INTERVENTION IN THE 1980s

U.S. Foreign Policy in the Third World

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Paramilitary Intervention

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Paramilitary intervention is defined as U.S. economic and military aid to an armed insurgency intent on overthrowing a government deemed inimical to U.S. foreign policy interests and represents a proxy utilization of force in situations in which policymakers have decided that direct U.S. intervention would be counterproductive. In short, use of this instrument allows U.S. policymakers to carry a war to the territory of another nation while at the same time avoiding the most costly aspects of that war—American casualties. The agents of U.S. paramilitary wars have included both existing guerrilla insurgencies and U.S.-organized exile invasion forces. Usually implemented covertly under the banner of anticommunism, paramilitary intervention generally has revolved around the provision of military weaponry through CIA-contracted airlines and the organization and training of insurgents by CIA personnel in allied nations adjacent to the target country.

This foreign policy instrument was used most often, though not exclusively, during the 1950s and early 1960s and included such varied cases as Angola, Cuba, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iraq, and Tibet. It was not until the 1980s, however, that paramilitary intervention became a comprehensive, coherent, and overt instrument of U.S. intervention in the Third World. During its time in office, the Reagan administration committed the United States to supporting guerrilla insurgencies attempting to overthrow Soviet-supported regimes in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua, all under the rubric of what has become known as the Reagan Doctrine.

THE PARAMILITARY OPTION
FROM THE 1940s TO THE 1970s

In the cold war atmosphere of the late 1940s, President Harry S. Truman presided over the roots of future U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World.
Truman ordered the creation of covert links with partisan guerrillas in the USSR in a largely unsuccessful effort to obtain military intelligence, cooperated with the British in several unsuccessful attempts at infiltrating emigré Albanians into their homeland to organize guerrilla bands and overthrow the country's communist dictatorship, and authorized the training of Korean commando squads as part of U.S. direct military intervention in the Korean War. It was not until the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, however, that the United States would vigorously pursue the overthrow of Third World governments through paramilitary intervention.

The Eisenhower administration's first paramilitary intervention resulted in the successful overthrow in 1954 of Guatemala's democratically elected and reform-minded Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, a leader perceived by U.S. policymakers as leading Guatemala on a path toward communism. Arbenz, attempting to promote broadly based development and build on reforms initiated in a 1944 middle-class revolution, formulated a land reform program targeted toward the largely landless rural farmer. The program immediately ran into problems because it included redistribution of 234,000 acres (95,000 hectares) of unused land owned by the United Fruit Company, a U.S. multinational company whose owners loudly protested these actions to the U.S. government. Arbenz also met with disfavor in Washington when he legalized the Guatemalan Communist party and brought a few of its leaders into the government. The Eisenhower administration's response was to formulate a covert psychological destabilization program, which included the creation of a paramilitary invasion force of 170 Guatemalan exiles (aided by air strikes carried out by CIA pilots) and the construction of a radio station to spread anti-Arbenz propaganda. Organized by the CIA at a mere cost of $20 million, the program succeeded in generating popular and military unrest, forcing a panicked Arbenz to flee; he was replaced by a military government led by Castillo Armas.

The inexpensive overthrow of Arbenz undoubtedly gave the Eisenhower administration (and future administrations) a false sense of power and of their ability to control the nature of Third World regimes through the paramilitary option. One must note that the United States was successful because the Arbenz regime represented a fragile democratic coalition with powerful domestic enemies—most notably a disenchanted military—that were all too happy to take control in exchange for U.S. economic and military support. Yet, this short-term "success" proved to be rather disheartening: The next thirty-two years would find Guatemala ruled by a host of repressive military dictatorships that would balk at any measure of social reform and thus fuel growing levels of guerrilla insurgency. Nonetheless, the Guatemalan case provided the model for future paramilitary interventions in the Third World.

A second intervention entailing an expanded version of the Guatemalan model was the CIA-organized paramilitary invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, designed to overthrow the revolutionary regime of Fidel Castro. Castro's success in ousting the popularly hated and U.S.-supported regime of
Fulgencio Batista in 1959, his clear intent to reform Cuba's economy along socialist lines, and his support for revolutionary movements in the Western Hemisphere quickly incurred the wrath of Washington. Rather than accept the reality of a leftist regime ninety miles from U.S. shores, the United States attempted to overthrow Castro by initiating a trade embargo (which continues in 1989), authorizing assassination attempts, and ultimately training, equipping, and providing logistical support for nearly 1,500 Cuban exiles at bases in Nicaragua for a paramilitary invasion. Initially authorized under the Eisenhower administration, the invasion forces were given the green light by President John F. Kennedy.

Unlike the weak government overthrown in Guatemala, Castro’s revolutionary regime enjoyed a large degree of support among the general population and especially within the military. Miscalculation within U.S. intelligence circles concerning the extent of Castro’s popularity was one of the factors contributing to the invasion’s failure (it was felt that if the exiles could maintain an invasion beachhead, popular rebellions, over time, would occur throughout the island). Rather than lead to Castro’s overthrow, the attempted invasion merely allowed Castro to whip up nationalist anti-U.S. feelings and subsequently strengthen his position on the island—the exact opposite of what the United States was trying to achieve. More important, Castro, who was completely isolated by the United States, had little choice but to turn to the willing embrace of the Soviet Union to ensure the longevity of the Cuban revolution in the face of possible future U.S. intervention. Ridiculing as “stupid” U.S. efforts to “drive Castro to the wall,” Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev nonetheless relished the expected results: “Castro will have to gravitate to us [Soviet Union] like an iron filing to a magnet.”

A third leader targeted by the Eisenhower administration for overthrow through paramilitary means was President Achmed Sukarno of Indonesia. Sukarno met with disfavor in Washington because he accepted communists into his cabinet, announced his intention of adopting one-party rule under “guided democracy,” and, most important, was a leader of the nascent Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the Third World (hosting its first conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955). As is well known, the Eisenhower administration (and particularly Secretary of State John Foster Dulles) vehemently rejected neutralism: Nations were either pro-Soviet or pro-United States, with nonaligned nations falling in the pro-Soviet category and ultimately being suspected of harboring procommunist tendencies.

Unlike the previous two cases, the vehicle for subverting Sukarno was paramilitary support beginning in 1956 for an existing secessionist movement that incorporated the Indonesian islands of Celebes, Java, and Sumatra. The covert CIA program included transfers of military weapons to the rebel government and CIA-piloted B-26 bombers flying support missions. Yet, when one of the U.S. pilots, Allen Pope, was shot down and captured by the Sukarno government in 1958—clearly establishing the CIA link—Eisenhower ordered the halt
of the paramilitary program. Five months later, the rebel government collapsed. Although the withdrawal of U.S. support hastened the defeat of the rebels, the primary reason for the movement’s failure was the lack of nationwide support for the secessionist generals and the clear superiority of military forces remaining loyal to President Sukarno.

A final paramilitary operation of the Eisenhower administration involved covert military support for Tibetan guerrillas fighting against communist China’s attempts to consolidate control over the formerly independent territory. The case of Tibet is unique in that although Beijing considered it to be an integral part of China—indeed, it was a vassal state of China for centuries—the territory had functioned as an independent state since the beginning of the twentieth century, generating popular pressures for the maintenance of some semblance of autonomy from Beijing. U.S. support for the indigenous guerrilla movement, which lasted from 1956 to 1973, included the training of guerrillas in the United States, India, and Nepal, as well as direct resupply of military materiel into Tibet through CIA air support. Unlike the previous three cases, however, U.S. intervention was just a “holding” exercise against consolidation of rule by communist China, as U.S. policymakers agreed that it was highly unlikely that the Tibetans could achieve independence.

U.S. support for the guerrillas was curtailed significantly in 1960 when Eisenhower ordered the cessation of violations of communist airspace (including the CIA resupply operations into Chinese-controlled Tibet) after the U-2 pilot Francis Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union. The subsequent decline of U.S. support during the 1960s (completely ceasing after the 1973 warming of Sino-American relations), was matched by the increasing inability of the Tibetan guerrilla forces to mount effective campaigns against the superior Chinese military forces. Despite achieving its short-term goal of harassing communist China, the covert program proved to be ultimately counterproductive when future administrations sought to achieve closer relations with the PRC.

In a twist to the paramilitary trend of the 1960s, the United States also became involved in organizing and funding rather substantial guerrilla armies in U.S.-allied Laos and South Vietnam to further the widening counterinsurgency war against communist guerrillas in both nations. In both cases, the CIA and U.S. Defense Department created autonomous guerrilla armies with the acquiescence of the host government, most notably among the Hmong ethnic groups in Laos (1960–1973) and the montagnards of South Vietnam’s central highlands (1961–1970). As the creation of these guerrilla armies was part of overt military intervention in allied nations, they differ from the defined subject of this chapter. Yet, it is important to note that both efforts inevitably unraveled once the United States withdrew from Indochina and had, perhaps, all along worked contrary to U.S. regional strategic interests: Support of the ethnically based armies in essence created self-interested “nations within nations,” defeating the primary U.S. goal of fostering unified, national governments capable of
Defeating highly motivated communist guerrilla insurgencies. Apart from U.S. operations carried out in Laos and South Vietnam, the paramilitary option during the 1950s (including intervention in Cuba in 1961) thus centered around three basic themes. First, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations sought the overthrow of leftist governments considered inimical to long-term U.S. foreign policy interests. The exigencies of the cold war struggle with the USSR ensured that the paramilitary option would be applied even to democratically elected (although leftist) regimes. Second, it was deemed critical by U.S. policymakers that the role of the United States remain hidden, therefore requiring covert action as carried out by the CIA. Most important, however, is that the president and his advisers maintained dominance in the policy process as they formulated covert interventionist policies with little or no oversight from Congress. As Harry Howe Ransom noted in the previous chapter, a “national, bipartisan cold war consensus permitted these activities to go forward with little congressional knowledge or supervision.”

Yet, despite extensive use of the paramilitary option against leftist governments during the 1950s, no new operations were begun in the 1960s after 1961. Two reasons may be posited for this decline: Growing U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War increasingly focused U.S. attention on Indochina to the detriment of other areas of the world, and the dramatic failure of the Bay of Pigs operation may have made policymakers reluctant to utilize the paramilitary instrument. The United States instead relied on more discreet forms of covert intervention, not resurrecting the paramilitary option until the early 1970s when it was applied against Iraq and Angola.

U.S. paramilitary intervention in Iraq was different from all the previous cases in that it was only an adjunct to (and at the request of) an ally’s previously established program. In order to force a settlement in a territorial dispute with Iraq that would be favorable to Iran, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi offered to provide military aid to a Kurdish group seeking to secede from Iraq. Fearsful that the shah would drop his military commitment once the border issue was resolved, the Kurdish leadership insisted upon a U.S. guarantee that aid would continue until independence was won. President Richard M. Nixon decided to help the shah and provided $16 million in covert aid over a three-year period (1972–1975). The intervention was highly successful; in return for the shah’s guarantee, that no further aid would be furnished to the Kurdish guerrillas (including U.S. aid), Iraq in 1975 recognized Iran’s claims in the Persian Gulf and Shaat al-Arab waterway. In the absence of external aid, the guerrillas were decimated by Iraq in the months following the signing of the agreement.

Although in the short run, U.S. policymakers could be pleased that such a small investment had substantially helped an ally, the long-term effects were much more dubious in nature; four years later a revolution in Iran created an intensely anti-U.S. regime, and five years later Iraq would go to war in part to regain the Shaat al-Arab, starting a bloody regional conflict that, despite a truce
and cessation of major hostilities in 1988, still is unresolved in 1989. The irony of the paramilitary campaign is that the United States in 1988 was leaning toward Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war (see Chapter 14).

The second paramilitary program of the 1970s, which served as the precursor of renewed emphasis on use of this tool during the 1980s, involved U.S. intervention in Angola's 1975 civil war. Three guerrilla groups had been fighting Portuguese colonialism in Angola since the 1960s: Agostinho Neto's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), backed by Cuba and the USSR; Holden Roberto's National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), backed by the PRC and Zaire; and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), backed by South Africa and the PRC. (The United States had maintained limited covert links with Roberto since the early 1960s and only began aiding Savimbi in 1975.) In 1974, Portugal announced it was divesting itself of its Angolan colony and convened a conference in Alvor, Portugal, with the heads of the guerrilla groups to work out a transition agreement. The conference was a great success; all three leaders became signatories to the Alvor Agreement, which outlined the nature and timetable for democratic elections and the formation of a tripartite transitional government in which power would be shared.

The administration of President Gerald R. Ford, however, had other plans. It has been asserted that, rather than risk a victory by the Soviet and Cuban-backed MPLA in free elections, the Ford administration provided Roberto's FNLA with over $300,000 in covert aid (funneled through neighboring Zaire), which prompted him to seek control militarily rather than risk defeat in agreed-upon elections. Both South Africa and Zaire sent troops to aid the FNLA. The entire equation changed, however, when Cuba, in response to FNLA attacks and external intervention, introduced 30,000 combat soldiers into the conflict and emerged, along with the MPLA, victorious. In the wake of Vietnam and fearful of growing U.S. involvement that might result in mirroring U.S. combat troops in another distant guerrilla war, Congress passed the Clark Amendment in 1976 prohibiting any further aid to guerrilla forces in Angola, effectively terminating this paramilitary operation. The net result of the intervention was disturbing; chances for a peaceful transition and future democratic government were lost, and the Soviets and Cubans gained a major ally and foothold on the African continent—the exact opposite of what the Ford administration had been attempting to achieve.

The most significant aspect of the Angola intervention was that it represented congressional assertion of oversight of U.S. foreign policy in general and covert intervention in particular. Harry Howe Ransom, in Chapter 7, has adequately explored the evolution of congressional-executive branch conflict over the covert action function during the post–World War II period. Let it suffice to note here that, from 1976 on, Congress would become an active player so far as U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World is concerned.
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THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND
PARAMILITARY INTERVENTION
IN THE 1980s

The Reagan Doctrine both intensifies and departs from past U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World. Whereas past administrations sporadically intervened to overthrow or harass leftist regimes, the Reagan Doctrine provides a comprehensive ideologically based program for arming insurgencies intent on overthrowing self-proclaimed communist Third World regimes. In a significant departure from the 1960s and 1970s, when paramilitary operations were to be kept hidden from public view, the doctrine has become an openly announced policy of intervention in the name of democracy and anticommunism. As President Reagan proclaimed in his 1985 State of the Union Address: “We must stand by our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.” In fact, despite serious friction between the executive branch and Congress over aid to the Nicaraguan contras, Congress adopted public resolutions of support for administration policies in Angola, Afghanistan, and Cambodia. For the first time in post–World War II history, the United States publicly adopted and implemented a program that went beyond traditional containment and embraced instead the need to roll back already established communist Third World regimes. It is to the specifics of the four applications of this doctrine that we now turn.

Afghanistan and the Holy War of the Mujahedin

The Soviet Union invaded the bordering nation of Afghanistan in December 1979 with over 100,000 troops in what was intended to be a short-term exercise to prop up a communist regime threatened by a mounting guerrilla insurgency. Nearly nine years later, approximately 120,000 Soviet troops remained, the insurgency had intensified, and the Soviet-installed leadership of Babrak Karmal, unable to end the guerrilla war of attrition, had been replaced by the Soviet-blessed Najibullah. In an effort to end what he had called a “bleeding wound” costing the Soviets as much as $6 billion a year and over 30,000 casualties (what some U.S. policymakers have termed “the USSR’s Vietnam”), Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced on February 8, 1988, his determination to seek a negotiated settlement to the Afghan conflict. Moving beyond rhetoric, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and the USSR signed agreements (known as the Geneva Accords) on April 14, 1988, in which the Soviet Union pledged the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops by February 15, 1989.

Two factors cast a shadow over the seemingly productive peace process. First, the guerrilla forces opposing the Soviet occupation, popularly referred to
as the "mujahedin" (holy warriors), rejected the peace accords, vowing to continue the guerrilla struggle against the departing Soviet troops as well as refusing to accept any power-sharing agreement with the Soviet-supported communist government. The communist regime is opposed by at least seven major resistance groups—united in a loose federation titled the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahedin—whose total strength numbers between 50,000 and 100,000 guerrilla fighters.

Second, although both the United States and the USSR have committed themselves to noninterference and nonintervention in Afghanistan, the Geneva Accords allow, in reality, for continued U.S. aid to the mujahedin as long as Moscow continues to arm the Kabul government. The Soviet Union was especially critical of U.S. intentions to continue to aid the mujahedin into 1989—claiming that U.S. aid violates the Geneva Accords—and thus temporarily suspended the withdrawal of its forces as of November 4, 1988 (although both Moscow and the Afghan government reiterated their adherence to the February 15 deadline).13 In essence, both sides will contribute to continuing civil conflict in Afghanistan as the Soviets attempt to extricate their forces from a seemingly unwinnable situation at the lowest cost possible. Indeed, even if the Soviets do achieve the complete withdrawal of their forces by the February 1989 deadline, the basis is set for a continuing proxy war between a Soviet-supported Afghan government and the U.S.-supported mujahedin until either a negotiated end to the conflict is achieved or one side militarily prevails over the other.

The mujahedin's jihad (holy war) enjoys a large degree of regional support, receiving economic and military aid from such diverse nations as the PRC, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. U.S. covert support for the guerrilla coalition, publicly supported by Congress in 1985 and actually begun in 1980 under the Carter administration, represents one of Washington's largest paramilitary undertakings. Intended to pressure the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan, this aid is funneled through neighboring Pakistan and, since 1986, includes the highly effective U.S. Stinger antiaircraft missile.14 U.S. military and economic aid, totaling $750 million for the period 1980–1985, was $470 million in 1986 and $630 million in 1987.

Several circumstances seemingly legitimize extending U.S. aid to the mujahedin: According to accepted precepts of international law, the Soviet Union illegally invaded and occupied the country; the vast majority of the Afghan people desire a Soviet withdrawal; and the guerrillas enjoy a large degree of regional support and overwhelming international support. Indeed, proponents of aid cite the Geneva Accords and initial Soviet withdrawal of troops as evidence of the fruits borne by strong external paramilitary support of the guerrillas.

Yet, one writer has questioned whether or not U.S. policy in Afghanistan is "mired in success"; although the United States has promoted its short-term goal of fostering the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the future prospects of Afghanistan's political system and relations with the United States remain unclear.15 One
major problem is the factionalized nature of the guerrilla resistance. Four out of the seven factions that compose the guerrilla coalition espouse Islamic fundamentalism, rejecting any type of power-sharing agreement with the communist government headed by Najibullah. The other three guerrilla factions promote a more traditional Afghani nationalism and are more willing to negotiate some type of power-sharing agreement. The fundamentalists, however, who are based largely in Pakistan, receive the major portion of external military aid (including U.S. aid) and subsequently work counter to the U.S. goal of achieving a negotiated settlement. Moreover, the seven-party alliance as a whole is considered by many foreigners and a large majority of Afghans to be a “corrupt” and “artificial” creation of Pakistan. In short, it is highly possible that civil conflict will continue to dominate Afghanistan’s political scene long after the expected withdrawal of Soviet troops, as competing factions jockey for total control of a future Afghan government.

A further point to consider is the net result of even a negotiated withdrawal is unlikely to yield a democratic government in the Western tradition, even though the Reagan administration has portrayed the mujahedin as democratic freedom fighters. The dominant Islamic fundamentalist faction, for example, proclaims the need to create an Islamic republic and, in fact, is ideologically much closer to the teachings of Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini than to the democratic vision of the Reagan administration. In fact, Pakistan’s leadership, whose country serves as the conduit of U.S. aid and which largely controls distribution of that aid, supports the radical fundamentalist Hezb-e-Islami guerrilla faction’s bid to play the dominant leadership role in a postcommunist government. Even if the nationalist faction were to gain power, it too rejects the need for a pluralist-type democracy in the Western sense.

Cambodia and Continuing Conflict in Indochina

The Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia in December 1978 to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government of Pol Pot, a Chinese-backed and internationally denounced communist regime that had slaughtered nearly 1 million of its own people over a three-year period beginning in 1975. Originally welcomed by the Cambodian people, the Soviet-backed Vietnamese installed a puppet government under the leadership of Heng Samrin. Ten years later, the Vietnamese still maintained an occupation army of over 100,000 troops to combat three guerrilla groups threatening the pro-Vietnamese regime.

The guerrilla groups are tied together in a loose coalition titled the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) and include the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), led by former Prime Minister Son Sann (numbering roughly 8,000 fighters); the Armée Nationale Sihanoukienne (ANS), loyal to former head of state Norodom Sihanouk (boasting 18,000 guerrillas); and the feared Khmer Rouge, led by Khieu Samphan (controlling between 30,000 and 40,000 guerrilla troops). Yet, in contrast to the success at-
tained by the mujahedin in Afghanistan, the three guerrilla groups in 1988 were no match for the Vietnamese army and the growing forces of the Heng Samrin regime.

Moreover, compared to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, Washington's commitment to the CGDK is very limited. The Reagan administration gradually increased the levels of non-lethal covert aid extended to the noncommunist factions of the CGDK (KPNLF and ANS) from $5 million in 1982 to $12 million in 1985 and nearly $18 million in 1988. This covert aid was complemented by nearly $3.5 million a year in covert aid as authorized by Congress through the Solarz Amendment in 1985. Yet, U.S. support for the guerrillas has been cautious, to say the least—obviously because of the still-strong memory of past U.S. intervention in Indochina—and has been forthcoming as a result of requests by allies in the region, most notably the PRC (which supports the Khmer Rouge), Thailand (whose territory borders Cambodia), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (which backs the noncommunist factions of the resistance).

As in the case of Afghanistan, several factors seem to merit U.S. paramilitary aid to the guerrillas: According to international law, the Vietnamese illegally invaded and occupied the country; the Cambodian people desire a Vietnamese withdrawal; and the Vietnamese occupation is denounced both regionally and within the international system. Moreover, proponents of aid to the CGDK may note that Vietnam has announced that it intends to withdraw 35,000 troops from Cambodia by the end of 1988 and all remaining forces (estimated at 70,000) by March 1990 if a political settlement can be achieved between the three guerrilla forces and the Cambodian government. Whether this intention is a result of military pressure and its drain on the Vietnamese economy (as seems to be the case for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan); of pressure by Mikhail Gorbachev—Vietnam's largest financial patron—who wishes to extricate the USSR from regional conflicts; or of enhanced Vietnamese confidence in the ability of the Heng Samrin regime to maintain itself in power (or a combination of all three) is difficult to decipher.

Regardless of Vietnamese intentions, the greatest problem for U.S. aid to the CGDK is that the Khmer Rouge constitutes the military backbone of the coalition. Even if U.S. aid is directed toward the noncommunist factions of the CGDK, their ultimate military victory (which is highly unlikely) could very likely mean a return to a communist, pro-Chinese regime headed by the Khmer Rouge. Offered a choice between continued Vietnamese occupation or a government headed by the Khmer Rouge, it has been suggested that the Cambodian people would choose the former. Yet, nonsupport of the guerrillas also ensures a communist regime, albeit one largely controlled by Vietnam. The fact that both scenarios do not bode well for a democratic, noncommunist successor regime explains in part why the United States has been hesitant to commit significant sums of money to the guerrilla war.

A related problem with the CGDK is the inherent incompatibility of the
ups in 1988 were the Heng Samrin in Washington's retraction gradually convinced the noncommunist factions to $12 million to support the Khmer Rouge and the noncommunist factions of the C.G.D.K. This infighting undoubtedly has hindered success on the battlefield and certainly has hindered political attempts at achieving a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Although the leaders of the three guerrilla factions and the Vietnamese-sponsored government met for peace talks in July 1988 for the first time since the Vietnamese invasion in 1978, they could only agree on the creation of a "working group" that would decide if any future talks would be possible. It is ironic that the seeming impasse between the guerrilla factions has been paralleled by a gradual thawing of relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC, both of which desire to resolve the Cambodian issue. As the Soviets and the communist Chinese are the major material backers of the primary groups involved in the conflict, this growing trend toward cooperation could be influential in formulating and guaranteeing a future accord agreeable to all parties.

☐ Angola and Resolution of the Cuban Dilemma

The military conflict in Angola is a continuation of the 1975 civil war in which the Soviet and Cuban-backed MPLA emerged victorious over the FNLA and UNITA guerrilla factions. At the end of 1988, the MPLA government continues to rely on over 50,000 Cuban troops and 2,000 Soviet advisers, in addition to its 50,000-strong army, to maintain the regime against Savimbi's UNITA guerrilla forces and repeated military interventions by the latter's regional patron, South Africa. Although unable to overthrow the MPLA government, the combined UNITA-South African forces have decimated Angola's economy. The MPLA stated quite frankly that, by the end of 1986, the continued struggle had cost the Angolan government close to $15 billion that otherwise could have been spent on development. This figure could only have increased in 1987 and 1988.

The Reagan administration, denouncing Angola as a Soviet puppet in Africa and portraying Savimbi as a democratic freedom fighter, was handed congressional repeal of the Clark Amendment in 1985, whereby removing a major obstacle to providing military aid to UNITA under the auspices of the Reagan Doctrine. Congress subsequently voted in the same year to authorize the president to extend $15 million in covert paramilitary aid on a yearly basis to UNITA. The military aid, including Stinger antiaircraft missiles, is funneled to UNITA forces through Zaire. The primary goals of U.S. involvement in the paramilitary war are to achieve the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola and pressure the MPLA to accept a power-sharing role with UNITA.

U.S. support for Savimbi is fraught with negatives and contradictions. The major problem tarnishing Savimbi's guerrilla struggle (and U.S. foreign policy by association) is his obvious dependence on South Africa. The sensitive nature
of the apartheid issue among black African countries originally contributed to regional recognition of the MPLA regime in 1975 and rejection of Savimbi's military struggle because of its association with South Africa. Moreover, contradictory U.S. policies have sent confusing signals to both South Africa and black African countries: Whereas adoption of economic sanctions underscores U.S. opposition to South Africa's system of apartheid, support for UNITA, by association, supports South Africa's regional policies of destabilization. The irony of U.S. support for Savimbi is that the Ford administration, in the hopes of excluding the Marxist MPLA from sharing power in 1975, contributed to the unraveling of the Alvor Agreement and the possibility for peaceful transition to a democratic government. Although one can only speculate as to whether all three factions would have abided by the agreement (indeed, the opposite is very likely), U.S. (and other foreign) intervention effectively precluded this possibility. Most important, it was the ensuing civil war that led to the massive introduction and long-term presence of Cuban troops in Angola, the issue of greatest concern to the Reagan administration in Africa and the topic of intense regional negotiations led by the United States in 1988.

The key to achieving the removal of Cuban troops from southern Africa—the primary goal of the Reagan administration—lies not in placing military pressure upon the MPLA through UNITA but rather in resolving South Africa's continuing occupation of Namibia, a former League of Nations Trust Territory that acts as a buffer between southern Angola and northern South Africa. As South Africa has repeatedly utilized Namibia to invade Angola, the bargaining position of the MPLA has been that Namibia's independence, and therefore a withdrawal of South African troops, would decrease the security threat to Angola and allow the parallel withdrawal of Cuban troops. Yet, South Africa traditionally has resisted international pressures to grant Namibia independence, for fear that the Angola-based and Marxist-oriented South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) would dominate free elections and pose a direct security threat to South Africa's northern frontier.

The dominant trend in 1988 has been one of diplomatic resolution of the stalemate. On July 20, 1988, a U.S.-mediated accord among Angola, Cuba, and South Africa was made public in which all three nations agreed in principle to work toward Namibian independence as the basis for a withdrawal of Cuban troops. This initial step was enhanced by a preliminary peace accord outlined on November 15, 1988, which mapped out a timetable for the simultaneous withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola and Namibia, respectively, and acceptance of a UN-sponsored plan for Namibian independence. On December 22, 1988, two agreements—the Namibia Accord and the Angola Accord—were signed, thus formalizing these countries' acceptance of independence for Namibia and the withdrawal of Cuban troops. Although confidence is high that these accords will pave the way for the arrival of UN forces to oversee free elections in Namibia in 1989 or 1990, skeptics note that South Africa originally agreed in principle to the UN-sponsored elections in 1978, only
to place one obstacle after another in the way of ultimate independence.\textsuperscript{25}

The attainment of an enduring settlement is clouded, however, by lack of comprehensive negotiations concerning external aid to the UNITA guerrillas or the issue of national reconciliation in Angola (that is, power-sharing with UNITA, the second major goal of U.S. paramilitary support for Savimbi). The Namibia Accord, signed by Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, alludes to the UNITA issue by pledging the signatories to “respect the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the states of south-west Africa” and to “insure that their respective territories are not used by any state, organization, or person” in connection with acts of violence against any state of southwestern Africa. Yet, although South Africa, in accordance with the accord, announced its intention to cease aiding UNITA, the Reagan administration, not a formal signatory, pledged continued U.S. aid to Savimbi's forces. “There can be no military solution,” noted Chester Crocker, assistant secretary of state for African affairs and the primary architect of the accord, affirming that U.S. aid would continue until there was an internal political settlement in Angola.\textsuperscript{26}

The Angolan government, despite a proclamation of general amnesty for UNITA guerrillas due to take effect in early 1989, believes that once Namibia is independent, the question of UNITA will be more easily dealt with militarily than through some type of political compromise that decreases the power of the MPLA. This is clearly a concern for Savimbi, who is worried that both South Africa and the United States, in their haste to achieve the withdrawal of Cuban troops, will ultimately allow support for UNITA to fall by the wayside once Cuban troops are actually withdrawn. Yet, numerous African diplomats have warned that “an agreement on a Cuban troop withdrawal will only work if there is a political settlement in the Angolan civil war,” and several African countries have been holding regional talks (apart from the U.S.-led talks) to reach such an agreement.\textsuperscript{27} Similar to the example of Afghanistan, it is highly likely that withdrawal of foreign forces (in this case Cuban) will leave in place a continuing civil conflict.

\section{Nicaragua and the Contra War}

Anastasio Somoza—one in a long line of popularly hated and U.S.-supported Nicaraguan dictators—was overthrown in 1979 by a broad-based revolution led by the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas, who are self-proclaimed Marxists, gradually centralized control over Nicaragua’s political system, established close links with Cuba and the Soviet Union, and began providing assistance to other revolutionary movements in Central America, most notably in El Salvador. Although the Carter administration in its last year in office attempted to construct a productive relationship with the Sandinista regime (with debatable results), the Reagan administration entered office with a negative preconception of the revolution and a determination to prevent another Cuba in the Western Hemi-
sphere. Perceiving Nicaragua as a beachhead for Soviet-led communist destabilization throughout Central America, support for the contras became the showcase for what paramilitary intervention could achieve under the Reagan Doctrine. Although official administration justifications for supporting the contras wavered between interdicting arms being sent to Salvadoran Marxist guerrillas, forcing the Sandinistas to democratize their system of governance, and limiting Soviet and Cuban influence in the region, the real aim seemed to be to overthrow the Sandinista regime.

As the paramilitary war against the Sandinistas is extensively discussed in Chapter 16, I will only highlight here several obstacles that hindered the successful carrying out of the Reagan administration’s effort. First, among the four paramilitary wars carried out by the Reagan administration, U.S. support of the contras fueled the greatest amount of public debate and controversy and contributed to a virtual tug-of-war between the executive branch and Congress. In brief, although originally endorsing military aid in 1982 (only for the purposes of interdicting arms), Congress by 1988 had reduced U.S. support to limited amounts of humanitarian aid, and it was doubtful that any new appropriations would be made for 1989. Congressional cutbacks mirrored international opinion: The U.S. policy of supporting the contras has been declared illegal by the World Court, opposed by the majority of Nicaraguans, and disputed by a significant number of nations within Central America as well as within the international system. Equally important is that the contras themselves suffer several shortcomings that limit their effectiveness as a viable alternative to the Sandinistas: None of the contra leadership is respected in Nicaragua; they have been unable to enunciate an attractive alternative program of government; and they are discredited by continued atrocities in the rural areas. Eight years of paramilitary warfare, although clearly able to wreak havoc within the Nicaraguan economy, have been insufficient to achieve the primary goal of overthrowing the Sandinista regime. In fact, it may be argued that U.S. paramilitary support for the contras has forced the Sandinistas to rely more heavily on Cuban and Soviet support and advisers, the exact opposite of U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region.

\section*{PARAMILITARY INTERVENTION IN PERSPECTIVE}

Despite the sporadic nature of U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World, this brief overview of this tool’s use in the post–World War II period provides the basis for several tentative conclusions. First, it appears that paramilitary intervention can be highly successful if the U.S. goal is to harass or otherwise disrupt the normal political or economic proceedings of a Third World country. There is no doubt that support for UNITA has contributed to se-
vere disruption of Angola’s economy or that support for Tibetan guerrillas delayed China’s consolidation of control over the disputed territory.

If the goal of paramilitary intervention is to overthrow the government in question, however, the results have been less positive. Only in the case of Guatemala in 1954—a democratic government with powerful domestic enemies, most notably a disenchanted military—did the United States succeed in overthrowing a government considered inimical to U.S. foreign policy interests through paramilitary means. In all other cases, the paramilitary option has fallen short. This especially has been the case when the United States has attempted to overthrow leftist revolutionary regimes (such as Nicaragua’s Sandinistas or Cuba under Castro) enjoying a large degree of popular support. Rather than overthrowing these types of regimes, U.S. intervention seems to stiffen their resolve and anti-U.S. rhetoric.

Yet, just as nationalism can be harnessed by revolutionary regimes to avoid defeat by counterrevolutionary paramilitary forces, so too can it be harnessed when the goal is withdrawal of a foreign occupation army. As witnessed by the USSR’s intentions to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan—regardless of the domestic configuration of a future Afghan regime (though the USSR will obviously continue to supply massive amounts of aid to keep the Najibullah government in power)—the combination of a popular guerrilla struggle with effective regional paramilitary support can make the costs of occupation potentially untenable in the long run. The key to success in Afghanistan, however, has not been the level of external aid but rather the widespread support that the guerrilla insurgency enjoys among the Afghani people. As is shown by the case of the contra war in Nicaragua, large infusions of external aid are insufficient for victory when the majority of the population rejects the legitimacy of the paramilitary group.

A further observation of paramilitary intervention is that it can lead to concessions by a Third World country, depending on the types of concessions sought. For example, Iran was able to achieve a desired border demarcation from Iraq through U.S.-guaranteed support of Kurdish guerrillas operating in Iraqi territory. Once this goal was achieved, support for the Kurdish guerrillas was dropped. Moreover, although U.S. support for the contras may make the Sandinistas think twice about sending arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas, it is not likely to force them to submit to something as important as dismantling their system of governance. Similarly, in the case of Angola, the MPLA has shown itself willing to negotiate the withdrawal of Cuban troops, but as of 1988 has refused to negotiate its dominant hold on political power. In short, the greater the importance or sensitivity of the demand sought, the lesser the likelihood that the target government will concede as the result of paramilitary intervention.

In addition, both the short-term and long-term effects of paramilitary intervention must be taken into account. In the case of Tibet, for example, although the short-term goal of harassing communist China seemed to be successful, the
long-term effect proved ultimately to be counterproductive, as the United States sought to achieve closer relations with the PRC. In the case of Iraq, the coerced border demarcation provided one of the reasons for the bloody Iran-Iraq war. In the cases of Angola, Cuba, and Nicaragua, attempts at isolating these self-proclaimed Marxist regimes has left them little alternative—especially when confronting externally supplied guerrilla forces—that to seek an even closer relationship with Eastern bloc countries, the opposite of what Washington was attempting to achieve. The possibility of long-term results contrary to the original foreign policy objectives is not limited to paramilitary intervention but rather may be applied to all types of intervention.

The question of long-term results is especially important as concerns the democratic or undemocratic nature of a successor regime if the U.S.-supported guerrillas achieve their goal and assume power. The Reagan administration, for example, fondly referred to anti-communist guerrillas as democratic freedom fighters. As already stated, the success of paramilitary struggles in both Afghanistan and Cambodia could lead to radical Islamic fundamentalist and pro-Chinese communist governments in those two countries, respectively. In this regard, it is difficult to see how this promotes the cause of democracy or even pro-U.S. regimes. In the case of Guatemala, U.S. paramilitary success led to a litany of corrupt dictatorships and a cycle of guerrilla insurgencies that has yet to reach its full conclusion. A democratic outcome in Angola or Nicaragua also is highly unlikely if either the contras or UNITA gain power, although it may be argued that these regimes would at least be more pro-U.S. than their predecessors.

Finally, the role of regional allies and the risks of escalation must be noted. In all the examined cases of U.S. paramilitary intervention, a regional ally bordering the target nation was imperative for training guerrillas and serving as a conduit for military aid. This situation provides the potential for future escalation, as the target nation, fed up with its neighbor’s interference in its domestic affairs, may decide to eliminate guerrilla camps across the border or widen the war by mounting a full-scale invasion. The former scenario has occurred frequently; punitive strikes have been carried out by Nicaragua against contra bases in Honduras, by Vietnam against guerrilla camps in Thailand, and by Afghanistan against mujahedin guerrillas in Pakistan. What would or should be the U.S. response if the latter scenario were to take place, and a U.S. ally were invaded by the target of a paramilitary campaign? The invasion of Honduras by Nicaragua, for example, could provide the basis for direct U.S. military intervention in Central America with potentially disastrous effects. Indeed, the Reagan administration responded positively to a Honduran request for U.S. troops after Sandinista soldiers apparently crossed the Honduran border on March 15, 1988, to attack contra guerrilla bases. Although U.S. troops were sent merely as a show of military muscle, the stage was set for a wider regional conflict that neither Washington nor Managua wanted.