Competitive Intervention and Its Consequences for Civil Wars

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores two interrelated puzzles about external intervention and internal war. The first asks why rebels, governments, and third party interveners often continue to invest in costly and protracted conflicts rather than sue for peace and a negotiated settlement. The second considers the consequences of these behaviors for temporal variation in the average duration and global prevalence of civil wars. A central finding that emerges concerns the critical role of competitive intervention—two sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third party states to both government and rebel combatants—in the dynamics and intractability of civil wars across time and around the globe. Developing a generalizable theory of competitive intervention, the dissertation explains the distortionary effects this form of external meddling has on domestic bargaining processes, describes the unique strategic dilemmas it entails for third party interveners, and links its varying prevalence to international systemic change. In doing so, it moves beyond popular anecdotes about “proxy wars” by deriving theoretically-grounded propositions about the strategic logics motivating competitive intervention in civil wars. It also uncovers a heretofore overlooked feature of this form of intervention—namely, that “not losing” is often more important than “winning” from the perspective of third party interveners under the shadow of inadvertent escalation. The theory is tested with a mixed-method design that combines statistical analyses of all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009 with detailed case studies of competitive intervention in Angola (1975-1991) and Afghanistan (1979-1992). The dissertation’s theoretical and empirical results shed new light on the international dimensions of civil war, address ongoing debates concerning the utility of intervention as a conflict management tool, and inform policy prescriptions aimed at resolving some of today’s most violent internal conflicts.

Thesis Supervisor: Roger D. Petersen
Title: Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science
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1 Introduction

Pressing international security and foreign policy concerns manifest as a consequence of civil wars fought around the globe. The deliberate targeting of civilian populations in Syria and Iraq has generated millions of refugees that have been forced to flee across international borders, generating migration emergencies across the Middle East and in Europe; the growth of militant jihadist organizations in Africa has spawned war zones that spill over national boundaries, spreading instability across the continent; and the onset of separatist violence in Ukraine has not only created the most prolonged and deadly domestic crisis in that country since its independence from the Soviet Union, but has also sparked renewed international tensions between the West and Russia. In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the consequences of internal wars permeate the domestic boundaries of the states they afflict, resonating throughout international politics and around the globe.

So too does interstate competition affect the dynamics and outcomes of intrastate conflicts. Whether as direct participants or indirect suppliers, third party states regularly vie against one another to influence the trajectory and outcomes of civil wars. This competition manifests in the form of tens of thousands of troops that are deployed to foreign war zones, millions of rounds of ammunition that are shipped to foreign combatants, and billions of dollars of aid that are
sent to support foreign governments and rebel militias alike. Whether motivated by altruism or malevolence, interventions by external states often entail significant consequences for internal wars.

While scholars have increasingly recognized that distinctions between inter- and intra-state conflicts are often misleading, to date relatively little work has theoretically or empirically explored the mechanisms underlying the inter/intra-state conflict nexus. In this dissertation, I endeavor to fill this gap in our knowledge by situating civil wars within the broader geopolitical environment in which they take place, exploring the connections between subnational conflict processes, interstate competition, and the characteristics of the international system. I develop a generalizable theory of external intervention in internal war that challenges the traditional inter/intra-state conflict distinction while providing new inferential leverage on the behaviors of armed groups, states, and third party interveners, as well as their impacts on the trajectories of internal wars.

A central finding that emerges concerns the critical role of what I call competitive intervention—two sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third party states to both government and rebel combatants—in the intractability and global prevalence of internal wars across time and around the globe. It is the goal of this dissertation to provide a theoretical and empirical account of competitive intervention that explains its pernicious effects, documents its consequences for civil wars, and informs policy prescriptions to resolve the unique strategic dilemmas it entails.

1.1 Puzzles and Motivation

In this dissertation, I investigate two interrelated puzzles about external intervention and internal war. The first puzzle concerns the strategic logics motivating domestic combatants and their international backers when civil wars become drawn-out, protracted battles of attrition. Civil wars are costly endeavors, requiring the mobilization of thousands of fighters, often for several years; military matériel, such as weapons and ammunition; extensive logistical support and means of resupply; medical supplies, nutritious food, and clean water; and miscellaneous spare parts, oils, and fuels. These resources must be acquired by state and non-state combatant organizations
that are designed not to generate wealth, but instead to destroy it. Once the shooting starts, rebels often struggle to locate a source of supplies to replace worn out equipment and replenish expended ammunition. Governments in developing countries—the principal victims of intrastate conflict—likewise struggle to sustain campaigns against rebels that employ asymmetric tactics, operate in remote regions, or hide amongst sympathetic populations. For states and rebel groups alike, acute resource problems are a challenge inherent in armed struggle.

Given the substantial costs associated with fighting a war, an important puzzle to be explained concerns the conditions under which parties to a conflict would delay negotiated settlement in favor of continued fighting. Indeed, precisely because the prosecution of a war is so costly, opponents should have strong incentives to coordinate their expectations about a conflict’s likely outcome as soon as possible. Notably, this is the case not only for the rebel and government forces that are directly engaged in a civil war, but for the third party interveners that support them as well. While interveners rarely pay the direct costs of war—troop casualties, civilian victimization, and the destruction of property—they nonetheless often invest substantial military and financial resources to affect battlefield outcomes. These investments make sense when a domestic combatant is provided a decisive military advantage that can quickly win the war, but they become increasingly puzzling when interveners maintain their support for domestic combatants over the course of many years, or even decades. Why do intervening states continue to invest in stalemated conflicts? Why do they not do what is necessary to ensure their domestic clients win?

I argue that answering these questions requires an account of external intervention in internal war that not only describes the effects of external meddling on domestic conflict processes, but also considers the wider strategic environment that shapes and constrains intervener decision-making in foreign civil wars. To those ends, I develop a theory that integrates the microfoundations of civil wars with the macro-motivations underlying third party interventions. My theory highlights

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1. Scarcity of weapons and ammunition is a common theme in classical works on guerrilla warfare. For a discussion, see: Marsh 2007: pp. 58-59.
the ways in which interstate competition can instigate divergent and contradictory intervention responses by rival third party states, a phenomenon I call “competitive intervention.” I then describe the distortionary effects this form of external meddling entails for domestic bargaining processes, model the unique strategic dilemmas it entails for intervening powers, and explain why “not losing” can become more important than “winning” when interstate competition becomes intertwined with intrastate wars.

The second puzzle that is explored in this dissertation concerns the consequences of changing patterns of competitive intervention for systemic trends in the average duration and global prevalence of intrastate conflict. While the number of ongoing civil wars saw a steady increase throughout the Cold War era, it has declined in the post-Cold War period. The prevalence of civil conflicts generating 25 battle-related deaths per year declined by over 20 percent between 1991 and 2009; civil wars generating 1000 battle-related deaths per year declined by 50 percent. These reductions—together with analogous reductions in the prevalence of interstate conflict—have inspired claims that the international community is “winning the war on war” and that the conflicts that remain are merely “remnants of war”—opportunistic predation by criminals, thugs, and other “residual combatants.”

Today, a growing body of scholarship has emerged to call attention to the fact that, contrary to popular images of rampant warfare and suffering, the international system has actually been experiencing a period of increasing peace.

Curiously, however, those proclaiming the decline of civil war have overlooked puzzling and contradictory trends in the incidence and prevalence of intrastate conflict over time. These trends are documented in Figure 1.1, which plots the number of outbreaks, terminations, and ongoing intrastate conflicts from 1946 to 2009. Two observations merit mention. First, the figure shows that, despite a relatively constant rate of yearly conflict outbreaks, there was a gradual increase in the total number of ongoing civil wars throughout the Cold War. In other words, states were

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3. See Goldstein 2011 and Mueller 2004, respectively.
4. To the best of my knowledge, the first work to call attention to this phenomenon was Gurr, Marshall, and Khosla 2000. Since then, a growing number of studies have commented on the decline, including Human Security Centre 2005; N. P. Gleditsch 2008; Mueller 2009, 2011; Pinker 2011; Gat 2012; Human Security Report Project 2013. See also the forum discussion in Gleditsch et al. 2013, as well as recent work by Hegre et al. 2013, who predict a continued decline in armed conflict between 2010 and 2050.
subject to more or less the same risk of civil war onsets during this period; the increase in the prevalence of civil war was driven by a gradual accumulation of conflicts over time.\(^5\) Second—and in contrast to the Cold War period—the figure shows that the decline in the total number of ongoing civil wars that took place between 1991 and 2009 occurred despite a notable up-tick in the rate of conflict outbreaks each year.\(^6\) Indeed, the incidence rate nearly doubled during this period, rising from a Cold War yearly average of 3.36 outbreaks per year to a post-Cold War yearly average of 6.37 outbreaks per year.\(^7\) That the global decline in the prevalence of civil war occurred despite an *increase* in the rate of outbreaks in the post-Cold War period begs the question: What

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5. This observation was first made by Fearon and Laitin 2003: p. 75, who note that “contrary to common opinion, the prevalence of civil war in the 1990s was not due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system,” but rather “resulted from a steady, gradual accumulation of civil conflicts that began immediately after World War II.”

6. Note that outbreaks here include the initiation of new civil conflicts as well as the resumption of violence in conflicts that had previously fallen below a 25 annual battle-death threshold.

7. This increase is not simply a function of the spike in new conflicts immediately following the end of the Cold War. For example, the rate of outbreaks since 1995 has been 5.2 conflicts per year, on average.
explains changing trends in the prevalence of civil war?

I argue that answering this question necessitates a consideration of the systemic dimensions of geopolitical competition in intrastate conflicts. To those ends, I examine whether changes in the international distribution of power have affected patterns of external intervention in civil wars over time. This exercise uncovers a striking discontinuity in the prevalence of competitive intervention that coincides with the waxing and waning of civil war in the international system, suggesting a fascinating proposition—namely, that the dominant driver of trends in the global prevalence of civil war has not been conflict outbreaks, but rather conflict durations. Here again, understanding the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention is central to explaining why this has been the case.

Having laid out the puzzles that motivate this dissertation, I now turn to outline my theoretical arguments in brief, discuss their contributions for scholarship and for policy, and offer a road map for what lies ahead.

1.2 Arguments and Contributions

What effect do competitive interventions have on domestic bargaining processes during civil wars? What is the strategic logic motivating third party states during these interventions? And what are the implications of changing patterns of competitive intervention for the average duration and global prevalence of civil war over time? To answer these questions, this dissertation develops a generalizable theory that explores the microfoundations of external military assistance and internal wars, the macro-motivations that shape and constrain third party interventions, and the systemic dimensions of geopolitical competition in intrastate conflicts.

I present the theory in three steps. I begin at the micro-level, applying a dynamic bargaining model of civil war termination to explore how external military assistance distorts the bargaining process between government and rebel factions. Conceiving of violent armed struggle as a coercive bargaining process that ends when opponents coordinate their expectations about the likely outcome of a war, I identify three ways in which external support delays negotiated settlements.
First, external support decreases the domestic combatants' anticipated costs of war, thereby incentivizing continued fighting today in the interest of greater concessions in the future. Second, external support balances the domestic combatants' capabilities, thereby increasing uncertainty about the likely outcomes of future battles. Third, external support enhances informational asymmetries about the domestic combatants' willingness and ability to continue fighting, thereby complicating the coordination of expectations during negotiations to end the war. Taken together, these distortions increase the domestic combatants' value for fighting while decreasing the range of mutually acceptable settlements between them. The end result, I argue, is a prolonged civil war.

Next, I turn to the macro-level of the third party interveners, modeling competitive intervention as a mixed-motive strategic game of interdependent decision-making. I argue that while competitively intervening states have conflicting interests over the outcomes of civil wars, they also have common interests in the avoidance of mutual destruction of potential gains. The challenge for both interveners is to pursue their individual interests while avoiding damaging and dangerous escalation with one another. I explain how interveners navigate this dilemma by tacitly and explicitly communicating to establish limits in the scope of their interventions. By signaling restraint through the force postures they adopt, the targets they attack, and the types of aid they provide domestic combatants, competitive interveners find ways to control escalation vis-à-vis one another, thereby avoiding costly confrontations. Yet while these limits regulate competition, they simultaneously—and paradoxically—prevent interveners from conferring decisive military advantages on their domestic clients. In effect, the contradiction inherent in the need to intervene and the need to control escalation warps interveners' positive objectives of “winning” into negative objectives of “not losing.” This, I argue, generates protracted civil wars with little hope of decisive military victory or defeat.

This framework enables me to account for changing trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars by highlighting variation in patterns of competitive intervention over time. I point to the importance of the end of the Cold War and the attendant termination of an era of competitive interventions between the United States and the Soviet Union as central to
understanding the reversal in trends. However, I also document temporal shifts in the prevalence of competitive interventions by less powerful states, suggesting that the Cold War’s influence on civil wars extended well beyond US-Soviet proxy warfare. I point to the consequences of the superpowers’ reliance on military aid for projecting power and asserting influence and show how this assistance empowered otherwise weak client states to pursue independent foreign policy objectives. With the end of the Cold War and the dawn of the “unipolar moment,” competitive interventions have become less common and less potent. However, the causal mechanisms that link the Cold War to protracted internal conflicts continue to impact some of today’s most violent civil wars, suggesting that the much touted “decline in war” is not guaranteed to continue in the future.

By developing these arguments and testing them against the empirical record, this dissertation makes a number of novel contributions to scholarship and to policy. First, it contributes to a growing body of literature that explores the ways in which the international system conditions intrastate conflicts. To date, existing research has linked the dynamics of the international system to changes in conflict intensities,⁸ outcomes,⁹ and technologies of rebellion.¹⁰ My theory of competitive intervention complements these findings, developing an argument that moves beyond popular anecdotes about Cold War era “proxy war” by deriving theoretically-grounded propositions about the strategic logics motivating competitive interventions in civil wars. In doing so, it uncovers the conditional nature of intervention under the shadow of inadvertent escalation.¹¹ By drawing attention to the pernicious role that competitive interventions by lesser powers have

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⁸. Lacina 2006.
¹¹. By “inadvertent escalation,” I refer to an escalatory dynamic that occurs when an intervener takes actions that are not intended to be provocative, but that are nonetheless interpreted as such by an opponent. This can occur as a result of accidental confrontations, unauthorized actions, or misinterpretations of behaviors adopted by one or both sides. It can also be a consequence of a decision to violate previously established norms or informal rules that bounded a conflict in some way. Notably, this conception of the term is somewhat broader than those found in other work on escalation. Posen, for example, considers the ways in which nuclear-armed powers that are locked in a conventional military conflict might move to the use of nuclear weapons. Because his analysis is concerned with the unintended consequences of a decision to fight a large-scale conventional war, he excludes occasional and/or accidental encounters between conventional and nuclear units, focusing instead on military operations that threaten to substantially degrade the nuclear retaliatory capability of an opponent. See: Posen 1982, 1991.
played in civil wars, it also underscores the importance of a generalizable theory of competitive intervention that not only explains past conflicts, but also informs contemporary policy.

Second, by examining competitive intervention from micro, macro, and systemic perspectives, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of linking multiple levels of analysis in order to advance our understanding of civil war. To date, much of the existing literature has juxtaposed the study of micro- and macro-level processes, as though they were mutually exclusive. This is problematic not only because it is illusory, but also because it has limited how researchers have conceptualized, studied, and understood civil wars. By calling attention to the inferential leverage to be gained through multi-level theoretical integration in the study of civil war, this dissertation helps to fill a gap in the existing literature while also contributing to the theoretical and empirical development of both the interstate and civil conflict research fields.

Third, my theory and empirics draw attention to a problematic assumption held among pundits, policymakers, and political scientists alike—that external interventions into civil wars help one side win militarily or contribute to the resolution of conflict by facilitating negotiated settlement. To the contrary, I demonstrate that interventions designed to mitigate conflict often instigate countervailing interventions by interstate rivals that block the resolution of civil wars. The importance of this contribution for the policy and practice of conflict management is manifest in current debates over US policy in Syria and Ukraine. Understanding the ways in which American engagement in these civil wars is hostage to US relations with Russia is critical to the settlement of both conflicts. While the US is rightly concerned about inadvertent escalation vis-à-vis its former Cold War rival in these wars, solving the strategic dilemma competitive intervention entails is a necessary prerequisite to their termination.

Fourth, my results speak to ongoing debates over the utility of military assistance as a foreign policy instrument in an age of reduced military expenditure and shifting security strategies. To date, existing research has been overly narrow in scope, almost entirely concerned with the

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12. See, for example: Licklider 1995; Walter 1997; Carment and Rowlands 1998; Regan 2002; Walter 2002; Siqueira 2003; Amegashie and Kutsoati 2007. This literature is reviewed in more detail in Chapter 2.
effect of boots-on-the-ground military operations. More generally, no study has yet explored how rates of intervention have varied, nor have any studies examined whether the types of military assistance provided to civil war combatants have changed. By considering a broader conceptualization of military assistance and external meddling in civil wars, this dissertation can track temporal trends in patterns of military aid to uncover their varying effects on civil wars over time.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the continued evolution of the security landscape of the 21st century. A central question for scholars and policymakers alike is whether Russia’s renewed foreign policy assertiveness and China’s rise in relative power will be accompanied by the initiation of new forms of interstate competition and a reversal of the recent decline of internal war. By studying the processes driving trends in the global prevalence and average duration of intrastate conflict, this dissertation stands to inform new policy solutions that can guide American engagement with international competitors in future third party civil wars.

1.3 Looking Ahead

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2 identifies points of departure for my research questions, establishing a conceptual foundation on which to build my theory of competitive intervention in civil war. It defines key terms, discusses my theory’s scope conditions, and reviews the contributions and limitations of existing approaches to the study of third party intervention, limited war, and intrastate conflict.

Chapter 3 builds off this foundation by developing a theoretical framework to understand competitive intervention and its consequences for civil wars. I present the theory in three steps, beginning with the microfoundations of external military assistance and internal conflict, progressing to the macro-level motivations of third party interveners, and finally considering the systemic dimensions of geopolitical competition in civil wars. I conclude by describing the research design I employ to test the theory in later chapters, which combines large-N quantitative

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13. See for example: Balch-Lindsay and Enterline 2000; Cunningham 2010. An exception, Regan 2002, suffers from methodological limitations that render empirical findings suspect. I elaborate on these issues in Chapter 2.
analyses with small-N qualitative case studies.

Chapters 4 through 6 provide an empirical assessment of the theory. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative component of the dissertation, testing my arguments against rival explanations and generating estimates of the relationships between key variables of interest. It analyses a dataset of external military assistance to civil war combatants that is global in scope for all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009; it documents changing patterns in the prevalence of competitive intervention over time; and it provides statistically and substantively significant evidence in support of my theory's hypothesized relationships.

Chapter 5 builds on this statistical evidence by examining the dynamics of competitive intervention in a specific case: the Angolan civil war (1975-1991). I show that while winning the war was undoubtedly the primary objective for Angola's domestic combatants, fears of uncontrolled escalation led third party interveners to pursue more limited objectives. I document how the need to avoid direct confrontations led South Africa and the United States, on one side, and Cuba and the Soviet Union, on the other, to condition the scope of their support for rebel and government forces alike. I argue that while this restraint was successful in helping the interveners contain the risk of confrontation with one another, it simultaneously prevented them from conferring decisive military advantages on their domestic clients. The net result was a stalemated conflict that would go on for decades, inflicting hundreds of thousands of deaths, displacing millions, and decimating Angola's economic, political, and social institutions.

Sadly, this narrative of protracted death and destruction is repeated in Chapter 6, which takes the analysis to another battlefield afflicted by competitive intervention: the Afghan civil war (1979-1992). I unpack the strategic logic motivating the Soviet Union's intervention in support of the Afghan Communist regime as it faced off against the mujahideen rebels that were backed by Pakistan and the United States. I explain how the interveners navigated the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention in this case by signaling restraint through the imposition of limitations on the scope of their support to the domestic combatants. While this restraint proved fruitful in controlling escalation between the interveners, its consequences for the dynamics and
outcomes of the Afghan conflict were significant: with the aid of their external backers, neither rebel nor government forces faced the resource constraints inherent in war; yet precisely because the interveners sought to avoid escalation, neither side was conferred a decisive military advantage that could help them attain victory. As was true in Angola, this resulted in a bloody and protracted conflict, with little hope for compromise or negotiated agreement.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation by reviewing its main theoretical and empirical findings and deriving their policy implications for contemporary civil wars afflicted by competitive intervention. It presents brief shadow cases of the ongoing US and Russian interventions in Syria (2011-present) and Ukraine (2014-present) and suggests practical policy proposals for international engagement in these conflicts. The chapter closes by mapping out fruitful paths for future research on civil war, interstate competition, and competitive intervention.
2 Conceptual Foundations and Points of Departure

This dissertation explores how interstate competition affects intrastate conflict through the mechanism of competitive intervention. It develops a theory that explains the behaviors of domestic combatants and third party interveners when conflicts become costly, protracted wars of attrition, and it tests whether those behaviors have been a driving force in the waxing and waning of civil war over time. In doing so, it sheds new light on the international dimensions of civil wars, the determinants of intractable conflicts, and ultimately, the processes that underlie changing trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars.

To lay a foundation for this theory, it is first necessary to identify core concepts and situate my research questions in the context of existing approaches to the study of external intervention and internal war. To those ends, this chapter introduces the concept of competitive intervention, defines the term and its component parts, and then discusses its similarities to and differences from the broader concept of proxy war. I also define the concept of civil war as it is employed in this dissertation and establish scope conditions on the generalizability of my theory.

Next, I review the existing literature that relates to the research questions at hand. As an organizing heuristic, I divide this research into three categories: (1) the conflict management and
third party intervention literature; (2) the limited war literature; and (3) the civil war duration literature. I review existing theories, discuss their contributions and limitations, and identify gaps in our knowledge that are to be addressed in the chapters that follow.

2.1 Concepts, Definitions, and Scope Conditions

This dissertation introduces a new concept to the study of civil war: a particular configuration of external support to domestic combatants that I have dubbed "competitive intervention." I define competitive interventions as opposing, simultaneous transfers of military assistance from different third party states to both government and rebel combatants engaged in a civil war.

Competitive interventions are competitive insofar as they are attempts by third party states to secure competing, rather than shared, interests in the outcome of a civil war. Thus, interventions in which two or more states compete with each other for the patronage of a single rebel group or government are not considered competitive interventions. Nor are interventions in which two or more states back different rebel groups considered competitive interventions. To fall within the scope of my theory, the domestic combatants must be opposing one another in the civil war and their external support must come from competing third party states.

Competitive interventions are interventions insofar as they employ military and/or economic instruments to influence the dynamics and outcomes of civil wars in foreign countries by affecting the balance of power between government and opposition forces. This definition is in line with those regularly adopted in the literature, but note that my conception of external assistance is broader than most studies. I consider external aid to encompass traditional boots-on-the-ground military operations, in which third party states intervene with their own forces to directly assist one side of a civil war, but I also include other forms of support that fall below the level of troop deployments, including: access to military or intelligence infrastructure; access to territory for staging and operation preparations; weapons and ammunition transfers; war matériel and logistical support; training and advising; financial aid; and recruitment opportunities, gun running, and harboring. This broad conceptualization of external aid is important because, as I elaborate in
the next chapter, competitively intervening states often constrain the scope of their support to domestic combatants in an effort to signal restraint to the other side. Consequently, a conception of external intervention focused exclusively on boots-on-the-ground military operations stands to miss much of the intervention behavior undertaken by third party states in foreign civil wars.

The concept of competitive intervention is closely related to the concept of proxy war, but it is a limited variety of this form of warfare. While many conflicts around the globe and across time have been labeled proxy wars by pundits, politicians, and political scientists alike, surprisingly little theoretical work has been done to identify the defining properties of this form of conflict. An important consequence of this omission has been the conceptual stretching of the proxy war concept to a myriad of often decidedly dissimilar cases. For example, the term has been used to describe conflicts where two or more “junior” states fight each other at the behest of their opposing senior allies. This application of the concept was especially popular during the Cold War, when scholars sought to interpret the role of the United States and Soviet Union in regional conflicts, such as the Arab-Israeli and Indo-Pakistani wars. Proxy war has also been used as a label for cases where a non-state actor fights a state opponent at the behest of another state patron. This conceptualization is common in the “delegation of war” literature, which posits that states delegate war to rebel groups to reduce the costs inherent in conflict.

Most troubling of all, proxy war has sometimes been used to describe cases in which any type of external party has indirectly engaged in a conflict to affect its outcome. One recent study, for example, includes under the rubric of “proxy wars” conflicts as diverse as the Thirty-Years War, the American Civil War, and the First World War; describes the American deployment of the Stuxnet virus against Iranian nuclear facilities as an “example of a proxy war strategy [...] in the cyber realm”; categorizes the US alliance with Taiwan as a “preventative proxy war” against China; and stylizes al-Qaeda’s war against the West as “a religiously inspired proxy war” insofar as jihadists see themselves as “proxy clients of God.” Another recent volume extends the concept

1. On conceptual stretching, see: Sartori 1970; Collier and Mahon 1993.
2. See, for example: Stein 1980; Bar-Siman-Tov 1984.
to include state sponsored terrorism, private military contractors, multinational corporations, remotely piloted drones, and suicide bombers who are coerced to undertake such operations by organizations they do not themselves support.\(^5\) Such a broad conceptualization not only makes comparisons across cases exceedingly difficult, it risks rendering the proxy war concept meaningless.

My definition of competitive intervention is considerably more narrow in scope. First, I restrict the class of interveners to opposing third party states; second, I restrict the class of recipients of external support to rival rebel and government combatant forces; and third, I restrict the class of conflicts under examination to ongoing civil wars—that is, a competitive intervention can only take place in a civil war that is experiencing active warfare between government and rebel forces. While these restrictions do scope out many of the “proxy wars” noted above, they ensure meaningful comparisons can be drawn across cases.

By “civil war,” I refer to organized armed conflict between a state and domestic political actors which results in fatalities. The question of “how many” fatalities are required to deem intrastate violence a civil war is an important one, not least because it has proven to be a contentious subject in the literature. Higher death thresholds help set civil wars apart from other forms of intrastate violence—for example, riots, terrorism, and coups—but it is well known that they also risk excluding conflicts that may be major wars for smaller countries. A lower death threshold guards against this selection bias, but it suffers from an opposite complication: the threshold is so low that it is not limited to civil wars.\(^6\)

In an effort to minimize these trade-offs, this dissertation adopts a fatality threshold criteria that includes both yearly minimums and cumulative totals. To be included within the scope conditions of my theory, conflicts must (1) inflict at least 25 battle-related deaths per year, and (2) inflict a minimum of 1000 cumulative battle-related deaths over the course of its full duration. While these criteria do reduce the generalizability of my theory of competitive intervention, they are important for reducing concerns over the heterogeneity of cases examined in the empirical

\(^5\) See the contributions in Innes 2012.

\(^6\) For a discussion, see: Anderson and Worsnop, forthcoming.
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chapters of this dissertation.

A further scope condition I adopt is the exclusion of coup d'état. From a theoretical point of view, it is debatable whether coups are civil wars—after all, they are confrontations within a government rather than between a government and a rebel group. From a methodological point of view, the inclusion of coups risks the introduction of bias insofar as bloodless coups would be omitted. For these reasons, I exclude coups from my universe of cases, irrespective of the number of fatalities they inflict.

Having defined key concepts and identified the scope conditions of my theory, I now turn to situate my main research questions within the context of the existing literature.

2.2 The Existing Literature

While this dissertation introduces competitive intervention as a new concept in the study of civil war, a variety of extant research in the international relations and comparative politics fields have substantial bearing on its theoretical development. To identify these contributions, this section reviews the literature on conflict management and third party intervention, limited war, and civil war duration. I summarize existing theories, discuss their strengths and limitations, and identify gaps in our knowledge that are to be addressed in the chapters that follow.

2.2.1 Conflict Management and Third Party Intervention

A natural point of departure for any study on external intervention in internal war is the existing conflict management and third party intervention literature. At the heart of this extensive body of research lies questions about the effects and motivations of outside participation in foreign civil wars.

One prominent perspective holds that external interventions help to end civil wars by facilitating bargaining and negotiated agreements between domestic combatants. Scholars argue that peace settlements arranged internally by a government and its rebel challengers are likely to be exceedingly difficult to guarantee, not least because neither side will be willing to give up their in-
dependent military forces. A central element of any peace negotiation must be the demobilization and disarmament of at least one side of the war, yet once they lay down their weapons, it becomes impossible for those combatants to defend themselves or to enforce future cooperation with the other side. This incentivizes continued fighting and the avoidance of a negotiated settlement, as neither the government nor the rebels can credibly commit to abide by a peace treaty’s terms, and both sides stand to benefit from unilateral defection from the agreement. A solution to this problem, it is argued, is provided by third party intervention: outside actors can guarantee the terms of a domestic settlement, monitor compliance of an agreement’s terms, and—most important of all—protect against defections from a treaty. These contributions help domestic combatants overcome the credible commitment problem that prevents them from committing to peace, and in this respect, third party intervention can play a critical role in helping to end civil wars.7

Support for these arguments can be found in studies that examine peacekeeping operations undertaken by international organizations like the United Nations (UN). In the post-Cold War period, the UN has moved beyond “traditional peacekeeping” by expanding the civilian component of its operations to include electoral observations, police training, and civilian administration. This new wave of “robust” peacekeeping, it is argued, has had a significant impact on the recidivism rate of civil wars: it has been shown that post-Cold War peacekeeping deployments reduce the risk of another round of fighting by almost 70 percent.8 Here again, the key mechanisms pointed to in the literature to explain this outcome are third party monitoring, reporting, and security guarantees. By raising the costs of returning to the battlefield, reducing uncertainty between domestic combatants, and preventing an accidental return to fighting, interventions by international organizations like the UN facilitate lasting peace agreements.9

While these arguments have shed important light on the barriers to peace negotiations in the aftermath of civil war, two limitations qualify their contributions. First, the perspectives outlined above tend to focus on the duration of post-conflict peace, rather than the dynamics of

intervention in an ongoing civil war. Peacekeepers, for example, are more often deployed to deter the resumption of conflict than to end an ongoing one, and while UN missions can be effective when supporting domestic actors committed to peace, they have been found to be "remarkably ill suited" to peace enforcement strategies involving the strategic employment of coercive force.

A second limitation, which arguably stems from the first, is this perspective's assumption that interventions are intended to expedite the resolution of conflict by either suppressing violence or by improving the prospects for negotiation. While this conception of third party interveners as generally benevolent "conflict managers" may be a reasonable view in the case of international organizations like the UN, it becomes untenable when the set of third party interveners is expanded to include another important type of external actor: self-interested states.

Indeed, the conflict management perspective is challenged by studies that have identified a range of political and strategic, as opposed to humanitarian, motivations underlying state interventions in civil wars. Rather than serve as impartial mediators, external states often choose sides, throwing their support behind government or rebel forces in an effort to secure their own interests in the outcome of a civil war. Some scholars have suggested that biased interventions of this form may be a good thing from the perspective of conflict management, arguing that interventions can be neither limited nor impartial if they are to have any hope of ending a civil war. While this view cuts against theories that highlight the importance of third party security guarantees for civil war termination, it has found empirical support in the literature: evidence suggests that sending troops to help one side of a civil war can shorten a conflict by increasing the probability the supported side will win the conflict outright. However, balanced interventions, in which multiple external states deploy troops to support opposing sides of a civil war, lead to longer conflicts by creating strategic stalemates between combatants.

10. Fortna is explicit about this in her study on the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping: "I am examining the effects of whether peace lasts, not on whether peace is achieved in the first place." See: Ibid.: p. 6.
12. See, for example: Byman et al. 2001; Findley and Teo 2006; Byman 2007; Salehyan 2009; Cunningham 2010; Bapat 2012; Findley and Marineau 2015.
While there is firm empirical support for arguments concerned with the effects of troop deployments on the duration of civil wars, evidence on the effects of interventions of other forms is less clear. To date, only one study has comprehensively examined the effects of external military assistance below the level of troop deployments, such as weapons transfers, financial aid, and advisers. It finds that both two-sided and biased transfers of military assistance increase expected civil war duration. Unfortunately, methodological complications—specifically, the problem of monotone likelihood—render these results suspect. Monotone likelihood is observed in the fitting process of a duration model when one or more independent variables perfectly predict (or nearly perfectly predict) a binary dependent variable. This problem manifests in the aforementioned study in the form of inflated coefficient estimates on the explanatory variables of interest, suggesting that a re-examination of the effect of external military assistance on the dynamics and duration of intrastate conflict stands to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature.

There are also opportunities to improve the theoretical foundations of our understanding of third party intervention in civil war. To date, most existing studies have adopted either a “phenomenon-centric” approach, with a focus on the consequences of intervention in civil war, or an “actor-centric” approach, with a focus on the patron-client relationship of interveners and domestic combatants. Consequently, they have failed to consider the interaction of interveners and the ways in which their competition with one another can shape and constrain civil wars. Exploring this additional dimension of the intervention process, and integrating it with the existing “phenomenon-centric” and “actor-centric” approaches, stands to shed new light on the international dimensions of intrastate conflict, as well as the determinants of intervener strategy and behavior.

15. An important exception is the provision of sanctuary to rebel groups. Salehyan 2009 shows that states that provide rebel organizations with cross-border basing access increase civil war duration in a neighboring country by enabling rebel groups to evade the repression of opposing government forces.
17. I elaborate on this problem and discuss a solution to overcome it in Chapter 4.
18. For example, external military aid to one side of a civil war is estimated to increase duration by over 80,000 percent; military support to both sides is estimated to increase duration by 80,820-120,570 percent; and economic support to either side is estimated to increase duration by over $3 \times 10^9$ percent. See: Regan 2002: p. 69.
19. This “phenomenon-centric” vs. “actor-centric” distinction was first drawn by Findley and Teo 2006.
Second, a common assumption found in the existing literature holds that backing friendly governments or rebel movements can help to end civil wars by manipulating the costs of fighting and the benefits of negotiated settlement. By facilitating a “mutually hurting stalemate” through the selective application of butter and guns, it is argued, interveners can create the preconditions necessary for peace.\textsuperscript{20} Yet empirical evidence suggests that this rarely occurs in practice; even when a civil war has become a costly, protracted battle of attrition, rebel and government forces regularly choose to continue to bear the human and financial costs of war. This suggests that conceiving of external military aid as a tool to manipulate the payoffs of war and peace is incomplete; there is a need to more rigorously identify the mechanisms that link external aid to the micro-level dynamics of the civil war bargaining process.

Finally, the existing literature struggles to explain a lingering puzzle of external intervention and internal war: interveners often remain engaged in conflicts for very long periods of time, sending money, matériel, and sometimes troops for many years or even decades. This behavior is hard to explain in the case of a humanitarian intervener that aims to end the violence and destruction of an internal conflict as quickly as possible; it is arguably even more difficult to explain in the case of a self-interested intervener that aims to benefit through its participation in a foreign civil war. If the “spoils of war” can be captured with decisive military advantages that tilt the balance of power between domestic combatants, why do external states often constrain the scope of their support? Why don’t they do what is necessary to help their favored side win? In the next section, I suggest that clues to answer these questions can be found in an older literature, prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, on the means and ends of what has come to be called "limited war."

\textsuperscript{20} See, for example: Licklider 1995; Carment and Rowlands 1998; Regan 2002; Siqueira 2003; Amegashie and Kutsoati 2007. "Mutually hurting stalemate" refers to a situation “when the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons).” See: Zartman 2001: p. 8.
2.2.2 Limited War

Limited war theory was the product of a small group of civilian thinkers concerned with the dangers of regional and civil wars (then often referred to as “local wars” or “peripheral wars”) in light of the tactical and strategic implications of the nuclear age. The origins of the theory lie in opposition to the Eisenhower Administration’s “New Look” strategy of “massive retaliation,” which sought to deter Communist aggression in local wars by placing less dependence on local defense and more reliance on America’s massive capacity for violence. Critics argued that a threat of massive retaliation was not credible in local wars, not least because Communist forces also possessed nuclear capabilities and could retaliate in kind. An “atomic stalemate” meant that to fulfill the threat of massive retaliation was to suffer costs as great as those inflicted. Assuming both sides accepted that the interests at stake were not worth mutually assured destruction—as they undoubtedly would in peripheral areas of lesser strategic and/or economic value—then any effort to protect US national interests through a strategy of massive retaliation was destined to fail.

These realities necessitated finding a way to successfully prosecute a war without resorting to the full military potential of the US armed forces. What was needed was “a deliberate hobbling of a tremendous power that is already mobilized and that must in any case be maintained at a very high pitch of effectiveness for the sake only of inducing the enemy to hobble himself to like degree.” In other words, belligerents had to consciously choose to restrain their military capacity, even when doing so stood to produce tactically detrimental outcomes, to control escalation and avoid mutually assured destruction. The question of how power could be hobbled for this end became an important subject of inquiry. The theoretical results of this research have subsequently

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21. The “massive retaliation” strategy was first articulated by John Foster Dulles during a speech in January 1954. The oft-quoted section of immediate relevance argues that “there is no local defense which alone will contain the mighty land power of the Communist world. Local defense must be reinforced by the further deterrent of massive retaliatory power.” For a full transcript of the speech, see: Dulles, 12 January 1954.


23. For early critiques of this kind, see: Brodie, 18 November 1954; W. W. Kaufmann 1954; Morgenthau 1954; Kissinger 1955.

made numerous contributions to the strategic studies and international relations fields.25

One contribution of this literature is its insights on tacit bargaining and communication. While some suggested that limitations in the scope of warfare could be found through formal processes of negotiation between belligerents,26 others observed that focal points—prominent or unique features that are mutually recognizable by two or more parties—could be exploited to coordinate behavior even in the absence of open communication.27 During the Korean War, for example, a range of focal points seemed to naturally limit the scope and intensity of the fighting between belligerents: the principal northern political boundary was marked by a river that served to geographically constrain the war; the thirty-eighth parallel served as a powerful focus of military stalemate; and weapons were distinguished by the qualitative differences between nuclear and non-nuclear armaments.28 The observation of these limits by belligerents reflected their mutual recognition that while either side could have expanded the war, doing so would have benefited neither. For limited war theorists, this demonstrated the role that tacit bargaining and communication could play in preventing escalation in other peripheral wars around the globe.

A second contribution of this literature stems naturally from the first: by calling attention to the ways in which belligerents constrain the scope of their participation in violent conflicts, limited war theory highlighted the willingness of policymakers to settle for goals that fell short of total victory. This observation may seem banal, but it challenged the existing view, predominate at the time, that the military should act decisively with "an 'all or nothing attitude' to the use of force."29 In the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars, and especially when the United States enjoyed a nuclear monopoly, American political leaders often asserted that their military ought to fight with everything it had, or not fight at all—a view that was reflected in the Eisenhower Administration's policy of "massive retaliation." In an age of mutually assured destruction, however, these ideas

25. For early treatments of the subject, see: W. W. Kaufmann 1956; Osgood 1957; Kissinger 1957; Brodie 1959; Halperin 1963a.
26. See, for example: Kissinger 1957.
27. The initial statement of these ideas can be found in Schelling 1957. These ideas were later elaborate in more detail in Schelling 1963 [1960]. For a similar approach, see: Rathjens 1958: pp. 187-188.
Limited war theory was in important respects a product of its time, shaped by the pressures and demands of the immediate post-World War II period and the dawn of the nuclear age: its scope was narrowly centered on wars in which the United States would square off against the Soviet Union or Communist China, whether directly or through proxies on one or both sides; the key limitation of interest centered on the (non-)use of nuclear weapons; and there were few historical cases outside of the Korean War with which to empirically assess the theory. By the late 1960s, the popularity of the limited war approach began to decline. Questions about how to defend peripheral areas in the nuclear age gave way to concerns more squarely focused on nuclear strategy, such as the requirements of extended deterrence and the implications of technological developments for strategic stability. 30 The Vietnam War also turned attention away from limited war and toward counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, not least because of the apparent “failure” of the limited war approach in that conflict. 31 With the end of East-West confrontation in the early 1990s, the limited war school faded even further. The dawn of the unipolar moment and American hegemony presented new strategic problems to consider—in the 1990s, humanitarian interventions in countries like Somalia and the Former Yugoslavia, and in the 2000s, the “return” of counterinsurgency operations in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Nonetheless, there are important lessons to be gleaned from this literature for the research questions examined in this dissertation. Limited war theory provided valuable insights on the interplay of explicit and tacit bargaining and communication; the importance of limited aims in the development of military strategy; and the critical role of escalation control in the pursuit of the national interest. And while nuclear strategy may seem divorced from the study of civil war, many of the strategic questions examined by limited war theorists in the 1950s and 1960s continue to be relevant in the contemporary period. Consider, for example, Russia’s recent participation in

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30. For a discussion, see: Trachtenberg 1989.
31. For a critique of limited war theory with respect to the Vietnam War, see: Rosen 1982.
the civil war in Ukraine. Russian military strategy in Crimea and Donbass has been described as an example of so-called “hybrid war”—an approach where adversaries eschew large-scale conventional confrontations in favor of a tailored mix of conventional, irregular, and covert means. Considerable concern has centered on questions of whether the West in general and the US in particular is prepared to meet the supposedly “new” challenge that this form of conflict entails. One recent report, prepared by the US Army War College, warns that “[t]he more the United States adheres to a traditional playbook, the more likely Russia will continue to experience significant success.”

Yet, the central elements of a hybrid war struggle are in many ways akin to those identified by the limited war school: upper bounds are established on overt violence; fears of inadvertent escalation to general war drive strategic decision making; and tacit bargaining and communication play a central role in the interactions of adversaries. This suggests that the dynamics of “hybrid war” may not be so new after all; the insights of the limited war literature have retained their relevance for contemporary conflicts like Ukraine, as well as other internal wars that occasion competitive intervention by rival third party states.

2.2.3 Civil War Duration

A third literature provides the empirical foundations for this dissertation’s research questions that examine the effects of external intervention on changing trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the global prevalence of civil war saw a steady increase between 1946 and 1991—this, despite a relatively constant rate of yearly conflict outbreaks. Between 1991 and 2009, however, these trends reversed: there was a global reduction in the prevalence of civil war despite an increase in the rate of yearly conflict outbreaks. Taken together, these contradictory trends suggest that the key driver of temporal variation in the global prevalence of civil war has not been conflict onsets, but rather conflict

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32. On Russian hybrid war, see: Freedman 2014; Monaghan 2015; Lanoszka 2016. For a broader discussion and history of hybrid war, see: Murray and Mansoor 2012.
durations. To assess this proposition more rigorously, I turn to the existing civil war duration literature.

Civil wars exhibit remarkable variation in their duration. While some conflicts burn themselves out in only a few weeks or months, others rage on for years or even decades. This wide variation has attracted the attention of political scientists, who have identified a range of state-level factors associated with lengthy, protracted conflicts. Low GDP per capita, for example, has been linked to longer conflicts, whether because it reflects weak state institutional and policing capabilities, or because low per capita incomes decrease the opportunity costs of fighting wars, thereby making them more lucrative for militant organizations. Democracies are likewise believed to suffer longer civil wars than their authoritarian counterparts, not least because they are constrained by domestic and international audiences in their ability to fight ruthlessly against insurgencies. Large population sizes have also been correlated with prolonged conflict, likely because state surveillance, policing, and control become more difficult as populations increase in size. And even a state’s physical terrain has been linked to the dynamics of civil wars: one popular finding in the existing literature holds that rough terrain—namely, mountains—benefits rebels by providing them with safe havens, where they can hide from state forces, store weapons, and regroup to plan new attacks.

A number of conflict-specific variables have also been linked to longer civil wars. It has been shown, for example, that as the number of factions participating in a war increase, so too does war duration. The logic behind this finding holds that bargaining in multi-party civil wars is more difficult due to narrower bargaining ranges, greater information asymmetries, last mover advantages, and shifting combatant alliances. It is likewise often argued that civil wars fought

34. Fearon and Laitin 2003. On state capacity and civil war more generally, see: Hendrix 2010.
36. For a comprehensive review and critique of arguments linking democracy to prolonged civil war, see: Lyall 2010; Getmansky 2013.
38. Fearon and Laitin 2003. Note, however, that this view has been challenged by studies that find either no relationship between mountainous terrain and civil war (Rustad et al. 2008; Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala 2009) or opposite effects (Buhaug and Rod 2006).
between ethnic groups are more difficult to end—a finding that has given rise to calls for partition as the best, and perhaps only, solution to ethno-nationalist conflict. The link between ethnic diversity and duration has been challenged, however, by scholars who argue that the frequency of lengthy, ethnically-oriented civil wars in weak states is a function of the incapacities of the state, rather than the attributes of ethnic groups themselves. Partition as a solution to ethnic conflicts has similarly been challenged, especially by those who find that there is little empirical evidence to suggest that partition decreases the risk of a return to war. The most recent foray into this debate suggests that both sides might be right—that is, while ethnic diversity per se does not affect civil war duration, it can prolong conflicts if rebel organizations become linked to groups that are excluded by the state along ethnic lines. A related argument suggests that conflicts over territorial secession are more intractable than are wars in which rebel groups pursue goals that do not threaten the territorial integrity of the state. The logic here is twofold: first, rebels perceive self-rule and control over a “homeland” territory as non-divisible goods; and second, central governments are driven to forcefully retain secessionist regions to ensure access to fuel or mineral resources located in that territory. This latter argument complements additional studies that have linked natural resource wealth in the conflict zone to longer civil wars.

Taken together, the existing civil war duration literature has demonstrated that a wide-range of variables play a role in long, protracted conflicts. Insofar as the costs imposed by internal wars are a function of their duration, these findings have made important contributions to scholarship and to policy. At the same time, however, many of these explanations privilege structural variables that change much too slowly to fully account for the recent decline in the prevalence of civil war. Variables subject to gradual change—such as GDP per capita or population size—are ill-suited to explain the sharp discontinuity in the number of ongoing intrastate conflicts that coincides

42. Sambanis 2000; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl 2009.
45. These are the “sons of the soil” conflicts highlighted by Weiner 1978 and Fearon and Laitin 2011.
with the end of the Cold War. Moreover, the “closed-polity” approach that is adopted in many existing studies overlooks the international processes, actors, and structures that impart important influences on internal conflicts.47

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, any account of temporal trends in the average duration and global prevalence of civil war must control for the wide range of political, economic, and social contexts in which intrastate conflicts are fought. Similarly, the relative explanatory power of a new theory of protracted conflict must be tested against competing hypotheses derived from existing theories. For these reasons, the literature on civil war duration provides the empirical foundations upon which this dissertation assesses the consequences of competitive intervention in civil war.

2.3 The Research Path Forward

Overall, the rich body of research on third party intervention, limited war, and civil war duration has made important contributions to our understanding of the civil war process and the ways in which external states can affect an internal conflict’s dynamics and outcomes. Yet, remaining empirical puzzles and conceptual ambiguities suggest that the existing literature can be profitably extended in a more encompassing direction—one which more carefully integrates the intra-state dynamics of internal conflicts with the inter-state dimensions of geopolitical competition in civil wars. Taking the inter/intra-state conflict nexus seriously promises to provide new inferential leverage for a range of puzzling phenomena, from variation in average civil war durations to changing patterns in the global prevalence of civil war, and from the bargaining dynamics of domestic combatants to the intervention strategies of third party states. While an attempt to pull these different puzzles together under a single theoretical framework does risk overlooking case-specific nuances, doing so is necessary if we are to account for the nested interactions of domestic combatants, intervening states, and the international distribution of power. In the next chapter I turn to this task, developing a generalizable theory that integrates the micro-, macro-

47. K. S. Gleditsch 2007.
and systemic-level dimensions of competitive intervention in civil war.
This chapter develops a generalizable theory of external intervention in internal war to explain the strategies and behaviours of armed groups, states, and their international backers when civil wars become costly, protracted battles of attrition. Situating intrastate conflicts within the broader geopolitical environment in which they take place, the theory explores how inter-state competition affects intra-state conflict through the mechanism of competitive intervention—two-sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third party states to both government and rebel combatants. Modeling competitive interventions as mixed-motive strategic games of interdependent decision-making, I explain how third party interveners navigate the unique strategic dilemmas this form of external meddling entails by tacitly bargaining over limits in the scope of their support to domestic combatants. Yet while limits serve to constrain intervener confrontation, they simultaneously prevent the conferral of decisive military advantages on domestic clients. I explain how this paradoxical feature of competitive intervention distorts the bargaining processes of domestic combatants, thereby prolonging civil wars. I then link changes at the level of the international system to temporal variation in patterns of competitive intervention, average conflict duration, and the global prevalence of civil war.
By integrating the microfoundations of external aid and internal conflict, the macro-motivations giving rise to interventions, and the systemic dimensions of geopolitical competition in civil wars, the theory moves beyond popular anecdotes about "proxy wars" and uncovers a heretofore overlooked feature of external intervention: that "not losing" is often more important than "winning" from the perspective of third party interveners under the shadow of inadvertent escalation. This theoretical result sheds new light on the international dimensions of internal war, the determinants of protracted intrastate conflict, and the mechanisms underlying the waxing and waning of civil wars over time.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first overview my theory of competitive intervention in civil war at the micro-, macro-, and systemic levels. Next, I derive a set of hypotheses from the theory, which I organize into two groups: those concerned with outcomes predicted by the theory, and those that identify mechanisms that link the theory's explanatory and outcome variables. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the research design that is adopted to test the theory in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Microfoundations: External Military Aid and Civil War

What explains protracted conflict in the face of mounting costs for domestic combatants? And how does external military assistance affect the bargaining processes between government and rebel forces? The bargaining approach to war provides a powerful framework to explore these questions. It models violent conflict as a coercive bargaining process which ends when opponents coordinate their expectations about the likely outcome of a war. Coordination of expectations is delayed because combatants possess asymmetric information about their willingness and ability to fight. This generates powerful incentives for both sides to misrepresent their capabilities and resolve in order to secure a better settlement than they would otherwise receive. Provided that combatants value the future sufficiently, they will opt to delay agreement in order to accrue information about the relative capabilities and resolve of their opponent to avoid settling prematurely on worse
terms. This information is attained through fighting, which reveals each sides’ ability to endure and impose costs.

War is conceptualized as an information-transmission mechanism through which combatants demonstrate their capabilities and resolve. As they win or lose battles, combatants update their beliefs about the likely outcome of continued periods of fighting. Victories in battle embolden a combatant to raise its war-terminating demands; defeats encourage less demanding settlement terms. Over time, the sequence of victories and defeats serves to coordinate the expectations of both sides. In effect, warfare serves as a costly learning process through which combatants signal their ability and resolve. Negotiated settlements become possible once opponents learn enough about their prospects in war to decide that its continuation will not earn additional concessions.  

Insofar as war terminates once fighting has lost its informational content and the expectations of combatants have converged, the timing of a given settlement will be a function of the rate at which fighting is able to transmit information about the combatants. A corollary of this proposition is the expectation that factors which delay or distort the information-transmission function of fighting will postpone the convergence of expectations that is necessary for settlement. The provision of external military assistance to civil war combatants has three such effects.

First, external military assistance delays the convergence of combatants’ expectations by decreasing the anticipated costs of war. External resources not only directly subsidize an ongoing war effort by providing an additional source of weapons, financing, and equipment, but also insulate combatants from the political burden of sustaining a costly war through taxation or some other form of local resource collection. As the costs of fighting fall, a combatant’s value for war increases. In effect, information about an opponent’s capabilities becomes cheaper to acquire. This delays conflict termination by reducing the set of negotiated settlements that both sides prefer to war while incentivizing continued fighting today in the interest of greater concessions in the future.

Second, external military aid encourages continued fighting by balancing combatant capa-

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2. Note that it is not necessary for both sides to agree on who will win the war; rather, all that is necessary is agreement on the relative likelihood of various outcomes. See: Slantchev 2003.
ilities, thereby affecting expectations of future victory. As capabilities shift towards parity, combatants’ abilities to correctly infer their chances of victory on the battlefield are reduced and the significance of informational asymmetries is enhanced. Unable to adequately infer their relative power vis-à-vis an opponent, civil war combatants must fight additional battles to acquire information, signal capability and resolve, and avoid settling on inequitable terms. In effect, parity generates uncertainty, and uncertainty prolongs conflict by increasing the value of fighting.

Finally, external military aid complicates the bargaining process by distorting information-transmission in ways that undermine the coordination of combatants’ expectations of the outcome of the conflict. Military aid is often exceedingly difficult to observe, obscured by secrecy and illicit networks. The inability to fully observe the quantity and quality of external aid complicates combatants’ efforts to estimate the capabilities of their opponent while encouraging recipients to misrepresent the advantages they have accrued from foreign sources. Here again, uncertainty generates divergent expectations about relative strength and the likely outcome of war, thereby increasing the value of fighting.

By reducing the costs of war, shifting expectations of victory, and distorting the process of information-transmission, external military assistance prolongs civil war. For domestic combatants fighting on the ground, external aid increases the value of fighting while decreasing the set of negotiated agreements acceptable to both parties. This generates powerful incentives to forgo settlement today in the interest of greater returns tomorrow.

3.2 Macro Motivations: Interstate Competition in Civil Wars

The model described above helps explain why external military aid would encourage prolonged fighting amongst domestic combatants, but why do external states invest in costly civil wars? This question is particularly puzzling when states maintain their support for domestic combatants over the course of many years, or even decades. Why do interveners continue to invest in stalemated

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3. Note that “balance” need not mean the provision of equivalent quantities and qualities of weapons—it also encompasses the delivery of military hardware capable of curtailing an opponent’s advantages. For example, anti-aircraft weapons, rather than fighter jets and helicopters, might be provided to a domestic client to counter its opponent’s dominance in the air.
conflicts, investing just enough resources to fuel the fighting, but not enough to terminate the war? Why do they not do what is necessary to ensure their domestic clients win?

To be sure, there are powerful motivations encouraging interveners to see their side through to victory. Revolutionary outcomes of civil wars not only challenge existing power relations within a country—they can also dramatically shift the relative balance of power among third party states. This incentivizes external intervention in defense (or assault) of the status quo. At the local level, a civil war next door presents a number of threats (conflict spillovers, refugee flows, and general instability generated by the war), but also opportunities (to overthrow rival regimes, capture disputed territories, or seize natural resource deposits) that incentivize neighbors to respond to a civil war in ways that shape its dynamics and outcomes. For example, South Africa sponsored rebels in Angola and Mozambique and fought them in Namibia and at home throughout the 1970s and 1980s in pursuit of a national security strategy that aimed to preserve white rule and retain control over Namibia against what was perceived as a “total onslaught” by black nationalist and communist guerrillas. Likewise, Rwanda and Uganda used civil war in neighboring Zaire as an opportunity to overthrow the government of Mobutu Seke Seko, teaming up with Laurent Kabila’s rebel movement, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). In both cases, civil wars were exploited by neighboring states for self-interested foreign policy goals.

At the global level, state competition is constrained by what Maoz dubs “reach capacity.” Only great powers possess the requisite economic, political, and military capabilities necessary to influence political outcomes at great distances. However, insofar as reach capacity and the span of strategic interests are correlated, we should expect these powers to take part in processes that occur in states that are not in their local neighborhoods, but still politically relevant for other political, economic, or security interests. For example, great powers might respond to far-off civil wars because they pose global threats that endanger the national interest (such as failed states and terrorist safe havens), or because they present opportunities to consolidate global national security goals (such as eliminating unfriendly regimes or gaining strategic advantages over international

Like any other international policy issue, however, the interests of third party states in the outcomes of civil wars are often overlapping and competing. While some states profit from the persistence of the status quo, others are advantaged by challenges to existing power relations within a country. Competing interests generate divergent responses, which often take the form of competitive interventions. In the following sections, I develop the argument that this form of external meddling presents a unique strategic dilemma for intervening states. While the challenge it entails is not insoluble, its management comes at a cost for foreign interveners and domestic combatants alike.

### 3.2.1 The Dilemma of Competitive Intervention

Third party states that find themselves engaged in a competitive intervention against an interstate rival are presented with a strategic dilemma. On the one hand, the desire to improve the battlefield situation of a domestic client encourages an intervener to escalate the scope of its military aid. As Kaufmann explains, "[b]ecause of its competitive character war places a heavy premium upon the attainment of an advantage, however fleeting." 5 Greater quantities of war matériel, more sophisticated weapon systems, rigorous training operations, or the deployment of supporting troops serve to reinforce a client's own forces, greatly improving their battlefield performance and their probability of winning the war. The military requirements of victory likewise often encourage an expansion of the war, whether to secure tactically advantageous territory in areas previously unaffected by fighting, or to eliminate enemy sanctuaries that lie outside the conflict zone itself. 6

6. I am imposing an assumption here that intervening states ultimately seek to see their domestic client through to victory, where "victory" amounts to some form of military dominance over an opponent. This is a simplification that is useful for the purposes of theory building, but that may not always hold in the real world—for example, interveners may become involved in a civil war not to secure a client's victory in a total sense, but rather in the more limited sense of forcing a negotiated agreement that an opponent would not otherwise accept. At other times, interveners may become involved in a civil war to "bleed" the resources of an international rival, incentivizing the continuation, rather than the termination, of a conflict. I recognize that these alternative, more limited, intervener objectives exist, but wish to emphasize that the dynamics I describe below should obtain even in cases where one intervener is not fully committed to total victory—in fact, the dynamics of signaling and restraint I highlight may manifest even more
However, the desire to escalate must be balanced by the uncertainty surrounding how an opposing intervener might respond. Perhaps, in an effort to avert defeat, an opponent will be incentivized to reply to the escalation "in kind," increasing its own participation in the conflict to negate the military gains achieved by its competitor through increasing levels of violence. Under this scenario, both interveners increase the scope of their support, yet neither side gains a strategic edge: strategic stability is maintained by offsetting investments in the domestic conflict. While the costs of war increase for both interveners, the conflict remains stalemated, and both sides would have been better off having forgone the original escalation.

Worse still, an opponent may not simply reciprocate an escalate—it might counter-escalate, further expanding the scope of intervention to punish its competitor and effect a reprisal. Under this scenario, the original escalation has not only increased costs, but has also proven strategically counterproductive: now the instigating intervener must double down on its investment, lest its domestic client be put in a militarily disadvantageous position by the counter-escalation.

The open-ended character of escalation/counter-escalation responses is also a precarious process in and of itself. The limits of these interactions are not always clear insofar as they risk a spiraling of actions and reactions in the interveners’ quests for strategic advantage in the civil war. An action by one side incentivizes a reaction by the other, which in turn incentivizes a new action by the first. This action-reaction dynamic produces new tactical and strategic situations that cannot be entirely anticipated by the interveners, imposes increasing costs on both sides in the form of resources committed to the civil war, and also increases the risk of a larger clash. As both sides bid up their respective investments in the civil war, the risk of direct confrontation between the interveners is raised. This threat of inadvertent escalation—perhaps to the level of war between the interveners—looms in the background of competitive interventions in civil wars.

Competitive interveners therefore face a painful strategic dilemma: an intervener’s national interest generates upward pressure to provide support at a level sufficient to ensure its domestic

strongly in these cases. I elaborate on this point and consider the implications of relaxing the victory assumption in my discussion of future extensions of the theory in Chapter 7.

7. This is Schelling’s "threat that leaves something to chance" and "competition in risk taking." See: Schelling 1963 [1960]: chapter 3, especially pp. 190-193; Schelling 2008 [1966]: chapter 3, especially pp. 105-110.
client will enjoy a decisive military advantage and win the civil war; yet the risk of responses in kind, counter-escalations, action-reaction dynamics, and enlarged conflict generates downward pressure to constrain the scope of that intervention and to avoid uncontrolled escalation. Faced by these contradicting upward and downward pressures, how should an intervening state respond?

3.2.2 Solving the Dilemma

The structure of the dilemma facing third party states engaged in a competitive intervention can be modeled as a mixed-motive strategic game of interdependent decision making. It is mixed-motive insofar as interveners' preferences among the set of possible outcomes are both opposed and coincident: they have conflicting interests over the outcome of the civil war, but they have a common interest in the avoidance of mutual destruction of potential gains. It is strategic in two respects. First, each intervener's "best" choice with regards to the level of support to provide a client is dependent on the level of support it expects the other intervener will provide to its own client. That is, interveners' behaviors must be both "purposive" and "contingent"—they must be directed toward the pursuit of the intervener's preferences, but they are constrained by the behaviors of the other side. Second, both interveners know that the other knows that they are both conditioning their behavior based on what each other is doing. Consequently, intervener behaviors are not only purposive and contingent—they also convey information.

The challenge for both interveners, then, is to pursue their individual interests while avoiding damaging and dangerous escalation. In essence, this is a coordination problem: the interveners must together establish limits on the scope of their interventions to regulate their competition with each other for the purposes of avoiding mutual destruction of potential gains. Of course, the establishment of limits requires communication and the signaling of intentions, but agreement on limits is complicated in times of war, not least because of the scorn it would inspire in one's client fighting on the ground. Even if open communication is possible, there are additional challenges to overcome: talk is cheap, enforcement is uncertain, and a willingness to negotiate can be mistaken

for weakness.

Where explicit communication is limited or impossible, tacit coordination assumes central importance. This is signaling through patterned action; communication through deeds rather than words. Through a sequence of patterned behaviors, opponents find limits to regulate their competition. The question of which limits interveners identify is unavoidably conditioned by the characteristics of the civil war they seek to influence. Limits will depend on the intervening states' interests, their skills, the relative strength of the domestic combatants, the characteristics of the state that is suffering the civil war, and so on. But as Schelling’s work on limited war and coordination games suggests, competitive interveners are best served by selecting limits that are “objective” (in the sense that they are conspicuous and both sides are aware of them) and “unique” (in the sense that they are novel, discrete, or discontinuous). Precisely because they serve as “focal points,” each side can reasonably hope that the other will also perceive objective and unique features as natural saliencies at which to set limits. In effect, interveners can use saliencies and focal points as a means to coordinate their expectations and behaviors around mutually-observed limits.

Once limits have been identified, restraint is signaled by conveying intentions through actions, behaving in predictable patterns, and acquiescing to existing rules and limits. As before, the objective for both interveners is to manage the expectations of the other side and to communicate information that coordinates intervention behaviors that avoid mutually damaging outcomes.

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10. As Smoke 1977: p. 252 puts it, “[t]here are different [escalation] ladders for every conflict, and they bear only a loose resemblance to one another. Controlling escalation in any particular conflict will often depend crucially on identifying the particular twists and protuberances of that conflict’s misshapen ladder.”


12. It bears mention that even when limits have been coordinated and communicated, there can be latitude for their interpretation. Whether or not this will be the case will be a function of just how “objective” the saliency is for the interveners, which in turn is a function of the limit’s arbitrariness, imprecision, incompleteness, and unverifiability. For a detailed overview on this issue in the context of red lines and fait accompli, see: Altman 2015: Chapter 2.

13. In addition, escalatory dynamics can be managed via the strategic use of secrecy. Carson highlights the utility of secrecy as a device for both creating and sustaining limits in war, demonstrating that interveners often purposely conceal evidence of foreign involvement in civil wars and regional conflicts to control escalation. By individually and collectively creating a “backstage” to an ongoing war, interveners can compete for influence while at the same time resisting pressure to escalate the scope of their involvement in a conflict. See: Carson 2016.
While detailed examples of this “cooperative competition” must await empirical examination in the case study chapters that follow, a few examples can help elucidate the form and function of these credible signs of restraint.

**GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES:** It has long been observed that geography and topography provide natural focal points that can be used to limit the scope of warfare. Bodies of war, rivers, deserts, and mountains can serve to delimit areas of operation and control. Even cartographic principles of latitude and longitude can function in such a role. In the 1980s, for example, France and Libya found themselves supporting opposing government and rebel forces, respectively, during the Chadian civil war. Libya’s intervention in support of rebel forces was motivated by territorial ambitions, ethnic affinities between the people of northern Chad and southern Libya, and, most important of all, the presence of uranium deposits in northern Chad. France, on the other hand, sought to maintain its economic, political, and strategic relations with the country, secure French influence in Africa, and protect its private and governmental investments in Chad’s industrial and financial institutions. Yet while both countries were willing to invest in their chosen proxies in pursuit of those goals, neither entertained the prospect of fighting a war against the other to secure them. To limit their interaction, an “interdiction line” (the so-called “Red Line”) was established at the 15th parallel. French forces remained south of the line; Libyan forces remained north of it. While this agreement amounted to a *de facto* partition of Chad, it controlled escalation by circumscribing areas of operation for both intervening forces.14

**WEAPONS:** Interveners are often at pains to communicate restraint by exploiting the qualitative distinctions of different weapon systems. Schelling highlighted the distinction between nuclear and all other weapons that was first made during the Korean War, but lesser distinctions are regularly observed.15 For example, during the civil war in Afghanistan (1979-1992), American

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14. French President François Mitterrand and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi would later negotiate a mutual withdrawal of their countries’ forces. While the accord was respected by the French, it was violated by the Libyans who remained in Chad until 1987. Interestingly, however, Libyan forces still respected the Red Line.

15. Schelling 1963 [1960]: p. 76. The aversion to the use of nuclear weapons has only grown in strength over the last number of decades, reinforced by their non-use in deadly and expensive interventions such as the US experience in Vietnam and the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. On this “nuclear taboo,” see: Tannenwald 2007.
transfers of massive quantities of small arms and light weapons—such as assault rifles, mortars, and grenade launchers—to mujahideen rebels fighting Soviet-backed communists was banal. The question of whether to provision rebel forces with Stinger ground-to-air missiles, however, was the subject of extensive and heated debate. American policymakers worried that these advanced weapons, which promised to undermine Soviet helicopter-based counterinsurgency strategy, might provoke Soviet escalation in the form of retaliatory attacks against Pakistan. If such an escalation occurred, several pathways for regional conflict would be present: the collapse of the Pakistani government, an opportunistic military attack by India, or even war between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. This latter possibility was particularly threatening due to the 1959 US-Pakistan Agreement of Cooperation, which obliged the United States to protect Pakistan in the event of a Communist attack.¹⁶

**LETHAL VERSUS NON-LETHAL AID:** In addition to the differences that distinguish weapon systems from one another, the distinctions between guns and body armor, bullets and communication radios, and mines and medical supplies have also been drawn to limit the scope of interventions. These distinctions ostensibly derive from the fact that lethal aid directly destroys enemy forces, while non-lethal aid does not—that is, the effects associated with each type of aid are different. This establishes a “lethal/non-lethal” saliency that has often been employed to signal restraint.¹⁷ For example, while the US has already provided hundreds of millions of dollars worth of non-lethal military assistance to Ukrainian forces fighting separatists in the East of that country, it has so far been unwilling to provide the Ukrainian government with the weapons it has requested over concerns it would further provoke Russia.¹⁸

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¹⁶. For an extended discussion of this case, see Chapter 6.
¹⁷. The distinction between lethal and non-lethal aid is particularly revealing insofar as it parallels the “weapons effects” arguments of proponents of tactical nuclear weapons. As early as 1956, the US was producing nuclear warheads with yields as low as 10 tons, deliverable by way of a tripod launching system equipped to a jeep (the Davy Crockett recoilless spigot gun). Proponents argued that, given their small yields (which were comparable with conventional armaments), use of these weapons was equivalent to traditional artillery, and therefore did not prejudice the limits of war. A similar type of argument often animates debates over the provision of non-lethal versus lethal military assistance to civil war combatants.
ADVISERS VERSUS COMBAT TROOPS: That there exists a general proscription against combat between competitive interveners' troops is evident in how rarely interveners supply combat troops to both sides of a civil war. In those cases where one intervener has deployed troops, its foreign opponent almost never responds in kind. Technical and military "advisers," however, have regularly been exempt from this rule—ostensibly because of the "non-combat" roles they serve. Accordingly, the deployment of these specialists to civil war zones for training and advisory missions is common. For example, Turkey supplied military instructors to assist Azerbaijani troops during the Nagorno-Karabakh War.\(^{19}\) Likewise, both the US and Soviet Union deployed tens of thousands of "technical advisers" throughout the Cold War.

These distinctions—geographic areas of "control" and "dispute," "light" and "heavy" weapons, "lethal" and "non-lethal" aid, and "advisers" and "combat" troops—serve to regulate confrontation between interveners in third party civil wars: they are discrete limits with symbolic significance that are easily recognizable even in the absence of explicit communication; they provide clear guidelines for one's own commanders; and they make violations by the enemy relatively easy to detect. They are the "rules of the game" that bound the scope of competition between interveners. Indeed, to escalate a war is to take a step that violates one of these limits.\(^{20}\)

But these limits are not only symbolically significant—they have tactical implications for civil war combatants as well. The need to limit interventions constrains tactically advantageous maneuvers, the provision of more sophisticated weapon systems, and the deployment of combat forces. By limiting the scope of their support, interveners forfeit military options that stand to provision a domestic client with decisive military advantages. In effect, the contradictions inherent in the need to intervene to ensure one's domestic client prevails and the need to constrain that intervention to control escalation warps an intervener's positive objective of "winning" into a negative objective of "not losing." Inevitably, this leads to stalemated conflicts which, when

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\(^{19}\) Aves 1998: p. 181.

\(^{20}\) This conception of escalation is in keeping with that proposed by Smoke 1977: p. 35, who defines escalation as "an action that crosses a saliency which defines the current limits of a war, and that occurs in a context where the actor cannot know the full consequences of his action, including particularly how his action and the opponent's potential reaction(s) may interact to generate a situation likely to induce new actions that will cross still more saliencies."
combined with the distortionary effects of external military aid on the bargaining process of domestic combatants, prolongs civil wars.

Notably, this outcome, while tactically suboptimal, is nonetheless strategically rational. To forgo investing in the conflict at any level is to forfeit the stakes of the conflict that inspired intervention in the first place, whether they be shifts in the relative balance of power, trade and market access, or concerns about credibility and reputation. At the same time, to invest in the conflict at a level required to ensure a domestic client wins risks the spiraling of costs and mutual destruction of potential gains vis-à-vis the other intervener. Thus, while limited interventions are inefficient in equilibrium, they provide higher payoffs than the alternative options of doing nothing or fighting to win.

3.3 Systemic Dimensions: The Varying Prevalence of Competitive Intervention and Civil War

Having established the microfoundations of external military aid and conflict duration, as well as a macro-level account of the unique strategic dilemmas states face when “not losing” becomes more important than “winning” during interventions in third party civil wars, the framework articulated above provides a comprehensive theoretical explanation for the duration effects of competitive intervention in civil war. This framework not only accounts for variation in the duration of civil wars, but also highlights a candidate explanation for the recent decline in the prevalence of intrastate conflict. Indeed, if competitive intervention prolongs civil wars as suggested above, then the varying prevalence of competitive intervention should in turn explain variation in the prevalence of civil war over time—a proposition I now turn to explore.

Insofar as state decisions to aid combatants are patterned in ways consistent with competitive state policy-making, temporal variation in geopolitical competition between states should affect patterns of external military aid over time. As strategic rivalries intensify and decline, and as alliance agreements are inked and dissolved, the nature of external meddling in third party conflicts should change. To be sure, it is in this regard that the end of the Cold War is critical to understanding the decline in the prevalence of civil war in the contemporary period. This
international systemic transformation is paramount precisely because it eliminated the greatest geopolitical contest the world has ever experienced—that between the US and the USSR.

The pervasiveness of superpower competition during the Cold War reflected the structural basis of US-Soviet relations. Bipolarity extended the geographic scope of concern and broadened the range of factors included in the competition between the superpowers. While their nuclear stalemate ensured that a direct confrontation between them did not occur, the history of the Cold War is replete with examples of indirect superpower competition and confrontation. Since a loss for one appeared as a gain for the other, and thereby threatened a shift in the relative balance of power, the Cold War encouraged the superpowers to perceive change anywhere in the world as a potential crisis. As US Secretary of State Dean Rusk explained to a press conference in 1961, “if you don’t pay attention to the periphery, the periphery changes. And the first thing you know the periphery is the center [...] [W]hat happens in one place cannot help but affect what happens in another.”

A reciprocal view was held in the Soviet Union. Khrushchev’s widely cited speech on revolution, in which he pledged his support to “wars of national liberation,” is well known. But it is notable that the provision of Soviet assistance was at all times strategic. Indeed, when criticized by Beijing that his leadership of the international communist movement was not “revolutionary enough,” Khrushchev retorted that one must not just read Marx, but “also correctly understand what one had read and apply it to specific conditions of the time in which we live, taking into consideration the situation and the real balance of forces.” The USSR was often willing to win over Third World countries by wooing state leaders who were more bourgeois than communist. At all times, courtship of anti-American regimes and rebel groups, not “national liberation struggles” per se, dominated Soviet policy in the Third World.

Deeply intertwined with the relative balance of power were concerns over the balance of credibility. Much of this anxiety stemmed from the logic of deterrence. To deter requires a

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21. For the foundational text on this point, see: Waltz 1979.
willingness to disprove any suspicion of weakness or indecision and to respond promptly to any violation of the status quo. Neither the US nor the USSR could allow challenges to the existing distribution of power to appear to succeed against their will for fear it might undermine the credibility of their deterrent threat. American and Soviet leaders also worried that a small setback or minor defeat might raise doubts about the credibility of their alliance commitments, which in turn might encourage their allies to drift towards neutrality, or worse still, switch sides.  

Superpower concerns over the relative balances of power and credibility had both direct and indirect effects on civil wars in third party states. The direct effect was active superpower interest, support, and intervention in internal conflicts around the globe. Because challenges to the status quo were perceived to threaten the relative balances of power and credibility, they were resisted. At the same time, because any action by one superpower—such as the provision of military aid to shore up a besieged regime or its rebel challenger—was perceived by its opponent to be an attempt to gain a geostrategic advantage, these actions demanded a response. The end result was an action/reaction dynamic, whereby both superpowers found themselves committing military and financial resources to otherwise marginal areas. And precisely because this aid was flowing to war zones as a function of the interaction of the superpowers and their competition with one another, this interference took the form of competitive interventions—simultaneous military assistance to both government and rebel forces.

This perspective is commonly rehearsed in the literature: the argument that many civil wars during the Cold War were "proxy wars" fought with Soviet and American money and arms through third party clients on the periphery of the superpowers' spheres of influence. But what is missing in the existing literature is an account for why this superpower sponsorship should be associated with longer civil conflicts. If the balances of power and credibility hinged on superpower

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24. US President Dwight Eisenhower articulated these ideas in a confidential letter to UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1955: "We have come to the point where every additional backstep must be deemed a defeat for the Western world. In fact, it is a triple defeat. First, we lose a potential ally. Next, we give to an implacable enemy another recruit. Beyond this, every such retreat creates in the minds of neutrals the fear that we do not mean what we say when we pledge our support to people who want to remain free." As quoted in Gaddis 1982: p. 131. Nearly three decades later, US President Ronald Reagan reiterated these ideas: "If we cannot defend [Central America], we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliances would crumble, and the safety of our homeland would be put in jeopardy." See: Reagan, 27 April 1983.
interventions, why would the US and USSR do just enough to prevent their sides from losing, but not enough to ensure their sides won the war?

The theory outlined above provides an answer: while challenges to the relative balances of power and credibility necessitated reflexive responses, the impossible stakes of direct US-USSR confrontation advised caution. In effect, the nature of superpower intervention during the Cold War was conditional under the shadow of inadvertent escalation: while the US and USSR were compelled to intervene, they were simultaneously—and paradoxically—compelled to do so with great restraint. This inevitably led to stalemated civil wars during the Cold War.

In contrast, the post-Cold War period is characterized by an absence of superpower competitive intervention. While local competition between neighboring states and regional rivals persists, the defining feature of the post-Cold War international system is its distinctive, unipolar distribution of power manifest in American primacy. Unipolarity affords the US much more freedom of action than it enjoyed under bipolarity, enabling it to operate without worrying about direct opposition from another superpower.

Yet, Cold War rivalry not only led to the proliferation of prolonged US-USSR proxy conflicts—it also had important indirect duration effects on civil wars. Constrained by the need to both deter and avoid direct confrontation, Washington and Moscow often employed indirect strategies for projecting power and asserting influence. Military assistance was an integral element of the superpowers' competition for influence across the globe, and accordingly, weapons transfers, economic aid, and training missions diffused not only to civil wars, but across the international system more broadly. This assistance empowered otherwise weak client states to pursue independent foreign policy objectives, and indeed, many clients used Cold War framings and superpower assistance to justify and implement their own brands of foreign adventurism. Cuba, for example, was active in Latin America and Africa; Libya supplied rebels fighting in North Africa and the Philippines; and Somalia and Ethiopia actively intervened in neighboring civil wars when bolstered by superpower aid (behaviors which continued uninterrupted when the countries traded superpower patrons in the late 1970s).
Notably, the superpowers struggled to control this adventurism: by exploiting US and Soviet imperatives for preventing defection to the opposing bloc, clients found ways to commandeer superpower weaponry and economic aid for their own foreign policy ends—a phenomenon that has come to be termed "reverse leverage" or "reverse influence." Their inability to rein in truculent allies was deeply frustrating for the superpowers—former Soviet deputy foreign minister Anatoly Adamishin writes that, rather than serve as a source of profit and influence, weapons transfers were often more of a "black hole"—yet neither the US nor the Soviet Union proved capable of resolving their need to prevent defection with their desire to increase influence over recipients of military aid. The end result was a proliferation of self-interested interventions, backed by superpower money and guns, by otherwise weak states in civil wars across the globe.

In the post-Cold War period, by contrast, clients have a much harder time garnering American assistance. As Walt explains, "[n]ot only do weaker states lack an attractive alternative partner, but the unipole needs them less and thus will worry less about possible defection or defeat." The US has greater choice in which clients it chooses to support, enjoys greater flexibility to discipline adventurism by weaker powers both allied and unaligned, and maintains "command of the commons" to restrict flows of economic and military assistance around the globe. Together, these features of the unipolar system serve to constrain foreign adventurism by lesser powers, thereby reducing (though not eliminating) the prevalence of competitive interventions among neighboring states and regional rivals.

In sum, the Cold War was associated with a higher prevalence of competitive intervention due to direct and indirect effects emanating from the bipolar configuration of the international distribution of power. In the post-Cold War period, by contrast, unipolarity has both eliminated superpower competitive interventions and reduced the level of foreign adventurism engaged in by weaker states. Consequently, competitive intervention has become less frequent in the

contemporary period—an outcome that has had important implications for the average duration and global prevalence of civil wars across the globe.

### 3.4 Testable Hypotheses

The preceding theoretical arguments yield a rich set of theoretically-integrated hypotheses about the nested interactions of domestic combatants, intervening states, and the international distribution of power. These hypotheses, which are examined empirically in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, can be usefully organized according to whether they are centrally concerned with outcomes predicted by the theory or with mechanisms that link the theory’s explanatory and outcome variables. This distinction between “outcomes” and “mechanisms” is regularly drawn in the existing literature, albeit often with different turns of phrase. As will be discussed in detail in the next section, this distinction is also reflected in the research design adopted in this dissertation.

**Outcome Hypotheses**

(H1) There was a higher rate of competitive intervention during the Cold War relative to the post-Cold War period. This increased rate reflects the presence of superpower proxy warfare as well as increased foreign adventurism by less powerful states.

(H2) Owing to the greater prevalence of competitive intervention, the Cold War is associated with longer average civil war durations relative to the post-Cold War period.

(H3) Competitive interventions prolong civil wars. This is a general effect which holds irrespective of time period (Cold War/post-Cold War) and the status of the interveners (superpower/non-superpower).

(H4) The global decline in the prevalence of civil wars coinciding with the end of the Cold War has been driven by reductions in the prevalence of competitive intervention.

**Mechanism Hypotheses**

(H5) During competitive interventions in civil wars, third party interveners constrain the scope of the assistance they provide to their domestic clients. This restraint is manifest in the quality and quantity of external military aid they provide their clients.

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(H6) Competitively intervening states exercise restraint in the scope of their assistance to domestic clients due to fears of conflict escalation vis-à-vis the opposing intervener.

(H7) Competitive interventions distort the bargaining process of domestic combatants, encouraging continued fighting and prolonging civil wars.

Having laid out my theory's outcome and mechanism hypotheses, I now turn to overview the research design adopted in this dissertation to test them.

3.5 Research Design

An important objective of this dissertation is to understand the effect of competitive intervention on the duration and prevalence of civil war. In an ideal social-scientific world, a researcher tasked with this assignment would turn to the "golden standard" of experimental research: the randomized, controlled design. The researcher would isolate as many countries as possible from the outside world, instigate a new civil war in each of those countries, randomly assign competitive interventions to a subset of the civil wars, let each conflict run its course, and then measure the difference in duration between those conflicts that received a competitive intervention ("the treatment group") and those that did not ("the control group"). Such an approach would allow the researcher to precisely identify the causal effect of the explanatory variable of interest while controlling for other variables through randomization. Other researchers could then replicate the study, running their own experiments by randomly assigning competitive interventions to another set of civil wars.

Thankfully, we do not live in a world where researchers can isolate countries in laboratory-like environments, instigate the outbreak of civil wars, or assign competitive interventions to ongoing conflicts. Consequently, randomized, controlled experiments are not a feasible research design for this dissertation. What is possible, however, is a research design that resembles this "golden standard" as closely as possible. While it may not be possible to control for other variables through randomization, it is possible to adjust for these variables using other methods.

This dissertation investigates the explanatory power of the theory outlined above by adopting a mixed-method, "nested" research design that draws inferences from cross-national statistical
work and detailed case study analyses. The central strength of this research design is its ability to leverage the inferential opportunities afforded by both large- and small-N research within a single framework, combining the generalizability of quantitative models with the nuance of qualitative case studies. Together, quantitative and qualitative methods enable a researcher to carefully estimate the effect of an explanatory variable of interest (in this dissertation, competitive intervention) while controlling for other variables through multivariate regression, process tracing, and within-case analysis.

A nested analysis approach entails, first, a large-N analysis that provides an initial assessment of the relationship between a set of rival (or complementary) explanatory variables and the outcome variable of interest across the universe of cases for which the theory ought to apply. The overarching goal of this component of the design is to test rival hypotheses against one another, generate baseline estimates of the strength of the relationships between variables, and identify levels of uncertainty surrounding those relationships. Uniquely, large-N analysis can produce generalizations that can adjudicate between rival explanations where analytic constraints prevent qualitative assessment; it can assess the extent to which partial explanations or control variables explain patterns of variation in the outcome variable of interest; and it can estimate the conditional relationships between explanatory variables.

Upon establishing preliminary associations between variables, the investigator moves on to the second stage of the nested analysis—small-N analysis using qualitative case studies. This component of the design entails the intensive examination of within-case processes to answer lingering questions left open by the large-N analysis. Country-level statistical analyses (of the

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30. The nested analysis approach was first proposed by Lieberman 2005.
31. Following Gerring 2004: p. 342, I define a case study as "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units."
32. The small-N component of the nested analysis approach can take one of two forms: small-N model testing or small-N model building. The former is to be employed when the specification and fit of the large-N model is demonstrated to be appropriate and the goal of the in-depth analysis is to further test the robustness of those findings; the latter is to be employed when the state of the theory is initially weak or refuted by the large-N analysis. In practice, aspects of both model-building and model-testing small-N analysis can be combined; for example, in the process of theory testing a particular case study might uncover a new rival explanation that went untested in the large-N analysis, motivate the development of a more refined theoretical model, or (in)validate measurement instruments used in the quantitative component.
type that are employed in this dissertation) are often plagued by potential problems of endogeneity, questions about heterogeneity of cases, and concerns about the quality of concept measurement. Small-N analysis provides an opportunity to counter criticisms of this kind by verifying the plausibility of proposed mechanisms and providing a sense for whether the theoretical story is compelling with reference to individual cases. Indeed, qualitative research tools are especially helpful for identifying the causal mechanisms that link explanatory and outcome variables. 

The small-N component of the research design entails the scrutiny of a heterogeneous set of materials—secondary sources, interviews, archival documents, and other subnational data—using structured comparisons, process tracing, and sub-national data analyses to shed light on the mechanisms that connect the explanatory variable to the outcome variable of interest. These materials provide more fine-grained evidence of particular events and behaviors, the temporal sequencing of causal processes, and narrative assessments of counterfactual claims. In short, the small-N component adds analytical depth that complements, corrects, and/or refines the analytical breadth provided by the large-N analysis.

As with any social science question, multiple sources of inferential leverage are generally preferable when tackling complex questions. The pairing of qualitative and quantitative methods enables rigorous tests of rival explanations, improves concept development and measurement, and ultimately increases overall confidence in the central findings of this dissertation. In short, a mixed-method design enables a researcher to leverage qualitative and quantitative tools in ways that preserve their respective strengths while overcoming their respective limitations.

In this dissertation, the transition from large-N to small-N methods entails a shift in the level of analysis from between-case analyses (i.e. cross-national analyses of civil wars) to within-case analyses (i.e. the intensive study of the civil war process in individual countries). In the large-N component of the project, statistical approaches are employed to test the outcome hypotheses listed above. This is taken up in the next chapter, which tests the macro-level predictions of the theory and probes its external validity against the universe of civil wars fought between 1975 and

2009. Upon identifying the associations between competitive intervention, protracted conflict, and the global prevalence of civil war, the dissertation then turns to the small-N component of the project: the intensive study of civil wars in Angola (1975-1991) and Afghanistan (1979-1992). This is taken up in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, which test the *mechanism hypotheses* of the theory and explore the processes that link competitive intervention to longer civil wars.

Having laid out my theory of competitive intervention in civil war, derived outcome and mechanism hypotheses that follow from it, and overviewed my research design, I now turn to empirical illustrations and tests of the theory.
4 Quantitative Models: Civil Wars, 1975-2009

What is the relationship between competitive intervention and the duration of civil wars? Have patterns in the prevalence of competitive intervention changed over time? What are the implications for intrastate conflicts? This chapter engages these questions by analyzing data on the universe of civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009. It introduces a dataset of competitive intervention that is global in scope, employs new methodological tools to overcome shortcomings in the existing literature, and examines the generalizability of my theory of competitive intervention in civil war. It aims to test the outcome hypotheses generated in the previous chapter by assessing the substantive and statistical significance of the relationships between civil war duration, competitive intervention, and the global prevalence of civil war.

An additional objective is to test the relative explanatory power of my argument against those found in the existing literature. As noted in the previous chapter, an important strength of large-N quantitative analyses is their ability to adjudicate between multiple rival hypotheses while also assessing the extent to which partial explanations or conditional relationships explain patterns of variation in the outcome variable of interest. By incorporating variables highlighted by existing research, the analyses presented below provide an assessment of the effect of competitive
interventions on civil wars that controls for the wide political, economic, and social contexts in which intrastate conflicts are waged.

The chapter also makes a novel empirical contribution by applying recently developed statistical tools to overcome methodological shortcomings in the existing literature. To date, research on external military aid and civil war duration has at times suffered from the problem of monotone likelihood, a mathematical complication observed in the fitting process of some statistical models when one or more independent variables perfectly predict (or nearly perfectly predict) a binary dependent variable. As elaborated below, I employ a corrective for monotone likelihood to overcome these methodological concerns, providing consistent estimates of the effect of competitive intervention on civil war intractability.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. I first detail the construction of the dataset and overview the variables included in the statistical tests presented below. Next, I describe the models and methods I employ, highlighting the advantages they present for the research questions examined in this dissertation. I then perform a set of analyses that test the outcome hypotheses derived in the previous chapter. I close with a summary of my results and a brief discussion of their implications for civil war researchers.

4.1 The Dataset: Case Selection, Variables, and Measurement

The dataset analyzed in this dissertation includes all civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009 with at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and a minimum of 1000 cumulative battle-related deaths over the course of their full duration. To construct the dataset, I first drew an initial list of candidate conflicts from the well-known UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD), which defines a civil war as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths [per year]” 1 To minimize concerns over heterogeneity of cases inherent in the ACD’s low fatality threshold, I then added the cumulative battle-related

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deaths requirement to my case selection criteria and removed any cases that failed to reach 1000 total battle deaths. Importantly, adding this cumulative requirement excludes the low intensity intrastate conflicts that populate the ACD, such as coups or violent protests. It therefore helps to ensure that cases are sufficiently alike to merit meaningful comparison in the empirical analyses reported below.²

My dependent variable, civil war duration in days, is likewise drawn from the UCDP ACD. I follow existing studies by analyzing conflict episodes, defined as continuous periods of active conflict-years.³ A conflict’s start date is recorded once the UCDP definition criteria are met; a conflict is considered terminated once it ceases to meet the UCDP criteria. Notably, by employing these coding rules I am implicitly adopting a negative conception of peace: my focus is on the absence of violent armed conflict, not necessarily the resolution of the conflict’s underlying incompatibilities.⁴ These scope conditions render a dataset that compiles 941 conflict-years divided between 95 distinct episodes of violence. The mean duration of civil wars in the dataset is 10.3 years; the median duration is 7.3 years.

My primary explanatory variable, competitive intervention, is generated using data on external military aid to civil war combatants drawn from the UCDP External Support Dataset, updated where appropriate using secondary sources.⁵ Observations are coded for both governments and rebel groups engaged in an ongoing conflict at the yearly resolution for multiple forms of military aid, including boots-on-the-ground military operations, weapons and ammunition transfers, financial aid, access to territory, war matériel and logistical support, training, access to military infrastructure, intelligence support, and recruitment, gun running, and harboring. I aggregate these different forms of aid into variables that record state support of any kind to a government and/or rebel group engaged in a civil war. I then code my competitive intervention

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² On this point, see: Anderson and Worsnop, forthcoming.
³ Kreutz 2010: p. 244.
⁴ The latter approach, which adopts a positive conception of peace, is generally understood to be the absence of indirect (or structural) violence. This simple negative/positive peace dichotomy is widely applied in peace and conflict research. For an elaboration on these concepts, see the foundational work by Galtung 1969.
⁵ Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011. I use Version 1.0-2011 of the External Support Dataset. Updates on the dataset included adding new coding where there was missing data, correcting errors in the original codings, and reorganizing the observations to make the dataset amenable to a cross-national, time series data structure.
variable to identify those cases where both the government and the rebels receive simultaneous support from different third party states.

The dataset also records which state(s) send military aid to civil war combatants. This enables me to differentiate between US-Soviet competitive interventions and competitive interventions by lesser powers. The dataset also distinguishes between substantiated instances of external support and alleged (unsubstantiated) instances of external support. I exclude alleged instances of support in my main analyses, but confirm the robustness of my results to their inclusion.\(^6\)

To capture the effect of international systemic change on the prevalence of civil war, I include an indicator differentiating the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. This variable enables me to explore whether the Cold War is associated with longer civil wars. It also facilitates testing the proposition that temporal change in the global prevalence of civil war has been driven by changing trends in average conflict duration.

Finally, the models reported below include a battery of control variables to account for competing explanations articulated in the existing literature. These include a number of characteristics of the civil war state (real GDP per capita, regime type, population size, oil production per capita, and mountainous terrain) as well as a number of conflict-specific factors (whether it is ethnically-based, secessionist, multi-party, and/or whether a UN peacekeeping operation was deployed at some point during its duration). Control variables, their operationalization, and the data sources used to construct them are listed in Table 4.1. I report summary statistics for all variables used in the analyses below in Table 4.2.

4.2 Models and Methods

My empirical strategy employs a duration model design to test the hypotheses outlined in the previous chapter. Duration models provide estimates of the conditional probability of an event occurring—in this case, of a civil war terminating—given the length of elapsed time since the start of a duration. In other words, they model the time it takes for events (war terminations) to occur.

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\(^6\) See Model 8 in Table 4.4 below.
### Variable Operationalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real GDP per capita</td>
<td>PPP (int’l $, fixed 2011 prices); lagged one year; log transformed to adjust for skewedness</td>
<td>Lindgren 2011a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Dummy; ‘1’ = polity2 score ≥ 7; ‘0’ otherwise; lagged one year</td>
<td>Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>State population size; log transformed to adjust for skewedness</td>
<td>Lindgren 2011b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil production per capita</td>
<td>Box-Cox transformed to adjust for skewedness</td>
<td>Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainous terrain</td>
<td>Share of state’s terrain covered by mountains; log transformed to adjust for skewedness</td>
<td>Fearon and Laitin 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic conflict</td>
<td>Dummy; ‘1’ = ethnic conflict; ‘0’ otherwise</td>
<td>Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secessionist conflict</td>
<td>Dummy; ‘1’ = secessionist conflict; ‘0’ otherwise</td>
<td>Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiparty conflict</td>
<td>Dummy; ‘1’ = greater than two domestic combatants fighting concurrently; ‘0’ otherwise</td>
<td>Gleditsch et al. 2002;Themmér and Wallensteen 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN peacekeeping</td>
<td>Dummy; ‘1’ = UNPK operation deployed to country in a given year; ‘0’ otherwise</td>
<td>UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.1: Control variables, their operationalization, and data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables, models 1-7</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<td>Competitive intervention</td>
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<td>0.477</td>
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<td>Cold War</td>
<td>941</td>
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<td>0.499</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Real GDP per capita</td>
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<td>1.03</td>
<td>5.875</td>
<td>10.263</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
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<td>0.438</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population size</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>17.176</td>
<td>1.421</td>
<td>13.708</td>
<td>20.912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil production per capita</td>
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<td>13.601</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>12.810</td>
<td>14.062</td>
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<td>Mountainous terrain</td>
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<td>Multiparty conflict</td>
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<td>0.446</td>
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</tr>
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<td>UN peacekeeping</td>
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<td>0.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional variables, models 7-11

<table>
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<th>Variables</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0.441</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government only</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebels only</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US/Soviet competitive intervention</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-superpower competitive intervention</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>0.286</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.2: Variable summary statistics
These models provide a number of advantages relevant to the research questions explored in this dissertation.

First, duration models explicitly model the effects of time on a dependent variable of interest. For obvious reasons, the termination of a conflict is intimately tied to the history that precedes it. Duration models provide a method for incorporating this history into a study’s statistical design, enabling me to account for the duration dependence that characterizes conflict data. Second, duration models control for the problems of “truncation” and “censoring.” While the dataset analyzed below has a wide temporal scope, covering all years from 1975 to 2009, there is a need to account for the fact that some wars began before 1975 (these are the “left truncated” cases) and some wars ended after 2009 (these are the “right censored” cases). Truncation and censoring amount to missing data problems insofar as parts of a case’s event history go unobserved. Duration models correct for this problem, alleviating concerns about selection bias arising from missing data. Finally, duration models facilitate the inclusion of time-varying covariates. This enables me to capture the variation of covariates not only between cases, but within cases as well.

I adopt a semi-parametric extended Cox model approach. A limitation of fully parametric models, such as the exponential, Weibull, or log-logistic, is the need to assume the distributional form of the baseline hazard in the data. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing a priori which distributional form best fits the data. Cox models are partial likelihood estimators that do not require assumptions about the baseline hazard, thereby liberating researchers from the need to impose a distributional form on the data. In fact, the baseline hazard can take any functional form in a Cox model framework. The model is semi-parametric, however, because covariates still enter the model linearly. Although the resulting estimates are not as efficient as maximum likelihood estimates for a correctly-specified fully parametric hazard regression model, this trade-off is more than compensated for by the fact that researchers can avoid imposing arbitrary (and likely incorrect) assumptions about the form of the baseline hazard.

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7. There are 18 left truncated observations and 19 right censored observations in the dataset.
8. For the original derivation of the Cox model approach, see: Cox 1972. For an accessible introduction to the extended Cox model, see: Kleinbaum and Klein 2012: Chapter 6.
One final methodological note merits discussion. Examination of the dataset revealed the potential for a problem often encountered when working within a duration model framework: monotone likelihood. Monotone likelihood occurs when the value of a covariate (or a linear combination of covariates) perfectly predicts—or almost perfectly predicts—an outcome. In the dataset analyzed below, there is only one case that saw a civil war terminate during a US-Soviet competitive intervention. Notably, this fact is itself powerful evidence that superpower competitive interventions had pronounced impacts on civil war duration. However, from a methodological perspective, monotone likelihood introduces mathematical complications which lead to infinite coefficient estimates and standard errors. Heinze and Schemper summarize the problem aptly: "In general, one does not assume infinite parameter values in underlying populations."

Thankfully, recent years have seen the development of correctives for monotone likelihood—namely, the application of Firth’s penalized likelihood estimators to Cox models. With the application of penalized maximum likelihood estimation, finite parameter estimates of constant and time-dependent effects can be obtained even in the presence of monotone likelihood. I therefore employ these techniques when disaggregating competitive interventions into their superpower and non-superpower varieties in model 11 below; all other models report standard Cox model estimates.

4.3 Empirical Results

4.3.1 Changing Trends in Competitive Intervention

How have trends in external military aid to domestic combatants varied over time? Figure 4.1 presents descriptive statistics that capture aggregate patterns in the dataset. It plots the percentage of civil wars experiencing competitive interventions, one-sided assistance to rebels, and one-sided

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9. Note that monotone likelihood is equivalent to the problem of separation in binary response models. Translated into the language of duration models, monotone likelihood occurs when "at each failure time, the covariate value of the failed individual is the largest of all covariate values in the risk set at that time or when it is always the smallest." See: Heinze and Schemper 2001: p. 114. On separation, see: Zorn 2005. For a more technical treatment, see: Firth 1993.

support to governments for all years between 1975 and 2009. The figure uncovers a striking discontinuity in the prevalence of competitive intervention coinciding with the end of the Cold War—namely, a significant decrease in the percentage of conflicts afflicted by this form of external meddling. In numbers, the percentage of conflicts experiencing competitive intervention has dropped from a Cold War yearly average of 46.7 percent to a post-Cold War yearly average of only 20.6 percent. In other words, the degree to which competitive intervention afflicts civil wars has been more than halved in the post-Cold War period.

In contrast to the reduction in the prevalence of competitive intervention, the percentage of conflicts experiencing one-sided support to governments has soared from a Cold War yearly average of 17 percent to a post-Cold War yearly average of 37.9 percent. One-sided support to rebel groups has also increased, rising from a Cold War yearly average of 9.4 percent of conflicts to a post-Cold War yearly average of 16.8 percent of conflicts. This reveals that external military assistance remains a key foreign policy instrument employed by states to secure their national
interests. Consequently, the drop in competitive intervention is not driven by a decline in external military assistance overall; rather, it is driven by the decline in simultaneous support to government and rebel forces.

A key question is whether the decline in competitive intervention in the post-Cold War period is simply a reflection of the termination of superpower proxy war in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Figure 4.2 disaggregates competitive interventions into their superpower and non-superpower varieties. The figure shows that while superpower proxy wars were waged during every year from 1975 to 1991, they never afflicted more than 17.7 percent of conflicts in any given year. At the same time, the Cold War was associated with pervasive levels of competitive intervention by less powerful states. This demonstrates that the higher prevalence of competitive intervention during the Cold War was not only a function of US-USSR proxy warfare; the role of lesser powers was equally important. Empowered by the assistance they received as clients of the superpowers, weaker states found ways to leverage their sponsor’s military and
economic resources for self-gain. One consequence of this empowerment was increased rates of foreign adventurism, which in turn resulted in a higher prevalence of non-superpower competitive intervention during the Cold War.

To provide a sense for how the different forms of military assistance provided to civil war combatants have varied over time, Figure 4.3 disaggregates external military assistance into its component parts, plotting the percentage of conflicts receiving troop deployments, weapons transfers, access to territory, economic aid, training, matériel and logistical support, the provision of intelligence materials, access to military infrastructure, and other services such as recruitment opportunities and gun running. Here again, the figure reveals striking discontinuities in the prevalence of two-sided support that coincide with the end of the Cold War. Competitive intervention has declined to an all-time low across each and every category of aid, and most dramatically in the case of weapons transfers, economic aid, training, and matériel and logistical support.

Similarly, the disaggregated plots again show that one-sided support to governments has increased in the post-Cold War period. Much of this increase appears to be due to growing levels of aid in the last decade of observations. Intelligence sharing with governments, for example, saw a particularly pronounced increase between 2000 and 2009, as did troop deployments, economic aid, and training. Concurrently, one-sided support to rebel groups remained fairly consistent until around 2000, after which time this form of support declined across all forms of external assistance. This trend is especially evident in the case of rebel access to territory, but also obtains for weapons transfers, training, economic aid, and matériel and logistics.

The timing of these increases in support to governments and decreases in support to rebels is undoubtedly related to the United States’ global “war on terror.” Following al Qaeda’s terrorist attacks in September 2001, the US embarked on an international campaign to identify, locate, and destroy terrorist organizations around the globe. In support of these objectives, it began to partner with weak states that were threatened by domestic threats while also implementing policies designed to deny state sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to terrorists. Figure 4.3 captures these policy shifts, suggesting that governments afflicted by civil war were increasingly likely to attract
Figure 4.3: Disaggregated patterns in external military assistance in the form of competitive interventions and one-sided support to civil war combatants, 1975-2009
external support in the post-9/11 period, while rebel groups (i.e. “terrorists” in US foreign policy lingo) have found it more difficult to secure external aid in the same period.

Importantly, the descriptive statistics presented above demonstrate that competitive intervention is neither an exclusively Cold War phenomenon nor an exclusively US-USSR phenomenon. This form of intervention has continued to afflict civil wars in the post-Cold War period; indeed, it has occasioned intrastate conflicts fought during every year recorded in the dataset. This underscores the importance of a generalizable theory of competitive intervention that not only explains past conflicts, but also informs contemporary policy. At the same time, the figures show that there is wide variation in the prevalence of this form of intervention over time. This provides strong evidence in support of outcome hypothesis 1: there was indeed a higher rate of competitive intervention during the Cold War relative to the post-Cold War period, and that higher rate was driven not only by the presence of superpower proxy warfare, but also by the increased foreign adventurism of less powerful states.

The descriptive statistics presented above highlight the important role of systemic effects and interstate competition on the frequency and form of third party intervention in civil wars. Having established how patterns of competitive intervention have changed over time, I now turn to explore the implications of this variation for the duration of civil wars.

### 4.3.2 Competitive Intervention, Conflict Duration, and the Prevalence of Civil War

Are changing patterns of external military aid associated with the decline in civil war in the post-Cold War period? Table 4.3 reports results obtained from running extended Cox models on the dataset described above. For each variable, the table reports coefficients with bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses. To facilitate translation of these results, I also report hazard ratios. To interpret the effect of a one-unit change in a variable of interest, one subtracts 1 from the reported hazard ratio and then multiplies by 100 to recover the percent change in the hazard of an event occurring. Thus, a hazard ratio of 1.10 indicates that a one unit increase in $x$ is associated with a 10 percent increase in the hazard of an event occurring (in this case, a 10 percent increase
in the hazard that a civil war ends). Alternatively, a hazard ratio of 0.90 indicates that a one unit increase in $x$ is associated with a 10 percent decrease in the hazard of an event occurring (in this case, a 10 percent decrease in the hazard that a civil war ends).\footnote{Note that log-transformed covariates are interpreted as percentage, rather than unit, increases. Thus, a hazard ratio of 1.10 indicates that a one percent increase in a logged variable is associated with a 10 percent increase in the hazard of an event occurring, while a hazard ratio of 0.90 indicates that a one percent increase in a logged variable is associated with a 10 percent decrease in the hazard of an event occurring.}

I begin by considering the general relationship between the Cold War and civil war duration. The theory presented in Chapter 3 posits a positive correlation owing to the greater prevalence of competitive intervention during that period; I find empirical support for this prediction. Model 1 reports a simple bivariate specification; model 2 examines how the incorporation of state characteristics, including GDP per capita, regime type, population size, oil production per capita, and mountainous terrain, affects the findings of the baseline model; and model 3 extends the analysis further by incorporating conflict-specific factors, including whether the civil war was ethnically-based, secessionist, or multiparty, and whether it attracted a UN peacekeeping operation at some point during its duration.

All three models report a statistically and substantively significant relationship between the Cold War and protracted civil war. In numbers, the Cold War is shown to be associated with an average 40.3 (model 1) to 50.3 (model 2) percent decrease in the hazard of a civil war terminating. In other words, the average Cold War conflict is nearly \textit{twice as long} as the average post-Cold War conflict—empirical evidence in support of outcome hypothesis 2.

However, demonstrating a temporal discontinuity in average civil war duration does not explain why the discontinuity occurred. Having identified the macro-level empirical pattern that describes temporal variation in conflict durations, the task that remains is to identify the variables that have driven that variation. This dissertation highlights the critical role of competitive interventions in prolonging civil wars. Models 4-7 test this argument by estimating the effect of competitive interventions on civil war duration. Model 4 reports a simple bivariate specification; model 5 re-incorporates the Cold War indicator; model 6 includes the characteristics of the civil war state listed above; and model 7 presents a fully saturated model that includes conflict-specific
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
<th>Model 7</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>COMPETITIVE INTERVENTION</strong></td>
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<td>-0.685**</td>
<td>-1.023***</td>
<td>-1.095***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.310)</td>
<td>(0.322)</td>
<td>(0.340)</td>
<td>(0.379)</td>
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<td>-0.670**</td>
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<td>-0.450</td>
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<td>(0.281)</td>
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<td>(0.393)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.377)</td>
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<td>(0.372)</td>
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Table 4.3: Extended Cox model estimates. The table lists variable coefficients, with bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses, followed by hazard ratios ($e^\beta$).

*p ≤ .10; **p ≤ .05; ***p ≤ .01

variables.

Across all model specifications, competitive intervention is shown to decrease the hazard of a civil war coming to an end by an average 49.6 (model 5) to 66.5 (model 7) percent relative to conflicts which did not experience a competitive intervention. These are substantively large effects that are statistically significant across all models. Moreover, these results are shown to be
insensitive to the inclusion of state and conflict-specific controls. This is strong empirical evidence that competitive interventions prolong civil wars.

An additional interesting finding emerges in these analyses. Models 5-7 show that the inclusion of the competitive intervention variable renders the Cold War indicator statistical insignificant. This suggests that an important mechanism linking the Cold War to longer conflicts is the greater prevalence of competitive intervention during that period. In effect, the Cold War variable appears to have served as a proxy for competitive intervention in models 1-3; when the competitive intervention variable is itself included in models 5-7, the independent effect of the Cold War is eliminated. I plot these results, together with their estimated uncertainty, in Figure 4.4, which reports estimates of the percent change in the hazard of a war terminating derived from models 3 and 7. When the competitive intervention variable is excluded from the analysis (model 3), the Cold War is shown to be associated with a 48.8 percent decrease in the hazard of war termination, with 95 percent confidence intervals that do not cross 0. When the competitive intervention variable is included in the analysis (model 7), however, the substantive significance of the Cold War indicator declines and the 95 percent confidence intervals do cross 0. The reason for this change is that the competitive intervention variable is doing the work: it is shown to be associated with a 66.5 percent decrease in the hazard of war termination, with 95 percent confidence intervals that do not even approach 0. These findings are important: they demonstrate that there is nothing unique about the Cold War variable per se; it is, after all, just an indicator for a particular period of time. Instead, a critical driver of longer civil war durations during the Cold War was the greater prevalence of competitive intervention during that period.

With respect to the control variables included in these models, neither GDP per capita, democracy, oil production per capita, mountainous terrain, nor ethnically-based or secessionist conflicts are shown to have a statistically significant relationship with duration. The UN peacekeeping variable also fails to reach statistical significance, perhaps reflecting the fact that peacekeepers tend to deploy only after an internal peace agreement has been reached and fighting has already
Figure 4.4: Percent change in the hazard of a civil war terminating for explanatory variables of interest. The plotted hazard ratios are drawn from Model 3 ("Cold War") and Model 7 ("Cold war with CI" and "CI"), as reported in Table 4.3.

been reduced to a lower intensity level. Large population sizes and multiparty civil wars, on the other hand, are shown to be strongly correlated with protracted fighting—findings that accord with the existing literature.

Table 4.4 extends the analysis by examining alternate specifications and disaggregating the external support and competitive intervention variables. Model 8 confirms that the results are not sensitive to the inclusion of alleged (unsubstantiated) support, as coded in the UCDP External Support Dataset. The substantive and statistical significance of the effect of competitive intervention on civil war duration is virtually unchanged in this model.

Models 9 and 10 examine the duration effects of competitive interventions relative to conflicts in which only the rebels or only government forces, respectively, are supported by external patrons. These models demonstrate that civil wars experiencing competitive interventions are longer than conflicts in which only one of the domestic combatants enjoys external support. Specifically, 13. Indeed, it is important to note that this finding does not speak to the ability of peacekeepers to keep the peace; the above analyses are focused more squarely on the duration of an ongoing civil war.
### Table 4.4: Extended Cox model estimates. The table lists variable coefficients, with bootstrapped standard errors in parentheses, followed by hazard ratios ($e^{\beta}$).

*p ≤ .10; **p ≤ .05; ***p ≤ .01

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 8 (incl. alleged support)</th>
<th>Model 9 (CI vs. rebels only)</th>
<th>Model 10 (CI vs. govt only)</th>
<th>Model 11 (CIs disaggregated)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficients</td>
<td>Coefficients</td>
<td>Coefficients</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>0.636</td>
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<td>-0.453</td>
<td>-0.453</td>
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<td>(0.353)</td>
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<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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Competitive intervention is shown to decrease the hazard of a civil war coming to an end by an average 72.1 percent relative to conflicts in which only the rebels are supported (model 9), and by an average 65.8 percent relative to conflicts in which only the government is supported (model 10).

Finally, model 11 disaggregates the competitive intervention variable into its superpower and non-superpower varieties, reporting extended Cox model with Firth penalized likelihood estimates to correct for monotone likelihood. I plot these results, together with their estimated uncertainty, in Figure 4.5, which reports estimates of the percent change in the hazard of a war terminating. The figure shows that superpower competitive intervention decreased the hazard of a
Figure 4.5: Percent change in the hazard of a civil war terminating for explanatory variables of interest. The plotted hazard ratios are drawn from Model 11, as reported in Table 4.4.

civil war terminating by an average 80.7 percent relative to those conflicts that did not experience a competitive intervention. These are large effects indeed, reflecting the fact that, in almost every case, superpower proxy wars did not end until the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of the Cold War. Notably, however, competitive interventions by lesser powers are also estimated to decrease the hazard of a conflict terminating by an average 61.2 percent relative to civil wars that do not experience a competitive intervention. In other words, while superpower proxy warfare prolonged internal conflicts, so too do competitive interventions by lesser powers.

Taken together, models 4-11 present significant evidence in support of outcome hypotheses 3 and 4. First, competitive interventions prolong civil wars. This effect holds irrespective of time period (Cold War/post Cold War) and/or the status of the interveners (superpower/non-superpower). And second, the global decline in the prevalence of civil war that coincided with the end of the Cold War was also coincident with a stark discontinuity in the prevalence of competitive intervention. Indeed, this pernicious form of external meddling has become much less common
in the post-Cold War period. Importantly, however, it has not disappeared entirely. For this reason, it is critical that we not only explain past conflicts, but also understand the dynamics and consequences of competitive intervention in contemporary civil wars.

4.3.3 Addressing the Selection Effect Critique

One possible critique of the findings reported above would be that there is a possibility of a selection effect driving the results. It may not be the case that competitive interventions are prolonging civil wars; rather, it might be argued, longer civil wars tend to disproportionately attract competitive interventions. In the latter case, the link between competitive intervention and longer conflict would be a spurious one.

There are two responses to this critique. First, the time-series cross-national data structure of the dataset alleviates this concern by allowing the competitive intervention variable to vary across years of a civil war. The models reported above compare the duration effect of a given year of competitive intervention with the baseline duration dependence of a year without competitive intervention. As a result, even if it were true that only long conflicts attracted competitive interventions, the model would account for this in the estimates it derives.

Second, the selection effect concern can be demonstrated to be empirically untrue. Figure 4.6 plots the year of competitive intervention onset for all civil wars that were afflicted by this form of intervention in the dataset. The figure reveals that in the vast majority (68.6 percent) of cases, the onset of a competitive intervention came in the first year of a conflict. In 90.1 percent of cases, the onset of a competitive intervention had occurred by the third year of a conflict. In other words, it is not the case that longer civil wars tend to disproportionately attract competitive interventions; rather, competitive interventions tend to generate longer conflicts.

4.4 Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter underscore the critical role competitive interventions have played in sustaining civil wars over time. The empirical findings reported above provide strong
evidence in support of my theory’s outcome hypotheses, identifying the conditional nature of the relationship between the Cold War period and protracted conflict, as well as the substantively and statistically significant relationship between competitive intervention and civil war duration. By testing my theory against the universe of civil wars fought between 1975 and 2009, these results confirm its external validity across space and time. Similarly, by testing my argument against those found in the existing literature, my findings confirm its generalizability across the wide political, economic, and social contexts in which intrastate conflicts are waged.

Having found support for the outcomes predicted by my theory, the task that remains is to identify the mechanisms that link competitive intervention to protracted conflict. My theory highlights the conditional nature of intervention under the shadow of inadvertent escalation, arguing that competitive interveners will constrain the scope of their support to domestic combatants to avoid mutual destruction of potential gains. This prevents the conferral of decisive military advantages on clients, distorts the domestic bargaining process, and generates military stalemates.
in ways that prolong civil wars. As noted in the previous chapter, testing these mechanism hypotheses requires a shift from between-case analyses (i.e. the study of cross-national datasets) to within-case analyses (i.e. the study of the civil war process in a single country). To those ends, this dissertation now turns to explore the dynamics of competitive intervention in one of the most deadly conflicts of the past century: the Angolan civil war (1975-1991).
5 Competitive Intervention and the Angolan Civil War, 1975-1991

That third party states would invest billions of dollars and risk the lives of thousands of soldiers, yet seek only to “not lose” rather than “win” in a foreign civil war may strike many as fanciful. Indeed, as reviewed in Chapter 2, most studies of external intervention in internal conflicts assume that states intervene to either help one side win militarily or to facilitate bargaining and negotiated settlement between domestic combatants—outcomes which terminate a civil war. It is this dissertation’s purpose to show otherwise.

My theory of competitive intervention in civil war explains that while “winning” may be the primary objective for a conflict’s domestic combatants, the need to avoid large-scale confrontations with one another leads third party interveners to pursue more limited objectives. Yet while limits serve to constrain intervener confrontation, they simultaneously prevent interveners from conferring decisive military advantages on their clients. In effect, the contradiction inherent in the need to intervene and the need to control escalation warps interveners’ positive objectives of “winning” into negative objectives of “not losing.” Inevitably, this leads to stalematized conflicts which, when combined with the distortionary effects of external military aid on the bargaining process of domestic combatants, prolongs civil wars.
The strategic logics motivating external interventions in the Angolan civil war during the 1970s and 1980s are illuminating examples of the dynamics my theory highlights. While winning was undoubtedly the primary objective for the Angolan government and its rebel challengers, fears of uncontrolled escalation led external actors to constrain the form and scope of their interventions. As I will demonstrate below, strategic restraint was manifest in distinctions between “advisory” and “combat” missions, geographic areas of control and contestation, adopted force postures, and target selection. In effect, the need to avoid uncontrolled escalation generated a set of interventions on the part of South Africa and the United States that aimed to sustain the rebel insurgency rather than propel it to victory, and a corresponding set of interventions on the part of Cuba and the Soviet Union that aimed to prevent the dislodging of the Angolan government rather than end the civil war.

The Angolan civil war is an important case for this dissertation, representing one of the clearest examples of the nexus between interstate competition and the civil war process. Between 1975 and 1991, Angola was the site of a complex system of conflicts that simultaneously took place at domestic, regional, and international levels. These conflicts were distinct but interrelated, exerting important conditioning effects on one another. By exploring how interstate competition manifest on the battlefields of Angola, this chapter demonstrates that external actors were not simply reacting to developments inside the country; neither the scope and form of external interventions, nor the strategic logics motivating outside powers, can be directly derived from the internal orientation of the conflict. Instead, the key strategic interactions that conditioned the dynamics and outcomes of the civil war occurred at the interstate level—namely, between the interveners themselves.

The Angolan case also presents a hard test for my theory. First, the conflict inflicted hundreds of thousands of deaths, displaced millions, and decimated the country’s economic, political, and social institutions. The United Nations estimates that between 1980 and 1988 alone, Angola lost some $30 billion due to the war—six times its 1988 gross domestic product.¹ The identification of

¹ UN Inter-Agency Task Force 1989: p. 2.
strategic restraint in the interactions of competitive interveners, despite the disturbing intensity
of violence between domestic combatants inside the country, provides powerful evidence of the
conditioning effect of fears of inadvertent escalation.

Second, intervener behaviors were not limited by strict resource constraints. The US and
USSR were global superpowers; South Africa was a regional hegemon; and Cuba profited from the
largess of the Soviet Union, which single-handedly supplied both the Angolan government and
the Cuban forces that were deployed to protect it. It is precisely because third party interveners
possessed considerable military and financial capabilities that decisions to continually invest in
the conflict at a level which generated stalemate, rather than decisive military advantages, appear
inefficient. Once one accounts for escalation fears amongst competitive interveners, however,
these seemingly disadvantageous decisions make strategic sense.

Finally, the interveners were strongly motivated to see their side win the civil war. For the
US and the USSR, Angola represented one of the “hot” frontlines of the Cold War given its vast
natural resource wealth, its strategic air and naval facilities, and its significance for the balance of
power in southern Africa. For the South Africans, the outcome of the conflict was of existential
significance due to deep-seated fears that a defeat in Angola would mark the beginning of the
end of the apartheid regime, representing the first domino in a cascade which would first liberate
Namibia (then South-West Africa) before propelling Black Nationalism to the seat of power in
Pretoria. And while the strategic interests of the Cubans are the subject of dispute—some stress
Castro’s ideological conviction to national liberation, others suggest the Cubans served at the
behest of the Soviet Union—no one can doubt the significance of the scale of Cuba’s intervention:
the tiny island nation maintained a deployment of tens of thousands of troops for over a decade,
peaking at 55,000 troops in 1988.2 Thus, the interests at stake for interveners in the Angolan
civil war cannot be dismissed as inconsequential; winning the war mattered. To understand why
interveners limited the scope of their support to domestic combatants requires an explicit account
of the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention.

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2. By war’s end, some 337,033 Cuban soldiers would serve in the country. See: Gleijeses 2013: p. 519.
The analysis that follows elucidates the form and function of “cooperative competition” during competitive interventions in Angola by drawing on an extensive set of primary and secondary materials. These include semi-structured interviews with former military commanders, political leaders, and diplomats in South Africa; archival documents from the United States and South Africa; and a growing number of memoirs, personal accounts, and oral histories published by political and military veterans of the Angolan conflict. For access to Cuban primary source material, I rely on the work of the international historian Piero Gleijeses who, to date, remains the only foreign scholar to have been allowed access to the Cuban archives for the post-1959 period. Gleijeses has published two lengthy works, *Conflicting Missions* and *Visions of Freedom*, which draw on thousands of Cuban documents and thousands of pages of conversations between Fidel Castro and his closest aids and foreign leaders. Gleijeses’ work is a tremendous contribution to scholarship in general and history specifically, not least because he has digitized and provided access to a large selection of the documents he has collected for his books. Unfortunately, not all of his collected documents are available online, and there is no way of knowing whether the sources he selected for publication (or for that matter, was provided access to) are biased in some way. Gleijeses’ work also tends toward considerable admiration for Fidel Castro’s regime, which renders his account of the Angolan conflict decidedly partial. For these reasons, I use his collection of Cuban documents whenever possible, but I also consult other pertinent primary and secondary sources to triangulate his interpretation of Cuban motivations.

The Angolan civil war is a highly complex case. The objective of this chapter is not to comprehensively overview the civil war, but rather to focus on the strategic behaviors adopted by competitive interveners in the conflict. To those ends, the chapter begins with a brief discussion of the origins of the civil war, a timeline of major events during its duration from 1975-1991, and an identification of the strategic interests pursued by external powers in the domestic conflict. It then shifts to examine how interveners navigated the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive interventions.

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intervention. The chapter concludes with an explicit consideration of whether “not losing” was indeed more important than “winning” from the perspective of external powers.

5.1 Origins of the Conflict: From Colonial to Civil War

The origins of the Angolan civil war can be traced back to the efforts of three national liberation movements that began fighting against Portuguese colonial rule in the early 1960s: the Marxist Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) led by Agostinho Neto, the Maoist (later pro-Western) União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) led by Jonas Savimbi, and the populist Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) led by Holden Roberto. All three movements developed guerrilla armies, but none of them established an effective fighting force. The Portuguese’s unrivaled weapons technology gave them a decisive military advantage over their challengers—the rebels had no response to Portuguese air power, for example—and the three guerrilla armies did themselves no favors by fighting each other as bitterly as they fought the Portuguese. The colonial administration proved itself capable of maintaining relative stability in Angola, and consequently, the rebels failed to exercise effective control over more than a tiny portion of the population.

Yet while they could not defeat the Portuguese army on the battlefield, the rebels’ low-intensity insurgency did impose a significant burden on Lisbon. First, it exacted a hefty financial cost, with revenue collected from Angola’s oil-fields, diamond and iron mines, and coffee and cotton plantations covering only half of the expenses incurred by the conflict. Second, Lisbon’s stubborn refusal to be swept up by the “Winds of Change” that saw European governments granting independence to their overseas territories contributed to Portugal’s growing diplomatic isolation.

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5. The MPLA and UNITA had armies, known as the People’s Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) and the Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA), respectively. However, in what follows I avoid the use of FAPLA and FALA and simply refer to the MPLA and UNITA in an effort to cut down on the great array of acronyms used in the literature on the Angolan war.

6. Together with counterinsurgency operations in Portugal’s other colonial holdings, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, Lisbon found itself spending nearly half (48 percent) of its national budget on defense as early as 1968. See: Moorcraft 1990: p. 72.

7. Throughout the duration of the colonial conflict, the international community imposed a number of punitive sanctions on Portugal, such as trade boycotts, the termination of diplomatic and consular relations, the closing of ports and transit facilities, and an arms embargo (though NATO member states did continue to sell military hardware
And third, the requirements of Portugal’s colonial counterinsurgency operations exceeded its military capacity, such that by 1970, it had 60,000 troops stationed in Angola and a further 90,000 deployed in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. This represented some 75 percent of its armed forces, and while human losses were relatively low, the metropolitan Portuguese population had become war weary. With no end to the colonial conflicts in sight, both citizens and military leaders began to question the continuation of the wars and, by extension, the government. Civil-military relations deteriorated, and on 25 April 1974, a military coup organized by the Movimento das Forças Armadas, a group of young leftist military officers, overthrew the Lisbon government to end the regime of the Estado Novo in what has come to be known as the Carnation Revolution.

The Portuguese coup marked the transition of Angola’s colonial war to a civil war. The military junta that took power in Lisbon moved quickly to grant independence to Portugal’s overseas territories. In September 1974 it recognized Guinea-Bissau, and in June 1975, Mozambique. In Angola, each of the three guerrilla armies was quick to sign negotiated peace agreements with the transitional government. Shortly thereafter, on 5 January 1975, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) sponsored a meeting in Mombasa, Kenya to reconcile Roberto, Neto, and Savimbi’s forces. A pact, known as the Alvor Agreement, was eventually signed in Alvor, Portugal on 15 January. The Agreement stipulated that the three rebel groups would form a coalition government with the Portuguese prior to national elections for a constituent assembly in October. It was further agreed that the parties to the accord would form an integrated military force, with the Portuguese contributing 24,000 troops until independence, and with the guerrilla armies contributing 8,000

to the Portuguese regime). UN Resolution 180 (1963), for example, called for Portugal’s “granting of independence [...] to all the Territories under its administration in accordance with the aspirations of the people” and requested all states to “refrain forthwith from offering the Portuguese Government any assistance which would enable it to continue its repression of the peoples of the Territories under its administration.” It further called for all states to “take all measures to prevent the sale and supply of arms and military equipment for this purpose to the Portuguese Government.” See: UN Security Council 1963.


9. Most famous of these critics was António de Spínola, deputy chief of the armed forces general staff, who in 1974 published Portugal e o Futuro (Portugal and the Future) which argued that Portugal could not win a military victory against the liberation movements in its African colonies. Spínola was dismissed from his post, but would later serve as the country’s president during the rule of the Junta de Salvagdo Nacional which replaced the Estado Novo following the 25 April 1974 military coup. See: de Spínola 1974.

10. UNITA signed in June 1974, and the FNLA and MPLA signed in October.
troops each. These provisions would then pave the way for Angolan independence, which was scheduled for 11 November.

While the transitional government did take office on 31 January 1975, the vital task of integrating the guerrilla armies was a non-starter: FNLA and MPLA soldiers began fighting each other in the capital the very next day. Clashes soon spread throughout the country, casting the die for a military resolution to political disagreements between the contending groups. On 23 March, a decisive showdown took place in Caxito, a coastal town of strategic significance some 35 miles northeast of Luanda. There, the FNLA seized control and massacred over 60 MPLA supporters. Neto proclaimed the attack the formal start of a civil war. By mid-year, and after consolidating its position in the south and east of the country, UNITA likewise joined the fray. By fall 1975, some 300,000-400,000 whites had fled the country—the largest such exodus from the continent since the Algerian War of Independence—and any hope for a peaceful transition to independence had disappeared.

5.2 A Brief Timeline of the Angolan Civil War

As violence erupted in the immediate aftermath of the Alvor Agreement, external states mobilized support for their favored sides. To be sure, foreign meddling in Angolan internal affairs was nothing new—transfers of weapons and financial aid to the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA had been a feature of the anti-colonial struggle since the early 1960s. However, in the power vacuum left by the collapse of Portuguese administration, the scope of external intervention increased dramatically.

Zaire threw its support behind Holden Roberto, the brother-in-law of Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko, providing the FNLA sanctuary, funding, weapons, and—for the first time—troops. Mobutu’s superpower patron, the United States, supplemented these efforts: as early as January 1975, some $300,000 in support for Roberto was approved by the Forty Committee, a division

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11. As a few examples: from the mid-1960s the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were supporting the MPLA’s liberation efforts; China had trained and armed Savimbi and other UNITA guerrillas; and Zaire and the United States were actively backing the FNLA.
of the Executive branch of the US government mandated to review proposed covert operations abroad. This was followed in July by a covert Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation, IA FEATURE, which authorized US support for both the FNLA and UNITA. Initially providing $6 million in funding, the operation's budget was increased to $31.7 million by November. The US also encouraged South Africa to join the anti-MPLA military alliance, and by August, South African troops were deployed inside southwestern Angola, ostensibly to protect the large hydroelectric projects at Calueque and Ruacana. While there, SADF Special Forces linked up with the forces

13. Of the original $6 million, the FNLA and UNITA received US$2 million for the general operations of their troops while Roberto and Savimbi were paid $200,000 per month each for five months. The rest was given to Mobutu in cash to encourage him to send more arms to both groups. On 27 July, a further $8 million was allocated to IA FEATURE for the procurement and delivery of US arms to Angola. On 20 August, another $10.7 million was authorized for more arms, mercenaries, and maintenance of FNLA and UNITA forces. Finally, on 27 November a further $7 million was approved for additional arms, the recruitment of mercenaries, and the lease of a C-130 aircraft for use in Angola. All funds were approved by US President Ford. Details of the IA FEATURE operation are provided by the former Chief of the CIA's Angola Task Force, John Stockwell. See: Stockwell 1978: p. 206.
14. South African recriminations in the aftermath of the SADF's withdrawal from Angola in 1976 strongly suggest American enticement. As the then defense minister PW Botha decried to South African Parliament in 1978, "I know of only one occasion in recent years when we crossed a border, and that was in the case of Angola when we did so with the approval and knowledge of the Americans. But they left us in the lurch. We are going to retell the story: the story must be told of how we, with their knowledge, went in there and operated in Angola with their knowledge, how they encouraged us to act and, when we had nearly reached the climax, we were ruthlessly left in the lurch." See: Republic of South Africa, Debates of the House of Assembly, 17 April 1978: col. 4852. Statements by American politicians likewise suggest US encouragement of the South African offensive. For example, US Senator Barry Goldwater is reported as saying that "There is no question but that the CIA told the South Africans to move into Angola and that we would help with military equipment." As quoted in Wolfers and Bergerol 1983: p. 8.
of MPLA dissident Daniel Chipenda (who had joined the FNLA), as well as with UNITA guerrillas.

In mid-October, a combined force of some 3,000 South African Defense Force (SADF) and UNITA troops were joined together in a mechanized column to begin advancing on Luanda from the south; Operation Savannah—the code name given to the military invasion—had begun. Simultaneously, the FNLA, reinforced with Zairian troops and armored cars, advanced from the north. For American policymakers, South African generals, and UNITA and FNLA rebels alike, it was hoped that the anti-MPLA coalition would reach Luanda by November 11 to seize control of
the country in time for Angolan independence.

With the defensive capability provided by Soviet arms, as well as the deployment of an elite MPLA unit—the Ninth Brigade, which had received extensive training in the USSR—the MPLA succeeded in beating back the FNLA offensive in the north. A decisive battle took place at Quifangondo, roughly 30 kilometers from Luanda, with MPLA forces inflicting a devastating beating that would ultimately render the FNLA a spent force. But the combined SADF/UNITA army proved too powerful to halt in the south. By 6 November, it had advanced some 800 kilometers, capturing the port cities of Benguela and Lobito in what the former chief of the CIA's Angola Task Force has described as “the most effective military strike force ever seen in black Africa.” The MPLA was quickly faced with what amounted to a severe military crisis, as UNITA forces positioned themselves to begin threatening water, food, and power supplies to the capital.

Yet despite the SADF’s military success, the invasion soon unraveled: the MPLA appealed for help from its longtime patrons, Cuba and the Soviet Union. Increasing shipments of Soviet arms were already being transferred to MPLA guerrillas by December 1974, and by late summer 1975, a handful of Cuban advisers had arrived in Angola to begin training MPLA recruits. In the wake of Operation Savannah, however, this trickle of military aid turned into a flood. Between November 1975 and March 1976, the Soviet Union established an air-and-sea bridge that coordinated the deployment of some 36,000 Cuban soldiers and the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of military equipment to reinforce the MPLA.

As Cuban forces continued pouring into Angola, the combined SADF/UNITA army was quickly becoming overstretched. International opinion also began to turn against what was seen as an aggressive invasion by a racist South African apartheid state. On 19 December, the US Senate

15. Members of the Ninth Brigade had been sent to the USSR in March 1975, where they were put through “Higher Officer” courses. The brigade returned to Angola in late August aboard a Soviet ship, along with its kit of armored cars (BRDM-2), artillery (82-mm mortars and twelve 76-mm guns), and antiaircraft weapons. See: Shubin 2008: p. 40; Gleijeses 2002: p. 268.
16. While the FNLA was pushed out of Angola, small bands of FNLA fighters did continue to operate from bases along the Zairian border. However, they never again represented a threat to the MPLA regime. Zaire would eventually expel Roberto and his rebel forces in November 1979 in accordance with an MPLA-Zairean peace accord that committed both states to ending support for insurgencies in each other’s countries.
adopted the Clark Amendment, which blocked additional covert funding for the Angolan conflict. Washington was forced to abandon the South African force it had encouraged to invade Angola and to terminate its own clandestine operations taking place in that country. This was followed on 22 January 1976 by a vote at the OAU on recognition of the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola. While the vote itself was inconclusive, resulting in a 22-22 stalemate, the deciding vote cast by OAU president Idi Amin came down in favor of recognition. The MPLA had won an important political victory, rendering the South African adventure an illegal occupation of an independent and sovereign state.

The writing was on the wall. On 22 January, the SADF withdrawal began. By 11 February, the UNITA capital at Huambo fell, and Savimbi returned his rebels to the Angolan bush. But the conflict was far from resolved—the next fifteen years would see continued fighting between the MPLA and UNITA in a war that was sustained almost entirely by external patrons who not only transferred weapons, money, and matériel to their domestic clients, but also deployed their own military forces to the battlefield. And yet, despite billions in aid from Soviet coffers and tens of thousands of Cuban troops, the MPLA proved unable to crush the UNITA insurgency. At the same time, despite regular SADF raids into Angola and millions of dollars of covert (and later, overt) aid from the United States, UNITA failed to overthrow the MPLA regime. 19

Frustrated by the stalemate, the MPLA launched a major offensive on 18 August 1985. Operation Second Congress (Operação Segundo Congresso) was designed to capture the town of Mavinga in Cuando Cubango for use as a springboard to the UNITA headquarters located at Jamba. It was believed that conquering Savimbi’s central command base would inflict a crippling blow on the rebel insurgency’s psychology, logistics, and operations. The offensive initially achieved a measure of success, but as was typical of the conflict, SADF intervention on behalf of UNITA—in the form of artillery and air strikes—halted the advance. 20 By 19 October, the MPLA brigades were

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19. The Clark Amendment, which barred aid to rebel groups engaged in Angola, remained in effect until its repeal on 1 October 1985. Yet the force of the Amendment was blunted by the fact that the United States continued to transfer “grey market” and “dual use” equipment, channeled aid through third party countries (including Morocco, Israel, and Zaire), and actively vetoed international efforts to sanction South African interventions in the country.

20. In the words of SADF Col. (ret.) Jan Breytenbach, “it became the South African Army’s lot to go to UNITA’s assistance and save its skin.” See: Breytenbach 2002: p. 252.
retreating back to their staging point at Cuito Cuanavale, and on 2 November the operation was called off.

The following year it was Savimbi’s turn to go on the offensive. Assisted by South African long-range artillery and airstrikes, some 4,000 UNITA troops attacked the MPLA staging grounds at Cuito Cuanavale on 9 August 1986. Yet while the SADF’s guns and combat aircraft hammered the MPLA’s defensive positions, UNITA infantry failed to capture the city. The UNITA offensive was first halted and then reversed, and by mid-August the operation was terminated.

A second major MPLA offensive, Salute to October, was launched in August 1987. Once again, the operation was designed to capture Mavinga en-route to Jamba, but this time the MPLA brigades—four in total, amounting to 11,400 men—were reinforced with SA-8 and SA-13 surface-to-air missile batteries, which the Soviets believed would protect the offensive from South African airstrikes. At first the advance met little UNITA resistance, but as two of the four brigades reached the Lomba River, the last significant natural barrier before Mavinga, the SADF once again sprang to action. In early September, South African forces began attacking the MPLA brigades, and while the SA-8 and SA-13 batteries offered the Angolans some protection against airstrikes, they could not inhibit South African artillery bombardments. The SADF’s G-5 artillery—capable of ranges of 30-40 kilometers—enabled the South Africans to shell the MPLA without fear of counter-battery fire, and by 7 October, MPLA forces were in full retreat. Once again, the brigades set up defensive position in and around Cuito Cuanavale, but this time they also requested Cuban reinforcements. Appreciating their precarious position, Cuban leader Fidel Castro obliged, and after a few months of stiff fighting, the SADF/UNITA assault relented.

But Castro was not yet finished. Simultaneous with the Cuban reinforcement of MPLA units at Cuito Cuanavale, he opened up a second front, sending Cuban forces into the southwest in what was a decisive move into Cunene province. It was a brilliant strategy, as Cuban forces outflanked the SADF units fighting near Cuito Cuanavale to begin threatening northern Namibia. Tension quickly mounted, as both sides began preparing for what might become the most violent clash of

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the Angolan conflict.

As preparations for large-scale conventional war hit an apex, the Namibian border was transformed into what both sides realized would be a hopeless killing field. Cooler heads prevailed, and a flurry of negotiations took place. Over a number of months, Angolan, Cuban, and South African officials would settle on the Tripartite Accord, which ended the direct involvement of foreign troops in the Angolan civil war. Signed on 22 December 1988, it was followed by a tenuous ceasefire between UNITA and the MPLA, and later, a negotiated agreement between the domestic combatants in December 1991. While the conflict would relapse the following year due to a dispute over electoral results, the involvement of the former competitive interveners was over.

5.3 Interveners and their Interests: Why Winning Mattered

Why did foreign powers intervene in the Angolan civil war? This section briefly reviews the strategic motivations underlying the external support provided by competitive interveners to Angola’s domestic combatants. It will be shown that the outcome of the Angolan civil war was a key concern for South Africa, the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union, albeit for different reasons. The involvement of these external powers was not motivated by peripheral interests, but rather by core national security objectives.

5.3.1 UNITA’s Friends: South Africa and the United States

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the survival of the European colonies in Angola, Rhodesia, and Mozambique was critical to South Africa’s national defense strategy. These states together formed what amounted to a white cordon sanitaire, buffering Pretoria from the instability associated with Africa’s anti-colonial wars. Believing its fate to be inextricably linked to the survival of its white neighbors, Pretoria coordinated closely with Portuguese and Rhodesian officials, providing men, equipment, and intelligence to assist their counterinsurgency efforts on the frontiers of white-minority rule.

The collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship in April 1974 fundamentally changed the South African national security calculus. First, the end of Portuguese administration in Angola threatened
to empower black liberation movements fighting against Pretoria’s control of Namibia (then known as South-West Africa). A former German colony, Namibia fell under a South African mandate following Germany’s defeat in the First World War. Pretoria ruled it as a fifth province, and sought to stamp out the armed activity of a nascent Namibian liberation movement known as the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO). SWAPO had begun its guerrilla war against South Africa in the mid-1960s, but was hamstrung by geography: only Zambia offered it safe haven, requiring its fighters to traverse the long and narrow Caprivi strip, which was dotted with South African military outposts, en route to Namibia. However, with the Portuguese gone, SWAPO could establish bases in southern Angola for cross-border operations. It could also begin training with its more senior allies in the MPLA, who shared SWAPO’s hostility for apartheid and promised it support in the fight against South Africa.

By the spring of 1976, SWAPO had moved its political headquarters from Lusaka to Luanda and had established a military headquarters near Lubango in southern Angola. “Our geographic isolation was over,” writes SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma. “It was as if a locked door had suddenly swung open. I realized instantly that the struggle was in a new phase [...] we could at last make direct attacks across our northern frontier and send in our forces and weapons on a large scale.”

SWAPO moved swiftly to seize its new opportunities: by April 1976, South African military intelligence was reporting that “more than 400” insurgents had entered the Ovambo region of northern Namibia from Angola.

Joining SWAPO in Angola was South Africa’s own domestic challengers, the African National Congress (ANC). Prior to the Portuguese coup, the movement had a political headquarters in Lusaka, but most of the guerrillas of its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), were trained outside of Africa. The ANC’s limited capacity to train recruits, together with the detention of Nelson Mandela and other MK leaders in 1962, rendered its armed operations ineffectual throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. But as was the case for SWAPO, the power vacuum opened up by the collapse of the Portuguese colonial administration presented the ANC with a new

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opportunity: by moving their military camps to Angola, the ANC could more easily train MK recruits, co-locate with SWAPO guerrillas, and benefit from the MPLA’s connections with Cuba and the Soviet Union. As it would happen, the decision to move to Angola would prove wise in June 1976 when, in the wake of the Soweto Uprising in South Africa, hundreds of disillusioned black youth left South Africa for ANC training camps in Novo Catengue, some 45 kilometers southeast of Benguela.

The danger posed by this swart gevaar (black threat) was only magnified by a second: the rooi gevaar (red threat). As Portuguese authority receded from southern Africa, Pretoria worried it would be replaced by Soviet influence. The persistent fear of the apartheid regime concerned the consequences of communist-sponsored black troops, which would enjoy vastly superior numbers and, with the largess of the Soviet Union, access to modern weapons. To be sure, these fears were well founded. As was typical of the Cold War, the socialist rhetoric espoused by many national liberation movements came in tandem with political and military support from the Soviet Union. Pretoria watched in horror as the USSR poured billions of dollars worth of military and financial aid into the ANC, SWAPO, and MPLA while simultaneously assisting the deployment of tens of thousands of communist Cuban troops in Angola.

The threat became existential as a dominos logic took hold. For South African military commanders like Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, Angola was the lynchpin of South African security: Pretoria would have to “do as much as possible to keep the enemy away from the Namibian border [...] if we couldn’t do that, Namibia would be the next to fall. And if Namibia fell, the enemy would have got very close to Cape Town through the Northern Cape, and to Pretoria/Johannesburg through Botswana, because they would have been the next dominos to fall in the process.”

Thus, for South Africa, the decision to intervene in Angola was driven by a deeply held belief

24. Interview, Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, 23 June 2014. A similar description of the threat faced by South Africa is offered by South African Foreign Minister (ret.) Pik Botha: “[If Namibia fell] there would be a serious risk that the Russians would threaten South Africa from that territory. [...] Should SWAPO govern South-West Africa, Botswana would be directly threatened, Dr. Savimbi would be shut out, and South Africa would be entirely surrounded by powers inspired by Russia.” See: Besoek van Mnr Clark aan Suid-Afrika en Suidwes-Afrika: 10-13 Junie 1981, 23 June 1981: p. 25.
that the country was engaged in an *oorlewingstryd* (struggle for survival).*25* By sponsoring a UNITA victory, Pretoria could eject SWAPO and the ANC from Angola, eliminating their access to safe haven; it could strengthen South Africa’s control over Namibia; and it could strike an important psychological victory by demonstrating South African resolve and dominance while demoralizing Black Nationalist ideology. In addition, the conditions for intervention were ideal: South Africa possessed sub-Saharan Africa’s most powerful military; it was economically dominant over its neighbors; its control over Namibian territory facilitated intervention into Angola; and two of the three groups engaged in the civil war, UNITA and the FNLA, had officially “invited” South Africa to assist them.

What is more, the United States was actively encouraging their intervention. Indeed, the US was in pursuit of its own geopolitical interests in Angola. A key American objective was the elimination of any opportunities the Soviets stood to gain in southern Africa. While it may seem crude to interpret American diplomacy as knee-jerk reactions against communist gains, such instincts undoubtedly played some role in American decision-making. During a meeting of the House Select Committee on Intelligence on 12 December 1975, for example, US Congressman Les Aspin asked CIA Director William Colby why foreign governments were backing UNITA. “Because the Soviets are backing the MPLA is the simplest answer,” Colby responded. “It sounds like that is why we are doing it,” remarked Aspin. “It is,” Colby confirmed.*26*

The negative consequences of staying neutral and avoiding involvement in the conflict were reviewed in a background paper prepared for former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger prior to a 1975 National Security Council (NSC) meeting. It stated that a MPLA victory increased the chances of “heavy Soviet influence in independent Angola, continued instability in Angola beyond independence, an unstable Zaire, and a general destabilization of the area. We would probably see another country added to the list of those that deny us access to ports and airfields for our Navy and Air Force. In addition to enjoying such access, the Soviets might be given military

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*25. This was the term used by PW Botha, at that time serving as the South African Prime Minister, during a meeting of the South African State Security Council. As quoted in Scholtz 2013: p. 53.

*26. Hearings before the House Select Committee on Intelligence (The Pike Committee) 1977: p. 218.*
facilities." The US was especially wary that Angola might serve as a launching point for the deployment of Cuban troops to other African states, mirroring the dominos logic articulated by the South Africans. During a NSC meeting in April 1976, Kissinger stressed it was important that the US “not allow the Soviets to succeed in using the Cubans that way.” A special concern was their potential deployment to Rhodesia. “If the Cubans are involved there,” Kissinger explained, “Namibia is next and after that South Africa, itself. […] We can’t permit another move without suffering a great loss.” As the former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Nathaniel Davis, puts it, “[Kissinger] would freely acknowledge, I believe, that he saw Angola as part of the US-Soviet relationship, and not as an African problem.” For United States policymakers, Angola was a hot frontline of the Cold War.

5.3.2 The MPLA’s Patrons: Cuba and the Soviet Union

The motivations underlying Cuba’s intervention in Angola is the subject of much debate. One view, shared by many American policymakers, holds that Castro was a “puppet” and that Cuban troops served as a “mercenary army” for the Soviet Union. Throughout the Cold War, US policymakers were frank and open on this point: “The extensive military activities of Cuba [are] of deep concern to the American people,” US President Jimmy Carter told Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev at a Summit in Vienna. “We [regard] Cuba as a proxy of the Soviet Union.” This dismissal of Cuban forces as Soviet surrogates has become entrenched in popular accounts of the Angolan civil war, such that even today Mumford writes that “Cuban military personnel had become the favored surrogate force during Soviet proxy wars,” and Davies contends that the Cubans were “receiving up to $1,000 per month from the MPLA government for each soldier it sent to Angola.”

However, this view has been challenged by Gleijeses, who insists that “[Castro] was no client.” Drawing on an extensive set of primary documents, Gleijeses’ work convincingly shows that the

Cuban decision to intervene in Angola was taken unilaterally by Castro without consultation with
the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{33} In subsequent work, Gleijeses has also shown that Cuba’s intercontinental
reach and influence in Angola not only consistently upset the United States, but was also a common
irritant for the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{34} What motivated Cuban intervention? “Not Cuba’s narrow interests,
not realpolitik,” argues Gleijeses.\textsuperscript{35} Instead, he contends, Castro was motivated by ideological
conviction and a deep personal commitment to the struggle against apartheid.

To be sure, there is little doubt that Castro’s dedication to socialist internationalism played a
role in his decision to aid the beleaguered MPLA. Today, even Kissinger concedes that Castro “was
probably the most genuine revolutionary leader then in power.”\textsuperscript{36} Yet, while ideological conviction
may have inspired the spirit of the Cuban intervention, operational realities necessitated close
coordination with the Soviet Union. Indeed, Cuba could only provide the large-scale assistance it
provisioned the MPLA government with substantial economic and military help from its super-
power patron. The small Caribbean island was simply incapable of supplying the large quantities
of war materiel necessary for a protracted counterinsurgency campaign against UNITA. Moreover,
Cuba lacked the logistical capacity needed to supply its troops deep into Angolan territory and
was incapable of sustaining their long-term overseas deployment thousands of kilometers from
the Cuban homeland.\textsuperscript{37}

Consequently, it is difficult to separate Cuban and Soviet ambitions in Angola, and for the
latter, there were a number of interests in play. First, an MPLA victory would allow the USSR
to establish itself as an influential power in southern Africa. Not least of importance in this
regard was access to Angolan air and naval bases, which would enable the Soviets to pressure
shipping lanes from the Indian Ocean around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} See especially: Ibid. pp. 305-308. See also: Gleijeses 2006.
\textsuperscript{34} Gleijeses 2013.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.: p. 30.
\textsuperscript{36} Kissinger 1999: p. 785.
\textsuperscript{37} The Cuban economy was also heavily dependent on Soviet goodwill. Indeed, even as the USSR implemented
\textit{perestroika} reforms, Soviet economic aid was quite generous to the Cubans: from 1986-1990, it averaged US$4.3 billion
per year, including non-repayable subsidies of US$2 billion and another US$2.3 billion in extended loans. Together,
this amounted to 15 percent of Cuba’s GDP if converted at the official rate of 1 peso per US dollar, and much more if
\textsuperscript{38} During the 1980s, the 30th Operational Squadron of the Soviet Navy, consisting of eleven ships, was headquar-
This was a critical seaway that transferred much of the West’s oil supply from the Persian Gulf to the West. Access to Angolan air and naval facilities would also enable the Soviets to monitor Western shipping lanes in the South Atlantic.\(^\text{39}\) Second, an MPLA victory would provide the Soviets with an important ideological victory, confirming the relative decline of the US and the success of the Soviet Union’s dedication to national liberation. Finally, an MPLA victory would enable the Soviets to access Angola’s vast natural resources while denying them to the West.\(^\text{40}\)

In the mid-1970s, Angola was the world’s fourth-largest coffee producer; sixth-largest diamond producer; an exporter of iron ore; and sub-Saharan Africa’s third-largest oil producer. In short, there was much to be gained in Angola, and coming on the heels of America’s defeat in Vietnam, the opportunity looked ripe for the picking.

5.4 Strategic Restraint during Competitive Interventions in the Angolan Civil War

From 1975-1991, external interveners spent billions of dollars and lost thousands of lives fighting in the Angolan civil war. Clearly, for all parties to the conflict, the battle for Luanda was worth significant sacrifices. Yet, the protracted character of the fighting presents something of a puzzle. If external interveners stood to gain from the victory of their domestic clients, why would they choose to invest in the conflict at a level that resulted in stalemate? Why did they not do what was necessary to ensure their domestic clients won the Angolan civil war?

As the theory laid out in Chapter 3 explains, competitive interventions present unique strategic dilemmas for intervening states. On the one hand, the desire to improve the battlefield situation of domestic clients encourages external interveners to escalate the scope of their military aid. Greater quantities of war matériel, more sophisticated weapon systems, rigorous training operations, and the deployment of supporting troops serve to reinforce a clients’ forces, greatly improving their

\(^\text{39}\) For example, Soviet Tu-95RT reconnaissance aircraft were permitted to land in Luanda. This enabled the Soviets to send reconnaissance flights from Severomorsk (located in the Soviet north) to Havana, then from Havana to Luanda, and finally from Luanda back to Severomorsk, providing a full picture of the situation in the Atlantic. See: Ibid.: p. 72.

\(^\text{40}\) Westad 1996b: p. 22.
battlefield performance and their probability of victory—a victory that will deliver the spoils of war. Yet on the other hand, the desire to escalate has to be balanced by the uncertainty surrounding how a rival intervener might respond. Viewing the increasing scope of one side’s intervention, the other might be incentivized to expand its own participation in the war. The response might be “in kind,” negating the military gains achieved by escalation through increasing levels of violence. But the response might also be a counter-escalation, further expanding the scope of intervention to effect a reprisal as punishment. The latter response is especially precarious insofar as it risks a spiraling of actions and reactions leading to ever larger confrontations between the interveners. This threat of inadvertent escalation—perhaps to the level of war between the interveners—looms in the background during competitive interventions.

While external interveners had important strategic interests at stake in the Angolan conflict, none of them were willing to entertain the idea of a war against each other. Their challenge, therefore, was to pursue their individual interests while avoiding inadvertent escalation; the interveners had to together establish limits on the scope of their interventions to regulate their competition with one another. In accordance with my theory of competitive intervention, these limits were established in Angola through the use of tacit and explicit communication that exploited the natural saliencies of focal points to manage expectations, coordinate behavior, and avoid mutually damaging outcomes. In what follows, I elaborate on the form and function of these credible signs of restraint.

5.4.1 “Advisory” versus “Combat” Missions

It is notable that, despite committing billions of dollars worth of military and financial aid to the civil war, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union deployed combat troops to the Angolan theater. As was the case with other “hotspots” during the Cold War, the impossible stakes of direct US-USSR confrontation precluded sending American or Soviet troops to decisively shift the balance of power between the domestic combatants—this despite the tremendous effect even a small deployment could have on the outcome of the fighting in Angola.
However, simply delivering military equipment to their Angolan clients proved problematic. As Stockwell explains, domestic combatants "were not able to organize the logistical systems necessary to deploy [weapons] or to develop the communications, maintenance, combat leadership, and discipline to organize an effective military effort." Many Angolan fighters lacked even basic shooting skills, had no formal military training, and had little experience of warfare. Consequently, the US and USSR faced a dilemma: how could they provision effective military aid without committing their own forces?

Their solution was to draw a distinction between "advisory missions," which involved training client forces, and "combat missions," which involved direct participation in the conflict. Such a distinction has long been observed by intervening states as a means to communicate restraint—ostensibly because of the "non-combat" role played by advisers. And indeed, while the provision of troops as secondary combatants is rare, technical and military advisers have regularly been deployed to civil war zones to serve as observers, trainers, and technicians for government and rebel forces alike. The Angolan civil war was no exception—both the US and USSR deployed military and paramilitary personnel that became deeply involved in the management of the conflict. These advisers performed a number of functions: they instructed and organized domestic combatant forces; they undertook strategic and tactical planning; they serviced combat vehicles and equipment; and (in the case of Soviet advisers) they served as technicians for advanced weapon systems, including anti-air batteries.

This support was critical to the combat effectiveness of both the MPLA government and their UNITA challengers; it was active US-Soviet participation in the conflict that directly contributed to

42. While the Clark Amendment barred US advisory missions in Angola, they were active prior to its passing in 1976 and following its repeal in 1985.
43. While detailed information about the scale of the American advisory missions remains classified, a recent monograph by the Russian Defence Ministry provides some figures that reveal how large these advisory missions could grow. It notes that 10,985 Soviet military advisers and specialists served in Angola from late 1975 to 1 January 1991. Unfortunately, yearly figures are not provided, but available oral histories suggest advisers usually served deployments of two years (for example, see the biographies of contributors in Shubin and Tokarev 2011). Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that some 1,000-2,000 Soviet advisers were deployed in Angola each year from 1976 to the end of 1990. A declassified CIA report suggests as much, estimating year-end totals of 500 Soviet advisers deployed in 1976, rising to 1,750 advisers deployed by 1982. See: CIA, October 1985: p. 7.
the dynamics and outcomes of the civil war. But by drawing a distinction between these "advisory" missions and "combat" missions, the US and USSR established an observable limit which could control escalation: the deployment of "advisers" was acceptable; the deployment of "combat troops" was prohibited. This distinction enabled both sides to support their domestic clients while ensuring a direct confrontation between American and Soviet troops would be avoided.

The distinction was reinforced by a general prohibition against advisers participating in combat. Sergey Kolomnin, a Soviet officer who served in Angola, notes that “[Russian advisers] were told time and again that we should only instruct, train and advise [...] but not fight.”44 Likewise, Soviet adviser Igor Zhdarkin explains that during his deployment in Huila province in 1986, Angolan battalions “were regularly sent out to clear the territory of the enemy. Constant raids were conducted in all directions. We often also helped them prepare for actual operations but didn’t participate ourselves, thank God.”45 Upon coming under fire, Russian advisers were instructed to withdraw. Petr Khrupilin, a senior member of the Soviet military mission in Angola, explains that, “[a]s a rule, [Russian] advisers in the Angolan brigades moved to the rear when there were military operations.”46 Similarly, Barabulya notes that his unit “had BTR-60PB armored troop carriers and BMP-1 infantry combat vehicles [that] stood in fortified structures (caponiers) all the time, ready for rapid evacuation.”47

An alternative approach was that of the American advisers: to simply avoid the frontlines altogether. Former Director of Intelligence William Colby writes that during advisory missions run between 1975-1976, training was conducted outside of Angola “as no CIA officers were permitted to engage in combat or train there.”48 Likewise, following the repeal of the Clark Amendment in October 1985, US military advisers instructed their clients far from the main fight, basing in

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45. Zhdarkin 2011: p. 117. See also: Barabulya 2011: p. 167 who confirms Soviet advisers “didn’t take a direct part in combat action.”
48. Colby 1978: p. 422. Stockwell concurs that the CIA was prohibited from deploying advisers in Angola, though he claims "we did it anyway." However, he does not dispute that advisers avoided combat. "No CIA staffers were killed or suffered any discomfort worse than malaria." The CIA, he explains, “[let] others run the serious risks." See: Stockwell 1978: pp. 177 & 247.
southeastern Angola at the UNITA headquarters in Jamba. Daniel Fenton, a senior CIA analyst on Angola, recalls that CIA officers “talked only to Savimbi and his chosen few. They lived in a compound, and they had no real freedom of movement.”

Notably, Cuban advisers who were forward deployed on training missions in MPLA base camps also avoided combat. As SADF Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries explained to me, “one thing that we found was that every time we became heavily engaged with a [MPLA] brigade the Cuban commanders and Soviet advisers were flown out by chopper.” Col. (ret.) Jan Breytenbach likewise observed the tendency of Cuban advisers to retreat: “Cuban advisers, when they saw [Angolan troops] jumping, they were off like a shot. [...] when things start getting wrong then they get out. They were not to give support when the fight is going on. [...] We always found remnants of them—cigarettes and booze and what have you. They were there, but they were gone.” The withdrawal of Cuban advisers had immediate tactical consequences, as the morale of MPLA units suffered. However, while tactically disadvantageous, withdrawal when under fire was a universal response for advisers deployed on the frontlines. As Breytenbach, who served as an adviser first to the FNLA and later to UNITA, explained, “[t]he first thing you get sorted out is your escape route to get out—then you carry on. But you must be able to get away quickly. [...] when things start getting wrong, then you must get out. And you always have a plan for getting out. You always have a standby plane or vehicle or something that you can get into and be gone.”

While the US and USSR only deployed advisers to the Angolan theater, three countries did deploy combat forces. The first, Zaire, sent troops in support of the FNLA in late 1975. However, upon the deployment of Cuban troops and subsequent FNLA defeat at the battle of Quifangondo in November that year, Zaire withdrew and never again deployed its own forces. Only the Cubans and South Africans maintained prolonged deployments. But as elaborated below, both sides went out of their way to avoid confrontations.

49. As quoted in Gleijeses 2013: p. 309.
50. Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014.
51. Interview, Colonel (ret.) Jan Breytenbach, 20 June 2014.
52. Ibid.
5.4.2 Force Postures: Advances and Retreats

When it launched Operation Savannah in October 1975, Pretoria sought to propel a FNLA/UNITA coalition to power in Angola. While the question of whether or not the SADF was to “go to Luanda” is the subject of dispute, it is clear that South Africa aimed to capture territory on behalf of its rebel clients. The SADF seized cities, established control over the Moçâmedes and Benguela railway lines, and held onto Angola’s coastal ports.

However, the rapid (and unexpected) deployment of Cuban forces in November 1975 transformed the tactical situation on the ground. The SADF was no longer fighting a ragtag guerrilla army—the Cubans presented a conventional threat. As the SADF/UNITA force began operating on increasingly longer supply lines, its commanders became concerned that logistics would struggle to sustain an escalation of the war.53 The arrival of the Cubans meant that the northward campaign would now require committing greater resources and accepting higher SADF casualties to preserve South African control of conquered territory. These were costs that Pretoria was unwilling to pay—the SADF would not become an occupying force. Yet, if UNITA was to seize power in Luanda, it would of course need to capture territory from the MPLA. The challenge for Pretoria, then, was to find a way to assist UNITA’s territorial advance while clearly communicating that it did not entertain the idea of fighting battles against the Cubans to hold on to Angolan cities.

The SADF’s solution was to adopt an in-and-out raiding strategy. South African troops would attack enemy bases in southern Angola, project UNITA’s power into captured areas, and then withdraw shortly thereafter. Breytenbach told me that territory could be held “for quite a while [...] because it [would] take them quite a while to bring in enough troops to kick us out again.” But South African decision makers were cognizant of the fact that holding on to Angolan territory would be viewed as the first step in a coordinated campaign to push deeper into Angola. If Pretoria had undertaken such a strategy, Breytenbach explained, “the Russians would come back en masse.”54 Consequently, in the aftermath of Operation Savannah, the SADF prioritized mobility—

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54. Interview, Colonel (ret.) Jan Breytenbach, 20 June 2014.
rapid offensives and withdrawals. Brigadier (ret.) George Kruys writes that “operations were
planned in detail in terms of time in, time out and exactly what was to be achieved while in Angola
as well as how the operation was to be coordinated and executed.”\textsuperscript{55} Territory was to be held only
as long as tactical advantage flowed from it.\textsuperscript{56}

The raiding strategy had immediate tactical consequences on the battlefield. As Opperman
explained, “[I]nstead of continuing and doing what you believed had to be done from a military
point of view, you had to withdraw [...] I think one of the constant factors to be considered was:
would it result in unnecessary escalation of the war, or are we really going to achieve what we
set out to do [...] it might make sense from a military point of view, a tactical point of view, but
from a strategic point of view that would be exactly the type of escalation that we would like to
prevent.”\textsuperscript{57} Precisely because they refused to defend Angolan territory, the conflict settled into
a predictable to and fro: South African forces would cross the border into Angola and, after a
brief battle, enemy forces would retreat; UNITA would then claim a military victory against the
MPLA, and the SADF would be withdrawn; upon South African forces vacating the area, the
MPLA would attack UNITA positions to recapture lost cities; the guerrillas would then melt back
into the countryside, and the cycle would repeat once more.

5.4.3 Geographic Areas of Contestation and Control

It has long been observed that geography and topography provide natural focal points for limiting
the scope of warfare. Bodies of water, deserts, and mountains can serve to delimit areas of operation.
Likewise, roads, railway tracks, and bridges can serve as saliencies that distinguish areas of control
and confrontation. In this way, natural and man-made markers bound the geographic scope of
competition between interveners, helping combatant forces to avoid confrontations by literally
separating them from one another.

Geographic saliencies were observed during the Angolan civil war to establish a buffer be-

\textsuperscript{55} Kruys 2001: p. 13.
\textsuperscript{56} For a discussion of these ideas, see: Scholtz 2013: pp. 247-251. For an elaboration on the South African approach
to mobile warfare, see: de Vries 2013.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview, Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, 23 June 2014.
between South African and Cuban forces that served this purpose. Perhaps the most observable manifestation of this strategic use of geographic saliencies was Cuba’s establishment of a defensive line that ran along the Moçâmedes Railway from Namibe across to Menongue (see Figure 5.3). From January 1979 until the spring of 1988, Cuba did not allow its troops to operate south of the railway line, though MPLA soldiers regularly did. As Major General (ret.) Johann Dippenaar explained to me, Cuban forces were positioned behind Angolan units “All the time, or sometimes in the front in the defensive positions, but in an advisory capacity, not behind the weapons.”

In fact, Cuba’s official policy dictated that its troops were not to operate in Cunene or southern Cuando Cubango provinces.

For their part, the South Africans responded to Cuba’s reticence by containing their own operations to south-central Angola. De Vries explained to me that, “strategically, [the SADF] established an area of dispute from the [Namibian] border, along the Cunene River, and up to Tchamutete, Cuvelai, those areas.” This territory was designated the “hunting grounds” for the

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58. The defensive line was not manned continuously across its entire 700 kilometer span. Rather, Cuban troops were stationed at key points along the line where enemy units would have been expected to advance—mainly along paved roads. These points included Namibe, Lubango, Matala, Cubango, Jamba (a town on the Namibe-Menongue road, not Savimbi’s headquarters in Cuando Cubango), and Menongue. See: Gleijeses 2013: p. 214.
59. Interview, Major General (ret.) Johann Dippenaar, 30 June 2014.
60. George 2005: pp. 119-120.
61. Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014. Breytenbach likewise contends that SADF

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**Figure 5.3:** Southern Angola. The Cuban defensive line, stretching from Namibe to Menongue, is indicated in dark grey. Data compiled from GADM database of Global Administrative Areas (Version 2.0).
SADF. South African forces would regularly conduct in-and-out operations into the provinces of Huila, Cunene, and Cuando Cubango, but would always remain south of the Cuban defensive line. "There were constraints placed on the tactical commanders [...] in terms of how far you could go. Can you attack Menongue? No. Can we attack Cuito Cuanavale from the west? No. Rather, stay on the eastern side of the river so that the war does not escalate."62

The buffer zone virtually eliminated the risk of Cuban/South African confrontation. The Cubans left the SADF to roam free south of the defensive line, while the South Africans steered clear of it. Breytenbach explained that, "In the beginning, we had some Cubans with Operation Savannah, when we went into Angola for the first time. But I think that we gave them such a bloody nose that they stayed away from us after that. You had Cubans in the rear areas, where they were training others as well, but when I was there, we never had Cuban formations operating against us."63 Indeed, between January 1979 and January 1988, there was not a single clash between South African and Cuban ground forces despite their deep and sustained involvement in the Angolan civil war.

5.4.4 Targets

A theme which emerged repeatedly during interviews with former South African military commanders was the critical role of careful targeting during cross-border operations into Angola.64 Naturally, targeting an enemy combatant's troops risks retaliation in kind. Thus, to avoid costly escalation and direct confrontation with each other, the interveners exploited focal points to distinguish between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" targets in Angola, where legitimacy was established according to the nationality of the target. In particular, while Angolan targets (MPLA and UNITA) were understood to be acceptable targets for the interveners' forces, South African and Cuban/Russian troops and advisers were not to be targeted.

control was established in "Cunene Province east of the Cunene River and as far north as Cassinga." See: Breytenbach 2002: p. 247.

62. Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014.
63. Interview, Colonel (ret.) Jan Breytenbach, 20 June 2014.
64. Interview, Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj, 4 July 2014; Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014; Interview, Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, 23 June 2014.
South African political and military leaders were keenly aware that operations against Angolan forces could be perceived as actions against Cuba or even the Soviet Union—interpretations which would risk escalation in the Angolan conflict. Consequently, cross border raids “had to be played very carefully, because the conflict could have developed into a regional war,” as de Vries put it. “We didn’t really want to fight against Cubans—that was not part of the idea.”65 To those ends, South African engagement always stopped short of confrontations with Cuban troops, and also expressly avoided interactions with Cuban and Russian advisers that were forward deployed with MPLA units. This was recognized by their opponents on the other side. “[T]he Russians were no worse at apartheid than we were,” joked former South African Ambassador Vic Zazeraj, “their officers were not living in the same camp as the rest of them.” He continued:

[The Russians] made sure that you could see from the air which was their camp—they had big hammers and sickles on their tents. They knew that there were Canberra and other aircraft flying over them photographing them every day […] they could see that it was happening. So they knew they were being targeted, identified, photographed, and they knew that an attack was going to come. So they would make sure that they were a few kilometers off to the side. 66

This is confirmed by accounts of Russian advisers themselves. For example, Vyacheslav Barabulya, whose tour of duty in Angola included forward deployment in Cuito Cuanavale, notes that the Russian encampment was seven kilometers from the besieged city.67

The use of Russian symbols (hammers and sickles) on advisers’ tents, together with the distance that separated Russian and Angolan camps, created clear target sets for South African aircraft. These were observable signals that helped South African pilots distinguish between Russian and Angolan targets and avoid hitting Russian encampments. As Zazeraj explains, “Our Air Force would be told not to hit the Russian camp. Take out the ammo dump, go take out the armed soldiers that pose a threat to you. But the Russian officers—you don’t want to have a missile go in their direction and upset them, because then you would have a crisis.”68

That the South Africans were selective in their targeting procedures was not lost on Russian

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65. Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014.
68. Interview, Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj, 4 July 2014.
advisers—to the contrary, it was deeply appreciated. The account of Russian Lieutenant-Colonel Igor Zhdarkin, who served in Angola from 1986-1988, is worth quoting at length:

The South Africans, by the way, being remarkable gentlemen, had bombarded only the Angolan brigades. In other words, I think the bombardment of our camp wasn’t part of their plans. Perhaps they didn’t want to risk international complications or confrontation with the Soviet Union, or something like that. But this evidently applied only to our own camp, whereas with all the others it was war as usual. So, if the Soviet adviser goes to his brigade and walks into a bombardment there, nothing can be done—war is war!

The South Africans sent us an ultimatum before 11 March 1988 stating: “Soviets, leave Cuito Cuanavale, we don’t want to touch you.” These leaflets were in English. The Angolans brought the leaflets to us and asked us to translate them because they couldn’t decipher the message. Those leaflets were packed inside hollow artillery shells, like propaganda! Their warning was precise, concrete and clearly written. “Soviets, we don’t want to touch you. Go away. Leave, please. We want right now to cut up these Angolans.”

The Cubans likewise avoided direct confrontations with South Africans. For example, in 1976, when South African forces were withdrawing from Angola in the aftermath of the OAU vote against their invasion, Cubans left time and space for their escape. In Castro’s words, “We kept pushing, pushing and pushing until they withdrew completely from Angola, without fighting. This is the battle that we won without bloodshed. Because we gave them time, and kept applying psychological pressure [...] and they withdrew.” During later stages of the conflict, the reaction of Cuban forces to South African incursions into Angola was characteristically muted. Aside from verbal protests, no action was taken to directly confront South African forces.

Encounters between intervening forces in the air were equally rare. As Scholtz writes, “the war in Angola was not characterized by great aerial battles. In fact, there were only four encounters in the air between South African and Cuban aircraft.” These four encounters were hardly dogfights: no planes were shot down and no casualties were inflicted on either side. Instead of confronting each other, the two sides tended to keep their distance. The account of Anatoliy Alekseevsky, who served as a Russian interpreter between 1986 and 1988, is typical: “Once when the Cubans encountered the [SADF] Mirages, they almost entered aerial combat, but the South Africans

70. Reuni6n del Comandante en Jefe con los Politicos para Analizar la Situaci6n de las Troupas Cubanas en la RPA, 9 December 1987: pp. 5-6 as quoted in Gleijeses 2013: p. 34.
simply left, ran away. They could see from the MiGs’ flight pattern that these weren’t Angolans. The Cubans didn’t insist on aerial combat and returned to base.”72 This frustrated the Angolans, who became upset that Cuban aviation “performed combat sorties only in the operational areas of Cuban forces, but did not support Angolan troops, though both MiGs and helicopters were available.”73

Likewise, air battles between Russians and South Africans did not occur. While most of the military transport planes and their crews operating in Angola were Soviet, the Soviet military mission did not allow its pilots to fly in combat zones.74 As the CIA reported in October 1985, Moscow “was not inclined […] to take on South African aircraft, despite sufficient opportunities.”75 Nor did South African air crews entertain the idea of confronting Russian-piloted aircraft. As Zazeraj explained to me, “[t]here was an unspoken rule that if it was a Russian pilot or even a Cuban pilot, the South African Air Force wouldn’t interfere with them too much. […] we didn’t want to get into a dogfight with them. […] if we were to deliberately engage and shoot down a Soviet plane that was not a threat to us—that would have worried us, because we did not want to draw them into the war any more. You don’t want to scratch the bear and create a problem that you can’t solve.”76

5.5 Restraint in the Final Months of the War

Much has been made of the final months of the Angolan civil war. Spawned by the MPLA’s large-scale offensive against UNITA in the southeast of the country—and the subsequent efforts of the SADF to halt it—the period between October 1987 and March 1988 would see heavy fighting around Cuito Cuanavale, a desolate but strategically valuable town on the western banks of the Cuito River, as well as the approval of a determined Cuban advance into Cunene province—the first time Cuban troops had moved into the southwest since January 1979. Over the last two decades, this culminating period of the conflict has been mythologized, with both sides claiming victory on

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73. Shubin 2008: p. 93.
74. Gleijeses 2013: p. 357.
75. CIA, October 1985: p. 12.
76. Interview, Ambassador (ret.) Victor Zazeraj, 4 July 2014.
the battlefield and, by extension, in the war. The battle for Cuito Cuanavale in particular has been described as “the biggest battle on African soil since World War II,” and Castro has famously suggested that “the history of Africa will have to be written before and after Cuito Cuanavale.”

On its face, the increase in the intensity of fighting in the final years of the conflict would appear to challenge my argument that fears of large-scale confrontations with one another led third party interveners to constrain the scope of their support to Angola’s domestic combatants. After all, participation by Cuban and South African forces in sustained combat risked inadvertent escalation between the external interveners, and the Cuban advance into the southwest violated the tacit agreement that maintained a buffer zone between Cuban and South African troops, as demarcated by the Cuban defensive line along the Moçâmedes Railway. In this sense, the actions of the interveners crossed saliencies that had constrained the scope of their support to Angola’s domestic combatants, representing an escalation of the war.

Yet while it is true that the intensity of the war increased between the fall of 1987 and the spring of 1988, it is precisely for this reason that the highly constrained nature of Cuban/South African confrontation is so striking. Indeed, despite ample opportunity to enlarge the conflict, the competitive interveners proved remarkably adept at avoiding decisive confrontations with each other. In what follows, I review the final months of competitive intervention in the Angolan civil war in detail to demonstrate the lengths to which Cuba and South Africa went to prevent a larger war.

During the early spring of 1987, South African military intelligence began picking up signals that foreshadowed a large MPLA offensive against UNITA: thousands of tons of military supplies were being stockpiled in and around Cuito Cuanavale, and intelligence suggested the town was being developed as a base area for an advance into the southeast. Alarmed by the growing threat this posed to their domestic client, SADF strategists began planning an intervention to halt the advance. A debate developed around the question of whether a counteroffensive should be

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77. For a discussion of the contested narratives of the final years of Cuban/South African confrontation in Angola, see: Baines 2014: Chapter 6.
78. See, for example: Mills and Williams 2006; Campbell 1990.
launched from the west of the Cuito River, which would enable the SADF to breakthrough to the MPLA's rear areas, or east of it, which would take on the MPLA forces head on in an effort to drive them back over the river into Cuito Cuanavale.

Despite agreement that the western assault option would bypass the MPLA's concentrations in the east, cut their communications, and sever their logistics and supply lines, it was not well received by the high command. A top secret planning document, written on 5 June 1987 on behalf of the Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Kat Liebenberg, sheds light on why this was the case. The document's general guidelines for operational planning explain that "[t]he central idea is to let the [MPLA] offensive fail without totally committing the RSA [Republic of South Africa]."\(^8\) It stresses that "operations must not provoke revenge attacks inside SWA [South West Africa]" and that "the conflict must not be allowed to escalate beyond the capacity of the SWATF [South West African Territorial Force] or the SADF in general."\(^1\) A western attack on Cuito Cuanavale risked clashes with Cuban forces manning the end of the Cuban defensive line at Menongue and would have required advancing into territory never before contested by SADF troops. Consequently, the decision was made to confront the offensive from the east. UNITA units were to serve as a screen to protect South African artillery teams that would pummel the advancing MPLA units from afar. This led to a series of battles along the Lomba River, a major physical obstacle to be crossed by the MPLA on their southeastern march. The combined UNITA/SADF force successfully halted the offensive, and by 5 October the remaining MPLA units were ordered to withdraw northwards back toward Cuito Cuanavale.

Having successfully stopped the MPLA advance, a counteroffensive was planned which aimed to destroy the remaining MPLA brigades to preclude a renewed offensive against UNITA later that fall. However, debate once again broke out over the question of whether the SADF should attack the town of Cuito Cuanavale from the west, which would enable the SADF to penetrate the MPLA's rear areas and envelope its remaining brigades, or attack from the east, which would require facing the MPLA head on in an effort to slowly drive their forces back over the Cuito River

\(^{80}\) H Leër/D OPS/309/1, 5 June 1987: Paragraph 5e.
\(^{81}\) Ibid.: Paragraph 16e.
and into their garrisons in the town. As before, the eastern attack option was clearly tactically disadvantageous, and yet it was adopted anyway. De Vries, who was designated the commander for a possible assault from the west, explains why:

I then conducted the joint operational planning cycle, and our proposed course of action was to attack Cuito Cuanavale from the west early in November. But during the presentation of our plans, the Chief of the Defence Force, General Jannie Geldenhuys, said no—we had to remain on the eastern side of the river. And what I surmised from that exchange is that they were very apprehensive about escalating the war. [...] they were still pussyfooting and making sure that they didn’t escalate the war into a regional war. [...] a small trigger could trigger that war into a massive, escalated, high intensity battle.”

De Vries’ interpretation accords with a statement given by Geldenhuys during a press interview, in which he explained that the leadership decided against “going west over the river, because it would lead to an unnecessary escalation of the war after the mission had been fulfilled already.”

Notably, South African efforts to control escalation were reciprocated by their Cuban opponents. Indeed, when the MPLA’s offensive began in mid-August 1987, no Cuban forces participated—the offensive was entirely composed of MPLA units and Soviet advisers. As battles raged along the Lomba River in September and October, the nearest Cuban military unit was stationed some 350 kilometers from the fighting. In mid-November, as the SADF began its counteroffensive to push the MPLA back toward the Cuito River, a group of approximately thirty Cuban military advisers were sent to Cuito Cuanavale—yet still no combat troops were deployed. On 5 December 1987, a further 106 Special Forces and 15 officers were sent to the town, but these forces were tasked with reorganizing the MPLA’s command structure, defense, and artillery positions.

It was only in late January 1988, by which time the South Africans had driven the Angolans back to a small bridgehead at Tumpo, just across the river from Cuito Cuanavale, that some 1,500 Cuban combat troops joined to stiffen the MPLA’s defence. The majority of these units were placed in rear positions, west of the Cuito River and in the third (and last) defensive line that protected the city—a force posture that clearly signaled Castro’s limited objectives at Cuito

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82. Interview, Major General (ret.) Roland de Vries, 9 September 2014.
85. Ibid.: p. 423.
Cuanavale and demonstrated that while he would not allow the SADF to destroy the remaining MPLA brigades, he was unwilling to force a decisive battle for the town. 86

A limited clash did occur between the SADF and a small groups of Cuban troops that were attached to an Angolan unit on 14 February 1988—“the first time since the Battle of Cassinga a decade previously that South Africans and Cubans would come eye to eye on the battlefield,” as Scholtz describes it. 87 Cuban troops also manned artillery deployed on the western side of the Cuito River and piloted combat aircraft that ran sorties in defence of Cuito Cuanavale. But as Gleijeses writes, “No climatic battle was fought at Cuito Cuanavale. The South Africans did not launch a major assault on the town; nor did the Cubans and the [MPLA] surge from the town to push them back to Mavinga.” 88 These were far from decisive encounters between the competitive interveners—largely because that was precisely what both sides sought to avoid. 89

Castro was unwilling to confront the South Africans in direct clashes at Cuito Cuanavale, so he adopted an indirect approach instead. While a limited number of Cuban troops would help stiffen the MPLA’s defence in the southeast, he ordered a major combat formation to prepare an advance into the southwest. Between March and May 1988, thousands of Cuban troops began moving into Cunene Province—a territory which they had been expressly forbidden from entering for nearly a decade. These troops, including Cuba’s vaunted 50th Division, were joined by “several thousand” MPLA troops and 2000 SWAPO insurgents who began integrating with the Cubans at the battalion level. 90

Why did Castro advance in the southwest? Certainly the strategy was not without risks—the chance of misperception or miscalculation was high, as a number of saliencies that had been exploited to limit South African-Cuban confrontation were becoming blurred: Cubans were now operating south of their defensive line and Cuban and SWAPO forces had begun co-basing in the

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86. Scholtz 2013: p. 316.
89. For example, in a planning document produced on 8 December 1987, the Chief of the Defense Force Kat Liebenberg stressed that the SADF’s counteroffensive had to avoid engaging in any “decisive battle.” See: SWAGM VHK 309/1 (Op Moduler) Memorandum, 8 December 1987: paragraph 4.
southwest. But Castro had realized that, with its forces tied down in the southeast, the SADF could not respond to the Cuban advance; his aim was to pry the SADF out of southeastern Angola without the need to directly challenge South African military power. And to those ends, Castro ensured that the flood of Cuban troops into Cunene province was matched with a determined diplomatic offensive on the issue of a joint termination of Cuban and South African participation in the Angolan conflict.\(^1\) In effect, his bold move in the southwest sought to shore up his bargaining position without actually fighting a war. In the words of Chester Crocker, the lead negotiator of the American delegation during the 1988 talks, “the potent Cuban force was primarily a political demonstration in keeping with Castro’s ‘strutting cock’ school of grand strategy.”\(^2\) Castro admitted as much to Gorbachev in March 1988, when he explained that “we are not doing this in order to win a war but to guarantee a just and reasonable political negotiation that will allow Angola to preserve its sovereignty, its integrity and its peaceful development, as well as assure the independence of Namibia.”\(^3\)

To signal his political—rather than military—intentions, Castro carefully calibrated the advance, moving Cuban units forward slowly. SADF troops noticed that advance patrols of Cuban units were “quite careful and cagey.”\(^4\) And while the power of Castro’s southern advance stemmed from the threat it posed to Namibia, the archival record makes plain the fact that Castro never envisioned an attack across the border. Indeed, as early as 3 December 1987, he had told his generals that he

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\(^1\) Specifically, negotiations centered around the implementation of the so-called “linkage” policy: the idea that South Africa’s retreat from Angola and relinquished control of Namibia (as per UN Security Resolution 435) was to be linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.


\(^3\) Castro to Gorbachev, 3 March 1988: p. 15, as quoted in Gleijeses 2013: p. 418. Interestingly, there is evidence that the Soviets worried that the Cubans might press the issue too far. As the chief of the Soviet General Staff, Sergey Akhromeyev, explained, the Soviets feared “a massive response from South Africa [...] South Africa is not going to abandon this territory without a fight.” See: Reunión con el Ministro de Defensa de la URSS en el Ministerio de Defensa, 27 November 1987: p. 14, as quoted in Gleijeses 2013: p. 413. Consequently, they were slow to agree to Cuba’s request for weapons to equip units destined for the southwestern advance, waiting fifty-nine days before granting approval. And even upon agreeing to arm the Cuban advance, the Soviets took precautions to limit Castro’s ability to act aggressively. As one example, Cuban requests for range-extending fuel tanks for combat aircraft were declined. This outcome, explains Gleijeses, “can be explained only by the Kremlin’s desire to restrain Castro and make sure that he would not push his offensive too far south, risking major clashes with the SADF and attempting to assert control over the skies of northern Namibia.” See: Ibid.: pp. 419 & 428.

\(^4\) This description was offered by SADF Commandant Jan Hougaard, as quoted in Bridgland 1990: p. 349.
did “not intend to cross the border with troops.”\textsuperscript{95} A few days later, he explained that “[a]n invasion of Namibia by our army would have very serious political repercussions. [...] We cross the border, and there would be an international scandal.”\textsuperscript{96} The limited aims of the Cuban advance are also confirmed by Soviet sources. For example, former Deputy Head of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anatoly Adamishin, writes that the Soviets “had a secret understanding with the Cubans that they would not cross the border with Namibia.”\textsuperscript{97} The South Africans, too, understood Castro’s limited objectives: South African military intelligence interpreted the southwestern advance as a “predominantly defensive strategy.”\textsuperscript{98}

Cuban MiG-23s did penetrate northern Namibia’s airspace in May 1988, but they did so cautiously, never attacking ground targets, never venturing closer than twenty kilometers from SADF airbases, and always making their presence known well in advance. As Brigadier-General (ret.) Dick Lord explains, “Although we did think they might attack [SADF] bases, the high altitudes they were flying at were not conducive to surprise. They were always within our radar cover. [...] We decided that they wanted to test our pilots’ reaction times.”\textsuperscript{99} But there were to be no dogfights: “there was a ban on air-to-air combat which might escalate the war,” explains Commandant Jan Hougaard.\textsuperscript{100}

Similarly, there were to be no decisive confrontations between ground forces: the South Africans offered no resistance to the Cuban advance, with the exception of a few brief skirmishes that took place between April and June 1988, mainly around the Calueque dam installation (which supplied northern Namibia with water and which had been defended by South African troops for several years). Notably, these were highly constrained interactions that were often the product of mistakes by advance patrols rather than deliberate actions. For example, on 18 April the first such skirmish occurred when an SADF unit, in pursuit of a retreating SWAPO group, ran into a Cuban patrol, resulting in the death of a SADF major. A second clash occurred on 5 May, when a

\textsuperscript{95} Reunión del Comandante en Jefe, 3 December 1987: p. 88 as quoted in Gleijeses 2013: p. 454.
\textsuperscript{98} MI/204/3/A6/8, 24 June 1988: paragraph 3a.
\textsuperscript{99} As quoted in Bridgland 1990: p. 344.
\textsuperscript{100} As quoted in Ibid.: p. 352.
reconnoitring SADF unit, operating approximately 50 kilometers inside Angola, approached a Cuban forward observation post. The South Africans were “surprised” by the resulting firefight, explains Hougaard, “because we thought we controlled the area opposite Ovamboland.”101 A third skirmish occurred on 22 May, when an advance team of SADF troopers ran into a group of Cubans walking down a road towards them. And a fourth and final clash occurred on 26/27 June, when the SADF shelled a joint Cuban-SWAPO base at Techipa, provoking a retaliatory Cuban airstrike on the Calueque dam that has been described as “a very academic attack” and “measured response”.102

That was the full extent of Cuban/South African confrontation. In Crocker’s words, “Like scorpions in a bottle, the rival forces avoided each other’s sting.”103 Having pushed the limits of their “cooperative competition,” the two sides began to concentrate on political negotiations. Only sixteen days later, South Africa, Angola, and Cuba had agreed to fourteen principles as a basis for peace in Angola, including the linked withdrawals of the SADF from Namibia and Cuban forces from Angola.

5.6 Was Not Losing More Important Than Winning?

Manifestations of strategic restraint—distinctions between “advisory” and “combat” missions, geographic areas of control and contestation, advances and withdrawals, and careful target selection—served to regulate confrontation between interveners in Angola. These were discrete limits with symbolic significance that were easily recognizable even in the absence of explicit communication; they provided clear guidelines for military commanders; and they made violations of the status quo relatively easy to detect. In short, they were the “rules of the game” that bound the scope of competition between interveners. But these limits were not only symbolically significant—they had tactical implications for civil war combatants. Despite seeking victory in Angola, interveners constrained tactically advantageous maneuvers, limited military objectives, and restricted the deployment of combat forces.

102. The former quotation is SADF Brigadier-General (ret.) Dick Lord, as quoted in Bridgland 1990: p. 362; the latter quotation is Crocker 1992: p. 372.
The central claim of my theory of competitive intervention holds that it is this contradiction—the desire to prevail in a conflict, but also control escalation—that warps interveners’ positive objectives of “winning” into negative objectives of “not losing.” Putting this argument to the test, I asked interviewees whether they thought South Africa did enough for UNITA during the Angolan civil war. “We did help them a lot,” Opperman responded, “[w]e provided them with a lot of material support; a lot of financial support; we gave them an international platform which they would not have had. So yes, we really helped them a lot.” But when I asked whether South Africa ever tried to ensure UNITA would win the civil war, he gave a negative response: “I don’t think we ever had the real option of getting them to win the civil war—that would have been beyond our means. Getting them to control the whole country and to keep them in place, despite the troop and armaments escalation from the other side, just wouldn’t have been possible. I don’t think that was really an option for us.”104 When I asked Dippenaar the same question, he echoed Opperman’s response. “I think there are a number of cases where UNITA could have done better if they were better equipped and better trained, where they could have taken over,” he explained. But while “the possibility was always there,” he acknowledged that South Africa was hamstrung by escalation concerns: “[t]he threat against the country from abroad […] was building up all the time.”105

Brigadier General (ret.) Deon Fourie, who served on the Staff of the Chief of the Army during the 1980s, told me that South African military and political leaders wanted “to try and save UNITA from the consequences of Cuban and Soviet intervention. […] the feeling [was] that we didn’t want to abandon UNITA to any unpredictable fate, but we didn’t want to go right into central Angola and get into serious trouble.” By “serious trouble,” Fourie was referring to direct confrontation with Cuban and Russian forces: “we didn’t want to get involved in a full-scale campaign, a full-scale war,” he explained, “[w]e just wanted to save UNITA and then leave them.”106 Dave Steward, former Director-General of the South African Communication Service, reiterated this sentiment:

104. Interview, Major General (ret.) Gert Opperman, 23 June 2014.
105. Interview, Major General (ret.) Johann Dippenaar, 30 June 2014.
106. Interview, Brigadier General (ret.) Deon Fourie, 16 June 2014.
“[a UNITA victory] would have been nice,” he explained, but in light of escalation fears, South African military assistance sought a more limited objective: to ensure UNITA could continue “holding the line.”

The archival record suggests that Cuba likewise pursued the more limited objective of “not losing” in Angola for fear of escalating the conflict. Cuban documents make clear that Castro saw the Cuban deployment as a deterrent to South African invasion rather than as a fighting force deployed to help the MPLA prevail in its civil war with UNITA. In fact, as early as January 1979, Cuba had completely ended its participation in the fight against UNITA and had informed Angolan defense minister Iko Carreira that Cuban advisers in counterinsurgency units would be withdrawn. This decision proved costly: UNITA enjoyed a period of recovery and development, as the MPLA failed to maintain the pace of operations set by the Cubans. By late 1979, Savimbi had moved UNITA’s headquarters from northern Namibia to Jamba in south-eastern Angola; in September 1980, he captured Mavinga; and by May 1981, he had repulsed the MPLA’s attempts to retake captured cities.

Disturbed by UNITA’s resurgence, in October 1981 a top Angolan official, Lúcio Lara, met with Cuban general Aberlardo Colomé. Raúl Castro relates that “Comrade Lara said that the working relationship between Angolans and Cubans was no longer characterized by the common search for solutions and by the active participation of the Cubans, as it had been in an earlier period. ‘Now the Cubans limit themselves to making recommendations and observing,’ Comrade Lara said.” To assuage these concerns, the Cubans agreed to reassign some military advisers to the war against UNITA. However, Castro ensured that Cuban troops remained north of the Cuban defensive line.

And even in the final months of the conflict, as Cuban troops advanced in the southwest for the

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107. Interview, Dave Steward, 6 June 2014.
108. See: Menéndez Tomassevich to Rodiles, 9 January 1979 and Versión de la Reunión con el Ministro de Defensa de la República Popular de Angola, 11 January 1979, as cited in Gleijeses 2013.
first time in almost a decade, the actions of frontline forces render plain Castro’s limited objectives. A decisive confrontation to ensure the MPLA a military victory over UNITA was not worth a conventional war with South Africa; the risks inherent in inadvertent escalation with the SADF necessitated a carefully calibrated approach.

5.7 Conclusion

While interveners seek to advance their security or geopolitical interests during their participation in a foreign conflict, the need to control escalation and avoid direct confrontations vis-à-vis interstate rivals limits their ability to confer decisive military advantages on their chosen clients. At the same time, it is precisely because they enjoy the support of competing external backers that domestic combatant forces neither face the resources constraints inherent in war nor the threat of defeat at the hands of their opponent. The net result is a protracted conflict, with little hope for compromise, concessions, or resolution.

It is thus not surprising that the internal peace agreement signed between the Angolan government and UNITA rebels in 1991 was preceded by the Tripartite Accord, an external agreement signed between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa in December 1988. It was only after this international agreement was reached that a domestic settlement was possible. That external aid distorted the domestic bargaining process during the Angolan civil war is manifest in the remarkable fact that UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi and Angolan president José dos Santos met for the first time only in June 1989—some fourteen years after the start of the war. That meeting concluded with a temporary ceasefire under the Gbadolite Declaration, setting the stage for what became six rounds of negotiations. In May 1991, UNITA and the Angolan government signed the Bicesse Accords, a comprehensive agreement including stipulations for a ceasefire, military monitoring, the formation of new Angolan Armed Forces, and ultimately elections the following year.

Tragically, the peace agreement broke down following presidential elections in the fall of 1992. Savimbi, along with eight other opposition parties, protested that the election had been neither free nor fair—a claim that was denied by a UN monitoring mission in Angola.\footnote{Margaret Anstee, who headed the UN mission in Angola, issued a public statement that explained that "[t]he
conflict would eventually relapse, in no small part due to Zaire’s re-entry in the conflict, South Africa and Cuba respected their obligations as stipulated by the Tripartite Accord—neither side intervened as the conflict was renewed. With the termination of competitive intervention, the first phase of the Angolan civil war was officially over.

This chapter used empirical evidence from the Angolan civil war to illustrate the strategic dilemmas states face when “not losing” becomes more important than “winning” during competitive interventions in third party civil wars. The following chapter will continue to explore this theme, drawing on what many consider to be the quintessential Cold War “proxy conflict”: the Afghan communist-mujahideen civil war (1979-1992).

United Nations considers that while there were certainly some irregularities in the electoral process, these appear to have been mainly due to human error and inexperience. There was no conclusive evidence of major, systematic or widespread fraud, or that the irregularities were of a magnitude to have a significant effect on the results officially announced on 17 October [1992]. Nor, in view of their random nature, could it be determined that such irregularities had penalized or benefited only one party or set of parties.” As quoted in UN Security Council 1992: paragraph 20.
6 Competitive Intervention and the Afghan Civil War, 1979-1992

When Soviet leaders ordered troops to Afghanistan in December 1979, they believed it would be a short war. The intervention sought limited aims: a change of the Afghan leadership, the protection of Afghan cities, and support for the Afghan military. But while it was expected that Soviet troops would be returning home within a matter of months, Moscow soon found its military mired in a protracted counterinsurgency campaign. Much has been written about the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, but to date, most existing research has focused on the Politburo’s decision to intervene in 1979 and to withdraw in the late 1980s.¹ This chapter poses a different question: why didn’t the Soviets do what was necessary to win the civil war?

This is an important question not only for explanations of the Afghan conflict, but also for our understanding of competitive intervention more generally. While the Afghan conflict is regularly cited as the archetypal Cold War “proxy war,” scholars have often overlooked the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention and the ways in which these dilemmas affect the dynamics and outcomes of civil wars. In Afghanistan, “winning” was a matter of life and

¹ On the Soviet decision to intervene, see: Westad 1996a; on the decision to withdraw, see: Mendelson 1998; Kalinovsky 2011.
death for the communist government and its rebel challengers in the mujahideen. For external interveners, on the other hand, the need to avoid large-scale confrontations necessitated more limited aims. As detailed below, strategic restraint was manifest in distinctions drawn by the interveners with respect to geographic areas of contestation and control, adopted forces postures, and the qualitative characteristics of different weapon systems. This restraint served to regulate the interveners' competition with one another and helped prevent a regional war between them. Yet, simultaneously (and paradoxically) it also prevented the conferral of decisive military advantages on Afghanistan's domestic combatants. The end result was a stalemated conflict that neither side was capable of winning, yet which neither side was willing to lose.

Like the Angolan civil war discussed in the previous chapter, the Afghan conflict is an important case for this dissertation for a number of reasons. First, it presents a hard test for the theory. It was one of the bloodiest conflicts of the Cold War period, killing an estimated 800,000 to 1.2 million Afghans, generating some 5.5 million refugees, and rendering another 2 million internally displaced persons. In an effort to stamp out the mujahideen insurgency, the Soviet Union unleashed an exceedingly violent campaign in the Afghan countryside, resorting to mass depopulation and the physical destruction of entire villages to deny the guerrillas of their domestic support base. In light of these tremendous human costs, the suggestion that the Afghan civil war presents evidence of "restraint" will undoubtedly strike some as absurd. Yet, it is precisely because of the level of brutality seen in Afghanistan that the restraint of the competitive interveners vis-à-vis one another is so remarkable. Despite their widespread mistreatment of the Afghan people—government, guerrilla, and civilian alike—external interveners were careful to avoid direct

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2. There are many accepted spellings for the name of the Afghan rebels. For clarity and simplicity, I have used a standardized 'mujahideen' in this chapter, including in quotations where alternate spellings appeared in the original.
4. Grau and Nawroz 1995: p. 19. Again, other estimates are roughly in this range. Sliwinski 1989: p. 54, for example, reports that 33.2 percent of the Afghan population became refugees by 1987. Estimating the pre-war Afghan population as between 12 and 15.5 million, this would amount to 3.98 to 5.15 million refugees.
5. Boulouque 1999: p. 717. Sliwinski 1989: p. 54 reports that 10.9 percent of the Afghan population was internally displaced by 1987. Assuming a pre-war Afghan population of between 12 and 15.5 million, this would amount to roughly 1.31 to 1.69 million internally displaced persons.
confrontations with each other that could further enlarge the conflict. It is in this respect that the Afghan case provides powerful evidence of the conditioning effect of fears of inadvertent escalation during competitive interventions in civil wars.

Second, understanding what happened in Afghanistan is of significant historical importance. The Afghan conflict was the largest regional war of the 1980s that saw the participation of both the Soviet Union and the United States, and for that reason, it has played a prominent role in debates about what led to the end of the Cold War. Many have attributed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan to the American and Pakistani covert aid program which supported the mujahideen insurgency. Others have gone even further, suggesting that the military pressure generated by the program not only defeated the Soviets, but also played a part in the collapse of the USSR itself. Former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example, has argued that the Afghan civil war “brought about the demoralization and finally the breakup of the Soviet empire.” Likewise, David Isby has suggested that “We’ll never know if Leonid Brezhnev and the Politburo had not made the decision to intervene in Afghanistan [...] whether the Soviet Union would still be in existence today.”

It is true that American and Pakistani weapons, equipment, and financing played a central role in the mujahideen’s military campaign, but the success of the covert aid program should not be exaggerated. The Soviets were not “defeated” in Afghanistan: rather than retreating under fire, Soviet leaders signed the Geneva Accords that brought their troops home at a time of relative strength and entrenched military positions. Nor were the costs imposed by the aid program so severe as to necessitate a Soviet withdrawal. In a declassified intelligence report written at the height of the war in 1987, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) itself acknowledged that the war had “not been a substantial drain on the Soviet economy” and that economic costs were “unlikely [...] to be of sufficient magnitude to constitute a significant counterweight to the political..."
and security implications the Soviets would attach to withdrawal under circumstances that could be seen as a defeat.” To suggest that the covert aid program not only defeated the Soviets in Afghanistan, but also played a role in the disintegration of the USSR itself, is to present a serious misreading of the Afghan civil war. What is more, it overlooks the ways in which American and Pakistani policymakers restricted the scope of their support to the mujahideen to avoid provoking Soviet retaliation.

Importantly, however, to claim that the Soviets were not “defeated” is not to claim they “won” the war. While they single-handedly helped the Afghan communist regime survive a protracted insurgency, the Soviets were unwilling to do what was necessary to eliminate the mujahideen—the risk of inadvertent escalation vis-à-vis their interstate rivals was simply too great. By the late 1980s, the desire of Soviet leaders to improve relations with the West exceeded their desire to keep the Afghan communists in power. They therefore sacrificed their long-standing position that outside support for the mujahideen be terminated and ordered their troops home. The Afghan communist regime managed to retain control of Kabul without the assistance of Soviet troops from 1989 to 1991, but when Soviet weapons, equipment, and financing dried up in 1992 following the collapse of the USSR, the communists could no longer outlast the mujahideen.

The analysis that follows unpacks the strategic dilemmas that faced the competitive interveners in Afghanistan by drawing on a rich set of primary and secondary sources, including archival documents from the Soviet Union and United States, official histories of the Afghan military campaign prepared by the Pakistani and Soviet General Staffs, and declassified intelligence reports from the CIA. In tandem with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3, these materials provide a new window through which to interpret the Afghan civil war, the strategic interactions of competitive interveners under the shadow of inadvertent escalation, and the nested interactions of domestic combatants, third party states, and the international distribution of power.

The Afghan civil war was a highly complex and internationalized affair, with the participation of many third party states, organizations, and individuals. It is not this chapter’s intent to provide
an exhaustive account of all these actors, their behaviors, and their interests; rather, the objective
is to determine the overarching strategic logics that drove intervener decision-making and to
identify how those decisions affected the dynamics of the war. To those ends, I limit my analysis
to the major players in the Afghan conflict: in the domestic realm, the communist government
and the mujahideen rebels;\(^{10}\) and in the international realm, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and
the United States.\(^ {11}\) While limiting the analysis to these actors may risk oversimplification, it is
necessary to render the case tractable. Moreover, no generality is lost: the case is examined from
the perspective of those who had the most to win—and the most to lose—during the war.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the origins of the civil war and a timeline of
major events during its duration from 1979 to 1992. Next, it identifies the strategic interests
pursued by the major actors that intervened in Afghanistan. The chapter then turns to examine
how interveners regulated their competition and established limits to control escalation vis-à-vis
one another. It concludes by considering whether “not losing” was indeed more important than
“winning” from the perspective of external powers.

### 6.1 Origins of the War

The origins of the Afghan civil war can be traced to the Saur Revolution of 1978. On 17 April
of that year, a prominent leader of the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan
(PDPA), Mir Akbar Khaibar, was assassinated outside of his home. The PDPA leadership and other
leftists in the country alleged the assassination had been ordered by the ruling Afghan President,

\(^{10}\) Here I include the many Sunni mujahideen parties that composed the bulk of the insurgency in Afghanistan, but exclude the Hazara Shiite mujahideen parties. The Hazaras did not possess the logistical capacity nor the military supplies to wage sustained operations against the Soviets, and for their part, the Soviets were by and large content to allow the Hazaras to remain isolated and autonomous during the war.

\(^{11}\) Many states played a secondary role in the Afghan conflict, mainly by selling or donating weapons and equipment, often to the CIA, Pakistan, or the mujahideen directly. Included in this list are Britain, China, Egypt, and Israel. Saudi Arabia was an important funder of the mujahideen, matching US contributions in cash, but it did not play a large operational role. As Prince Turki put it, “[w]e don’t do operations. We don’t know how. All we know how to do is write checks” (as quoted in Coll 2005: p. 72). Finally, another state excluded in the analysis below is Iran. Sharing a 550-mile long border with Afghanistan, it was impossible for Iran to avoid the war entirely. However, the Iranian role was relatively limited for three reasons: first, the Afghanistan-Iran border areas are dominated by open terrain, which made it difficult for rebels to find shelter; second, the Iran-Iraq War held most of Iran’s attention during the Afghan civil war; and third, the majority of Iranian military aid went to the Hazara Shiite resistance that played a relatively marginal role in the conflict. On Iran’s limited role, see: Defense Intelligence Agency, n.d.
Mohammed Daoud Khan, and used Khaibar’s funeral as an occasion for mass demonstrations in Kabul. Interpreting the scale of the protest as an alarming indication of the extent of the PDPA’s organization, Daoud had the party’s leadership arrested. However, he moved too slowly: the rebellion had spread to the military, and on 27 April, army and air force officers sympathetic to the PDPA led a coup against Daoud, who was deposed and killed along with his family. The PDPA’s leaders were promptly released from prison and formed a new Revolutionary Council. On 30 April, the military officers handed over power to the Council, which proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).

The new Afghan leaders sought revolutionary goals for their country, calling for radical social, political, and economic reform. They demanded an end to ethnic discrimination; equality for women; redistribution of land; the eradication of illiteracy; and a larger role for the state in the national economy. These policies, issued by decree of the Revolutionary Council, were a vision for a fundamentally transformed Afghan society. Unfortunately for the PDPA, however, the revolutionaries were out of touch with their fellow countrymen. Opposition to the new regime emerged almost immediately, as its commitments to egalitarianism and social justice came up against the fiercely conservative prejudices of Afghanistan’s landowners, traditional leaders, and mullahs. A collection of Islamic guerrilla groups, known as the mujahideen, began organizing a campaign to oust the new communist regime. The PDPA responded with repression, using the tools of mass arrests, torture, and executions. Members of the political opposition were rounded up and killed, as were local leaders, the tribal aristocracy, and any other social group that might pose a threat—be they army officers, bureaucrats, or even teachers.

Far from stamping out the opposition, however, the PDPA’s brutality unified popular resistance to its rule. The ill-prepared state apparatus soon began to disintegrate, encouraging still larger segments of the population to revolt. On 15 March 1979, the first of what would become a series of mutinies in the Afghan army took place in Herat. Fearful that the country was slowly slipping from its control, the PDPA turned to the Soviet Union for help. Moscow had not played any role

12. On the PDPA’s radical vision, see: Rubin 2002: pp. 115-120.
in the PDPA’s coup, but had committed itself to the defense of the Afghan revolution in December 1978 under the provisions of a Treaty of Friendship. It had also deployed numerous Soviet advisers to assist the Afghan government, some of whom fell victim to demonstrators during the mutiny in Herat.

The Politburo met for an emergency session on 17 and 18 March. On the first day, a number of important Soviet leaders, including Andrei Gromyko, the minister of foreign affairs, Dmitrii Usinov, the minister of defense, and Yurii Andropov, the KGB chief, spoke in favor of intervention. For all three, the risk of losing influence over Afghanistan outweighed the negative consequences of engaging Soviet troops. On the second day, however, these same policymakers were striking a different chord. “[W]e can suppress a revolution in Afghanistan only with the aid of our bayonets,

13. The Afghan coup was a surprise to Soviet officials in Kabul, as the PDPA’s leaders had neither informed nor consulted the Soviet leadership of their plans. See: Braithwaite 2011: pp. 41-42.
and that is entirely inadmissible," argued Andropov. Gromyko, too, spoke out against intervention, highlighting the negative impact it would have on détente with the US, arms reductions under the SALT-II negotiations, and the planned Carter-Brezhnev summit that was to take place that June.\textsuperscript{15} While the Soviet leaders agreed to continue the aid they had already promised to send to Afghanistan, including more weapons and an increased number of military advisers, it was decided that the PDPA would have to quell the rebellion without the help of Soviet troops.\textsuperscript{16}

The Afghan army did manage to pacify Herat, but conditions in Afghanistan continued to worsen throughout 1979. Popular resistance was spreading and increasing numbers of Afghan army units were going over to the enemy. By the summer, mutinies had struck Jalalabad, Asmar, Ghazni, Nahrin, and even Kabul itself.\textsuperscript{17} Further complicating matters for the communists was infighting taking place within their own party. Feuding between its two wings, Parcham ("Banner") and Khalq ("Masses"), had characterized the PDPA from its inception in 1965, but upon assuming power in 1978, confrontation reached new peaks.\textsuperscript{18} The Khalqists began squeezing out their Parchamist opponents, removing them from major posts in the government and exiling them through ambassadorships in foreign countries. As power became increasingly concentrated, infighting spread within the Khalq wing itself, with two Khalqist leaders, Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, jockeying for control of the party. As tension between the two strongmen reached an apex, Taraki attempted to have Amin killed.\textsuperscript{19} The plan failed, however, and with the

\textsuperscript{15.} Ibid.: pp. 13 & 17.
\textsuperscript{16.} The aid included five MI-24 (Hind) attack helicopters, eight MI-8T transport helicopters, thirty-three BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, fifty BTR-60PB armored personnel carriers, twenty-five armored reconnaissance vehicles, fifty mobile anti-air units, and one 9K31 Strela-1 (SA-9) surface-to-air missile system. The Soviets also committed to repair Afghan helicopters and aircraft, to send 100,000 tons of grain, and to raise the price that they paid the Afghan government for gas from $21 to $37 per cubic meter. See: Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and Afghan Prime Minister Nur Mohammed Taraki, 17 or 18 March 1979: p. 1; Record of Meeting of A.N. Kosygin, A.A. Gromyko, D.F. Ustinov, and B.N. Ponomarev with N.M. Taraki, 20 March 1979: p. 8.
\textsuperscript{17.} Rubin 2002: p. 120.
\textsuperscript{18.} The theoretical basis for the division within the party concerned beliefs about the appropriate timeline of an Afghan revolution. While the Parchamists saw Afghanistan as not yet ripe for socialism and stressed the need to work in alliance with other nationalist and progressive forces, the Khalqists believed that socialism could be imposed quickly once the PDPA seized power. The two wings also differed in the composition of their membership. While the Parcham was composed mainly of urban intellectuals, the Khalq drew its supporters from the countryside and Pashtun tribes. On the PDPA's factionalism, see: Westad 2007: pp. 300-305; Braithwaite 2011: pp. 38-39; Christia 2012: pp. 114-116.
\textsuperscript{19.} It remains unclear whether the Soviets had known about Taraki's plan. Leading up to the assassination attempt on 14 September 1979, Soviet advisers were pressuring Taraki to remove Amin from power. Soviet representatives
help of a contingent of army officers, Amin had Taraki arrested. A few weeks later, on 9 October 1979, Taraki was smothered to death while tied to a bed in his jail cell.

Amin’s decision to have Taraki killed disturbed the Soviets. In a conversation with East German leader Erich Honecker shortly after the coup, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev complained about Amin’s “disproportionate harshness” and “power-driven” mentality. Letters circulated amongst the Politburo leadership in the aftermath of Taraki’s death also reveal growing concern about Amin’s erratic behavior, which included closed-door meetings in which attacks were made against Soviet policy, reported secret meetings with US officials, and signs of a more balanced policy in Afghanistan’s relations with Western powers. Amin’s refusal to accept the recommendations of Soviet political and military advisers was also deeply frustrating for Moscow, especially in light of the Islamist insurgency’s growing strength across Afghanistan.

By early December, Andropov began laying out the case for a direct intervention to remove Amin and secure the Soviet Union’s interests in its southern neighbor. Over the course of a number of meetings between 8 and 12 December, senior Soviet leaders considered the pros and cons. Distrust of Amin and concern for the geopolitical consequences of “losing” Afghanistan convinced Soviet leaders that a military response had become necessary. On 12 December, the Politburo approved the deployment of Soviet forces in a handwritten resolution entitled “Concerning the Situation in A.” Some thirteen days later, on 25 December 1979, the Soviet 40th Army (officially dubbed the “Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan”) crossed the border into Afghanistan. Just before nightfall on 27 December, some seven-hundred members of

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20. Minutes of Meeting between General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and General Secretary Erich Honecker, 4 October 1979.
22. Personal Memorandum from Andropov to Brezhnev, December 1979. The Soviet Ministry of Defense had already begun military preparations for a possible response to combat in Afghanistan. For example, in June the Soviets sent a parachute battalion, disguised as an aviation maintenance team, to protect Soviet air squadrons based at the Bagram airfield and also sent a special detachment of KGB men, disguised as embassy service personnel, to help protect the Soviet Embassy. See: Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee on the Situation in Afghanistan, 28 June 1979: p. 1.
KGB special units attacked Amin’s residence at the Dar-ul-Aman Palace in Kabul, deposed the Afghan leader, and installed a new regime led by Babrak Karmal. By all accounts, the Soviet coup was a resounding success. But far from ending political instability in Afghanistan, the Soviet intervention was only beginning.

6.2 A Brief Overview of the War

While the purpose of the Soviet intervention was initially limited—overthrow Amin, install Karmal, garrison key cities, and protect Afghan military bases—the level of instability in Afghanistan was worse than Soviet leaders expected. The Afghan army had been demoralized as a result of purges undertaken by the PDPA and was no longer capable of controlling the rural countryside. Almost immediately, Soviet troops found themselves drawn into skirmishes—whether in defense of Afghan army units or to protect government buildings. Protests and attacks on Soviet troops spread quickly, and by March 1980, the 40th Army was engaged in full-scale operations to repel advancing groups of mujahideen.

Further complicating the Soviet position was the swift international response to their intervention. In the US, the Carter administration had authorized cash and other non-military supplies for Afghan opposition groups as early as 3 July 1979. These were relatively meager contributions, however, amounting to roughly half a million dollars. With the deployment of Soviet troops, this aid package was rapidly expanded, such that by 10 January 1980—just two weeks after the Soviet invasion—the first US arms shipment was arriving for distribution to mujahideen fighters. The following month, Carter’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, traveled to Pakistan where he met with Pakistani President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. Together, the two men worked out the details of an expanded covert aid program to support the Afghan insurgency. Brzezinski then continued on to Saudi Arabia, where he secured the financial backing of the Saudi king.

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24. Karmal had been the former vice president and deputy prime minister of the 1978 revolutionary government, but had been exiled during the Khalq’s purge of the Parcham wing of the PDPA.
27. For the Saudis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan signaled a drive to secure further influence in the Middle East and control of the region’s oil. Aid to the mujahideen was seen to be an effective means for the Saudis to confront
**Figure 6.2:** Relationships of major actors during the Afghan civil war.

The general characteristics of the covert aid program are today well known (see Figure 6.3). The American government provided the CIA with funding to covertly purchase arms, equipment, and other war matériel from third party states, most notably Britain, China, Egypt, and Israel. The Saudi government matched these contributions financially, dollar for dollar. The CIA then coordinated the distribution of arms, equipment, vehicles, communications equipment, and financial aid to the Pakistani intelligence service, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). It also provided training to Pakistani military instructors on weapons and equipment, and supplied satellite intelligence and operational planning. For its part, the ISI managed the distribution of military aid to the mujahideen, which it channeled through an alliance of seven political parties—four Islamic fundamentalist and three moderate traditionalist—that positioned themselves as representatives of the various mujahideen commanders.28

All seven parties maintained headquarters-in-exile in Peshawar, Pakistan. Each was affiliated with, though separate from, mujahideen commanders in the field, but it was the parties that enjoyed influence and power: as a rule, every mujahideen commander had to belong to one of the seven parties to receive arms, ammunition, and training.29 In effect, the ISI used the parties as a means to secure Pakistani interests in Afghanistan, while the parties used their access to foreign military aid to wield influence over the mujahideen commanders. The ISI’s favoritism for some of Soviet ambitions. At the same time, support to Pakistan’s army and intelligence services would strengthen Pakistan as a regional ally. However, the Saudis were careful to link their investments in Afghanistan with continued US involvement and support for the mujahideen, which was a condition of their aid.

28. Most of the military aid was transported by sea to the port of Karachi, though some of it was flown in to Islamabad. Major ISI warehouses were located near Rawalpindi and Quetta. Smaller depots, which were controlled by the mujahideen, were scattered along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

the parties—the Islamic movements in general and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami in particular—often fueled schisms within the alliance. Indeed, while united in their struggle against the communists, in-fighting between the seven parties and their affiliated commanders characterized mujahideen alliance relations throughout the duration of the war. However, the call to arms against the communists—the invading infidels—was an important unifying factor that held the different parties and their tribes together. As the former head of the ISI’s Afghan Bureau, Brigadier (ret.) Mohammed Yousaf, puts it, so long as the Soviets remained in the country, “the mujahideen could

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30. On the power-driven rationale behind alliance politics between the mujahideen during the war, see: Christia 2012: Chapter 4.
sink some of their internal differences to combine against a common enemy."\(^{31}\)

In general, the mujahideen operated outside major Afghan cities, avoiding set-piece battles with Soviet troops in favor of small-unit ambushes and asymmetric attacks on major roadways, supply lines, and outposts. At first, the Soviet army struggled to counter these tactics. The 52,000 personnel that composed the initial intervention force was not originally intended to fight a counterinsurgency campaign—instead, it was ordered to garrison major cities and protect military bases to enable the Afghan army to pursue the mujahideen.\(^{32}\) But as the Soviets quickly discovered, the Afghan army had disintegrated due to defections and the PDPA's purges of its officer core. As a result, Soviet forces were soon bearing the brunt of combat duties.

Between 1980 and 1985, Soviet forces were engaged in sustained combat on a wide scale. The center of gravity in the conflict was in the east of the country, along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Here lay the Afghan capital, Kabul, the strategic airfield at Bagram, and the major north-south roadway that linked the Soviet Union to Kabul.\(^{33}\) The vast majority of Soviet troops were deployed in the east, whether in garrisons in cities or in the hundreds of mutually supporting guard posts (zastavas) that protected Soviet supply lines from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kandahar. The majority of Afghan/Soviet offensive operations were likewise concentrated in the east, reflecting the Soviet brass's effort to deny the mujahideen of its Pakistani sanctuary by sealing the border.

The conventional, theater-level offensives initially employed by the 40th Army's senior leadership failed to counter the mujahideen's guerrilla tactics, but over time, Soviet forces adapted to their foe, prosecuting what was to be a relatively successful counterinsurgency campaign. While the rebels proved remarkably committed, they suffered repeated losses as Soviet forces exploited their complete domination of the air to bomb and strafe mujahedeen base areas, perform reconnaissance, and provide convoy security, tactical lift, mining, ambushes, and dismounted operations. Soviet helicopter-borne Spetsnaz teams, backed by columns of motorized infantry,

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33. The aforementioned roadway was the eastern section of the Highway 1 ring road, stretching from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kandahar. This section of the highway is also the route of the above-ground oil pipeline that stretched from the Soviet Union to Bagram airbase.
proved especially effective in hammer-and-anvil operations. The Soviets also sought to drain the mujahideen of popular support in the Afghan countryside, sometimes by using tactics of mass depopulation and destruction of unfriendly population centers. By the fall of 1984, Soviet forces had achieved considerable military success, leading one mujahideen commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud, to comment that it had “become a very hard war, far harder than before. [...] Their commandos have learned a great deal about mountain guerrilla warfare and are fighting much better than before.”

Finding it increasingly difficult to feed and equip their forces, mujahideen factions began establishing fixed supply bases, including larger bases in inaccessible mountain areas near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and smaller caches hidden outside towns and villages. This semi-concentration of forces left them more dependent on fixed positions, providing the Soviets with observable target sets which were actively sought out and destroyed. Throughout 1985 and 1986, the 40th Army continued to enjoy success, especially as its troop numbers reached their peak level of 120,000 personnel.

Yet despite their best efforts, Soviet forces proved unable to decisively eliminate the mujahideen. While they could clear insurgent strongholds, they could not hold onto liberated territory; insufficient forces were available to expand the 40th Army’s area of physical control. When major operations were conducted in one part of the country, forces had to be drawn from other areas, leaving them vulnerable to insurgent counterattack. The mujahideen quickly learned to simply wait for the Soviets to depart an area before returning to reestablish their bases. As the Russian General Staff admits, “[t]his happened repeatedly.”

Frustrated by their inability to decisively end the war, Soviet leaders began making moves to withdraw their forces in the fall of 1986. Meeting in Geneva for negotiations with the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, Soviet representatives offered a preliminary timetable for withdrawal.

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34. As quoted in Girardet, 2 October 1984.
in exchange for pledges from the other interveners to cease military aid to the mujahideen. The American and Pakistani representatives balked at the proposal, and the talks soon broke down. But the Soviets were undeterred. They next engineered a change in the Afghan leadership, replacing Babrak Karmal with the head of the Afghan secret police (Khadamat-e Aetela’at-e Dawlati, or KhAD), Mohammad Najibullah. The new Afghan leader called for a ceasefire, national reconciliation, and a coalition government that included members of the opposition. Perhaps most important of all, Najibullah also began secret talks with resistance groups based in Pakistan.\(^{38}\) Informal negotiations for a Soviet withdrawal continued, and by April 1988 an agreement, known as the Geneva Accords, was finally reached. The Accords included a bilateral agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan on non-interference, for which the US and USSR were to serve as guarantors, and also contained provisions for a timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, slated to begin on 15 May 1988 and end on 15 February 1989.

The Soviets stayed true to the timetable, but the war was not yet over. Claiming the right to continue sending military aid to the Kabul regime after the completion of its troop withdrawal, the USSR massively expanding the levels of military aid it provided to the Afghan government.\(^{39}\) In 1990 alone, Moscow supplied some “54 military airplanes, 380 tanks, 865 armored personnel carriers, 680 antiaircraft guns, 150 R-17 rocket launchers and thousands of tons of fuel.”\(^{40}\) For their part, the US and Pakistan declared the right to continue their own aid program to the mujahideen, and the fighting continued unabated.

It would take an exogenous shock—an attempted coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991—to bring the competitive intervention to an end. As the Soviet Union disintegrated from within, Moscow and Washington reached an agreement on “negative symmetry,” in which they pledged to mutually cut off aid to their respective domestic combatants by the end of 1991. Pakistan,

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39. The Soviets held to this position given Pakistani opposition to the continuation of the Najibullah regime in Kabul. They also argued they maintained state-to-state agreements with Afghanistan which should be permitted to continue. On this issue, see: Shultz 1993: pp. 1087-1094.

40. Dobbs, 16 November 1992, who cites unspecified Politburo documents. Of note, Dobbs also writes that "the Kremlin gave serious consideration to sending 12,000 or so troops back into Afghanistan after the official withdrawal date of Feb. 15, 1989, to guard the Salang Highway that links Kabul to the Soviet border. In the end, they relied on an airlift."
however, was not party to the agreement. The Najibullah regime was doomed, as the military balance swung decisively in the mujahideen’s favor. In April 1992, Kabul fell, and the communist experiment in Afghanistan was over.

6.3 Interveners and their Interests: Why Winning Mattered

What was at stake for third party states intervening in the Afghan civil war? This section overviews the strategic motivations underlying the external support provided by competitive interveners to the Afghan communist government and their rebel challengers in the mujahideen. It will be shown that support for Afghanistan’s domestic combatants was informed by a range of geopolitical and national security calculations on the part of the intervening states. While the intensity of these interests varied across interveners, for all sides, winning the war mattered.

6.3.1 The Communists’ Lifeline: The Soviet Union

Kabul and Moscow enjoyed friendly relations long before the onset of the Afghan civil war. Soviet military assistance began as early as 1919, when Moscow first provided financing, small arms, ammunition, and aircraft to support Afghanistan’s resistance to Britain during the Third Anglo-Afghan War. In February 1921, a Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship was signed, followed by a neutrality and mutual nonaggression agreement in June 1931. Relations were deepened further in 1956, when the Soviet Minister of Defense took on the responsibility of training national military cadres. By the 1970s, hundreds of Soviet specialists and advisers worked in Afghanistan, training the Afghan armed forces, providing technical assistance, and giving policy guidance to the Afghan regime. In short, political, economic, and military support had been a common feature of Afghan-Soviet relations for decades prior to the PDPA’s rise to power and the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation in December 1978—the agreement the Soviets would later argue constituted a legal basis for Soviet intervention in “defense” of Afghanistan.

From the beginning, it was hoped that by sponsoring a pro-Soviet nationalist regime in Kabul,
Moscow could buffer the USSR’s southern border and prevent the spread of foreign influence emanating from interstate rivals—first the British, and later the Americans. With the onset of instability in Afghanistan in 1978/1979, these aims took on increasing importance. It was not that the Soviets worried about the Afghan conflict spilling over into the USSR—rather, their concerns revolved around the possibility of American encroachment into Afghanistan itself.

Indeed, despite supporting Hafizullah Amin’s PDPA regime with military and financial aid, Soviet officials were deeply suspicious of the Afghan leader’s long-term loyalties. Amin had studied in the US in the 1950s, attending graduate school at Columbia University, and the KGB had long-questioned whether he might be working for the CIA, perhaps having established ties to US intelligence services during his time abroad. Amin’s behavior in 1979 did little to quell these suspicions: he met secretly with US officials, he sought out American economic assistance; he spoke out against Soviet policy in closed-door meetings; and then, of course, he had his PDPA rival, Nur Muhammad Taraki, murdered in cold blood. In a personal memo to Brezhnev in November 1979, Andropov summarized the Soviets’ frustration with Amin:

The situation in the party, the army and the government apparatus has become more acute, as they were essentially destroyed as a result of the mass repressions carried out by Amin. At the same time, alarming information started to arrive about Amin’s secret activities, forewarning of a possible political shift to the West. [These included:] Contacts with an American agent about issues which are kept secret from us. Promises to tribal leaders to shift away from USSR and to adopt a “policy of neutrality.” Closed meetings in which attacks were made against Soviet policy and the activities of our specialists. The practical removal of our headquarters in Kabul, etc. The diplomatic circles in Kabul are widely talking of Amin’s differences with Moscow and his possible anti-Soviet steps. All this has created, on the one hand, the danger of losing the gains made by the April [1978] revolution [...] while on the other hand, the threat to our positions in Afghanistan (right now there is no guarantee that Amin, in order to protect his personal power, will not shift to the West).

At best, Amin could not be trusted to follow the instructions of his Soviet advisers; at worst, Amin might have been planning what Soviet General (ret.) Leonid Shebarshin called “doing a Sadat on us”—that is, a wholesale defection from the Soviet camp.

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41. The Russian General Staff 2002: pp. 7-8, 10.
42. Westad 2007: p. 305.
43. Personal Memorandum from Andropov to Brezhnev, December 1979.
For the Soviet leadership, the possibility that the CIA had recruited Amin fit into a larger narrative about American efforts to challenge Soviet influence in the region. The Iranian revolution of 1978 to 1979 had reordered international power relations regionally and globally, as the US lost control of its most important Persian Gulf ally and the intelligence monitoring facilities it possessed in Iran. Rather than celebrate the misfortune of their superpower rival, however, the Soviets became deeply concerned about the likelihood of a US response. Major General (ret.) Alexander Lyakhovsky recounts discussion of a CIA effort to create a “new Great Ottoman Empire” that would have threatened the southern Soviet Republics. Similarly, General Shebarshin highlights that access to Afghanistan would have enabled the US to establish intelligence centers close to the USSR’s “most sensitive [i.e. southern] borders.” Soviet leaders also feared the possibility of American Pershing missiles being stationed in Afghanistan—if Amin did indeed “do a Sadat,” the absence of reliable air defense systems along the USSR’s southern border would have left the country vulnerable to attack. So intense was Soviet concern that they even speculated about the possibility of a US invasion of the Persian Gulf, which would have “threatened to cardinally change the military-strategic situation in the region to the detriment of the interests of the Soviet Union,” as one former Soviet diplomat describes it. That the Carter administration had moved naval forces to the Persian Gulf in the fall of 1979 only reinforced Soviet concern.

Added to these security risks were the political costs inherent in “losing” Afghanistan. As Kalinovsky explains, “Soviet leaders never saw Afghanistan in isolation from the rest of their commitments and their relations with the Third World, and for this reason, among others, they felt they could not tolerate a loss there.” That the US Congress had failed to ratify the SALT-II agreement in the summer of 1979 only reinforced the Soviet desire to defend their reputation. To lose Afghanistan at a time when American policymakers seemed to be abandoning détente would be especially harmful to Soviet credibility in the developing world.

The gradual worsening of the US-Soviet relationship during the Carter administration’s final years in office, together with increasing levels of instability in Afghanistan, added urgency to the Afghan crisis. To prevent American encroachment in the USSR’s own backyard, Soviet leaders believed it had become necessary to stabilize Afghanistan with military force.

6.3.2 The Mujahideen’s Backers: Pakistan and the United States

It is ironic that at the same time that Moscow worried about American expansionism in the Persian Gulf region, Islamabad and Washington perceived aggressive Soviet intent in Afghanistan. From the perspective of Pakistani leaders, for example, the Soviet intervention presented a menacing external security threat. Militarily, Pakistan had always positioned its forces along its eastern border, arrayed to meet the military challenge posed by its arch-rival India, and it had neither the infrastructure nor the military capacity to fight in the east and the west simultaneously. Yet, in late-December 1979, the potential for a two-front war looked very real: the Soviet Union and India were linked through a Treaty of Friendship, signed on the eve of Pakistan’s dismemberment in 1971, and unlike most other non-aligned countries, India was unwilling to condemn the Soviet intervention. This was an ominous development from the perspective of Pakistan’s military leadership. As Yousaf explains,

Pakistan felt insecure. India was on her eastern flank, an enormous nation of 800 million hostile Hindus, with whom Pakistan had fought three times. To the west lay Afghanistan and the Soviets, a communist superpower whose army was now deployed within easy reach of the mountain passes into Pakistan. Potentially, it was a highly dangerous strategic situation. India and the Soviet Union were allies; should they combine, Pakistan faced the prospect of being squeezed out of existence.\(^5^0\)

At the same time, acquiescing to the Soviet occupation was not an option for Pakistan: doing so would mean the elimination of a buffer against further Soviet incursions in the region. Special concern revolved around the possibility of communist expansion into Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan, both of which were long subject to Afghan irredentist claims.\(^5^1\)

The Afghan civil war also presented major internal security challenges. Even before Soviet

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troops had intervened, some 400,000 Afghan refugees had fled across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to escape the persecution of the PDPA regime in Kabul.\textsuperscript{52} Within a year of the Soviet occupation, the number of refugees crossing the border had soared to roughly 1 million;\textsuperscript{53} by the end of 1981, the exodus exceeded 2 million.\textsuperscript{54} Hundreds of tent and mud-hut encampments teemed with destitute Afghans, and as the number and size of these camps grew, so too did the strain they put on the local population. Diseases were endemic, sanitation was extremely poor, and water was scarce. Over time, hostility slowly built-up between Pakistanis and Afghans, as the refugees spilled onto land owned by tribal leaders. The Afghan intelligence service, KhAD, helped inflame this discord, encouraging violence and instability inside Pakistan.\textsuperscript{55} As the war in Afghanistan continued, these internal security threats only grew worse.

In short, the Afghan civil war was deeply threatening from the perspective of Pakistan's president Zia al-Haq. Yet at the same time, it also presented an opportunity. Zia was quick to recognize that the conflict being waged next door, and Soviet participation in it, offered an opening to improve relations with the US. The Carter administration had imposed sanctions on Zia's regime in response to its continued illicit pursuit of nuclear weapons, but the US could not run an effective aid program to the mujahideen without Pakistan's help. By playing the role of a "frontline state," Zia positioned himself to be able to extract a high price for Pakistan's cooperation in the Afghan crisis, skillfully linking his willingness to serve as the conduit to the mujahideen with security guarantees and increases in military aid from the US.\textsuperscript{56}

For its part, Washington was happy to oblige. The violent overthrow of Amin deeply disturbed the Americans, who worried about the Soviet threat to the wider Persian Gulf region. Only one day after the Soviet intervention began, on 26 December 1979, Carter's National Security

\textsuperscript{52} Braithwaite 2011: p. 231.
\textsuperscript{53} Coll 2005: p. 62.
\textsuperscript{54} Cordovez and Harrison 1995: p. 54.
\textsuperscript{55} Yousaf and Adkin 1992: pp. 138-140.
\textsuperscript{56} The US-Pakistan military aid relationship is a classic example of the reverse leverage phenomenon discussed in Chapter 3. Zia famously rejected as "peanuts" a $400 million military aid package offered by Carter in 1980. Pakistan subsequently received a $3.2 billion aid package from the Reagan administration the following year. By 1987, Pakistan was one of the largest recipients of American aid, second only to Israel—this, despite Pakistan's continued clandestine pursuit of nuclear weapons. See: Paul 1992: pp. 1082-1090.
Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote a personal memorandum to the president, describing the Soviet intervention as "an extremely grave challenge." In the memo, Brzezinski highlights that "If the Soviets succeed in Afghanistan [...] the age-long dream of Moscow to have direct access to the Indian Ocean will have been fulfilled." He goes on to suggests that the Soviets might even try to secure a presence "right down on the edge of the Arabian and Oman Gulfs."\(^{57}\) This perspective was shared by many in Washington: the view that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was evidence of the communists' aggressive intent toward the wider Persian Gulf region and—critical to that part of the world—Middle East oil.

The supposed link between the Afghan civil war and oil was first articulated only days after the Soviet intervention began. In a Speech to the Nation on 4 January 1980, Carter argued that

A Soviet-occupied Afghanistan threatens both Iran and Pakistan and is a steppingstone to possible control over much of the world's oil supplies. [...] If the Soviets are encouraged in this invasion by eventual success, and if they maintain their dominance over Afghanistan and then extend their control to adjacent countries, the stable, strategic, and peaceful balance of the entire world will be changed.\(^{58}\)

Only a few weeks later, during his State of the Union address on 23 January 1980, Carter again hit on the theme of Middle East oil, issuing a stern warning to the Soviets in what would come to be known as the "Carter Doctrine":

The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil. [...] Let our position be absolutely clear: an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.\(^{59}\)

So intense was American concern that Thomas Thornton, then the NSC director of South Asian affairs, recalls that "careful measurements were made on maps throughout Washington to determine how much closer the Soviet Union was to the Straits of Hormuz and other exotic sites in the

\(^{57}\) Personal Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, 26 December 1979: p. 1.

\(^{58}\) Carter, 4 January 1980.

\(^{59}\) Carter, 23 January 1980.
petro-world." For the Carter administration, the Persian Gulf was a “third strategic zone,” on par with Europe and Asia, rendering the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan “the most serious threat to peace since the Second World War.”

For the Reagan administration as well, Afghanistan was a central theater in the global campaign to “roll back” Soviet influence. As Westad notes, “[t]he Reagan approach was in many ways a continuation of the policies and methods developed by Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his staff.” In Afghanistan, this included a significant expansion of military and financial aid to Pakistan and the mujahideen. But as we will see in the next section, American support was not unlimited—despite their desire to see a mujahideen victory in Afghanistan, American policymakers were constrained by larger strategic dilemmas.

6.4 Intervener Restraint during the Afghan Civil War

From 1979 to 1992, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Pakistan spent billions of dollars in an attempt to influence the dynamics and outcomes of the Afghan civil war. For the Soviets, the costs proved even greater, including some 13,833 dead, 49,985 wounded, and 311 missing in action. For all sides, death, destruction, and disturbing levels of violence characterized experiences of the Afghan civil war. It is for this reason that the protracted nature of the conflict is so puzzling. Why did external interveners allow the conflict to become stalemated? Why did they not do what was necessary to win?

As predicted by my theory of competitive intervention in civil war, the risks of inadvertent escalation and enlarged conflict conditioned the scope of intervener support for domestic combatants in ways that prolonged the civil war. While the interveners had important strategic interests

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61. Carter, 23 January 1980. In his memoirs, Carter again relates that “a successful take-over of Afghanistan would give the Soviets a deep penetration between Iran and Pakistan, and pose a threat to the rich oil fields of the Persian Gulf area and to the crucial waterways through which so much of the world’s energy supplies had to pass.” It was for this reason that Carter described the Soviet intervention as “the most serious international development that has occurred since I have been President.” See: Carter 1995: pp. 481-482.
63. These are the official Russian figures. See: The Russian General Staff 2002: p. 309. There is some variation in estimates across sources. Braithwaite 2011: pp. 140-143, for example, estimates 14,427 Soviet fatalities.
at stake in the conflict, they found themselves trapped by the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention: the desire to prevail, but also avoid mutual destruction of potential gains. In what follows, I explain how external powers navigated these dilemmas, highlighting in particular the form and function of "strategic restraint" during the Afghan civil war.

6.4.1 Geography, Borders, and Conflict Containment

The imposition of geographic boundaries on intervener contestation and control provides an observable indicator of restraint during competitive interventions. As we saw in the previous chapter, during the Angolan civil war these geographic bounds were imposed within the country in the form of the Cuban defense line that stretched along the length of the Moçâmedes Railway. This was a geographic saliency that was exploited by both the Cubans and the South Africans to create a mutually recognizable buffer zone between their military forces. By observing this boundary, the competitive interveners could avoid direct clashes while also maintaining a presence in Angola that served to militarily support their domestic clients.

Geographic saliencies were also exploited to limit the scope of warfare during the Afghan civil war, but given the presence of Soviet troops throughout the territory of Afghanistan—and the absence of any other state's troops in the country—these boundaries manifest in a different way. Rather than bound the scope of intervener confrontation within the conflict zone, geographic saliencies were exploited to contain the war and prevent conflict spillovers. This was particularly important for the purposes of preventing a Soviet-Pakistani border war.

One of the most striking features of the Afghan case is that while Soviet leaders set essentially no restraints on the application of military force within the borders of Afghanistan, they carefully calibrated their military presence along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border with an eye to avoiding confrontation with Pakistan. This restraint is all the more remarkable given the critical role that Pakistani sanctuary and support played in the mujahideen's war effort. Indeed, it was Pakistan that served as the conduit for almost all of the mujahideen's military supplies; it was Pakistan that administered the refugee camps that served as the guerrillas' primary manpower pool; and it
was Pakistan that provided the safe haven behind which tens of thousands of resistance fighters
could rest, recover, and refit for operations. In short, terminating the mujahideen’s sanctuary
in Pakistan was a necessary prerequisite for Soviet military victory, yet Soviet forces expressly
avoided actions that threatened Pakistani territory.

As is often the case during episodes of competitive intervention, it was escalation concerns that
hamstrung Soviet military objectives. To terminate the mujahideen’s safe haven would require
sending Soviet ground forces into Pakistan, risking a military response from Pakistani troops. To
be sure, Soviet military strength dwarfed that of Pakistan’s, but the possibility of Soviet-Pakistani
confrontation worried Soviet leaders on two fronts: first, it would mean a significant expansion
of their war effort, as the civil war in Afghanistan escalated into a regional war in southwest
Asia; and second, the onset of a regional war risked a global confrontation with the United States
given the existence of a US-Pakistan mutual security agreement. While vague on details, the 1959
US-Pakistan Agreement of Cooperation required Washington “to take such action, including the
use of armed forces, as may be mutually agreed upon” in the event that the latter country came
under attack by communist forces.\(^{64}\) The impossible stakes of direct clashes between American
and Soviet forces, however remote, were simply too great for Moscow to even consider attacking
Pakistan; consequently, it was decided that Soviet troops would have to stay on the Afghan side
of the border.

To ensure stability in the border regions and to avoid accidental Soviet-Pakistani skirmishes,
Moscow established a simple rule for its commanders: no combat operations could take place
within five kilometers of the border without the explicit permission of the senior Soviet military
leadership.\(^{65}\) Offensive raids into Pakistan were forbidden, as were “hot pursuit” operations over
the Pakistani border. To maintain pressure on Islamabad, an exception was made for Soviet and

\(^{64}\) For the full text of the agreement, see: Agreement of Cooperation Between the Government of the United States
of America and the Government of Pakistan, 10 U.S.T. 317, 5 March 1959. The section quoted above continues, “[...]
and as envisaged in the Joint Resolution to Promote Peace and Stability in the Middle East.” Section 2 of the Joint
Resolution to which the agreement refers limits the US defense commitment to assisting “nations requesting assistance
against armed aggression from any country controlled by international Communism.” This was a not-too-subtle
qualifier that ensured the US would not need to come to Pakistan’s defense in the event of an India-Pakistan war.

\(^{65}\) Grau and Jalali 2005: p. 661. See also: Kozlov 1997.
Afghan aircraft, which were permitted to violate Pakistani airspace to conduct air strikes on mujahideen base camps in the border regions of Pakistan—I address the nature of these air strikes in the following subsection. But for the tens of thousands of Soviet ground forces fighting in Afghanistan, combat was restricted to the Afghan side of the border.

The tactical consequences of these border rules cannot be overemphasized. As Charles Cogan, the former chief of the Near East and South Asia Division of the CIA's Directorate of Operations puts it, "The Pakistani border constituted a sort of psychological Yalu River, behind which the resistance could regroup in relatively safe haven." Forbidden from eliminating the mujahideen's base infrastructure at its source, Soviet troops were forced to try to seal the 2,250 kilometer long border to prevent military supplies from flowing into Afghanistan. Given their woefully inadequate numbers and the rough, mountainous terrain, this was an impossible task—and the military leadership knew it. During a Politburo meeting on 13 November 1986, Foreign Minister Gromyko complained that "[t]oo long ago we spoke on the fact that it is necessary to close off the border of Afghanistan with Pakistan and Iran. Experience has shown that we were unable to do this in view of the difficult terrain of the area and the existence of hundreds of passes in the mountains." Viktor Chebrikov, the then chief of the KGB agreed that Gromyko was "partly right" that closing the border was hampered by geographic difficulties, "but," he continued, "partly the failure in the closing is also tied to the fact that not everything was done that could have been. […] The military path for the past six years has not given us a solution." The Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, concurred: "Fifty-thousand Soviet soldiers are stationed to close off all passages where cargo is transferred across the border. […] we can maintain the situation at the current level, but we need to look for a way out and resolve the question […] We must go to Pakistan."

For their part, the Pakistanis were deeply afraid of the possibility of Soviet incursions. As Yousaf explains,

66. Cogan 1993: p. 79.
As a soldier, I find it hard to believe that the Soviet High Command was not putting powerful pressure on their political leaders to allow them to strike at Pakistan. After all, the Americans had expanded the Vietnam war into Laos and Cambodia, which had been used as secure bases by the Viet Cong. The Soviet Union, however, held back from any serious escalation. I had to ensure that we did not provoke them sufficiently to do so. A war with the Soviets would have been the end of Pakistan and could have unleashed a world war. It was a great responsibility, and one which I had to keep constantly in mind during those years.68

In an effort to avoid provoking the Soviets, Islamabad likewise observed geographic limits on the scope of its support to the mujahideen. First, Pakistani Army and Air Force units were prohibited from crossing into Afghanistan, forbidden from engaging in “hot pursuit” operations, and ordered to avoid the immediate border areas. Second, Islamabad sought to ensure that the actions of the mujahideen did not provoke Soviet retaliation in the form of attacks on Pakistan. Zia repeatedly stressed that “[t]he water in Afghanistan must boil at the right temperature”—a metaphor that succinctly captures his concern about conflict spill over.69 While Pakistan would support the opposition in its campaign against the Soviets, it was critical that the mujahideen avoided provocative actions that could cause the pot to “boil over” into Pakistan.

One such provocative action that went beyond the pale was attacks on Soviet soil. Indeed, the importance attached to geographically bounding the Afghan civil war stands out clearly in American and Pakistani responses to mujahideen attacks inside the USSR in April 1987. That month, three ISI-equipped teams of mujahideen slipped across the Amu Darya river into the Soviet Union. The first crept towards an airfield near Termez in Uzbekistan and, upon getting in range of their target, launched a barrage of rockets; the second ambushed a Soviet convoy along a border road; and the third attacked an industrial site some ten miles inside the USSR. It remains unclear where the idea to run operations inside the Soviet Union itself came from. Yousaf claims it was pushed by the then-CIA Director William Casey.70 To be sure, Casey was a Cold War warrior bent on punishing the Soviets and affecting a “roll back” of Soviet influence, but it seems unlikely that he actually encouraged violent operations on Soviet soil. Milton Bearden, a CIA Field Officer that served in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989, absolves Casey of knowing about or authorizing the

operations in his memoirs. Moreover, at the time of the attack, Casey had already stepped down as Director of the CIA, forced to resign in January 1987 due to the growth of a brain tumor. And while it is true that the US sanctioned cross-border propaganda operations starting in late 1984, distributing Korans translated into local dialects into Soviet Central Republics, attacks on Soviet soil not only risked massive escalation, they were also prohibited by American law. That the CIA gave the ISI extensive satellite reconnaissance on Soviet targets inside Afghanistan, but refused to provide satellite photos of the USSR itself, also casts doubt on Yousaf’s claims.

Regardless of whether the attacks were the product of miscommunication between the CIA and ISI, or the independent initiative of Yousaf and the mujahideen, the cross-border operations generated an immediate response from Washington and Islamabad. The Americans stressed to their Soviet counterparts that they had never sanctioned any military attacks on Soviet soil and demanded that their Pakistani partners end the attacks. “Please don’t start a third world war by conducting these operations inside Soviet territory,” Bearden told Yousaf. The Pakistani leadership also panicked, with Zia and the then-head of the ISI, Hamid Gul, ordering an end to all such operations at once. That same month, Yousaf was passed over for a promotion to major-general, and would “retire” shortly thereafter. In his own reflections, Yousaf acknowledges that the attacks “caused the water temperature to come perilously close to boiling. [...] There was, for a short while, a real fear among the politicians that the Soviet Union and Pakistan might go to

72. This initiative was an extension of an ongoing propaganda campaign inside Afghanistan itself. In the mid-1980s, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a University of Nebraska at Omaha project that printed explicitly violent textbooks for elementary school students in Afghanistan. Printed in Dari and Pashtu, these textbooks sought to foment Islamic militancy and resistance to the Soviet occupation. In one third-grade mathematics textbook, for example, children are presented with the following subtraction problem: "One group of mujahideen attack 50 Russian soldiers. In that attack 20 Russians were killed. How many Russians fled?" In a fourth-grade mathematics textbook, children are asked: "The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per second. If a Russian is at a distance of 3,200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian’s head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead." Staff at the University of Nebraska at Omaha were aware of this violent content, but chose to ignore it. As one USAID official later put it, "I think we were perfectly happy to see these books trashing the Soviet Union." See: Stephens and Ottaway, 23 March 2002. For a discussion and further examples of the violent content in these textbooks, see: C. Davis 2002: pp. 92-93.
74. Ibid.: pp. 211-212. Yousaf claims he had "long before decided to retire if not promoted," suggesting that his decision to leave ISI was voluntary. Whether the timing of his "early retirement" was coincidental or not remains unclear, however.
war. It was a dangerous game.”

Cross-border adventures by Soviet forces were similarly punished by the Soviet military leadership. There is evidence of at least one such border violation by the 15th Spetsnaz Brigade under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Babushkin, which during an operation against a mujahideen logistics base in Krer, Afghanistan crossed the border into Pakistan. This “forbidden cross-border vendetta,” as Grau and Jalali describe it, had not been approved by the high command, but when parts of the brigade became pinned down by mujahideen fire, Babushkin was forced to request helicopter gunship and medevac support, thereby disclosing his unauthorized raid. The gunships arrived soon thereafter, but when Babushkin directed the helicopter flight leader, Lieutenant Colonel Tseloval’nik, to attack mujahideen positions, he refused, arguing “I am not allowed to because of the international border.” The flight leader had the Soviet helicopters make several dry runs over the area, but they did not fire on mujahideen positions. Finally, after roughly thirty-minutes of refusing to attack, Tseloval’nik came back over the radio, stated he was ready to fire, and began flying repeated low-level gun runs while the surviving Spetsnaz retreated with their dead and wounded.

Upon learning of the raid, the Soviet military leadership was furious. Tseloval’nik recalls that as soon has he had returned to his airbase,

Uniformed KGB officers immediately approached me and said “Explain to us, Lieutenant Colonel, who gave you the right to conduct combat beyond the border?” I looked back at them with astonishment and denied doing so. The military prosecutor who was with the KGB stated “There was a group across the border and you provided fire support for them.” “That cannot be,” I replied. “Here, listen to the flight recorder tapes.” They listened to our tapes and heard [Babushkin’s] requests and our denials over and over again.

In effect, the flight leader’s half-hour of dry runs were an alibi to avoid punishment by the military leadership. Once the charade had served its purpose, the flight recorder tapes were shut off and the fire support commenced. Tseloval’nik escaped the wrath of the military prosecutors, but Babushkin was not so lucky. A formal inquiry was launched which found him guilty, relieved him

76. For a full account of this incident, including the quotations cited in the following two paragraphs, see: Grau and Jalali 2005: pp. 661-672.
of his command, and sent him back to the Soviet Union.

Such responses by the competitive interveners to violations of geographic limits makes clear the importance they attached to the saliencies that contained fighting within Afghanistan. To avoid enlarging the conflict into a regional war, interveners imposed boundaries on sanctioned operations both for their own troops and for their domestic clients. While there were essentially no restraints on the application of military force within the borders of Afghanistan, cross-border operations by ground forces were strictly forbidden.

6.4.2 Force Postures: Avoiding Engagements and Communicating Restraint

In addition to maintaining a buffer zone between their ground forces, competitive interveners also communicated restraint in the force postures they adopted during the Afghan civil war. This form of restraint manifest in limits imposed on the size and orientation of Soviet and Pakistani ground forces, as well as in highly restrictive rules of engagement that were explicitly designed to avoid confrontations in the airspace along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Consider first the limited nature of the Soviet ground force in Afghanistan. The initial purpose of the Soviet intervention was to install a new leader, garrison key cities, and protect key infrastructure while the Afghan army went about the business of pacifying the mujahideen. These were, relatively speaking, limited objectives, and it was anticipated that Soviet troops would only be directly involved in fighting during the initial overthrow of the Amin regime. It did not take long, however, for Soviet leaders to see that they had underestimated the scale of the instability that challenged communist rule in the country—within months of the intervention, Soviet forces were engaged in major operations across Afghanistan.

Moscow accepted that it was impossible to keep their soldiers out of the fight, but they were careful to restrict the size of their deployment—and the infrastructure that supported it—to prevent the conflict from spiraling out of control. As one internal assessment prepared by the US Army observes, “the Kremlin obviously imposed limitations on the size of the Soviet force deployment. [...] The Soviet name for their forces in Afghanistan, ‘Limited Contingent,’ was
as real as it was propagandistic.” Even at its peak strength of 120,000 personnel, insufficient forces were available to appreciably expand Soviet control of Afghan territory. When major operations against mujahideen positions were conducted in one part of the country, forces had to be drawn from other areas, rendering them vulnerable to insurgent counterattack. To make matters worse, Afghanistan’s long, mountainous border was almost impossible to control. Lacking the manpower to effective close it, Soviet commanders instead focused on controlling the most important passageways used by the mujahideen to smuggle men and weapons across the border. This left open hundreds of smaller trails and pathways, allowing the opposition’s supply lines to operate throughout the duration of the war.

But by restricting the size of their deployment, the Soviets could credibly signal the limits of their objectives in Afghanistan. The CIA reflected on this point in a report prepared in April 1985. Estimating that Soviet forces were short by anywhere from 285,000 to 385,000 troops for the purposes of eliminating the Afghan resistance, the report highlights that even a limited operation across the Afghan border would require “major improvements in air and logistical facilities” and “would cause the Soviets to make extensive preparations—increasing the size of their forces—that would provide more warning of an impending attack.” While the 40th Army could prevent the overthrow of Kabul, it simply did not possess the military capacity needed to eliminate the mujahideen via an expansion of the war into Pakistan.

To be sure, these realities were evident to Soviet leaders—it was obvious that there were not enough troops to close the border, let alone carry out the ‘hold’ part of a clear-and-hold strategy. But as is common during competitive interventions, escalation concerns had a chilling effect on military strategy. As former KGB officer Vladimir Kuzichkin recalls, “When we began to get bogged down, of course, the army argued for more troops. The Soviet general staff wanted at least twice as many—to seal off the frontier with Pakistan and get better control along the border with Iran. But the Politburo ruled that out. By then, it feared provoking a serious Western reaction.”

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77. US Army, May 1989: p. 2. In a heavily redacted section of the report, the Soviet intervention is characterized as one of “limited goals, limited commitment.”
78. CIA, April 1985: pp. 4, 6 & 23.
79. Kuzichkin, 22 November 1982: p. 34.
A "surge" in Afghanistan risked a similar escalation in American and Pakistani participation in the war. Consequently, troop levels remained capped at 120,000 personnel—strategic stability trumped tactical advantage.

Defensive force postures were also adopted by the Soviets in the skies above the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. As noted above, an important exception to the geographic limits observed by the interveners was the use of air strikes by Afghan and Soviet aircraft within the border regions of Pakistan. In their efforts to stem the tide of men and war matériel crossing the border into Afghanistan, communist aircraft violated Pakistani airspace and conducted bombing raids on Pakistani territory. Importantly, however, these incursions were limited in terms of their targets and their geographic depth. As an official history prepared by the Pakistani air staff explains, "[t]he employment of air power by the Soviets was limited to hit and run raids against undefended and exposed targets in the border belt." Afghan and Soviet aircraft would fly parallel to the Afghan-Pakistani border, darting across only a few miles to bomb mujahideen convoys and base camps before returning to Afghan airspace. Because Pakistan Air Force (PAF) fighters were committed only in the event of an actual ingress, this in-and-out raiding strategy ensured an "impossibly short reaction time for any effective interception." Even when air incursions did establish contact with PAF fighters—sometimes within visual range—Soviet and Afghan pilots would never challenge Pakistani aircraft. As the air staff describes, "[t]he moment the enemy intruders noted that the PAF aircraft had been committed, they would turn around and exit."80

For their part, the Pakistanis responded to Soviet reticence by signaling their own defensive intentions. As Air Commodore (ret.) A. Hameed Qadri recalls, "[t]he dictates of defense policy required adaptation of a defensive posture, and exercise of restraint."81 Islamabad warned Moscow and Kabul of its intention to defend its borders, yet undermined its own rhetoric by demonstrating its firm determination to avoid a border conflict with Soviet forces. As the CIA described it, "Islamabad implicitly has conceded it cannot defend the border region, and the Army and Air

80. Pakistan Air Force 2000: pp. 37, 41, & 59. The PAF did lose one F-16 during the war, but this was a friendly fire incident that occurred in April 1987.
Force are held as a reserve force to deter—and, if need be, to combat—deeper penetrations."^82

PAF pilots avoided confrontations in the air, adopting an explicitly defensive force posture with highly restrictive rules of engagement. They were not permitted to engage in "hot pursuit" of Soviet/Afghan aircraft and were forbidden from entering Afghan airspace. In fact, Qadri recalls that PAF pilots "were specifically instructed to avoid engagements."^83 The reason for this caution, the air staff explains, was that "[t]he PAF was under orders to use all the means it could to avert an intensified air war directly with the Soviet air power. That was a distinct possibility and if it had materialized, Pakistan's Afghan war policy would have suffered a serious setback. [...] [T]he overriding political consideration was that the PAF involvement should be kept to a minimum. Pakistan did not wish to escalate this conflict."^84

Higher commands carefully monitored the progress of interceptions, and watched nervously as PAF fighters approached enemy aircraft. Qadri relates that

Such was the caution exercised by the higher command that almost everyone who mattered monitored the progress of interceptions from Section Operations Centre and Northern Air Command Headquarters. It almost amounted to breathing down the necks of our controllers by the senior staff, which restricted the freedom of combat controllers. [...] As the CAPs [Combat Air Patrols] were maintained in depth with strict instructions to avoid engagement, the whole exercise was one of extreme frustration for the controllers and pilots.^85

The caution of the higher command that Qadri highlights is confirmed by some basic data on the frequency and intensity of PAF combat air patrols. Over the course of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the PAF recorded some 2,476 air violations involving 7,589 enemy aircraft. In response, PAF squadrons committed to the defense of Pakistan's western airspace flew 10,939 sorties and logged 13,275 flying hours. And yet, despite the high number of airspace violations and the high intensity of PAF combat air patrols, only eight intruding aircraft—0.001 percent of all recorded violators—were ever shot down over the course of the Afghan war.^86 To put this figure

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82. CIA, April 1985: p. 11.
86. An account of each confrontation is provided in Pakistan Air Force 2000: pp. 44-55. It remains unclear what the mix of downed Afghan versus Soviet piloted planes was during the war. At least one Soviet and three Afghan pilots were shot down. The nationalities of the other four are unknown.
### Table 6.1


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Squadron</th>
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<tr>
<td>9 SQN</td>
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<td>3,701:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1,825</td>
<td>2,585:20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>346</td>
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<td>737</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 SQN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 SQN</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,939</strong></td>
<td><strong>13,275:40</strong></td>
</tr>
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in context, consider that in 1987 the CIA estimated Soviet *peacetime training* attrition to be 70 tactical aircraft *per year*. 87

It is also notable that the intense operational tempo of combat air patrols had negative consequences for the PAF squadrons assigned to these duties: peacetime training was interrupted, the training of fresh pilots was delayed, and spare parts were rapidly consumed without a corresponding contribution to training. What is more, the restrictive rules of engagement imposed by the senior Pakistani leadership negatively affected the morale of PAF pilots. Pakistani air crews watched with frustration as Afghan and Soviet aircraft bombed border targets within Pakistani territory while their own rules of engagement prevented them from retaliating. As the PAF air staff relates,

> A fleeting encounter with the enemy would soon lead to utter despair when the enemy aircraft, after dropping their ordnance on mujahideen camps, would cross over leisurely to the other side. This adversely affected the squadron pilots’ spirits. Day and night they were engaged in what they thought was a largely fruitless activity, severely constrained as it was by the ROEs [rules of engagement]. 88

The Pakistani media also harshly criticized the PAF’s failure to challenge airspace violations, putting “tremendous pressure on PAF personnel.” 89

Nonetheless, the higher command remained committed to its strategy of exercising restraint

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89. Qadri 1998.
and avoiding escalation. At the tactical level, rules of engagement would continue to strictly limit the freedom of PAF pilots and their controllers. As the PAF air staff explains, "[t]he GOP [Government of Pakistan] did not wish to escalate the Afghan conflict under any circumstances. Doing anything else would have been strategically counterproductive."  

6.4.3 Weapons, Military Aid, and Fears of Escalation

By observing border rules and adopting restrictive rules of engagement, the interveners successfully avoided direct clashes between their military forces. For Pakistan and the United States, however, an additional strategic dilemma complicated their participation in the conflict: to keep the pot "boiling," the mujahideen required weapons, equipment, and other war matériel; yet, to prevent the pot from "boiling over," limits had to be found to avoid provoking Soviet retaliatory strikes. The key question was: how could Islamabad and Washington effectively assist the mujahideen while at the same time communicating restraint to Moscow?

For Pakistan, the answer lay in qualitative characteristics that could be exploited to distinguish different weapon systems. Specifically, Zia argued that all weapons flowing to the mujahideen should be "battlefield credible"—that is, plausibly captured, by the mujahideen, on the Afghan battlefield. As former US Congressmen Clarence Long explains, "[i]f it was American made, the Soviets would trace it to Pakistan and he [Zia] didn't want that. He suggested we get foreign-made guns." 91 This would enable Pakistan to claim that the mujahideen had captured the weapons from Soviet forces inside Afghanistan, when in reality the vast majority of arms were being supplied through the US/Pakistan covert aid program.

As it happened, the "battlefield credible" distinction suited American officials as well. Carter's CIA Director, Admiral Stansfield Turner, and his Deputy Director for Operations, John McMahon, worried about provoking Soviet retaliation and insisted that American aid should be both limited and plausibility deniable. They too wanted American aid to come in the form of Soviet-designed

91. As quoted in Woodward and Babcock, 13 January 1985.
arms. To those ends, the CIA was instructed to purchase Soviet weapons from the international arms market and from states with access to Soviet-model armaments, including Egypt (a former client of the USSR), Israel (which possessed stockpiles of Soviet weapons captured from Arab armies), and China (a former Soviet ally and beneficiary of Soviet military aid). The CIA also began producing large quantities of Soviet-model weapons in Egyptian ordnance factories to make up for supply shortages on the international arms market.

These limits remained in place between 1980 and 1983, with the arms provided to the mujahideen restricted to relatively low-technology weapons such as rifles, mines, grenade launchers, and Soviet-designed SA-7 light antiaircraft weapons. By the mid-1980s, however, it was becoming increasingly clear that more would have to be done to assist the mujahideen in their struggle against Soviet forces. As noted above, though the Soviets got off to a slow start in Afghanistan, over time they learned to adjust their tactics, successfully exploiting their dominance in the air. MI-24 (Hind) gunships with armored underbellies and cockpits attacked mujahideen positions with near-impunity from above, while helicopter-borne Spetsnaz teams began taking the war to the remote valleys and mountain peaks where the mujahideen had established base camps. Reeling from this military pressure, mujahideen commanders began requesting increased aid—especially more effective air defense weapons—in August 1983. Fearful that the insurgency was at risk of being defeated, voices inside and outside of the Reagan administration began lobbying the CIA and the Pentagon to meet the commanders' requests.

Among those calling for increased aid was US Congressman Charles Wilson. A powerful member of the Subcommittee for Defense Appropriations of the House Appropriations Committee, Wilson had visited Pakistan and met with the mujahideen in 1981. Impressed by the courage of the Afghan fighters, he became determined to advance their cause. In the fall of 1983, Wilson managed to add a secret amendment to the defense appropriations bill, re-channeling some $40

96. Wilson's unique power on the subcommittee stemmed from his membership on the House-Senate conference committee, which was the body that reconciled the two legislative bodies' versions of the defense appropriations bill.
million of Defense Department money to the CIA for its Afghan program. Having repeatedly heard that the mujahideen's most difficult military challenge was the Soviet helicopters that pounded their positions from the sky, Wilson stressed that the money should be used to purchase anti-aircraft weapons.

Initially, congressional supporters wanted to supply American-made Redeye or Stinger ground-to-air missiles. However, the CIA blocked both weapons on no uncertain terms—they clearly violated the "battlefield credible" requirement and could be easily traced back to the United States.97 A third option, the British-made Blowpipe, was suggested as a plausibly deniable alternative, but the weapon required mujahideen fighters to stand in the open and guide a missile onto their target, leaving them vulnerable to Soviet attack. This left a fourth option: the Swiss-made Oerlikon anti-aircraft cannon. As it happened, this was the weapon championed by Wilson and, like the Blowpipe, it presented a plausibly deniable option for the CIA. However, it too was a tactically disadvantageous choice: the gun weighed hundreds of pounds, requiring multiple mules to transport it over Afghanistan's rough, mountainous terrain. What is more, it was an expensive option, with unit costs of $1 million per gun and shells running $50 each. As the then-CIA station chief in Islamabad, Howard Hart, put it, the selection of the Oerlikon was "tactically stupid."98 Hart also opposed the weapon on the grounds that, while it was plausibly deniable, it was not of Soviet manufacture and could not have been captured on the battlefield.99 However, congressional supporters of the mujahideen, led by Wilson, persevered, and beginning in the summer of 1984, the CIA relented to a limited test of the cannon in Afghanistan. As predicted, the Oerlikon had little effect on the battlefield, and over the course of 1984, the plight of the mujahideen worsened.

Meanwhile, the CIA continued to express concern about Soviet retaliation against Pakistan. In October 1984, the agency requested that a Senate resolution demanding further aid to the mujahideen amend its calls for "material assistance" to the lesser pledge of "effective support."100 That same month, the then Deputy Director for Intelligence Robert Gates penned a classified

100. Ibid.: p. 37.
memo which warned that "the Soviets are likely to learn about [American aid increases] through leaks [...] What impact will this have on the Soviets as they consider their options? [...] Sharp and steady increases [in insurgent activity] over a period of two years, month to month, would suggest that more of the same is not enough and that the Soviets would have to consider more seriously more dramatic action." The Pentagon also remained worried about Soviet retaliation against Pakistan. According to Fred Iklé, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy between 1981 and 1988, officials worried that "one million Soviet troops" might march on Pakistan in retaliation.

Notwithstanding these fears, in the spring of 1985 the Reagan administration began to reassess its strategy in Afghanistan. There were a number of motivating factors. First, there was strong bipartisan support for the mujahideen in Congress, which was stirring up domestic interest in the war. In January 1985, for example, a Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan was established that began holding hearings to raise awareness of the plight of the mujahideen. Second, the Soviets had slowly increased the number of Spetznaz deployed to Afghanistan and had continued their efforts to "pacify" the mujahideen’s rural support network using tactics of mass depopulation. Cut off from their local support and pressed in the remote valleys and mountainous terrain where their base camps were located, the mujahideen’s military outlook looked increasingly grim. Finally, and most importantly, in early 1985 intelligence reports began streaming in from agents the CIA had recruited in the Soviet Defense Ministry which warned that Soviet hard-liners were pushing a plan to attempt to win the Afghan war within two years. American officials feared that a sharp escalation by the Soviets would put at risk the continued viability of the opposition.

Notably, the American intelligence reports about a Soviet escalation of the war were incorrect. As Kalinovsky points out, no Soviet sources support this theory. But the intelligence weighed on US decision makers who worried about the survival of the mujahideen’s campaign. Feeling political pressure at home and warned of Soviet escalation in Afghanistan, in March 1985 the Reagan administration responded. That month, the President signed National Security Decision Directive

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166 (NSDD-166), augmenting the original presidential finding signed by Carter that authorized US aid to the mujahideen beginning in 1979. This directive has been pointed to by many researchers as a watershed decision which set the foundation for significant American escalation in Afghanistan. Until recently, however, NSDD-166 has remained classified. Consequently, researchers have been compelled to rely on interviews with former US policymakers and intelligence officers to learn the contents of the directive, most of whom have tended to frame it as aggressive and escalatory. In one of the first articles on NSDD-166, for example, journalist Leslie Gelb cites administration officials who suggest the directive authorized “all available means” to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan. This line has in turn been repeated by other scholars working on Afghanistan and US foreign policy, becoming an established narrative in the existing literature.

The recent declassification of NSDD-166 provides an opportunity to reassess these claims. As it turns out, the phrase “all available means” does not appear in NSDD-166, nor does the term “escalation”. What is more, while the directive calls for an improvement in the military effectiveness of the Afghan resistance, there is no discussion of a need to send high-technology, US-made equipment to the mujahideen. The directive does note that the “ultimate goal” of the US covert aid program “is the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of its independent status,” but notably, it does not specify mujahideen victory as a US objective. Instead, the document states that US aid is intended to “prevent the defeat of an indigenous movement which is resisting Soviet aggression.” In short, NSDD-166 is not the escalatory policy change many have interpreted it to be: not losing was still more important than winning.

This is not to say there was no adjustment to US policy—indeed, the dollar value of US aid rose to $250 million in 1985. But officials in Washington and Islamabad were still unwilling to violate the self-imposed limits they observed with respect to the types of weapons they provided the mujahideen. By exploiting the qualitative characteristics of different weapon systems—namely, their “battlefield credibility” and country of origin—the US and Pakistan could continue to back

the Afghan opposition while simultaneously controlling escalation vis-à-vis the Soviets.

6.5 The Stinger and Escalation in Afghanistan

It was in March 1986 that a landmark policy decision was made which deepened US and Pakistani participation in the Afghan civil war: for the first time, the mujahideen would be provisioned with high-technology, US-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. This was a weapon which crossed the “battlefield credible” saliency that had been exploited by the US and Pakistan to communicate restraint and control escalation since the start of the war; for that reason, it is important to investigate the factors that motivated its approval. As I elaborate below, the Stinger decision was indeed an escalation, and in that regard, it cuts against my argument that interveners take care to avoid escalating the scope of their support to domestic combatants in fear of reprisals from interstate rivals during competitive interventions. At the same time, however, approval of the Stinger cannot be separated from the dire military situation that faced the mujahideen in early 1986. In an important respect, the Stinger was less an attempt to “win” in Afghanistan and more an effort to maintain balance on the battlefield—in particular, by countering the Soviets’ supremacy in the air.

As the war in Afghanistan continued during 1985, the struggle facing the mujahideen looked increasingly grim. By this time, the Afghan army had regained its composure, stepping up its participation in the conflict and taking the lead in a number of operations across Afghanistan with the support of Soviet aviation and artillery. Soviet troop levels had also reached their peak during this period, largely as a result of an influx of additional Spetsnaz units that ran frequent operations along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Between April to June 1985, Soviet regular forces undertook a series of ambitious offensives against resistance bases in the Maidan, Kunar, and Pandshir valleys. One month later, an offensive in Paktia province relieved the city of Khost and also pushed to clear Zhawar, an important basing complex comprised of a series of interconnected caves and tunnels on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.107

As the opposition continued to lose ground, Zia and his fellow generals began to fear the Soviets might actually win in Afghanistan. Yousaf recalls that any strong offensive towards Zhawar (and therefore, towards Pakistan) “always produced squeals of alarm from both politicians and the military in Islamabad.” With this latest push, “[t]he Soviet/Afghan forces had shown that their tactics and techniques were improving, they had been able to penetrate into areas long held to be inaccessible, and had they been able to close right up to the border and destroy our bases there, the entire campaign might have been put in jeopardy.”¹⁰⁸ These views were also taking hold in American policy circles. As the then Secretary of State George Shultz explains in his memoirs: “Spetsnaz troops had hurt the mujahideen freedom fighters, and there had been no major victories for the Afghan resistance for months. [...] The Soviets seemed to be winning.”¹⁰⁹

The key to the Soviets’ success, it was widely believed, was their dominance in the air—the mujahideen simply did not have the weapons required to deal with Soviet gunships, vertical envelopments, and aerial assaults. It was with this concern in mind that American proponents of the mujahideen, led by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Fred Iklé, his Coordinator for Afghan Affairs Michael Pillsbury, and Senator Orrin Hatch, once again returned to the question of anti-air weapons in May 1985. But unlike previous attempts to secure such weapons for the mujahideen, this time the American policymakers would not settle for second-class, foreign-made arms—they were determined to earn approval for the US-made, state-of-the-art Stinger.

From a military perspective, the Stinger was an obvious choice. It was an easy to use, “fire and forget” man-portable air defense system that fired an infrared homing surface-to-air missile; it had a range of up to five miles and an effective ceiling of 10,000 feet, which compared very favorably to the two-mile range and 7,500 foot ceiling of the Soviet-made SA-7; fully armed, it weighed just 34.5 pounds, making it easy for mujahideen rebels to carry in the mountainous Afghan terrain; and it was relative cheap to produce, costing only $30,000 per unit. But from a strategic perspective, the provision of a high-technology, American-made weapon made many US policymakers nervous. The intelligence community remained wary of the Stinger, with one official warning that “When

this weapon gets in and if helicopters start getting shot out of the sky with regularity, we've got a problem. [...] A weapon like this could force the Soviets to become more indiscriminate in their use of force. They could begin much more bombing. It could change the equation radically.\textsuperscript{110} Another administration official highlighted that "One of the important things is restraint and that includes restraint on our part [...] and restraint by the Soviet Union. You've got to consider what they haven't done to Pakistan and others. [...] Afghanistan is on their border, and you have to believe the Soviets could, if they chose, march in with sufficient troops to do the job."\textsuperscript{111}

Another issue was whether the Pakistanis would ever approve the Stinger. Zia had long opposed it, arguing that it contradicted his policy that all arms supplied to the mujahideen be of communist origin.\textsuperscript{112} It was Islamabad, after all, that faced the immediate threat of Soviet retaliation. Pillsbury and Iklé had first set out to get Zia's approval of the Stingers in May 1985, highlighting for the Pakistani leader that the mujahideen could not effectively operate in Afghanistan due to a lack of adequate anti-air capabilities. Zia would not commit, however. "He hemmed and hawed," recalls Iklé, because "he was cautious at that point."\textsuperscript{113} The next month, Pillsbury again visited Pakistan, this time accompanied by Senator Hatch, for another 2-hour meeting with Zia. During this visit, the Pakistani leader did agree to request the missiles from the Reagan administration; however, he did so with the condition that they were solely for use by Pakistani forces, not the mujahideen.

Over time, however, military realities began chipping away at Zia's conviction to stick with the "battlefield credible" distinction. Soviet and Afghan offensives had made 1985 the bloodiest year of the war, in no small part due to their dominance in the air. ISI officials were increasingly vocal in their calls for more effective aid for the mujahideen, especially anti-aircraft weapons. This domestic pressure was matched by renewed external pressure in January 1986, when yet another delegation of US Congressmen and Senators traveled to Pakistan to visit the Pakistani leader. During this visit, the US delegates spoke bluntly about the need to approve the Stinger,

\textsuperscript{110} As quoted in Woodward and Babcock, 13 January 1985.
\textsuperscript{111} As quoted in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Yousaf and Adkin 1992: p. 181.
\textsuperscript{113} As quoted in Cordovez and Harrison 1995: p. 195.
emphasizing its military utility and stressing Zia’s "moral obligation" to obtain the weapons.114

It was at this time, in late-January 1986, that the Pakistani leader reportedly relented to the pressure and approved the Stinger. One meeting participant recalls that Zia “kind of hesitated for a moment and sort of looked up and reflected for what might have been 10 seconds or so, and he said ‘Okay.’ This was not something that he was gunning for.” 115 Another claims Zia made it “crystal-clear” that he wanted the Stinger.116 The reality likely falls somewhere in the middle of these two accounts. Given his stark resistance to the weapon only months prior to his eventual approval, it seems unlikely Zia was enthusiastic to begin shipping Stingers to the mujahideen. At the same time, by early 1986 it was clear that something had to be done to bolster the resistance. As Yousaf explains, “heavy fighting along the border with Pakistan [...] frightened everybody into forgetting the risks and giving us [the ISI] what we wanted.”117 The military situation called out for the Stinger.

The American delegation finally got the Pakistani approval they were looking for, but they still required the assent of the CIA. Upon returning to the US, Senator Hatch called CIA Director William Casey personally to brief him on Zia’s decision, spurring Casey to call a meeting to discuss authorizing the Stinger for the mujahideen. Covert operations run during the Reagan administration were usually overseen by the inter-agency Planning Coordination Group (PCG), but given the special nature of the Stinger, the meeting was held in the White House situation room. The highly-charged nature of the Stinger debate revealed itself during the meeting when Thomas Twetten, then the deputy chief of the CIA’s Near East and South Asia Division, vetoed it, insisting that Zia still opposed sending the missile. Discussion broke down and the meeting ended without consensus.118 By the end of February, however, the CIA corrected its error and, under sustained pressure from Iklé, Pillsbury, and Hatch, it formally dropped its opposition to the missiles.

114. Lundberg 2008: p. 76.
115. The identity of this participant is unknown. The quotation can be found in Ibid.: p. 76.
116. The quotation is Morton Abramowitz, then the Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, as quoted in Cordovez and Harrison 1995: p. 196.
117. Yousaf and Adkin 1992: p. 182. Yousaf dates the decision to permit the Stingers as April 1986, but this appears to be an error on his part. Other sources are unanimous that it was in January 1986 that Zia approved the weapons, and the Reagan administration had also agreed to send them before April.
The following month, the Reagan administration approved the Stinger for distribution to the mujahideen. It would still be a number of months until the weapon appeared on the Afghanistan battlefield—it was first used on 25 September 1986—but the bureaucratic battle over the Stinger was over.

While the Stinger decision crossed the “battlefield credible” saliency that had previously limited the scope of US and Pakistani support to the mujahideen, it was motivated by the stark military realities that faced the mujahideen in 1985 and 1986. Without the ability to counter Soviet dominance in the air, the mujahideen simply could not continue taking the fight to the communists. In this regard, the decision to send Stingers was more about maintaining a military balance in Afghanistan and less about “winning” the war. Indeed, it is notable that while the Reagan administration approved the Stinger, they still maintained quantitative and qualitative controls on the weapon: first, only 250 launchers and 1,000 missiles were provided; and second, approval only extended to the FIM-92A variant of the missile (Stinger Basic), not the FIM-92B variant (Stinger POST)—this, despite the fact that the FIM-92A was known to struggle with countermeasures regularly employed by the Soviets, such as the use of starburst flares.119 Thus, even as they crossed the battlefield credible saliency, US policymakers still put constraints on their military aid.

6.6 Was Not Losing More Important Than Winning?

While Afghanistan was the site of one of the most brutal episodes of intrastate violence in the 20th century, the civil war that was waged between the communist government and the mujahideen insurgency also witnessed multiple forms of strategic restraint between competitive interveners—in geographic areas of contestation and control, in force postures, and in the qualitative characteristics of the weapons provided to the domestic combatants. As predicted by the theory developed in Chapter 3, this restraint was adopted by the interveners even when doing so was tactically disadvantageous from a military perspective—the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive

119. On the number of weapons sent to the mujahideen, see: Cordovez and Harrison 1995: p. 198. On the FIM-92A vs. FIM-92B distinction, see: Kuperman 1999: p. 231 and note 145. While the FIM-92A uses an infrared seeker, the FIM-92B uses a dual infrared/ultraviolet seeker, resulting in significantly higher resistance to enemy countermeasures, such as flairs, and other natural disturbances.
intervention effectively warped the interveners' positive objectives of "winning" into negative objectives of "not losing."

The historical record of the Afghan civil war provides significant confirmatory evidence for this argument. Consider, for example, how one former KGB General describes the Soviet experience: "We began by simply backing a friendly regime; slowly we got more deeply involved; then we started manipulating the regime—sometimes using desperate measures—and now? Now we are bogged down in a war we cannot win and cannot abandon. It's ridiculous. A mess."120 Lieutenant-General (ret.) Boris Gromov, who oversaw the withdrawal of Soviet troops, puts it this way: "There is no basis for saying that the 40th Army suffered a defeat, just as there is no basis for saying we scored a military victory in Afghanistan."121 Soviet officials admitted to their American counterparts that Afghanistan entailed an unwelcome cost for Moscow, but at the same time they asserted that the costs of alternative policies would be even higher.122 The Soviets knew they could not defeat the mujahideen without significantly escalating the war; they resigned themselves to simply avoiding defeat themselves.

The Pakistanis also appreciated the contradictory nature of their country's defense strategy. As the official history of the Pakistan Air Force puts it, their objective was "confrontation and provocation avoidance—it was like walking on a tight rope."123 In their account of the war, it is made clear that "Pakistan was not trying to win the war for the Afghani people;" instead, they explain, the aim was "to provide several kinds of moral, material and diplomatic support to the Afghan resistance, but while doing so it was required to avoid a direct or escalated involvement in the war."124 Notably, this restraint on the part of the Pakistanis was apparent to Moscow at the highest levels: in a meeting with Najibullah in 1987, Gorbachev noted that "in Pakistan they understand they ought not to play dangerous games with the Soviet Union. They see the limits."125

For the American side, the story is not quite so straightforward. American participation in

120. As quoted in Kuzichkin, 22 November 1982: p. 33.
125. Record of Conversation, Mikhail Gorbachev with Mohammad Najibullah, 20 July 1987.
the early periods of the war certainly was constrained by fears of escalation vis-à-vis the Soviets, a fact which manifest in limitations to the military aid provided to the mujahideen. That this amounted to “not losing” being more important than “winning” was clear to some 60 Senators and 124 Congressmen in the fall of 1983 when they sponsored a joint House-Senate resolution that accused the Reagan Administration of providing the mujahideen “with only enough aid to fight and die but not enough to advance their cause of freedom.” In 1985, the Reagan administration authorized the notorious NSDD-166, which called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the restoration of the independent status of Afghanistan. Yet, far from authorizing “all available means,” as many have suggested, American objectives remained limited to “prevent[ing] the defeat” of the mujahideen.

It was only in 1986 that the American intelligence and military services finally relented to congressional pressure to provision high-technology, American-made weaponry to the mujahideen, symbolized in the form of the Stinger anti-aircraft missile. To be sure, this was an escalation of US involvement in the conflict, and in that sense, represents evidence that cuts against my argument that interveners shy away from escalatory behaviors for fear of reprisals from rival interveners. But the decision to send the Stinger cannot be divorced from the increasingly dire military predicament of the mujahideen. In the face of increasingly effective Spetsnaz raids, aerial bombardments, and mass depopulation tactics, many analysts in both Pakistan and the US feared that Soviet forces were inching closer to victory. In this regard, the increasing scope of American military aid was more about maintaining balance on the battlefields of Afghanistan by countering the Soviets’ dominance in the air. What is more, the decision to send Stingers was far from unanimous, with many policymakers and intelligence officers continuing to worry about the possibility of Soviet reprisals. After all, it was not a forgone conclusion that the Soviets would not respond aggressively to the American provocation, either by ramping up troop levels or retaliating against Pakistan. Fortunately for American and Pakistani officials, Moscow had already given up

126. S. Con. Res. 74, 6 October 1983; H. Con. Res. 237, 18 November 1983. The resolution was not put to a vote in 1983; an amended version of the resolution was passed in 1984.
hopes of victory in Afghanistan months before the first Stingers shot down Soviet helicopters in the fall of 1986.128

Why did the Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan? It was not because they suffered a defeat at the hands of the mujahideen, nor because they could not afford to continue their counterinsurgency campaign.129 Instead—and in sharp contrast to the political rhetoric surrounding the effects of the American covert aid program in general or the Stinger missile specifically—the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan because it offered a pragmatic way to advance a larger foreign policy objective of the Gorbachev regime: improved relations with the West through perestroika. Importantly, perestroika was not a consequence of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, but rather the culmination of a process of political change that had been building for decades in response to political, economic, and social problems that ultimately stemmed from the failure of the Soviet command economy. In short, it was not that the US and Pakistan “won” in Afghanistan; it was that the Soviets stopped competing.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to demonstrate the limits of intervener support for domestic combatants during competitive intervention in the Afghan civil war. By limiting the geographic boundaries of their military operations, adopting explicitly defensive combat postures, and restricting the scope of the military aid they provided their domestic clients, Pakistan, the US, and the USSR helped preserve strategic stability in their competition with one another. In this way, the interveners prevented a costly escalation of the conflict and avoided mutual destruction of potential gains.

128. See: Kuperman 1999. It is also significant that the approval of the Stinger came after the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev. The new Soviet leader had given significant clues that he was not personally committed to the war. During a meet with Reagan at a summit in Geneva in November 1985, for example, he brought up the topic of a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, going so far as to suggest that the US could "help" the Soviets get out. Speaking to journalists after the summit, Reagan reported that his conversations with Gorbachev indicated that the Russians "want a solution" to the fighting in Afghanistan. Three months later, during a speech to the Communist Party Congress, Gorbachev publicly declared Afghanistan to be a "bleeding wound," stating that "[w]e should like, in the nearest future, to withdraw the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan." See: Weinraub, 23 November 1985; Shultz 1993: p. 601; Reagan 1990: p. 639; Gorbachev, 26 February 1986.

129. In 1987 the CIA itself acknowledged that the financial costs of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan were neither a drain on their economy nor a likely reason for withdrawal under circumstances that could be seen as a defeat. See: CIA, February 1987: pp. iii and v.
The consequences of the interveners' behaviors for the dynamics and outcomes of the Afghan conflict were significant. With a constant stream of aid, supplies, and weapons, the civil war combatants could continue fighting beyond their domestic material constraints. At the same time, the protection provided by Soviet troops and the sanctuary provided by Pakistani territory ensured that neither the Afghan communist government nor its mujahideen challengers faced the threat of defeat at the hands of their opponent. That external military assistance distorted the bargaining process of domestic combatants is made clear by the fact that negotiation between the mujahideen and the Afghan government was literally non-existent throughout the entire duration of the war. Instead, the peace process took place at the international level, convened between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This was a decidedly odd arrangement, in which one side of the Afghan civil war—the mujahideen—was entirely excluded from negotiations over the future of the country for which it was fighting. Adding to the peculiarity of the talks, Pakistan did not recognize the Kabul regime as a legitimate negotiating partner and refused to meet with the Afghan delegation in person. This meant that talks took place indirectly in the form of “proximity talks,” with the lead UN negotiator, Diego Cordovez, shuffling between rooms to deliver messages between delegations.

A final twist to the negotiation saga was the role of the superpowers: despite being the funders and suppliers of the war, the US and USSR stood on the sidelines of the talks, adopting the role of unofficial “partners” and “guarantors” of the agreement. Since they were not primary parties to the negotiations, Washington and Moscow felt little need to cease supplying their favored clients, and consequently, weapons, equipment, and financial aid continued to flood into Afghanistan even after the agreement was signed. It is of little surprise, then, that the Geneva Accords failed to end the Afghan civil war. Without an external agreement between the competitive interveners, a lasting internal agreement between the domestic combatants was simply not possible. So long as the Afghan government and the mujahideen faced neither the resources constraints inherent in war nor the threat of defeat at the hands of their opponent, the domestic bargaining process had little hope of getting off the ground.
There are important lessons to be learned from these failures, and from the Afghan case more generally. In the next chapter, I explore the policy implications of this dissertation’s theoretical and empirical findings for contemporary civil wars afflicted by competitive intervention. I briefly examine shadow cases of US and Russian interventions in Syria (2011-present) and Ukraine (2014-present) and derive practical policy proposals for engagement in both conflicts.
This dissertation has asked new questions about conflict and cooperation in the international system at the intersection of international relations and comparative politics. It has developed a theory of competitive intervention—two-sided, simultaneous military assistance from different third party states to both government and rebel forces—that sheds new light on the behaviors of civil war combatants and their international backers and that helps to explain temporal variation in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars. My approach to developing this theory has been broad in scope, emphasizing the unique inferential benefits that accrue from the integration of micro-, macro-, and systemic-level processes. My methodological approach has likewise been pluralistic, marrying the generalizability of quantitative analyses with the nuance of qualitative case studies. The evidence reviewed in this dissertation’s empirical chapters has confirmed both the external validity of my theoretical arguments, as well as the veracity of my proposed mechanisms.

In this final chapter, I review my main arguments and empirical results and consider their relevance for two contemporary, ongoing conflicts: the Syrian (2011-present) and Ukrainian (2014-present) civil wars. I briefly overview how the strategic dilemmas inherent in competitive intervention have affected external participation in these conflicts, and then discuss the implications
of my arguments for policy and conflict management. I conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research on civil war, interstate competition, and competitive intervention.

7.1 Summary of Arguments and Results

This dissertation has explored two interrelated puzzles about external intervention and internal war. The first puzzle asked why domestic combatants and their international backers remain committed to civil wars even when they become costly, protracted battles of attrition. Why do rebels and government forces continue to bear the human and financial costs of fighting rather than sue for peace and a negotiated political settlement? And why do intervening states continue to invest in perpetually stalemated conflicts rather than do what is necessary to help their side win the civil war? I argued that answering these questions requires an account of external intervention in internal war that not only describes the effects of external meddling on domestic conflict processes, but also considers the wider strategic environment that shapes and constraints intervener decision-making in foreign civil wars. While “winning” is undoubtedly the primary objective for a civil war’s domestic combatants, my theory of competitive intervention explains how fears of inadvertent escalation lead interveners to pursue more limited objectives. I modeled and explained the unique strategic dilemmas interveners face when “not losing” becomes more important than “winning,” and I examined how these dilemmas distort the bargaining processes of domestic combatants in ways that prolong civil wars.

I then examined a second puzzle concerned with the consequences of changing patterns of competitive intervention for systemic trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars. While internal conflicts proliferated during the Cold War, their numbers have declined in the post-Cold War period. Notably, this reversal in trends is not simply a function of Cold War era conflicts terminating; rather, new civil wars breaking out since 1990 have much shorter average durations. What explains changing trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil war? And why is the international system experiencing less civil war in the contemporary period? I argued that the decline in civil war witnessed in the post-Cold War period has been driven by
changing patterns in the prevalence of competitive intervention. I pointed to the importance of the end of the Cold War and the attendant termination of an era of competitive interventions between the US and USSR as a contributing factor to the reversal in trends. However, I also documented significant temporal shifts in the prevalence of competitive interventions by less powerful states, underscoring the importance of a generalizable theory of competitive intervention that not only explains superpower proxy wars, but also informs contemporary policy.

From these theoretical arguments, I derived a rich set of outcome and mechanism hypotheses about the dynamics and effects of competitive interventions in civil wars. With regards to the outcome hypotheses, I first examined if there was a higher rate of competitive intervention during the Cold War relative to the post-Cold War period (H1). I showed that this was indeed the case, and that the increased rate reflected superpower competition as well as increased foreign adventurism by less powerful states. I then examined whether the Cold War was associated with longer average civil war durations relative to the post-Cold War period (H2). I found that the average Cold War conflict was almost twice as long as the average post-Cold War conflict. To explain this outcome, I tested the hypothesis that competitive interventions prolong civil wars (H3). I found that they do, and that this is a general effect which holds irrespective of time period (Cold War/post-Cold War) and the status of the interveners (superpower/non-superpower). Finally, I explored whether the global decline in the prevalence of civil wars coinciding with the end of the Cold War has been driven by reductions in the prevalence of competitive intervention (H4). I found that it has, and that the independent duration effect of the Cold War disappears upon accounting for the varying prevalence of competitive intervention in civil wars.

Turning to the mechanism hypotheses, I tested the proposition that third party interveners constrain the scope of the assistance they provide to domestic clients during competitive interventions (H5). In case evidence drawn from the Angolan and Afghan civil wars, I demonstrated that this was indeed the case. To explain this outcome, I examined whether competitively intervening states exercise restraint in the scope of their aid due to fears of conflict escalation vis-à-vis an opposing intervener (H6). I found confirmatory evidence in support of this hypothesis, and then
asked whether these intervention strategies distort the bargaining process of domestic combatants in ways which encourage continued fighting and prolonged civil wars ($H_7$). Once again, I found considerable evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Taken together, the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence presented in this dissertation underscore the critical role of competitive intervention in the dynamics, duration, and prevalence of civil war in the international system. The importance of these findings for the policy and practice of conflict management in contemporary civil wars is manifest in the strategic dilemmas currently facing US policymakers as they grapple with the complexity of ongoing conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.

7.2 Competitive Intervention in Contemporary Conflicts: On Syria and Ukraine

In March 2011, fifteen young boys were caught writing graffiti in the Syrian city of Daraa. Their painted message, which read "the people want the fall of the regime," was inspired by the political upheavals taking place elsewhere in the Middle East as part of the Arab Spring. Major unrest had not yet occurred in Syria, but it was generally understood that popular discontent with the Bashar al-Assad regime was widespread. The response from state security forces, therefore, was as swift as it was cruel: the graffiti writers were incarcerated, beaten, and tortured.

News of the young boys' plight quickly became public knowledge, sparking local demonstrations that demanded their release. The Assad regime responded with repression, using tear gas, water cannons, and even live fire to quell the discontent. Far from stamping out the nascent political movement, however, the regime's violence fanned the flames of civil disobedience. Demonstrations quickly spread to other cities, and demands for greater political reform continued to mount. As the unrest became increasingly threatening to the regime, the Syrian Army was called in to suppress it. Armed protesters soon clashed with government troops, foreshadowing a coming civil war within Syrian society. In July 2011, disillusioned members of the Syrian Army began to defect from the regime, announcing the formation of the Free Syrian Army—a rebel group that, for the first time, explicitly called for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. Undeterred, the regime
doubled down; by the fall of 2011, a full-blown insurrection was underway.

In the years since the onset of civil war, a dizzying array of rebel groups, insurgent militias, and external interveners have emerged to make Syria one of the most complex battlegrounds in contemporary history. Today, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) controls territory that extends across the Syria-Iraq border; Kurdish troops fight for their autonomy in the north of the country; and scores of so-called “moderate” rebel groups intermix with the jihadist Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra) in isolated pockets in the north-west and south-east. Meanwhile, the Assad regime continues to hold strong in the west. The complexity of the domestic battlefield is rendered further abstruse by the networks of regional and global third party interventions in the war: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar back the rebels, “moderate” and “jihadist” alike; Western states, including France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, have favored the Kurdish groups; and Iran and the non-state Lebanese group Hezbollah have thrown their support behind the Assad regime, their longtime ally in the region.

But perhaps the most important competitive intervention currently taking place in Syria is that between the United States and Russia. To date, military operations undertaken by both sides have been complicated by complimentary and competing interests in the outcome of the war. While both oppose ISIS and agree that Syria’s civil war undermines efforts to destroy that group, they have vastly different prescriptions—centering on whether Assad stays or goes—for resolving it. Russia supports the Assad regime incumbent in Damascus; the US supports rebels fighting to overthrow it. Thus, while both interveners have a mutual enemy in ISIS, they have mutually exclusive (and competing) domestic clients.

The Syrian case provides a fascinating window through which to observe the dynamics of competitive intervention in a contemporary conflict, not least due to the lengths both interveners have gone to avoid mutual destruction of potential gains. As is the case with any competitive intervention, the desire to help their side win the civil war, while at the same time avoiding inadvertent escalation vis-à-vis one another, has led the US and Russia to establish limits on the scope of their support to rebel and government forces, respectively. In keeping with the predictions
of this dissertation’s theoretical arguments, strategic restraint has manifest in a range of tacit and explicit agreements that seek to avoid direct confrontations through diplomatic, military, and intelligence channels.

In the air, for example, the interveners have established a memorandum of understanding that mandates “maintaining professional airmanship at all times, the use of specific communication frequencies and the establishment of a communication line on the ground.” American and Russian pilots are to operate at “safe distances” from one another, and “it is standard practice for [US pilots] to stand off until the airspace is clear.” Of course, “de-conflicting” in the air still leaves the problem of where each side’s bombs are landing on the battlefield. Thus, the US and Russia have also coordinated their efforts to avoid inadvertent targeting on the ground. For example, the US Pentagon has acknowledged that it has informed Russia about the locations of US Special Forces that are currently operating in Syria. While officials stress that the locations they have identified are “not specific areas, but firmly broad areas,” a Pentagon press secretary has confirmed that this information sharing has taken place outside of the memorandum of understanding that de-conflicts US and Russian aircraft. When queried about the logic of these disclosures, the head of the US Air Force Central Command, Lieutenant General Charles Brown, highlighted the importance of controlling escalation: “We told them [the Russians] these are […] general areas where we have coalition forces that we don’t want them to strike […] because all it’s going to do is escalate things.”

Rather than acknowledge de-confliction and information sharing as US-Russian “cooperation,” however, many US officials continue to stress their independence and competing interests vis-à-vis Russia. In a November 2015 interview with National Public Radio, for example, the then Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), US General (ret.) Philip Breedlove, stressed that cooperation was “not the word” he would use:

1. These quotations are comments by Lieutenant Colonel Kristi Beckman, a spokeswoman at the US Central Command, as reported in Ignatius, 12 January 2016. Unfortunately, the text of the memorandum of understanding has not yet been publicly released.
2. The quotation is from comments by US Lieutenant General Charles Brown, as reported in Gibbons-Neff, 18 February 2016.
3. As quoted in Torbati, 18 February 2016.
I would not use that word. We are not cooperating. We have developed a safety regime with them to ensure the de-confliction of our aircraft, et cetera, in the sky. But cooperation is not the word. [...] What I would say is that we have developed the regimens and the procedures to allow us not to come into contact and when we do, how we handle that, how we communicate, how we operate, the things that we do and don’t do to be—so as to not look bellicose.4

Similarly, US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter has emphasized that negotiations with Russia are “not based on trust.” Instead, he explains, “[t]hey’re based on a transaction and on mutual interest to the extent—and when and as we’re able to identify that with the Russians.”5 Recent proposals for further coordination in the form of a “Joint Implementation Group” have also been resisted by officials in the Pentagon and the US intelligence community.6

For their part, Russian pilots have continued to bomb US-backed rebels when they see fit to do so. In one incident in June 2016, for example, Russian airstrikes repeatedly targeted rebels located at the At-Tanf garrison despite American attempts to stop them through official channels of communication. After a first pass over their target, the Russians were intercepted by American fighters that flew close enough to visually identify the Russian planes. The two sides reportedly spoke directly to each other over a communications channel set up to avoid air accidents, and the Russians soon departed from the airspace. Having accomplished their objectives and running low on fuel, the American pilots returned to base. As the American fighters departed, the Russian planes returned, flying a second pass over their target and bombing the American-backed rebels once again.7

As of July 2016, the Syrian conflict has generated a humanitarian crisis of staggering proportion: an estimated 400,000 Syrians have been killed; some 6.5 million have been internally displaced; another 4.8 million have been rendered refugees in neighboring countries; and a further 13.5

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4. A full transcript of General (ret.) Breedlove’s interview can be found in National Public Radio, 2 November 2015.
5. A full transcript of Secretary Carter’s comments has been released by the US Department of Defense. See: Press Briefing by Secretary Carter and Gen. Dunford in the Pentagon Briefing Room, 25 July 2016.
6. One leaked proposal, obtained by the Washington Post in July 2016, called for a joint command center in Amman, Jordan to coordinate an intensified bombing campaign against ISIS and the Nusra Front. See: Terms of Reference for the Joint Implementation Group, n.d. While meetings on the proposal between US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did end with a “tentative deal,” the terms of the deal were not made publicly available. See: Harris, 15 July 2016.
million are in desperate need of humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, international efforts to arrange a ceasefire between government forces and the various anti-government opposition groups have comprehensively failed, and ISIS continues to control large swathes of territory across the country. Consequently, while strategic restraint under the shadow of inadvertent escalation has to date helped the US and Russia avoid a direct confrontation, it has also resulted in a vicious and protracted civil war with little prospect of negotiated settlement.

The same story can be told in the case of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. With government forces and separatist rebels backed by military aid from foreign powers, the flames of that civil war have continued to burn. To date, the US and its NATO partners in Europe have provided billions in aid to Kiev, have deployed military advisors to train government troops, and have conducted some of the largest military exercises in Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War. Meanwhile, Russia has armed separatist forces, has deployed Russian “volunteers” to the battlefield, and has conducted a series of snap readiness drills to ensure its troops are prepared for an enlarged conflict.

This military posturing has given rise to mounting fears of escalation, with some scholars beginning to make reference to a “new Cold War.” Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has gone further, registered his concern that the conflict in Ukraine might spark a larger “hot war” between the US and Russia. “Unfortunately I cannot say for sure that a cold war won’t lead to a ‘hot’ one,” Gorbachev explained. “I fear they could take the risk.” Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has echoed these concerns, warning against “beginning a process of military engagement without knowing where it will lead us and what we’ll do to sustain it.”

As predicted by the theory presented in Chapter 3, these fears of inadvertent escalation have conditioned the character of the intervention strategies adopted by the US and Russia. While

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8. Calculating accurate death tolls poses an almost insurmountable challenge in a complex war zone like Syria. These estimates are provided by the UN’s special envoy in Syria, Staffan de Mistura, as reported in Hudson 2016. Estimates of the number of people displaced, rendered refugees, and in need of humanitarian aid are reported in United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 18 July 2016.
9. See, for example: Legvold 2014; Kroenig 2015; Black and Johns 2016.
10. As quoted in Marquard, 29 January 2015.
11. As quoted in National Post, 30 January 2015.
the US has provided hundreds of millions of dollars worth of “non-lethal defensive security assistance”—including armored Humvees, unarmed drones, and counter-mortar radars—and has also deployed hundreds of American advisers to train Ukrainian government troops, it has thus far been unwilling to provide the lethal military aid Kiev has long requested. Concerns that transferring American-made arms might further provoke Russia and escalate the fighting has necessitated a more careful approach—one which signals restraint by drawing distinctions between lethal and non-lethal military aid and between advisers and combat troops. “That bloodshed is something that we’re trying to avoid and de-escalate,” explained White House press secretary Josh Earnest. “[T]he president is very mindful of the potential risk that’s associated with providing additional lethal military assistance to the Ukrainians.”

Russia, too, has constrained the scope of its support to the separatist rebels. Its deployment of “little green men”—seemingly professional soldiers in Russian-style combat uniforms armed with Russian weapons but lacking any identifying insignia—as well as its insistence that Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine are “volunteers” on “holiday” illustrates its desire to secure its interests in Crimea and Donbass while at the same time avoiding escalation with the West. The need to maintain plausible deniability for its involvement in the war has required Russia to limit the scope of its invasion. This in turn has provided the essential space needed for the West to save face and avoid a forceful counteraction that could spark a wider war.

The restraint of both competitive interveners is wise, but it is agonizing. It amounts to an intervention on the part of Russia that sustains the rebel insurgency rather than propels it to victory, and a corresponding intervention by the US that prevents the dislodging of government forces from Eastern Ukraine rather than ends the civil war. For both sides, “not losing” has become more important than “winning”: neither side is willing to pay for victory, yet neither side is willing to concede defeat. For those caught in the crossfire, the costs of the fighting have continued to mount: as of July 2016, the conflict has claimed 9,553 lives, wounded another 22,137, and displaced an estimated 1.1 million people.13

13. These are estimates provided by the UN. See: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian
The staggering costs of the wars in Syrian and Ukrainian highlight that the deleterious effects of competitive intervention continue to afflict some of today's most violent conflicts. How can this dissertation's theory and empirics inform international engagement in these wars and in other potential future conflicts? Below, I first consider the major policy implications of my findings before closing with suggestions for future research.

7.3 Policy Implications

7.3.1 Interventions to End Civil Wars: Assumptions and Realities

As noted in Chapter 2, a common view held among policymakers and political scientists holds that military interventions can help end civil wars by either helping one side win a conflict or by facilitating negotiated agreements between domestic combatants. It is therefore little surprise that this logic has been deployed by those advocating for a greater US role in the conflicts currently being waged in Syria and Ukraine. In the Syrian case, for example, a recently leaked internal memo prepared by some fifty-one US State Department officers has called for increased US involvement in the conflict and military strikes against the Assad regime. In making their case for "a more militarily assertive US role in Syria," the memo writers contend that "the judicious use of stand-off and air weapons [...] would undergird and drive a more focused and hardnosed US-led diplomatic process." By raising the cost of the war and shifting the tide of the conflict against the Assad regime, the US can send a clear signal that "there will not be a military solution to the conflict." This, it is argued, will "propel a new and reinvigorated diplomatic initiative" that stands to "put an end to this conflict once and for all."14

A similar logic underpins calls for a greater US role in Ukraine. Frustrated by the stalemate that has continued to afflict that war, senior policymakers have argued that the US and other NATO members should alter their current policies, which only permit the provision of non-lethal assistance, and begin providing lethal military aid to Ukrainian government forces. One joint

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study, prepared by the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, calls for the provision of $3 billion in aid, including anti-armor missiles and air defense systems. In justifying this aid, the report’s authors explain that lethal aid would “inflict significant costs on the Russian military, should the Russians launch new offensive operations, sufficient enough that Moscow will be deterred from further aggression.” This is “essential” to achieving a “peaceful, political solution” to the conflict, it is argued, because “[o]nly if the Kremlin knows that the risks and costs of further military action are high will it seek to find an acceptable political solution.”

After years of death and destruction in Syria and Ukraine with little gains to show for US diplomatic and military efforts, the hope that more robust interventions in both countries might deliver sustainable peace are understandable. But as this dissertation’s theory and empirics have made clear, the logic underpinning the arguments of intervention advocates is flawed. While military strikes might increase the costs of war on Assad’s regime in Syria, the active involvement of Russian forces would more than make up for these losses. Indeed, Russia would almost certainly be encouraged to increase its own military activity in Syria in response to American escalation. There is historical precedent for such an outcome: it was precisely when the Assad regime seemed most threatened by US-backed rebels, in September 2015, that Russia stepped up its participation in the war, actively intervening with its own forces. This decision proved to be critical for the regime’s survival, as Assad himself has acknowledged: “Russian support of the Syrian Army [...] tipped the scales against the terrorists. [...] It was the crucial factor.”

The same is true in Ukraine. While calls for stepped up military aid, including the provision of lethal armaments, are no doubt well-intended, they are short-sighted. An exclusive focus on the balance of forces of domestic combatants overlooks the strategic interaction of the US and Russia as competitive intervener and ignores the question of Russia’s response to American escalation. Russia might respond “in kind,” escalating the scope of its own support to separatist

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17. See Bill Neely’s interview with Bashar Al-Assad, which was held on 13 July 2016. A full transcript of the interview is available from the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency, 14 July 2016.
forces to negate the US's increasing levels of military aid. But more worryingly, Russia might also counter-escalate, further expanding the scope of its intervention to effect a reprisal. This latter response is especially precarious insofar as it risks a spiraling of actions and reactions leading to ever larger East-West confrontation.

More robust US interventions in Syria and Ukraine will increase the scope of violence inflicted by those wars, but they will not solve the problems that underlie them. Until the strategic dilemmas inherent in the US and Russia's competitive interventions are resolved, both civil wars will go on.

7.3.2 Sequencing of External and Internal Peace Agreements

The theory presented in Chapter 3 highlights how external military aid distorts the bargaining process of domestic combatants by decreasing anticipated costs of continued fighting, increasing expectations of victory in future battles, and complicating the coordination of expectations of future outcomes. Together, these distortions increase combatants' value for fighting while decreasing the range of mutually acceptable settlements—outcomes that prolong civil wars.

A natural corollary of this argument is that the termination of external support can serve to eliminate distortions of the bargaining process, thereby facilitating negotiated settlements between domestic combatants. In cases of competitive intervention, however, terminating external support is complicated by the competition and animosity of the rival interveners. This observation has important implications for the policy and practice of conflict management: it suggests that ending civil wars that are afflicted by competitive intervention will require internal peace agreements between domestic combatants to be preceded by external agreements between interveners.

Consider evidence from the qualitative case studies presented in this dissertation. In the previous chapter, it was shown that there was little attempt to reconcile the interests of interveners during the Afghan civil war. While it is true that talks were held between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the fact that Islamabad stubbornly refused to so much as acknowledge the legitimacy of the Kabul regime—to say nothing of its unwillingness to terminate aid to the mujahideen—doomed those negotiations from the start. For their part, the superpowers were of little help: neither side
participated in the talks, nor did they interrupt the flow of military aid to their respective domestic clients. With their war subsidized by external backers, neither the Afghan communist government nor its mujahideen challengers felt compelled to enter into negotiations to end the war.

In the case of the Angolan civil war discussed in Chapter 5, by contrast, a domestic peace process did eventually emerge. Notably, however, an internal agreement between UNITA and the MPLA only became possible after an external agreement was signed between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa. Prior to the external agreement, the Angolan civil war remained hostage to the larger geopolitical struggle taking place between Cuba and South Africa over the former’s withdrawal from Angola and the latter’s withdrawal from Namibia. The Tripartite Accords addressed both issues—and notably, did so without a single reference to the Angolan civil war. Once these international policy issues where addressed at the interstate-level, meaningful progress could be made on the underlying domestic policy issues that fueled the civil war. In fact, negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA began just six months after the signing of the Tripartite Accords, resulting in a ceasefire under the Gbadolite Declaration and a peace agreement under the Bicesse Accords.

The proposition that external agreements will often have to precede internal agreements also finds support in other regions of the world. Consider, for example, the Esquipulas II Accord. This was an international agreement between Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua that provided the principles under which those states would work to cooperatively resolve the numerous conflicts that plagued Central America during the 1980s. The Accord defined a number of measures to promote national reconciliation at the domestic level—such as democratization and free elections—and also established measures to regulate conflict at the interstate level, including the termination of all military, financial, and logistic aid to irregular forces, the non-use of territory to attack other states, negotiations on arms controls, and international verification procedures. As Oliver explains, these measures “signified that the Central American presidents had agreed to play by the same set of rules, [...] ensuring that everyone was taking

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18. For the full text of this agreement, see: Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America (Esquipulas II Accord), 31 August 1987.
similar measures at the same time in an effort to reduce mistrust and the perceived risk involved in pursuing peace unilaterally.”¹⁹ In this respect, the external considerations of the Esquipulas II Accord were the foundation for the internal peace agreements that were later established in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala.

The implications of these historical examples for the cases of Syria and Ukraine are clear: efforts to end both civil wars must begin with external agreements between competitive interveners. In Ukraine, that means going beyond internal ceasefire agreements like Minsk I and II by explicitly acknowledging both the West and Russia’s legitimate interests in the outcome of the conflict. This will require compromise from both sides, including a recognition that Ukraine can be neither a satellite of Russia nor a protectorate of the West. It will also require commitments to end provocative military posturing across Eastern Europe and to cease the flow of military assistance—both “lethal” and “non-lethal,” “volunteered” and “deployed”—to Ukraine’s domestic combatants.

In Syria, the prospects for peace are decidedly more narrow. The sheer number of armed groups and external actors participating in the war greatly complicates the bargaining process, rendering a lasting agreement between government and opposition forces highly unlikely. Notwithstanding these challenges, however, an external agreement between the US and Russian holds the potential for reducing violence against civilians and degrading the capabilities of ISIS. Such an agreement will again require compromises: on the part of the US, a willingness to give up its stubborn insistence that peace must be predicated on the removal of the Assad regime; on the part of Russia, a readiness to discuss some from of post-conflict regime transition in the medium term; and for both sides, a commitment to rein in regional allies like Saudi Arabia and Iran to disentangle the myriad of competing interests that continue to fuel the war. These concessions will hardly bring peace to Syria, but they will be a first step in the right direction; it is only when external powers end their meddling that an internal settlement will be possible.

¹⁹. Oliver 1999: p. 155. It merits mention that delays in the establishment of domestic peace agreements in the aftermath of the Esquipulas II Accord were in large part driven by US opposition to the Accord—that is, continued external meddling from a global actor that was not party to the regional agreement signed by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.
7.3.3 Policymaker Perceptions and Escalation Control

A third policy lesson that emerges from this dissertation’s theory and empirics concerns the importance of policymakers’ capacities to envision their opponent’s expectations when attempting to control escalation during competitive interventions in foreign civil wars.\(^{20}\) Attentiveness to a conflict’s context and frames of reference plays a critical role in tacit communication and signaling, while a failure to consider an opponent’s position and perspective can be dangerous and damaging. In the Angolan case discussed in Chapter 5, for example, it was South Africa’s identification and tacit acceptance of the Cuban defensive line— and an awareness that Cuban troops were not operating south of it—that helped to ensure a direct confrontation was avoided. Similarly in the Afghan case discussed in Chapter 6, the defensive force postures that were adopted by Russian and Pakistani air crews demonstrated their limited intentions and desire to avoid costly dogfights over Afghan skies. In both cases, a failure to interpret these signals of restraint risked disastrous consequences: escalation, direct confrontation, and mutual destruction of potential gains.

The importance of this situational awareness is clear in cases where interveners fail to appreciate their opponent’s perspective. Consider, for example, China’s entrance into the Korean War. It is now widely acknowledged that the American decision to send US forces north of the 38th parallel and to advance toward the Yalu River was critical to Mao Zedong’s decision to commit Chinese forces to the conflict.\(^{21}\) Mao felt immediately threatened by the American advance and feared the long-term political implications of an American presence in North Korea. Unfortunately, American policymakers failed to appreciate the veracity of Chinese signals of resolve, disregarded Beijing’s security concerns, and dismissed the strategic importance of the 38th parallel as a geographic saliency that regulated the intensity of the Korean War. As a result, they were unable to anticipate how Mao would respond to the American offensive. The consequences of these failures to envision the Chinese position and perspective proved tragic: US troops were met by a massive Chinese counteroffensive and a greatly escalated war.

\(^{20}\) On an opponent’s perceptions and presuppositions for escalation control, see: Smoke 1977: Chapter 9.
\(^{21}\) For a detailed discussion of this case, see: Christensen 1992.
Even when intentions appear "obvious" to policymakers on one side of a competitive intervention, it is critical that they ask whether it is also obvious for their opponent. Controlling escalation is an interactive process that requires policymakers to not only adequately signal their own limited intentions, but to also look carefully for signs of an opponent’s restraint. For the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, this latter point is especially important, not least because intervener signaling has manifest in indirect and somewhat unexpected forms—consider, for example, the verbal gymnastics underlying the stubborn refusal of policymakers to acknowledge US-Russian de-confliction, information sharing, and possible joint military strikes as "cooperation," Russia’s deployment of “little green men” on “holiday” in Crimea and Donbass, or the description of US aid to Kiev as “non-lethal defensive security assistance.” These examples call attention to the role of tacit bargaining and communication in both conflicts. For American and Russian policymakers alike, careful attention to the cues and context of competitive intervention is critical for the avoidance of dangerous and damaging escalation between their two countries.

7.4 An Agenda for Future Research

This dissertation has introduced a new concept to the study of civil war—competitive intervention—that challenges the traditional distinction drawn between inter-state and intra-state conflicts. By unpacking the strategic dilemmas that underlie this particular form of external meddling, it has shed new light on the international dimensions of civil war while improving our ability to understand the behaviors of armed groups, states, and third party interveners under the shadow of inadvertent escalation. In doing so, it has helped to fill a major gap in the existing literature, but much work remains to be done. In this final section, I consider avenues for future research on civil war, competitive intervention, and the changing security landscape of the international system.

Over the last decade, there has been an explosion in research on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of civil war. Initially enamored with large-N, cross-national econometric studies, recent years have seen a decided shift from aggregated, macro-level analyses to much more

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fine-grained, micro-level studies employing data collected at the subnational level. Some of today’s most cutting-edge research forgoes cross-country data entirely, preferring instead detailed subnational analyses that disaggregate large, complex social processes into relationships pertaining to individual actions. This turn toward the microdynamics of civil war has paid considerable dividends, uncovering new insights on topics from civilian victimization and child soldiering, to rebel recruitment and rebel governance, to the organization of mass killing and genocide. Together, these advances have led some analysts to suggest that subnational dataset construction should be prioritized by civil war researchers.

Yet while this micro-level turn has been attended by important advances in our understanding of conflict dynamics, the trend toward greater disaggregation has left the micro-macro conflict nexus largely unexplored. This dissertation demonstrates that distinctions between inter- and intra-state conflicts are often misleading, and that there are theoretical and empirical benefits that accrue from micro-macro integration in the study of civil wars. Future research stands to likewise benefit from multi-level theoretical integration, whether by contextualizing the contingent characteristics of civil wars, examining the ways in which macro-historical processes affect conflict dynamics, or by modeling the reciprocal influences of micro-, macro-, and systemic-level processes. Ultimately, this work will be empirically and conceptually taxing, and its validly will hinge on whether researchers possess a sufficiently sophisticated understanding of the operative processes linking the micro- and macro-levels. But further exploration of these linkages promises fruitful future research that will help to develop stronger theoretical foundations for the broader field of conflict research. Indeed, a synthesis of international relations theory with insights gleaned from the civil war literature promises new inferential leverage in the study of political violence of all kinds, while further exploration of the intra/interstate conflict nexus can contribute to the

23. On this micro-level turn, see: Kalyvas 2008.
27. See the many contributions in Arjona, Kasfir, and Mampilly 2015.
Theoretical and empirical development of both the interstate and civil conflict research fields.

These contributions will be critical to answering new questions that arise as the international system undergoes renewed change. While some believe the current unipole, the United States, will face no viable challengers in the near- to medium-term,30 others are not so sure.31 The current debate over the global diffusion of power and its implications for international stability has unfolded against the backdrop of Russian military interventions and Chinese military modernization. A central question for policymakers is whether Russia’s recent assertiveness and China’s global rise will be accompanied by new challenges to existing global governance structures, breakdowns in international diplomacy, and the proliferation of ungovernable spaces in weak states. As noted above, Russia is already engaged in competitive interventions against the US in Syria and Ukraine, and for its part, China has been accused of offering to transfer “huge stockpiles” of arms to a Libyan regime under assault by American-armed rebels.32 These developments are symptomatic of what the theory outlined in this dissertation would predict for renewed global rivalry. What are the long-term implications of these behaviors for international security and civil war?

A focus on the likelihood of a direct US-Russian or US-Chinese confrontation ignores key lessons highlighted in this dissertation. Given Russian and Chinese conventional and nuclear capabilities, strategic rivalry with the US is not likely to manifest in the form of interstate war. While always a possibility, it is a remote one: direct confrontation would be just as costly as a US-Soviet war would have been during the Cold War. As a result, tensions are much more likely to manifest in the form of indirect confrontation—that is, conflicts short of interstate war.

This dissertation has considered one form of indirect confrontation—competitive intervention—but the transformed security landscape of the 21st century presents a range of additional avenues for states to compete below the threshold of interstate war. China’s growing anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities provide a defensive umbrella under which it can strengthen its military position in the South China Sea; Russia’s exploitation of “frozen conflicts” can be leveraged to

32. Smith, 2 September 2011.
bolster its bargaining power; and Saudi Arabia's manipulation of oil prices can be used to drive out competitors and secure economic interests. At present, the dynamics of state competition in these "grey zones"—and their implications for international security broadly conceived—remain largely unexplored. In this respect, state confrontation below the threshold of war represents an exciting opportunity for future research on interstate competition.

Future work can also broaden this dissertation's empirical and theoretical findings by considering other conditions under which "not losing" can become more important than "winning." Many functions of violence extend beyond winning a war, and conflict actors often pursue priorities beyond victory. This is true of belligerents that directly benefit from the instability inherent in war, such as illicit networks that operate illegal economies, but it is also often true of mediators and peacekeepers that seek to help war-torn societies. Consider, for example, the motivations underlying state contributions to interventions undertaken by international organizations like the United Nations and African Union. These operations are often undermanned and under-resourced, lacking the capacity to successfully accomplish their objectives. Why do state contributors to these missions invest their resources in a sub-optimal fashion? What priorities might they be pursuing beyond "victory"? These are important questions not only for scholars, but also for the policymakers who fund these missions.

The theoretical framework advanced in this dissertation can also be extended by examining variation in the motivations of state interveners. An assumption underlying the theory introduced in Chapter 3 is that competitively intervening states ultimately seek to see their domestic client win the civil war they are fighting, where "winning" amounts to battlefield victories and/or some form of military dominance over their opponent. Yet, while interveners are often motivated by a desire to see their client through to victory, they may also become engaged in a civil war in pursuit of more limited objectives. For example, it might be hoped that the provision of external aid to one side will affect the costs and benefits of a negotiated settlement, forcing an agreement that would not otherwise be acceptable to the dominant domestic combatant force. Alternatively, an intervener may invest in a conflict not to help one side win, but rather to trap an international
rival in a costly foreign imbroglio, “bleeding” them of resources by preventing the termination of the war. How might these alternative, more limited, intervener objectives affect the dynamics of competitive intervention I describe?

The victory assumption underlying my theory is a useful simplification of a complex reality that has been profitably employed in this dissertation for the purposes of generating testable hypotheses about the behaviors of competitive interveners under the shadow of inadvertent escalation. Future work can relax this assumption to examine the degree to which the behaviors of interveners in pursuit of more limited objectives conform to the predictions of my theory. In particular, limited objectives should amplify the dynamics of tacit and explicit signaling, patterned actions, and strategic restraint I describe. Indeed, it is precisely in those cases where a total victory is less valuable to one of the interveners that the search for limits on the scope of violence should be most important. An intervener attempting to “bleed” an international rival, for example, must take care to avoid provoking a forceful retaliation by its opponent, or the transformation of a localized civil war into a regional interstate conflict. Similarly, an external state seeking to force a negotiated agreement between domestic combatants must be sure to signal these limited intentions to opposing interveners. Rather than interpret attempts to affect the costs and benefits of a domestic settlement as an indication of benevolent intentions, a foreign opponent is likely to see them as hostile and combative behaviors that threaten its own national interests in the outcome of the civil war. Even for intervening states that seek limited objectives, then, the search for limits in the scope of support to domestic combatants will be critical to navigating the strategic dilemmas competitive intervention entails.

Finally, questions abound on the issue of building a more sustainable future and a more peaceful international system. The decline of civil wars across the globe is a good news story for the international community, but regrettably, violence remains an ever-present feature of our contemporary international landscape. While competitive intervention has become both less common and less potent in the post-Cold War period, it has not yet disappeared. Consequently, while the number of ongoing civil wars has been decreasing in the post-Cold War period, researchers and
policymakers must keep abreast of changing patterns of interstate competition and transfers of external military assistance to civil war combatants. As this dissertation has stressed, these factors are central to understanding changing trends in the global prevalence and average duration of civil wars. While by definition domestic confrontations, civil wars are intimately tied to the dynamics of international politics.
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