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Introduction

Weak states are and have always been inviting targets for the attention of competing great powers, especially when the weak state occupies a geopolitically significant position. Whether this significance is derived from access to trade routes, control over material resources, or other factors of strategic importance to the competing powers, the opportunity to bolster its position by exerting influence over a weak state is tempting for any power that has the means to do so. While competition over weak states has been a constant feature of the international system for centuries, nations have diversified their strategies for exerting influence beyond their own borders. Outright military force is still used, but states often rely on other means. One of the most popular and potentially most destabilizing strategies that states utilize is funding armed groups within the target state. These militant groups are often used as proxies, allowing a strong state to project influence in a weak state without actually going to war. This thesis will attempt to investigate the factors that impact the states’ choice of strategy in competition for influence within weak states. Specifically, it will test whether regime type influences the likelihood that a strong state will sponsor armed groups in a weak state where it is trying to exert influence.

Examples of powers striving to exert influence over weaker states abound throughout history. In fact, one could argue that competition for influence comprises the bulk of the strategic efforts of great powers. War is relatively rare, but the competition for influence among great powers is constant. This phenomenon
has been occurring since at least the dawn of European colonialism, as European nations competed with each other for influence over the comparatively weak states of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Perhaps the best example of this competition came in the nineteenth century, when the comparatively liberal British and the authoritarian Russian governments played the “Great Game,” competing over Central Asia’s crucial trade routes. The two great powers jockeyed for influence, Russia vying for a port on the Black Sea and Britain jealously guarding the northern frontier of its Indian possessions, without ever directly controlling the states of Central Asia. Over one hundred years later, Afghanistan’s weak central government is subject to the contending efforts of the US, Russia, China, Iran, India, and Pakistan – all trying to ensure optimal strategic returns in a weak, but geopolitically crucial country. Once again, the powers competing have a diverse set of regime types, ranging from the democratic US to authoritarian Iran. Between the Great Game era and present day, there have been countless other examples of great power competition over weak states, whether it is Russia and Europe vying for influence over Eastern Europe, Cold War struggles in Asia, or more localized conflicts such as the competition between Ethiopia and Eritrea over Somalia.

If the question of whether or not regime type affects a state’s influence exertion strategies can be answered, the implications would have significant academic and practical significance. Realists would expect states to determine their strategies for influence exertion based purely on strategic factors such as proximity and means, while liberal institutionalists would expect that democratic states would be more likely to encourage the promotion of strong institutions within weak states
and to attempt to bring weak states into international institutions. The results of this investigation will thus represent an important contribution to the ongoing debate between these two perennial schools of thought. Practically, if it can be shown that regime type has a significant effect on the likelihood that a state will exert influence through armed proxies, policymakers in powerful states would gain a greater understanding of the strategies with which they are likely to compete while attempting to gain influence in contested states. Moreover, if democracies are less likely to support disruptive armed groups, this may imply that weak states subject to the influence of democratic powers may in time be more likely to become well-functioning nations.

This thesis will first review the existing literature on state behavior as it relates to influence exertion, and show how my research will make a significant contribution to this literature. I will then develop a theoretical mechanism to justify my hypotheses that democratic regimes will be less likely to fund armed groups as a means of influence projection, while authoritarian regimes will be more likely to do so. Next, I will explain my proposed methodology for testing this thesis in the context of three time periods in the history of Afghanistan. Then I will analyze the three cases themselves, examining the strategies of states competing over Afghanistan in an effort to find support for my hypothesis. Finally, I will conclude, discussing the limitations of my research and possible avenues for future research.
Literature Review

While there is a dearth of research on the way states exert influence in relation to regime type, there is some literature on the different types of strategies that states may pursue – including democracy promotion, economic aid, and sponsoring violent groups as proxies. Reviewing the literature on these three strategies will be fruitful, as I will then be able to draw inferences about their possible relation to regime type. First, however, it is necessary to survey the literature available on the different theoretical perspectives and their proposed strategies for the maintenance of state power.

Miller lays out the main distinctions in international relations thought, dividing the dominant schools into four camps: offensive realists, defensive realists, offensive liberals, and defensive liberals. According to Miller’s typology, offensive realists emphasize the maintenance of hegemony as the key to preserving a peaceful order (and consequently a state’s power within that order). They do not believe that it is possible to substantially change the intent of another threat, and thus they would expect states to use any means possible to strengthen their power and mitigate threats from others, regardless of regime type. Defensive realists, in contrast, advocate the maintenance of a stable balance of power, and generally advocate abstention from the affairs of other countries while building up defensive capabilities. Miller emphasizes that neither camp of realists believes that institutions or regime types affect state intentions substantially, and thus they would expect states to use whatever strategy works best to further their own
interests regardless of regime type.\textsuperscript{1} If realists are correct, then, there would be no correlation between regime type and influence strategy selection.

Liberals disagree with realists and believe that state intentions can be changed through the spread of democratic and liberal institutions. Defensive liberals believe this is best done through the integration of states into international collective security institutions such as the UN or more region-specific institutions. Thus defensive liberals would focus on pursuing strategies that promote the economic and political integration of weak states into liberal institutions as the best way to maximize the interests of democratic states. Offensive liberals also support such efforts, but have less faith in their power alone and thus would prefer to combine them with “forced democratization” through military intervention or economic sanctions. Both camps of liberals would expect democratic powers to exert influence by promoting democratic institutions, but offensive realists might combine these strategies with other more aggressive strategies.\textsuperscript{2} Armed intervention by the United States in Vietnam, Korea, and Iraq could serve as examples of these offensive realist actions. Nevertheless, these were direct military actions, and there is no literature dealing with the possibility that offensive realists could be inclined to use proxy violent groups as a strategy for influence projection, and my thesis will investigate this possibility. Miller’s offensive/defensive and realist/liberal distinctions will be helpful in analyzing the strategies that states might choose to exert influence, as each school of thought provides a set of


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
strategies that states may follow. My study will fill a gap in the literature by determining whether regime type causes states to follow the strategies of one of these four theoretical camps more frequently.

One important factor in choosing influence strategies is the empirical finding that democracies do not fight each other (“the democratic peace”). There is a large body of literature on the democratic peace, in which scholars have suggested several causal mechanisms for this result. Bueno de Mesquita et al. argue that democratic leaders face a larger selectorate, and thus need to provide public goods (goods that benefit all citizens) to stay in power. Since victory in war is a public good, democratic leaders are only likely to engage in wars that they can win, while autocratic leaders can lose a war and still distribute spoils to their smaller selectorates and stay in power. Mousseau advances a similar argument but couches it in economic terms, finding that when the effect of contract-rich economies is controlled for, the correlation between democracies and peace goes away. Since the democratic peace means that democracies would be less likely to face a threat if the target state becomes a democracy, it would give democratic states a strong incentive to pursue strategies of democracy promotion, rather than destabilizing strategies such as arming militias. As mentioned above, however, states following the precepts of offensive liberalism may combine peaceful democracy promotion with more aggressive actions. Enterline and Greig examined this behavior, and found that

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3 Ibid.
imposed democracy is correlated with both decreased regional war and increased economic growth. This would seem to confirm that offensive liberal states can reap benefits from imposing democracy. Enterline and Greig’s conclusion only held, however, in cases where the state in which the target state became fully democratic, as imposed democracies that were only weakly democratic did not see the same benefits.6

The dependent variables considered in this thesis will be the influence exertion strategies that states choose. The first possible influence exertion strategy considered is peaceful democracy promotion. The broad heading of “democracy promotion”, however, encapsulates methods ranging from peaceful diplomacy to military intervention. Since this thesis focuses on states exerting influence by methods other than war, we are most interested in democracy promotion by peaceful means. There is a sizable literature on democracy promotion by force, but relatively little has been written about democracy promotion by peaceful means. In general, the scholarly consensus is that a state’s conversion to democracy is more likely to come about due to domestic factors rather than external influences.7 There are suggestions, though, that external factors may also play a role in the development of democracy. Whitehead suggests that these factors can be classified into three categories: contagion, or the spread of democratic ideas from nearby democracies, control, or the imposition of democratic practices by a third party, and

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consent, or the internal decision to promote democracy in response to external incentives, such as requirements to join an organization like the European Union.\textsuperscript{8} Although the literature that exists on democracy promotion is split on the strategy’s efficacy, it does suggest that democracies, supplemented by the NGOs and the international organizations that they support, would be most likely to use this strategy.\textsuperscript{9}

Another possible strategy for influence exertion is foreign aid. There is substantial literature on foreign aid, but most of it focuses on the recipient states rather than donor states. If democratic states hope to use foreign aid to promote democratic behavior in recipient states, however, the literature shows that these attempts are empirically likely to fail. Knack has found that there is no correlation between foreign aid and democratization, while Nowak-Lehmann et al. conclude that foreign aid is not correlated to an increase in exports to donor countries.\textsuperscript{10} Sullivan et al. have even shown that US foreign aid and recipient state cooperation are inversely related.\textsuperscript{11} Even conditional aid is questionable, as Montinola finds that foreign aid conditionality only has an effect on recipient state action when the recipient state is already democratic.\textsuperscript{12} We would expect that states pursuing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9}Schraeder, Peter J.
\item \textsuperscript{12}Montinola, Gabriella R. “When Does Aid Conditionality Work?” \textit{Studies in Comparative International Development} 45, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 358–82. doi:10.1007/s12116-010-9068-6.
\end{itemize}
defensive liberal strategies would be most likely to use foreign aid, although states following realist strategies could use conditional aid as well in order to coerce states. The literature suggests that foreign aid is a futile strategy either way. Nevertheless, states continue to use it, and as the literature sheds little light on whether the choice to donate foreign aid is correlated with regime type in the donor state, foreign aid could be a fruitful area for further research.

The final strategy that states may pursue is arming extremist groups in hopes of influencing affairs in a target weak state. Violent groups are often used to conduct proxy wars, and they have the potential to both destabilize target states and draw outside powers into conflict with each other. These realities make funding armed groups the strategy with the most dire policy consequences, and as such the strategy that I will be focusing on in this thesis. Although most examples of this strategy’s use in the present day come from autocracies or mixed regimes (Iran and Pakistan being two prime examples), the literature suggests that this correlation may be due to environmental factors rather than regime type. Yeisley points out that the US, a democracy, funded armed groups during the cold war and suggests that proxy warfare may be a feature of bipolar systems where the cost of all-out war is too high for either power to undertake. Conrad finds that states engaged in enduring rivalries are more likely to be victims of state-sponsored terrorism, suggesting that the choice to fund extremist groups may stem from strategic factors

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rather than regime type.\textsuperscript{14} While we might expect realists to be more likely to arm extremist proxies, the literature suggests that the decision to do so is more dependent on situational factors than regime type. To date, there is no literature explicitly testing whether regime type influences a state's propensity to fund armed groups in order to project influence, and as such my thesis will address a gap in the literature.

Overall, there little literature connecting regime type and influence exertion strategies, but the inferences from the literature on specific strategies suggests that there may not be a correlation. However, liberal theories of international relations would suggest that democratic states would endeavor to promote democracy in weak states. This is complicated, however, by the fact that countries pursuing offensive liberal strategies may also engage in military intervention as a form of democracy promotion. This literature review thus suggests that the two main tasks of this thesis will be to control for the effect of situational variables on strategy selection and to determine whether regime type causes states to pursue strategies more in line with a certain theoretical school of thought. If the thesis can determine whether regime type influences a state's propensity to fund armed groups while taking situational factors into account, it will be a significant contribution to the literature.

Theory

In this thesis, I hypothesize that more democratic powers will be less likely to fund armed groups as a strategy for influence exertion, as a result of pressure to choose strategies that would encourage more stability, such as economic aid and democracy promotion. In contrast, more authoritarian regimes will attempt to exert influence by supporting violent proxy groups, as they are unaffected by many of the constraints that face a democratic regime. There are three mechanisms that could cause democratic regimes to eschew funding violent groups as a means to exert influence: international norms, self-interest, and domestic political considerations.

States that are more democratic tend to place more value on upholding international norms, as defined by institutions like the United Nations. The UN, as the most important international institution, plays an important role in ensuring that international norms favor a democratic environment. It does this through its structure as a democratic organization itself, by creating norms through international laws that promote human rights and democracy, and by actively promoting democracy through electoral assistance. The Warsaw Declaration, which committed signatories representing over half the world’s countries to promoting and strengthening democracy around the world, provides further evidence for the dominant place of democracy in today’s international norms. In order to keep their place as respected members of the community of democracies that currently dominates global norms, democratic powers have incentives to take

15 Schraeder, Peter J.
16 Ibid.
actions that would promote democracy and avoid actions that would bring condemnation. Economic aid, for example, is generally accepted and encouraged by the international community, while sponsoring violent groups is not. Thus, democratic states may be less likely to support armed proxies due to a desire to conform to international norms. Authoritarian states, the leaders of which are less likely to value international acceptance as a form of gaining legitimacy since they are already operating outside the dominant democratic norms, may adopt strategies of influence exertion that are less likely to have an overall stabilizing effect.

Even if they are not motivated by a desire to follow international norms, democracies may pursue stabilizing forms of influence projection and refrain from funding armed groups purely out of their own self-interest. Democracies generally do not go to war with each other, and thus turning a weaker state into a democracy would reduce the chances that the weak state could become a military threat to the stronger state in the future. Democracies do fight autocracies, however, so an autocratic power would have no incentive to promote democracy out of a desire to avoid war with the weak state. Moreover, encouraging economic development and open institutions may set the weak state on a path to joining the international system of free trade. Milner and Kubota have found that democratization of a government reduces the ability of a government to erect trade barriers, leading to an empirical correlation between democracy and trade openness.\[^17\] Therefore, the promotion of democratic, stable economies in weak states could open new markets

and thus enhance the economic prospects of powerful democracies. Overall, encouraging the growth of a stable democracy in a weak state may turn the weak state into an ally and trading partner, both of which would be beneficial for strong democracies. Perpetuating conflict inside a country via support for armed proxies would be detrimental to these goals, and thus self-interest may drive democracies to avoid this strategy. Authoritarian states, in contrast, are less likely to reap the benefits of a stable environment in the weak state, as they are often less engaged in international trade networks. In addition, autocratic leaders less likely to be deposed due to changes in the lives of those that they rule. Thus, their power and wealth are not as dependent on the success of their country as a whole. They may thus have less of an incentive to pursue stabilizing strategies that would benefit the whole country economically, preferring to focus on their own personal wealth. With less to gain from a stable environment, autocracies may be more likely to perceive funding armed groups as a viable strategy for advancing their interests.

Finally, leaders of democracies are more sensitive to changes in domestic opinion, as they have to be re-elected to stay in power. Mesquita’s selectorate theory helps to explain this reality. Authoritarian leaders are responsible to only a small selectorate, and authoritarian leaders can often stay in power with the support of a small winning coalition comprised of military leaders, who are less likely to be opposed to funding armed groups. In contrast, democratic leaders are responsible to a larger selectorate, and need to keep the support of a majority of voters. In order to win an election, democratic leaders often emphasize foreign policy values.

of freedom and nonviolence that are likely to appeal to a large electorate. When a democracy funds a violent group, public knowledge of this action may cause a backlash, as the public perceives the leader to be breaking his or her stated principles and going against the ethos of the democratic nation. History shows that funding armed groups may be detrimental to the political prospects of the leader of a democracy if made public. The Iran-Contra scandal, in which the Reagan administration in the US was politically damaged by revelations that it had armed rebel groups in order to augment US influence in the weak state of Nicaragua, is a prominent example of this phenomenon. Cognizant of this lack of public support for such actions, democratic leaders may naturally tend towards more stabilizing strategies to assert their influence. As discussed above, authoritarian leaders are often less dependent on the opinion of their people for their power. Thus, authoritarian leaders may be less hesitant to fund armed groups as such actions have less impact on their chances of staying in power.

In addition, Mesquita’s framework also predicts that authoritarian regimes are more likely to enter wars that they may not win, and that democracies “try harder” once they are in a war. This is because democratic leaders need to deliver public goods in the form of wartime victories in order to maintain the support of a majority of the selectorate. Authoritarian leaders, in contrast, merely need to secure enough goods from war to keep their smaller winning coalition happy, and these can often take the form of spoils rather than outright victory.\(^{19}\) Although this theory relates to direct use of force by states, it could reasonably be extended to the

\(^{19}\)Ibid.
funding of armed groups. Supporting armed groups does not generally allow a state to win a war outright, but it may produce either spoils or more favorable outcomes for a leader. Thus, authoritarian leaders may be more likely to fund armed groups in an effort to please their smaller winning coalition, while democratic leaders may be unlikely to do so because proxy armed groups cannot deliver the same public goods that an outright military victory can.

In essence, these theoretical mechanisms follow the liberal framework. It hypothesizes that democracies believe that it is possible to change the intent of other states, and thus will attempt to bolster weak states and encourage them to become democracies as a means of promoting their own interests. It assumes that regime type can influence behavior, contradicting the realist position that state behavior is based solely on perceptions of threat and maximization of power. Thus, either proving or disproving the thesis proposed above would be valuable. If I prove the thesis, it will lend support to liberal theories of state behavior. On the other hand, if I disprove the thesis, realist theories of state behavior will seem more accurate.

The three causal mechanisms outlined above suggest that democratic powers will be more likely to try to exert influence by promoting democracy and stable environments in weak states. Since armed conflict is detrimental to these goals, the theoretical justifications above suggest that democracies will be less likely to fund violent groups as a means of exerting influence. In addition to destabilizing the target state, such activity goes against international norms and public opinion, with which democracies are often more concerned. In contrast, authoritarian regimes are
less constrained by public opinion and international norms, and are often less open to trade, thus removing any incentive to stabilize the target state economy. This analysis produces my thesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Democratic states will be less likely to fund violent groups in target states.*
Analysis

In order to test these hypotheses, the thesis will examine a group of three case studies, all in Afghanistan. The country of Afghanistan has been a fairly weak state throughout most of history. Its strategically located position astride the trade routes of Central Asia has made it a bone of contention among larger powers for centuries. Thus, this thesis will examine three periods in Afghan history when the competition between great powers was particularly fierce. The three hypotheses above will be tested by analyzing the information available for each time period. Focusing on the same target state, in periods in which different great powers were engaged in competition, will allow me to control for factors that could otherwise confound the analysis. Since the target state is the same, variables such as geography and demographics within Afghanistan will not affect the strategies chosen by powerful states. The drawback of this approach is that my results will not necessarily be applicable beyond Afghanistan. Even as focusing on Afghanistan controls for other factors such as geography, it also opens the possibility that those same factors could produce a different result in another region. Nevertheless, given Afghanistan’s historical prominence as an arena of contestation and its relevance to policy debates today, I am confident that focusing on Afghanistan will yield useful results even with this caveat.

The first period that will be examined is the “Great Game” period in the nineteenth century. During this time, Great Britain and Russia competed for control over Afghanistan. Although neither state was a complete democracy in the modern
sense, Britain was certainly more democratic than Tsarist Russia. The methods used by these two great powers will thus be instructive and provide a meaningful test of the hypotheses. This period will likely prove the most difficult to measure, however, as it is the farthest in the past. Government records from this period will not be as complete, and I will thus most likely have to rely on existing historical analysis, supplemented if possible by official records of the time period. In addition, the means by which powers supported armed groups in this time period may have been different from the more recent case studies, and I may have to adjust my definition using the standards of the time. While this will be difficult, finding support for my hypotheses in a case so far in the past would argue for the robustness of my results.

Second, the thesis will examine events in Afghanistan during the 1970s, in the decade prior to the Soviet invasion. Afghanistan was a site for proxy Cold War competition between the United States and the USSR. Since the thesis is examining methods used by states short of war, it will focus on the period before war broke out, in which both states tried to influence affairs in Afghanistan. This period will thus provide another means to test the hypothesis, in the same environment but with different powers. Soviet Russia was an autocratic regime, but not the same type of regime as Tsarist Russia. The U.S., meanwhile, was a completely different power, more democratic and subject to different geographical realities than Great Britain. If parallels can be drawn between the strategies pursued by the U.S. and Britain, this will provide substantial evidence for a pattern in the behavior of democratic states.

Finally, I will consider the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. As the U.S. prepares to pull out this year, regional powers are vying for influence in the region.
This includes Pakistan, India, and China. These regimes run the spectrum from autocracy to democracy. Thus, their behavior will be an interesting test of the hypotheses. If the more democratic regimes pursue the behaviors predicted by the theory, then the hypotheses will have significant support.
Case Study: The Great Game, 1801-1907

In the 19th century, Afghanistan made its first appearance as one of the modern world’s crucial theaters of competition. As Britain and Russia, two of the age’s greatest powers, strove to expand their empires, it soon became apparent that Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia would become a flash point for potential conflict between the two. Situated between expansionist Russia and India, the British Empire’s most prized possession, Afghanistan occupied a geographically crucial position. It was also a land of the unknown, ruled by local kings and largely untouched by Western imperialism. Thus, it was almost inevitable that Russia and Britain would jockey for position over the critical territory. For an entire century, Russia and Britain vied for influence in Afghanistan, using spies, armies, and diplomats in a competition that has come to be known as the Great Game.

Russia

Russia’s drive to expand in Asia was rooted in events that happened long before the first British colonizers set foot in India. In the early 1200s, Mongol hordes led by Genghis Khan overran the various principalities occupying modern-day Russia and began two centuries of brutal rule that were disastrous for the Russian people. It may seem preposterous to claim that events of the 1200s affected national policy for Russia 600 years later, but it is a consensus view among historians that the Mongol experience has been crucial in shaping Russia’s worldview up to the
present day. As Peter Hopkirk put it, “rarely has an experience left such deep and
long-lasting scars on a nation’s psyche as this (the Mongol invasion) did on the
Russians.”\(^{20}\) The experience of subjugation by foreigners from the East left Russia
with a perpetual desire to expand and stave off the possibility of such an event
happening again, and the eventual collapse of the Mongol Empire cleared the way
for massive expansion across the 4,000 miles of Siberia and beyond.

As Russia came into its own right as a world power, it began to set its eyes
not only on Siberia, but on Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the ultimate prize – India.
The first Russian to make a move towards this goal was Peter the Great, who sent an
expedition to the central Asian Khanate of Khiva, with the goal of opening a path to
India. Peter’s force was decimated by the Khan, and Catherine the Great’s designs on
India were just as fruitless. In January of 1801, Czar Paul tried to persuade Napoleon
to join him in a daring overland strike on India, passing through Persia and
Afghanistan and trying to gain their allegiance along the way. A force of 2,000
Cossacks was actually raised for this endeavor, but they had no idea how dangerous
their route through the unforgiving high steppes of Central Asia would be. When
Czar Paul died in March, the Cossacks were recalled.\(^{21}\) Still, these early Russians
endeavors into Afghanistan, as a means to reach India, set into motion a constant
Russian advance across Central Asia for the century to come.

As the century unfolded, Russia’s primary interests became in defending
their territories in Central Asia. Their preferred method for doing so, however, was

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
to conquer another territory, thus expanding their frontiers farther and protecting the previously conquered territory. Russian Foreign Minister Gorchakov summed up the Russian mindset in the “Gorchakov Manifesto” of 1864. Gorchakov argued that “ambition plays a smaller role in than imperious necessity (in expansion) and the greatest difficulty is knowing where to stop.”22 In essence, the Russians viewed their expansion over “savage peoples” as an Asian version of the American concept of “Manifest Destiny”. The Russians were civilized, and they could only assure their safety against uncivilized savages by further expansion.23 Although Russians would have certainly loved to have it, there is little evidence that after the late 18th century the Russians had serious designs on India. Instead, it was this inexorable logic of expansion that made the Russians, as the British Viceroy of India George Curzon put it “as much compelled to go forward as the Earth is to circle the Sun.”24

In Afghanistan itself, Russian expansionism gave the Russians an interest in keeping the country divided among smaller local chiefs. Expanding was always easier without a unified power to resist Russian advances. To this end, Russia mainly pursued strategies of pressuring Afghanistan from the outside. The “classic great game strategy, which the Russians were to use again and again” was to first send envoys bearing gifts to local rulers, then secure and alliance, and eventually annex them outright.25 Over the course of the century, Russia applied this strategy by annexing or making protectorates the Khanates of Kokand, Bokhara, and Khiva,
and annexing the great cities of Tashkent, and Samarkand. These were all Central Asian states, whose occupation served the dual Russian purposes of expansion and pressuring Afghanistan. Russia’s other powerful means of external power was its alliance with Persia. Russia defeated Persia in an 1826 war, and from that point forward Persia served as a Russian client state. Russia often supported Persian armies in their forays into Afghanistan, and the Persians repeatedly threatened Herat, a key city in western Afghanistan that commanded the approaches to India.

Although it tried to pressure Afghanistan to keep the country weak, Russia also strove to maintain friendly relations with the government in Kabul. This was helpful in their endeavors elsewhere, and it also served as a useful way to keep pressure on the British, who repeatedly diverted resources to Afghanistan in response to perceived Russian diplomatic inroads. This Russian strategy usually took the form of intrepid Russian officers who were sent to the court of the Afghan Amir (ruler) in an attempt to win his friendship with gifts and offers of protection. The most notable of these was Captain Yan Vitkevich, who was sent to the court of Dost Mohammed in 1837. Although the British initially had more influence in Mohammed’s court, Vitkevich eventually won his favor. The Amir’s reception of Vitkevich angered the British to such a degree that they soon thereafter launched an invasion of Afghanistan to depose Dost Mohammed. In 1878, a similar pattern repeated itself as the Russians sent their General Stolietov to Kabul to negotiate a treaty with the Amir, Sher Ali. Again, the British took umbrage and set in motion a

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26 Yorke, Edmund.
27 Ibid.
28 Hopkirk, Peter.
chain of events leading to a second British invasion over Sher Ali’s refusal to apologize for hosting Stolietov. In both cases, the Russians recalled their diplomats before hostilities broke out, but in both cases their maneuvers deftly succeeded in provoking the British to invade Afghanistan out of fear of increased Russian influence.\textsuperscript{29} Although provoking the British may not have been an intentional Russian strategy, both wars caused the British to expend huge amounts of resources, and thus improved the relative Russian position.

\textbf{Britain}

We have seen how the Russian expansionist drive in Central Asia was rooted in history that had nothing to do with the British presence in India. From the British perspective, however, things looked very different. By 1800, the British East India Company had basically consolidated its hold over India, and the subcontinent was the most valued possession in Britain’s vast empire. As such, any threats to India were of vital concern to British interests. The first time that another imperial power threatened India it was France, not Russia, that was the object of concern. In 1797, Napoleon invaded Egypt, threatening to continue on to India once he had succeeded there. Although this invasion came to nothing, it alarmed the leaders of British India and caused them to focus on their own defense.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29} Yorke, Edmund.
\textsuperscript{30} Hopkirk, Peter.
Until 1815, no British thinkers really saw Russian expansion in Asia as a cause for alarm, and certainly not as a threat to India.\textsuperscript{31} As the 1820s progressed, however, the Russians defeated the Persians in the 1826 war, and signed the Treaty of Adrianople with Turkey in 1829, giving Russia a dominant position in the Near East. Given these Russian advances, a growing school of thought in Britain raised the alarm about Russian expansion as a threat to India. As explorers mapped the routes from Russian possessions to India, the British became increasingly worried about the status of Afghanistan, through which it appeared all invasion routes would have to pass. Lord Ellenborough, the President of the East India Company’s Board of Control, summed up British fears vis-à-vis Afghanistan, asserting, “If the Russians once occupy Cabul (sic) they may return there with the Indus in their front, until they have organized insurrection in our rear, and completely equipped their army.”\textsuperscript{32} Ellenborough’s position illustrates another British fear of the period, namely that Russian advances into Afghanistan could cause Britain’s Indian subjects to sense weakness and revolt.

Britain also had larger geopolitical interests in stopping Russian expansion into Afghanistan and Asia more broadly. In the 1800s, Britain was expanding the franchise and moving towards liberal free-market capitalism, while Russia was brutally repressing its citizenry and closing its markets. Thus, British public sentiment ran against Russia, which Britons saw as the antithesis of their liberal society. In fact, historian John Howes Gleason has argued that as a result, “antipathy toward Russia... soon became the most pronounced and enduring element in the

\textsuperscript{31} Fromkin, David.
\textsuperscript{32} Yorke, Edmund.
(Britain's) national outlook on the world beyond.” In addition to this broad anti-Russian sentiment, Britain was motivated by the fact that Russian advances towards the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf would threaten Britain’s dominance of the seas, the condition upon which its entire strength as a maritime empire rested. Finally, British policymakers feared that Russian expansion would lead to a collapse of the weak Asian Islamic regimes, in turn igniting imperial competition over the remnants that would likely cause a destructive war between great powers. In all, Britain's global position of strength, as well as her prized Indian possessions, would be threatened by Russian expansion into Afghanistan.

Accordingly, Britain’s interests in Afghanistan were twofold. First and foremost, Britain needed an Afghan government that was friendly to British interests. Second, the British had an enormous interest in bolstering the power of the central government in Kabul. A strong, stable state was preferable to a weak state splintered among local chiefs because only a strong state could effectively repel invasion by an outside power, namely Russia. In fact, Arthur Connolly, the first British officer sent to reconnoiter Afghanistan, concluded that if Afghans were united in hostility to an invader, “the difficulties of the march would be rendered well neigh insurmountable.” Thus, the maintenance of a strong and friendly Afghan state would be an effective defense for India, making the only route to the subcontinent all but impassable to Russia.

33 Fromkin, David.
34 Ibid.
35 Hopkirk, Peter.
As the century went on, two schools of thought as to how to achieve this goal emerged within Britain. The first was the “masterly inactivity” school, eventually led by Sir John Lawrence, the Governor-General of India starting in 1864. The adherents of this school believed that the best course would be to avoid substantial British ventures beyond India, letting the complex politics of Afghanistan keep Russia out essentially on their own. The other school, which more often dominated British policy, was the “forward school”. These thinkers advocated a more aggressive British approach, whereby Britain would control and perhaps even directly occupy Afghanistan.

Like the Russians, the British attempted to use diplomats to influence the Amirs of Afghanistan. Unlike the Russians, however, they more frequently resorted to direct military intervention in the effort to secure Afghanistan. This was first demonstrated in 1837, when a Russian-backed Persian army attacked the crucial city of Herat. The British were alarmed by this move, and formed the Tripartite Treaty between themselves, Ranjit Singh (the leader of the Sikh state), and Shah Suja, who was their chosen leader for Afghanistan. These combined forces invaded Afghanistan in 1838, with the aim of removing Dost Mohammed, who had accepted the Russian diplomat Vitkevich into his court, and replacing him with the more amenable Shah Suja. After the initial military success of this operation, Britain’s involvement became just as much a financial effort as a military one. By 1841, the British were spending a million pounds a year on Afghanistan. A large part of this money was going to subsidize Shah Suja’s increasingly corrupt court, as well as to pay the Eastern Ghilzai chiefs who controlled most of the mountain passes to
In this way, the British were both attempting to bolster a strong central
government in Kabul and hedging their bets by buying off local chiefs with sway
over crucial strategic areas.

In 1842, an Afghan rebellion ousted the British from the country and re-
installed Dost Mohammed on the throne. Interestingly, the Russians did not appear
to have had any direct involvement in this rebellion. By 1857, however, Britain had
signed a friendship treaty with their old enemy, Dost Mohammed. This
demonstrated how important good relations with the Afghan Amir were, as British
interests took precedence over historical animosity. By the 1870s, the Russians
were advancing again, annexing states on Afghanistan’s borders. By 1878, the
situation was becoming dire for Britain. Britain had refused to accept Russia’s gains
at the end of the Russo-Turkish war as codified in the Treaty of San Stefano, and in
an attempt to retaliate the Russians sent General Stolietov to press for a treaty with
Afghanistan. Lord Lytton, the new Viceroy of India and a strong adherent of the
“forward school”, pressed the Stolietov issue with Sher Ali (the Afghan Amir).
Lytton’s insistence turned the matter into one of imperial pride, and eventually
Britain demanded an apology from Ali for allowing Stolietov to visit his court, and
the permanent recognition of a British Mission in Kabul. When it became clear that
no such concessions were forthcoming, the British invaded once again. The second
Anglo-Afghan war essentially ended in a stalemate. Both wars, however, were

36 Yorke, Edmund.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
clear manifestations of the British need to make an ally out of the Afghan Amir, by force if necessary.

The Great Game finally concluded in 1907 when the British and the Afghans signed the Anglo-Russian Entente. In terms of Afghanistan, Britain essentially won the contest, as the two countries agreed that Britain would have control of Afghan internal policy, and Russia promised to stop interfering in Afghan affairs. No Afghans were present at the negotiations, so the ultimate deciding factor in this era’s struggle for Afghanistan was the relative strength of the two imperial powers. Still, as this narrative has revealed, moves made in Afghanistan affected this power balance, and Britain’s increased commitment of men and resources eventually allowed it to claim Afghanistan as a client state.

1801-1907: Conclusion

In terms of democratization, Britain and Russia were on divergent paths in the 1800s. Britain was not yet a democracy in the modern sense of the word, but it had an elected parliament that became more democratic as the century went on. The franchise was expanded in three separate reform acts throughout the century, and by 1884 the majority of males could vote. These measures were combined with the introduction of the secret ballot and anti-corruption laws that made Great Britain more democratic. Russia, on the other hand, was an absolute monarchy,

39 Fromkin, David.
and in fact moved further towards repression and autocracy as the century went on.41

Despite these differences in regime type, the strategies employed by each country in the Great Game were remarkably similar. Both Britain and Russia sought the friendship of the Amir of Afghanistan by sending envoys bearing gifts and promises of an alliance. Russia supplemented these diplomatic overtures with military aggression on Afghanistan’s periphery, both directly and also by using Persia as a client state. Britain, on the other hand, invaded Afghanistan twice to ensure that the sitting Amir was sympathetic to their interests. In addition, Britain expended large amounts of money propping up the governments of their chosen Amirs.

Although funding armed groups in the way that the Pakistanis and the Americans did later in Afghanistan was not an option for the players of the Great Game, their behavior is still instructive. Despite being a democracy, Britain did not have a preference for more peaceful means of projecting its influence. Instead, it strove for a stable and friendly Afghanistan by any means possible, including military force. Russia also used its military to expand in the region, but in Afghanistan itself it relied primarily on outside pressure and diplomatic overtures. Both sides used the options available to them, and it is hard to see how regime type played a substantial role in the policymaking process for either side.

41 Fromkin, David.
Case Study: Afghanistan, 1954-1989

The onset of the Cold War brought a new era of competition over Afghanistan. As the Soviet Union competed with the United States for influence and advantage worldwide, it was imperative that it shore up its position in its immediate neighborhood. The USSR sought to dominate most of the states in its immediate neighborhood, ensuring that they were controlled by client regimes that the Soviets could control. In 1956 and 1968, the Soviets proved that they were willing to use military force to ensure that the neighboring states of Hungary and Czechoslovakia stayed in their sphere of influence. By the late 1970s, Afghanistan had become the next neighbor of the USSR to rise to the forefront of Soviet strategic concerns. Although Afghanistan was also effectively a Soviet client state, political turmoil cast this status into jeopardy and turned Afghanistan into a prominent arena for Cold War competition. As the Soviets struggled to maintain their influence, the United States saw an opportunity to undermine Soviet power and jumped into the fray. Thus, a new era of competition over Afghanistan was inaugurated.

The USSR

The Soviet Union had been involved in Afghanistan since its very inception. In 1919, in an echo of the Great Game of the previous century, the Soviets supported an Afghan war against the British. Once Soviet-British ties were mended, though, the USSR was largely uninterested in Afghanistan until 1954. In that year, the United
States signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with Pakistan. Seeing the tightening of U.S.-Pakistani ties as a threat, and seeking a partner to counterbalance them, the Soviets turned to Afghanistan. From 1954 onward, the Soviets provided extensive military and economic aid to Afghanistan. By the 1960s, Afghanistan was completely dependent on the USSR, although the USSR had little desire to meddle in Afghanistan’s internal affairs as long as Afghanistan remained a loyal client state.  

In the 1970s, political changes began to wrack Afghanistan. These changes were initially in the Soviets’ favor, as in 1973 King Zahir was overthrown, and was replaced with by Mohammed Daoud, who abolished the monarchy and set himself up at the head of a left-leaning dictatorship. Although Daoud initially cooperated with the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the Soviet-supported Afghan communist party, in 1977 he came to view the PDPA as a threat and made preparations to eliminate the party. In response, the PDPA staged a coup d’etat, known as the Saur Revolution, and took power. On its face the Saur Revolution was yet another positive development for the Soviets, as it placed an explicitly communist party in power. Yet things quickly turned sour. The PDPA government, led by radical Prime Minister Hefizollah Amin, quickly implemented a program of land reforms that sparked resentment among many rural Afghans, who felt that these land reforms were being implemented without concern for their interests. This resentment, combined with the fact that many saw Islam as incompatible with


44 Gibbs, David.
Marxism, caused a rebellion to break out. By 1979, this rebellion had become a full-fledged revolt against the PDPA, with six rebel groups based in Pakistan fighting alongside an additional two hundred locally-led groups.45

Ever since they secured Afghanistan as a client state in 1954, the Soviets’ primary interest in Afghanistan had been the maintenance of a stable and compliant state. The 1979 rebellion threatened this interest, but the Soviet leadership was still determined not to commit to a military intervention as late as March 1979, when the Soviets told Afghan communists that they could expect aid and advice, but no direct military relief.46 This changed in October 1979, when Amin, the radical Prime Minister, murdered the more moderate President, Nur Mohammed Taraki. The Soviets did not trust Amin, and feared that he would cut ties with the USSR and turn to America.47 Amin’s takeover was the last straw, and it spurred the Soviets to intervene directly in December 1979. Thus, in 1979, the Soviets had three main goals in Afghanistan. The Soviets wanted to prevent Afghanistan from falling into the hands of anti-communist Muslim extremists, to save face in the international arena by ensuring that the communist PDPA did not fall, and to replace Amin with a ruler more pliable to Soviet control.48 These fell in line with the overriding Soviet imperative, which was to keep control of a neighboring state that would have threatened the USSR’s security if control was lost. KGB chairman Yuri Andropov summed up Soviet thinking in March 1979: “We cannot lose Afghanistan.”49

45 Ibid.
47 Hughes, Geraint.
48 Gibbs, David.
49 Riedel, Bruce.
Unsurprisingly, the Soviets relied heavily on propping up the existing government of Afghanistan as a method to achieve their goals. Between 1955 and 1979, the USSR sent an estimated $1.265 billion in economic assistance to Afghanistan. This aid was used on a wide variety of projects, most notably transportation infrastructure such as roads and tunnels, and a military air base at Bagram. In addition to bolstering the Afghan economy, these projects were strategically useful for the Soviets. As Khruschev pointed out in his memoirs, “The highways Moscow built for Afghanistan in the 1950s were designed for military transport in case of war with Iran or Pakistan [both U.S. allies].” During the Soviet intervention, economic aid skyrocketed – between 1982 and 1986, the Soviets sent $7.5 billion in economic aid to Afghanistan. Projects included crucial infrastructure like housing and power stations, and were supervised by thousands of Soviet experts. This aid comprised almost 10% of the total Soviet foreign aid budget, representing a significant commitment to the ability of the client government in Afghanistan to improve its economic situation, and thus foster stability.

The Soviets also provided military assistance to the Afghan government. Between 1955 and 1979, military aid totaled $1.25 billion, but the Soviet commitment was not limited to money alone. The Soviets also sent technical advisers to Afghanistan, and trained Afghan officers in Soviet military academies. This investment paid off – when the intervention started, the Soviets helped rebuild

50 Hughes, Geraint.
52 Riedel, Bruce.
53 Hughes, Geraint.
the Afghan military. Between 1979 and 1989, the Afghan army grew from 25,000 to 150,000 strong with Soviet help. The Soviets also assisted the Afghans in developing an air force, which had more than four hundred aircraft and one hundred helicopters.\textsuperscript{54} Again, these methods make sense in the context of the Soviet goal of stability, as the Soviets were attempting to help the Afghans secure the country and assist in the fight against the rebels. Of course, the most drastic component of Soviet power projection after 1979 was the Red Army, which sent 110,000 men into Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{55} That part of the Soviet strategy, however, is outside the scope of this paper, which focuses on methods short of outright warfare.

Although the Soviets relied mainly on assistance to the Afghan government, they also funded violent groups when it suited their purposes. Their main aim in this effort was to isolate and pressure Pakistan, which was providing safe haven and training to the mujahideen rebels in Afghanistan. To this end, the Soviets used KHAD, Afghanistan’s state intelligence service, which was essentially an extension of the KGB. KHAD supported a Pakistani group called al Zulfiqar, which was led by a man named Murtaza. Because Zia Al-Huq (Pakistan’s president at the time) had killed Murtaza’s father (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto), Murtaza was furious at the Pakistani state and motivated to overthrow it. Al Zulfiqar’s most visible accomplishment was the hijacking of a Pakistani plane and the murder of a Pakistani diplomat who was a passenger. The KGB actively supported and advised this mission.\textsuperscript{56} Although Al Zulfiqar was ultimately a fairly small factor in the war, the USSR’s support for them

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Riedel, Bruce. \textsuperscript{55} Ibid. \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.}
shows that they did not discount the use of armed proxies as a strategy in the Afghan conflict when they felt it could serve their needs.

**The U.S.A.**

The US did not share the USSR’s geographical interests in Afghanistan. Lacking a shared border, or even a clear rationale for any geopolitical interest in Afghanistan, US policymakers shied away from engaging with Afghanistan through World War II. America did not establish diplomatic relations with Afghanistan until 1934, and did not establish a physical embassy with a resident ambassador until 1942. In 1948, a Department of Defense report assessing Afghanistan’s importance in light of the new post-war environment concluded: “Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States... Its geographic location coupled with the realization by Afghan leaders of Soviet capabilities presages Soviet control of the country whenever the international situation so dictates.” Essentially, going into the 1950s the U.S. had accepted that Afghanistan would fall into the Soviet sphere of influence, and the costs of fighting that reality were greater than the costs of living with it.

By the mid-1950s, the U.S. did have growing concerns about Soviet influence in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. Afghanistan, however, still did not play a prominent role in U.S. strategy to shore up their position in the region.

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Instead, the U.S. cemented alliances with three other regional powers – Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. In 1954, the U.S. concluded an arms deal with Pakistan, and in 1955 it signed the Baghdad Pact, which brought the U.K., Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) alliance. Afghanistan remained an area of Soviet influence, and the U.S. remained largely content with that situation.

The year 1979, in which the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, also brought a revolution in Iran (a key American ally) and the replacement of the American-allied Somozav regime in Nicaragua with a communist government. These shifts in the global picture enhanced Afghanistan’s importance to American strategy. With American allies falling and the Soviets on the offensive in Afghanistan, key allies like Saudi Arabia were beginning to rethink their allegiances. In response, U.S. policymakers decided that they needed to put on a “full court press”, as Reagan administration officials would call it, against the Soviets to avoid further shaking the confidence of their allies.\(^{59}\) The U.S. could not afford a Soviet victory in Afghanistan, and their overriding objective now became, as President Carter put it in his diary in 1979, “to make this action by the Soviets as politically costly as possible.”\(^ {60}\)

As a result of this new mindset, President Carter moved with considerable rapidity to approve $500,000 in funding for weapons to arm the mujahideen rebel groups in Afghanistan. The first shipments of arms arrived in Afghanistan two weeks after the Soviet intervention began.\(^ {61}\) Not only did the Americans provide assistance, but Carter put together a coalition of other nations to fund the rebels as

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\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) Riedel, Bruce.
\(^{61}\) Lansford, Tom.
well. Saudi Arabia agreed to match each dollar of American assistance. In addition

Pakistani Zia al-Huq was firmly committed to the resistance effort, as he feared that Soviet success could lead to his country being attacked jointly by the USSR from Afghanistan to the north and its ally India from the south. Thus, Zia was an ardent proponent of funding the rebels, and all the weapons actually went through the ISI (Pakistan’s intelligence service) before they got to the mujahideen. In the first half of the war, however, the coalition’s goal was merely to increase the costs of war for the Soviets, rather than to defeat them outright. Both the U.S. and the Pakistanis feared that if they were too aggressive, the USSR and India could escalate the conflict and attack Pakistan, setting off a possible nuclear war. Thus, their goal became, as Zia put it, to “keep the pot boiling but not boil over.” To this end, the U.S. gave the mujahideen $60 million a year between 1981 and 1983, and $100 million in 1984. These funds went towards purchasing Soviet-made weapons, so that if the weapons were found the mujahideen could claim they had captured them in battle. The CIA and ISI were committed to a policy of deniability and wanted their involvement to go unnoticed. 62

In the mid-1980s, the American calculus changed again. Domestically, bipartisan support for the war was building as Congressmen like Democrat Representative Charlie Wilson and Republican Senator Orrin Hatch whipped up political support. In Pakistan, Zia had changed his mind about his desired intensity of intervention for two reasons. First, after five years of fighting he was surer that the Soviets did not have the capability or desire to press on to Pakistan. Second,

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62 Riedel, Bruce.
India’s Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had just been assassinated and replaced with her son Rajiv, whom Zia saw as much less of a threat. Thus, he pushed for the U.S. to send shoulder-mounted Stinger missile systems to the mujahideen in 1986. This represented a considerable increase in investment and would end the policy of deniability, as these weapons could not be obtained from the Soviets. Nevertheless, riding rising support for the war within Congress, Reagan approved the sale of Stingers in 1986, and of anti-tank missiles in 1987. The American financial commitment skyrocketed accordingly. In 1985, the U.S. gave $250 million to the mujahideen, in 1986, $470 million, and in 1987, $630 million. The objectives had clearly changed. Rather than simply aiming to raise the costs for the Soviets, the American aid was now designed to allow the mujahideen to win the war and force the Soviets to leave. This was spelled out quite clearly in National Security Directive 166, which Reagan issued in 1985. The Directive states that “the ultimate goal of our policy is the removal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan,” and then proceeds to lay out a number of methods to reach this goal, including “improve the military effectiveness of the Afghan resistance.” As America’s goals increased in scope, so too did the scope of its commitment to arming the rebels. In the end, this strategy was successful, and the Soviets withdrew their last troops from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989.

63 Ibid.
64 Lansford, Tom.
66 Riedel, Bruce.
1954-1989: Conclusion

The events of 1954-1989 in Afghanistan clearly do not offer any support for the hypothesis of this paper. In this case, the United States, a democratic power, relied primarily on funding armed groups as its influence exertion strategy. In contrast, the Soviet Union, an autocratic regime, used an extensive package of economic and military aid as its primary method of influence. Of course, the Soviets did launch an armed intervention directly, and also funded armed groups in an effort to achieve their objective vis-à-vis Pakistan.

In this era of Afghan history, it is clear that the options available and the likelihood that each option would achieve each power’s goals were far more decisive than the regime type of the power. The overriding goal for the Soviets was a stable Afghanistan with an easily controllable government. Thus, they poured economic and military aid into the government, which accomplished the dual purposes of giving the government tools to stabilize its own country and making the government beholden to the USSR. For the Americans, Afghanistan was not as strategically important, and thus only minimal aid was given. When the Soviets invaded and the country did become important, funding the mujahideen was essentially the only option open to the U.S. The Americans could not openly intervene for fear of escalation, and aid would have been fruitless as the government was already firmly in the Soviet orbit by the time the Americans became interested. Pakistan’s connections with the ISI provided a relatively easy way for the U.S. to influence events in Afghanistan, and they utilized this option.
Moreover, events specifically disproved at least two of the causal mechanisms that this paper hypothesized could lead democracies to be less likely to fund armed groups. First, domestic political conditions in the U.S. actually favored arming the mujahideen, rather than prohibiting the arming of a radical group as this paper had hypothesized. Although the operation was supposed to be kept clandestine, news of U.S. funding for the mujahideen came out in a Washington Post article less than a month after the program had begun. The public was thus aware of the program, but no limiting backlash occurred. In fact, the program was quite popular, especially within Congress (which was regularly briefed on it), on both sides of the aisle. Second, the paper hypothesized that international norms might stop democratic regimes from funding armed groups. In this case, the very opposite happened – the U.S. participated in an international coalition which armed the mujahideen, including democracies such as the U.K. and autocracies such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The U.N. did not play an active role in the conflict, but this was because of Russia’s veto power rather than any norm that would have prohibited funding the mujahideen. Finally, the third hypothesized causal mechanism—that democracies have incentives to create more democracies, and thus would shy away from creating conflict—did not seem to factor into U.S. policy at all. This is further confirmed by the lack of U.S. aid and democratization efforts after the Soviet pullout.

Overall, the evidence in this case falls strongly against the hypothesis of the paper. It appears that each power selected from its available options those that

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67 Riedel, Bruce.
would best serve its interests, and regime type did not seem to factor into the policy-making process.
Case Study: Afghanistan, 2001-2015

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States intervened in Afghanistan, starting what would become America's longest-ever foreign military engagement. Although American and coalition forces struggling with the Taliban and other insurgents have dominated global headlines throughout this war, there has been another struggle raging within the country – an ongoing contest between neighboring powers, especially India, Pakistan, and China for influence in Afghanistan. At the close of 2014, NATO's combat mission formally concluded.\textsuperscript{68} Without NATO, Afghanistan's government will have to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining security against the continued threat of militant groups like the Taliban and bolstering the country’s fragile economy. This case study will examine the interests of each power in Afghanistan, and how the various powers have attempted to pursue those interests over the past few years.

Pakistan

Given its location on Pakistan’s northern border, Afghanistan has been tied to the area that comprises Pakistan today before modern Pakistan was even founded. In 1839, Sir Mortimer Durand, foreign secretary of British India, and Abdur Rahman Khan, the Emir of Afghanistan, agreed to a border between their two countries.

Known ever since as the “Durand line”, the line is still used as the border between the two countries, but it cuts through areas inhabited by ethnic Pashtuns and Baloch. As a result, Pakistani leaders have argued since the country's inception that Pakistan should try to reclaim the Afghan areas inhabited by Pashtuns, and Pakistani President Ayub Khan even argued for a federation of the two states in the 1950s. Ever since the 1971 war that was so calamitous for Pakistan, Afghanistan has assumed even greater importance as a fallback position in the face of possible attacks from India, Pakistan's enduring rival. “Strategic depth” – the ability to retreat and recover in the face of an Indian attack before launching a potential counterattack, has become a central concept of Pakistan's national defense strategy. Afghanistan is the obvious choice to provide this strategic depth – it occupies space to the northwest, where Pakistan could fall back in case of an attack from the south by India. In an age of nuclear weapons, this strategy makes somewhat less sense, but it is still nevertheless a prevalent mindset among Pakistan's top military leaders. Pakistani policymakers thus see having Afghanistan as an ally, or at least destabilizing Afghanistan to the point where Pakistan can exert considerable influence there, as imperative in order to combat a perceived existential threat from India. Former Pakistani Army Chief of Staff Ashfaq Kayani summed up the position of the Pakistani military as follows: “Strategically, we cannot have on Afghan army on our western border which has an Indian mindset and capabilities to take on


71 Arni, Anand, and Abhimanyu Tondon.
Pakistan.” This type of rhetoric coming from the military is extremely important, as most experts agree that the military by and large dominates Pakistan’s foreign policy, even when a civilian government is nominally in power.

In fact, Pakistan has relied heavily on violent means in its attempts to gain influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s intelligence services, the ISI, play a large role in supporting several militant groups operating in Afghanistan. These include the Haqqani network, TTP (otherwise known as the “Pakistani Taliban”) and the Afghan Taliban itself. In addition, Pakistan has redirected some groups previously active mostly in Kashmir to fight in the Afghan theater, most notably Lashkar-e-Taiba, an anti-Indian group with longstanding ties to the ISI. The ISI is a secretive organization, and thus the extent of their role is not exactly known, but U.S. intelligence is confident that they at least fund, equip, train, and provide safe haven to these groups. Many observers and even Taliban commanders, however, assert the ISI does much more than that. An LSE study found widespread acknowledgement among top commanders that ISI representatives sit on the Quetta Shura, the governing council of the Taliban, and the Haqqani network command council. One commander interviewed asserted, “all our plans and strategy are made in Pakistan and step by step it is brought to us, for military operations or other activities.” A political figure supported this assertion, going so far as to say, “Everything is controlled by the ISI. Without the agreement of the ISI, then the

72 Dalrymple, William.
73 Dalrymple, William
74 Hanauer, Larry, and Peter Chalk.
insurgency would be impossible.” It should be noted that it is unclear to what extent the civilian and regular military leadership of Pakistan approves of or even knows about these ISI activities. Nevertheless, the actions are being taken by Pakistan whether the government approves of them or not, and these statements suggest that the ISI does indeed play a huge role in supporting and directing armed insurgent groups in Afghanistan.

The ISI has used its influence to direct armed groups to target Indian interests in Afghanistan, in keeping with Pakistan’s overall objective of avoiding what they see as encirclement by India. Most notably, attacks were carried out on the Indian embassy in Kabul in both 2008 and 2009, as well as on Hamid Guesthouse, a hotel popular with Indians in Afghanistan, in 2010. Together, these attacks killed almost a hundred people and may have played a significant role in deterring India’s reconstruction efforts, as India did not start any major new reconstruction initiatives between 2009 and 2011. Pakistan has also used its influence over the Taliban to enhance its diplomatic position in the region. In February 2010, Pakistan arrested several high-profile Taliban leaders who had been advocating the Taliban’s participation in peace talks with the Afghan government. This stroke was meant to disrupt the peace process and signal to other interested parties, including India, that Pakistan was able to exercise considerable control over how and when any peace process would move forward.

76 Ibid.
77 Hanauer, Larry, and Peter Chalk.
78 Waldman, Matt.
Although Pakistan has also offered economic aid, it has only spent $300 million (less than one sixth of what India has spent), and it has funded projects in a much more targeted manner than India’s across-the-board spending. Most of Pakistan’s spending has been on transportation projects designed to connect Pakistan to Central Asia, as access to Central Asian energy is a strategic goal for Pakistan just as it is for India. Moreover, Pakistan has prevented Indian goods from entering Afghanistan through Pakistan, a policy clearly intended to blunt India’s efforts to gain economic influence in Afghanistan.  

While it is tempting to vilify Pakistan for using more violent methods than India, it should be noted that their sponsorship of violent groups appears to be rooted more in a lack of other options and the presence of a perceived existential threat than any pre-existing preference for using violent proxies. Pakistan’s GDP stands at approximately $237 billion, while India’s, at $1.88 trillion, is almost eight times as large. Thus, deploying economic and diplomatic assets or funding the Afghan government’s security forces as India has done may simply not be feasible financially for Pakistan. In contrast, ISI ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan date back at least to the Soviet invasion era, when the ISI was instrumental in the Taliban’s creation, and so continuing to use that influence costs Pakistan little in material terms. In fact, Christine Fair, a Georgetown Professor, testified before the U.S. House of Representatives that “Pakistan’s reliance on Islamist militancy, (is) the

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79 Hanauer, Larry, and Peter Chalk.
81 Waldman, Matt.
only tool that it has to change India’s trajectory.”\(^\text{82}\) This situation - Pakistani leaders convinced that they face an existential threat from India in Afghanistan and militant groups as Pakistan’s only viable option for combatting that threat – creates a strategic logic that drives Pakistan inexorably towards sponsoring militant groups.

**India**

For India, the situation in Afghanistan is not quite as dire as it is for Pakistan. As it dwarfs Pakistan in geographical and economic size, population, and military strength, an Afghanistan aligned with Pakistan does not present the same type of existential threat. Nevertheless, influence in Afghanistan is a tempting prospect that offers a myriad of benefits for India. First, it allows India to improve its position vis-à-vis Pakistan while providing an economic opportunity for Indian investment. As in Pakistan, the Indian military is concerned with Afghanistan, but this sentiment is also prevalent among outlets that represent the views of a wider segment of the population. As the editorial board of LiveMint, a prominent Indian news website, put it: “When it comes to Afghanistan, what Pakistan gains will only be at the expense of India.”\(^\text{83}\) In contrast to Pakistan, India does not have a history of military coups and a highly independent military, and thus foreign policy is more responsive to the opinions of the electorate. Therefore, advocacy by popular news outlets like


LiveMint for a large Indian role in Afghanistan can be an important factor in shaping foreign policy.

Perhaps more importantly than its potential to counter Pakistani influence, Afghanistan plays an important role in India’s strategy beyond Pakistan. In terms of security, India would prefer a stable Afghanistan in order to eliminate a potential haven for terrorists planning to attack India, similarly to the U.S. Indian policymakers also hope that access to Afghanistan will allow them to extend their reach into the crucial energy resources of Central Asia. Moreover, successfully helping to stabilize Afghanistan would lend credibility to India’s desire to be seen as a responsible and important and responsible member of the international community and a nascent regional power.\(^\text{84}\)

India’s activities in Afghanistan have been focused on the dual objectives of establishing friendly relations with the Afghan government and building that government’s capacity. Progress towards the first goal was hindered before 2001, when the Taliban was in control of Afghanistan and India refused to recognize the Taliban government, closing India’s embassy in Kabul and cutting off diplomatic relations. The election of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in 2004, after the U.S.-led intervention, allowed India to make significant progress in their diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. Karzai’s biography predisposed him to favor India, because he went to university in the Indian town of Simla, and to distrust Pakistan, because he was convinced that the ISI (Pakistan’s intelligence services) had played a

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role in his father’s death.\textsuperscript{85} India seized the opening created by Karzai’s election, reopening its embassy in Kabul and opening four other consulates. These consulates have provided India with an on-the-ground diplomatic presence throughout the country, enabling Indian diplomats to work to build political and economic ties between the two countries at a local level.\textsuperscript{86}

In addition to this diplomatic infrastructure, the Indian government has worked to cultivate personal ties with Afghan leaders, especially Karzai, who visited India about every six months while in power.\textsuperscript{87} These efforts bore considerable fruit, culminating with the signing of a Strategic Partnership agreement in October 2014. In the agreement, the two countries agreed “to impart a long term commitment to their multifaceted bilateral relations and to actively develop them in political, development, economic, trade, scientific, technological, and other fields in the years ahead.”\textsuperscript{88} While such language in diplomatic agreements is commonplace and can sometimes be deployed without the backing of tangible cooperation, it is telling that India officially elevated its relations with Afghanistan to the level of a Strategic Partnership. At least nominally, this puts India’s formal level of engagement with Afghanistan at the same level as its other “Strategic Partners”, which include

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\textsuperscript{85} Dalrymple, William.
\textsuperscript{86} Hanauer, Larry, and Peter Chalk.
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international heavyweights such as the U.S., China, Russia, and Japan. Finally, India has sought to use ties to Afghanistan to expand its stature beyond the bilateral relationship itself, most significantly by spearheading a successful effort to make Afghanistan a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The addition of Afghanistan enlarged SAARC, a body that India generally dominates, and also raises the possibility of linking SAARC, and India by extension, more closely to the resource-rich countries of Central Asia. India has sought first to strengthen its bilateral ties with Afghanistan, and then to parlay the bilateral relationship into gains on the Asian regional stage.

India has also been very active on the economic and infrastructure front in Afghanistan, with both its government and its private companies spending billions on reconstruction in the country. Since 2001, India has committed $2 billion worth of development projects to Afghanistan, more than it has to any other country. These projects have ranged in size from community-level projects to high-profile projects like the construction of Afghanistan's parliament building, while covering various sectors from education to power transmission. This effort has earned India a favorable position in the eyes of the Afghan people, with a 2009 poll showing that 74% of Afghans viewed India favorably, while just 8% said the same about Pakistan. In addition to currying favor with the Afghan government and people, many of India's infrastructure projects have served India's strategic aims as well.

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91 Pant, Harsh V. See also Hanauer, Larry and Peter Chalk.

92 Dalyrmple, William.
Most prominently, India has helped to construct a several roads linking Afghanistan’s highway network to the Iranian port of Chabahar. These links are crucial to India’s interests, as they allow Afghan goods to reach international shipping lanes without using the Pakistani port of Gwadar, which was once the only option. This undercuts Pakistan’s influence while also allowing India greater access to Afghanistan’s material resources, which some have valued at $1 trillion. India has used infrastructure investments as a tool to better both its image in Afghanistan and its economic and strategic situation.

Finally, India has recently increased its attempts to bolster the security capabilities of the Afghan government. Partly at the urging of the U.S., during much of the past 10 years India restrained itself from providing much direct military assistance to avoid stoking confrontation with Pakistan. As the U.S. and the rest of its coalition prepare to leave, however, Afghanistan has found itself increasingly desperate for military equipment and India has stepped in to fill the gap. Last April, India signed a deal with Russia whereby India will pay Russia to provide arms to Afghanistan. The arms sales are expected to start with small arms, but could eventually progress to larger equipment such as tanks and helicopters. This deal may be a harbinger of a shift from “soft” to “hard” power in Indian Afghan policy, as Indian policymakers become increasingly wary of the Pakistani-aligned Taliban gaining influence once coalition forces leave. While possibly further enhancing

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93 Hanauer, Larry, and Peter Chalk.
94 Pant, Harsh V.
India’s profile in the region, such a shift may also prove dangerous as it could alienate Pakistan and possibly provoke conflict.

**China**

Despite sharing a border with Afghanistan, China’s interests in the country are significantly less extensive than India or Pakistan’s. China has no ties to any ethnic minorities in Afghanistan, and historically has not been involved in Afghanistan’s wars and internal politics, as Pakistan has.\(^\text{96}\) China is a rising power, however, and involvement in Afghanistan would seem like a good option for bolstering China’s worldwide credibility as a responsible member of the international community, just as India strives to do by engaging Afghanistan. Unlike India, however, China has significant incentives to refrain from direct military involvement or even weapons sales. First, China is strongly allied with Pakistan, a nation that the Chinese foreign minister has called China’s “irreplaceable all-weather friend.”\(^\text{97}\) Committing troops would risk putting pressure on Pakistan and thus losing a key ally. China is also wary of allying itself too closely with the U.S., as it fears that doing so could increase the risk of terrorist attacks on China as well as

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strengthen a potential rival in America.\textsuperscript{98} China has thus supported international efforts to find a peace process in Afghanistan but stopping short of committing any troops to the country.

Nevertheless, China has a significant interest in ensuring Afghanistan’s security. Most immediately, instability in Afghanistan poses a threat to China in the form of “East Turkistan”, a militant separatist movement in China’s Xinjiang province, which borders Afghanistan. The movement, which advocates a separate state for Xinjiang’s Uighur minority, has carried out several damaging attacks on China, including a suicide bombing that killed five people in Tiananmen Square in 2013.\textsuperscript{99} East Turkistan has repeatedly threatened future attacks, making them an enduring threat to Chinese security. East Turkistan militants have strong ties to the Taliban, and during the Taliban regime in 1996-2001 East Turkistan members obtained shelter, funding, and training in Afghanistan. Because continued instability in Afghanistan strengthens the Taliban, it would in turn strengthen East Turkestan, exposing China to a greater threat of continued terrorist attacks from the group. In a wider sense, instability in Afghanistan has the potential to spill over to other countries, strengthening radical Islamist groups across the region and increasing the terrorist threat to China.\textsuperscript{100}

As a result of this situation, China’s main priority in Afghanistan is stability, much the same as America’s. Ideally, China would like to see Afghanistan as a


\textsuperscript{100} Huasheng, Zhao
sovereign and independent state, with an internally peaceful and progressive society and good relations with its neighbors and the wider international community. China has publicly adopted four main strategies to achieve this goal. As stated in 2007 by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, these strategies are: safeguarding stability and security, developing Afghanistan’s economy, promoting political reconciliation, and enhancing international cooperation.\(^{101}\)

Of these four stated strategies, China has focused mainly on developing Afghanistan's economy. From 2002 to 2010, China gave $205.3 million in foreign aid to Afghanistan, and has pledged another $327 million in aid through 2017.\(^{102}\) Chinese companies have invested a total of $10 billion in Afghanistan, making China the largest foreign investor in Afghanistan. The most notable project has been Chinese Metallurgical Corporation’s (CMC) $3.5 billion Aynak Copper Mine, the largest foreign investment project in China.\(^{103}\) The CMC has also promised to build steel works, railways, and a coal plant, bringing its total investment in Afghanistan up to $4 billion.\(^{104}\) The CMC is a state-owned enterprise, and as such its activities can in some sense be taken to represent the policy objectives of the Chinese government. China is deliberately encouraging its companies to invest in Afghanistan, both to improve China’s economic position and to bolster Afghanistan’s economy, in turn leading to stability.

\(^{101}\) Ibid.


\(^{103}\) Ng, Tiffany P.

\(^{104}\) Huasheng, Zhao
Until recently, China has taken few concrete steps towards the implementation of its other three stated strategies for engagement in Afghanistan. As one of the “six plus two” countries (Afghanistan’s six neighbors plus Russia and America), China has participated in essentially every international effort aimed at achieving peace in Afghanistan. It has generally preferred to let the U.N. and other multilateral organizations take the lead, however.\textsuperscript{105} With the end of the NATO combat mission, Beijing has shown signs that it may be increasing its efforts on the security and diplomatic fronts. In an effort to bolster Afghanistan’s security capacity, China has begun training Afghan police, and is considering funding nonlethal security equipment as well. Diplomatically, China has taken the first steps towards a leading role in the political reconciliation process by receiving both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and a delegation from the Afghan Taliban in China. Some observers think that China’s goal may be to host peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, playing the role of mediator in the peace process.\textsuperscript{106} This tacit acceptance of the Taliban is risky for China, as the Taliban still maintain ties to the East Turkistan movement. Nevertheless, China appears to be calculating that the possibility of peace and stability in Afghanistan is more valuable to its security than the potential risk posed by acknowledging the Taliban as a legitimate actor.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Page, Jeremy, Margherita Stancati, and Nathan Hodge.
2001-2015: Conclusion

This time period has seen the three neighboring countries competing over Afghanistan that span a range of regime types. Freedom House rates India as “free”, Pakistan as “partly free”, and China as “not free”. ¹⁰⁷ Of the three, Pakistan is the only one to explicitly fund armed groups in Afghanistan. In fact, funding armed proxies has been a central part of Pakistan’s Afghan strategy, while India and China have given no funding to armed groups at all. This result suggests no correlation between a nation’s regime type and its likelihood to fund armed groups.

Each power’s geopolitical situation and available options seem to be much more important factors in its selection of influence strategy than regime type. India and China both have strong interests in a stable Afghanistan, while at least some of those in charge of Pakistani policy see benefits in an unstable Afghanistan. This led India and China to pursue similar strategies of economic and diplomatic engagement, aiming to bolster the strength of the Afghan state in hopes of stability. Pakistan, in contrast, funded client groups with the specific aim of destabilizing the state in order to provide “strategic depth”. In addition, Pakistan was the only state with long-standing ties to militant groups in Afghanistan, and the state with the least resources and thus the most limited ability to pursue economic engagement. It appears that the decision to fund armed groups stemmed much more from a lack of other options and a desire for instability than from Pakistan’s status as only a partial democracy.

This is not to say that regime type had no influence over Pakistan’s decision to fund armed groups. The secretive nature of the ISI and the independent power of Pakistan’s military ensure that hard-liners can siphon Pakistani funds to armed groups even if civilian leaders, who are more responsive to the people, are unaware of such activity. In a more democratic state such as India, this would perhaps be less likely. Nevertheless, in China’s authoritarian system, the government could certainly have funded armed groups without much fear of public backlash, and yet it chose not to do so. Thus the means available to each power and each power’s strategic goals played a much larger role in determining their behavior than regime type.
Conclusion

Based on the evidence in these three case studies, there is no evidence to suggest that the hypothesis has been confirmed. In the Great Game, an autocracy and a democracy pursued similar methods for gaining influence in Afghanistan. Neither funded armed non-state groups, but Britain, the democracy, actually came closest by militarily intervening in favor of its chosen candidate for the throne. From 1954-1989, the U.S., a democracy (albeit in cooperation with autocratic regimes such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia), made the funding of armed mujahideen a cornerstone of its Afghanistan strategy. In contrast, the autocratic Soviet Union relied primarily on economic and military aid, coupled with direct military intervention. In the present day, democratic India and autocratic China have both based their strategies primarily on aid, while autocratic Pakistan has been funding armed insurgent groups. In all the case studies, national behavior was driven much more by each state’s interests and options than by regime type. Throughout this expansive swathe of history, there was very little evidence that any of the hypothesized causal mechanisms worked to prevent democracies from funding armed groups.

Instead, the most important factor in a state’s decision of whether or not to fund armed groups in Afghanistan seemed to be whether or not that state had an interest in stability in the country. Britain in the 19th century, the USSR in 1954-1989, and the US, India, and China in the present day all had substantial interests in a stable Afghanistan. As such, all these powers pursued strategies of aid designed to
bolster the existing state, with the added benefit of securing the goodwill of that state. The three of them – Britain, the USSR, and the U.S. – also turned to direct military intervention to assure that a more favorable regime was in power. In contrast, 19th-century Russia, 1954-1989 America, and present day Pakistan all favored an unstable Afghanistan, mostly to make domination of the country by a rival power less feasible. The U.S. and Pakistan both elected to fund armed groups in order to promote instability. In the 19th century, Russia did not have this option in the form we think of today, but it did sponsor armed incursions by its client state of Persia aimed at destabilizing Afghanistan. These parallels suggest that a state’s preference for a stable or unstable Afghanistan was a far more important factor than its regime type in determining its influence exertion strategy.

The conclusion that regime type has no bearing on the strategy a state will choose when attempting to project its power in a weaker state has implications for the wider body of international relations literature. This thesis has contributed to broader debates over state behavior, examining the liberal/realist divide from a different angle. Since the hypothesis has been disproved, this finding lends credence to the realist contention that regime type does not affect the way a state conducts foreign policy. The case studies seem to support the realist contention that democratic concerns rarely reach into the realm of foreign policy, as domestic politics rarely entered the foreign policy calculations of each state considered. It seems, instead, that states are far more likely to craft strategy based on their interests. States will choose the options available to them that have the best chance of accomplishing their goals. While this may seem like common sense, it actually is a
significant strike against the liberal viewpoint that state strategies are affected by regime type.

Although this thesis has attempted answer the research question in the most conclusive way possible, there are certainly limitations on the conclusions that should be drawn from my research. Since it is beyond the scope of this thesis to construct a quantitative dataset of influence exertion strategies across all cases and time periods, the thesis has been limited to case studies. Moreover, I have focused my case studies on a single country, Afghanistan. While this has the advantage of controlling for many variables, it also has the drawback of testing my hypothesis in only one geographic location. It is therefore possible that while my results may hold across time, they may not hold when geography changes. Another limitation on this analysis is that much of the data needed is not publicly available. Thus, the analysis has been be partially dependent on my analysis of the readily available information, which carries the risk that I may have misinterpreted certain actions as evidence of influence exertion when no such motive is present, or vice versa.

As this thesis is a first exploration into the subject, it opens many avenues for further research. One path forward would be to extend my analysis to other cases and other geographic areas. Perhaps a database could even be constructed based on my criteria to test the thesis quantitatively across all cases. In addition, other variables besides regime type could be used as the independent variable. It may be fruitful for example, to research whether economic system, power, or geographic proximity affects a state's choice of influence exertion strategy. Analysis of the dependent variable could also be extended to include more nuances. Funding of
armed groups could likely be broken up into more specific subcategories. Moreover, other influence exertion strategies, such as foreign aid and democracy promotion, could be included. Since influence exertion is such a major part of state interactions, this thesis could be a starting point for a wide range of further inquiry.
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