

# Advising War Limited Intervention in Conflict

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September 28, 2021

## Abstract

Great powers often intervene in conflict by supporting a local proxy, but how do they ensure that their proxies operate in accordance with their preferences? Existing literature argues that interveners address this classic principal-agent problem using carrots and sticks. I propose that states can use a different, overlooked tool to manage proxies: sending military advisors to interact face-to-face with their militaries. The benefit of sending military advisors is not only to provide technical expertise but also to leverage personal relationships to gather valuable information and directly influence the local military. I derive implications from a formal model about when interveners will be willing to invest in advising as a form of costly monitoring. Furthermore, drawing on literature from sociology, I argue that over time advisors can leverage personal relationships with their counterparts to influence them, shaping their counterparts' approach to political issues such as human rights and civil-military relations. Given these roles of advisors, intervening states are more likely to deploy them to work with proxies with low military capacity and low preference alignment. After presenting original quantitative data on the global spread and recent increase in advisor deployments, the paper evaluates the theory via a case study of US intervention in El Salvador under the Carter and Reagan administrations. Drawing on archival evidence and a unique set of interviews I conducted with military advisors, the case study shows that foreign policy decisionmakers sent advisors for information gathering and influencing and advisors knew their roles. These findings on advisors as a local, personal means of influence over other militaries have implications for scholarship on the mechanisms of great power influence, the effectiveness of intervention in conflict, and conflict management and escalation.

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# 1 Introduction

The failed US intervention in Afghanistan involved large numbers of military advisors working with the Afghan military. Over the past 20 years, US military advisors similarly advised wars in Iraq, Yemen, Uganda, Ukraine, and other countries. Interveners often have a “hands-on” approach that involves directly embedding their own personnel in a local military. China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – all powerful states accounting for around 68 percent of interventions in civil wars between 1949 and 2000<sup>1</sup> – send advisors in around half of their interventions. Original data I collected show that this trend is increasing and advisors are now participating in more conflicts than at the peak of the Cold War. Sending military advisors, however, presents a puzzle. Advisors do not alter the balance of forces in the conflict, yet their lives are often on the line. Military advisors expose the intervener to escalation pressures if they are killed or the conflict deteriorates. Relative to intervention with aid or arms, advisors also represent an increased commitment to the conflict that can make the intervener look bad if the local military commits human rights abuses, wastes aid, or performs poorly on the battlefield. Despite these risks, interveners choose to send military advisors in some conflicts and stay “hands-off” in others.

What explains deployment of military advisors in the context of conflict? How do military advisors fit into intervening states’ broader efforts to manage local proxies? The existing literature has focused on military advisors as a means to remedy serious problems of low military capacity and the conditions when advisors succeed or fail at this task. It argues that advisors can assist local militaries with “technical, training, planning, and operational advice” to prevent the intervener from having to commit its own combat troops, which are costly and can lead to escalation.<sup>2</sup> The goal of sending military advisors, as described in the literature, is to make the local partner’s military competent enough that it can defeat its opponent on the battlefield or force it toward a political settlement. In this conceptualization of military advisors, they are focused solely on building military capacity and are thus distinct from other military actors engaged in defense diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I will argue that though the capacity-building role of advisors is important, they have another, overlooked *transformational* role, acting as a local, social means for interveners to manage proxy

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick M Regan. “Third-party interventions and the duration of intrastate conflicts”. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46.1 (2002), pp. 55–73.

<sup>2</sup>Brian P. O’Lavin. *War on the Cheap: U.S. Military Advisors in Greece, Korea, The Philippines, and Vietnam*: Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, Dec. 1, 2015. DOI: 10.21236/AD1009181. URL: <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/AD1009181> (visited on 11/19/2018).

<sup>3</sup>See the following way that advisors are often depicted: “The traditional (and still valid) custom of sending military advisors—or financial military assistance—to foreign armies also does not reflect the post-Cold War imperative of a military dialogue for diplomatic purposes, where the sole objective is increasing military efficiency in a conflict or in preparing one.” Frédéric Charillon, Thierry Balzacq, and Frédéric Ramel. “Defense Diplomacy”. In: *Global Diplomacy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. Ed. by Thierry Balzacq, Frédéric Charillon, and Frédéric Ramel. The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020, pp. 267–278. ISBN: 978-3-030-28786-3. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-28786-3\_19. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28786-3\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28786-3_19) (visited on 03/15/2021)

war. By transformational role, I mean specifically that advisors are tasked with *transforming* both the behavior and the preferences of the local military in areas where the intervener and proxy disagree. Local proxies often disagree with their supporters on vital issues that affect the conflict such as political, economic, and military reform; the use of aid and arms; the amount of effort to spend on fighting; the target of the intervention; and human rights.<sup>4</sup> Advisors help address these conflicts of interest by directly monitoring and influencing a local military. The transformational role of advisors should not be overlooked because it is intertwined with the advisor's role as capacity builders – there is not one without the other. As capacity builders, advisors gain access to the military of the local partner required to play their transformational role. After gaining access through capacity building, military advisors build personal relationships with their local counterparts, making them a powerful source of information about their counterparts' behavior and attitudes which they then pass up their chain of command. Interveners can use this information to formulate carrots or sticks to hold the proxy accountable for its actions. After working with their local counterparts for an extended period of time, advisors gain their trust. This allows advisors to influence their counterparts through a myriad of informal and personal interactions taking place over a meal, a drink, or in the thick of battle. Over time, the influence that advisors have over their counterparts can lead to tangible differences in the preferences and behavior of the local military, bringing the intervener and proxy closer together. By performing this transformational role alongside their capacity-building role, advisors help ensure that the increase in capacity they provide serves the intervener's goals. Otherwise, there is little point in building capacity.

Military advisors, by monitoring and influencing the proxy, complement other tools used by interveners to manage conflicts of interest with proxies. Recent scholarship adopts a principal-agent framework to explain how powerful states can incentivize local partners by consistently rewarding them with material incentives for good behavior and punishing them for bad behavior.<sup>5</sup> Incentives are important, but they face their own limitations. Incentives are typically used at the strategic level by the intervener against the top military or political leadership of the proxy. They are not designed to target the local level, and theories about strategic incentives during proxy war are often sparse on the details of the interaction between the intervener and

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<sup>4</sup>Vladimir Rauta. "Framers, founders, and reformers: Three generations of proxy war research". In: *Contemporary Security Policy* 42.1 (Jan. 2, 2021). Publisher: Routledge. eprint: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1800240>, pp. 113–134. ISSN: 1352-3260. DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2020.1800240. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2020.1800240> (visited on 03/26/2021); Barbara Elias. "The Big Problem of Small Allies: New Data and Theory on Defiant Local Counterinsurgency Partners in Afghanistan and Iraq". In: *Security Studies* 27.2 (2018), pp. 233–262; Stephen Biddle. "Building Security Forces & Stabilizing Nations: The Problem of Agency". In: *Dædalus* 146.4 (2017), pp. 126–138; Andrew Boutton. "US foreign aid, interstate rivalry, and incentives for counterterrorism cooperation". In: *Journal of Peace Research* 51.6 (2014), pp. 741–754; Daniel Byman. "Friends like these: Counterinsurgency and the war on terrorism". In: *International Security* 31.2 (2006), pp. 79–115.

<sup>5</sup>Eli Berman and David A Lake. *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*. Cornell University Press, 2019; Walter C Ladwig III. *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*. Cambridge University Press, 2017; Walter C Ladwig III. "Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency: US Involvement in El Salvador's Civil War, 1979–92". In: *International Security* 41.1 (2016), pp. 99–146.

proxy at the local level, where policy often fails. In addition, though incentives can be applied without accurate information about the proxy's actions, they are more effective when targeted to specific actions of the proxy. Interveners, then, have incentives to invest in monitoring. The details of monitoring so far have not been addressed by the literature. Finally, interveners are often reluctant to extensively use carrots and sticks.<sup>6</sup> This suggests interveners believe they have other tools to directly shape a local proxy. In this paper, I present one such tool: sending military advisors to interact face-to-face with counterparts in a local military, acting as a means for interveners to shape proxy behavior at the local level.

To support my argument, I rely on multiple kinds of empirical analysis. I first provide descriptive analysis of what advisors do using an original dataset of great power intervention in civil wars with military advisors from 1946-2019. I significantly expand the temporal scope of data from Regan (2002) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2009) as well as collect additional disaggregated data on in-country military advising during civil wars. I also draw on a unique set of 29 interviews I conducted with US military advisors who served in conflicts between 1970-2019, such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and others. I then evaluate the hypotheses and causal mechanisms of my theory using a case study of US intervention in the Salvadoran Civil War under the Carter and Reagan administrations (1979-89). The case study presents archival evidence and interviews with 16 US military advisors who served in El Salvador. I show that policymakers expected advisors “to transform the [Salvadoran] army into a more rational force,”<sup>7</sup> in the words of Carter's National Security Council staff, acknowledging a role for advisors in both monitoring and influencing the Salvadoran military. In addition, my work evaluates not only policymaker intentions but also what advisors experience on the ground. I show that in El Salvador, advisors on the ground recognized the importance of monitoring and influencing the local military. The multiple kinds of data I employ in this paper allow me to provide empirical evidence on the scope and prevalence of intervention with advisors (with quantitative data) as well as evaluate both policymaker intentions (through archival evidence) and what advisors experience on the ground (through interviews).

My argument and findings have three main implications and contributions. First, I provide a contribution by theorizing how powerful states use training and advising as a conduit of influence over other militaries. This furthers our understanding of when great powers have leverage over weaker partners – a persistent problem in proxy war and alliance relationships alike. My research shows how powerful states can influence weaker actors not only through carrots or sticks but also through personal relationships on the ground. Furthermore, by conceptualizing military advisors as a certain kind of defense diplomacy where face-to-

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<sup>6</sup>Walter C. Ladwig III. *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-107-17077-3. DOI: 10.1017/9781316756805. URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/forgotten-front/86CB9E2C1DB5EFD93CAC50BC651D3A34> (visited on 11/10/2020).

<sup>7</sup>Memo from Robert Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 13, 1980, “SCC on El Salvador – March 13, 1980,” El Salvador Collections, DNSA.

face interaction and personal relationships are crucial, I also add to a growing literature on the effects of individuals, personal relationships, and emotions in international politics and diplomacy.<sup>8</sup>

Second, I contribute to debates on the effectiveness of great power intervention in conflict. A common explanation for why interventions often fail is that building proxy military capacity is difficult or is done incorrectly.<sup>9</sup> My research highlights how advising missions can fail when interveners can't influence how capacity is used. I show that working with a local military is rarely just about building capacity, and transformation of the local military is often the primary goal of sending advisors. In addition to showing why the transformational role of advisors is important, my theory highlights two reasons why transformation can be difficult to achieve. First, advisors are sent to the worst proxies with low capacity *and* conflicts of interest with the intervener – since when proxies are capable and aligned, interveners benefit by staying hands off and letting the proxy do the work. Advisors are therefore set up to fail. Second, even when transformation is possible, it can fail to materialize because of flaws in the design of the advisor intervention (and other reasons outside the scope of my theory). My theory implies that in order to be able to gather information and influence, advisors need to be embedded *at every level* of a local military, for long periods of time, and have the cultural knowledge and expertise to be able to build personal relationships with their counterparts. They must recognize that they are sent not just to build capacity but also to transform the local military. Advisors will struggle to build influence if they don't speak the local language, if they aren't trained to build relationships or given enough time to do so, if they are incentivized to measure success solely in terms of capacity-building, if the intervener does not send enough advisors or if it only sends low-ranking advisors who can be more easily sidelined by their counterparts, and when the advisors themselves “go native.”<sup>10</sup> This prompts us to consider more carefully the design of future interventions with military advisors as well as how other tools of proxy management, such as carrots or sticks, can reinforce the transformational role of advisors.

Third, my finding that military advisors tend to be sent to work with proxies with low military capacity

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<sup>8</sup>Todd Hall and Keren Yarhi-Milo. “The personal touch: Leaders' impressions, costly signaling, and assessments of sincerity in international affairs”. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 56.3 (2012), pp. 560–573; Marcus Holmes. *Face-to-face diplomacy: Social neuroscience and international relations*. Cambridge University Press, 2018; Barbara Keys and Claire Yorke. “Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat”. In: *Political Psychology* 40.6 (2019), pp. 1235–1249; Tarak Barkawi. ““Defence diplomacy” in north-south relations”. In: *International Journal* 66.3 (2011). Publisher: SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, pp. 597–612; See for example:

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, the following opinion piece on the failed US intervention in Afghanistan: Jason Dempsey. “We Got Afghanistan Wrong, but There's Still Time to Learn Something”. In: *Politico* (Apr. 25, 2021). URL: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/04/25/were-leaving-afghanistan-but-we-havent-learned-anything-484553>.

<sup>10</sup>In Afghanistan, many of these barriers to influence were present in the US advising effort. For example, the US Special Inspector General For Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) pointed out: “For most of the conflict, the United States and NATO have deployed individual advisors or pickup training teams and assigned them to frequently shifting and temporary military command structures in Afghanistan. Most of these advisors came from backgrounds unrelated to advising foreign security forces and were often underprepared for their tours of duty. In addition, since these advisors and ad hoc training teams typically deployed for only six to 12 months, they had little opportunity to establish long-term rapport with their Afghan counterparts or take ownership of multi-year [security sector assistance] SSA programs.” Special Inspector General for. *Divided Responsibility: Lessons from U.S. Security Sector Assistance Efforts in Afghanistan*. June 2019. URL: <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-19-39-LL.pdf>

and/or low preference alignment has implications for the literature on intervention and conflict escalation. Interveners' deliberate support of weak proxies with military advisors can provoke further escalation if advisors are unsuccessful in reforming the proxy military. US intervention in Vietnam is an example of these pressures for escalation. States can avoid escalation by limiting the number of military advisors and their role, like the United States did in El Salvador, but only at the expense of being able to more fully monitor and influence the actions of the proxy. My research thus highlights a tradeoff between influencing local conflict and limiting commitment.

In the remainder of this paper, I first discuss what military advisors do, describing what we know about them and showing that the number of interventions with military advisors has been increasing over time. Next, I move on to my argument, theorizing how the information-gathering and influencing roles of advisors work at the local (micro) level, before moving to my theory and hypotheses about when advisors will be deployed. I then test implications of the theory using a case study of US intervention in El Salvador. I show that policymakers viewed advisors as essential for transforming the Salvadoran military and provide evidence from advisors that they viewed their role in similar ways. The final section concludes.

## 2 What do military advisors do?

Great powers “try to organize, shape, and direct armed forces in foreign countries. . . to constitute armed force for local, regional, and global projects of order-making.”<sup>11</sup> To shape other militaries, great powers frequently rely on military-to-military interactions: sending members of their military to work with other militaries. In peacetime, military advisors are part of the toolbox of defense diplomacy, such as military aid, military training, and providing arms or entering military alliances.<sup>12</sup> The roles of advisors during peacetime include modernizing another military, nation building, forging closer economic ties with another state, or building ideological ties.<sup>13</sup> I focus on the use of military advisors by great powers to intervene in conflict, either to support an existing order by providing aid to a government engaged in counterinsurgency or to undermine an order by supporting the rebels. I limit my analysis to intrastate conflict because the logic of advisor deployment during peacetime is likely to be different than their deployment during conflict,

<sup>11</sup>Barkawi, ““Defence diplomacy” in north-south relations”.

<sup>12</sup>Patricia L. Sullivan, Brock F. Tessman, and Xiaojun Li. “US Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation”. In: *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7.3 (July 1, 2011), pp. 275–294. ISSN: 1743-8594. DOI: 10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00138.x. URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00138.x/abstract> (visited on 10/18/2016); Carla Martinez Machain. “Exporting Influence: U.S. Military Training as Soft Power”. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Sept. 16, 2020). Publisher: SAGE Publications Inc, p. 0022002720957713. ISSN: 0022-0027. DOI: 10.1177/0022002720957713. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720957713> (visited on 10/29/2020); Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper. “To arm or to ally? The patron’s dilemma and the strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances”. In: *International Security* 41.2 (2016), pp. 90–139; Donald Stoker. *Military Advising and Assistance: From Mercenaries to Privatization, 1815–2007*. Routledge, Dec. 21, 2007. 280 pp. ISBN: 978-1-135-98821-0.

<sup>13</sup>Stoker, *Military Advising and Assistance*.

where intervening states must pay attention to escalation dynamics and face a set of tradeoffs between other intervention options. I focus on great powers because they have global interests that lead them to frequently intervene in conflict abroad, flexibility to choose among a menu of options for intervention, and are more powerful than the armed actors that they advise.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.1 Who are military advisors?

Military advisors are military personnel sent to work with the military of a state or armed group, sometimes as individuals or as part of a larger advising mission by the sending state.<sup>15</sup> They can be sent overtly in uniform, covertly out of uniform, or, the sending state can publicly acknowledge them but intentionally limit publicity surrounding their deployment.<sup>16</sup> Advisors are distinct from combat troops or special operations forces because they do not have an independent combat role. They may be permitted to accompany local units on extensive, in-field training when the local unit will run a significant risk of engaging with enemy forces, as well as accompany local forces into combat to direct and assist.<sup>17</sup> But advisors cannot add to the combat capacity of the proxy unit except through the advice they provide. In many cases, advisors will be restricted from accompanying proxy forces into combat, be deployed only to “safe” areas of the country, and be given strict orders about self-preservation.<sup>18</sup>

Advisors are also distinct from intelligence personnel because they report to the military chain of command of the intervener. The distinction between intelligence personnel and military advisors sometimes

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<sup>14</sup>Great powers also make up the majority of interventions with military advisors, as data from Regan (2002) shows. Smaller states deploy advisors, as well, but the reasons for deployment can be different. Australia, for example, frequently intervenes abroad when the United States does, but the motivation is to be a good alliance partner to the United States. Many states that send military advisors tend to be the neighbors of states involved in conflict and/or regional powers. They intervene either to support the government or to undermine it by supporting the rebels.

<sup>15</sup>Stoker, *Military Advising and Assistance*.

<sup>16</sup>The current US advisors in Afghanistan and Iraq are examples of full publicity about the intervention. Contemporary US deployments to Africa are an example of limited publicity, while US intervention in Laos was an example of covert intervention. Interveners can have both domestic political reasons to limit publicity as well as a desire to control perceptions in the host state. See: Harry H. Kendall. “Vietnamese Perceptions of the Soviet Presence”. In: *Asian Survey* 23.9 (1983), pp. 1052–1061. ISSN: 0004-4687. DOI: 10.2307/2644106. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644106> (visited on 03/04/2019)

<sup>17</sup>Alice Hunt Friend. *The Accompany They Keep: What Niger Tells Us about Accompany Missions, Combat, and Operations Other than War*. War on the Rocks. May 11, 2018. URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2018/05/the-accompany-they-keep-what-niger-tells-us-about-accompany-missions-combat-and-operations-other-than-war/> (visited on 10/29/2020).

<sup>18</sup>In the data I collected, I also coded whether the intervention included special operations forces or combat troops. If the intervener described the military forces sent as “advisors” but they were used to augment the proxy’s military capability by engaging in combat rather than advising, the *sof* indicator variable took a value of 1. Coding for the presence of special operations forces in country allows me to show the difference between forces from the intervener engaged in combat versus those sent solely for the purpose of military advising. I also coded an indicator variable *troops* for the presence of more than 1,000 ground combat units from the intervener sent with an independent combat mission. I found that interveners frequently send advisors alongside these other forms of intervention. France, for instance, never sends advisors without either a special operations or troops component to the intervention. Nevertheless, a substantial number of interventions involved advisors only, which indicates that advisors really do perform different functions from those of combat troops.

Additional evidence that advisors play roles separate from combat troops is the small size of most advisors deployments, which prevents them from adding much combat capability to the local military. Out of the interventions where I was able to collect data on the size of the advisor deployment, 34 percent involved fewer than 100 advisors, while another 30 percent involved fewer than 500 advisors, for a total of 64 percent involving fewer than 500 advisors. Fewer than 24 percent of the interventions involved more than 1000 advisors. More than half of these interventions with 1000 or more advisors involved an acknowledged presence of combat troops by the intervener, further indicating that advisors are not used to obfuscate the deployment of combat troops but rather have their own role.

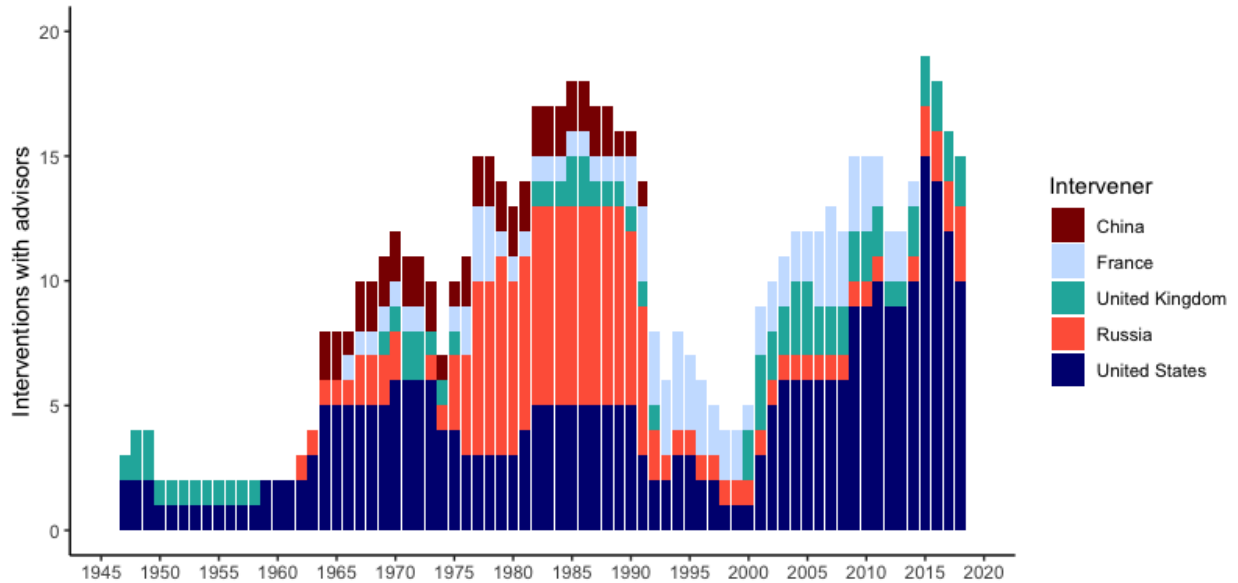


Figure 1: Great power interventions with military advisors, 1946-2019

becomes very blurred in actual interventions, however, since interveners will often ask intelligence personnel to play a role very similar to that of military advisors when the intervention is covert. In Laos, for instance, the United States sent CIA advisors to work with the Hmong guerilla forces because the entire mission was covert.<sup>19</sup> While there could be significant overlap between the roles of intelligence officers in advising roles and military advisors, I focus on military advisors, that is, advisors who are members of the intervener’s military.

## 2.2 The increasing global use of military advisors

Advisors are widely used as a tool of intervention in conflict, and their usage is increasing. I collected original quantitative data on the deployment of advisors by the United States, Russia/USSR, China, France, and the United Kingdom during periods of conflict from 1946-2019. To construct the dataset, I identified cases of advisors sent to work directly with proxy militaries during intrastate armed conflict, as measured by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Armed Conflict dataset.<sup>20</sup> I identified 82 events of intervention with military advisors across 730 conflict-years between 1946 - 2019 by the United States, Russia/USSR, China, the United Kingdom, and France.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of intervention with military advisors by interveners over time. As the

<sup>19</sup>Joshua Kurlantzick. *A great place to have a war: America in Laos and the birth of a military CIA*. Simon and Schuster, 2017.

<sup>20</sup>Mihai Catalin Croicu et al. “UCDP External Support Project Primary Warring Party Dataset Codebook”. In: *Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (2011).



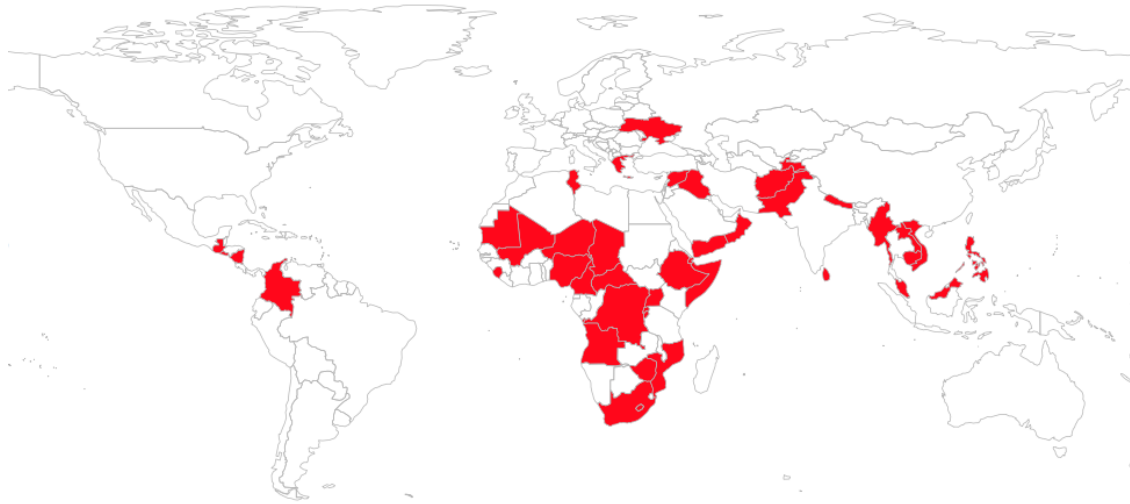


Figure 2: The geography of intervention with military advisors, 1946-2019.

The map plots the location of conflicts with one or more parties that were trained and advised by great power military advisors. In the case of some rebel groups, training occurred across the border in a neighboring state. Zimbabwe, for instance, is highlighted in red on the map even though there were no Soviet advisors deployed there because rebel groups were trained by the Soviet Union across the border in Angola.

figure shows, China only intervened with military advisors after the Sino-Soviet split until the fall of the Soviet Union. Soviet intervention with military advisors peaked – and actually surpassed – US intervention with military advisors during 1975-1990, indicating how proxy war was quite common during the last decade of the Cold War.<sup>21</sup> All great powers conducted fewer interventions with advisors in the decade following the Cold War. After 9-11, US intervention with advisors spiked, reaching levels surpassing those of the Cold War. Most of these interventions took place in the context of the Global War on Terror, alongside other forms of intervention like special operations forces, combat troops, and the use of airpower.

Figure 2 shows the global extent of interventions with military advisors. Interventions are clustered in each great power’s “backyard,” in countries adjacent to them or in the immediate region. This is consistent with the findings of Clare and Danilovic (2020) that great powers tend to intervene in regions within their “sphere of influence” or where they have important interests in terms of alliances and trade.<sup>22</sup> The “hands-on” nature of intervening with military advisors could account for why interveners tend to send them to the most important conflicts, either in a country neighboring them or one of their rivals. Interventions on the African continent are the exception, partly because of the United States’ strategy of extensive counterterrorism

<sup>21</sup>These data add new meaning to US fears about Soviet expansionism at the end of the Cold War. As General Jones complained during Reagan’s first National Security Council meeting in February 1981, “American influence has declined. In 1970, we had 500 advisers in Latin America. That number has now fallen to 65. The Soviets have more military advisers in Peru than we have in all of Latin America.” National Security Council Meeting Minutes February 6, 1981, Folder “NSC 0001 6 Feb 1981,” Box 1 Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>22</sup>Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic. “The Geopolitics of Major Power Interventions in Civil Wars”. In: *Political Research Quarterly* (2020), p. 1065912920976910.

interventions in the region after 9-11 but also because of Soviet support for movements of national liberation within the continent. In sum, these data show the continued relevance of interventions with advisors, and their global extent. So what are advisors doing when deployed to numerous conflicts around the world?

### 2.3 The tasks of advisors

We often tend to think of advisors most simply as trainers. But this is just a small portion of what they do when placed on the ground with a local military. Military advisors build proxy military capacity at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels so that the intervener’s troops can stay out of or withdraw from a conflict.<sup>23</sup> Advisors may also be sent to weak states to prevent conflict and influence it if it does develop.<sup>24</sup> As capacity-builders, advisors transfer their knowledge as highly-skilled professionals to their less-skilled counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

For the data I collected, I coded the tasks military advisors performed in five areas: Training, Monitoring, War planning, Technical assistance, or Defense institution building. Advisors engaged in training provided tactical advice or trained the proxy’s military units. Advisors engaged in monitoring participated in fact-finding missions or were embedded in proxy units. Advisors engaged in monitoring were part of high-level delegations visiting the front, sent to assess aid needs, or embedded with proxy units. Advisors engaged in war planning provided operational or strategic level advice about how, when, and whether the proxy’s units should engage in combat with the enemy. They also advise the proxy about the overall conduct of war, such as the best way to fight and how to treat civilians. They work with small independent combat units like battalions (operational level) or up to the Ministry of Defense (strategic level) attempting to influence the decisions of the military. Advisors planning war at the operational level work directly with local commanders in the planning and execution of major operations, sitting in when commanders brief the brigade staff on the mission and participating in the after-action review of the mission once completed. At the strategic level, advisors can design military strategy and assist the proxy with “developing a plan for victory”, like British advisors did when advising the Sultanate of Oman about how to fight a counterinsurgency.<sup>26</sup> Advisors engaged in technical assistance either filled technical roles for the supported party’s military (such as Joint

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<sup>23</sup>O’Lavin, *War on the Cheap*. Similarly, Barkawi notes that enabling withdrawal of foreign troops is the prime motivation for military capacity building efforts during civil conflict.

<sup>24</sup>Jan Bachmann. “Policing Africa: The US military and visions of crafting ‘good order’”. In: *Security Dialogue* 45.2 (Apr. 1, 2014). Publisher: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 119–136. ISSN: 0967-0106. DOI: 10.1177/0967010614521267. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614521267> (visited on 10/29/2020).

<sup>25</sup>Brian Tyrone Crumley. “Attachés, MAAGs, and MACs”. In: *A Companion to American Military History*. Section: 39. eprint: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781444315066.ch39>. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2009, pp. 604–616. ISBN: 978-1-4443-1506-6. DOI: 10.1002/9781444315066.ch39. URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444315066.ch39> (visited on 03/15/2021).

<sup>26</sup>Walter C. Ladwig III. “Supporting allies in counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion.” in: *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19.1 (2008). URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592310801905793?journalCode=fswi20> (visited on 11/06/2020).

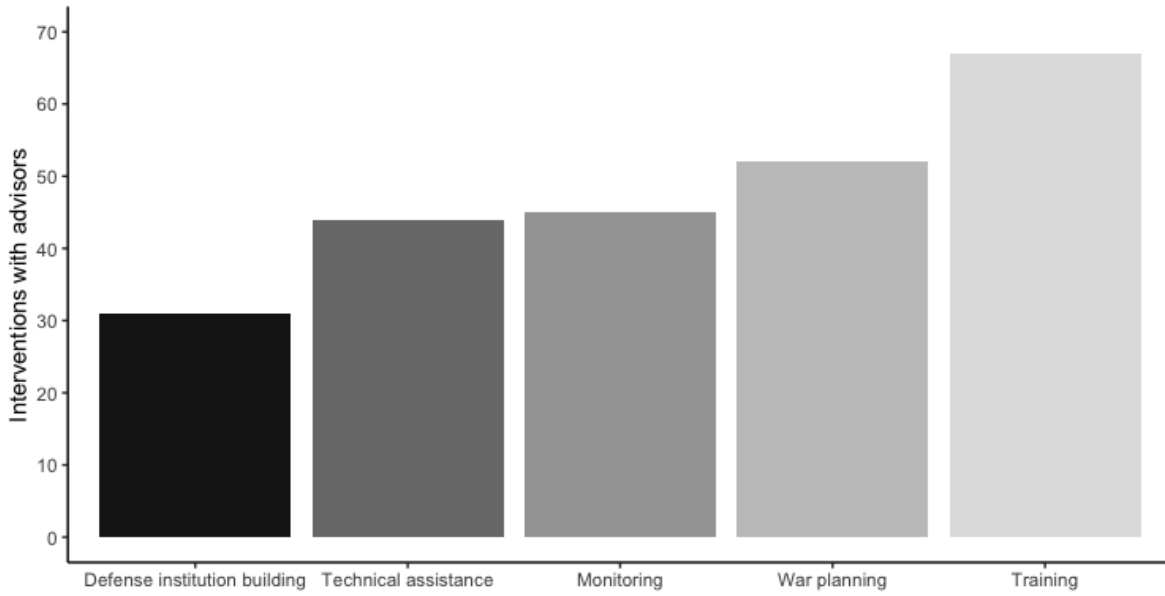


Figure 3: Tasks of advisors

Tactical Air Controllers that provided targeting instructions to the intervener’s air force) or provided training on new equipment provided by the intervener.<sup>27</sup> Advisors engaged in defense institution building provided advice at the strategic level (eg. top military leadership or Ministry of Defense) on recruitment, organization, civil-military relations, military reform, or leadership of the military.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 3 shows the frequency of these tasks across the intervention events. Advisors most often train local militaries, followed by war planning. Monitoring is also quite common. Figure 3 shows that advisors are frequently involved quite extensively in the affairs of a local military, working with top military officers or planners on defense institution building and on the ground with tactical units as part of technical assistance or monitoring. The idea of the military advisor as a lone officer conducting training far from the front lines is a Cold War fiction of governments eager to hide the extent of what their advisors were doing in foreign countries. In the case study, for instance, I will detail how the Reagan administration instructed staff to refer to US advisors in El Salvador as trainers, even though their role was far more extensive.<sup>29</sup> Therefore,

<sup>27</sup>O’Lavin, *War on the Cheap*, For an example of advisors as both providers of technical skills and technical specialists, consider US intervention in Iraq and Syria. A component of U.S. troops in theater were Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTACs) responsible for calling in U.S. airstrikes during combat and Marines operating High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), an advanced weapons system capable of firing long distances.

<sup>28</sup>Alexandra C Chinchilla and Paul Poast. “Defense Institution Building from Above? Lessons from the Baltic Experience”. In: *Connections* 17.3 (2018), pp. 61–71 On military effectiveness more broadly, see: Caitlin Talmadge. *The Dictator’s Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*. Cornell University Press, 2015; Stephen Biddle. *Military power*. Princeton University Press, 2010.

<sup>29</sup>On the other hand, the idea of military advisors as merely a cover for Special Forces or small numbers of combat troops is also a fiction of the Cold War. During US intervention in El Salvador, Soviet propaganda spread the idea that US advisors were leading Salvadoran forces into combat. That was also untrue. Advisors were often playing a role solidly in the middle, both integrated with the local military yet removed from directly participating in combat operations.

given the involvement of advisors in a local military, it is reasonable to expect them to have some effect on what that military does.

The role of military advisors has also evolved over time with the introduction of new technology that makes the precision use of air power and extensive intelligence collection by the intervener possible. In contemporary US interventions like in Iraq and Afghanistan, a key role that advisors play as capacity builders is connecting the local proxy force with key US or coalition enablers, such as air power, intelligence, or logistics.<sup>30</sup> Advisors I interviewed described how the forces they were advising could only gain access to logistical support, intelligence, and US air support if they were conducting joint operations with US forces or with an advisor present.<sup>31</sup> As technology like precision-guided munitions and air power makes it easier for intervening states to intervene in combat without needing to put boots on the ground, advisors often assume a role more like “connectors” between proxy military units and the intervener’s overwhelming air power. When using advisors in this way, interveners may not always focus on building sustainable military effectiveness and reforming the institutions that make it possible for a local military to maintain its own logistics and air power. The intervener, in these cases, favors short-term tactical gains over long-term military effectiveness.<sup>32</sup>

As capacity-builders, advisors gain unparalleled access to the local military. The *degree* of access they have to local forces depends on whether they are embedded with local forces. Embedded advisors are sent either alone or in small groups to work and live with their counterparts for a few months or years. In contrast, advisors that are not embedded rotate from unit to unit for short periods of training and advising and have far less consistent contact with their counterparts. Or, as was common during US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, combat units from the intervener and the local military might be partnered and participate in combat together but advisors are not embedded. The *level* of access that military advisors have depends on where they work. Advisors usually work both at the strategic level with the local partner’s Ministry of Defense or top military leadership, and with operational units like a brigade or battalion, but for large advising missions, they may be embedded with tactical units down to the company level. When embedded at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, advisors have access to the most important people of a proxy military.

While the main role of advisors in the literature is building military capacity, advisors can also play other

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<sup>30</sup>An advisor working with the Afghan military’s Special Mission Wing, a special operations aviation unit, described his role as the following: “A lot of what we did was coordinating the assault and air support, ensuring that they had different tools available to them, like UAVs and helicopter assaults to protect the helicopters.” *Interview with US military advisor to Afghanistan*. In collab. with Interviewee 25. Jan. 1, 2020

<sup>31</sup>*Interview with US advisor to Iraq*. In collab. with Interviewee 9. Jan. 12, 2019.

<sup>32</sup>Much of contemporary US advising is focused on tactical capacity building at the expense of strategic reforms or strategic level engagement. Bill Nance. *Getting advising right: the Army needs a fundamentally different approach to building partner forces*. Modern War Institute at West Point. Aug. 29, 2019. URL: <https://mwi.usma.edu/getting-advising-right-army-needs-fundamentally-different-approach-building-partner-forces/>

roles, such as gathering intelligence. This follows directly from the access that advisors have to the proxy military. British military advisors sent to work with the Soviet general staff during the Second World War focused on intelligence gathering (mostly on the order of battle and German equipment), along with some intelligence sharing, coordination, and planning for resistance to a possible German occupation.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, John Waghelstein notes how he and other advisors received intelligence about a likely coup during an advising mission to the Dominican Republic. The American Embassy disregarded the intelligence and then was surprised when the coup happened roughly on the timeline the advisors predicted.<sup>34</sup> By placing their people on the ground to collect critical information, interveners can monitor proxy behavior more broadly.<sup>35</sup> Stephen Biddle argues that collecting information is central to the role of certain kinds of advisors, such as special forces, who can offer “language skills, cultural awareness, and intelligence-gathering skills to serve as more-effective monitors of partner behavior.”<sup>36</sup>

Other work acknowledges that advisors will encounter politics in their position advising local forces. Advisors will sometimes build relationships with their counterparts and get involved in local politics. When we think of advisors, we often think of those with big personalities who played this warrior-diplomat role, like T.E. Lawrence and Edward Lansdale.<sup>37</sup> They were more akin to “kingmakers”<sup>38</sup> in their relationships with the proxy’s military-political leaders than to technocrats or passive gatherers of intelligence. Advisors working alone with local counterparts to manage an insurgency or counterinsurgency similarly face blurred lines between the political and the military.<sup>39</sup> There is “no good way to be effective without becoming enmeshed in local politics.”<sup>40</sup> Military and political concerns are particularly enmeshed during contemporary advising missions, as advising transformed from a colonial project to one of regime change or people-centric counterinsurgency. The warrior-diplomat role can be filled by ordinary advisors on the ground instead of just high-level ones in a quasi-diplomatic role.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Alaric Searle. “Uneasy intelligence collaboration, genuine ill will, with an admixture of ideology: the British Military Mission to the Soviet Union, 1941-1945”. In: *Military advising and assistance: from mercenaries to privatization, 1815-2007*. Ed. by Donald Stoker. Routledge, 2007.

<sup>34</sup>John D. Waghelstein. “Ruminations of a woolly mammoth, or training and advising in counterinsurgency and elsewhere during the Cold War”. In: *Military advising and assistance: from mercenaries to privatization, 1815-2007*. Ed. by Donald Stoker. Routledge, 2007.

<sup>35</sup>O’Lavin, *War on the Cheap*; Robert D. Ramsey III. *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador*. Combat Studies Institute, 2012. URL: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/ramsey.pdf> (visited on 06/07/2018).

<sup>36</sup>Stephen Biddle. “Building Security Forces & Stabilizing Nations: The Problem of Agency”. In: *Daedalus* 146.4 (Sept. 21, 2017), pp. 126-138. ISSN: 0011-5266. DOI: 10.1162/DAED\_a\_00464. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_00464](https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00464).

<sup>37</sup>Max Boot. *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam*. Google-Books-ID: cTYsD-wAAQBAJ. Liveright Publishing, Jan. 9, 2018. 549 pp. ISBN: 978-0-87140-943-0.

<sup>38</sup>Anna Simons. “The Military Advisor as Warrior-King and Other “Going Native” Temptations”. In: *Military anthropology: soldiers, scholars and subjects at the margins of empire*. Ed. by Montgomery McFate. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-19-094305-9. URL: <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/12372992> (visited on 03/15/2021).

<sup>39</sup>Richard A. Jones. “The Nationbuilder: Soldier of the Sixties”. In: *Advice for advisors: suggestions and observations from Lawrence to the present*. Ed. by Robert D. Ramsey. Global war on terrorism occasional paper 19. OCLC: 255404771. Fort Leavenworth, Kan: Combat Studies Inst. Press, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-16-076875-0.

<sup>40</sup>Simons, “The Military Advisor as Warrior-King and Other “Going Native” Temptations”.

<sup>41</sup>Remi M. Hajjar. “Military Warriors as Peacekeeper-Diplomats: Building Productive Relationships with Foreign Counterparts in the Contemporary Military Advising Mission”. In: *Armed Forces & Society* 40.4 (Oct. 1, 2014). Publisher: SAGE

The literature on the intelligence gathering and warrior-diplomat roles of advisors relates most closely to my work. While the literature provides us with useful insights about what advisors do, it does not explicitly theorize why advisors are sent in some cases and not others, the kinds of information advisors collect, the roles of advisors and how they are connected to one another, and the implications of sending advisors for the relationship between intervener and proxy. I build upon this literature to argue that advisors do not merely brush up against politics in their work on military reform<sup>42</sup> or rely on cultural understanding in their relationships with their counterparts. Instead, navigating and influencing the politics of proxy war is an explicit part of their responsibilities and a core reason why interveners send advisors. Advisors end up doing the work typically attributed to “defense diplomacy” — relating to foreign soldiers based on their identity in a shared community and using these connections to improve political understanding between the sending and receiving groups<sup>43</sup> — across the proxy military during conflict.

### 3 Explaining the role and deployment of military advisors

The capacity-building role of advisors is important but it misses a key reason why advisors are sent: to help interveners manage a proxy with divergent interests. This matters because we can’t evaluate the effectiveness of great power intervention without understanding what advisors are asked to do and how politics is central to their mission. I argue that states use military advisors to act as both information gatherers and conduits of influence over the local partner’s military, and advisors recognize their responsibilities. This transformational role of advisors goes beyond navigating the politics of military reforms aimed solely at increasing military effectiveness and includes influencing the military as a political actor. During wartime, solutions to political disagreements between intervener and proxy requires buy-in from the military. The military makes key decisions about politics on a daily basis, such as how to treat civilians, implement aid and political projects, and relate to civilian authorities. And when the proxy military is a non-state actor or a weak government, buy-in requires lobbying an array of military actors spread out across zones of conflict. In such a conflict, the local level is critically important because that is where the war will be won or lost. Advisors provide “boots on the ground” for the intervener to manage a complicated network of proxy military actors as well the civilians with whom they interact.

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Publications Inc, pp. 647–672. ISSN: 0095-327X. DOI: 10.1177/0095327X13493275. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X13493275> (visited on 03/15/2021).

<sup>42</sup>See the following for the importance of politics in capacity-building efforts: Mara E. Karlin. *Building militaries in fragile states: challenges for the United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. 283 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8122-4926-2

<sup>43</sup>Charillon, Balzacq, and Ramel, “Defense Diplomacy”.

### 3.1 Advisors as information gatherers

I first theorize the role of advisors as information gatherers. That is, advisors collect specific kinds of information that can only be collected through personal relationships on the ground and that are useful to the intervener to hold the proxy accountable and understand the proxy’s military. When military advisors are embedded with the proxy, they can collect a kind of information that the intervener could not gain in any other way. Embeddedness creates the proximity for informal relationships to develop and creates trust between advisors and their counterparts. Advisors use these relationships to collect highly detailed information on the behavior, opinions, and attitudes of their local counterparts—even those who would be unwilling to work as intelligence assets for the intervener. They can reveal information about which military officers support reform and appropriate civil-military relations and which are opposed. This kind of information could not be gained through technology, short-term visits from Embassy personnel, or even intelligence assets. It is a kind of information that requires intimate observation by people on the ground.

Advisors can collect useful information about the proxy’s behavior. A source of tension in the relationship between intervener and proxy is the proxy’s hidden information about its own behavior, which makes it difficult for the intervener to properly apply incentives. To address this problem of moral hazard, interveners can invest in monitoring.<sup>44</sup> We can think of monitoring dynamically as a multi-step process by which the intervener first communicates its policy positions to the proxy, the proxy then complies enough to keep support, the intervener verifies this and then maintains support if the proxy complies enough. Advisors can act like two-way conduits of information.<sup>45</sup> They first communicate the intervener’s policy preferences to the local military and in turn communicate the behavior of the local military back to the intervener. Intervenors can use the valuable information that advisors provide on the actions of the military – anything from advance warning on a possible coup to reports of atrocities committed by security forces – to hold the local partner accountable for its actions.<sup>46</sup> The visible presence of advisors reminds the proxy’s military of the intervener’s preferences and that information about its behavior will be communicated back to the intervener.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, with military advisors on the ground, the intervener gains information about the

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<sup>44</sup>For an extensive discussion of principal-agent theory and various incentive structures for addressing moral hazard, see: Jean-Jacques Laffont and David Martimort. *The theory of incentives: the principal-agent model*. Princeton university press, 2009; Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker. “Small footprint, small payoff: The military effectiveness of security force assistance”. In: *Journal of Strategic Studies* 0.0 (Apr. 12, 2017), pp. 1–54. ISSN: 0140-2390. DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2017.1307745. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1307745>; Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*.

<sup>45</sup>Colonel Bryce Denno, US military advisor in Vietnam, describes the use of advisors to communicate messages from the intervener and then to report back on the counterpart. Bryce F. Denno. “Advisor and Counterpart”. In: *Advice for advisors: suggestions and observations from Lawrence to the present*. Ed. by Robert D. Ramsey. Global war on terrorism occasional paper 19. OCLC: 255404771. Fort Leavenworth, Kan: Combat Studies Inst. Press, 2006, pp. 33–43. ISBN: 978-0-16-076875-0, pp. 33–43.

<sup>46</sup>Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker, “Small footprint, small payoff”.

<sup>47</sup>On this point, many interviewees talked about how their presence was a deterrent to the proxy military, e.g.: “The good thing about an advisory effort is it does two things. It gives the host nation, the receiving nation, an incentive to use what we

proxy and the proxy knows it is being watched, which changes its behavior.

Furthermore, since advisors are acknowledged by the intervener, their information can be revealed when useful, unlike some kinds of intelligence that cannot be shared to protect sources and methods.<sup>48</sup> This specific and revealable information about leaders in the proxy's military allows the intervener to press for reforms with the proxy's political and defense officials. These reforms can range from modernizing defense institutions to requesting the removal of specific military leadership. Advisors can provide the information necessary for the intervener to make hiring-and-firing decisions about military leadership by great powers seeking to shape a proxy military.<sup>49</sup>

The second kind of information that military advisors provide to the intervener is situational awareness based on the local context in which they are embedded. Using their position on the ground embedded with a local military unit, advisors complement information collected through other sources of intelligence. Advisors pass on information about the micro-dynamics of civil war: information about local threats and enemies, successes or failures, public opinion, and trends over time. To collect this kind of information, advisors talk to a wide variety of people, from local civilians, military officers, and rank-and-file soldiers to captured enemy combatants. A US military advisor embedded with a militia unit in northern Mali in 2011 described how his team used its position on the ground to report on the threat of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was not being provided by other channels:

I think [we were] the first Operational Detachment Alpha [small Special Forces unit] up in Northern Mali in a couple of years at that point. . . And what we were gathering from our discussions with locals and then some of the intelligence work that we were doing was like, "Hey, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb is much more entrenched and bigger up here than I think anyone realizes now". . . I think that the [US Embassy Mali] Country Team at the time in 2011, was interpreting the lack of reporting on Al-Qaeda activity in Northern Mali as evidence of lack of Al-Qaeda. *Whereas in reality, there was a lack of reporting because there was a lack of access.*<sup>50</sup>

In sum, advisors use their personal relationships with locals and people in the proxy military to collect information. The intervener can use this information to monitor, that is, hold the proxy accountable for

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give them properly. It also gives them an incentive not to commit human rights violations. . . . Just the idea of having someone physically present with the indigenous armies is very beneficial, even if what I did for 14 months was completely ineffective, because just by me being there changes their behavior. . . . There's a lot of effort to have the appearance of towing the line and not being found out or being ratted-out. So the advisory effort serves that purpose, and it's a very open purpose. . . . I want to make sure I mention that because it's not just a collateral benefit. In some cases it's the number-one benefit. And if you can get them to do anything that makes sense, well, that would be good too." *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 14. Mar. 8, 2020

<sup>48</sup>Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson. "The Disclosure Dilemma: Nuclear Intelligence and International Organizations". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 63.2 (2019). \_eprint: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ajps.12426>, pp. 269–285. ISSN: 1540-5907. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12426>. (Visited on 03/25/2021), States can face a "disclosure dilemma": disclosure of intelligence can further political goals but tip off a violator that it is being observed.

<sup>49</sup>Mara E Karlin. *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017; Louis-Alexandre Berg. "Elite Bargains and External Influence: Security Assistance and Civil-Military Relations in Post-War Liberia and Sierra Leone". In: *Civil Wars* 22.2 (July 2, 2020). Publisher: Routledge \_eprint: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2020.1707495>, pp. 266–288. ISSN: 1369-8249. DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2020.1707495. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2020.1707495> (visited on 11/10/2020); O'Lavin, *War on the Cheap*.

<sup>50</sup>*Interview with US military advisor*. In collab. with Interviewee 23. Nov. 25, 2020.



its actions through selectively revealing information. Advisors are a visible sign of monitoring, which makes them deterrents to misbehavior. But advisors can also collect a second kind of information about local dynamics that allows interveners to “keep a finger on the pulse” of the conflict. In turn, interveners can use this information to continually assess the success of intervention.

### 3.2 Advisors as conduits of influence

Since advisors typically have no command authority, their impact is greater when they have more influence over their counterparts.<sup>51</sup> To explain how influence develops and when it is likely to be strongest, I draw on sociological theory of social bonding between diplomats.<sup>52</sup> To begin a relationship, the advisor and his counterpart first must have *bodily co-presence*, i.e. they must interact in person.<sup>53</sup> The initial reason for interacting in person is purely practical: advisors are there to provide value by building military capacity for their counterparts.<sup>54</sup> The capacity-building and transformational roles of military advisors are closely intertwined because without their role as capacity-builders, advisors would have no reason to interact with their counterparts and would bring little to the table. Advisors emphasize the importance of doing a good job at capacity-building as the foundation for rapport. One advisor described the process as the following: “The best way to establish a rapport is through hard work. And so maybe start off with something quick and easy that, whoever your counterpart is supposed to be, wanted.”<sup>55</sup>

For a positive interaction to result between advisor and counterpart, *barriers to outsiders* and *mutual focus of attention* must be present.<sup>56</sup> In the diplomatic context, clear separation must exist between those involved in the interaction and those who are excluded, and the interacting individuals must understand that they are “jointly trapped in this conflict together.”<sup>57</sup> In the context of a military advisor and his counterpart,

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<sup>51</sup>Captain Richard A. Jones, US military advisor to Vietnam, put it this way: “Our soldiers are deprived of command—the most necessary factor in influencing the action—although, curiously enough, they may still be charged with a large measure of the responsibility. Therefore, our leadership training must be almost completely recast. We must study and teach all the subtle nuances, all the Carnegie-like techniques of winning friends, and we must learn to be patient and to apply Lenin’s maxim of ‘one step backward, two steps forward.’ Otherwise the advisor may face endless frustration and will be only marginally effective.” See Jones, “The Nationbuilder: Soldier of the Sixties”. Historically, however, colonial powers or other powerful states sometimes sent military advisors to directly command the local partner’s troops. When intervening in Oman during the Cold War, British military advisors filled the roles of non-commissioned officers since outsiders had more credibility than locals did in commanding a multi-ethnic force (Ladwig III, “Supporting allies in counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion:”), while in Afghanistan (1978-89), Soviet advisors assumed operational planning and even direct command of military forces (Olga Oliker. *Building Afghanistan’s security forces in wartime: the Soviet experience*. OCLC: ocn746619384. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011. 100 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8330-5168-4, p. 24).

<sup>52</sup>Marcus Holmes and Nicholas J. Wheeler. “Social bonding in diplomacy”. In: *International Theory* 12.1 (Mar. 2020). Publisher: Cambridge University Press, pp. 133–161. ISSN: 1752-9719, 1752-9727. DOI: 10.1017/S1752971919000162. URL: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-theory/article/social-bonding-in-diplomacy/6DFE8CD5B2096259259FAEAF0819285> (visited on 03/15/2021).

<sup>53</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, “Social bonding in diplomacy”; Randall Collins. *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton University Press, 2004.

<sup>54</sup>David L Shelton. “Some Advice for the Prospective Advisor”. In: *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador*. Ed. by Robert D. Ramsey III. Combat Studies Institute, 2012. URL: <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combat-studies-institute/csi-books/ramsey.pdf> (visited on 06/07/2018).

<sup>55</sup>Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 5. Jan. 15, 2020.

<sup>56</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, “Social bonding in diplomacy”.

<sup>57</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, “Social bonding in diplomacy”, p. 149.

their shared identity as warriors<sup>58</sup> provides a sense of exclusivity. Advisors have credibility because they are insiders; their advice comes from a place of understanding and expertise. Because the advisor is the “expert” from a strong and powerful military, the counterpart might seek to emulate the advisor.<sup>59</sup> When the advisor and his counterpart work together on defeating a shared enemy, they have a mutual focus of attention. This focus will be heightened when advisors accompany their counterparts into combat or incidentally come under fire. In combat, advisors can directly demonstrate their expertise as soldiers as well as focus their attention on the task of fighting alongside their counterpart.<sup>60</sup> Advisors as skilled practitioners of combat can thus more easily bond and establish personal relationships with their counterparts than the intervener’s civilians can.

In addition to interacting through their professional relationships, advisors are able to ‘get on the same page’ with their counterparts through an array of social activities as part of working and living alongside their counterparts on a daily basis. Advisors utilize these informal interactions as a key way to generate influence over their local counterparts, using occasions like a meal or a meeting over drinks as an opportunity to broach proposals for reform in a non-threatening way.

One advisor described using social engagements, like meeting for drinks after work, as a means to get a meeting with his counterpart (who was higher in rank). While deployed as US military advisor to the Ministry of Defense of the Central African Republic (CAR), this advisor took his counterpart out for drinks and spoke French to bond with him. As a result, he convinced his counterpart to contribute to a US-Ugandan coalition fighting against the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) when the US Ambassador and the country team hadn’t been successful.<sup>61</sup> Another advisor described a lengthy process of social interactions that generated influence: “. . . It was often after a couple of beers or something that you could even broach the subject with your counterpart and say, once alcohol sort of dulled the sensitivities a little bit. . . golly, ‘don’t you realize’ and ‘you know what this is doing.’ And then they would respond, and little by little, you could make that argument. And that’s what happened. It happened a little by little over time.”<sup>62</sup>

The final criterion for a positive interaction is *shared mood* between the interacting individuals, that is, recognizing shared interests and the “human” in the other.<sup>63</sup> If the interactions occur and the individuals

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<sup>58</sup>For more on professional military identity, see the following on the US context: Risa Brooks. “Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking civil-military relations in the United States”. In: *International Security* 44.4 (2020). Publisher: MIT Press, pp. 7–44.

<sup>59</sup>I thank Risa Brooks for suggesting this mechanism. Simons, “The Military Advisor as Warrior-King and Other “Going Native” Temptations”; Robert D. Ramsey. *Advice for advisors: suggestions and observations from Laurence to the present*. Global war on terrorism occasional paper 19. OCLC: 255404771. Fort Leavenworth, Kan: Combat Studies Inst. Press, 2006. 181 pp. ISBN: 978-0-16-076875-0.

<sup>60</sup>One advisor told me how he saved his counterpart’s life under fire, and after that “everybody knew what happened. So I was pretty bulletproof after that, and I could pretty much do what I wanted to do.” *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 13. Feb. 6, 2020

<sup>61</sup>*Interview with US military advisor*. In collab. with Interviewee 23. Nov. 25, 2020.

<sup>62</sup>*Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>63</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, “Social bonding in diplomacy”.

do not recognize shared interests, a negative rather than positive social bond will develop.<sup>64</sup> Shared mood is the product of repeated interactions with mutual focus of attention.<sup>65</sup> Over time, interacting individuals can develop trust and empathy, understanding each other's motivations.<sup>66</sup> When the elements of a successful interaction (face-to-face interaction, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood) are present, the interacting individuals share a positive, "excited reaction of experiencing something together."<sup>67</sup> As one advisor put it: "...Both [the other American advisor] and I lived on that cuartel with [our counterparts]. It was a rather austere place, they saw us sharing both their hardships and their victories with them. And that made it easier to assimilate into the organization."<sup>68</sup>

Advisors often build close personal relationships with their counterparts that are characterized by positive emotions, loyalty, and even affection. Some of these positive bonds are the expected outcome of an exchange relationship where both parties benefit,<sup>69</sup> e.g. the advisor provides advice and the counterpart feeds and provides security for the advisor. But over time, some of these relationships become intense and more akin to the bonds between two close friends than between two individuals merely working with one another.<sup>70</sup> I asked my interviewees to describe their relationships with their local counterparts. Advisors often responded using emotive language, such as: "He was the finest officer I ever met in my life... We became good friends, really good friends"<sup>71</sup>; "We really liked [him]. We believed in him. We didn't go native. It wasn't like in that sense, it's just we had faith in him"<sup>72</sup>; "... I made the mistake of getting emotionally involved to some extent because it did feel like a paternal relationship. I felt like I was their company commander and I was responsible for them because I realized that if I didn't fight for them, nobody else would"<sup>73</sup>; and "I had better relationships with the people I was advising than I did with a lot of my [American] counterparts."<sup>74</sup> Other advisors described strong friendships with their counterparts that continued even after their professional relationships ended.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, "Social bonding in diplomacy", pp. 150–151.

<sup>65</sup>Jonathan H. Turner and Jan E. Stets. *The sociology of emotions*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>66</sup>Naomi Head. "Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue". In: *Emotions in international politics: Beyond mainstream international relations*. Ed. by Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<sup>67</sup>Holmes and Wheeler, "Social bonding in diplomacy", p. 150.

<sup>68</sup>Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 11. Mar. 9, 2020.

<sup>69</sup>Turner and Stets, *The sociology of emotions*; Simons, "The Military Advisor as Warrior-King and Other "Going Native" Temptations".

<sup>70</sup>Gibby differentiates between "professional courtesy" and "genuine friendship." Bryan R. Gibby. *The Will to Win: American Military Advisors in Korea, 1946-1953*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2012. 1 online resource (393 pages). ISBN: 978-0-8173-8611-5. URL: <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/11143118> (visited on 10/29/2020).

<sup>71</sup>Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 5. Jan. 15, 2020.

<sup>72</sup>Interview with US military advisor to Afghanistan. In collab. with Interviewee 27. Apr. 27, 2020.

<sup>73</sup>Interview with US advisor to Iraq. In collab. with Interviewee 9. Jan. 12, 2019.

<sup>74</sup>Interview with US military advisor to Afghanistan. In collab. with Interviewee 25. Jan. 1, 2020.

<sup>75</sup>To build close relationships, advisors had to be able to actually converse with their counterparts in a language that both understood reasonably well. While interpreters can assist, communication is better when it includes only the advisor and counterpart. US advisors who spoke the local language well or whose counterparts were fluent in English felt they more easily built relationships and had more influence. An advisor described the importance of language in fostering connection with his counterparts in an Afghan Special Operations aviation unit and intelligence unit (but note how he puts the burden for cultural connection on the Afghan advisees rather than himself): "We trained them to fly helicopters at Fort Rucker in the U.S, so

Both the more “thin” and “deep” forms of these personal relationships, I argue, allow military advisors to act as conduits of influence for the intervener at the local level. After building influence through positive interactions, advisors can use that influence to persuade their local counterparts that certain reforms or objectives that the intervener wants are in the local counterpart’s best interests, too,<sup>76</sup> persuading them that actions like restraint toward the civilian population or proper and humane interrogation of prisoners can lead to better military results. When relationships are close between advisors and their counterparts, advisors can exercise substantial influence over them and even change their minds over time.

### 3.3 Advisor deployments

In the previous sections, I outlined how advisors can both monitor and influence their counterparts when deployed. I now theorize when advisors will be deployed to work with a proxy. I first rely on a formal model of the strategic interaction between the intervener and proxy to generate empirically testable hypotheses about advisor deployment. I describe the model and its implications informally here, and include the full model in Appendix A. In the formal model, advisors are conceptualized as a form of monitoring, which allows the intervening state to learn about the actions of its proxy. Monitoring, in turn, allows the intervener to more easily apply strategic incentives to the proxy, choosing its rewards and punishments based on the proxy’s behavior. However, monitoring can be costly, because it involves putting people on the ground in potentially dangerous positions with the local military.

The portion of my theory that address advisors as conduits of influence expands the role of advisors from a static to a dynamic setting. Since formal modeling has limitations in this dynamic setting, I develop that portion of the theory without a model, drawing on literature from sociology. Furthermore, the levels of analysis of analysis in information-gathering and influencing roles of advisors are different; information-gathering is used to inform the use of incentives at the strategic level, while influence operates at the local and individual level.

My formal model is a typical delegation model where the intervener (principal) chooses between three

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they’re very competent, great English, really smart guys. They know American culture. They understand how U.S. advisors work and talk and think. So, it just was a really cool thing to see on the ground, that really strong relationship. It did translate to the intel side. It wasn’t quite as easy for me, only because none of the intel guys had come to the U.S. So, they were, I guess, maybe a little bit less culturally understanding and a little bit ... They just didn’t have the same level of interaction with Americans prior to the advisory mission happening that some of the other guys had, but very, very intelligent...I just got really lucky in that I had a team of guys that was already really smart and competent and that could speak English well. And that it was already a cut above the rest in that sense. I don’t think I could have gotten a quarter of as much done if I was in a regular unit that got to interact with their guys for a quarter the amount of time and in a different capacity. I got lucky, essentially, because it does not look like that everywhere.” *Interview with US military advisor to Afghanistan*. In collab. with Interviewee 25. Jan. 1, 2020. For more on the importance of language competency, see: David T. Gardner. *Lessons from the Past: Vital Factors Influencing Military Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan*. Section: Technical Reports. NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY CA DEPT OF NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS, Mar. 1, 2012. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA560642> (visited on 03/15/2021)

<sup>76</sup>Carol Atkinson. *Military soft power: Public diplomacy through military educational exchanges*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

Table 1: Levels of analysis in the theory

Role of Advisors	Level of Analysis for Effects
Information gathering	Strategic level
Influencing	Individual and local level

options for intervention: staying out, supporting a proxy (hiring an agent), or going in with ground combat troops. The principal’s tools to incentivize good behavior on the part of the agent in my model are withdrawing or escalating if the proxy makes proxy war unsustainable. Escalating or withdrawing are both punishments for the proxy, who would prefer to retain both support and its autonomy. The reward for the proxy in the model is the intervener’s continued support. The proxy complies just enough in equilibrium in order to keep support, provided support is sufficiently valuable.

Principal-agent models typically involve some kind of asymmetric information; in my model, the agent knows more about its actions than the principal does, unless the principal invests in monitoring. The dilemma that interveners face in my model is when it is worth it to pay for costly monitoring. Military advisors are particularly costly forms of monitoring. They are sent in insufficient quantities to change the balance of military capability, but are often deployed in dangerous positions close to the front lines or in exposed outposts where they could be attacked. This is especially true if advisors are embedded at forward operating bases or accompany their local counterparts into combat. If military advisors die, interveners could face public pressure either to escalate and pay the costs of combat or to withdraw and give up the goals of the intervention, similar to how combat casualties have these effects depending on public opinion and the nature of domestic politics at the moment.<sup>77</sup> As a result, decisionmakers in intervening states view advisors as a serious commitment to a conflict that could change the political costs and benefits of intervention and are often reluctant to deploy them (for more on the costs of advisors, see pages 58-59 in Appendix A). For example, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which ended in a nearly ten-year commitment of Soviet combat troops, began with Soviet officials refusing even to begin a training program for officers and border guards, despite repeated Afghan requests.<sup>78</sup>

To evaluate when advisors will be sent to monitor, I consider a model with two players: the Intervener (I) and Proxy (P). The Intervener would like to influence a civil war, perhaps to support an ally or client;<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Dieuwertje Kuijpers and Gijs Schumacher. “Don’t Mention the War versus Escalating Commitment: Political Party Responses to Military Casualties”. In: *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16.4 (2020), pp. 587–607.

<sup>78</sup>Odd Arne Westad et al. *The global Cold War: third world interventions and the making of our times*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>79</sup>Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, “To arm or to ally? The patron’s dilemma and the strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances”; Brett Ashley Leeds, Andrew G Long, and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. “Reevaluating alliance reliability: Specific

to further ideological goals;<sup>80</sup> to respond to domestic pressure to intervene;<sup>81</sup> or for regime change in another state.<sup>82</sup> Proxies can be either non-state actors or states that the Intervener would like to fight against the target of the intervention in exchange for support from the intervener.<sup>83</sup> The target of an intervention is another actor in a civil war, either a non-state armed group or the state.

In the model, the Intervener must choose whether to (1) not support the Proxy, thereby staying out completely or limiting its involvement to diplomatic intervention; (2) provide support to the Proxy, which will improve the military prospects of the Proxy; or (3) intervene with its own combat troops. Proxies vary in terms of how much their preferences align with the Intervener's preferences as well as in their military effectiveness. If the Intervener chooses to support a Proxy, it wants the Proxy to choose policies as close as possible to its own preferences and to have their military be as effective as possible. The Proxy, of course, prefers to pocket as much support as possible while pursuing its ideal policies. Proxies with both high preference alignment with the Intervener and high military effectiveness are rare. Proxies vary greatly in their willingness and ability to fight and support broader goals of interveners.<sup>84</sup> Even during the Cold War, when we often assume strong ideological affinity and clientelism between the supporting state and the proxy, proxies exhibited significant agency to choose their sponsors and then their behavior after receiving support.<sup>85</sup>

If the intervener chooses to support the proxy, it then chooses whether to monitor it. After observing whether it is being monitored, the proxy chooses a policy position. If the intervener chose to monitor, it can observe the proxy's actions, but must pay the cost of monitoring. Finally, the intervener decides whether to continue supporting the proxy, escalate by sending in combat troops, or withdraw its support for the proxy.

My model provides two main implications to guide empirical testing. First, the lower the preference alignment between the intervener and proxy, the more likely interveners will be to deploy military advisors.

The model shows that interveners prefer to support proxies with similar interests, but they will support

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threats, specific promises". In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44.5 (2000), pp. 686–699; Marita Kaw. "Predicting Soviet military intervention". In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33.3 (1989), pp. 402–429.

<sup>80</sup>Renato Corbetta. "Determinants of Third Parties' Intervention and Alignment Choices in Ongoing Conflicts, 1946–2001". In: *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6.1 (2010), pp. 61–85.

<sup>81</sup>Patrick M Regan. "Choosing to intervene: Outside interventions in internal conflicts". In: *The Journal of Politics* 60.3 (1998), pp. 754–779.

<sup>82</sup>Michael Poznansky, Alexander B Downes, and Lindsey A O'Rourke. "Friends, Foes, and Foreign-Imposed Regime Change". In: *International Security* 42.2 (2017), pp. 191–195; Alexander B Downes and Lindsey A O'Rourke. "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations". In: *International Security* 41.2 (2016), pp. 43–89; Elizabeth N Saunders. "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy". In: *International Security* 34.2 (2009), pp. 119–161.

<sup>83</sup>I focus the nature of proxy support on preventing the target of the intervention from military victory, rather than ensuring the proxy's military victory, in congruence with Vladimir Rauta. "A structural-relational analysis of party dynamics in proxy wars". In: *International Relations* (Oct. 12, 2018), p. 0047117818802436. DOI: 10.1177/0047117818802436. (Visited on 10/12/2018)

<sup>84</sup>Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*; Elias, "The Big Problem of Small Allies: New Data and Theory on Defiant Local Counterinsurgency Partners in Afghanistan and Iraq"; Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*; Rauta, "A structural-relational analysis of party dynamics in proxy wars".

<sup>85</sup>Rauta, "A structural-relational analysis of party dynamics in proxy wars"; Belgin San-Akca. *States in disguise: causes of state support for rebel groups*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

proxies with misaligned interests when non-intervention is off the table and combat is an equally bad option. Under these conditions, interveners will send military advisors to monitor the proxy's actions. Second, interveners' decisions to deploy advisors depend not only on the proxy's military capacity and alignment but also on the cost of monitoring. When the cost of monitoring is low, great powers should deploy them more often, and to more aligned proxies. When the cost of monitoring is high, great powers will deploy them less often and to less aligned proxies.

These implications, and my theory about *how* monitoring and influencing are made possible by the capacity-building role of advisors, lead to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1. *Capacity building:*** *Interveners will be more likely to send military advisors when the proxy's military capacity is low.*

Interveners will be more likely to send military advisors when the military capacity of the proxy is low, since the *raison d'être* of advisors is building military capacity. Capacity building provides the reason for the military advisors and proxy forces to interact, enabling monitoring and influence.

**Hypothesis 2. *Monitoring and Influencing:*** *Interveners will be more likely to send military advisors when their preference alignment with the proxy is low.*

As the model's first implication shows, interveners will be more likely to send military advisors when the preference alignment between the intervener and proxy is low, so advisors can monitor the proxy. Influence will similarly be the most important when the interests of the intervener and proxy are further apart.

**Hypothesis 3. *Cost Consciousness:*** *Interveners will be more likely to send military advisors when the cost of sending them is low.*

This hypothesis follows directly from the second implication of the model. As the cost of sending advisors to monitor decreases, interveners will be more likely to send them. If the cost of sending advisors is high, then interveners will only send them when the degree of preference misalignment with the proxy is high.

Table 2 illustrates the interaction between the preference alignment of the intervener and proxy and the proxy's military capacity. My theory predicts that advisors will be sent to monitor and influence when the preference alignment between the intervener and proxy is low. They will also be sent to build military capacity when the proxy's military capacity is low. As I detail earlier in this paper, the military capacity building role of advisors is essential to allow them to monitor and influence the proxy, so most cases of advisors should be in the bottom row of the table. Advisors will rarely be sent when the proxy is both highly aligned with the intervener and has high military capacity, and cases of monitoring without capacity building will also be comparatively rare.

Table 2: Theory predictions for deployment and tasks of advisors

	<i>High alignment</i>	<i>Low alignment</i>
<i>High military capacity</i>		Monitor/Influence (H2)
<i>Low military capacity</i>	Build capacity (H1)	Monitor/Influence (H2) & Build capacity (H1)

The data I collected on military advising show that most cases are in the bottom row of the table, as predicted, though cases exist in each cell of the table. Chinese support for the Pathet Lao (1959-73) is an example of support for a proxy with highly alignment and high military capacity, although there are few similar cases in my data. Soviet support for the Somali government (1976-77) is a proxy with high capacity but low alignment. An example of advisor deployments to a proxy with high alignment but low capacity is US support for the government of Ukraine (2014-present). The case study I address in the next section – US support for the government of El Salvador (1979-92) – is a case of low alignment and low military capacity, which my theory predicts should lead to deployment of advisors for both monitoring/influencing and capacity building.

## 4 US intervention in El Salvador (1979-89)

In this section, I provide a case study of US intervention during the Carter and Reagan presidencies (1979-89) to support the government side in the Salvadoran Civil War. I demonstrate first that when making decisions about the kind of intervention, policymakers chose to send advisors to monitor and influence the Salvadoran military. Policymakers evaluated and rejected an alternative that would have been more politically feasible – training the Salvadoran military outside the country – because they believed the advisors needed to be present in-country and interact face-to-face with the Salvadoran military there in order to prevent human rights abuses. The transformational role of advisors was highly important and deeply intertwined with their capacity-building role. Finally, I provide evidence from interviews of advisors that shows they considered monitoring and influencing a key part of their responsibilities in working with the Salvadoran military. Many advisors went so far as to say that guiding and correcting the behavior of the Salvadoran military was the most important part of their job.

The Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1992) was fought between the center-right junta government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a Communist insurgency. From the beginning it was marked by widespread human rights violations committed by the military and political right



in El Salvador.<sup>86</sup> Scholars estimated that there were around 71,000 civilian forced disappearances and killings over the course of the conflict, or about 1–2 percent of El Salvador’s prewar population. The vast majority of these crimes were committed by the Salvadoran army, paramilitary security forces, and allied death squads, especially early in the conflict.<sup>87</sup> These civilian killings ranged from assassinations to massacres in which entire villages were wiped out. The Salvadoran security forces also committed other human rights abuses such as torture and execution of captured FMLN prisoners or detained suspects. Information about these human rights abuses was widely available and publicized by the US press.<sup>88</sup> Though repression decreased over time, government forces never stopped committing atrocities.<sup>89</sup> Notable instances of atrocities near the end of the war include the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter during the 1989 guerilla offensive.<sup>90</sup>

The United States repeatedly clashed with the Salvadoran government over its human rights abuses as well as the military’s constant threat to conduct a coup to replace the centrist government. While others have written at length about aid conditionality and strategic incentives during US intervention in El Salvador,<sup>91</sup> I focus on a complimentary but no less important part of US efforts to protect and promote reform: sending military advisors to directly shape the Salvadoran military.

The Salvadoran Civil War exhibits within-case variation in the key variables that my theory predicts should lead to deployment of military advisors (Table 3). In the first period, the Salvadoran military had medium capacity and the cost of monitoring was high, due to public reluctance to support the Salvadoran government given its human rights abuses. Carter declined to send military advisors for capacity building since it would tie the US government publicly to the Salvadoran military. Advisors were sent on a rotational basis solely for information-gathering to assess the quality and intentions of the Salvadoran military, as well as monitor the military’s progress on reform. In the second period, the capacity of the Salvadoran military sharply declined, as the FMLN launched its Final Offensive in January 1981. Carter quickly approved advisors for capacity building. Upon taking office, Reagan continued Carter’s policies.

These initial deployments of advisors by Carter and Reagan offer strong support for my theory. Advisors were sent for monitoring and then for capacity building after a sharp decline in the Salvadoran military’s

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<sup>86</sup>The FMLN committed human rights abuses, too, but it is generally agreed in scholarly literature that groups affiliated with the government committed the vast majority.

<sup>87</sup>Amelia Hoover Green and Patrick Ball. “Civilian killings and disappearances during civil war in El Salvador (1980–1992)”. In: *Demographic Research* 41 (2019), pp. 781–814.

<sup>88</sup>For just one example, on January 26, 1980, just two days before the Carter administration’s National Security Council (NSC) met for the first time to consider greater US support for the government of El Salvador, the Washington Post ran a short story about 11 political killings in El Salvador. The Washington Post. *11 Political Slayings in El Salvador*. English. Jan. 1980

<sup>89</sup>Green and Ball, “Civilian killings and disappearances during civil war in El Salvador (1980–1992)”.

<sup>90</sup>Danny Hajek. “Remembering The 1989 Massacre Of Jesuits In El Salvador”. In: *NPR.org* (Nov. 15, 2019). Library Catalog: [www.npr.org](https://www.npr.org). URL: <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/15/779628824/remembering-the-1989-massacre-of-jesuits-in-el-salvador>.

<sup>91</sup>Ladwig III, “Influencing Clients in Counterinsurgency: US Involvement in El Salvador’s Civil War, 1979–92”; Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*.

Table 3: Advisor deployment cases in the Salvadoran Civil War

US President	Dates	Preference Alignment	Capacity	Advisor Role	Theory support
Carter	1979-1981	Low	Medium	Advisors sent for information-gathering only.	Strong
Carter	1981	Low	Low	Advisors sent for capacity-building, monitoring, & influencing. Not embedded.	Strong
Reagan	1981-1984	Low	Low	Advisors sent for capacity-building, monitoring, & influencing. Not embedded.	Strong
Reagan	1984-1984	Low	Low	Advisors temporarily embedded in the brigades.	Mixed
Reagan	1984-1989	Medium	Medium	Advisors permanently embedded in the brigades.	Mixed

capacity. Due to the US public’s opposition to advisors, they were not permitted to accompany their counterparts into combat nor were they embedded with the local military, which would have been a more effective form of monitoring. The third period offers more mixed support for my theory. In 1984, advisors were finally embedded within the brigades to monitor the 1984 presidential election in El Salvador. This deployment of advisors to the brigades offers mixed support for my theory, as advisors were embedded despite no change in the cost of monitoring. After the 1984 election led to the successful installation of a pro-US and liberal candidate as President of El Salvador, Congress was more forgiving of the Reagan administration’s intervention. The Salvadoran government also initiated major reforms. My theory predicts that policymakers would be more likely to embed advisors permanently with Salvadoran forces as the cost of monitoring declined. As I highlight later in the paper, the decision to embed the advisors in the brigades was a bottom-up one made by US military advisors in the US Embassy in San Salvador, rather than a decision of US policymakers, placing this decision outside the scope of my theory. The outcome thus fits my theory but the mechanism of *how* the advisors became permanently embedded does not.

Advisors complemented US diplomatic efforts to restrain the Salvadoran military from committing human rights abuses and to stop the military from overturning the civilian government in a coup. This was especially the case after US advisors were embedded with Salvadoran brigades. I argue that by providing specific

information gleaned through personal relationships on the ground, US military advisors made it easier for the United States to conduct the monitoring needed for a policy of aid conditionality. Furthermore, I show that advisors attempted to influence their local counterparts to adopt a more humane approach to counterinsurgency as well as adopt a more democratic view of civil-military relations. I do not directly evaluate the effect of advisors on reducing repression, but evidence suggested they had some success as overall levels of repression fell around the time that advisors were embedded in the Salvadoran brigades. Advisors also provided specific, first-hand accounts of their successes (and failures) of influence, which suggest they had local, though perhaps tenuous, effects on levels of repression.

The case study of the Salvadoran Civil War also shows the challenges of advising when preference alignment between the proxy and intervener is low and when the cost of monitoring is high. The political constraints of intervention in El Salvador restricted the size and scope of the advising mission, imposing serious limitations on advisors' ability to monitor and influence their counterparts. Monitoring and influencing were also made more difficult by the delay in allowing advisors to work with operational units and by restrictions that prevented advisors from accompanying their counterparts into combat.

## 4.1 Background

The Salvadoran civil war grew out of a decade of worsening tensions between a conservative regime backed by oligarchs and the military on the one side and poor, subsistence laborers with little outlet for political participation on the other.<sup>92</sup> In 1972, the military overturned an electoral victory by a coalition of leftist and centrist parties, including the centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC), which the United States would later end up supporting during intervention in the civil war. The military's subverting of the legitimate democratic process increased the attractiveness of armed revolution.<sup>93</sup> Rapidly rising commodity prices increased commercial agriculture, leading to displacement of the poor campesinos who did not own land and a huge decline in living standards for the rural poor.<sup>94</sup> It is this dissatisfaction that promoted insurgent mobilization into a front that at its peak had "perhaps 14,000 full-time combatants, 100,000 part-time fighters and hundreds of thousands of sympathizers."<sup>95</sup> To counter this mobilization by the left, the right in El Salvador organized in the form of paramilitary organizations called "death squads," some linked with the security forces and military and others remaining independent. The death squads, along with the National Guard and police organizations, sought to repress and intimidate anyone suspected of leftist

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<sup>92</sup>Hugh Byrne. *El Salvador's civil war : a study of revolution*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996. 241 pp.

<sup>93</sup>Byrne, *El Salvador's civil war : a study of revolution*, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup>Hal Brands. *Latin America's Cold War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. 385 pages, [16] pages of plates. ISBN: 978-0-674-05528-5; Elisabeth Jean Wood. *Insurgent collective action and civil war in El Salvador*. Cambridge studies in comparative politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 308 pp., pp. 22–28.

<sup>95</sup>Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, p. 10.

sympathies.<sup>96</sup> This environment of repression led US advisors to wonder when they first got to El Salvador in the 1980s which side the United States should actually be supporting.<sup>97</sup>

During this period of increasing violence in El Salvador, the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in July 1979 alarmed US policymakers. The Carter administration was concerned about the potential for another crisis that would strengthen the Communist left in Latin America. Carter's central focus on human rights in foreign policy, however, had led to detachment from many countries in the region, including El Salvador.<sup>98</sup> The administration began debating how to re-engage with countries like El Salvador to "reverse the perception of US vacillation or withdrawal."<sup>99</sup> While the United States was considering options for engagement with El Salvador, a group of reform-minded young officers and civilians seized control of the Salvadoran government in an October 1979 coup. The junta was genuinely reformist and willing to consider issues like land reform; some of its members included Communists.<sup>100</sup>

The Carter administration debated whether to support the new government, and if so, how. The civilians in the new junta were broadly sympathetic to US goals and priorities, but the Salvadoran right (exemplified by the ARENA party's Roberto D'Aubuisson, a known death squad leader) and military were not. The military threatened repeatedly to launch a coup and fight without US help if pushed too hard. This was no idle threat given its history of direct military rule from 1931-1982 and broad political backing from powerful Salvadoran oligarchs.<sup>101</sup> Despite the mismatch in goals between the United States and a powerful portion of the Salvadoran government, the Carter administration was compelled to intervene to prevent the possibility of another Communist victory in El Salvador. Yet Carter did not want to empower the military to commit more repression. He opted to support the Salvadoran government while placing strong conditions on aid to incentivize the Salvadoran military to reform.<sup>102</sup>

## 4.2 Advisors sent for information-gathering only (1979-81)

The key US goals for El Salvador became the following: first and foremost, to prevent a leftist military or political victory in El Salvador; second, to compel the military to work with a coalition of centrist politicians and not overthrow the government; and third, to reduce the level of repression enough to maintain Congressional support for intervention, as well as increase Salvadoran support for the government. The first

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<sup>96</sup>Todd R. Greentree. *Crossroads of intervention : insurgency and counterinsurgency lessons from Central America*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2008. 196 pp., p. 78.

<sup>97</sup>Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 13. Feb. 6, 2020.

<sup>98</sup>Byrne, *El Salvador's civil war : a study of revolution*, p. 47.

<sup>99</sup>Memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski for President Carter, June 13, 1979, Box 25, Folder "Meetings PRC111 6/11/79," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>100</sup>Greentree, *Crossroads of intervention : insurgency and counterinsurgency lessons from Central America*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>101</sup>William D Stanley. "El Salvador: The Consolidation and Collapse of Military Domination". In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2020.

<sup>102</sup>Russell Crandall. *The Salvador Option*. Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 133.

goal was essential because of the Cold War context of the Salvadoran civil war. The second goal was essential because if a right-wing government were to take power in a coup, continued US support to the Salvadoran government would be untenable and increase the probability of an insurgent victory.<sup>103</sup> And finally, the Carter administration believed that looking the other way on human rights violations would ultimately be self-defeating since the impetus for the insurgency was the government's lack of reform—a "crisis of delegitimization," as NSC staffer Robert Pastor called it.<sup>104</sup>

The new junta got off to a strong start, purging 80 officers and 1,400 enlisted men accused of human rights abuses.<sup>105</sup> The right began to strongly push back against these reforms and repression actually increased in the few months following the coup.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, by February 1980, Pastor noted that the right was the "most immediate threat to US interests" in El Salvador, and if the right seized power to prevent reform, a "bloodbath of unbelievable proportions" would ensue, ensuring a victory for the Communists.<sup>107</sup> The right was enabled by the perception that the United States would support El Salvador no matter what given the decline of US influence in Latin America.<sup>108</sup>

To prevent a military coup and build the political legitimacy of the Salvadoran government, the Carter administration sought to broker a deal between the moderate Christian Democratic Party, or PDC, led by Napoleon Duarte, and the military.<sup>109</sup> The administration considered sending US military advisors as a carrot to incentivize the Salvadoran military to support the civilian government and as a tool to influence the more reform-minded portion of the security services. Outlining the benefits of sending military advisors, Carter National Security Council staff member Robert Pastor stated that the PDC saw US military advisors "as a way to increase their own influence (through us). Moreover, the 36-man team will train the army, which is more supportive of reforms and opposed to the repression, than the Treasury police or the security forces, and so the [military advisors] will help us to strengthen the hands of those who are more willing to curb the repression."<sup>110</sup> He noted further that "We could therefore use [the advising teams] to *transform the army into a more rational force*, which, in turn, could be used to stop the killings by the Treasury police and other military units of less reliability than the army."<sup>111</sup>

As it was considering advisors, the Carter administration made clear that it expected advisors to build

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<sup>103</sup>Minutes from Special Coordination Committee Meeting, January 28, 1980, Box 32, Folder "Meetings, SCC 261 1/28/80," Zbigniew Brzezinski Material - Subject Files (NSA 7), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

<sup>104</sup>Memo from Robert A. Pastor for Zbigniew Brzezinski, July 19, 1979, Box 30, Folder "Meetings - SCC 183, 7/17/79," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>105</sup>Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*, p. 218.

<sup>106</sup>Greentree, *Crossroads of intervention : insurgency and counterinsurgency lessons from Central America*, pp. 78–79.

<sup>107</sup>Memo from Robert A. Pastor for Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 26, 1980, Box 37, Folder "Serial Xs (2/1/80-4/15/80)," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*, pp. 221–225.

<sup>110</sup>Memo from Robert Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 13, 1980, "Mini-SCC on El Salvador," El Salvador Collections, DNSA.

<sup>111</sup>Memo from Robert Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 13, 1980, "SCC on El Salvador - March 13, 1980," El Salvador Collections, DNSA. Emphasis mine.

capacity, monitor, and influence their counterparts. The Department of Defense had briefed Pastor on the potential roles of military advisors, should Carter choose to send them. The briefing (after Pastor's edits) made clear that the administration envisioned three main roles for the military advisors: first, to demonstrate US support for the junta government that is "critical to: forestall any coups, carry out announced reforms," second, to build military capacity, and third, to teach "the military proportionate responses to various situations rather than the overuse of force which they tend to rely on."<sup>112</sup> Following the briefing, Pastor wrote that if the "DOD/JCS understand clearly that their mission is not just to help the Salvadoreans [sic] beat the Left, but also to curb the right and minimize the use of lethal force on their part" then "There is no question in my mind that the [military advisors] could be an effective instrument because our military has tremendous influence over the military in Central America..."<sup>113</sup>

Even though the Carter administration recognized that military advisors were needed both to build capacity and curb the right, they were reluctant to send advisors because of potential domestic and international political backlash. To limit the costs of sending advisors, the principals agreed they should only be sent as part of a multilateral effort involving Venezuela.<sup>114</sup> The multilateral effort failed when a Washington Post article on US aid to El Salvador revealed that Carter was considering sending in military advisors, outraging the Venezuelan public.<sup>115</sup> Policymakers, then, were abundantly aware of the potential costs of sending advisors.

While the Carter administration tried to settle on a means of intervention, the centrist government that the United States was trying to broker in El Salvador was under attack by the reactionary elements in the military and the right. The right used repression to force leftists and centrists out of the government and replaced progressive military officers with rightist ones.<sup>116</sup> These actions intensified the violence in El Salvador into a bona fide civil war, much as Pastor had predicted. In this context, the US ambassador to El Salvador, Robert White, strongly opposed sending in advisors lest it tie the United States to the Salvadoran right. He threatened to resign as ambassador if the Carter administration actually sent the advising teams.<sup>117</sup> The proposal to send advisors for capacity building was shelved.

Nevertheless, a few advisors were deployed on a rotating basis to survey the Salvadoran military's needs and prepare for a possible larger intervention. During the rapprochement period with El Salvador in the

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<sup>112</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-24-21-2-12-7.

<sup>113</sup>Memo from Robert Pastor to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 13, 1980, "SCC on El Salvador – March 13, 1980," El Salvador Collections, DNSA.

<sup>114</sup>Special Coordination Committee Meeting Minutes, January 28, 1980, Folder "Meetings – SCC 274, 2/15/80," Box 32, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>115</sup>Special Coordination Committee Meeting Minutes, February 15, 1980, Folder "Meetings – SCC 274, 2/15/80," Box 32, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>116</sup>William M. LeoGrande. *Our own backyard : the United States in Central America, 1977-1992*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. 773 pp., p. 47.

<sup>117</sup>LeoGrande, *Our own backyard : the United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, p. 45.

second half of 1979, the US Department of Defense began reestablishing ties with the Salvadoran military to access additional information that it had lacked during years of limited contact. Military officers from the US embassy were sent out to inspect Salvadoran units in the field.<sup>118</sup> In November 1980, another U.S. Army assessment team was sent, followed by a 5-man U.S. Army Operational and Planning Assistance Team for the purpose of “monitoring the [Salvadoran] defense planning mechanism” in action.<sup>119</sup>

The information-gathering efforts of the US military personnel on the ground working in conjunction with the US Embassy helped the Carter Administration monitor the Salvadoran military’s progress on reform. For instance, American officers were present at briefings where Salvadoran officers ordered subordinates to capture soldiers alive, though taking prisoners was not common until 1983.<sup>120</sup> However, additional monitoring was needed. The State Department, for instance, noted the difficulty in monitoring the progress of proposed reforms to the Salvadoran military in training, professionalism, and respect for human rights. In general, tracking reforms and their implementation was much easier than tracking specific levels of violence and the military’s commission of atrocities.<sup>121</sup> US military advisors could be especially useful at monitoring the implementation of reforms at the local level, because the Salvadoran military was so decentralized, as I will discuss later in this paper. Despite the potential utility of a larger US military presence, the Carter Administration’s preeminent concern was avoiding appearing too close to the repressive Salvadoran government.<sup>122</sup> Carter even considered withdrawing the information-gathering advisors because rumors that US military advisors were in El Salvador were starting to circulate.<sup>123</sup>

On December 2, 1980, four US churchwomen were murdered in El Salvador by troops from the Salvadoran National Guard.<sup>124</sup> In response, the Carter administration suspended all aid, despite the worsening security situation and growing evidence that the FMLN was receiving support from Nicaragua.<sup>125</sup> In this context, the Carter administration debated how to restore support to a Salvadoran government that increasingly needed it yet showed little willingness to reform. The administration noted the need for military advisors but was concerned about receiving blame if the Salvadoran military did not follow through on reform.<sup>126</sup> Pastor summed up the case against advisors: “They will give us many more problems than they can possibly

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<sup>118</sup>Telegram US Department of State, From San Salvador to Sec State, Cable 07097, December 11, 1979, “The military of El Salvador in its moment of crisis,” El Salvador Collections, DNSA

<sup>119</sup>LeoGrande, *Our own backyard : the United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, U.S. Department of State cable, San Salvador 08006, November 17, 1980, “Operation Golden Harvest” (NSA El Salvador collection).

<sup>120</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-6-21-1-34-4.

<sup>121</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-15-11-6-43-0.

<sup>122</sup>Crandall, *The Salvador Option*.

<sup>123</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-6-21-1-35-3.

<sup>124</sup>Ray Bonner. “How One American Diplomat Solved the Case of the Murdered Churchwomen in El Salvador”. In: *The Atlantic* (Feb. 11, 2016). URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/02/el-salvador-churchwomen-murders/460320/> (visited on 03/31/2021).

<sup>125</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-6-21-2-9-1.

<sup>126</sup>Special Coordination Committee Meeting, December 11, 1980, Folder “Meetings – SCC 354, 12/11/80,” Box 33, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library.

help the Salvadorans.”<sup>127</sup> After the military and the PDC reached a bargain, to include installing Duarte as President and committing to firing some rightist officers that the United States wanted to depose, the Carter administration agreed to resume assistance.<sup>128</sup> In terms of priority, military advisors were ranked “last because they are the most visible and will require significant political justification both in Salvador and elsewhere.”<sup>129</sup>

### 4.3 Advisors sent following a sudden decrease in capacity (1981)

It took a sudden change in the Salvadoran military’s capacity for Carter to overcome his reluctance to send advisors for capacity building. After the FMLN launched a major offensive on January 11, 1980, revealing the strength of the insurgency, Brzezinski advised Carter to renew assistance because the situation was now urgent and US military personnel in country believed the Salvadoran military had only one week of ammo left.<sup>130</sup> Given this decrease in the Salvadoran military’s capacity, Carter approved a few teams of advisors not just for monitoring but also for capacity building by training and advising Salvadoran units.<sup>131</sup> This decision to send advisors for capacity building following a downward shift in capacity strongly supports my theory.

When Reagan took office just a few days later, he essentially reaffirmed Carter’s overall policy toward El Salvador.<sup>132</sup> Despite Reagan’s public critique of the Carter administration for not doing enough to help the Salvadoran government resist a Communist insurgency, his administration recognized that a coup or publicly visible atrocities could jeopardize the domestic political sustainability of intervention.<sup>133</sup> And Reagan’s staff was acutely sensitive to the domestic political costs of sending advisors as well as the potential for escalation should they be sent.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger observed: “As far as the training teams are concerned, there are problems. If American military men are caught in the crossfire, there is the temptation to send in more men to protect them and we get into a Vietnam situation.”<sup>134</sup> Besides deciding whether advisors were worth the risk of escalation, the Reagan administration had to balance between the most effective and the most politically palatable ways to use military advisors. Deploying US advisors throughout El Salvador was the

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<sup>127</sup>Memo from Robert Pastor to ZB, December 11, 1980, Folder “Meetings – SCC 354, 12/11/80,” Box 33, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>128</sup>Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-24-22-3-9-8.

<sup>129</sup>Memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President, December 16, 1980, Folder “El Salvador: 12/80-1/81,” Box 21, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Country File, Jimmy Carter Library; Jimmy Carter Presidential Library: RAC Project: NLC-24-22-5-4-1.

<sup>130</sup>Memo from Zbigniew Brzezinski to President, January 14, 1981, Folder “El Salvador: 12/80-1/81,” Box 21, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection Country File, Jimmy Carter Library.

<sup>131</sup>Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, p. 180.

<sup>132</sup>Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, pp. 200–220.

<sup>133</sup>White House Situation Room message to San Salvador, State 054865, March 4, 1981, Folder “El Salvador Vol I 1/20/81 - 5/31/81,” Box 87, Executive Secretariat Country Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>134</sup>National Security Council Meeting Minutes February 11, 1981, Folder “NSC 0002 11 Feb 1981,” Box 1 Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Library.



best way to build capacity, but it had serious drawbacks. An interagency report put it this way:

It brings U.S. personnel closer to areas that might be subject to attack by major hostile forces, increases U.S. visibility, blurs the distinction between ‘trainer’ and ‘advisor,’ possibly undermines [Government of El Salvador] efforts to project an independent image, could ‘legitimize’ the introduction of Cuban and Nicaraguan ‘advisors’ into El Salvador, and could also eventually bring us within the terms of the War Powers Resolution. While these teams will be instructed not to accompany Salvadoran units on combat missions, the insurgency is such that their inadvertent involvement in hostilities cannot be discounted.<sup>135</sup>

To overcome the political problems of sending advisors to El Salvador, the DoD proposed sending advisors to Honduras to train Salvadoran troops there. But NSC staff rejected this option and developed an in-country alternative. They argued that US advisors needed to be present in-country in order to monitor and influence the Salvadoran troops: “U.S. presence at brigade locations will also have an important disciplining effect on the Salvadorean [sic] troops. The sense of despair and fear when you are in combat alone and losing sometimes leads to acts of brutality and even barbarism. Conversely, any group of soldiers in the world tries to ‘show’ better in the presence of military ‘observers’ from another nation.”<sup>136</sup>

In the end, the NSC staff won. The Reagan administration decided to send in-country advisors to multiple training sites, in both San Salvador and other garrisons, but with clear restrictions: “They would not go on patrol. They would not accompany on helicopter combat missions. They would use arms only in self-defense. They would not be stationed in areas where guerrillas are strong.”<sup>137</sup> While advisors were placed in country for the purposes of monitoring and influencing, their presence was also limited in its coverage of the brigades; one was a rotating team, and the other was located with the Atlacatl Battalion (a special forces unit).<sup>138</sup> Advisors also could not be considered properly embedded, as they were there for a few months at a time either rotating between units or training a unit while it was not conducting operations.

Sending advisors generated high costs for the Reagan administration. Only 6 percent of Americans supported sending advisors.<sup>139</sup> Congress compared the Reagan administration’s proposed policies to the early days of US involvement in Vietnam.<sup>140</sup> Consistent with my theory, policymakers were aware of the costs of sending advisors and took steps to limit them. They decided to “avoid the Laos approach” and send the advisors in uniform, to avoid the even worse political consequences of getting caught trying to hide the presence of advisors. But advisors had to keep a low profile: they couldn’t wear their berets in the field,

<sup>135</sup>El Salvador Interagency Options Paper for the NSC, February 18, 1981, Folder “NSC 0003 18 Feb 1981 (1/2),” Box 1 Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>136</sup>Memo from Robert L Schweitzer and Roger Fontaine for Richard V Allen, February 24, 1981, Folder “NSC 0004 27 Feb 1981 (4/4),” Box 1 Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>137</sup>National Security Council Meeting Minutes, February 27 1981, Folder “NSC 00004 27 February 1981 (3/4),” Box 1 Executive Secretariat Meeting Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>138</sup>*Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>139</sup>1961- Peceny Mark. *Democracy at the point of bayonets.* University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. 254 pp.

<sup>140</sup>United States Department of State. Testimony of Ambassador White [Reprint of “Washington Post” Account of Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee] 1981. El Salvador Collections, DNSA.

and had to travel to El Salvador in civilian clothes.<sup>141</sup> They couldn't be photographed carrying weapons.<sup>142</sup> And to highlight the distinction between the proposed policy in El Salvador and US policy in Vietnam, the Reagan administration began calling the advisors "trainers" both internally and in discussions with the press.<sup>143</sup>

The specter of Vietnam also led Congress to attempt to limit the size of the advising mission. Carter had fixed the size of the mission at 55 men after a December 1980 internal administration meeting.<sup>144</sup> When the Reagan administration first sent advisors to El Salvador, in March 1981, Undersecretary of State Walter J. Stoessel promised the Senate Appropriations Committee that the administration would not raise the limit without consulting with Congress.<sup>145</sup> Congress held Reagan to this commitment. In 1983, when the Reagan administration considered increasing the number of advisors in El Salvador, Congress began working on legislation to formally limit US presence in El Salvador. To preempt this, Reagan agreed to maintain the informal limit of 55 advisors.<sup>146</sup>

The steps taken by the Reagan administration to reduce the cost of sending advisors, however, limited the overall effectiveness of the advising mission. A more extensive US footprint could have improved monitoring and influencing. For example, General Paul Gorman (Commander in Chief, United States Southern Command) recommended that US advisors accompany Salvadoran combat units into combat, which would "ensure most effective use of US intelligence but also would discourage excesses by the units themselves."<sup>147</sup> Reagan's NSC, however, rejected this proposal because advisors accompanying Salvadoran forces would be politically untenable: It would "carry the inherent danger of permanently halting our current program – especially the role of the military advisor in El Salvador. This change could create a lightning rod for Congressional and public sector opposition. The effectiveness of this change on the battlefield becomes irrelevant if its symbolism become [sic] dominant – the President's announced policy will be cynically viewed as a cover-up for direct US involvement and the emotional baggage of Vietnam will be attached to us immediately."<sup>148</sup> Due to the high cost of monitoring, the US advising mission was not expanded to include embedded advisors

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<sup>141</sup>United States Department of State, Letter from Powell A. Moore to Gary Lee, February 10, 1982, El Salvador Collections, DNSA; Department of Defense Joint Chiefs Message Center, March 06, 1981, El Salvador Collections, DNSA.

<sup>142</sup>In interviews, advisors to El Salvador mentioned how they knew advisors who had been sent home early as punishment for breaking these restrictions.

<sup>143</sup>As Richard Allen put it in a letter to Congressman Bill Goodling: "The small number of trainers (not advisors) in no way represents a repetition of the unhappy and ill-conceived Vietnam experience." Letter from Richard V. Allen to The Honorable William Goulding, March 81, Folder "El Salvador 03/07/1981 – 03/10/1981," RAC BOX 6, Roger Fontaine Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>144</sup>Cecil Bailey. "Counterinsurgency in El Salvador: What Was The Model?" Unpublished Manuscript. Unpublished Manuscript. 2020, The 55-man limit counted only US military advisors who were training Salvadoran forces, and not members of the MILGP, defense attaché staff, or humanitarian, medical or civilian teams.

<sup>145</sup>LeoGrande, *Our own backyard : the United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, p. 208.

<sup>146</sup>Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, p. 253.

<sup>147</sup>Memo from Roger Fontaine and Chris Shoemaker for William P. Clark, February 25, 1982, Folder "El Salvador 01/29/1982 – 03/01/1982," Box 30, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>148</sup>Memo from Richard Childress to William P. Clark, February 26, 1982, Folder "El Salvador 01/29/1982 – 03/01/1982," Box 30, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Ronald Reagan Library.

that could accompany their counterparts into combat. As a result, US advisors were constrained in their information gathering and influencing.

#### 4.4 Advisors embedded in the brigades (1984-89)

US monitoring and influencing of the Salvadoran military improved after the advising mission expanded to include embedded advisors with the Salvadoran brigades. In 1984, US Ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering worked to embed US military advisors in the Salvadoran brigades to monitor the Salvadoran presidential election, where US favorite José Napoleón Duarte ran against the far-right ARENA party's candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson. Given the Salvadoran military's past history of intimidating civilians as well as meddling in politics, Pickering wanted to be sure the military would cooperate and properly ensure security at the polling places.<sup>149</sup> To monitor the military during the elections, he embedded advisors for several months at a time with the Salvadoran brigades.<sup>150</sup> Advisors were sent to the brigades with secret orders to monitor the elections, to let the Embassy know the location of the polling places, as well as accompany Salvadoran soldiers to secure them.<sup>151</sup> The elections resulted in a decisive win by Duarte, with help from the CIA and US funding.<sup>152</sup> This democratic outcome increased Congressional support for the US intervention and led to loosening of the restrictions on advisors – a decline in the overall cost of monitoring.

Salvadoran officers were not happy to have US advisors transition from short-term training to embedding with them. As one advisor put it: “The Salvadorans were kind of resisting that because it's one thing to have a visitor, it's another thing to have somebody live with you.”<sup>153</sup> As a result, policymakers did not renew the positions of the embedded advisors after the initial deployments ended.

Officers on the ground in the Military Group (MILGP), the office in the US Embassy in San Salvador overseeing security cooperation, thought the embedded advisors were useful. They took initiative to request replacements for the embedded advisors and found a way to pay them.<sup>154</sup> This ended up being a lucky turn of events: officers from the MILGP were able, with cooperation from SOUTHCOM, to request “the right people” for the job who spoke Spanish, understood the culture, and weren't “flamboyant” characters who lacked awareness of the sensitivity of building capacity while restraining the military.<sup>155</sup> After this on-the-

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<sup>149</sup>LeoGrande, *Our own backyard : the United States in Central America, 1977-1992*; Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, Cable from Ambassador Pickering to General Vessey, San Salvador 01844, February 18, 1984, El Salvador Collections, DNSA..

<sup>150</sup>Kenneth Finlayson. “OPATT to PATT: El Salvador to Colombia and the Formation of the Planning and Assistance Training Teams”. In: *Veritas* 2.4 (2006). URL: [https://arsof-history.org/articles/v2n4\\_patt\\_page\\_1.html](https://arsof-history.org/articles/v2n4_patt_page_1.html) (visited on 04/01/2021); Bailey, “Counterinsurgency in El Salvador: What Was The Model?”

<sup>151</sup>*Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 14. Mar. 8, 2020.

<sup>152</sup>Philip Taubman. “C.I.A. SAID TO AID SALVADOR PARTIES”. in: *The New York Times* (May 12, 1984). issn: 0362-4331.

<sup>153</sup>*Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 14. Mar. 8, 2020, Bailey notes how the Salvadoran colonels were especially opposed to higher ranking officers, which called their authority into question. He also notes how US advisors with good rapport with counterparts were considered more acceptable.

<sup>154</sup>Bailey, “Counterinsurgency in El Salvador: What Was The Model?”

<sup>155</sup>*Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 22. Mar. 18, 2020.

ground innovation by the MILGP, advisors were embedded in the brigades until the end of the war. As I will show in the next section, this improved the quality of US monitoring and influencing through advisors.

The embedding of US advisors in the brigades offers mixed support for my theory. Pickering's initiative led to the embedding of advisors despite no decline in the cost of monitoring – a change in local policy rather than in broader conditions that influence high-level policymaking. After the decline in the cost of monitoring after US public support for intervention in El Salvador increased following Duarte's election, my theory predicts that embedded advisors stay on in the brigades, which is exactly what happened. However, the permanent embedding of advisors was a bottom-up initiative rather than a top-down policy change, which is outside the scope of my theory.

On the whole, however, US policymaking in deploying advisors to El Salvador strongly supports my theory. Advisors were first deployed solely for gathering information about the Salvadoran military, given the United States government's lack of knowledge about the Salvadoran military and its strong conflicts of interest with the government of El Salvador. Carter did not send advisors for capacity building until a strong decline in Salvadoran military capacity made it necessary to prevent a possible insurgent victory. In sending advisors for capacity building, both the Carter and Reagan administrations viewed advisors as having a dual purpose of both building capacity and monitoring and influencing the Salvadoran military. Both administrations were acutely aware of the cost of sending advisors and took steps to limit the public visibility of the intervention, including placing restrictions on the size, extent of involvement, and activities of advisor deployments. Advisors were eventually embedded in the Salvadoran brigades on the initiative of local policy entrepreneurs such as Ambassador Pickering and officers in the US MILGP.

#### **4.5 Monitoring and influencing on the ground**

Policymakers understood that advisors would have to transform the Salvadoran military's approach to human rights and civil-military relations, but did advisors recognize their role? Advisors initially understood their mission as one of capacity building (as Carter NSC staff member Robert Pastor had feared), but quickly realized their true mission was information gathering and influencing. One of the first advisors in El Salvador described it as an organic process of discovery. I include the full quote because it shows how advisors navigate their twin roles of building capacity and transforming the local military:

When we were planning and thinking about this in 1980 and before we deployed in '81 we considered our role to enhance the combat effectiveness of the Salvadoran army and help their army and air force to defeat the guerrillas on the battlefield. However, once we got there and it happened within the first six month...*we realized the real mission was to guide and correct the behavior of the Salvadoran military.*

...The guys in the first OPAT [team of military advisors] went to train up the Atlacatl Battalion. There were two teams, one with the Atlacatl and then my team was sort of roving. We went to Sonsonate and then to Chalatenango. I became aware of an atrocity out in the Sonsonate area and thought that I should probably pull my guys out of there. I went to the MILGP [office in the US Embassy that was coordinating security assistance] and ended up talking with the MILGP ops officer, a Lieutenant Colonel at the time. He was a special forces officer, an old Vietnam guy. And he said, let's go talk about this. And we went over to British club and had some fish and chips and a beer. And essentially what he said is 'You can pull your guys out of there, but then who's going to change how they act?'

And that became where I personally understood the change of mission. Now, to my knowledge the army, from anybody above us to include the MILGP, was still bringing us in telling us how to do tactical operations. In fact, we were put on a helicopter with our brigade ops officers and sent to Panama and shown by the Rangers how to do a proper ambush to kill more guerrillas. So that's where the army was at but that's not where we were at. And that continued as an informal sort of mission at the O-4 [US Major rank] and below level. Now, not everybody adhered to that but most did. And in my opinion, that's what made the difference there because we did change their behavior.<sup>156</sup>

The bottom-up process described by this advisor shows that there was a gap between what US civilian policymakers wanted (as shown in the archival evidence I presented earlier) and what the military chain of command actually asked the advisors to do. The military advisors' chain of command chose to focus on the capacity-building role of advisors. While policy was made by the principals, the advisors had significant agency to determine their own role in a bottom-up process. And in El Salvador, most US advisors came to view their role as similar to what US civilian policymakers had intended for them. In their conversations with me, advisors explained at length how they both gathered information and influenced their local counterparts.

Advisors were able to monitor their counterparts, especially once they were embedded in the Salvadoran brigades. The Operations Planning and Training Team (OPATT) mission embedded advisors in the Salvadoran brigades, placing them with the decentralized centers where the ground war was taking place and complementing the larger US advising presence with the Estado Mayor (Ministry of Defense), air force, artillery, and after 1985, the police forces.<sup>157</sup> The OPATT mission improved information gathering for monitoring: "One of the things that I think the OPATTs instantly provided was accuracy in what the Salvadorans were really doing. Could have been a lot better because they weren't allowed to go to the field with them. But they had a finger on the pulse that did not exist before. . . .Once we had people living inside the cuartels, we had the information, and *the Salvadorans knew we had the information about what they were doing.*"<sup>158</sup>

Advisors gathered information through informal relationships that developed with their counterparts, formed by eating meals with them and engaging them in conversation.<sup>159</sup> A US advisor in El Salvador commented on how advisors formed close bonds with Salvadoran NCOs, who were sidelined by their commanding

<sup>156</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>157</sup> Bailey, "Counterinsurgency in El Salvador: What Was The Model?"

<sup>158</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 22. Mar. 18, 2020.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 12. Feb. 1, 2020.

officers and therefore were grateful to US advisors for working closely with them. US advisors would de-brief them after patrols to get the real story of what happened.<sup>160</sup> OPATT advisors described easy access to information from a wide variety of sources:

... As you're moving around and traveling around, you're talking to real people. Everybody that's out there from all levels, you find yourself meeting with the governor of San Miguel, the mayor of San Miguel, the zone commander in the morning and in the afternoon, you're out there talking to some campesino guy who's at the civil defense of San Alfonso or something. . . . You're talking to the privates, the colonels. . . . *Never before or since have I felt I had more of a finger on the pulse than when we were out there in those locations.*<sup>161</sup>

Advisors provided specific kinds of information that complemented intelligence sources. Through their working relationships with their counterparts, they could provide specific information about the perpetrators of atrocities. One advisor told me about how during the 1989 guerilla offensive, he was able to serve as an alibi for his counterpart, thus helping the Embassy determine who did not commit the Jesuit murders.<sup>162</sup> Another advisor provided the information that helped the Embassy determine who was actually responsible for the murders.<sup>163</sup> Advisors were also able to provide information about the military operations which their counterparts conducted, which ensured more accountability for them. One advisor described the process of taking and accounting for prisoners later in the war:

So when we took prisoners I went and looked at them. I made sure the Red Cross came in when they were evacuated to the prison in the city. I'd call up and tell our intel guys, the Americans in the city, 'Hey, we've got six prisoners coming in, make sure they get to the prison,' and they would. So they knew that kind of follow up would take place. Again, just being embedded, it does everything.<sup>164</sup>

Because policymakers made US aid conditional to some extent on the actions of the Salvadoran government, the information advisors provided actually had consequences. A US advisor to Salvadoran officers described how one of his counterparts wanted to "go out and do terrible things." He complained to his chain of command in the MILGP and "they put the pressure on and he was relieved." The replacement was "super" and much more receptive to the advice of his advisors.<sup>165</sup> The combination of diplomatic pressure and information from the advisors deterred human rights abuses. As an advisor described it:

I think the presence of US soldiers on most of the cuartels was a deterrent in terms of human rights violations. I think that they knew that the Americans would report violations and if

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<sup>160</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 13. Feb. 6, 2020; *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>161</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 18. Feb. 19, 2020, Emphasis mine.

<sup>162</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 5. Jan. 15, 2020.

<sup>163</sup> "U.S. Major Eric Buckland's statement (typed) of prior knowledge of Jesuit murders, addendum, polygraph report, and retraction of original prior knowledge statement." Document. January 1990. Digital Commonwealth, <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth-oai:xw42ng911> (accessed February 01, 2021)

<sup>164</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 17. Feb. 3, 2020.

<sup>165</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

violations were reported, they would lose support in terms of materiel, in terms of advisors, in terms of equipment and ammunition. . . . I know that during the [1989] offensive, at some of the cuartels, the U.S. advisors were asked to leave just due to the fact that they were seen as rats, so to speak.<sup>166</sup>

At the same time as its information sources were increasing, the Reagan administration told the press it lacked the ability to monitor,<sup>167</sup> since advisors could not accompany Salvadoran troops into combat. Some of the academic literature makes a similar claim.<sup>168</sup> But this was a half-truth. It was true that the United States could not fully monitor the activities of Salvadoran military units that did not have embedded advisors, such as the Batallones de Infantería de Reacción Inmediata (BIRI) units, which were immediate reaction infantry battalions that conducted many of the military raids against guerillas and were responsible for many human rights violations during the war. But wherever there were US advisors in the brigades, the United States could mostly monitor events on the ground.

Advisors provided important information as monitors, but the real work to “guide and correct the behavior of the Salvadoran military,” as one of my interviewees stated, came through personal relationships and their influence on the ground. The four criteria I theorized earlier as the basis for a positive interaction where the advisor can generate influence over his counterpart (face-to-face interaction, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood) were often present in the advising mission in El Salvador. Advisors had to begin by providing value for their counterparts: “We worked ourselves into a job. . . instead of just being a pain in the ass, we were adding value and that helped.”<sup>169</sup> This capacity-building mission provided the basis for face-to-face interaction with the local counterpart.

Advisors further demonstrated their credibility as skilled warriors, and members of a community with barriers to outsiders, if they came under fire. Though advisors were ordered to stay out of combat, they often could not avoid participating in it. They were posted to dangerous and isolated cuartels and some engaged in fierce combat inside the cuartel when it was overrun.<sup>170</sup> The first advisor casualty, SFC Gregory Fronius, died in an attack on the 4th Brigade in El Paraiso; other Americans were killed elsewhere in the country.<sup>171</sup> Later in the war, advisors were permitted to accompany the leadership of a brigade when it went on an operation. Advisors also routinely came under fire when conducting training operations out in the countryside with their counterparts.<sup>172</sup> By the mid-1980s, the advisors were receiving combat pay and were armed with M-16s for self-defense. So advisors often had an opportunity to demonstrate their skill

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<sup>166</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 11. Mar. 9, 2020.

<sup>167</sup> Memo from Oliver L. North to Robert C. McFarlane, March 28, 1984, Folder “ El Salvador 11/1/83-3/31/84, Box 30, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Ronald Reagan Library.

<sup>168</sup> Ryan T. Baker. “El Salvador, 1979-92: Revisiting Success”. In: *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*. Ed. by Eli Berman and David A. Lake. Cornell University Press, Mar. 15, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5017-3309-3, p. 142.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 14. Mar. 8, 2020.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 11. Mar. 9, 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Greg Walker. *At the Hurricane's Eye: U.S. Special Forces from Vietnam to Desert Storm*. Ivy Books, 1994, pp. 100–103.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador. In collab. with Interviewee 11. Mar. 9, 2020.

under combat, which improved their influence over their counterparts. But the restriction on US advisors accompanying their counterparts on patrols, or situations where they were expected to engage in combat, did make influence more difficult. A US advisor summed it up: “Even to influence them, to improve their behavior, we would have had a lot more credibility if we’d been able to go with them. We all kind of wanted that, but that wasn’t the deal.”<sup>173</sup>

Despite these restrictions, as advisors and their counterparts worked shoulder-to-shoulder on the daily business of war, they generated what I described as a mutual focus of attention on the same tasks. Once advisors initiated a professional relationship, they took advantage of consistent professional and informal interactions to build influence with their counterparts. They inserted themselves into everything from the brigade’s operations to discussions about civil-military relations and human rights with their counterparts. One advisor described this process of building influence as the following:

...I can’t give orders, but what I can give is suggestion after suggestion after suggestion, or really just circulate ideas. That’s the cultural part. I’m a pretty gregarious guy. Most of the advisors, they’re not introverts... And so I know these guys. I live with them. I’m in the field with them. I hang out with them and watch TV with them at night. So you could say things like, ‘Well, do you think we could get away with this? Do you think we could try this? Do we have enough money to do this?’

How do you influence people? That is how we did things.<sup>174</sup>

Advisors cultivated influence by drawing attention to the interests they shared with their counterpart – what I described as a shared mood. Both the advisor and his counterpart wanted fewer guerilla attacks against the brigade. Advisors were able to use the influence they built up with their counterparts to teach and advise them to find better ways of operating that would still respect human rights. One advisor described the following:

I thought I was witnessing indirectly human rights violations during interrogation procedures in the Brigade because I heard some things that I thought were indicative of these types of abuses. So at that point, I made a point to try to train the interrogators and I told the interrogators that using those techniques does not work. And I had a fairly good background in interrogation...I felt that it was in the best interest of the cause, to try to get them to change the way they did interrogation...So, these are just little techniques that we used to reduce the level of violence on the part of the Salvadoran Military, and increase effectiveness through a degree of benevolence, versus ruthless conduct.<sup>175</sup>

Similarly, as part of working with the Salvadoran armed forces on war planning, advisors were able to remind their counterparts to plan the mission carefully to prevent civilian casualties. One advisor to the Salvadoran armed forces stated that he would put his counterpart on the spot when planning an operation,

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<sup>173</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>174</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 14. Mar. 8, 2020.

<sup>175</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 13. Feb. 6, 2020.



asking questions about the target and the actionable intelligence that prompted it. He would ask them not to use artillery, aircraft, rockets, etc. against civilians, telling them he would make the case to the US Embassy why they should not get any more foreign aid if they planned bad operations that broke these rules.<sup>176</sup> Yet another advisor described having a conversation with his counterpart during social engagements – “Of course it was easy because he was a drunk” – about human rights abuses that the brigade had committed the other day, trying to persuade him to recognize “that just makes more guerillas.”<sup>177</sup>

Advisors also directly discussed the politics of civil-military relations with their counterparts. An advisor, who served as commander of the MILGP in El Salvador, described conversations near the end of the war with high-level Salvadoran military officers to make sure they understood that they would have to stand aside and not conduct a coup in order to reach a peace agreement in El Salvador.<sup>178</sup> Another advisor told me how he was asked to reach out to a counterpart to let him know that the United States wouldn’t stand for a coup and he communicated back to the Embassy that the Salvadoran had changed his mind.<sup>179</sup>

In sum, advisors were aware of the potential and necessity of creating influence over their counterparts in the Salvadoran military. Influence was not a secondary priority – it was the mission and directly impacted how advisors did their jobs. They viewed personal relationships as critical to developing influence with their local counterparts. They leveraged shared experiences, everyday interactions, and their credibility as effective soldiers to generate strong relationships with their counterparts.

I have argued that policymakers were aware of the potential of military advisors to influence the Salvadoran military and considered this an important part of their role. Both Carter and Reagan decided to deploy advisors because of the Salvadoran military’s low military capacity and low preference alignment with the United States. The political costs to sending advisors were high for both the Carter and Reagan administrations, who cautiously considered ways to limit public visibility even though these restrictions lowered the overall effectiveness of the mission. I also demonstrated that advisors were aware of their roles of monitoring and influencing, and the interview and archival data I collected show their attempt to fulfill these roles.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper examines why great powers send military advisors to work with local militaries during conflict and the circumstances in which this form of intervention is likely to occur. I argue that intervening states frequently rely on an overlooked tool to manage local partners: sending military advisors to directly shape their militaries. Advisors don’t just build military capacity. They also play an important transformational

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<sup>176</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 21. Feb. 26, 2020.

<sup>177</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 16. Mar. 2, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 19. Mar. 3, 2020.

<sup>179</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador.* In collab. with Interviewee 15. Mar. 2, 2020.

role by monitoring and influencing the local military. Advisors are deployed to conduct “foreign policy at the very tip of the spear,” as one of my interviewees put it.<sup>180</sup> Advisors first gain access to their local counterparts by providing value as military capacity-builders, which creates the proximity needed to monitor and gather information. Over time, they develop and leverage their personal relationships with local counterparts, shaping local approaches to issues such as human rights and civil-military relations. Advisors thus complement other forms of great power influence over proxies, and help interveners gain the information they need about local conditions to better manage the proxy.

I test empirical implications from my theory using a qualitative case study on US intervention in El Salvador (1979-89). The case study provides archival evidence to evaluate the theory’s predictions about how interveners manage war with local agents and the causes and mechanisms of intervention with military advisors. I find that policymakers were aware of the potential of military advisors to influence the Salvadoran military and thought carefully about whether to deploy them as part of the overall intervention. The political costs to sending advisors were high for both the Carter and Reagan administrations, who cautiously considered ways to limit public visibility even though these restrictions lowered the overall effectiveness of the mission. Using extensive interviews with US military advisors, I also demonstrate that most advisors thought their key role was to restrain the Salvadoran military from committing human rights abuses through monitoring and influencing their counterparts on the ground.

This paper suggests a different framework to view great power influence over weaker actors in general. It shows how powerful states can influence weaker actors not only through carrots or sticks but also through personal relationships on the ground. Influence is not exclusively bought at the level of strategic incentives; it is also a local process carried out by individuals working throughout a proxy military, from its Ministry of Defense to isolated units at the front. I provide a theoretical contribution by theorizing how powerful states use training and advising as a conduit of influence at the local level over other militaries. This furthers our understanding of when great powers have leverage over weaker partners – a persistent problem in proxy war and alliance relationships alike. A fruitful area for future research is directly measuring the strength and effects of influence through advisors. Future research should examine when advisors can be most effective at building influence for interveners, as well as when this influence helps interveners enact a variety of reforms to proxy militaries. It could examine the causal effect of localized increases in influence by great powers on human rights and civil-military relations by taking advantage of sub-national and temporal variation in advisor deployments.

My work provides three main implications for the foreign policy and grand strategy of great powers. First, optimism around proxy war as a cheap and effective means of conflict is unwarranted. Great powers should

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<sup>180</sup> *Interview with US military advisor to El Salvador*. In collab. with Interviewee 15. Mar. 2, 2020.

be aware of how they typically tend to craft interventions with military advisors, choosing the weakest and hardest-to-manage proxies for intensive intervention. Even modest increases in influence over such proxies requires substantial commitments from interveners in terms of time and military advisors. As my case study on US intervention in El Salvador shows, the US effort to restrain the Salvadoran military while simultaneously building lethal capacity was long, difficult, and led to comparatively modest payoffs in the end. It required embedding advisors in the brigades, which increased the political cost of intervention. And it also required using advisors to *complement* instead of *substitute* for carrots and sticks used with the proxy.

Second, when an intervener is willing to commit the time and effort, advisors can be a useful tool of influence over other militaries. The information and deep knowledge of local conditions collected by advisors can complement and reinforce the use of incentives should the intervener choose to use them, as the United States often did in El Salvador, and the localized influence of advisors can lead to reforms. My research speaks directly to how the design and execution of potential interventions can be improved, as well as when they are likely to fail. For the design of future interventions, El Salvador shows us that the interveners interested in restraining a proxy should refrain from building capacity without assigning embedded advisors throughout the proxy military. These advisors should have explicit instructions to monitor and influence their counterparts. Embedding advisors throughout a local military and permitting them to accompany local forces in combat increases the political costs of any intervention that is highly visible to the public, but improves control over local forces. Interveners must also follow up on information received through monitoring and actually enforce consequences for the proxy's misbehavior, though they will often struggle to do this consistently whenever they can't walk away from a conflict.

Third, advisors are still needed to manage conflict despite modern military technology, such as precision-guided munitions and drones. The data I collected show that great power involvement in proxy wars has accelerated in the past two decades as new technology offers more control over direct combat operations without requiring states to commit ground combat troops. Yet my work shows that without advisors on the ground and diplomatic pressure on the proxy, great powers cannot influence the political conditions that determine whether proxy war is ultimately successful. Despite modern air power, military advisors are still needed on the ground to manage the proxy and help it interface with technology.

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## Appendix A Model

I consider a model with two players: the Intervener (I) and Proxy (P). The Intervener would like to influence a civil war, perhaps to support an ally or client;<sup>181</sup> to further ideological goals;<sup>182</sup> to respond to domestic pressure to intervene;<sup>183</sup> or for regime change in another state.<sup>184</sup> Proxies can be either non-state actors or states that the Intervener would like to fight against the target of the intervention in exchange for support from the intervener.<sup>185</sup> The target of an intervention is another actor in a civil war, either a non-state armed group or the state.

This model is one of complete information.<sup>186</sup> In contrast to preferences, however, the proxy's actions, especially its day-to-day military operations, are harder for the intervener to observe. In the model, I allow for hidden actions of the proxy and show when interveners would pay for perfect information by investing in monitoring. Learning more about the military's behavior requires information gathering from military advisors, similar to the information gathered through embassies about the proxy's politicians.

In the model, the Intervener must choose whether to (1) not support the Proxy, thereby staying out completely or limiting its involvement to diplomatic intervention; (2) provide support to the Proxy, which will improve the military prospects of the Proxy; or (3) intervene with its own combat troops. Proxies vary in terms of their quality: their preference alignment with the Intervener and competence to fight. Competence in the model is an exogenous parameter known by both players,  $\pi \in (0, 1]$ , that denotes how good the military of the Proxy is at fighting, compared to the Intervener's own military, which is highly competent. Alignment is endogenously generated in the model by the proxy's strategic choice of a degree of policy distortion away from its ideal point,  $t$ .

If the Intervener chooses to support a Proxy, it wants the Proxy to choose policies as close as possible to its own preferences and the Proxy's competence to be as high as possible, that is  $\pi = 1$ . An aligned proxy shares the same policy preferences with the intervener, while a competent proxy has sufficient military ability to fight in place of the intervener's own troops. Such proxies are rare and most interveners and proxies will disagree about at least some important issues.<sup>187</sup> The Proxy prefers to choose policies as close to its ideal

<sup>181</sup>Yarhi-Milo, Lanoszka, and Cooper, "To arm or to ally? The patron's dilemma and the strategic logic of arms transfers and alliances"; Leeds, Long, and Mitchell, "Reevaluating alliance reliability: Specific threats, specific promises"; Kaw, "Predicting Soviet military intervention".

<sup>182</sup>Corbetta, "Determinants of Third Parties' Intervention and Alignment Choices in Ongoing Conflicts, 1946–2001".

<sup>183</sup>Regan, "Choosing to intervene: Outside interventions in internal conflicts".

<sup>184</sup>Poznansky, Downes, and O'Rourke, "Friends, Foes, and Foreign-Imposed Regime Change"; Downes and O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations"; Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy".

<sup>185</sup>I focus the nature of proxy support on preventing the target of the intervention from military victory, rather than ensuring the proxy's military victory, in congruence with Rauta, "A structural-relational analysis of party dynamics in proxy wars".

<sup>186</sup>Constructing the model in this way, as in Powell (2019), Robert Powell. "Why Some Persistent Problems Persist". In: *American Political Science Review* 113.4 (2019), pp. 980–996 highlights the primary cause of tension in the intervener-proxy relationship – disagreement about policy rather than unknown preferences.

<sup>187</sup>Berman and Lake, *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*; Barbara Elias. *Why allies rebel: defiant*

point,  $t \in \{\mathbf{R}_{\geq 0}\}$ , as possible.

To compensate it for deviating from its ideal point in the policies chosen, the Proxy will receive  $s$  amount of support. Resources are passed from the intervening state to the proxy in the form of money, civilian technology or equipment, arms, people that can fill technical military roles, or human capital from military advisors.<sup>188</sup> Support is an exogenous parameter, since the Intervener is limited in how useful its support is to the Proxy. The value of  $s$  to the Proxy can be thought of as the ceiling on how valuable the Intervener is to the Proxy if the Intervener provided the Proxy with every form of compensation available – such as aid, arms, military advisors, and political support.

In addition to choosing whether to support the Proxy, the Intervener must also choose whether to invest in monitoring it. If the Intervener chooses proxy support without monitoring, it provides some bundle of aid and arms to the proxy, which are modeled using the  $s$  parameter as a transfer to the proxy. Without monitoring, the Intervener cannot observe the Proxy’s actions. If the Intervener chooses to monitor, it sends military advisors to the proxy, along with some bundle of aid and arms (the  $s$  parameter). With monitoring, the Intervener can observe the Proxy’s actions, but it must pay a cost.

I now move to the path of play.

## A.1 Path of Play

Play proceeds as follows:

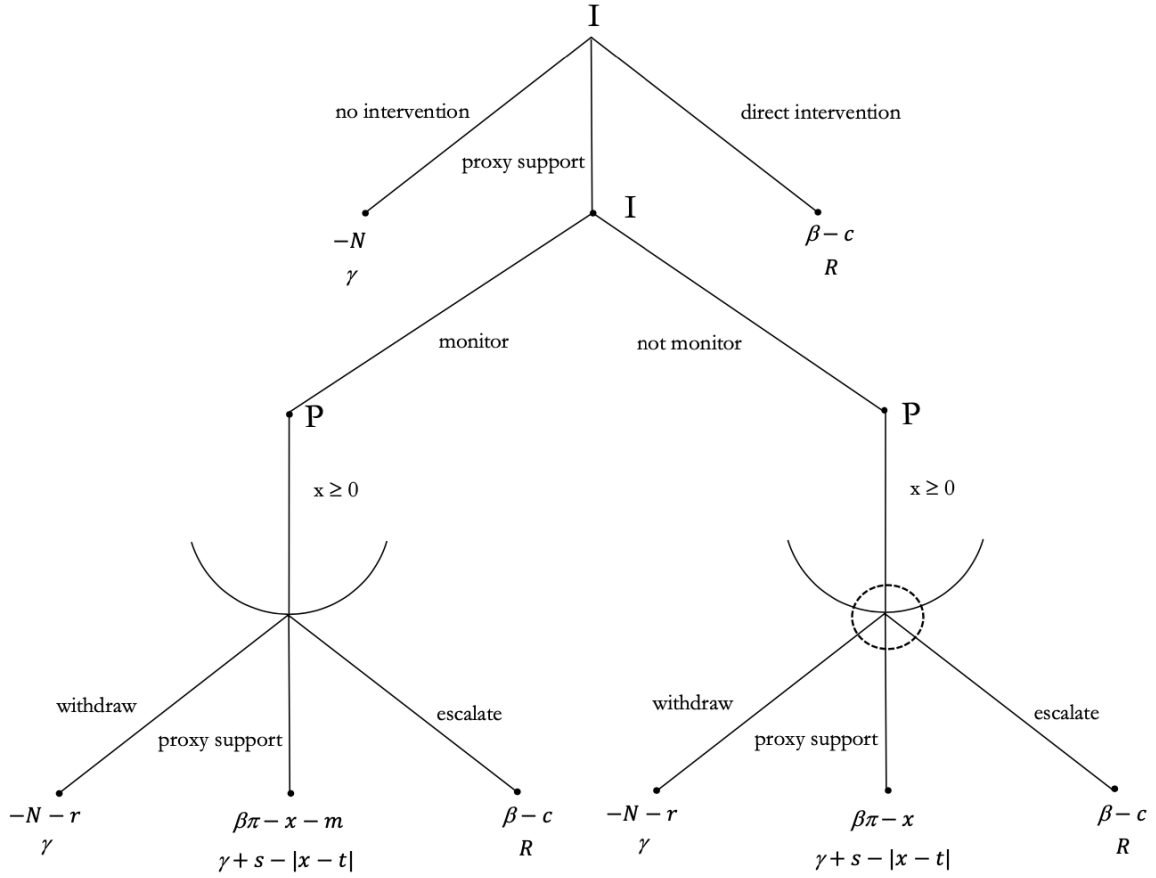
1.  $I$  chooses an action,  $a \in \{\text{No support, Proxy support, Direct intervention}\}$ . If it chooses no support or direct intervention, the game ends, and both players receive fixed payoffs (detailed below).
2.  $I$  chooses an action  $a \in \{\text{Monitor, Not monitor}\}$ . If  $I$  chooses monitoring, it must pay a cost,  $m$ , of sending its personnel in the form of military advisors.
3.  $P$  chooses a policy  $x \geq 0$ , which can be close to or far from the ideal point of the Intervener, which is fixed at 0. The Intervener knows  $t$  but does not observe  $x$  unless it invested in monitoring.
4.  $I$  chooses an action,  $a \in \{\text{Withdraw, Proxy support, Escalate}\}$ . The game ends.

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*local partners in counterinsurgency wars*. Cambridge University Press, 2020; Ladwig III, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counter Insurgency*; Rauta, “A structural-relational analysis of party dynamics in proxy wars”.

<sup>188</sup>Since proxy war involves the transfer of resources from the intervener to the proxy with the intent to influence the conflict, it is different from diplomatic interventions, which include declarations of support (such as recognition for rebel groups), the prospect of such support, or some kinds of sanctions. Paul Poast. “Lincoln’s gamble: Fear of intervention and the onset of the American civil war”. In: *Security Studies* 24.3 (2015), pp. 502–527; Abel Escribà-Folch. “Economic sanctions and the duration of civil conflicts”. In: *Journal of Peace Research* 47.2 (2010), pp. 129–141

Figure 4: Intervention with monitoring game



## A.2 Payoffs

Payoffs are distributed as follows. If the Intervener chooses no support in the first stage game, then its payoff is  $-N$ . The fixed payoff for the Proxy of fighting with its own troops in the war without outside help is  $\gamma$ . If the Intervener chooses direct intervention in the first stage, its payoff is  $\beta - c$ , where  $\beta > 0$  is the benefit of achieving the desired outcome of the war and  $c \geq 0$  is the cost of intervening with combat troops.

If the Intervener chooses proxy support with or without monitoring, and withdraws in the final stage, its payoff is  $-N - r$ , where  $N \geq 0$  is the payoff of no support,  $r > 0$  is the reputational cost of supporting a proxy and then leaving the war. The Proxy again receives the fixed payoff of fighting with its own troops in the war without outside help,  $\gamma$ .

If the intervener chooses direct intervention after proxy support, with or without monitoring, its payoff is  $\beta - c$ , where  $\beta > 0$  is the benefit of achieving the desired outcome of the war and  $c \geq 0$  is the cost of intervening with combat troops. The Proxy's fixed payoff from direct intervention is denoted as  $R$ .

If the Intervener chooses proxy support in both the first and last stages of the game, without monitoring,

its payoff is  $\beta\pi - x$ , where  $\beta > 0$  is the benefit of achieving the desired outcome of the war,  $\pi \in (0, 1]$  is the military ability of the Proxy, and  $-x$  is the cost of divergence between the Intervener's preference and the bundle of policies chosen by the Proxy. If the Intervener chooses proxy support with monitoring, the Intervener pays a cost of monitoring,  $m$ , if it chooses to continue proxy support in the final stage. The Intervener pays this cost only if it continues proxy support and not if it withdraws or escalates after initial proxy support for two reasons. The  $r$  parameter for withdrawing after proxy support already encapsulates the lost resources and reputational cost of leaving without resolving the conflict and can account for sending advisors and then leaving without resolving the conflict, as well. Similarly, the cost of direct intervention will be the more relevant cost if the Intervener chooses direct intervention. After ground combat troops are in the country, the cost of sending in advisors will be insignificant. If the Intervener chooses proxy support in both the first and last stages of the game, with monitoring, its payoff is  $\beta\pi - x - m$ , where  $m$  is the cost of monitoring.

For the Proxy, if the Intervener chooses to continue support in the final stage, regardless of whether the Intervener chose to monitor, its payoff is  $\gamma + s - x - t$ , where  $\gamma$  is the fixed payoff for the Proxy of fighting with its own troops in the war,  $s$  is the benefit of the support provided by the Intervener, and  $-x - t$  is the cost of divergence between the Proxy's chosen bundle of policies and its true preference,  $t > 0$ .

In my model, the intervener can commit to compensating the proxy with  $s$  support, at least while the conflict is ongoing, because if it abandoned the proxy it would have to give up its ability to influence the conflict's outcome and receive the payoff for non-intervention,  $-N$ , thus punishing itself.

### A.3 Analysis

Having defined the structure of the game, I now move to analyzing when proxy support in both the first and last stage, as well as monitoring, can be sustained as a subgame perfect Nash equilibrium. I make the following assumptions to support such equilibria.

First, for the Intervener to sometimes prefer proxy support to direct intervention, it must be the case that combat is at least as costly as the loss in performance from contracting out fighting to a proxy force,  $c \geq (1 - \pi)\beta$ . If  $c < (1 - \pi)\beta$ , choosing direct intervention would always make the intervener better off than choosing proxy support, regardless of how compliant the proxy. I call this assumption the need for delegation.

**Assumption 1. Need for delegation:** *Combat is sufficiently costly; otherwise, any strategy involving direct intervention or escalation would strictly dominate proxy support. That is, given strategies  $s_i, s'_i \in S_i$ , let  $s_i = (\text{Direct intervention}, a_2)$  and let  $s'_i = (\text{Proxy support}, a_2)$ . If the cost of combat  $c < (1 - \pi)\beta$ , then*

$u_I(s_i, s_{-i}) > u_I(s'_i, s_{-i})$  for all  $s_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ .

Second, the Proxy must prefer autonomy rather than direct intervention: it would rather fight with its own troops and gain support from the Intervener rather than lose control of the fighting when the Intervener sends in ground combat troops. Assumption 2 ensures that the Proxy prefers proxy support and fighting without the Intervener's troops on the ground, as long as it does not have to diverge too much from its preferences, and does not prefer direct intervention regardless of  $x^*$ .

**Assumption 2. Proxy prefers autonomy:** *The Proxy prefers autonomy in warfighting: it will always be weakly worse off if the Intervener sends in combat troops than if it chose some other strategy. That is, for  $s_{-i}, s'_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ , let  $s_{-i} = (\text{Direct intervention}, a_2, a_3)$ . If  $R \leq \gamma + s$ , then  $u_P(s_i, s_{-i}) \leq u_P(s_i, s'_{-i})$  for all  $s_i \in S_i$ .*

Assumption 2 ensures that the Proxy does not prefer direct intervention regardless of  $x^*$ .<sup>189</sup> I then solve for the equilibria of interest using the concept of subgame perfection. Formal proofs follow in the Appendix.

**Lemma 1.** *In equilibrium, the Proxy sets  $x$  equal to its ideal point,  $s_P^* = \{t\}$ , if the Intervener chooses not to monitor.*

To see this, suppose the Proxy chooses some  $s_P < \{t\}$ . Since the Intervener chooses between withdrawing, maintaining support, and escalating without knowing what the Proxy chose, its strategy does not depend on the Proxy's action. The Proxy can then benefit by deviating to  $s_P^* = \{t\}$ . Therefore, in equilibrium, the Proxy must always play  $s_P^* = \{t\}$  if the Intervener chooses not to monitor. The Intervener's equilibrium strategies are as follows (I abbreviate the action "Proxy support" as  $PS$ ):

**Lemma 2.** 1. *If  $c \leq \beta + N$ , then*

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} PS, \text{ Monitor}, PS, \text{ Escalate} & \text{if } x \leq x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Escalate}, \text{ Escalate} & \text{if } x > x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, PS, PS & \text{if } x \leq x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} < x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Escalate}, PS & \text{if } x > x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} < x^* + m \end{cases}$$

and  $x^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame with monitoring and  $x^{**} = t$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame without monitoring.

<sup>189</sup> Assumption 2 is only needed for subpoint 1 of Lemma 3 below, since if  $I$  is playing an equilibrium strategy of proxy support if  $x \leq x^*$  and escalate if  $x > x^*$ , the Proxy will choose  $x > x^*$  if it prefers direct intervention. In that case, an equilibrium will exist where the Intervener escalates after proxy support and the Proxy chooses an  $x > x^*$ . If  $s_I^* = (\text{Proxy support}, \text{Proxy support})$  if  $x \leq x^*$  and  $s_I^* = (\text{No intervention}, \text{Withdraw})$  if  $x > x^*$ , the Proxy will choose  $x \leq x^*$  if  $t - s \leq x^* \leq t$  - even if Assumption 2 does not hold.

2. If  $c > \beta + N + r$ , then

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} PS, \text{ Monitor}, PS, \text{ Withdraw} & \text{if } x \leq x^* \text{ \& } x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ No \text{ intervention}, \text{ Monitor}, PS, \text{ Withdraw} & \text{if } x^* < x \leq x^* + r \text{ \& } \\ & x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ No \text{ intervention}, \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Withdraw}, \text{ Withdraw} & \text{if } x > x^* + r \text{ \& } \\ & x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, PS, PS & \text{if } x \leq x^* + r \text{ \& } x^{**} < x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Withdraw}, PS & \text{if } x > x^* + r \text{ \& } x^{**} < x^* + m \end{cases}$$

and  $x^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame with monitoring and  $x^{**} = t$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame without monitoring.

Lemma 2 shows that the Intervener will choose monitoring if the Proxy's ideal point,  $t$ , is above the threshold at which, under perfect and complete information without monitoring, the Intervener would choose proxy support over either direct intervention or no support ( $x^{**} > x^* + m$ ). If  $t$  is exactly equal to this threshold, then the Intervener is indifferent between monitoring and not monitoring; if  $t$  is below this threshold, the Intervener will never need to pay the cost of monitoring because the Proxy's preferences are sufficiently close to the Intervener's preferences.

For the Proxy, if the policy distortion required by the Intervener is moderate and the value of the support provided is high enough, the following equilibrium conditions apply:

**Lemma 3.** *Let  $s_I$  be as defined in Lemma 2. In equilibrium:*

1. Let  $x_1^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$ . Then  $s_P^* = \min\{x_1^*, t\}$  implies  $R - \gamma - s + t \leq x_1^* \leq t$ .
2. Let  $x_2^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$ . Then  $s_P^* = \min\{x_2^*, t\}$  implies  $t - s \leq x_2^* \leq t$ .

I derive Proposition 1 from assumptions 1 and 2 and lemmata 1-3.

**Proposition 1.** *If the cost of combat is high but withdrawal is more costly; the Proxy prefers independence in warfighting; and the Proxy's preferences diverge sufficiently from the Intervener's preferences, there exists an equilibrium where I invests in monitoring and continues proxy support if  $x \leq x_1^*$  and escalates after initial proxy support if  $x > x_1^*$ , and P chooses  $\min(x_1^*, t)$ , provided  $x_1^* \geq R - \gamma - s + t$ . If the cost of combat is sufficiently high and the Intervener and Proxy divergence sufficiently in preferences, there exists another equilibrium where I invests in monitoring and continues proxy support if  $x \leq x_2^*$  and does not support a proxy at all if  $x > x_2^*$ , and P chooses  $\min(x_2^*, t)$ , provided  $x_2^* \geq t - s$ .*



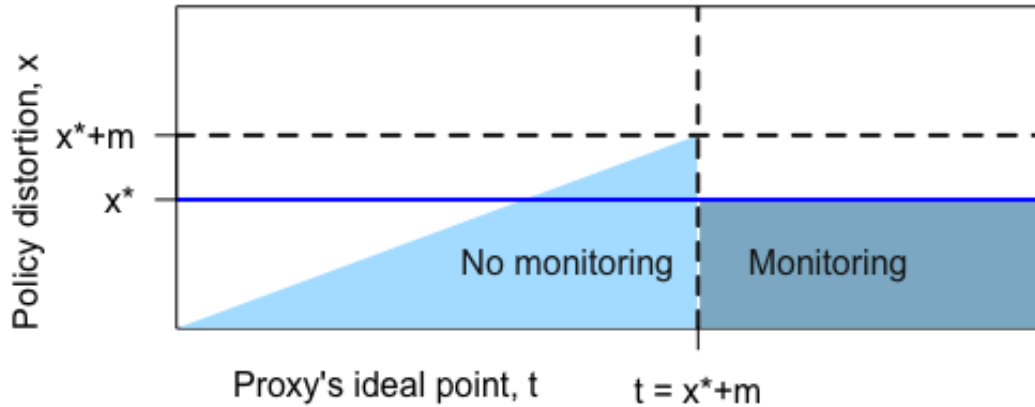


Figure 5: Equilibrium levels of policy distortion with monitoring (shaded regions)

#### A.4 Monitoring

The main set of insights from the model is that monitoring can help interveners get more compliance when they delegate to proxies with misaligned interests. To enforce the bargain made with the Proxy, the Intervener needs to verify the Proxy's actual level of policy distortion. If the proxy's actions are hidden, even if its preferences are known, the intervener cannot condition further support on the proxy's actions because it cannot observe them. The intervener must pay the proxy without observing its performance and as a result, the proxy is unable to commit to a lower level of policy distortion. The proxy chooses its ideal point and the resulting policy distortion is large if the proxy and the intervener have very misaligned preferences. Under these conditions, the Intervener is willing to pay a lot to have perfect information about the Proxy's actions in order to enforce a bargain with the proxy.

Since monitoring is costly, policy distortion under monitoring is always lower than policy distortion in the perfect and complete information case, because interveners expect to be rewarded for their costly monitoring by even more compliance from the proxy. Furthermore, the higher the cost of monitoring, the lower the equilibrium level of proxy policy distortion. Figure 5 shows the proxy's level of policy distortion,  $x$ , in equilibrium based on the proxy's ideal point. Without monitoring, the proxy chooses its ideal point,  $t$ . Once the proxy's ideal point gets too far away from the intervener's ideal point, that is when the proxy's ideal point is equal to the equilibrium value of policy distortion if the intervener had perfect information about the

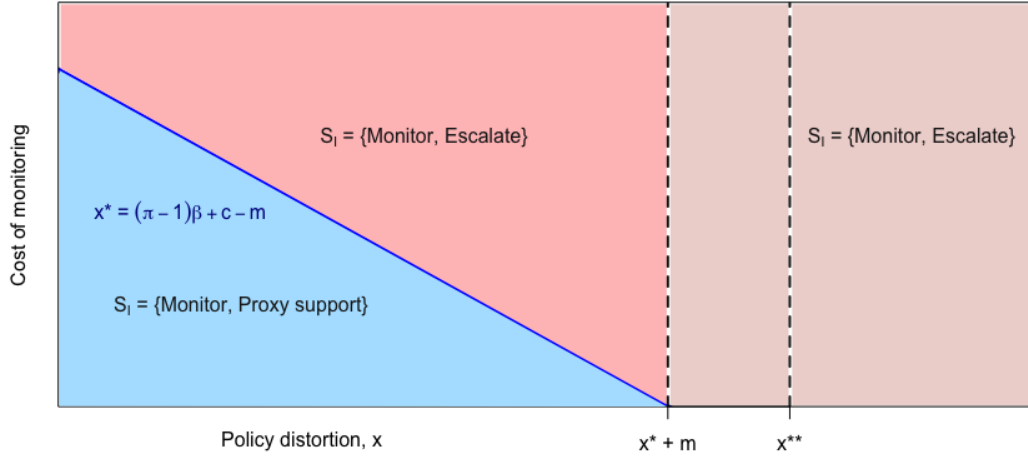


Figure 6: Intervener strategies in monitoring subgame (when  $x^{**} > x^* + m$  and  $c \leq \beta + N$ )

proxy's actions, the intervener is willing to pay for monitoring. The gap of  $m$  length between  $x^*$  (the dark blue shaded region) and  $x^* + m$  (the light blue shaded region) shows the increased proxy compliance when monitoring is present. When monitoring is present, then, we should expect to see the proxy making more of an effort to follow the intervener's interests, even when its interests are farther away from the intervener's interests.

When monitoring is costly, an intervener will only choose monitoring when it anticipates difficulty observing the proxy's actions and expects the proxy to diverge from the intervener's preferences so much if unobserved that proxy support would not be a sustainable option. The higher the cost of monitoring, the more policy distortion the Intervener will tolerate before investing in monitoring. Interveners will be cautious about sending in advisors when the costs of monitoring are high. Therefore, interveners will be more likely to send advisors when its preferences are misaligned with the proxy's preferences. If policy distortion would be minimal without monitoring, the Intervener does not invest in monitoring when it is costly.

Figure 6 shows how the intervener strategies in the monitoring subgame and the equilibrium level of policy distortion vary with the cost of monitoring. The first dotted line represents the equilibrium level of policy distortion with perfect and complete information,  $x^* + m$ , while the second dotted line represents the proxy's policy distortion if the intervener does not choose monitoring,  $x^{**}$ , which is equal to the proxy's ideal point,  $t$ . In Figure 6, the proxy and the intervener disagree sufficiently such that the proxy's ideal point is greater than the maximum level of policy distortion that the intervener will tolerate in equilibrium if it could perfectly observe the proxy's actions without paying for monitoring. In this case, the intervener

is forced to invest in monitoring in order to gain the proxy's compliance. The dark red region to the left of the figure represents the additional compliance gain that the intervener gets from monitoring, moving the proxy's level of policy distortion in equilibrium (the dark blue line) toward the intervener's ideal point of zero. As the cost of monitoring gets higher, the proxy will be more compliant in equilibrium. When the cost of monitoring is equal to zero, the proxy's policy distortion is equal to what it would be in a version of the game with perfect and complete information ( $x^* + m$ ).

My model shows that monitoring can increase the benefits of proxy war for the intervener, even when the proxy and intervener have misaligned interests. It is important to underscore, however, that investing in monitoring does not ensure that the Intervener will get high levels of compliance from the Proxy.<sup>190</sup> Even with monitoring present, the compliance of the proxy depends on the alignment of interests between the intervener and proxy and the intervener's willingness to use incentives to reward or punish the proxy for its behavior. While monitoring reduce the policy distortion of the proxy, the proxy will still distort policy up to the point at which the intervener can credibly threaten to escalate or withdraw.

My model predicts that when advisors are costly to send, they will lead to larger increases in the proxy's level of compliance since they serve as a costly signal about the importance of compliance. However, interveners will send advisors less often when they are costly. But when interveners want to build military capacity and monitor a local military despite the high costs, interveners can lower the costs through limiting the public visibility of advisor deployments. The smaller the size of the advisor deployment, the less media attention and public backlash it will attract in both the host and sending countries. Intervenors minimize attention to the small numbers of advisors that they do need to deploy through actions such as requiring the advisors to wear civilian clothing when traveling to their work location (as US advisors did in 1950s Vietnam and 1980s El Salvador) or limiting their contact with the media (as US advisors were restricted in El Salvador).

The international system can influence the cost of sending advisors. When the system is bipolar and proxy wars take their traditional form of competition between two (or more) great powers, the cost of sending advisors will be higher because it increases the commitment of interveners to the conflict as well as increases the potential for escalation. Therefore, we might expect interveners to send advisors less often when the international system is multi- or bipolar than when it is unipolar, since great powers have a lower cost of monitoring when they are unlikely to be challenged by a competing intervention that could put their advisors in harm's way.

In the aftermath of 9-11, when the United States faced few challenges from other great powers, it deployed advisors throughout the world to help local governments contain armed non-state actors. As showed in the

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<sup>190</sup>See, for example, the following on early US interventions with military advisors as monitors: O'Lavin, *War on the Cheap*.

quantitative data in the main paper, US interventions with military advisors in the past 20 years far outpaced US and Soviet advisor deployments at the peak of the Cold War. Moreover, with modern air power, the United States can limit the likelihood of casualties and a resulting public exposé.<sup>191</sup> As a result, US policymakers know that a small deployment of advisors is unlikely to attract much attention, especially when ubiquitous. Advisors have deployed to many African countries, for instance, with little public visibility except when casualties happen, such as when four US advisors were killed in 2017 in Niger.<sup>192</sup> When costs of sending advisors are low, we should expect to see them deployed more often to a wider range of conflicts.

## A.5 Formal proofs

### A.5.1 Assumption 1: Need for delegation

**Assumption 1. Need for delegation:** *Combat is sufficiently costly; otherwise, any strategy involving direct intervention or escalation would strictly dominate proxy support. That is, given strategies  $s_i, s'_i \in S_i$ , let  $s_i = (\text{Direct intervention}, a_2)$  and let  $s'_i = (\text{Proxy support}, a_2)$ . If the cost of combat  $c < (1 - \pi)\beta$ , then  $u_I(s_i, s_{-i}) > u_I(s'_i, s_{-i})$  for all  $s_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ .*

*Proof.* Assume not.

1. For the Intervener to choose proxy support if  $c < (1 - \pi)\beta$ , then it must be the case that  $I$ 's expected utility from proxy support is higher than  $I$ 's expected utility from direct intervention (that is, any of  $I$ 's strategies involving  $a_1^1 = \text{Direct intervention}$ ),  $EU_I(DI, *) \leq EU_I(DI, PS, PS)$ , or  $\beta - c \leq \beta\pi - x$ .
2.  $\beta - c \leq \beta\pi - x \implies (1 - \pi)\beta + x \leq c$ . Given that  $x \geq 0$ , this is a contradiction.
3. Therefore, it must be the case that if the cost of combat  $c < (1 - \pi)\beta$ , then  $u_I(s_i, s_{-i}) > u_I(s'_i, s_{-i})$  for all  $s_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ .

□

## A.6 Assumption 2: Proxy prefers autonomy

**Assumption 2. Proxy prefers autonomy:** *The Proxy prefers autonomy in warfighting: it will always be weakly worse off if the Intervener sends in combat troops than if it chose some other strategy. That is,*

<sup>191</sup>For an extended discussion of the ways that states take on more expansive projects of intervention by using technology and limiting casualties, see: Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli. *Surrogate warfare: the transformation of war in the twenty-first century*. Georgetown University Press, 2019; Vladimir Rauta et al. “A Symposium—debating ‘surrogate warfare’ and the transformation of war”. In: *Defence Studies* 19.4 (2019), pp. 410–430

<sup>192</sup>Rukmini Callimachi et al. “‘An endless war’: Why 4 US soldiers died in a remote African desert”. In: *New York Times* 20 (2018).

for  $s_{-i}, s'_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ , let  $s_{-i} = (\text{Direct intervention}, a_2, a_3)$ . If  $R \leq \gamma + s$ , then  $u_P(s_i, s_{-i}) \leq u_P(s_i, s'_{-i})$  for all  $s_i \in S_i$ .

*Proof.* Assume not.

1. If  $R \leq \gamma + s$ , for the Proxy to be weakly better off if the Intervener sends in combat troops than if it chose some other strategy it must be the case that, for  $s_{-i}, s'_{-i} \in S_{-i}$ , let  $s_{-i} = (\text{Direct intervention}, a_2)$  then  $u_P(s_i, s_{-i}) \geq u_P(s_i, s'_{-i})$  for all  $s_i \in S_i$ .
2. This implies  $\gamma + s - x - t \leq R$ . Let  $-x - t = 0$ . This implies  $\gamma + s \leq R$  for some  $s_i \in S_i$ , a contradiction.

□

### A.6.1 Lemma 1

**Lemma 1.** *In equilibrium, the Proxy sets  $x$  equal to its ideal point,  $s_P^* = \{t\}$ , if the Intervener chooses not to monitor.*

*Proof.* The solution concept is subgame perfect equilibrium, therefore, both players must in equilibrium play a Nash equilibrium in every subgame. Suppose the Proxy chooses some  $s_P^* \neq \{t\}$ . For this to be an equilibrium in the subgame without monitoring, it must be the case that  $u_i(s_P^*) \geq u_i(s_P, s_I^*)$ . However, if the Proxy were to deviate to  $s'_P = \{t\}$ .  $u_i(s'_P, s_I^*)$  would be greater than if  $s_P^* \neq \{t\}$ . Therefore,  $s_P^* \neq \{t\}$  cannot be a strategy profile in equilibrium. □

### A.6.2 Lemma 2

**Lemma 2.** 1. *If  $c \leq \beta + N$ , then*

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} PS, \text{ Monitor}, PS, \text{ Escalate} & \text{if } x \leq x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Escalate}, \text{ Escalate} & \text{if } x > x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, PS, PS & \text{if } x \leq x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} < x^* + m \\ PS, \neg \text{ Monitor}, \text{ Escalate}, PS & \text{if } x > x^* \ \& \! \! \! \& \! \! \! x^{**} < x^* + m \end{cases}$$

and  $x^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame with monitoring and  $x^{**} = t$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame without monitoring.

2. If  $c > \beta + N + r$ , then

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} PS, Monitor, PS, Withdraw & \text{if } x \leq x^* \ \& \ x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ No \ intervention, Monitor, PS, Withdraw & \text{if } x^* < x \leq x^* + r \ \& \ x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ No \ intervention, Monitor, Withdraw, Withdraw & \text{if } x > x^* + r \ \& \ x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ PS, \neg Monitor, PS, PS & \text{if } x \leq x^* + r \ \& \ x^{**} < x^* + m \\ PS, \neg Monitor, Withdraw, PS & \text{if } x > x^* + r \ \& \ x^{**} < x^* + m \end{cases}$$

and  $x^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame with monitoring and  $x^{**} = t$  is the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame without monitoring.

*Proof.* Let  $x^*$  be the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame with monitoring, and  $x^{**}$  be the equilibrium value of  $x$  in the subgame without monitoring. If  $c \leq \beta + N$ , then  $I$  will never play a strategy profile where it withdraws in either subgame, because its expected utility will be higher from any profile where it escalates, because  $c \leq \beta + N \implies c \leq \beta + N + r$ . Therefore:

1. In the subgame with monitoring,  $EU_I(Proxy \ support, x^*) \geq EU_I(Escalate, x^*)$  if  $x^* = (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$ . Therefore, if  $x \leq x^*$ ,  $I$  will play the action *Proxy support* in the monitoring subgame, and will *Escalate* if  $x > x^*$ .
2. In the subgame without monitoring,  $EU_I(Proxy \ support, x^{**}) \geq EU_I(Escalate, x^{**})$  if  $x^{**} = (\pi - 1)\beta + c$ , that is, if  $x^{**} = x^* + m$ . Therefore, if  $x \leq x^{**}$ ,  $I$  will play the action *Proxy support* in the subgame without monitoring, and will *Escalate* if  $x > x^{**}$ .
3.  $I$  will choose to monitor if  $x^{**} \geq x^* + m$ . This is because if  $x^{**} > x^* + m$ ,  $I$  will escalate in the subgame without monitoring, in which case its expected utility will be  $\beta - c$ , which implies  $EU_I(Monitor, x^*) \geq EU_I(\neg Monitor, x^{**})$  given  $x \leq x^*$ .
4. It follows that  $I$  will choose *Proxy support* in the first stage of the game. If  $c \leq \beta + N$ , then  $I$  will never play a strategy profile where it does not intervene, and as the previous step has shown,  $I$  prefers proxy support to escalation, which implies  $I$  prefers proxy support to direction intervention.

If  $c > \beta + N + r$ , then  $I$  will never play a strategy profile where it escalates in either subgame, because its expected utility will be higher from any profile where it withdraws, because  $c > \beta + N + r$ :

1. In the subgame with monitoring,  $EU_I(\text{Proxy support}, x \leq x^* + r) \geq EU_I(\text{Withdraw}, x > x^* + r)$  if  $x^* = \beta\pi + N - m$ . Therefore, if  $x \leq x^* + r$ ,  $I$  will play the action *Proxy support* in the monitoring subgame, and will *Withdraw* if  $x > x^* + r$ .
2. In the subgame without monitoring,  $EU_I(\text{Proxy support}, x^{**} + r) \geq EU_I(\text{Withdraw}, x^{**} + r)$  if  $x^{**} = \beta\pi + N$ , that is, if  $x^{**} = x^* + m$ . Therefore, if  $x \leq x^{**} + r$ ,  $I$  will play the action *Proxy support* in the subgame without monitoring, and will *Withdraw* if  $x > x^{**} + r$ .
3.  $I$  will choose to monitor if  $x^{**} \geq x^* + m$ . This is because  $EU_I(\text{Monitor}, x^*) \geq EU_I(\neg\text{Monitor}, x^{**})$  if  $x^{**} > x^* + m$ .
4. It is clear that  $I$  will never withdraw since not intervening in the first stage will always dominate a strategy profile that involves proxy support and then withdraw. This is because  $I$ 's payoff for non-intervention,  $-N$  is always greater than its payoff for withdrawal,  $-N - r$ . Therefore, if in the subgame equilibria described previously,  $x^* < x < x^* + r$  or  $x^{**} > x^* + m$ ,  $I$  will choose not to intervene. Otherwise, contingent on  $I$  playing the subgame equilibria described in the previous steps,  $I$  will choose proxy support in the first move.

□

### A.6.3 Lemma 3

**Lemma 3.** *Let  $s_I$  be as defined in Lemma 2. In equilibrium:*

1. Let  $x_1^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$ . Then  $s_P^* = \min\{x_1^*, t\}$  implies  $R - \gamma - s + t \leq x_1^* \leq t$ .
2. Let  $x_2^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$ . Then  $s_P^* = \min\{x_2^*, t\}$  implies  $t - s \leq x_2^* \leq t$ .

*Proof.* It is clear first that in equilibrium,  $P$  will never choose an  $x > t$ . If  $P$  were to deviate to  $s'_P = \{t\}$ , then  $u_i(s'_P, s_I^*)$  would be greater than if  $s_P^* = \{x > t\}$ .

1. Given Assumption 2 and the previous lemmas, if  $x_1^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$ , then  $s_P^* = \min\{x_1^*, t\}$  implies that  $EU_P(s_P^*, s_I^*) \geq EU_P(s'_P, s_I^*)$ . This implies  $\gamma + s - x - t \geq R$ , since  $I$  is playing a strategy of escalating if  $x > x^*$ . Therefore,  $P$ 's movement away from its ideal point is  $x - t \leq \gamma + s - R$ . Solving, this implies  $x \leq t - \gamma - s + R$ . Since  $x^* < t$ , this implies  $R - \gamma - s + t \leq x_1^* \leq t$ .
2. Given Assumption 2 and the previous lemmas, if  $x_2^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$ ,  $s_P^* = \min\{x_2^*, t\}$  implies that  $EU_P(s_P^*, s_I^*) \geq EU_P(s'_P, s_I^*)$ . This implies  $\gamma + s - x - t \geq \gamma$ , since  $I$  is playing a strategy of withdrawing (or not intervening) if  $x > x^*$ . Solving, this implies  $x \leq t - s$ . Since  $x^* < t$ , this implies  $t - s \leq x_2^* \leq t$ .

□

#### A.6.4 Proposition 1

**Proposition 1.** *If the cost of combat is high but withdrawal is more costly; the Proxy prefers independence in warfighting; and the Proxy's preferences diverge sufficiently from the Intervener's preferences, there exists an equilibrium where I invests in monitoring and continues proxy support if  $x \leq x_1^*$  and escalates after initial proxy support if  $x > x_1^*$ , and P chooses  $\min(x_1^*, t)$ , provided  $x_1^* \geq R - \gamma - s + t$ . If the cost of combat is sufficiently high and the Intervener and Proxy divergence sufficiently in preferences, there exists another equilibrium where I invests in monitoring and continues proxy support if  $x \leq x_2^*$  and does not support a proxy at all if  $x > x_2^*$ , and P chooses  $\min(x_2^*, t)$ , provided  $x_2^* \geq t - s$ .*

*Proof.* Proposition 1 follows directly from Assumptions 1-2 and Lemmas 1-3. There are two equilibria of this game where monitoring can be sustained.

1. **Monitoring with Escalation as punishment for noncompliance:** If Assumptions 1 & 2 hold and  $c \leq \beta + N$ , then

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} \text{Proxy support, Monitor, Proxy support, Escalate} & \text{if } x \leq x^* \text{ \& } x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ \text{Proxy support, Monitor, Escalate, Escalate} & \text{if } x > x^* \text{ \& } x^{**} \geq x^* + m \end{cases}$$

where  $s^*$  is of the form  $(a_I^1, a_I^2, a_{I_m}^3, a_{I_{-m}}^3)$  (where  $m$  and  $-m$  denote the two subgames with or without monitoring), and  $x_1^* \equiv (\pi - 1)\beta + c - m$  and  $s_P^* = \min\{x_1^*, t\}$  if  $R - \gamma - s + t \leq x_1^* \leq t$ .

2. **Monitoring with Withdrawal as punishment for noncompliance:** If Assumption 1 holds and  $c > \beta + N + r$ , then

$$s_I^* = \begin{cases} \text{Proxy support, Monitor, Proxy support, Withdraw} & \text{if } x \leq x^* \text{ \& } x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ \text{No intervention, Monitor, Proxy support, Withdraw} & \text{if } x^* < x \leq x^* + r \text{ \&} \\ & x^{**} \geq x^* + m \\ \text{No intervention, Monitor, Withdraw, Withdraw} & \text{if } x > x^* + r \text{ \&} \\ & x^{**} \geq x^* + m \end{cases}$$

where  $s^*$  is of the form  $(a_I^1, a_I^2, a_{I_m}^3, a_{I_{-m}}^3)$  (where  $m$  and  $-m$  denote the two subgames with or without monitoring), and  $x_2^* \equiv \beta\pi + N - m$  and  $s_P^* = \min\{x_2^*, t\}$  if  $t - s \leq x_2^* \leq t$ .

□



## Appendix B Interview data

### B.1 Interview subjects

I interviewed 29 current or retired members of the United States Army who had served as military advisors between 1970-2019, and one civilian who served in a government agency with involvement in US intervention in Afghanistan. Interviewees were selected using snowball sampling: I reached out to my contacts who served in the US military and asked for referrals to colleagues who had served in an advising capacity. In addition to ensuring good coverage of the major US interventions of the past 20 years, I focused specifically on US intervention in El Salvador (1979-1992). I identified people who served as advisors in El Salvador using a list of officers and non-commissioned officers who received a combat decoration for their service in the conflict.<sup>193</sup> I reached out via email or LinkedIn to establish initial contacts across different networks of advisors who had served in different capacities and with different military units/security services in El Salvador, and then used snowball sampling to identify other interviewees. Jacqueline Hazleton also provided crucial assistance in establishing initial contacts with military advisors who served in El Salvador.

16 of my interviewees served in El Salvador, 8 served in Afghanistan, 5 served in Iraq, 2 in Ukraine, and 1 in Syria. These conflicts were the subject of the interviews; most interviewees had served in additional conflicts or trained and advised during short deployments around the world. The numbers do not add up to 29 due to some advisors serving in multiple conflicts.

After establishing contact with an interviewee, I conducted an interview ranging from 1-4 hours, with the average interview length around 90 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured; I asked a generic set of questions to each interviewee (listed below) and then asked follow-up questions depending on their answers. Most interviews were recorded, but interviewees were given the option not to record the interview, in which case I took notes. If the interview was recorded, transcripts were made using Rev (machine-produced and human-edited) and Trint (machine-produced). I then reviewed and edited the transcripts for accuracy. If the interview was not recorded due to the interviewee's choice or failure of the recording device, I took notes during the interview and then filled them in with my best recollection and impressions immediately after concluding the interview. Using transcripts and notes, I then hand-coded the interviews for major themes related to information gathering and influencing. Although many interviewees were willing to go on the record, I decided to keep all interviewees anonymous to fully protect the privacy of those who requested confidentiality.

The generic interview protocol I used for the semi-structured interviews follows below. Subjects either

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<sup>193</sup>Nelson Mumma, Jr. "El Salvador vets honored," *Sine Pari*, August 1998, Vol. 2, No. 4. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=opSS9Xmsjw4C&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA23>

were asked these questions in an interview or filled out the questionnaire via email. For interviews, I would then ask follow up questions based on interviewees' responses to these questions. The interview protocol for advisors who served in El Salvador was slightly different from the generic protocol; questions asked only to advisors who served in El Salvador are in bold. I occasionally asked only a subset of these questions if we ran out of time during the interview.

## B.2 Question protocol

1. Describe your experience in the US military. What was your training or military qualifications? Your MOS?
2. **When you served in El Salvador, were you part of the 55 advisors in-country or was it a temporary duty assignment?**
3. When you were deployed as an advisor, where were you assigned, specifically what region, department, or province?
4. Role as military advisor: what local forces were you advising? If possible, share specific military units and their capabilities. What size unit (Platoon, Company, Battalion-size element)? Or were you advising a Brigade staff? What is the US equivalent?
5. What training or briefings did you receive before being assigned?
6. What was the capability you were ask to build? Do you know if this capacity was requested by the local partner or as a result of guidance by US leaders?
7. What were your responsibilities as military advisor? What did your day-to-day routine look like?
8. Describe the combat quality of the military force you advised. What were their strengths and weaknesses?
9. Describe your relationship with the leadership of the unit you were advising.
10. What were the main challenges in your role as a military advisor?
11. What limitations did US leadership put in place and what affect did it have on your mission?
12. **If they won combat award: can you tell me how you received your combat award in El Salvador?**
13. Did you engage in combat with the forces you were advising? If so, describe some major operations that you undertook.
14. Do you know if the forces you trained engage in combat operations? If so, how did they perform?
15. Did you witness any human rights abuses or any actions contrary to US interests while acting as an advisor? If so, what did you do?

16. Did you have a formal means of measuring success of your mission? How would you rate the improvement in the local ally over time?
17. When and where should advisors be sent?
18. When your assignment ended, were you replaced by other military advisors?
19. Any other comments you would like to add?
20. Anyone you could refer me to?

## Appendix C Cited archival collections

### **Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California**

- Fontaine, Roger, Files
- Latin America Directorate, National Security Council
- Meese, Edwin, Files
- National Security Council Executive Secretariate: Meeting Files
- North, Oliver, Files
- Tillman, Jacqueline, Files.

### **Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia**

- Brzezinski, Zbigniew Collection
- Pastor, Robert, Country Files
- RAC Project Files.

### **National Security Archives, Washington, DC, Digital collections**

- El Salvador: the Making of U.S. Policy, 1977-1984 (El Salvador 1977-1984)
- War, Peace, and Human Rights: 1980-1994 (El Salvador 1980-1994).

### **U.S Department of State, Virtual Reading Room**

- El Salvador Declassification Project