INTERVENTION
INTO THE 1990s

U.S. Foreign Policy in the Third World
Second Edition

edited by
Peter J. Schraeder

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Paramilitary intervention is defined as economic and military aid designed to foster an armed insurgency against a foreign government, usually with the intent of overthrowing that government. This type of intervention represents a proxy use of force in situations in which policymakers of a hostile government have decided that direct military intervention would be counterproductive. As a result, the agents of paramilitary wars are usually existing guerrilla insurgencies within the target country or exiled nationals living outside of that country. In short, use of this instrument allows policymakers of a hostile government to carry a war to the territory of another country while at the same time avoiding the most costly aspects of that war: military casualties that ultimately result from direct military intervention.

The paramilitary option was often implemented by the United States during the 1950s and the 1960s against such varied countries as Angola, Cuba, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iraq, and the PRC. In each of these cases, covert operations included 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. Despite the existence of rationales that usually underscored the Cold War requirements of anticommunism and containment of the Soviet Union, it was not until the 1980s that paramilitary intervention became a comprehensive and coherent 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 self-proclaimed Marxist regimes in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua, all under the rubric of what became known as the Reagan Doctrine. Each of these paramilitary wars was continued under the Bush administration.
THE PARAMILITARY OPTION
FROM THE 1940s TO THE 1970s

In the Cold War atmosphere of the late 1940s, President Harry S Truman authorized a variety of covert operations that served as the precursors of U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World. Among these were the creation of covert links with partisan guerrillas in the Soviet Union in a largely unsuccessful effort to obtain military intelligence; cooperation 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 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.1 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 four decades 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 1992), 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 over 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 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.6

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.7

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 demands of the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union 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 presidents and their advisers dominated the policymaking process as they formulated covert interventionist policies with little or no oversight from Congress. As Harry 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.8 Fearful 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 authorized $16 million in

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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 Shatt 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 what became a bloody regional conflict in part to regain the Shatt al-Arab. The irony of the paramilitary campaign is that the United States in 1988 was leaning toward Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War (see Chapters 17 and 18).

The second paramilitary program of the 1970s, which served as the precursor of renewed emphasis on use of this tool during the 1980s and 1990s, 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 Soviet Union; 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 miring 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
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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.10

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 became a force to be reckoned with when the executive branch sought to implement paramilitary strategies in the Third World.

THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND PARAMILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE 1980s AND THE 1990s

The Reagan Doctrine both intensified and departed from past U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World. Whereas past administrations sporadically intervened to overthrow or harass leftist regimes, the Reagan Doctrine provided a comprehensive ideologically based program for arming insurgencies intent on overthrowing self-proclaimed communist Third World regimes.11 In a significant departure from the 1960s and 1970s, when paramilitary operations were to be kept hidden from public view, the doctrine became an openly announced policy of intervention in the name of democracy and anticomunism. 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."12 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 Mujahedins

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 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 Soviet Union signed agreements (known as the Geneva Accords) on April 14, 1988, in which the Soviet Union pledged the complete withdrawal of its troops by February 15, 1989—a deadline that was rigorously observed.

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 an Islamic “jihad” (holy war) against the departing Soviet troops and the communist Najibullah regime. This stance enjoyed a large degree of regional support, with the mujahedin receiving economic and military aid from such diverse countries as the PRC, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. U.S. covert support for the mujahedin, publicly supported by Congress in 1985 and actually begun in 1980 under the Carter administration, was the largest and most expensive paramilitary undertaking in U.S. history; reaching an annual peak of $260 million (totaling $750 million for the 1980–1985 period alone), U.S. paramilitary aid largely was funneled through neighboring Pakistan and, after 1986, included the highly effective U.S. Stinger antiaircraft missile. The overriding goal of this involvement was the overthrow of the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime.

The issue of foreign assistance to groups in Afghanistan constituted a second problem of the Geneva Accords. Although both the United States and the Soviet Union committed themselves to noninterference and nonintervention in Afghanistan, the 1988 agreement allowed for continued U.S. aid to the mujahedin as long as Moscow continued to arm the Kabul government. In essence, the basis was set for a continuing proxy war between the Soviet-sponsored Afghani government and the U.S.-supported mujahedin. As a result, the Soviet Union as late as 1991 was providing approximately $250–$300 million in annual aid to the Najibullah government, a figure matched by comparable amounts of CIA-distributed aid to the mujahedin.

The thorny issue of superpower aid was resolved on September 13, 1991. On that date, Secretary of State James A. Baker III and Soviet Foreign Minister Boris D. Pankin signed an agreement that committed both of their countries to terminating military shipments to all belligerents in Afghanistan by January 1, 1992—another deadline that was rigorously adhered to by both sides. The decline of the Cold War was the obvious factor leading to the
Soviet troops rallied leadership in 1989, a year when he announced an end to Afghanistan. The United ed the complete dline that was the peace process, pularly referred orders, vowing to oviet troops and large degree of military aid id Arabia. U.S. was the largest; reaching an the 1980–1985 gh neighboring U.S. Stinger was the n constituted a United States and id noninterven tional U.S. aid to ul government, een the Soviet-Mujahedin. As a mately $250– figure matched n. September 13, Soviet Foreign d both of their in Afghanistan eed to by both leading to the resolution of superpower involvement in what constituted one of the bloodiest proxy conflicts (perhaps exceeded only by the Vietnam War) between the United States and the Soviet Union. “We no longer saw Afghanistan as the Soviet thrust for a warm-water port in the Persian Gulf or as a beachhead for a close alliance with Iran,” explained a State Department official involved in the negotiating process. “We were playing out an old grudge without really knowing why we got in there in the first place.”

The termination of Soviet (and, subsequently, Russian) military support for the Najibullah regime was clearly perceived by U.S. policymakers as a victory for the United States in the rapidly ebbing Cold War. As noted by several of those interviewed who played a role in the paramilitary war, three circumstances legitimized extending U.S. aid to the mujahedin: (1) According to accepted precepts of international law, the Soviet Union illegally invaded and occupied the country; (2) the vast majority of the Afghani people desired a Soviet withdrawal; and (3) the mujahedin continue to enjoy a large degree of regional support and overwhelming international support. The case study of Afghanistan undoubtedly will become one of the “success” stories of those who, in the future, will argue for other applications of the paramilitary option as an instrument of intervention.

Yet those analysts and policymakers less enchanted with the paramilitary war have questioned whether U.S. policy in Afghanistan remains “mired in success”; although the United States achieved its primary goals of fostering a Soviet military withdrawal and a termination of all Soviet aid to the Najibullah regime, the future prospects of Afghanistan’s political system and relations with the United States remain unclear. It is important to note, for example, that the 1991 superpower accord—superseded, of course, by the fragmentation of the Soviet Union only months later—only extricated the superpowers from a very bloody internal civil war. Despite Najibullah’s attempts during 1991 to cast off his Marxist clothing and seek a government of national unity, the majority of the mujahedin forces opposed to his government refused to accept any sort of power-sharing arrangement that included the former Marxist leader. Moreover, despite the fall of the Najibullah regime and the subsequent occupation of Kabul (the country’s capital) by the mujahedin in early 1992, deep divisions within the mujahedin ranks make a government of national unity difficult to achieve. Despite rhetorical support for what has been called the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahedin—a loose federation of the major resistance groups (numbering approximately 50,000–100,000 fighters)—the guerrilla forces are fractionalized by religious and political objectives. Among the most serious divisions is that between the Islamic fundamentalists led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the most militant mujahedin leader who refuses to entertain any sort of compromise solution short of an Islamic fundamentalist regime, and those guerrilla factions that espouse a more traditional form of Afghan nationalism (and, thus, are perhaps more inclined to entertain the idea of a
more moderate coalition government). As succinctly explained by Hamed Karzai, a foreign policy adviser to the president of the guerrilla coalition, "Afghanistan is so divided and there are still so many hands in the Afghan issue that the country may lose itself to its divisions."18

The potential intensification of the Afghani civil war—already exacerbated by billions of dollars in foreign military aid although no longer desired by either Russia or the United States—poses a serious problem for the United States. As policymakers continue to seek stability in the fragile republics that once constituted the Soviet Union, the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan threatens the secular nature and, in the eyes of U.S. policymakers, the stability of those republics. One analyst has warned, for example, that several of the Muslim republics, particularly neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, are fearful that the establishment of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan may threaten the survivability of their own largely secular forms of government.19 Moreover, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif indicated in January 1992 that his country, once the staging area for the majority of U.S. paramilitary assistance to the mujahedin, was not bound by the 1991 superpower agreement. Fearful that a new Afghani government may look to India for support, both the Pakistani military and intelligence services continue to press for active involvement in determining the nature of the post-Najibullah regime.20 “As much as, if not more than, the former Soviet Union, Afghanistan is threatened with economic collapse and ethnic and sectarian conflict,” explained one analyst underscoring the explosive potential for even greater levels of regional conflict. “Combined with the coming crisis of the international state system in Central Asia and the escalation of tensions between nuclear-armed adversaries on the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan threatens to become part of a regionwide challenge to world peace.”21

A further point to consider is that even a negotiated outcome among the various mujahedin factors is unlikely to yield a democratic government in the Western tradition, even though both the Reagan and the Bush administrations 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 now deceased leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, than to the democratic vision often portrayed by the White House. In fact, Pakistan’s leadership traditionally has supported the radical fundamentalist Hezb-e-Islami guerrilla faction’s bid to play a dominant leadership role in a post-Najibullah government.22 Even if the nationalist faction were to gain power, it too rejects the need for a pluralist-type democracy in the Western sense.

Finally, regardless of whether one approved or disapproved of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, the paramilitary program was in direct contradiction with another cornerstone of the Bush administration’s foreign policy in the Third World: the so-called “war on drugs.” In 1989 alone, those
areas in Afghanistan controlled by the U.S.-supported mujahedin were responsible for exporting nearly 700 tons of opium, making Afghanistan the world’s second largest exporter after Burma. One mujahedin leader, Nasim Akhunzada, was even known as the “heroin king” before his death.23 As is so often the case in covert activities such as paramilitary wars, the achievement of one objective (building up a guerrilla force to defeat a Soviet occupation force) demands involvement with unsavory individuals (such as drug traffickers) in a foreign policy trade-off having potentially devastating implications for the United States.

Cambodia and Continuing Conflict in Indochina

The Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia in December 1978 to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government of Pol Pot. As depicted in the world-renowned movie The Killing Fields, the Khmer Rouge headed an internationally denounced communist regime that had slaughtered nearly 1 million of its own people between 1975 and 1978. Originally welcomed by the Cambodian people, the Soviet-backed Vietnamese army installed a government under the leadership of Heng Samrin and, as late as 1989, continued to maintain an occupation force of approximately 70,000 troops on Cambodian soil to combat an antigovernment guerrilla insurgency. By September 1989, however, a variety of factors had led to the removal of all remaining Vietnamese troops (although some elite units were returned in October of that year); the financial drain on an already struggling economy to maintain an occupation force against a growing guerrilla insurgency (as seemed to be the case in the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan); pressures by Mikhail Gorbachev (Vietnam’s largest financial patron in 1989), who wished to extricate the Soviet Union from regional conflicts; and Vietnamese confidence in the ability of a new Cambodian regime headed by Prime Minister Hun Sen to maintain itself in power.

In events that roughly parallel the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, two factors contributed to an escalating civil conflict in Cambodia even after the Vietnamese troops were withdrawn. First, the array of guerrilla groups opposed to the Vietnamese occupation force formed a loose military coalition titled the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) and vowed to continue fighting until the “puppet” Cambodian regime was overthrown. The three major groups that formed this loose coalition were 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 Prince Norodom Sihanouk (boasting 18,000 guerrillas); and the feared Khmer Rouge, led by Khieu Samphan (controlling between 40,000 and 50,000 guerrilla troops).

The overall military objective of the CGDK enjoyed a large degree of regional support, with various guerrilla factions receiving economic and mili-
tary aid from such diverse countries as the PRC (which supports the Khmer Rouge) and Thailand (whose territory borders Cambodia), as well as from regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (which backs the noncommunist factions of the resistance). Compared to the exceptional degree of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, however, the U.S. commitment to the CGDK was rather limited. The Reagan administration implemented a paramilitary program subsequently continued by the Bush administration that gradually increased the levels of nonlethal 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, largely funneled through neighboring Thailand, was complemented by nearly $3.5 million a year in overt aid as authorized by Congress through the Solarz Amendment in 1985. U.S. military support for the guerrillas was cautious to say the least—obviously because of the still-strong memory of past U.S. intervention in Indochina. And when it became clear that U.S. aid had violated congressional restrictions by contributing to the growing military success of the Khmer Rouge, Congress in April 1991 suspended U.S. aid to all of the guerrilla factions.

A second factor clouding the initially welcomed withdrawal of Vietnamese troops was the continuation of a proxy war—with Cambodia as the battlefield—between a variety of foreign powers. The Soviet Union and Vietnam backed the Hun Sen regime as an ally in their historical competition with China for influence within the region. It is precisely for this historical reason that the PRC backed the pro-Beijing Khmer Rouge, regardless of how murderous its leaders had been when in control of Cambodia before 1978. Similarly, Thailand backed all the guerrilla factions regardless of ideology, perceiving them as effective counterweights to an expansionist Vietnam. ASEAN and the United States backed the noncommunist factions of the CGDK.

The civil war by proxy tentatively came to an end on October 23, 1991, when all four Cambodian belligerents signed a UN-enforced peace treaty brokered by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the PRC. Among the major elements of the treaty already in place by January 1992 were the maintenance of a cease-fire (that took effect the day the treaty was signed); the termination of all foreign arms supplies to military factions within Cambodia; and the creation of a twelve-member Supreme National Council, a national body composed of representatives from each of the four Cambodian military factions that is to serve as a transitional administration until unsupervised elections are held in 1993. As in the case of Afghanistan, the end of the Cold War was a crucial factor leading to the October 1991 peace accord. A derivative element of this process was a greater willingness on the part of China and Vietnam—the primary military supporters of the Khmer Rouge and the Hun Sen regime, respectively—to place pressure on their clients to negotiate in good faith for a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.
supports the Khmer Rouge, as well as from re- cast Asian Nations of the resistance), remain in Afghanistan, despite limited. The gram subsequently ceased the levels of the CGDK (KPNLF) and nearly $18 million in aid as by 1985. U.S. military obviously because of China. And when it restrictions by congress in 1985.

In the case of Afghanistan, several factors seemed to merit U.S. paramilitary aid to the guerrillas: (1) According to international law, the Vietnamese illegally invaded and occupied the country; (2) the Cambodian people desired a Vietnamese withdrawal; and (3) the Vietnamese occupation was denounced both regionally and within the international system. Explained one Defense Department official in 1991: “Despite the fact that we [the United States] played a somewhat minor role in providing covert military aid when compared to others, such as China, who were obviously more concerned with events in their immediate backyard, it was nevertheless the combination [emphasis added] of external aid from several quarters which achieved the diplomatic settlement.”

Despite the upbeat atmosphere that immediately followed the signing of the 1991 peace accords, two factors clouded the prospects of maintaining internal peace in Cambodia while seeking to carry out UN-supervised elections scheduled for 1993. First, the greatest dilemma for those seeking a non-communist solution in Cambodia is that the Khmer Rouge constitutes the military backbone of the former three-member guerrilla coalition and is continuing to consolidate its military hold over occupied territory. “As best anyone can tell, the Khmer Rouge are hiding equipment and people wherever they can,” explained one Western diplomat who was involved in the peace process. “There’s no way to detect a lot of it.” It is precisely for this reason that Congress, prior to the signing of the 1991 peace accord, passed legislation prohibiting the provision of any U.S. paramilitary aid to the communist factions (the Khmer Rouge) of the CGDK. As pointed out by critics of any paramilitary aid, however, strengthening two-thirds of the antigovernment guerrilla coalition (the KPNLF and the ANS) inevitably strengthened the other one-third (the Khmer Rouge) that was militarily dominant to begin with. As a result, the Khmer Rouge, rather than being isolated, remained a force to be reckoned with. “Listen, the Khmer Rouge is not made part of this peace agreement out of any belief that Pol Pot [reportedly in retirement] has reformed his ways,” explained another Western diplomat. “We involved the Khmer Rouge because they were the most powerful rebel group out there, and they could not be ignored.” In short, a major fear of foreign observers, and particularly Cambodians, is that past military aid and current political recognition within the peace process could lead to another government dominated by the Khmer Rouge. This scenario is perhaps the most important reason why, in sharp contrast to its major commitment to the mujahedin in Afghanistan, the United States was hesitant to commit significant sums of paramilitary aid to the guerrilla war in Cambodia.

A related problem with the peace process is the inherent incompatibility...
of the four Cambodian factions. During the duration of the guerrilla war from 1978 to 1991, one could discern little cooperation among the guerrilla groups, either militarily on the battlefield or in the political realm. In fact, in the military realm, the dominant trend was one of growing clashes between the Khmer Rouge and the noncommunist factions of the CGDK. This infighting not only hindered success on the battlefield as well as at the diplomatic bargaining table, it also threatens the current peace process. For example, upon his arrival in Phnom Penh on November 27, 1991, as part of the UNSponsored peace process, Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan was savagely beaten by Cambodians screaming “muderer!” and “kill the monster!” A legitimate question for Khmer Rouge leaders was whether the attack was spontaneous or part of a government-sponsored event to discredit further the former rulers of Cambodia. Indeed, several days earlier in a surprise announcement, the ruling Hun Sen regime announced the appointment of former enemy Prince Sihanouk as president of Cambodia, underscoring a new alliance apparently designed to isolate the Khmer Rouge. As each of the factions continues to jockey for political position, the ultimate success of the still-fragile peace accord—which, by necessity, requires the full cooperation of the Khmer Rouge—is anything but assured.

Angola and Paramilitary Aid to Savimbi's UNITA Forces

The military conflict in Angola was a continuation of the 1975 civil war in which the Soviet- and Cuban-backed MPLA emerged victorious over the FNLA and UNITA guerrilla factions, both of which had been supported by the United States. At the end of 1988, the MPLA government continued to rely on approximately 50,000 Cuban troops and over 1,000 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 achieve military supremacy on the battlefield, the combined UNITA–South African forces were able to decimate Angola’s economy in a guerrilla war that by 1986 reportedly had cost the Angolan government close to $15 billion that otherwise could have been spent on development.

The United States played an extremely important paramilitary role in what became another proxy war within the East-West framework of the Cold War. The Reagan administration, denouncing Angola as a Soviet puppet and portraying Savimbi as a democratic freedom fighter, was handed congressional repeal of the Clark Amendment in 1985, an action that thereby removed a major obstacle to providing military aid to UNITA under the auspices of the Reagan Doctrine. Congress subsequently voted that same year to authorize the president to extend $15 million in covert paramilitary aid on a yearly basis to UNITA, a figure that had grown to approximately $60 million in annual aid under the Bush administration. The paramilitary aid,
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army role in e work of the Cold Soviet puppet and, was handed ution that thereby UNITA under the led that same year paramilitary aid on approximately $60 paramilitary aid, including Stinger antiaircraft missiles, was funneled to UNITA forces through Zaire and, to a lesser degree, South Africa. The primary goals of U.S. involvement were to achieve the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola and pressure the MPLA to accept a power-sharing role with UNITA.

The resolution of South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, a former League of Nations Trust Territory that acted as a buffer between southern Angola and northern South Africa, was a critical component of early diplomatic efforts designed to seek the removal of Cuban troops—the most important goal of the Reagan administration. Because South Africa had repeatedly used Namibia to invade Angola, the bargaining position of the MPLA was 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 had resisted international pressures to grant Namibia independence, for fear that the Angola-based and Marxist-oriented South West People's Organization (SWAPO) would dominate free elections and pose a direct security threat to South Africa's northern frontier.

The stumbling block of Namibian independence was resolved by diplomatic means in 1988. On July 20 of that year, 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 the withdrawal of Cuban troops. This initial step was enhanced by a preliminary peace accord outlined on November 15, 1988, that mapped out a timetable for the simultaneous withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola and Namibia, respectively, and acceptance of a U.N-sponsored plan for Namibian independence. On December 22, 1988, these positions were formalized by the signing of two agreements known as the Namibia and the Angola Accords. Hailed as a success by both critics and supporters of the Reagan administration's policies in southern Africa, these accords led to the independence of Namibia on March 21, 1990, and the removal of all remaining Cuban troops in Angola by June of that year.

The 1988 accords were clouded, however, by the lack of comprehensive negotiations over external aid to UNITA guerrillas or the issue of national reconciliation (i.e., power sharing) between the MPLA and UNITA (the second major goal of U.S. paramilitary support for Savimbi's forces). The Namibia Accord, signed by Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, alluded 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 keeping with the accord, announced its intention to cease aiding UNITA, the Reagan and Bush administrations pledged continued U.S. aid to Savimbi's forces. For its part, the Angolan government incorrectly believed that once Namibia was
independent, the question of UNITA would be more easily dealt with militarily than through some type of political compromise that decreased the power of the MPLA. In short, the examples of Afghanistan and Cambodia had another parallel: The withdrawal of foreign forces (in this case Cuban and South African) left in place a continuing civil conflict. At the end of 1990, Moscow was still supporting the MPLA with approximately 1,100 advisers and $800 million in economic and military aid, a figure unmatched by the much smaller amount of $60 million in U.S. covert paramilitary aid to UNITA forces.34

The delicate issue of resolving Angola’s internal civil war through some sort of power-sharing agreement was tentatively resolved on May 31, 1991, when President José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola and Savimbi signed a peace agreement brokered by Portugal, the former colonial power. Under the terms of the agreement, both sides agreed to (1) abide by an informal military truce that went into effect on May 15; (2) build a unified armed force; and (3) support the creation of a multiparty political system in preparation for UN-monitored free elections in 1992.35 As in the case of Afghanistan and Cambodia, the end of the Cold War was a crucial factor leading to the May 1991 peace accord. For example, whereas the decline of single-party rule in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union led to the dramatic rise in popular pressures for multiparty democracy in Angola and throughout Africa, in essence forcing the MPLA and other African leaders to seek compromise or risk being swept out of office, Savimbi had to confront the growing reality of decreasing funds from the United States as policymakers sought to capitalize on the “peace dividend” associated with the end of the Cold War. Toward this end, the U.S. Congress earmarked only $30 million in aid to UNITA for 1992 with the restriction that it be used only for transforming the guerrilla movement into a political party.36

Similar to U.S. pronouncements related to the 1988 peace accord, the 1991 agreement effectively ending Angola’s bloody civil war was hailed as a victory for U.S. foreign policy and, implicitly, U.S. financial support for a paramilitary war between 1986 and 1991. “Once adversaries in war, you now stand together as partners in peace,” announced an obviously pleased Secretary of State Baker. “You have the opportunity to show the world that a multiparty democracy can be built where before there was only destruction and distrust.”37 As one indication of the likely success of the 1991 accord, State Department officials underscored the incident-free return of Savimbi to Luanda, the capital of Angola, on September 29, 1991 (after sixteen years of self-imposed exile fighting in the countryside), to prepare for presidential elections in 1992.38

Although clearly supportive of the 1991 peace accord, critics of U.S. paramilitary involvement in Angola from the 1970s to the 1990s fundamentally questioned the assumed “successes” of administration policies from Nixon to Bush. First, U.S. support for Savimbi was fraught with
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e on the major problem tarnishing Savimbi’s guerrilla struggle (and U.S. foreign policy by association) was his obvious initial 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. Second, contradictory U.S. policies sent confusing diplomatic signals to both South Africa and black African countries: Whereas adoption of comprehensive economic sanctions in 1986 underscored U.S. opposition to South Africa’s system of apartheid, support for UNITA, by association, supported South Africa’s regional policies of destabilization.

The greatest irony of U.S. support for the current power-sharing agreement 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 just as likely), intervention on the part of the United States and others 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 for its policies in Africa. In short, explain the critics of the Reagan/Bush paramilitary policy in Angola, the 1991 peace accord largely constitutes the implementation of the accord that was shattered in 1975.

Nicaragua and the Contra War

Anastacio 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. Declaring their allegiance to the major cornerstones of Marxism-Leninism, the Sandinistas gradually centralized control over Nicaragua’s political system, established close ties 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 Hemisphere. Perceiving Nicaragua as a beachhead for Soviet-led communist destabilization throughout Central America, U.S. officials made support for the contras into 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 El 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. This policy was continued by the Bush administration after it assumed office in 1989.

The multifaceted low-intensity warfare campaign against the Sandinistas included elements of economic destabilization, military psychological warfare, propaganda warfare, and, most important for this chapter, paramilitary intervention. Because these matters are extensively discussed in Chapter 16, this section is limited to brief highlights of some of the problems faced by the Reagan and Bush administrations in the pursuit of this policy. First, of the four paramilitary wars implemented under the banner of the Reagan Doctrine, 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 purpose of interdicting arms flows into El Salvador), Congress on February 8, 1988, prohibited any future military aid to the contra effort. These congressional cutbacks mirrored international opinion: Not only was the Reagan administration’s contra policy declared illegal by the International Court of Justice, it was opposed by the majority of Nicaraguans and disputed by a significant number of nations within Central America as well as within the international system. It was precisely because of the lack of domestic support that the administration pursued what many have agreed was an illegal, covert extension of the contra war that not only contravened the spirit, if not the letter, of laws passed by Congress, but led to a crisis of leadership for the Reagan administration that came to be known as the Iran-contra affair. According to the Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, administration actions demonstrated a “disdain for the law” that challenged the basic checks and balances of the U.S. Constitution.

An equally important problem associated with the paramilitary war was that the contras themselves suffered several shortcomings that limited the effectiveness of their organization as a viable alternative to the Sandinista regime: Few, if any, of the contra leaders were respected in Nicaragua; they were unable to enunciate an attractive alternative program of government; and they were discredited by continued atrocities in the rural areas. Nonetheless, the massive destruction wrought by the paramilitary campaign during the 1980s was unquestionably a contributing factor that led to the massive defeat of the Sandinistas in free elections held in Nicaragua on February 25, 1990. However, a critical point of debate between proponents and critics is whether the paramilitary campaign was the crucial element leading to the holding of elections and the defeat of the Sandinistas. Although several proponents of the paramilitary war (such as Lt. Col. Oliver North) underscored the electoral victory of President Violeta Chamorro as a vindication of the Reagan administration’s efforts, critics can just as easily argue that U.S. paramilitary sup-
Paramilitary Intervention

in the Sandinista regime. This influence was substantial, as the Sandinistas were supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, but the economic and political pressure from the United States and its allies 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 during the 1980s. As a result, these critics could argue, the paramilitary war only delayed what might have been earlier elections and, perhaps, just as resounding a defeat for the Sandinistas. "In truth," explains Kornbluh (Chapter 16) in a contribution to this debate, "the elections resulted from a Costa Rica-sponsored peace process that Washington repeatedly tried to sabotage, and were scheduled only after Congress finally cut off contra aid over the Reagan administration's bitter objections."

■ PARAMILITARY INTERVENTION IN PERSPECTIVE

Drawing upon the case studies of U.S. paramilitary intervention in the Third World from the Truman to the Bush administrations, one can discuss several tentative conclusions about the efficacy of this interventionist tool. First, it is clear that paramilitary intervention can be highly effective if the goal is to harass or otherwise disrupt the normal political or economic proceedings of a Third World country. For example, there is no doubt that support for UNITA contributed to the severe disruption of Angola's economy and that support for Tibetan guerrillas delayed China's consolidation of control over disputed territory. In fact, the critical premise of paramilitary warfare—inflicting severe casualties on a target country without incurring any of your own—was borne out by the varying impacts of the Reagan Doctrine. In addition to the hundreds of thousands killed or wounded in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Nicaragua during the 1980s, it has been estimated that 341,000 people (mostly civilians) were killed in Angola alone from 1975 to 1991. Sadly, Angola has the macabre distinction of being the "amputee" center of the world (with over 50,000 victims) as a result of the extensive use of land mines during the guerrilla war.41

If the goal of paramilitary intervention is to overthrow militarily 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 was the case when the United States attempted to overthrow leftist revolutionary regimes (such as Nicaragua's Sandinistas or Cuba under Castro) that initially enjoyed a large degree of popular support. Rather than overthrowing these types of regimes, U.S. intervention seemingly only served to stifle 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
evidenced by the Soviet Union's withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan—
regardless of the domestic configuration of a future Afghani regime—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, was not the
level of external aid but rather the widespread support that the guerrilla
insurgency enjoyed among the Afghani people. As is shown by the case of
the contra war in Nicaragua, large infusions of external aid were insufficient
to achieve a military victory when the majority of the population rejected the
legitimacy of the paramilitary group.

As demonstrated by the long-term application of the Reagan Doctrine,
the time factor and the willingness to maintain high levels of aid played
significant roles in bringing an opponent to the bargaining table. For
example, the tremendous costs associated with extended paramilitary wars in
Angola and Nicaragua inevitably played a part in prompting the MPLA and
the Sandinistas to consider some form of power sharing with their
opponents. This does not mean, however, that the foreign-sponsored
paramilitary wars played the crucial role in the decision to negotiate. Of equal
if not greater importance was the decline of a countervailing power (the
Soviet Union) willing to provide both regimes with military and economic
aid to stem the advances of counterrevolutionary forces.

The potentially contradictory short-term and long-term effects of
paramilitary intervention also 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
offered them little alternative—especially when confronting externally
supplied guerrilla forces—than to seek even closer relationships 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 anticommmunist guerrillas as democratic
freedom fighters. As already stated, the final outcomes of paramilitary
struggles in both Afghanistan and Cambodia could entail radical Islamic
fundamentalist and pro-Chinese communist governments in those two
too can it be tion army. As Afghanistan—i regime—the tive regional ally untenable r, was not the guerrilla by the case of re insufficient on rejected the gan Doctrine, of aid played ng table. For military wars in MPLA and ng with their gn-sponsored tiate. Of equal ng power (the and economic m effects of in the case of ng communist timately to be rest relations tion provided Angola, Cuba, exist regimes ng externally s with Eastern ng to achieve, foreign policy other may be s concerns the U.S.-supported dministration, s democratic paramilitary dical Islamic 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 insurgency that has yet to reach its full conclusion. A democratic outcome in Angola or Nicaragua also was highly unlikely if either the contras or UNITA were to have gained power, although it may be argued that these regimes would at least have been 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 were 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 have provided 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.