economic benefits of regional hegemony. To begin, by definition, regional hegemons do not have to contend with the security threats from other great powers within their sphere of influence, which frees them to expand into other geographic regions without facing a direct threat to their homeland.[81] Subordinate states may further bolster the security interests of hegemons by following them into war and providing them with material resources that bolster their military strength.[82] Moreover, the power imbalance inherent within a hegemonic system allows the hegemon to influence the domestic political and economic behavior of weaker states in its favor, allowing the hegemon to enjoy the benefits of deeper economic integration and gaining support from subordinate states in international institutions.[83]

As Table 4 illustrates, the United States attempted eighteen covert and three overt hegemonic regime changes during the Cold War to maintain its position of regional hegemony within the Western Hemisphere and the military, economic, and political benefits that go along with that position. These benefits include, in the words of NSC 144/1, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Latin America;" "(a) hemisphere solidarity in support of our world policies, particularly in the UN and other international organizations; (b) an orderly political and economic development in Latin America so that the states in the area will be more effective members of the hemisphere system and increasingly important participants in the economic and political affairs of the free world;

[80]Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics*, 27.
[81]Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 34–35, 40–42, 168–70; Fazal, *State Death*.
[82]David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 12; Lake, "Escape from the State of Nature."
[83]Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 1–34; Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, chap. 4; David A. Lake, "Regional Hierarchy: Authority and Local International Order," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. S1 (February 2009): 35–58.

Table 4. US-backed hegemonic covert regime change attempts during the Cold War.

Date	Target State	Target Government(s)	Tactic(s)
1952–54	Guatemala	Democracy: Arbenz	Coup, dissidents
1960–61	Cuba	Single-party personal: Castro	Assassination, dissidents
1960–61	Dominican Republic	Personal: Trujillo	(Inadvertent assassination), coup
1961–71	British Guiana/Guyana	Colonial/democracy: Leftist parties	Coup, election interference
1961–62	Dominican Republic	Democracy: Leftist parties	Election interference
1962–73	Chile	Democracy: Allende & leftist parties	Coup, election interference
1963	Haiti	Personal: Duvalier	Dissidents
1963–66	Bolivia	Single-party: Leftist parties	Election interference
1964	Brazil	Democracy: Goulart	Coup
1965–68	Dominican Republic	Foreign-occupied/personal: Leftist parties	Election interference
1965–69	Haiti	Personal: Duvalier	Dissidents
1971	Bolivia	Military: Torres	Coup
1979	Grenada	Personal: Bisho	Democracy promotion
1979–80	Nicaragua	Single-party: Ortega	Democracy promotion, dissidents
1982–85	Suriname	Military: Bouterse	Democracy promotion
1984–89	Chile	Military-personal: Pinochet	Democracy promotion
1986–89	Haiti	Multiple: Military/military-personal	Democracy promotion
1987–89	Panama	Military-personal: Noriega	Coup

(c) The safeguarding of the hemisphere, including sea and air approaches, by individual and collective defense measures against external aggression through the development of indigenous military forces and local bases necessary for hemisphere defense."[84] Despite occurring during the Cold War, these operations did not reflect a specific Cold War strategy per se, and in most hegemonic cases US officials did not believe direct Soviet encroachment into the country was imminent. Instead, I found US leaders were primarily driven by the desire to maintain America's position of hegemony—a goal that has driven US policy in the region since the Monroe Doctrine (1823) and has survived past the Cold War.[85] In the Cold War context, US policymakers believed one key to maintaining American hegemony was to ensure individuals who acquiesced to America's position in the region ran Latin American states. If Latin American leaders who openly rejected this arrangement assumed power, US officials feared other states would be emboldened to defect from the region's hierarchical order, which, in turn, could eventually lead to foreign intervention by another great power. Lars Schoultz explains: "Instability per se is not the issue, of course. Few U.S. policymakers would be concerned if Salvadorans or Guatemalans or Haitians spent their time shooting one

[84]NSC, NSC Guatemala, 19 August 1953, *FRUS, 1952–1954, The American Republics*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1983), doc. 424.

[85]James Monroe, "Seventh Annual Message to Congress," 2 December 1823, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/monroe.asp; commonly referred to as the Monroe Doctrine. On the Monroe Doctrine's importance to US foreign policy, see: Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Martin Sicker, *The Geopolitics of Security in the Americas: Hemispheric Denial from Monroe to Clinton* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002); Mark T. Gilderhus, "The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2006): 5–16; Lester D. Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

another were it not for the fact that one possible consequence of this instability might be to provide hostile forces with the opportunity to seize territory in Latin America and then use it to threaten U.S. security."[86]

How Does Regime Change Work?

With the three types of security interest that motivated America's Cold War regime changes described, the question naturally arises of how US policymakers expected regime change to secure these interests. How does regime change work? And under what conditions will policymakers pursue regime change rather than another foreign policy tool?

Regime change has a unique appeal for policymakers. Unlike most other foreign policy tools, regime change offers the possibility of altering the underlying preferences and interests of a foreign government. Most foreign policy tools to alter another state's behavior rely upon coercive diplomacy or brute force. While these efforts may succeed in temporarily changing the other state's behavior, they do not change the target government's underlying interests—meaning if the interstate dispute is more than a one-time disagreement, the two states are likely to clash again. In these cases, toppling an uncooperative regime may seem preferable to repeatedly attempting to persuade it to act against its interests. Regime change promises this type of longer-lasting solution to interstate conflicts by installing foreign leaders who share similar policy preferences.[87] In theory, such a move could fundamentally transform the two states' relationship. If the operation succeeds, the newly installed foreign leader should act in the intervening state's interests without having to be told to do so. This, in turn, should reduce the intervening state's uncertainty over the new regime's intentions and pave the way for future cooperation.[88] At least in theory, regime change thus offers the possibility of transforming a contentious relationship into a cooperative one.[89]

[86]Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 38.

[87]Other studies that articulate a version of this logic include Bueno de Mesquita and Downs, "Intervention and Democracy"; Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations," *International Security* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 43–89; Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote."

[88]On how overcoming uncertainty can improve cooperation, see: Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214; Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane, "Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions," *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (October 1985): 226–54; Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92; Brian C. Rathbun, "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (September 2007): 533–57.

[89]On the failure of regime change to change the policy preferences of foreign governments in practice, see Downes and O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

Given these potential benefits, we might reasonably expect to see states launch regime change operations quite often. Yet, compared to the frequency that states find themselves in interstate disputes, regime changes are relatively rare. This raises the question: Under what conditions are states likely to pursue regime change in response to an interstate dispute? Following the logic of regime change, we see that most interstate disputes are not good candidates for intervention. When two states face a minor or one-time dispute, traditional diplomacy or coercion will probably suffice to resolve the conflict. Considering the difficulty of successfully overthrowing another state and the potential military and political costs associated with these types of intervention, regime change would be overkill.[90] Instead, regime change is better geared toward interstate disputes where the two states have irreconcilable policy disagreements, which suggests measures short of replacing the target government are unlikely to resolve the dispute.[91]

The hardest disputes to reconcile occur when the target government has a strong incentive not to cooperate—particularly when they fear losing power should they cooperate with the intervening state.[92] As such, the most common catalysts for regime change are disputes that require the target state to take actions that would weaken its grip on power, such as relinquishing military capabilities or abandoning a fundamental position of its political platform, without which it could not maintain power domestically.[93] These disputes involve an irreconcilable alignment of preferences between the two states, which suggests the only way for the intervening state to ensure the target state will act in the former's interests over the long term is to install a leader with shared preferences.

A second important criterion for regime change is the intervening state must be able to identify a plausible alternative to the target government, which shares its policy preferences.[94] If all plausible political replacements want to pursue the same policies as their predecessors, then there is no

[90]Bruce Jentleson, "Coercive Diplomacy: Scope and Limits in the Contemporary World," *Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief* (December 2006), 7.

[91]Or, as is the case with preventive operations to influence the results of democratic elections, the intervening state foresees a political party may win the election with which it will have irreconcilable policy disagreements and intervenes to prevent this from happening. For instance, in the early 1950s the United States sought to covertly influence democratic elections in France and Italy—even though it enjoyed good relations with both states at the time—to prevent socialist/communist parties from winning the elections, for they feared that if those parties were to win they may have steered France and Italy into the Soviet camp.

[92]Analogous to Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes"; Willard-Foster, "A Peace Too Costly to Keep: Why Major Powers Overthrow Foreign Governments" makes this argument explicitly.

[93]Bueno de Mesquita et al., "An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace"; Wolford, Reiter, and Carrubba, "Information, Commitment and War"; Downes, "The Causes of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change in Interstate Wars"; Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 169–203.

[94]Levin makes a similar argument regarding great-power electoral interventions. Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote."

benefit to regime change.[95] Consequently, before intervention, we should see policymakers attempting to identify and support foreign leaders whom they believe share their interests. Just wanting the same thing as the intervening state, however, may not be enough to be deemed a plausible alternative—the best alternatives also can put those policies into action. Interveners should, therefore, attempt to identify foreign leaders with the capacity to rule the target state, such as those with preexisting domestic support or previous experience ruling.[96]

For this reason, the availability of plausible political alternatives was often the decisive factor in determining if/when the United States intervened during the Cold War. For instance, policymakers in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations repeatedly debated overthrowing South Vietnamese premier Ngo Dinh Diem throughout his nine-year reign (1954–63).[97] Although Diem was an American ally, US policymakers felt his regime's incompetence in fighting his country's communist insurgency was paving the way for a communist takeover of Southeast Asia, and they hoped to install a more competent leader to prevent this from happening. Despite debating whether to launch a coup on multiple occasions, Eisenhower administration officials ultimately decided against regime change because they could not identify a better alternative to Diem. In December 1954, for instance, the State Department wrote, "We will continue to support Diem, because there is no one who can take his place who would serve US interests any better."[98] Likewise, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles lamented: "We have accepted him because we knew of no one better."[99] Conversely, in 1963, when US officials were again approached by South Vietnamese generals seeking support for a coup, the Pentagon Papers recount, "In this context a month-long policy review took place in Washington and in Vietnam. It was fundamentally a search for alternatives. In both places the issue was joined between those who saw no realistic alternatives to Diem … and those who felt that the war against the VC (Vietcong) would not possibly be won with Diem in power and

[95]Downes and O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

[96]Alexander Downes, "Catastrophic Success? Assessing the Effectiveness of Foreign-Imposed Regime Change" (paper presented at the 2009 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Toronto, Ontario, 3–6 September 2009); Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, "Perfect Storms? Political Instability in Imposed Polities and the Futures of Iraq and Afghanistan," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (December 2008): 880–915; Goran Peic and Dan Reiter, "Foreign-Imposed Regime Change, State Power and Civil War Onset, 1920–2004," *British Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 3 (July 2011): 453–75; W. Michael Reisman, "The Manley O. Hudson Lecture: Why Regime Change Is (Almost Always) a Bad Idea," *American Journal of International Law* 98, no. 3 (July 2004): 516–25.

[97]Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, chap. 7.

[98]Pentagon Papers [1969], *United States–Vietnam Relations*, pt. 4, A.3, *Evolution of the War: U.S. and France's Withdrawal from Vietnam, 1954–1956*, 22, https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-A-3.pdf.

[99]Ibid., 23.

preferred, therefore, to push for a coup of some sort."[100] Ultimately, the latter group gained the upper hand after providing "fuller information on the coup plot, including a lineup of forces and the proposed plan of action" and in November 1963, Diem was ousted with US support.[101]

Finally, it is interesting that US policymakers did not appear to believe that any one type of government would be more likely to share its policy preferences. Some ideological theories of regime change maintain that states should install governments of the same regime type because similar regimes are said to hold similar interests, and if true, we should see the United States attempting to install democracies. As aforementioned, however, this was not the case. Although 12.5 percent of America's Cold War interventions sought to incite democratic revolutions in authoritarian states, 10.6 percent of cases sought to do the opposite by overthrowing democratically elected leaders and replacing them with autocrats. Most regime changes, however, did not attempt to change the regime type of the target state: either they aimed to replace one autocrat with another or they sought to influence the results of democratic elections. Rather than consistently promoting any particular regime type, US leaders appear more pragmatic. When policymakers believed most of the population shared their interests and that a US-friendly party could win national elections, they backed democratic groups. When only a smaller subset of the population shared their preferences, they supported whatever type of authoritarian government (military junta, single-party, personalist, etc.) that would bring that group to power. In nearly 70 percent of Cold War cases, US policymakers believed an authoritarian regime was the best plausible alternative, but the logic of regime change suggests Washington's overall preference for authoritarianism is not set in stone and that policymakers should be open to supporting democracy when they believe pro-American parties are likely to win national elections.

Why Do States Conduct Regime Change Operations Covertly versus Overtly?

Having discussed why policymakers may want to launch a regime change, the question arises of how best to conduct that operation. Why do policymakers conduct some regime changes covertly and others overtly? To evaluate that question, this section analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of covert versus overt action and introduces a framework to explain the policy tradeoffs faced by policymakers. In the broadest terms, I argue

[100]Pentagon Papers [1969], *United States–Vietnam Relations*, pt. 4, B.5, *Evolution of the War: The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, May–November 1963*, iv, https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-B-5.pdf.
[101]Ibid., v.

policymakers decide whether and how to conduct a regime change operation by weighing the potential benefits of an intervention against the mission's potential costs and its likelihood of success. When confronted with these tradeoffs, I found US policymakers generally preferred to conduct regime changes covertly to minimize the regime change's potential military, economic, and reputational costs, even though they understood covert operations were less likely to successfully overthrow their targets than their overt alternatives.

Lowering Costs

Whether a regime change is conducted covertly versus overtly has a strong impact on an operation's potential costs. Specifically, I find covert conduct lowers a regime change's potential security, economic, and reputational costs. Why? Covert operations are designed to ensure "plausible deniability" of the intervening state's role in the operation by entirely concealing the intervener's actions or creating enough ambiguity about their level of involvement that they can disavow participation. Toward this end, all American covert operations during the Cold War involved collusion with foreign actors, who were positioned to take the blame if the operation was exposed or failed to topple its target.[102]

By definition, regime changes threaten the political survival of their targets, and with their survival at stake, governments targeted for regime change have a strong incentive to fight. Consequently, we see that conflicts, where one side possesses regime change objectives, tend to militarily escalate. Nevertheless, covert conduct lowers a regime change's potential security costs because if the intervening state can successfully conceal its role in the operation, it should not become a target of military retaliation. Indeed, even in cases where the target state suspects the intervening state's role, covert conduct may minimize the likelihood of retaliation by obfuscating the extent of the intervener's actions and avoiding a direct challenge to the target state's authority.[103] During operations targeting the Soviet Union and its allies, for instance, US planners strongly preferred covert conduct to minimize the chances of a military confrontation with Moscow—understanding an overt intervention into the Soviet bloc "would in all probability start a global war."[104] NSC Memorandum 20/1, which discussed

[102]In theory, there may be covert interventions where the intervening state does not collude with domestic actors in the target country (for instance, covertly meddling in a foreign election to help one party win without the knowledge of that party). However, this was not the case in any of the cases that I analyzed.

[103]Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Austin Carson, "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War," *International Organization* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 103–31.

[104]"National Security Council Directive 5608: U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe," 3 July 1956, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114689.

targeting Soviet-backed regimes in Eastern Europe, warned in August 1948, "We cannot say, of course, that the Russians will sit by and permit the satellites to extricate themselves from Russian control in this way. We cannot be sure that at some point in this process the Russians will not choose to resort to violence." As a result, the memo concludes the US should only "make possible a liberation of the satellite countries in ways which do not create any unanswerable challenge to Soviet prestige."[105]

Even in situations when the intervening state's role becomes exposed, covert conduct may lower the operation's military costs because foreign actors conduct the heavy lifting of the fighting. For instance, four Americans and 114 Cuban exiles were killed during the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Although the Bay of Pigs is commonly perceived in the United States as a costly debacle, compared to the projected military costs of an overt intervention, these costs were minimal. For instance, a declassified 1962 casualty estimate for a direct American invasion of Cuba projected "up to 18,500 casualties in the first ten days of the operation" and even warned of the possibility of Soviet nuclear retaliation.[106]

Covert conduct also lowers a mission's potential economic costs because the resources necessary to instigate a regime change covertly are typically much lower than those necessary for overt missions.[107] Precise data on the economic costs of many covert interventions are difficult to obtain and, depending upon how costs are calculated, these figures can vary significantly. Nonetheless, for operations where data are available, the costs (adjusted for inflation to 2018 US dollars) are typically far lower than overt interventions: for instance, the US spent between $937,000 and $187 million in Iran (1952–53), between $28 and $65.4 million in Guatemala (1952–54), approximately $75.7 million in Chile (1962–73), $344,000 during the 1963 coup in South Vietnam, $2.5 million in Bolivia (1971), and $74.5 million supporting Kurdish secessionists in Iraq (1972–75).[108] For

[105]NSC 20/1, "U.S. Objectives with Respect to Russia," in *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950*, ed. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 173–203.

[106]Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Memorandum for the President, Subject: Evaluation of the Effects on US Operational Plans of Soviet Army Equipment Introduced into Cuba," 2 November 1962, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB397/docs/doc%2022%2011-2-62%20memo%20to%20JFK%20re%20invasion%20plans.pdf.

[107]In theory, an overt operation to replace a country's leader through a decapitating airstrike could feasibly be accomplished at a similarly low cost. In practice, however, this has never occurred. Not only are decapitating airstrikes difficult to pull off, even if the foreign leader was killed during the attack, the intervener would likely not be able to control who takes power afterward. Given this, states may be reluctant to attempt decapitating airstrikes. According to Robert Pape, for instance, the United States unsuccessfully attempted decapitating airstrikes on enemy leaders on six occasions. Nevertheless, five of these attempts were in conjunction with larger overt interventions: Iraq (1991, 1998, 2003), Serbia (1999), and Afghanistan (2001). Only in Libya (1986) did the United States unsuccessfully attempt a regime change through an airstrike alone. Robert A. Pape, "The True Worth of Air Power," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 2 (March/April 2004): 116–30.

[108]On Iran, see Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 210; On Guatemala, see Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Policy of Foreign Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 138; On Chile, see Church Committee, *Covert Action in Chile, 1963–1973* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1975), 95; On South Vietnam, se:

comparison, the United States spent $338.3 million overtly overthrowing Grenada in 1983 and $331 million overtly overthrowing Panama in 1989.[109]

The same holds true for larger covert operations as well. For instance, the United States spent $390 million during the Bay of Pigs invasion.[110] While this may seem quite costly, by comparison, the United States spent roughly $1.37 billion during the thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis without ever setting foot onshore.[111] Even the costliest of America's covert Cold War interventions—Operation Cyclone to support Mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan during the 1980s—is estimated to have cost $6.6 billion.[112] While this number is substantial, it is still a small fraction of the $20 billion the United States spent to topple the Taliban regime in 2001 and the $2 trillion the United States has spent on nation building in the country since then.[113] Case studies of America's covert interventions show US policymakers were impressed by the cost efficiency of covert action.[114] Debating regime change in Albania in 1949, for instance, analysts remarked, "for peanuts the US could get a friendly government in Albania."[115] Similarly, John F. Kennedy wrote, "Why so little?" in margin of a 1961 memo next to the $660,000 the United States had allocated for covert "'Psychological Operations'" in North Vietnam.[116]

Finally, covert action lowers potential reputational costs because it allows the intervening state to behave hypocritically—it may secretly act in ways that contradict its purported values, public positions, and legal obligations. For one, as aforementioned, covert regime change operations violate

Testimony of Lucien Conein to the Church Committee, 20 June 1975, Mary Ferrell Foundation, Church Committee Boxed Files, http:///www.maryferrell.org/php/showlist.php?docset=1015, 68–73; On Bolivia, see Department of State, Memorandum for the 40 Committee, Subject: Bolivia, 29 June, 1971, *FRUS, 1969–1976*, vol. E-10, *Documents on the American Republics, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2009), doc. 104; On Iraq, see William J. Daugherty, *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 175.

[109]For Grenada, see "Operation Urgent Fury: The 1983 U.S. Intervention in Grenada—Joseph Washecheck," http://www.pnsr.org/?p=842; For Panama, see United States General Accounting Office, "Panama: Costs of the U.S. Invasion of Panama," (General Accounting Office, September 1990), 3.

[110]Jim Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), xv.

[111]Assistant Secretary of Defense, "Increased Costs Associated with Activities Incident to Cuba," 24 January 1963, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB397/.

[112]Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001), 68.

[113]For the cost of the initial invasion, see Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas E. Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model," *International Security* 30, no. 3 (Winter 2005/06): 124–60; On the long-term costs, see Watson Institute, "US Budgetary Costs of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2018: $5.6 Trillion," https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2017/USBudgetaryCostsFY2018.

[114]William J. Daugherty, "Covert Action: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195375886.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195375886-e-0037#oxfordhb-9780195375886-note-193.

[115]Quoted in Albert Lulushi, *Operation Valuable Fiend: The CIA's First Paramilitary Strike against the Iron Curtain* (New York: Arcade, 2014), 42.

[116]Quoted in Jones, *Death of a Generation*, 27.

numerous norms publicly held by Washington—respect for state sovereignty, peoples' right of self-determination, respect for liberal values and institutions, and international human rights. Covert action also allows states to conceal their role in missions that could potentially harm their strategic position, such as getting caught overthrowing an ally, which would undermine their reputation on the international stage. Finally, covert action allows the state to conceal controversial aspects of an intervention, such as collaborating with human rights abusers or other unsavory groups, from domestic and international audiences.[117]

In sum, covert action lowers the military, economic, and reputational costs associated with regime change by concealing the intervening state's role in the operation. Depending on the operation, different costs may be more salient. When targeting Soviet allies, for instance, US policymakers preferred covert conduct primarily to minimize the risk of war. During hegemonic operations in the Western Hemisphere, by contrast, Washington was less concerned with the possibility of military escalation. Instead, policymakers preferred covert conduct to minimize the reputational costs associated with targeting allies and undermining what Lake describes as the region's "social contract," namely that "dominant states must demonstrate that they cannot or will not abuse the authority that subordinates have entrusted to them."[118] Or as Henry Kissinger explained to President Nixon in 1970, "We are strongly on record in support of self-determination and respect for free elections; you are firmly on record for nonintervention in the internal affairs of the hemisphere and of accepting nations 'as they are.' It would, therefore, be very costly for us to act in ways that appear to violate those principles, and Latin Americans and others in the world will view our policy as a test of the credibility of our rhetoric."[119]

Less Chance of Success

While covert operations may be less costly, the downside of covert action is the need to maintain plausible deniability inherent in covert action impedes interveners' efforts to translate their state's power into successful outcomes. One reason why is the size of covert operations are limited by the necessity of trying to avoid detection. When conducting a covert mission, interveners must choose between size and secrecy. That is, covert

[117]Gibbs, "Secrecy and International Relations"; Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*; O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, chaps. 6–8.
[118]David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 14.
[119]White House, "Memorandum for the President, Subject: NSC Meeting November 6–Chile," 5 November 1970, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%204%20-%20Kissinger%20to%20Nixon%20re%20Nov%206%20NSC%20meeting.pdf.

interventions face a fundamental tradeoff between wielding resources and plausibly denying their role in an intervention. The larger a covert operation becomes, the more people become privy to its details and the less likely it is to remain secret. States thus struggle to covertly organize a sufficiently powerful opposition movement capable of overthrowing the government without revealing their role in the operation. Or as Secretary of State Dulles lamented while trying to overthrow the Indonesian government, "You reach a point where it is extremely difficult to do much more without showing your hand."[120] This tradeoff is a recurrent theme in numerous histories of covert operations. For instance, the official CIA review of the Bay of Pigs operation concludes, "The myth of 'plausible deniability' was the caveat that determined the CIA would be the principal implementing arm for the anti-Castro effort. From inception to termination, 'deniability' would be the albatross around the necks of Agency planners."[121] Overt missions do not face this same restriction and are free to use additional resources whenever necessary. In comparison to covert operations, overt missions also generally have more flexibility, better supervision over actors on the ground, and more thorough contingency planning. The implication of this is that—while costlier—an overt operation may have a higher chance of successfully overthrowing its target. This explains why, of the six overt regime changes attempted by the United States during the Cold War, US policymakers escalated to overt conduct only after first trying and failing to overthrow the target government covertly in five cases.

Tradeoff between Costs and Effectiveness

Policymakers, therefore, face a dilemma. If they attempt a regime change covertly, its potential costs may be lower, but it is also more likely to fail. If they intervene overtly, the potential costs are higher, but they stand a better chance at overthrowing the target government. Which scenario is preferable? During the Cold War, US policymakers overwhelmingly chose the former option. American leaders appear to have believed the low potential costs of covert conduct made it worth the higher chance of failure. We can thus see policymakers pursuing covert operations despite their low predicted odds of success: for instance, a "slight remaining chance of success" in Iran (1953);[122] a "20 percent" estimate of success in Guatemala (1954);[123] "a marginal probability of success" in Cuba

[120]Dulles as quoted by John Prados, Presidents' *Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Secret Operations since World War II* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 139.
[121]Central Intelligence Agency, "An Analysis of the Cuba Operation," iii–iv, 18 January 1962, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/ciacase/EXF.pdf.
[122]Kermit Roosevelt quoted in Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 172.
[123]Eisenhower quoted in Evans Thomas, *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 120.

(1961);[124] and a "one in ten chance" in Chile (1970).[125] Taken together, this suggests that, when faced with this tradeoff between minimizing costs and maximizing the likelihood of success during the Cold War, US policymakers opted for the former, which explains why they pursued covert action more than ten times more frequently than overt interventions. Indeed, in many cases, covert conduct lowered the regime change's anticipated costs to such an extent that it shifted the cost-benefit calculation from the point where intervention was not desirable to where it became worthwhile. Given this tradeoff, as the stakes of an intervention grow interveners become more likely, ceteris paribus, to intervene overtly to maximize the likelihood of success.[126]

Although I expect the tradeoff between cost and effectiveness to hold true for all covert interventions, states do not necessarily have to come to the same conclusion as the United States did during the Cold War in their preference for covert action. Instead, the framework highlights the tradeoffs and choices interveners make when deciding whether to conduct a regime change covertly versus overtly. Policymakers should calibrate their own preference for covert versus overt action depending on their state's perceived costs and odds of success for an intervention. During the Cold War, American leaders held a strong preference for covert action to minimize military and reputational costs: the bipolar international system meant that escalation with the Soviet Union was a real concern, and the ideological nature of the Cold War meant US policymakers did not want to be caught engaging in illiberal practices. However, as a state's political circumstances change so too may its preference for covert or overt action. In the unipolar era (1991–2018), by contrast, Washington is freer to overtly intervene without fear of retaliation from another great power, which may help to explain why the United States was willing to overtly overthrow Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).[127] Nevertheless, the Bush administration appears to have dramatically underestimated the costs—now estimated at over $5.6 trillion—associated with occupying and rebuilding these countries afterward.[128] Had his administration had a more accurate appraisal of these wars' true costs prior to intervening, they may have decided against regime change or intervened covertly. Subsequent American administrations

[124]McNamara quoted Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83.
[125]Central Intelligence Agency, "Richard Helms's Notes on Meeting with the President of Chile," 15 September 1970, NSA, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%203%20-%20Handwritten%20instructions%20from%20Nixon%20Sep%2015%201970.pdf.
[126]This point and other rationales for overt action developed in O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*, chap. 3.
[127]Nuno P. Monteiro, "Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12): 9–40.
[128]Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld estimated that the Iraq War would cost "something under $50 billion." "Rumsfeld Briefs Press," *CNN*, 19 January 2003, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0301/19/se.01.html; Watson Institute, "US Budgetary Costs of Post-9/11 Wars through FY2018: $5.6 Trillion."

appear more skeptical of overt regime change due to its high costs. President Barack Obama repeatedly expressed reservations about overt regime change, and his administration decided to intervene covertly in Syria (2012–17) and pursued a joint covert/overt intervention designed to minimize direct American military involvement in Libya (2011).[129] President Donald Trump repeatedly criticized the Iraq War and the tactic of overt regime change during the 2016 campaign.[130] And, if recent policy debates over regime change in Iran is any indication, the Trump administration also appears to prefer covert conduct to avoid the possibility of becoming entangled in a costly war.[131]

Looking beyond the United States

Because this article focused on US-backed cases, the question naturally arises of whether we can apply its insights beyond the United States. Nothing in this article's arguments regarding the strategic objectives and logic of regime change nor the decision-making framework for covert and overt conduct is limited to the United States, so future research can access its generalizability as additional covert cases are uncovered. Although obtaining reliable data on foreign covert actions is difficult, where limited information is currently available, I have found this data to be consistent. For instance, Rory Cormac's detailed analysis of British covert interventions since World War II shows British leaders launched numerous covert regime changes in pursuit of similar security-oriented objectives as the United States. During the Cold War, in fact, Cormac shows that the United Kingdom frequently intervened alongside the United States during many of the covert interventions discussed here.[132] Soviet-backed regime changes during the Cold War, by contrast, mirrored their American counterparts in terms of objectives and conduct: Moscow conducted offensive operations to divide the American alliance system and help communist parties win elections in Italy and France; preventive operations into multiple civil wars—including in Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, and Mozambique—to prevent those countries from joining the Western camp; and hegemonic operations to carve out a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.[133] Despite overt interventions in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan

[129]On Obama's skepticism for overt regime change, see Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *Atlantic Monthly* 317, no. 3 (April 2016): 70–90. For a brief history of US actions in Libya, see Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall," *New York Times*, 27 February 2016. On Syria, see Gareth Porter, "How America Armed Terrorists in Syria," *American Conservative*, 22 June 2017.
[130]For one example, see Gerald F. Seib, "Listen Closely: Donald Trump Proposes Big Mideast Strategy Shift," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2016.
[131]Jonah Shepp, "Trump's Iran Strategy: Regime Change on the Cheap," *New York Magazine*, 30 July 2018.
[132]Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[133]Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

(1979), the Soviet Union also demonstrated a similar strong preference for covert action to minimize the chances of military conformation.[134] Since the Cold War, Russia has been accused of using covert action to help pro-Russian leaders assume power in Eastern Europe as part of its bid reestablish a sphere of influence in the region.[135] US intelligence agencies have also accused Russia of covertly meddling in democratic elections in the United States and Western Europe to support candidates sympathetic to Russia's strategic objectives and to "undermine the credibility of the US-led liberal democratic order."[136]

Given the centrality of covert regime change in current foreign policy debates, it is important for scholars to understand when and why states will pursue these interventions. Nevertheless, existing scholarship on regime change has focused very heavily on overt cases. To redress that problem, this article has introduced a new theory regarding the strategic objectives of America's Cold War regime changes and a framework to explain policymakers' reasoning to intervene covertly versus overtly.

[134]Carson, *Secret Wars*; Carson, "Facing Off and Saving Face."
[135]Thomas Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[136]Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Background to 'Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections': The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution," 6 January 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.