

Geopolitical Ruptures: Loss Aversion, Risk Propensities, and Contestations of Spheres of Influence among Great Powers

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Abstract

The accelerating consolidation of a multipolar world system has encouraged a renewed discussion on spheres of influence in international relations, particularly with regards to their role in maintaining international security and mitigating destabilizing forms of competition among great powers. This thesis focuses on one aspect of the phenomenon and explores why great powers contest rival spheres of influence. More specifically, the thesis attempts to explain the variation in aims and intensity of contestations of spheres of influence among rival great powers, with particular emphasis on a challenger's policies toward disobedient or restive states in the sphere of a rival power. The thesis uses insights from prospect theory to develop a simple framework and test two hypotheses across five cases. The argument is that great powers experiencing a decline in domestic and international status and material power are likely framed in the domain of losses, and thereby likely to pursue risk-acceptant policies towards restive states in the rival sphere of influence. Conversely, great powers enjoying growing or stable status are likely framed in the domain of gains and thus likely to pursue risk-averse policies towards restive states.

Résumé

La consolidation accélérée d'un système mondial multipolaire a encouragé un nouveau débat sur les sphères d'influence dans les relations internationales, en particulier en ce qui concerne leur rôle dans le maintien de la sécurité internationale et l'atténuation des formes déstabilisantes de concurrence entre les grandes puissances. Cette thèse se concentre sur un aspect du phénomène et explore les raisons pour lesquelles les grandes puissances se disputent des sphères d'influence rivales. Plus précisément, la thèse tente d'expliquer la variation des objectifs et de l'intensité des contestations des sphères d'influence entre les grandes puissances rivales, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur les politiques d'un challenger à l'égard des États désobéissants ou rétifs dans la sphère d'une puissance rivale. La thèse s'appuie sur la théorie des perspectives pour développer un cadre simple et tester deux hypothèses dans cinq cas. L'argument est que les grandes puissances qui connaissent un déclin de leur statut national et international et de leur puissance matérielle sont probablement encadrées dans le domaine des pertes, et donc susceptibles de mener des politiques d'acceptation des risques à l'égard des États rétifs dans la sphère d'influence de la puissance rivale. À l'inverse, les grandes puissances qui jouissent d'un statut croissant ou stable sont susceptibles de se situer dans le domaine des gains et donc de mener des politiques d'aversion au risque à l'égard des États rétifs.

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1. Introduction: Spheres of influence in International Relations

Background, Puzzle, and Rationale

The ongoing consolidation of a multipolar world order poses many interesting and pressing questions for observers and practitioners of international politics. Given that in some respects it clearly represents a return to a more traditional pattern of international politics, the ongoing trend invites one to consider the workings of older forms of statecraft. In the realm of security, spheres of influence are one such arrangement strongly associated with, but not necessarily exclusive to, multipolar world orders. In general terms, spheres of influence refer to states or territories over which a great power enjoys predominant military, political, economic, and cultural influence. Such arrangements are rather controversial, as some view spheres of influence as pillars of international security that moderate great power competition, while others condemn them as being immoral and cynical forms of *realpolitik* that promote instability.¹ Much of the debate revolves around the normative issues and utility of recognizing and respecting spheres of influence, but overlooks the more puzzling question of when and why states substantially violate rival spheres of influence they have implicitly or explicitly recognized beforehand.

A cursory glance at the historical record indicates that great powers maintain their respective spheres for a variety of material and ideational reasons, such as their value as transit routes, buffer zones, and even sources of great power identity and status. Given this, great powers ought to exercise much caution in their affairs with smaller states in the sphere of a rival power. However, there are cases where smaller states defy a great power and attempt to break free from its sphere of influence. These ruptures clearly offer challengers with a range of

¹ G. John Ikenberry, "The end of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (January 2018): 23.

potential gains. For example, challengers could exploit the rupture to harass or humiliate the rival power, or they could pursue more ambitious gains ranging from supporting the autonomy of the restive state to dislodging or denying it from the rival sphere altogether. What is particularly puzzling is that there is much variation in great power responses to ruptures in the spheres of influence of rival powers. Some ruptures are vigorously exploited by challengers, as shown in the extensive cooperation between the Soviet Union and Cuba following the Cuban Revolution. Other ruptures are met with minimal attention, as shown by the very limited cooperation between the United States and Hungary amidst the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This thesis attempts to solve this puzzle.

With regards to rationale, the puzzle and spheres of influence more broadly are worth examining for various reasons. As will be shown in later sections, spheres of influence are among the more neglected phenomena and concepts in the international relations literature. Yet such neglect is unwarranted, as spheres of influence have existed in various forms throughout history and will likely gain prominence in some form as the new era of multipolarity and great power politics continues to unfold. Moreover, studying the aforementioned puzzle can offer some insights into how spheres of influence can succeed or fail as arrangements for managing great power competition. This is worthwhile because although spheres of influence are often invoked as elements of international stability, there are cases where violations of such arrangements occurred, culminated in crisis, and nearly ignited conflict among great powers, with the Cuban Missile Crisis being perhaps the most notable example. As will be shown in the following section, such events are especially puzzling from the perspective of some international relations theories.

Alternative Explanations

Given its emphasis on security factors, structural realist international relations theory offers an obvious foundation for any inquiry into the workings of spheres of influence. Both offensive and defensive variants of the theory analyze international relations as an anarchic system in which rational unitary state actors interact and aim to survive by engaging in self-help behaviours.² However, both variants of the theory offer diverging views of fundamental state aims, as well as the implications of international anarchy. While offensive realism holds that the anarchic international system compels states to revisionist power-maximization and the pursuit of hegemony,³ defensive realists contend that there are actually systemic imperatives for security-maximization and the preservation of the balance of power through moderate defensive policies.⁴

Although structural realist theory gives minimal direct attention to spheres of influence, it is possible to deduce hypotheses relevant to the puzzle at hand. There are both offensive and defensive realist explanations for why spheres of influence form among great powers. As Resnick explains, an offensive realist perspective suggests that a rational great power will recognize that it has a lesser interest in the states comprising the rival sphere of influence, and that any expansionist policy will likely fail as it will be vigorously countered by the rival power.⁵ For a defensive realist, the recognition of a sphere of influence is effectively a form of signalling and appeasement intended to temper the insecurity and bellicosity of the rival power.⁶ Taken together, structural realism predicts that great powers facing a ruptured rival sphere will engage

² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 89-90; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 30-32.

³ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 33-35.

⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 118-121; Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 21.

⁵ Evan Resnick, "Interests, ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," *European Journal of International Relations* 28, no. 3 (2022): 567.

⁶ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 567.

in *optimal restricted cooperation* with the restive state. This response includes all political, economic, and military measures intended to support the autonomy of the restive state.⁷ In doing so, the great power challenger cautiously expands its influence in the restive state, but takes much care to not compromise the political and military dominance of the rival great power.⁸ In other words, states pursuing this policy cautiously test but hardly violate the limits of a rival power's tolerance for interference in its sphere of influence. For offensive realists, a great power will engage in such behavior because the rupture provides an opportunity to distract, harass, and possibly humiliate a rival power.⁹ For defensive realists, such action is warranted because the rupture offers a chance to mitigate the negative effects of initially recognizing the rival sphere of influence.¹⁰

Another possible explanation can be derived from the ideological distance theory. Pioneered by Haas, this theory focuses on the role of ideological distance in threat perceptions, and broadly argues that higher degrees of ideological difference generate heightened threat perceptions by producing fears of demonstration effects and expectations of conflict, while also raising the likelihood of mistrust and miscommunication among relevant actors.¹¹

Although spheres of influence are not directly discussed in Haas' work, it is possible to deduce relevant hypotheses. In short, if there is emergent ideological homogeneity between great power challenger and restive state, the former will engage in unrestricted cooperation with the latter and ultimately aim to dislodge or deny it from the sphere of the rival power.¹² This is because a common ideology will facilitate high levels of trust between the two states and drive

⁷ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 568.

⁸ Resnick, "Interests, ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 568.

⁹ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 568-569.

¹⁰ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 5.

¹¹ Mark L. Haas, *The ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 4-12.

¹² Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 569-171.

the challenger to overinflate the significance of the small restive state.¹³ Additionally, the two states will be compelled to demonstrate the success of their shared ideology, which also enables the effective mobilization of resources.¹⁴ On the other hand, if there is much ideological heterogeneity between the challenger and restive state, the latter will engage in noncooperation with the former and thereby refrain from challenging the rival sphere of influence. This is because the ideological differences between the two states will lead to mutual distrust and weak desire for cooperation, as well as wariness of promoting or enabling the success of a different ideology.¹⁵ In a recent study, Resnick modifies the ideological distance theory to better accommodate the timing of a great power's response to a rupture, and suggests that ideological homogeneity leads to short-term unrestricted cooperation, while heterogeneity leads to long-term noncooperation.¹⁶

The Main Argument

This thesis argues that substantial great power contestations of rival spheres of influence are largely driven by the former's desire to avoid losing international and domestic status and material power. More specifically, drawing on prospect theory, the thesis argues that a great power experiencing a decline of international and domestic status and material power is likely framed in the domain of losses, and is thereby more likely to pursue extensive risk-acceptant cooperation with a restive state in the sphere of a rival power. Conversely, a great power that enjoys stable or increasing status is likely framed in the domain of gains, and is hence likely to pursue risk-averse policies towards restive states in the rival sphere. It is very important to note two features of the argument. First, the argument only seeks to explain the initial decision to

¹³ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 569-171.

¹⁴ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 569-171.

¹⁵ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 569-171.

¹⁶ Resnick, "Interests, Ideologies, and Great Power Spheres of Influence," 570-572.

intrude on a rival sphere following a rupture, while keeping the actual causes of the rupture exogenous to the explanation. Second, the argument does not necessarily seek to challenge the alternative explanations, but to rather complement and qualify them where possible.

Spheres of Influence in the International Relations Literature

Although the concept is widespread in public discourse, the relevant scholarly literature gives minimal attention to spheres of influence. This neglect is especially pronounced in the mainstream theoretical literature. Despite a close association with *realpolitik*, spheres of influence are given little consideration in the major works of realist theory. In Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, a foundational work of classical realist theory, spheres of influence are mentioned sparingly and generally described as an element of the international balance of power.¹⁷ In Waltz' *Theory of International Politics*, the founding text of structural and defensive realism, the concept does not appear at all.¹⁸ However, spheres of influence are briefly considered in other defensive realist works such as Walt's *The Origins of Alliances*, which accounts for their creation by arguing that weaker states tend to bandwagon and thereby join the sphere of a stronger state.¹⁹ The founding text of offensive realism, Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, gives some albeit indirect attention to spheres of influence, mainly through the argument that great powers will seek to frustrate the efforts of other powers at establishing regional hegemony.²⁰ There are also no references to spheres of influence or related phenomena

¹⁷ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993): 195-196, 373-390.

¹⁸ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*,

¹⁹ Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 31, 24-25.

²⁰ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power politics*, 140-150.

in Keohane's *After Hegemony* and Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics*, both respectively being seminal works of neoliberal institutionalist and constructivist theory.²¹

Interestingly, spheres of influence have received some sustained attention in works of English School international relations theory. In *The Anarchical Society*, Bull explains how spheres of influence are an element of international order, mainly in the sense that they are created and sustained by the exercise and formal or informal mutual recognition of great power preponderance in a given region.²² However, aside from several scattered remarks, the concept does not play a significant role in Bull's theory. One English School work that offers much more sustained attention is Keal's *Unspoken Rules and Superpower Dominance*, which explores spheres of influence as manifestations of tacit understandings and "unspoken rules" among great powers.²³ However, Keal does not consider the kind of relationships most relevant to the puzzle at hand, namely those between a great power and small states in the sphere of a rival.²⁴

Literature directly pertaining to spheres of influence is scarce, with most studies being preoccupied with historical, descriptive, and conceptual matters. For example, an early study by Rutherford discusses the privileges great powers hold over their satellite states and attempts to distinguish spheres of influence from other arrangements such as protectorates and mandates.²⁵ In his study of how and why spheres of influence are developed, Mathisen stresses the role of security and economic motives, as well as the importance of geography and technology as

²¹ Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

²² Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, 4th ed. (London: Red Globe Press, 2012), 212.

²³ Paul Keal, *Unspoken Rules and Superpower Dominance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 45.

²⁴ Keal, *Unspoken Rules and Superpower Dominance*, 5.

²⁵ Geddes Rutherford, "Spheres of Influence: An Aspect of Semi-Suzerainty," *The American Journal of International Law* 20, no. 2 (April 1926): 300-325.

enabling factors.²⁶ Other studies are more concerned with history and often focus on the development of individual spheres of influence within Europe and Latin America.²⁷ Although performing valuable foundational work, the main deficiency of these early studies is that they do not venture beyond conceptual and descriptive matters.

Over the past decade there has been some renewed scholarly interest in spheres of influence. Although still concerned with conceptual matters, many new studies explore spheres of influence in relation to contemporary events and international relations theories. One group of recent studies tends to adopt an English School perspective and seeks to challenge the common Western narrative of spheres of influence returning to the forefront of international politics.²⁸ One example is Buranelli's study, which conceptualizes spheres of influence as forms of "negotiated hegemony" that do not wax and wane, but rather constantly evolve and transform in accordance with the context in which they are implemented.²⁹ Hast's book-length study offers an intellectual history of the concept and places it in dialogue with English School and constructivist theory, arguing that spheres of influence are "regional solidarist orders" that enable pluralism at the global level.³⁰ Another recent example is Jackson's study, which conceptualizes spheres of influence as "hierarchical practises of control and exclusion," and explores how such

²⁶ Trygve Mathisen, "Factors Promoting Sphere of Influence Relationships," *Cooperation and Conflict* 8, no. 3 (1973): 155-171.

²⁷ Jan Nijman, "The Dynamics of Superpower Spheres of Influence: US and Soviet Military Activities, 1948-1978," *International Interactions* 17, no. 1 (1991): 63-91; Geoffrey Roberts, "Ideology, Calculation and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy 1939-1945," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 1999): 655-673; Albert Resis, "Spheres of Influence in Soviet Wartime Diplomacy," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 3 (September 1981): 417-439; Marco Mariano, "Isolationism, Internationalism, and the Monroe Doctrine," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 35-45.

²⁸ Ian Ferguson and Susanna Hast, "introduction: The Return of Spheres of Influence?" *Geopolitics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 279-281.

²⁹ Filippo Costa Buranelli, "Spheres of Influence as Negotiated Hegemony: The Case of Central Asia," *Geopolitics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 379.

³⁰ Susanna Hast, *Spheres of Influence in International Relations: History, Theory, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68.

practises are understood from realist, liberal, constructivist, and relational theoretical perspectives.³¹

Some recent studies explore spheres of influence in relation to substantive security issues. Often realist in orientation, these studies are critical of the American tendency to oppose the consolidation of spheres of influence led by other powers. For example, O'Rourke and Shiffrinson argue that spheres of influence can stabilize relations among great powers by serving as buffer zones, clarifying state interests, and providing more room for diplomatic maneuvers when interests conflict.³² Etzioni reaches similar conclusions,³³ but extends his realist analysis to consider how spheres of influence can provide great powers with a sense of status and psychological security.³⁴ Etzioni also contends that spheres of influence can be compatible with a liberal international order, and that their recognition can facilitate peaceful change in the international system.³⁵ Although providing more policy-oriented insights, these works are still largely descriptive in nature.

It is worth mentioning that the extensive literature on hierarchy in international relations is highly relevant when thinking about spheres of influence. The features and dynamics of spheres of influence have much congruity with those of international hierarchies. Indeed, spheres of influence may be easily understood as instantiations of international hierarchies. Still, the literature on hierarchies shares some of the deficiencies identified in the literatures discussed previously, at least with regards to spheres of influence. Much of the prominent works focus

³¹ Van Jackson, "Understanding Spheres of Influence in International Politics," *European Journal of International Security* 5, no. 3 (2020): 257-259.

³² Lindsey O'Rourke and Joshua Itzkowitz-Shiffrinson, "Squaring the Circle on Spheres of Influence: The Overlooked Benefits," *The Washington Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2022): 106.

³³ Amitai Etzioni, "Spheres of Influence: A Reconceptualization," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2015): 118.

³⁴ Etzioni, "Spheres of Influence," 123.

³⁵ Etzioni, "Spheres of Influence," 123.

conceptual issues and questions pertaining to the formation, maintenance, and consequences of international hierarchies. Furthermore, much of the existing literature tends to focus more on the dynamics within hierarchies than those between different hierarchies and dominant states.³⁶

While McCormack's recent work is somewhat of an exception given its attention to inter-hierarchical rivalries, it mainly focuses on how such rivalries affect the domestic politics of smaller subordinate states.³⁷ Overall, one can say that this thesis is in dialogue with the hierarchy literature and may offer a few directions towards addressing some gaps, especially those pertaining to questions of when and why great powers contest rival hierarchical orders and support defiant subordinate states within them.

Contribution to the Literature

As shown by the preceding review, there is scarce literature on spheres of influence, with most studies being of a largely descriptive nature and preoccupied with conceptual matters. Moreover, aside from Resnick's recent study, there have been practically no attempts at generating and testing hypotheses related to spheres of influence and their workings in wider patterns of international relations. Naturally, this thesis aims to fill these research gaps.

Definitions

For the purposes of this thesis, *spheres of influence* are defined as groups of states or territories over which a great power enjoys predominant political, military, economic, and cultural influence. Through such an arrangement, a great power influencer exerts much control over the foreign, domestic, and security policies of the smaller influenced states, while also often excluding other powers from cultivating a similar degree of influence. A sphere of influence is

³⁶ David Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Ayşe Zarakol, "Theorizing Hierarchies," in *Hierarchies in World Politics*, ed. Ayşe Zarakol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3-13.

³⁷ Daniel McCormack, *Great Powers and International Hierarchy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

stable when the influencer great power can exercise such control over the smaller influenced states, and when the overall arrangement is implicitly or explicitly recognized by other powers. Although smaller states within a sphere can be subject to the direct or indirect influence of other powers (e.g., via economic or cultural exchange), the overall limits are established and enforced by the dominant influencer power. For the purposes of this thesis, a sphere of influence is substantially violated or contested when a rival power manages to greatly reduce the ability of an influencer power to control the political and security affairs of a smaller influenced state.

Ruptures refer to instances when a defiant small state attempts to leave a sphere of influence or gain autonomy, and accordingly faces coercive retaliation from the influencer great power. As mentioned earlier, the actual causes of a rupture are exogenous to the explanation offered by this thesis. The defiant behavior may be manifested by excessively disobedient political elites, popular upheaval, or some combination of both. It is important to note that a disobedient small state alone is not sufficient to cause a rupture, and that such behavior must reach a level where it invites a coercive response from the dominant influencer power.

Plan of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight sections, with the first and current section providing an introduction and literature review. The second section offers an overview of prospect theory and relevant methodology, while also developing a basic analytical framework and hypotheses. The following five sections test the hypotheses through a series of case studies. The final section offers concluding remarks and discusses theoretical and policy implications.

2. Theory and Methodology

Prospect Theory: Insights, Applications, and Limitations

Prospect theory is a psychological theory of human decision-making under conditions of risk. Originally pioneered by Kahneman and Tversky,³⁸ prospect theory has become very influential in the fields of psychology, economics, and political science, mainly because it provides an alternative to conventional rational-choice models of human behavior. The theory is quite prominent in the international relations literature, where it is employed to explain risky behaviors. Studies have used prospect theory to explain specific war initiation decisions,³⁹ as well as cases of decision-making amidst crises.⁴⁰ Other more ambitious studies use prospect theory to revise or propose wider theories of great power intervention in peripheral regions,⁴¹ policy preference formation,⁴² foreign policy change,⁴³ and deterrence.⁴⁴ There are even recent studies using prospect theory to explore issues pertaining to the role of status in international

³⁸ Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk," *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (March 1979): 263-292.

³⁹ Ariel S. Levi and Glen Whyte, "A Cross-Cultural Exploration of the Reference Dependence of Crucial Group Decisions Under Risk: Japan's 1941 Decision for War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 6 (December 1997): 792-813; Rose McDermott and Jacek Kugler, "Comparing Rational Choice and Prospect Theory Analyses: The US Decision to Launch Operation Desert Storm, January 1991," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 3 (2001): 49-85; Anat Niv-Solomon, "When Risky Decisions are not Surprising: An Application of Prospect Theory to the Israeli War Decision in 2006," *Cooperation and Conflict* 51, no. 4 (December 2016): 484-503.

⁴⁰ Louise Richardson, "Avoiding and Incurring Losses: Decision-Making in the Suez Crisis," *International Journal* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 370-401; Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Barbara Farhham, "Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: Insights from Prospect Theory," *Political Psychology* 13, no. 2 (June 1992): 205-235; Audrey McInerney, "prospect Theory and Soviet Policy Towards Syria, 1966-1967," *Political Psychology* 13, no. 2 (June 1992): 265-282.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004)

⁴² Sean Ehrlich, and Cherie Maestas, "Risk Orientation, Risk Exposure, and Policy Options: The Case of Free Trade," *Political Psychology* 31, no. 5 (2010): 567-684; Jean A. Garrison, "Framing Foreign policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle: President Carter, His Advisors, and the Struggle for the Arms Control Agenda," *Political Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2001): 775-807.

⁴³ David A. Welch, *Painful Choices: A Theory of Foreign Policy Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

⁴⁴ Brock F. Tessa and Steve Chan, "Power Cycles, Risk Propensity, and Great-Power Deterrence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 2 (2004): 131-153; Jeffrey Berejikian, "A Cognitive Theory of Deterrence," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 2 (March 2002): 165-183.

relations.⁴⁵ As will be shown in this section, prospect theory is quite suitable for addressing the research question at hand. In addition to offering an alternative, nuanced, and dynamic perspective on decision-making, prospect theory allows one to account for the shifting preferences, risk propensities, and potentially suboptimal decisions involved when a great power responds to a rupture in a rival sphere of influence. In other words, prospect theory is well suited for explaining what is probably among the riskiest policies a great power can pursue.

One major reason for the prominence of prospect theory is that it offers an alternative to the rationalist expected-utility model. According to the latter's common formulation, actors seek to maximize expected-utility when selecting options under conditions of risk. In this model, actors weigh the utilities of the outcomes associated with different options with their respective probabilities of occurrence, and then select the option offering the highest expected-utility.⁴⁶ Additionally, utility for a certain good is understood to be a function of net asset levels and does not increase in proportion with the objective amount, meaning that goods often have diminishing marginal utility after a certain point.⁴⁷ Risk-averse actors are deemed to have concave utility functions, and prefer certain over uncertain outcomes when given options with similar expected utilities.⁴⁸

Issues surrounding the expected utility model gave impetus to the development of prospect theory as an alternative approach to understanding decision-making under conditions of risk.⁴⁹ In general, prospect theory offers five key insights, with the first pertaining to reference dependence. In particular, the theory posits that individuals tend to think not in terms of net

⁴⁵ Kai He, and Huiyun Feng, "Role Status and Status-Saving Behavior in World Politics: the ASEAN Case," *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March 2022): 363-381.

⁴⁶ Jack S. Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," *Political Psychology* 13, no. 2 (June 1992): 173.

⁴⁷ Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," 173.

⁴⁸ Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," 173.

⁴⁹ Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," 173-174

assets, but rather in terms of gains or losses, and thus perceive the range of possible outcomes as being deviations from a reference point.⁵⁰ In their early work, Kahneman and Tversky maintained that the reference point is usually the status quo,⁵¹ though others have noted that it may also be an aspiration level.⁵² This ambiguity related to reference point selection poses a major problem for studies employing prospect theory. As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, this issue can be addressed in various ways.

The second, third, and fourth insights of prospect theory are closely related and respectively pertain to loss aversion, the endowment effect, and the certainty effect. Regarding loss aversion, Kahneman and Tversky notably contend that “losses loom larger than gains,” and suggest that individuals are more sensitive to losses relative to comparable gains.⁵³ Put differently, the pain of losses is greater than the pleasure of comparable gains. Loss aversion is related to the endowment effect, the third major insight, which refers to the tendency to value current possessions more than comparable goods not currently possessed.⁵⁴ Closely related is the certainty effect, the fourth insight, which refers to another tendency where outcomes perceived as probable are underweighted relative to outcomes deemed certain.⁵⁵ Additionally, individuals tend to perceive uncertain yet highly probable outcomes as being certain.⁵⁶ These are among the observations that lead Kahneman and Tversky to propose an s-shaped value function, where

⁵⁰ Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory,” 277.

⁵¹ Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory,” 277.

⁵² Levy, “An Introduction to Prospect Theory,” 174.

⁵³ Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory,” 279.

⁵⁴ Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard H. Thaler, “Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias,” in *Choices, Values, and Frames*, eds. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159-160.

⁵⁵ Kahneman and Tversky, “Prospect Theory,” 265.

⁵⁶ Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions,” *The Journal of Business* 59, no. 4 (October 1986): 268.

outcomes above a given reference point follow a concave pattern, while outcomes below it follow a steeper and convex pattern.⁵⁷

Finally, prospect theory offers insights and predictions related to the risk propensities of decisionmakers. In particular, the theory holds that decisionmakers will be risk-averse if they perceive themselves to be facing gains relative to their reference point.⁵⁸ Conversely, if decisionmakers perceive themselves to be facing losses relative to their reference point, they are likely to be risk-acceptant.⁵⁹ In other words, decisionmakers will be risk averse when given options to attain more gains, and risk acceptant when given options to stall or recoup losses.

Prospect theory suggests that actors facing risky choice problems make decisions according to a two-phase process. The first is the editing or framing phase, where actors perform various mental operations and arrive at a simplified representation of the available options and their outcomes, as well as the general context of a given choice problem.⁶⁰ In simple terms, actors in this phase determine available options and frame their respective outcomes as being either gains or losses in relation to an established reference point.⁶¹ This phase is especially important due to the role of framing effects, which refer to how decisions could be affected if an option is presented in favorable terms or in relation to strongly unfavorable options.⁶² Editing is followed by the evaluation phase, during which decisionmakers evaluate the edited options and select the one offering the highest value.⁶³ Taken together, the two-phase process reflects the aforementioned patterns related to reference dependence, loss aversion, and risk propensities, as well as the endowment, certainty, and framing effects.

⁵⁷ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 279.

⁵⁸ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 285-286.

⁵⁹ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 285-286.

⁶⁰ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 274.

⁶¹ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 274.

⁶² Tversky and Kahneman, "Rational Choice and the Framing of Decisions," 257-260.

⁶³ Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory," 275.

One of the major deficiencies of prospect theory is that it lacks a “theory of framing” and therefore does not explain how actors come to perceive their respective domains and reference points.⁶⁴ As a result, studies must attempt to either reconstruct or infer the framing of a given actor. This thesis determines an actor’s likely framing using McDermott’s approach, which entails the use of objective and subjective measures. Subjective data can be derived from sources such as memoirs, public speeches, private correspondence, and policy assessments, while objective data can be derived from economic indicators, opinion polls, and world events or trends.⁶⁵ This indirect approach aims to find indicators of an actor being “in” a gain or loss domain relative to the reference point.⁶⁶ While there are several ways to determine the reference point,⁶⁷ this thesis will assume that it is the status quo. Although it examines domain in a manner distinct from the conventional and more ideal approaches focusing on outcome descriptors, semantic manipulations, and situational context, this indirect holistic approach has the advantages of having less demanding data requirements and allowing one to better account for domestic and international gains or losses simultaneously.⁶⁸ In the event that international and domestic developments are in conflict (e.g., actor faces international losses and domestic gains), care will be taken to identify the most salient issues. Still, in many cases, an actor’s framing and domain should be obvious and easy to categorize.⁶⁹

Studies employing prospect theory face the challenge of operationalizing the degrees of risk associated with the options in a choice problem. This thesis follows McDermott’s approach

⁶⁴ Jack S. Levy, “Loss Aversion, Framing, and Bargaining,” *International political Science Review* 17, no. 2 (April 1996): 186.

⁶⁵ McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics*, 37-38.

⁶⁶ William A. Boettcher III, “The Prospects for Prospect Theory: An Empirical Evaluation of International Relations Applications of Framing and Loss Aversion,” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 3 (2004): 341.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Mercer, “Prospect Theory and Political Science,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 3-11.

⁶⁸ Boettcher, “The Prospects for Prospect Theory,” 342.

⁶⁹ McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics*, 11-12.

and understands risk in terms of the range between the best and worst possible outcomes associated with a given option.⁷⁰ A risk-acceptant option has wider variance between best and worst outcomes compared to a risk-averse option, which has a smaller outcome variance.⁷¹ For example, the outcomes of a risk-acceptant option might range from peace to war, while a risk-averse option has outcomes ranging between peace and diplomatic friction. In different terms, a risk-averse option has potential outcomes that lie closer to an actor's reference point and thus offer minimal gains or losses, while outcomes of a risk-acceptant option are more divergent and thus offer more gains or losses.

Finally, another problem of prospect theory worth mentioning is the aggregation problem, which refers to the issues surrounding the applicability of a theory of individual behaviour when explaining the behaviours of states and groups.⁷² Recent experimental and empirical evidence suggests that the aggregation problem might not be much of an issue and that the insights of prospect theory likely extend to collective decision-making.⁷³ Nonetheless, it is still important to acknowledge this problem. This thesis aims to emulate He and Feng's approach of focusing on state behaviours while treating the perceptions of relevant political elites and decisionmakers as representations of state interests.⁷⁴

Variables, Framework, and Hypotheses

As explained in the introductory section, this thesis aims to explain the variation in great power responses towards restive states in rival spheres of influence. More specifically, it

⁷⁰ McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics*, 38-39.

⁷¹ McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics*, 38-39.

⁷² Jack S. Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 102.

⁷³ Barbara Vis, "Prospect Theory and Political Decision Making," *Political Studies Review* 9, no. 3 (2011): 334-343; Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks*, 32-33.

⁷⁴ Kai He and Huiyun Feng, *Prospect Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in the Asia Pacific* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 6-7.

investigates the relationship between an actor's domain (the independent variable) and policy towards a restive state in a rival sphere (the dependent variable). In line with prospect theory, the independent variable or domain can be one of either losses or gains. As mentioned in the preceding section, domain will be discerned according to objective and subjective criteria, while the reference point is assumed to be the status quo. Objective indicators of domestic losses and status being under strain include leaders pursuing unpopular or unsuccessful policies; being the target of coups or unrest; or falling ratings. Objective indicators of international losses and strained status include declining or relatively low influence and material power; inability to maintain domestic order; recent military defeat; public humiliation by other states; and uncertainty or defections among allies or subordinates. A state is likely framed in the domain of gains if it not experiencing these challenges, or if it is facing their opposites. Subjective indicators will focus on relevant actors' assessments of the status quo, and will be derived from primary sources where available.

In theory, when faced with a restive state in the ruptured sphere of a rival, great powers have a spectrum of policies available. The most ambitious end of the spectrum is *extensive cooperation*, which refers to policies intended to either dislodge the restive state from a rival sphere or protect it from the rival power's efforts to reassert control. If successful, this strategy effectively eliminates or drastically reduces the political and military dominance a rival great power enjoys over the restive state. When engaging in *extensive cooperation* with a restive state, great powers will pursue policies that may involve the issuance of security guarantees; deployments of military personnel or weapons of mass destruction; provisions of substantial military aid and security cooperation; provisions of substantial economic aid; and forms of coercive diplomacy against the rival power (e.g., sanctions). If the rupture is triggered by a

popular uprising in a restive state, *extensive cooperation* also includes efforts to either facilitate or consolidate a regime change.

As one might expect, *extensive cooperation* is a relatively more risk-acceptant policy. This is especially clear if one measures risk using the approach mentioned previously. In terms of best possible outcomes, it is easy to see that this policy could offer substantial gains. By dislodging a restive state, a great power could gain substantial geopolitical leverage and status at the expense of the rival power. However, in terms of worst-possible outcomes, *extensive cooperation* naturally has a high likelihood of excessively provoking the rival power, and may lead to drastic countermeasures towards either the restive state or great power challenger. If this occurs, the challenger is placed in a dilemma between risking escalating security competition with the rival power, or retreating under pressure and potentially being left in a worse position in material and ideational terms. The challenger has a high chance of dramatic losses of status as well as its existing foothold in the rival sphere. *Extensive cooperation* is probably the most ambitious and risk-acceptant policy, as it has a very wide outcome variance. In simple terms, it offers high risk and high reward.

The least ambitious end of the spectrum is *limited cooperation*. This general policy represents a very minimal commitment, and is limited to policies such as relatively modest economic and military cooperation, humanitarian aid, moral support, and diplomatic pressure. This strategy generally serves to show solidarity with the restive state and potentially shame the rival great power. For obvious reasons, this policy offers little in terms of best-possible outcomes and may provide a great power challenger with modest gains in status or leverage within the restive state. At the same time, the policy carries very minimal risk in the sense that the worst-possible outcomes should be limited to minor diplomatic friction with the rival power. Given that

this policy implies a very minor violation of the sphere of influence, it is unlikely to provoke drastic counteractions from the rival power that would harm the overall position of the challenging power. Overall, the possible outcomes of *limited cooperation* should fall relatively close to the status quo and accordingly show relatively minimal outcome variance. Considering these characteristics, this policy is very risk-averse and offers minimal gain at minimal risk.

Finally, the structural realist prediction of *optimal restricted cooperation* lies at the center of the spectrum. As mentioned earlier, this general policy is intended to support the autonomy of the restive state without drastically reducing the political and military dominance of the rival great power. Although this policy forgoes the large potential risks and rewards of *extensive cooperation*, it offers much more potential gain but slightly more risk compared to *limited cooperation*. In terms of best possible outcomes, *optimal restricted cooperation* could provide a great power challenger with a decent increase in leverage and status within the rival sphere of influence. In terms of worst possible outcomes, the great power challenger could face a counterreaction from the great power, albeit not significantly larger than if it pursued a policy of *limited cooperation*. In essence, while the components of an optimal strategy may be hard to discern, they should include most elements of *limited cooperation* but lack the intensity and drastic elements and intentions of *extensive cooperation*. This optimal policy essentially tests but stays within the limits posed by the rival power. Indeed, this is what distinguishes this policy from the others. Whereas *limited cooperation* hardly tests the limits of the rival power, *extensive cooperation* disregards and violates them completely.

Based on the preceding basic framework and overview of prospect theory, two testable hypotheses can be deduced:

H1: If state or its leadership is facing a deficit or decline in status and/or material power domestically or internationally, it is likely framed in the domain of losses and will pursue risk-acceptant extensive cooperation towards restive state in the sphere of influence of a rival power.

H2: Conversely, if a state or its leadership enjoys stable or increasing status and/or material power domestically or internationally, it is likely framed in the domain of gains and will pursue risk-averse limited cooperation with the restive states in the rival sphere of influence.

As mentioned earlier, when states and/or leaders are framed in the domain of losses, they will be inclined to pursue extensive cooperation with restive states in a rival sphere of influence and hence make more forceful intrusions. If successful, this action could help the great power recoup or reverse losses in a variety of ways. For example, a successful intrusion could harm the status of the rival great power and hence signal renewed vigor and resolve of the challenging great power towards the rest of the international community. In terms of domestic politics, a successful intrusion could enhance the status of the incumbent government by diverting attention from its faults or by harming the credibility of domestic challengers. Conversely, a state enjoying stable or growing status will see little reason to stake its status and security on restive states in a rival sphere.

Methodology and Case Selection

This thesis applies prospect theory in the aforementioned manner to five cases and tests the hypotheses according to the method of “structured, focused, comparison” as described by George and Bennett.⁷⁵ More specifically, hypotheses are mainly tested using a “least similar” comparative case study approach and the congruence method.⁷⁶ This method examines the

⁷⁵ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 67.

⁷⁶ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 50-51, 155, 253.

congruence between the values of the independent and dependent variables of both the theory and cases. Strong congruence between the theory and cases suggests a possible causal relationship that strengthens the hypotheses offered by this thesis.⁷⁷ Where there is available evidence and strong alternative explanations, analysis will be supplemented with process-tracing to determine the causal mechanisms involved.⁷⁸ If the first hypothesis is correct, states facing losses should pursue most of the policies in the category of *extensive cooperation*, and should be driven to do so by the desire to prevent or stall losses in international or domestic material power or status. If the second hypothesis is correct, states facing gains should engage in *limited cooperation*, and should do so out of fear of excessively disturbing the favorable status quo. It is worth noting that the respective predictions offered by prospect theory and structural realism (and other rationalist theories) need not be viewed as always being contradictory, because in many cases optimal utility-maximizing decisions would still be selected by individuals who are risk-averse when facing of gains and risk-acceptant when facing losses.⁷⁹

Hypotheses are tested across five cases. The first four cases are from the Cold War era and include the limited cooperation between the United States and Hungary amidst the Hungarian Revolution of 1956; the extensive cooperation between the Soviet Union and Cuba following the Cuban Revolution of 1959; limited cooperation between the Soviet Union and Chile during the presidency of Salvador Allende between 1970 and 1973; and extensive cooperation between the United States and Afghan Mujahedin before and during the Soviet intervention in late 1979. The fifth case is contemporary and examines the extensive cooperation

⁷⁷ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 181-183.

⁷⁸ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 178-179, 205-206.

⁷⁹ Janice Gross Stein and David A. Welch, "Rational and Psychological Approaches to the Study of International Conflict: Comparative Strengths and Weaknesses," in *Decisionmaking on War and Peace: The Cognitive-Rational Debate*, eds. Nehemia Geva and Alex Mintz (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 75-76.

between the United States and Ukraine after the Euromaidan uprising of 2014, as well as after the Russian intervention of early 2022. Cases are selected on the basis of their variation on the dependent and independent variables. Additionally, selected cases offer clear examples of restive states in relatively well delineated spheres of influence. Each case study is divided into four parts. Case studies will first provide brief historical background surrounding the defiance of the restive state in question. After this, the cases studies determine the domain of the challenging power and subsequently examine the policies it pursued toward the restive state. Case studies conclude with a discussion of alternative explanations.

3. The United States and Hungary amidst the Hungarian Revolution of 1956

Historical Background

Hungary became part of the Soviet sphere of influence after the end of the Second World War. Although liberated and eventually occupied by the Soviet Red Army, Hungary nonetheless held relatively free elections in November 1945, which brought to power the center-right Independent Smallholders Party.⁸⁰ However, owing to “salami tactics,” the Hungarian Communist Party managed to erode the power of the ruling coalition and emerge victorious in the elections of 1949, after which the Hungarian People’s Republic was formally proclaimed.⁸¹ This period also saw the further consolidation of what would become the respective American and Soviet spheres of influence in Europe, as shown by American-led integration projects such as the Marshall Plan and NATO, as well as Soviet initiatives such as Cominform, Comecon, and various security treaties with allied states.⁸² In line with these trends, Hungary accelerated the Sovietization of its domestic order and pursued deeper integration into the Soviet sphere of influence.⁸³

Relations between Hungary and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate after 1953. The first source of tension was the reformist “new course” policies of Hungarian leader Imre Nagy, who sought to limit the repressive and unproductive Stalinist policies of his predecessor.⁸⁴ Soviet officials took note of these developments, and feared that Nagy’s “new course” was excessively deviating from acceptable communist practise.⁸⁵ These fears paved the way to Nagy’s dismissal

⁸⁰ Csaba Bekes, *Hungary’s Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 50.

⁸¹ Bekes, *Hungary’s Cold War*, 59.

⁸² Bekes, *Hungary’s Cold War*, 59.

⁸³ Bekes, *Hungary’s Cold War*, 63.

⁸⁴ Peter Kenez, *Before the Uprising: Hungary Under Communism, 1949-1956* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 149-151.

⁸⁵ Kenez, *Before the Uprising*, 163-167.

in 1955 and the emergence of new leadership that brought Hungary into the Warsaw Pact while attempting to undo some of Nagy's reforms.⁸⁶ Another factor that complicated Hungarian-Soviet relations was the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, which granted Austria neutral status. This is significant because, in addition to signalling Soviet willingness to negotiate and cede control of certain areas, the resulting "Austrian model" became attractive to many in Hungary and Eastern Europe more broadly.⁸⁷ Hungarian-Soviet relations were especially complicated after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in early 1956. This act further emboldened reformist and anti-Soviet forces throughout Eastern Europe, and inadvertently helped spark popular upheavals in Poland and subsequently in Hungary by the end of the year.⁸⁸

The Hungarian Revolution began in late October 1956 and unfolded in two broad phases. During the first phase, peaceful demonstrations developed into open clashes with Soviet and Hungarian government forces, before culminating in the reinstatement of Nagy as prime minister and the initial withdrawal of Soviet military personnel from Budapest on October 28.⁸⁹ The second phase began the following day. After it became clear that Soviet forces were actually regrouping and preparing to intervene, Nagy declared Hungary's neutrality and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, while appealing to the United Nations for support.⁹⁰ The Soviet intervention began on November 4, and swiftly suppressed the Hungarian Revolution.

American Domain

Overall, the United States was likely framed in the domain of gains in the period prior to the Hungarian Revolution. Indeed, American assessments of the status quo were generally

⁸⁶ Kenez *Before the Uprising*, 172-176.

⁸⁷ Kenez, *Before the Uprising*, 235.

⁸⁸ Bekes, *Hungary's Cold War*, 104-107

⁸⁹ Bekes, *Hungary's Cold War*, 107-115.

⁹⁰ Bekes, *Hungary's Cold War*, 115-117.

positive. Domestically, Eisenhower was quite popular and enjoyed relatively strong approval ratings throughout his first presidential term.⁹¹ Eisenhower's satisfaction was strongly evident in his State of the Union address delivered in January 1956, where he noted growing levels of prosperity, as well as how American society demonstrated a "spiritual vigor" and was "sharing in these good times."⁹²

The United States was generally in a stable and favorable position internationally during the relevant period. In his 1956 State of the Union address, Eisenhower noted that the American security posture "commands respect" throughout the world, and how "the free world has seen major gains for the system of collective security," as shown by West German NATO accession as well as the consolidation of security pacts with states in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.⁹³ Furthermore, although the perception of a communist threat remained, the address explained how "communist tactics against free nations have shifted in emphasis from reliance on violence and the threat of violence to reliance on division, enticement, and duplicity."⁹⁴ Similar sentiments were reflected in important strategic documents. For example, although aware of approaching nuclear parity, NSC 5602/1 from March 1956 envisioned an overall favorable American-Soviet strategic balance, as well as stable American alliance structures.⁹⁵

⁹¹ John E. Mueller, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," *American Political Science Review* 64, no. 1 (1970): 31; Robert Mason, "War Hero in the White House: Dwight Eisenhower and the politics of Peace, Prosperity, and Party," in *Profiles in Power: Personality, Persona, and the U.S. President*, eds. Jelte Olthof and Maarten Zwiers (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 112-113.

⁹² Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 5, 1956," Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.
https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/file/1956_state_of_the_union.pdf

⁹³ Eisenhower, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 5, 1956."

⁹⁴ Eisenhower, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 5, 1956."

⁹⁵ National Security Council Report, March 15, 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Volume XIX*, eds. William Klingaman, David Patterson, Ilana Stern, and John P. Glennon (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 66.

A satisfactory American position can also be observed with respect to the situation in Europe. In particular, the general security situation in Europe became drastically more stable by 1956, as both the United States and Soviet Union consolidated their respective spheres of influence via various institutional and military means. In line with these developments, by 1955 American strategy towards the Soviet sphere of influence no longer focused on “revolutionary change” and trying to overthrow communist governments, but instead shifted focus to cultivating long-term “evolutionary changes” among satellites to render their interests more compatible with those of the United States.⁹⁶ This favorable situation was further compounded by Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin and efforts to relax relations with the West and Soviet satellites. Indeed, general satisfaction with the status quo is reflected in NSC 5608 of July 1956, which noted that although “Soviet domination of the Eastern European satellites remains firm,” communist governments in the region still faced popular dissatisfaction but relaxed their repression following Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin.⁹⁷ The report concluded that these developments “increased the previously limited US capabilities to influence basic change in Soviet domination of the satellites.”⁹⁸

Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that American decisionmakers were generally satisfied with the status quo, and likely perceived themselves to be in the domain of gains shortly before the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution. As shown in the preceding discussion, the domestic and international status quo was perceived by key officials as being favorable. With regards to the situation in Europe, United States clearly became satisfied with the emerging

⁹⁶ National Security Council Report, January 31, 1955. *FRUS, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Volume XXIV*, eds. Ronald D. Landa, Aaron D. Miller, Charles S. Sampson, and John P. Glennon (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), Document 4.

⁹⁷ National Security Council Report, July 3, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Eastern Europe, Volume XXV*, eds. Edward C. Keefer, Ronald D. Landa, Stanley Shaloff, and John P. Gleeson (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 73.

⁹⁸ National Security Council Report, July 3, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 73.

status quo. Although still committed to the elimination of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, American officials clearly no longer attached much urgency to the matter, and were instead focused on longer-term goals. Given this situation, prospect theory predicts a risk-averse American policy toward Hungary.

American Response

The emerging unrest in Hungary quickly caught the attention of American officials. As mentioned earlier, by this time American policy towards the Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe shifted towards more gradual measures and no longer viewed the overthrow of governments to be a feasible option. However, this policy was initially not made public and contradicted much of the Eisenhower administration's rhetoric about liberating Eastern Europe from Soviet domination.⁹⁹ Once the revolution was underway, Secretary Dulles pondered the consequences of American inaction and expressed his reservations about the United States being "caught doing nothing" while the Hungarian rebels "were ready to stand up and die."¹⁰⁰ Despite this, the American response was very restrained and unfolded over several days.

The growing unrest in Hungary was discussed during a meeting of the National Security Council on October 26. After reading diplomatic cables describing how the rebels were requesting American assistance, officials noted that the Hungarian uprising had a more explicitly anti-communist and anti-Soviet character than earlier uprisings in Eastern Europe.¹⁰¹ Secretary Dulles notably suggested that the uprising was the "most serious threat yet to be posed" to Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, while other officials began commenting on the "possibility of an

⁹⁹ Csaba Bekes, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Great Powers," *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13, no. 2 (1997):56.

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State in Washington and the Representative at the United Nations (Lodge) in New York, October 24, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol XXV, Document 104.

¹⁰¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 301st Meeting of the National Security Council, October 26, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol. XXV, Document 116.

ultimate replacement of Soviet influence in the satellites by a Western orientation.”¹⁰² However, Eisenhower showed little enthusiasm for action. Instead of following the suggestion that the United States initiate a discussion at the United Nations Security Council, Eisenhower maintained that the situation should be analyzed further by relevant departments.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Eisenhower expressed his concern that “in view of the serious deterioration of their position in the satellites,” the Soviet Union might be “tempted to resort to very extreme measures and even to precipitate global war.”¹⁰⁴ American officials concluded that more analysis was needed before a decision could be made.¹⁰⁵

The situation in Hungary was also discussed in a meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, which also occurred on October 26. During this meeting, officials were also biased against any options calling for substantial American involvement, such as sending weapons or directing the rebels via radio.¹⁰⁶ Officials stressed that they must “avoid implicating the United States,” and avoid giving the Soviet Union a pretext for an invasion.¹⁰⁷ Instead, officials at this meeting concluded that the American response should be limited to humanitarian aid.¹⁰⁸

American officials continued to show much caution as the Hungarian Revolution intensified over the following days. In his speech to the Dallas Council on World Affairs on

¹⁰² Memorandum of Discussion at the 301st Meeting of the National Security Council, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 116.

¹⁰³ Memorandum of Discussion at the 301st Meeting of the National Security Council, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 116.

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 301st Meeting of the National Security Council, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 116.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum of Discussion at the 301st Meeting of the National Security Council, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 116.

¹⁰⁶ Notes on the 39th Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 117.

¹⁰⁷ Notes on the 39th Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 117.

¹⁰⁸ Notes on the 39th Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, October 26, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 117.

October 27, Secretary Dulles condemned the Soviet Union and noted that a United Nations resolution was being prepared. He further explained that the events in Hungary demonstrated Soviet weakness, and that the “United States has no ulterior motive in desiring the independence of the satellite countries.”¹⁰⁹ He further noted that the United States does “not look upon these nations as potential military allies.”¹¹⁰ During another meeting of the Committee on Soviet and Related Problems on October 29, officials noted that “the decision was taken higher up not to give arms,” and concluded that more humanitarian aid was appropriate.¹¹¹ By October 30, the analysis ordered by the National Security Council explained that the new Hungarian government was unlikely to reach a compromise between popular demands and Soviet interests, though it could not determine whether or not a possible Soviet intervention could effectively suppress the rebels.¹¹² The report also noted that if similar uprisings occur in adjacent states, the Soviet Union would likely grant them more internal autonomy.¹¹³ The report concluded that it was unlikely any American action “short of overt military intervention” would severely provoke the Soviet Union and “increase the risk of general war,” though the likelihood was still present given Soviet suspicions of American policy.¹¹⁴

American officials continued to show caution in wake of the apparent Soviet withdrawal from Budapest and start of the second phase of the Hungarian Revolution. On October 31, American diplomats in Budapest enthusiastically reported that the revolution appeared to have

¹⁰⁹ Address by the Secretary of State before the Dallas Council on World Affairs, October 27, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 128.

¹¹⁰ Address by the Secretary of State before the Dallas Council on World Affairs, October 27, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 128.

¹¹¹ Notes on the 40th Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, October 29, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 132.

¹¹² Special National Intelligence Estimate, October 30, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 137.

¹¹³ Special National Intelligence Estimate, October 30, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 137.

¹¹⁴ Special National Intelligence Estimate, October 30, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 137.

succeeded, and suggested that the United States commit to economic and political assistance.¹¹⁵ However, officials in Washington showed little enthusiasm. The draft policy outlined in NSC 5616 reiterated earlier estimates regarding the risk of general war, and concluded that the earlier gradualist policy outlined in NSC 5608/1 remained valid.¹¹⁶ The report suggested that an American response should be limited to humanitarian aid, propaganda, and public appeals via the United Nations, world media, and diplomatic channels.¹¹⁷ Additionally, the report suggested that the United States reassure the Soviet Union that it had no interest in Hungary, and proposed that more consideration be given for advocating Hungarian neutrality.¹¹⁸ On November 1, the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems met to discuss NSC 5616, and concluded that in addition to action via the Security Council, psychological and propaganda measures were the only reasonable options.¹¹⁹ Interestingly enough, during a meeting of the National Security Council on November 1, Eisenhower did not even wish to discuss the situation in Hungary, and instead wanted to concentrate on the emerging crisis in Egypt regarding the Suez Canal.¹²⁰ On November 4, as the Soviet intervention began unfolding, American officials concluded that there should not even be a United Nations force deployed to Hungary.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to the Department of State, October 31, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 148.

¹¹⁶ Draft Statement of Policy by the Planning Board of the National Security Council, October 31, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 151.

¹¹⁷ Draft Statement of Policy by the Planning Board of the National Security Council, October 31, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 151.

¹¹⁸ Draft Statement of Policy by the Planning Board of the National Security Council, October 31, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 151.

¹¹⁹ Notes on the 42nd Meeting of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems, November 1, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 153.

¹²⁰ Memorandum of Discussion at the 302nd meeting of the National Security Council, November 1, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 152.

¹²¹ "Action Taken as a Result of the White House Decision, November 4, 1956," in *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: a History in Documents*, eds. Csaba Bekes, Malcolm Byrne, and M. Janos Rainer (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 388.

The American response was cautious even as the Soviet Union suppressed the Hungarian Revolution. On 7 November, the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems recommended that the United States continue supporting Hungary via propaganda, public appeals, and humanitarian aid, while recommending against further inflaming relations with the Soviet Union.¹²² It further suggested that unless Soviet bellicosity grew, the United States should refrain from more drastic measures such as embargoes.¹²³ During a meeting of the National Security Council on November 8, Eisenhower explained that there was no need to antagonize the Soviet Union directly, and that the United States should publicize the Soviet reaction for propaganda value.¹²⁴

Overall, it is clear that the United States, being in the domain of gains, opted for a strategy of *limited cooperation* with Hungary during the upheavals of 1956. Although showing much sympathy to the rebels, the response of the United States was limited to humanitarian aid, propaganda, moral support, and diplomatic pressure. Despite being aware that the Hungarian Revolution was possibly a major opportunity to counter Soviet influence, officials showed caution throughout the event, and clearly feared provoking the Soviet Union and disturbing the relatively favorable status quo in Europe. In the interest of avoiding a problematic obligation, high-ranking American officials even showed little enthusiasm for supporting Hungarian neutrality.¹²⁵ Offering minimal chances for large gains or losses, the selected strategy was clearly risk-averse and thereby congruent with the prediction of prospect theory.

¹²² Notes for an Oral Report to the Operations Coordinating Board by the Chairman of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems (Beam), November 7, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XIX, doc. 174.

¹²³ Notes for an Oral Report to the Operations Coordinating Board by the Chairman of the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems (Beam), November 7, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 174.

¹²⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 303rd meeting of the National Security Council, November 8, 1956, *FRUS*, vol. XXV, doc. 175.

¹²⁵ Csaba Bekes, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Declaration of Neutrality," *Cold War History* 6, no. 4 (2006): 491.

Alternative Explanations

The American response to the Hungarian Revolution is inconsistent with the predictions of structural realism, which holds that the United States should have engaged in *optimal restricted cooperation* with Hungary and cautiously test the limits of Soviet tolerance. Indeed, the records of private deliberations among leading American officials indicated a great level of caution towards developments in Hungary. Moreover, American officials understood that any actions short of direct military intervention were unlikely to invite a vigorous Soviet response, and thereby recognized that more could have been done to assist the Hungarian rebels and challenge Soviet power. Despite this, American officials opted for the very risk-averse policies explained above.

Although the prospect theory-based argument offered by this thesis and aforementioned ideological distance theories both advance very similar hypotheses with regards to the case in question, the preceding analysis strengthens the former and weakens confidence in the latter explanation. This is mainly due to the causal mechanism involved. As mentioned earlier, the ideology-based explanation suggests that the *limited cooperation* between the United States and Hungary was a result of ideological differences and subsequent mutual distrust or enmity. Although some American officials had little trust in Nagy,¹²⁶ the United States still clearly expressed much sympathy toward the Hungarian rebels. Most importantly, the records of key deliberations indicated that instead of ideological considerations, it was precisely fears of provoking the Soviet Union and thereby disturbing an increasingly favorable status quo that were the major variables in the American calculus. In other words, the analysis above suggests that

¹²⁶ Johanna Granville, "Caught with Jam on our Fingers: Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 5 (November 2005): 833.

psychological mechanisms of aversion to risk and loss were more consequential than ideological distrust and enmity.

4. The Soviet Union and Cuba after the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1962

Historical Background

Cuba became part of the American sphere of influence during its struggle for independence against Spain. Presented with the opportunity to further realize the Monroe Doctrine and eliminate another European power from the Americas, the United States intervened against Spain in Cuba in 1898 and eventually emerged victorious.¹²⁷ Before withdrawing militarily, the United States imposed the Platt Amendment in 1901, which effectively rendered Cuba a protectorate and guaranteed American rights to construct military bases and intervene as deemed necessary.¹²⁸ In response to social and political instability in Cuba, the United States intervened on several occasions between 1902 and the mid-1920s.¹²⁹ As the Cuban economy declined into the following decade, a coup in 1933 brought Fulgencio Batista to prominence.¹³⁰

Batista dominated Cuban politics either directly or indirectly from 1933 to his downfall in 1959. This period was characterized by various contradictions. Although Batista came to prominence through a revolution that promised greater independence and living conditions for Cuba, there was still an understanding that American interests needed to be respected.¹³¹ Furthermore, although the Cuban-American relationship remained stable throughout Batista's rule and brought much prosperity to Cuba, it also contributed to the growth of immense government corruption and nationalist sentiment among the population.¹³² Revolutionary

¹²⁷ Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 49-51.

¹²⁸ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 63-64.

¹²⁹ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 76.

¹³⁰ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 83-90.

¹³¹ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 97-99.

¹³² Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 110-111.

activities and popular discontent greatly increased after Batista established a military dictatorship in 1952.¹³³ Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement would eventually become the leading revolutionary faction of the Cuban Revolution, which began with the attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953 and culminated with the fall of Batista's regime in early 1959.¹³⁴

Relations between Cuba and the United States began to deteriorate sharply as Castro consolidated power. Despite initial caution, the American government became suspicious of Castro as he began pursuing land reforms, nationalizing American properties, engaging in anti-American rhetoric, and increasing contacts with the Soviet Union.¹³⁵ The rupture grew as the United States escalated covert efforts and severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, before eventually launching the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961.¹³⁶

Soviet Domain

Although not without positive aspects, Soviet assessments of the status quo were generally negative in the years prior to the Cuban Revolution. Although the Soviet Union made progress in consolidating its sphere of influence, the country found itself increasingly isolated and defensive by the time Khrushchev came to power.¹³⁷ As part of his efforts to reverse these trends, Khrushchev introduced two policies in early 1956 that would define his tenure. The first was destalinization. In addition to discrediting and undoing the excesses of Stalin, destalinization was driven by Khrushchev's aims of improving the overall governance of the Soviet Union and gaining support against his major domestic opponents, many of whom were Stalinists.¹³⁸ Despite

¹³³ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 141-142.

¹³⁴ Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*, 1442-145.

¹³⁵ Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255-259.

¹³⁶ Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 258-259.

¹³⁷ Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 101-102.

¹³⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 104-105.

being part of a broader effort to improve the Soviet position among allies,¹³⁹ destalinization effectively triggered major crises in the Soviet sphere of influence. Khrushchev's second major initiative was shifting to a foreign policy that emphasized "peaceful coexistence," which aimed to temper the perceived bellicosity of the United States and its allies.¹⁴⁰

Khrushchev's policies also alienated major Soviet allies, particularly China. In fact, Chinese officials feared the domestic and international implications of Khrushchev's policies, and denounced them as being revisionist.¹⁴¹ Chinese leaders were also not pleased with the "great power chauvinism" the Soviet Union showed towards other communist states.¹⁴² The ensuing Sino-Soviet split became particularly acute by 1960, and marked the beginning of competition between the two states for leadership over the communist world.¹⁴³

Further international setbacks occurred amid Soviet efforts to address the unresolved status of Berlin, which was still partly occupied by American forces despite being located completely within East German territory. Although there was some diplomatic progress between Khrushchev and Eisenhower after the former's initial demand for an American withdrawal, the downing of a U2 spy plane over the Soviet Union in 1960 shattered any notions of a sincere reproachment between the two states.¹⁴⁴ In fact, Khrushchev, who did not heed warnings about Eisenhower's insincerity, felt publicly humiliated by the ordeal.¹⁴⁵ A similar setback occurred after Khrushchev made a similar demand to Kennedy in 1961. Instead of acquiescing to the

¹³⁹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 104-105.

¹⁴⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 104-105.

¹⁴¹ Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 46.

¹⁴² Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 62.

¹⁴³ Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 179-182.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 55-58.

¹⁴⁵ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 57-58.

demand, Kennedy further reinforced the American garrison in West Berlin, which ultimately led to a political stalemate and construction of the Berlin Wall.¹⁴⁶

The most immediate international setback directly pertained to Cuba. Although the Bay of Pigs invasion ultimately failed, it demonstrated the real risk to the Soviet Union of losing its newly established influence in Cuba. These fears were further compounded by the growing conflict between radicals and Soviet-oriented moderates within the Cuban Communist Party.¹⁴⁷ By the middle of 1961, the Cuban government formally requested a more robust security commitment from the Soviet Union, particularly one involving the deployment of troops and conventional missiles.¹⁴⁸ All of these events placed great pressure on the Soviet leadership. Indeed, in his memoirs Khrushchev explained how he was convinced that Cuba would face more American aggression in the future, and that “something had to be done to protect Cuba.”¹⁴⁹ Additionally, he recounted his fear that the Soviet Union was “going to lose Cuba,” and how such a development “would have been a big blow to Marxist-Leninist doctrine and would have thrown us far back in Latin America, lowering our prestige there.”¹⁵⁰

Finally, underlying much of the international setbacks of the Soviet Union was its continued strategic disadvantage in relation to the United States, particularly with regards to nuclear capability. Although Soviet capabilities were certainly growing throughout the 1950s, its unfavorable strategic position was further threatened by Kennedy’s 1960 announcement of the largest military buildup in American history.¹⁵¹ To make matters worse, in 1961 the Kennedy

¹⁴⁶ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 139-142.

¹⁴⁷ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1961* (New York: Norton, 1998), 166-167.

¹⁴⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 137-139.

¹⁴⁹ Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Volume 3: Statesman, 1953-1964*, ed. Sergei Khrushchev, trans. George Shriver and Steven Shenfield (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 321.

¹⁵⁰ Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 324.

¹⁵¹ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 34.

administration publicly disclosed that the “missile gap” between the Soviet Union and United States was a myth, and that the latter actually held strategic superiority.¹⁵² Although intended to moderate increasing Soviet bellicosity, the disclosure only further humiliated the Soviet leadership and revealed its posturing to be a bluff.¹⁵³

A deficit of status and legitimacy is also visible in Soviet domestic affairs. In particular, Khrushchev’s policies of destalinization and peaceful coexistence earned him much criticism from hardliners and conservatives within the Soviet government, who increasingly considered him weak and lacking ideological conviction.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, Khrushchev’s ambitious and heavily publicized economic reforms proved to be lacklustre by 1960, leading to decreased productivity, food shortages, and even riots in some locations.¹⁵⁵ Aware of his unfavorable domestic position, Khrushchev took measures to centralize power, but still faced increasing pressure to adopt a more assertive stance towards the West.¹⁵⁶

It is reasonable to conclude that Soviet officials likely perceived themselves to be in the domain of losses preceding the Cuban Revolution and Bay of Pigs invasion. The preceding analysis suggests that domestic and international losses reinforced each other. Khrushchev’s foreign and domestic policies contributed to crises in the Soviet sphere of influence and the alienation of China, while also exposing him to growing opposition from hardliners within the Soviet political establishment. At the same time, the Soviet efforts to resolve the status of Berlin encountered challenges and coincided with an increasingly precarious position in Cuba. Underlying these issues was the continuing strategic imbalance between the Soviet Union and

¹⁵² Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 36.

¹⁵³ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 36.

¹⁵⁴ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 54.

¹⁵⁵ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 58.

¹⁵⁶ Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, 58-59.

United States. Overall, Soviet officials were clearly dissatisfied with the status quo reference point and were thereby in the domain of losses. In these circumstances, prospect theory predicts the adoption of a risk-acceptant strategy towards Cuba.

Soviet Response

Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Cuba developed gradually as Castro consolidated power, and intensified as Soviet officials simultaneously found themselves in a declining position while becoming confident about Castro's intentions. Initial cooperation was relatively limited and likely driven by a sense of solidarity with Cuba. Although the land reform of May 1959 triggered the first wave of American hostility toward Cuba, Soviet officials were still unsure of Castro's intentions and did not wish to compromise relations with the United States, especially given the rudimentary détente that developed after Khrushchev's meeting with Eisenhower at Camp David in late September 1959.¹⁵⁷ However, after returning from the United States in late September 1959, Khrushchev convinced the Presidium to grant a Cuban request to purchase small arms from Poland.¹⁵⁸ Driven by a general sense of solidarity with Cuba, Khrushchev likely viewed the weapons sale as a low-risk means of supporting the country.¹⁵⁹

Despite its initial modesty, Soviet-Cuban cooperation grew throughout 1960. In February 1960, the Soviet Union agreed provide Cuba with economic assistance in the form of trade credits and purchases of Cuban sugar.¹⁶⁰ However, Castro still felt threatened and requested greater Soviet security assistance, especially after a ship carrying munitions exploded in Havana the following month.¹⁶¹ Soviet officials responded to Castro with a private commitment to supply

¹⁵⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 22-23.

¹⁵⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 24.

¹⁵⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 24.

¹⁶⁰ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 38-39.

¹⁶¹ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 42.

weapons via Czechoslovakia, as well as reassurance that an American intervention was unlikely.¹⁶² However, after receiving more detailed intelligence on Cuban perceptions of the American threat, the Soviet officials agreed to urgently grant all Cuban requests for weapons free of charge.¹⁶³ Soviet officials approved another shipment of small arms in May after Castro privately outlined his plans to nationalize American oil companies operating in Cuba.¹⁶⁴ After receiving intelligence on American plans for a pre-emptive strike on the Soviet Union in the near future, Khrushchev publicly gave an informal security guarantee to Cuba and threatened the United States with a nuclear attack should an intervention occur.¹⁶⁵ It is worth noting that this commitment was probably driven in part by Khrushchev's fear that Castro would come under the influence of China.¹⁶⁶

The year 1961 would see growing difficulties for the Soviet Union, as well as a renewed cycle of hostility between the United States and Cuba. After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of April, Castro publicly declared his adherence to Marxism and desire to build socialism in Cuba.¹⁶⁷ Over the following months, Soviet officials uncovered multiple American-sponsored covert operations in Cuba, which proved that Castro's domestic position was still not completely stable.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, it became clear that Khrushchev's ultimatums and diplomacy with Kennedy would not resolve the ongoing issues related to Berlin.¹⁶⁹ After receiving more intelligence about another possible American intervention, the Soviet Union approved an

¹⁶² Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 45.

¹⁶³ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 47.

¹⁶⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 48-49.

¹⁶⁵ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁶ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: Norton, 2006), 305-306.

¹⁶⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 99.

¹⁶⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 137.

¹⁶⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 137-139.

enhanced military aid package to Cuba that included air-defense systems.¹⁷⁰ These growing pressures effectively gave impetus to Khrushchev's drastic decisions in the following year.

In February 1962, Soviet officials received worrying signals from Kennedy that the United States would soon intervene more strongly in Cuban affairs.¹⁷¹ By the end of April, Soviet officials learned about large American military exercises taking place in the Caribbean.¹⁷² To make matters worse, there were signs that Castro was facing growing domestic difficulties, and that the pro-Soviet faction of the Cuban elite was in decline.¹⁷³ Although Soviet officials agreed to expedite more military aid to Cuba,¹⁷⁴ Khrushchev continued to worry about the fate of Cuba. In his memoirs, Khrushchev explained that he believed a larger American intervention was inevitable and that the loss of Cuba would have been a large blow to Soviet prestige.¹⁷⁵ Khrushchev's memoirs also show that he viewed the issue of Cuba as being linked to other American denials of Soviet interests and prestige, such as the diplomatic stalemate over Berlin as well as the presence of American missiles and bases near the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, when he proposed the plan of deploying nuclear weapons in Cuba to other officials, Khrushchev directly called attention to troublesome American behavior and how his risky plan could improve the balance of power between the United States and Soviet Union.¹⁷⁷ Khrushchev's proposal, later known as Operation Anadyr, was approved and eventually contributed to the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962.

¹⁷⁰ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 139.

¹⁷¹ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 153.

¹⁷² Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 166-168.

¹⁷³ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 164-166.

¹⁷⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 170.

¹⁷⁵ Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 325.

¹⁷⁶ Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 321-329.

¹⁷⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 273.

Overall, it is clear that the Soviet Union, finding itself increasingly in the domain of losses, opted for a strategy that culminated in *extensive cooperation* with Cuba after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Although an earlier study applied prospect theory to explain American and Soviet decision-making during the missile crisis,¹⁷⁸ the preceding analysis shows how Soviet officials were engaging in risky behavior even prior to sending missiles to Cuba. Indeed, the most substantial increases in Soviet assistance to Cuba came shortly after perceived challenges from the United States and China. The Soviet deployment of military personnel and nuclear weapons, as well as preceding forms of security assistance and public guarantees constituted a form of *extensive cooperation* with Cuba, and were thus risk-acceptant. In addition to fortifying Castro and Soviet influence in Cuba, these policies, if successful, could have allowed the Soviet Union to assert its status in relation to both the United States and China, while also addressing the strategic imbalance with the former. On the other hand, these policies could have excessively provoked the United States and placed Soviet officials in a difficult situation of choosing between fighting the country or losing even more standing by retreating from Cuba. Soviet policies therefore offered the possibility of recouped losses or even gains relative to the status quo, as well as further losses.

Alternative Explanations

Soviet policy towards Cuba between 1959 and 1962 is not entirely consistent with the structural realist prediction of *optimal restricted cooperation* between the two states. Structural realism might partly explain the initial stages of cooperation between the Soviet Union and Cuba, during which the former demonstrated both caution as well as a willingness to explore ways of expanding influence and testing the limits of American tolerance. However, structural

¹⁷⁸ Mark L. Haas, "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2001): 241-270.

realism cannot account for the drastic and rather imprudent escalation of Soviet commitment to Cuba that nearly led to war with the United States. In other words, other factors must be considered to explain why Soviet officials went against structural imperatives, especially given the relative weakness of the Soviet Union compared to the United States during the time in question.

As in the previous case study, the prospect theory argument of this thesis and the ideological distance theories yield practically identical hypotheses. However, the analysis above suggests that prospect theory both complicates and complements the ideological distance argument. The ideological distance argument cannot be entirely ruled out, as Soviet officials gave much attention to the ideological character of the new Cuban government. Indeed, Soviet support increased in accordance with confidence in Castro's communist orientation. However, it is also true that support to Cuba increased as the Soviet officials perceived themselves and the country falling further into the domain of losses. Indeed, Khrushchev and other officials eventually came to understand that the defense of Cuba could offer major geopolitical gains and even offset certain strategic weaknesses of the Soviet Union, most notably in nuclear weapons capabilities. Without a more detailed examination of Russian primary sources, it is not possible to fully disentangle the different causal factors. Still, one interesting advantage of prospect theory is that it may provide insight into how Soviet ideology changed as a result of developments in Cuba and the United States. This is in the sense that as Soviet officials faced further losses after 1960, they introduced the concept of "national democracy" to account for the Cuban revolutionary experience, which thereby accommodated and justified the defense of such countries.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 73; William T. Shinn Jr., "The 'National Democratic State:' A Communist Program for Less-Developed Areas," *World Politics* 15, no. 3 (1963): 383-384.

5. The Soviet Union and Chile during the Presidency of Salvador Allende, 1970-1973

Historical Background

In contrast to many Latin American states, Chile managed to achieve a relatively high level of prosperity and political development in its first decades as an independent state. Contact between the United States and Chile particularly grew during the War of the Pacific in the early 1880s, which saw the latter gain resource-rich territories from neighbouring Peru and Bolivia. Hoping to further eliminate European influence and enhance its standing in Latin America, the United States attempted to mediate between the warring sides but was met with Chilean distrust and suspicion.¹⁸⁰ Although deteriorating in wake of the Chilean Civil War of 1891, relations between Chile and the United States improved by the end of the century as the former acquiesced to the latter's hemispheric hegemony.¹⁸¹ In the meantime, the accelerating industrialization of Chile was accompanied by the growth of communist, socialist, and other leftist political movements, all of which led to tensions with the conservative Chilean military and oligarchy well into the following decades.¹⁸²

Although communist and other leftist parties were growing in popularity, successive Chilean governments were pro-American and sought to take a leading role in suppressing communism domestically and internationally.¹⁸³ However, by 1963 the continued growth of the leftist parties and apparent erosion of the right-wing parties alarmed the United States, which sought to mitigate the trend by supporting the presidential campaign of Eduardo Frei, who was

¹⁸⁰ James Lockhart, *Chile, the CIA, and the Cold War: A Transatlantic Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 29-30.

¹⁸¹ Lockhart, *Chile, the CIA, and the Cold War*, 32.

¹⁸² Lockhart, *Chile, the CIA, and the Cold War*, 51.

¹⁸³ Lockhart, *Chile, the CIA, and the Cold War*, 108.

elected in 1964.¹⁸⁴ Although Frei's ambitious reforms initially drew much acclaim,¹⁸⁵ his government eventually lost the favor of the Nixon administration and Chilean military.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, discontent with the pace of Frei's reforms led to the growth of the Popular Unity coalition led by Allende, which would win the 1970 elections on a platform that called for the development of a socialist Chile.¹⁸⁷

Relations between Chile and the United States deteriorated over the course of Allende's presidency. American officials were alarmed by Allende's victory and viewed it as a potentially serious challenge to American interests and prestige in Latin America.¹⁸⁸ American officials particularly feared that Allende's success would reinforce the leftist and anti-American political trends developing in nearby Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina, while also serving as a model for European communist parties.¹⁸⁹ Despite overall caution, Allende's government still pursued provocative policies that included redistributing land,¹⁹⁰ nationalizing the copper industry, and showing solidarity with the Third World.¹⁹¹ Faced with the dilemma of opposing a democratically-elected president, the United States opted for indirect and covert coercion against Chile. In addition to smearing Allende's public image, the United States courted the Chilean military and increased funding to political opposition groups. Additionally, The United States either withheld or stalled important loans and other forms of economic assistance to Chile, all of

¹⁸⁴ Sebastian Hurtado-Torres, *The Gathering Storm: Eduardo Frei's Revolution in Liberty and Chile's Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 11-12.

¹⁸⁵ Hurtado-Torres, *The Gathering Storm*, 72.

¹⁸⁶ Hurtado-Torres, *The Gathering Storm*, 93-95.

¹⁸⁷ Hurtado-Torres, *The Gathering Storm*, 148.

¹⁸⁸ Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 60.

¹⁸⁹ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 60-61.

¹⁹⁰ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 144-145.

¹⁹¹ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 81-82.

which effectively hindered Allende's domestic aims.¹⁹² A combination of American efforts and domestic turmoil in Chile culminated in Allende's overthrow in September 1973.

Soviet Domain

The status and power of the Soviet Union was growing before and throughout Allende's presidency. In international terms, the Soviet Union overcame the humiliation it experienced after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and began a massive military buildup throughout the remainder of the decade.¹⁹³ Owing to these measures, the Soviet Union finally achieved strategic parity with the United States by 1972, and managed to have this enhanced status effectively recognized with the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) in 1972.¹⁹⁴ Mutual trust and recognition were further fostered through the establishment of a diplomatic "back channel" between Soviet and American leaders.¹⁹⁵ Recognized as landmark achievements by Soviet officials, such developments were part of the *détente* that emerged between the two superpowers.¹⁹⁶

During the relevant period, the Soviet Union also found the European status quo increasingly favorable. Despite intervening in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet Union experienced significantly improved relations with France and West Germany, with the latter even recognizing East Germany in 1972.¹⁹⁷ These developments fostered the beginnings of a kind of *détente* in Europe, while also giving Soviet officials hope that the political and territorial status quo on the continent would soon be formally recognized.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, these initial

¹⁹² Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 88-89.

¹⁹³ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 205.

¹⁹⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 218.

¹⁹⁵ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 216-217.

¹⁹⁶ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1985), 55.

¹⁹⁷ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 211-212.

¹⁹⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 214-215.

interactions gave impetus to the Helsinki Accords that culminated in 1975 and formalized the European status quo.¹⁹⁹

Finally, the domestic status quo within the Soviet Union was very favorable to Brezhnev and his government during the period in question. After 1968, Brezhnev intensified his consolidation of power and managed to gradually forge a new consensus among Soviet officials on foreign and domestic matters.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Brezhnev's growing international status and foreign policy successes throughout the following years accorded him much domestic political capital, and even helped offset the negative effects of various domestic pressures.²⁰¹ Indeed, while public opinion data is unavailable, there are strong indications that Brezhnev was at the peak of his popularity by 1973.²⁰²

Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that the Soviet Union was in the domain of gains during the relevant period in question. Indeed, the Soviet Union was now finding success in resolving the outstanding political and security issues it failed to do so during Khrushchev's tenure. The country finally achieved strategic parity with the United States and was formally treated as an equal in the ensuing arms control negotiations. Concurrently, the Soviet Union was coming closer to reaching its longstanding goal of having the European status quo effectively recognized. Given that the Soviet Union was clearly operating in the domain of gains, prospect theory predicts risk-averse policies towards Allende's Chile.

Soviet Response

Overall, the Soviet Union did not cultivate extensive relations with Chile during Allende's tenure. Soviet officials pursued generally risk-averse policies towards Chile despite

¹⁹⁹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 237-238.

²⁰⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 223- 224.

²⁰¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 224-226.

²⁰² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 225.

welcoming Allende's victory and being aware of the potential gains it could offer. During the 24th Party Congress in early 1971, Brezhnev described Allende's victory as a very important event, while other officials saw it as the second major blow to American hegemony in Latin America since the 1959 Cuban Revolution.²⁰³ Additionally, events in Chile were perceived as being part of a potentially larger wave of political gains for leftist forces in Latin America, particularly in neighbouring Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina.²⁰⁴ There was also a perception that Allende's success could bolster the Soviet position regarding the peaceful path to socialism, which was a major aspect of the ongoing ideological dispute with China.²⁰⁵ This general optimism was bolstered by Allende's brief initial successes in growing the Chilean economy, lowering the inflation rate, and managing the aftermath of the American-sponsored assassination of the head of the Chilean military.²⁰⁶

Despite initial Soviet optimism, there was a relatively modest expansion of relations between Chile and the Soviet Union during Allende's first year in power. In May 1971, the Soviet Union renewed an earlier credit issued to Frei's government at a lower rate, and provided funds for projects in the Chilean mining, construction, and fishing industries.²⁰⁷ It is also worth noting that Soviet media took care to emphasize that Chile was governed by a leftist coalition, and not a formal communist party.²⁰⁸ Initial security cooperation was led by the KGB, which focused on cultivating a direct relationship with Allende and advising him on reforming the

²⁰³ Ilya Prizel, *Latin America Through Soviet Eyes: The Evolution of Soviet Perceptions during the Brezhnev Era, 1964-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 163.

²⁰⁴ Prizel, *Latin America Through Soviet Eyes*, 163.

²⁰⁵ Paul E. Sigmund, "The USSR, Cuba, and the Revolution in Chile," in *The Soviet Union and the Third World: Successes and Failures*, ed. Robert H. Donaldson (New York: Routledge, 2023), 36.

²⁰⁶ Prizel, *Latin America Through Soviet Eyes*, 162; Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 145.

²⁰⁷ Sigmund, "The USSR, Cuba and the Revolution in Chile," 36.

²⁰⁸ Sigmund, "The USSR, Cuba and the Revolution in Chile," 36.

Chilean intelligence services.²⁰⁹ The KGB sought to dampen the effect of American covert activities in various ways, such as by funding media sympathetic to the Popular Unity coalition and passing relevant intelligence to Allende.²¹⁰ More substantial security cooperation at this stage was limited by Chilean reluctance and fears of provoking the United States.²¹¹ In some ways, the year 1971 represented the peak of Soviet optimism and cooperation with Chile, especially when compared to the following years of Allende's tenure.

Despite the growing difficulties facing Allende and the Popular Unity coalition, Soviet cooperation with Chile remained relatively modest throughout 1972. Economic and living conditions declined around the start of the year, leading to various labour strikes and shortages.²¹² At the same time, Chilean foreign and domestic policy increasingly lost momentum due to growing disagreements between radical and moderate factions within the Popular Unity coalition.²¹³ In an early memo, KGB head Andropov wrote that Soviet policy towards Chile must be cautious as the country was in the American sphere of influence, and further noted that the United States permitted the Soviet Union to depose reformers in Czechoslovakia some years prior.²¹⁴ Around the middle of 1972, Soviet officials became increasingly skeptical of Allende's prospects and overall competence, and even downgraded the status of Chile from a country "building socialism" to one that is seeking "free and independent development."²¹⁵ Shortly before Allende left for Moscow in December 1972, Chilean diplomats met with the Soviet ambassador to the United States, who "insistently" explained that the Soviet Union sought to

²⁰⁹ Kristian Gustafson and Christopher Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand: Soviet and Cuban Intelligence in Allende's Chile," *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 3 (2018): 411-413.

²¹⁰ Gustafson and Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand," 411.

²¹¹ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 117-118.

²¹² Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 145.

²¹³ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 145-146.

²¹⁴ Gustafson and Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand," 416.

²¹⁵ Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 178.

avoid tension with the United States in the unfolding “new era of international relations.”²¹⁶

Despite his efforts to portray Chile as a “silent Vietnam,” Allende only received modest credits, food aid, and advice from the Soviet Union to resolve outstanding issues with the United States.²¹⁷

Soviet assistance to Chile remained relatively modest throughout 1973. Despite Allende’s increasingly untenable domestic position, Soviet officials only showed a slightly increased concern for his security. A KGB report from February 1973 indicated that Allende was pressured once again to reform the Chilean intelligence services.²¹⁸ By April, KGB analysts informed Andropov that Allende would likely be deposed by the military or other reactionary forces.²¹⁹ On September 11, Allende was overthrown by a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet. Although the Soviet Union sold Chile about 100 million dollars in weaponry, the ship carrying the weapons was ordered to return once the coup was underway.²²⁰ Interestingly, the Soviet Union was quite restrained even shortly after the coup, and made practically no effort to hold the United States accountable.²²¹ Soviet officials initially focused on pressuring the Chilean junta via the United States to release the imprisoned head of the Chilean Communist Party.²²² Although the Soviet Union later capitalized on the propaganda opportunities offered by the coup and strongly denounced Pinochet, Soviet communications were very careful not to directly antagonize the United States.²²³

²¹⁶ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 193.

²¹⁷ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 198.

²¹⁸ Gustafson and Andrew, “The Other Hidden Hand,” 413-414.

²¹⁹ Gustafson and Andrew, “The Other Hidden Hand,” 415.

²²⁰ Gustafson and Andrew, “The Other Hidden Hand,” 416.

²²¹ Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 268.

²²² Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, 268.

²²³ Michelle D. Paranzino, “From Détente to Revolution: Soviet Solidarity with Chile after Allende, 1973-79,” *The International History Review* 44, no. 1 (2022): 163-164.

Overall, the preceding analysis suggests that the Soviet Union pursued relatively risk-averse policies towards Chile during and shortly after Allende's tenure. Soviet assistance was largely limited to moral support, intelligence support, and modest amounts of economic aid. Although Chile was the second largest recipient of Soviet aid in Latin America, the amount was far from what Cuba received, and certainly far from the amount that would have helped Allende alleviate the domestic and foreign pressure he was facing.²²⁴ Furthermore, unlike Cuba, the Soviet Union did not help establish, arm, or train local Chilean paramilitary groups to resist the coup.²²⁵ While more extensive cooperation may have been hindered by the conservatism of the Chilean military and Soviet pessimism towards Allende's prospects and competence,²²⁶ it is also clear that Soviet restraint was also driven by a desire to avoid straining the détente with the United States. Furthermore, while it is true that Chile was on the periphery of Soviet interests and offered minimal geopolitical advantage against the United States,²²⁷ the Soviet Union was still clearly risk-averse in pursuing the gains in status and prestige Allende's election offered. Without a more detailed exploration of relevant primary sources, it is difficult to strongly categorize Soviet policy as being either limited or optimal cooperation. Nonetheless, it is still very clear that Soviet policy towards Chile was risk-averse overall.

Alternative Explanations

One may conclude that Soviet cooperation with Chile during Allende's presidency is somewhat consistent with structural realism. This is in the sense that Soviet officials were aware of the limits to Allende's power as well as the limited geopolitical advantage Chile could offer.

²²⁴ Prizel, *Latin America Through Soviet Eyes*, 164.

²²⁵ Gustafson and Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand," 411-413.

²²⁶ Sigmund, "The USSR, Cuba, and the Revolution in Chile," 43-44; Prizel, *Latin America Through Soviet Eyes*, 163-164.

²²⁷ Gustafson and Andrew, "The Other Hidden Hand," 408-409.

As a result, Soviet officials were relatively prudent and did not try to overextend Soviet influence in Chile. Without more detailed examinations of Russian primary sources, definitively categorizing Soviet policy as either *optimal restricted cooperation* or *limited cooperation* is not possible. However, given that the former option is still relatively risk-averse, Soviet policy towards Chile did not exactly contradict the predictions of prospect theory. Moreover, prospect theory could offer more leverage in explaining the great caution Soviet officials demonstrated during the months following Allende's overthrow. Overall, the analysis suggests that prospect theory and structural realism are complementary in this particular case.

The analysis above weakens the explanation offered by ideological distance theory. Although Allende's government was a coalition of broadly leftist parties not entirely aligned with the Soviet Union in ideological terms, it probably had the greatest ideological compatibility with the Soviet Union among Latin American states at the time aside from Cuba. As mentioned above, the Soviet Union even initially recognized Allende's Chile as a country "building socialism." Given this, the ideological distance explanation would expect a somewhat stronger Soviet commitment to Chile. Yet such a degree of cooperation did not occur, as the Soviet Union pursued a very risk-averse policy, and even downgraded Chile's ideological status as it became clear that Allende's overthrow was imminent.

6. The United States and the 1979 Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

Historical Background

Despite sharing a border with the Soviet Union, Afghanistan navigated between the rival superpowers in the early years of the Cold War. Officially a monarchy until 1973, Afghanistan pursued non-alignment and sought to resist both Soviet and American attempts to draw it into their respective camps.²²⁸ That said, one could still view Afghanistan as a de facto Soviet satellite, mainly given its close proximity to the Soviet Union and the strong Soviet influence over its security and foreign policies.²²⁹ Indeed, throughout the Cold War many American officials understood that the Soviet Union had greater influence and interest in Afghanistan and would accordingly be ready to outmatch any American efforts at cultivating influence.²³⁰ Still, the monarchy was overthrown in 1973 by Mohammad Daud, who declared himself president and initiated an ambitious heavy-handed programme to modernize Afghanistan along Soviet lines.²³¹ However, Daud's position became untenable by 1977, mainly owing to his stalled and increasingly unpopular reforms.²³² Given his growing contacts with American officials and repression of communists, Daud's relations with the Soviet Union also deteriorated at this time.²³³ Daud was overthrown by Afghan communists in late April 1978.²³⁴

The period from Daud's overthrow in 1977 to the Soviet intervention at the end of 1979 was one of chaos and instability in Afghanistan. Although now formally in control of the

²²⁸ Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30.

²²⁹ Braithwaite, *Afgnantsy*, 16-18, 28-33.

²³⁰ Robert Rakove, *Days of Opportunity: The United States and Afghanistan Before the Soviet Invasion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 122, 245-246.

²³¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 299-300.

²³² Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 300.

²³³ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 302.

²³⁴ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 302.

country, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was plagued by intense infighting between its Khalq and Parcham factions.²³⁵ To make matters worse, in addition to repressing domestic opposition groups, the new government also initiated a set of deeply unpopular social and economic reforms.²³⁶ Cycles of repression and revolt ensued, eventually leading to a large uprising in Herat in early 1979.²³⁷ This uprising came as a shock to Soviet officials, who were becoming increasingly aware of the growing Islamist insurgency in Afghanistan and the incompetence of the Afghan communists.²³⁸ Facing a deteriorating situation and alarmed by the growing contacts between the Afghan government and the United States, the Soviet Union began a large military intervention in late December 1979.²³⁹

American Domain

The United States was likely framed in the domain of losses in the period prior to the Soviet intervention. Indeed, the United States faced many setbacks throughout the 1970s. Although détente became increasingly strained by the end of the decade, the United States still operated in a general condition of strategic parity with the Soviet Union.²⁴⁰ Additionally, during this period the Soviet Union was making gains in the Third World, particularly in countries like Ethiopia, Angola, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.²⁴¹ By the end of the decade the United States also experienced difficulties in Central America, as its clients in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua faced growing insurgencies.²⁴² While these were all clear setbacks, their negative effects were further compounded by American losses in the strategic Persian Gulf region.

²³⁵ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 302.

²³⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 306-308.

²³⁷ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 306-308.

²³⁸ Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 47-48.

²³⁹ Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 77-81.

²⁴⁰ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 787.

²⁴¹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 241-245. 287.

²⁴² Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 341.

The United States was particularly facing losses in the strategic Persian Gulf and South Asia regions. One setback was the communist overthrow of Daud. Although American officials were initially divided on whether the overthrow was an entirely local affair or part of a strategic Soviet offensive towards the Persian Gulf, they nonetheless understood that Soviet influence in Afghanistan would only grow as the Afghan communists consolidated power.²⁴³ Officials were also very concerned with the loss of American credibility among important states in the region,²⁴⁴ as well as the deterioration of American relations with Pakistan.²⁴⁵ These issues were only compounded by the loss of American influence in Iran following the Islamic Revolution of February 1979.²⁴⁶ There were also fears of wider regional unrest inspired by events in Iran, and that such developments could be exploited by the Soviet Union.²⁴⁷ As shown in Brzezinski's memoirs, officials were aware that such developments in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere fuelled worldwide perceptions of American weakness vis-à-vis Soviet assertiveness.²⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that events in Iran also affected American capabilities to monitor Soviet compliance with the various arms control treaties, mainly since the emergence of an anti-American government compromised an important intelligence-gathering installation located in the country.²⁴⁹

The American government also faced difficult conditions domestically. Indeed, Carter's approval rating was sharply declining throughout 1979.²⁵⁰ In addition to a difficult economic

²⁴³ Rakove, *Days of Opportunity*, 317-320.

²⁴⁴ Rakove, *Days of Opportunity*, 320-321.

²⁴⁵ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 663.

²⁴⁶ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, his Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 173-174.

²⁴⁷ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 662.

²⁴⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 428.

²⁴⁹ Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 324.

²⁵⁰ The Gallup Organization, "Presidential Approval Ratings—Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," *Gallup*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>

situation and energy crisis,²⁵¹ the Carter administration faced growing criticism for its apparent restraint and weakness vis-a-vis Soviet assertiveness in the Third World.²⁵² Such views were only reinforced in the months prior to the Soviet intervention, especially after the Carter administration found itself humiliated by the discovery of a Soviet brigade in Cuba,²⁵³ as well as the start of the hostage crisis in Iran.²⁵⁴ Indeed, in his memoirs Carter noted that November 1979 was the beginning of a particularly difficult period in his life and political career.²⁵⁵ Overall, international and domestic losses reinforced each other, leading to widespread perceptions of American weakness.

Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that the United States was framed in the domain of losses during the months prior to the Soviet intervention. Moreover, the preceding discussion suggests that the American position was steadily deteriorating throughout this time, both internationally and domestically. Unable to prevent earlier Soviet gains in the Third World, the United States faced the growing prospect of rapidly losing influence, credibility, and status, particularly in the Persian Gulf. At the same time, the Carter administration had to contend with an increasingly unfavorable domestic position. Given these circumstances, prospect theory predicts a risk-acceptant American policy towards Afghanistan.

American Response

Prior to the intensification of the Afghan insurgency in early 1979, there was minimal American interest in Afghanistan. Indeed, a National Security Council meeting in May 1978 concluded that although Daoud's overthrow was a setback, the United States should still

²⁵¹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 273; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 114.

²⁵² Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 78-87.

²⁵³ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 828-830; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 267-270.

²⁵⁴ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 176-179.

²⁵⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 468.

recognize the new government, maintain regular relations, and refrain from covert action.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, a CIA report from May 1978 indicated that although the Soviet Union likely welcomed the Afghan coup, it would capitalize on the gain cautiously and focus its efforts on helping the new government consolidate power.²⁵⁷ However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and growing insurgency in Afghanistan provided an opportunity to reassess American policy. Indeed, American attitudes changed by the following year.

American interest in Afghanistan grew after the March 1979 uprising in Herat. An ensuing CIA report took note of this event and the broader deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, while noting that the Soviet Union was clearly very concerned about the situation and probably feared another Iranian scenario in Afghanistan.²⁵⁸ The report further suggested that although the Soviet Union would be “most reluctant” to launch a major intervention to support an unpopular government, it would face a dilemma if the situation deteriorated to the point where “only a massive military intervention could save the Afghan Marxists.”²⁵⁹ A following CIA report posed the question of possible American support for the insurgency, and suggested that such an effort, if successful, could punish the Soviet Union for its recent gains in the Third World, encourage anti-Soviet sentiment among Muslim states, and even offer an opportunity to mend relations with Iran.²⁶⁰ In a meeting at the end of March 1979, American officials noted that assisting the insurgency carried the risk of further Soviet entrenchment in Afghanistan, as well as a possibly wider regional conflict if either the Soviet Union or Afghanistan fomented an uprising among the

²⁵⁶ Memorandum for the Record by Thomas Thornton of the National Security Council Staff, May 3, 1978. *FRUS, 1977-1980, Afghanistan, Volume XII*, eds. David Zierler and Adam M. Howard (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2018), Document 12.

²⁵⁷ Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, May 5, 1978, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 13.

²⁵⁸ Special Analysis Paper Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, March 23, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 39

²⁵⁹ Special Analysis Paper Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, March 23, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 39

²⁶⁰ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and how They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 131-132.

Baluchis of Pakistan.²⁶¹ Despite these concerns, some officials entertained the prospect of “sucking the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire.”²⁶² American officials ordered more detailed policy studies in preparation for the meeting of the Special Coordination Council on April 6.²⁶³

Around late March or early April 1979, the CIA proposed several covert action options. The proposal noted that although the Soviet Union was unlikely to initiate a large military intervention, it could provide virtually unlimited resources to the Afghan government.²⁶⁴ The options in the proposal included radio propaganda broadcasts from Pakistan, forms of financial assistance, non-lethal military aid, and varying degrees of lethal military aid and training.²⁶⁵ A follow-up CIA report explored possible Soviet reactions to the proposed options, and advised that although increased Soviet involvement was likely, a successful covert action program would raise the costs of doing so. The report further explained that if the Soviet Union was unsure of the extent to which it would support the Afghan government, a substantial American covert action program could induce a large and vigorous Soviet intervention.²⁶⁶ The report explained that all options entailed progressively larger risks of the conflict spreading to Pakistan, and that a strong Soviet counteraction was most likely if the insurgents received lethal aid.²⁶⁷

American officials met at the Special Coordination Committee meeting on April 6 to discuss the proposed options. Officials noted that the situation regarding Afghanistan was difficult and embarrassing for the Soviet Union, and that it was in the American interest that the insurgency continued even if it failed in overthrowing the Afghan government.²⁶⁸ Officials

²⁶¹ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 144.

²⁶² Gates, *From the Shadows*, 144-145.

²⁶³ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 145.

²⁶⁴ Paper Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, undated, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 45.

²⁶⁵ Paper Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, undated, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 45.

²⁶⁶ Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 47.

²⁶⁷ Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 47.

²⁶⁸ Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 48.

further noted that covert aid could help sustain the insurgency, but that this general policy must be accompanied with support and reassurance for Pakistan.²⁶⁹ Additionally, officials were aware that knowledge of the covert American role was likely to leak, and that this could invite more Soviet hostility.²⁷⁰ Urged by Brzezinski, the committee agreed to assess the feasibility of providing of propaganda via radio from Pakistan and financial assistance, as well as training and material support.²⁷¹ If Pakistan agreed to cooperate with the United States, a presidential finding was to be prepared for Carter.²⁷² Throughout the following weeks, officials received more intelligence reports about the growing insurgency and their requests for aid, and suggested efforts to encourage unilateral Pakistani support.²⁷³ Around the same time, officials also received intelligence that China was considering sending weapons to the insurgents.²⁷⁴ Becoming aware of the growing insurgency, American officials urgently met once again to consider covert action options.²⁷⁵

The American covert action program began over the summer of 1979, and steadily increased over the following months. On July 3, Carter signed a finding authorizing psychological operations, radio propaganda broadcasts from Pakistan, financial and non-lethal material aid to the insurgents, as well as a worldwide propaganda campaign to publicize the actions of the Afghan government.²⁷⁶ Although this initial assistance was formally non-lethal, officials later commented that there was an understanding that the United States would facilitate

²⁶⁹ Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 48.

²⁷⁰ Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 48.

²⁷¹ Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 48.

²⁷² Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 48.

²⁷³ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

²⁷⁴ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

²⁷⁵ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

²⁷⁶ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146-147; Report Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, August 22, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 59.

the transfer of weapons and other materiel to the insurgents by other states.²⁷⁷ By the end of August, the United States was being pressured by Pakistan to send more aid and even weapons to the insurgents.²⁷⁸ In the middle of September, officials received yet another CIA alert that Soviet involvement was growing and that a direct military intervention was likely being considered at that point.²⁷⁹

The overall instability in Afghanistan was further aggravated by yet another coup on September 14, during which incumbent leader Taraki was overthrown by his deputy Hafizullah Amin. American officials recognized that this development was not in the Soviets' favour given that it only increased the instability in Afghanistan and eliminated a key pro-Soviet figure in the Afghan government.²⁸⁰ In late September, the CIA issued another report that explained how Taraki's overthrow likely complicated the Soviet position in Afghanistan, and that a large military intervention was likely in the event of prolonged political chaos, foreign military intervention, or the emergence of an anti-Soviet regime.²⁸¹ Still, the report noted that the Soviet Union would be very reluctant to intervene given the potentially major costs involved.²⁸² On October 23, American officials met again and agreed to urgently increase support to the insurgents, mainly in the form of more financial aid, communications equipment, non-military

²⁷⁷ Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37-38.

²⁷⁸ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

²⁷⁹ Alert Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, September 14, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 62.

²⁸⁰ Memorandum From Thomas Thornton of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), September 17, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 64.

²⁸¹ Interagency Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, September 28, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 67.

²⁸² Interagency Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, September 28, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 67.

supplies, and procurement advice.²⁸³ Over the coming weeks, American officials were kept informed of the growing Soviet military presence and deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.²⁸⁴

American involvement in Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf region greatly expanded as the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan began on in late December 1979. As the intervention began Brzezinski sent Carter a dramatic memo describing the situation as “regional crisis” and part of a Soviet offensive towards the Indian Ocean.²⁸⁵ He also warned that the intervention could destabilize Iran while further testing American credibility among Pakistan and China, and that the former could acquiesce to some form of Soviet domination.²⁸⁶ Additionally, Brzezinski explained that without more support to the Afghan insurgents, Afghanistan was unlikely to become a “Soviet Vietnam.”²⁸⁷ American officials concluded that the “greatest risk” was a “quick, effective Soviet operation to pacify Afghanistan,” which would be very costly to the image of the United States in the region and domestically.²⁸⁸ American officials agreed to drastically increase assistance to the insurgency and begin directly providing lethal aid, noting that this measure had a psychological effect and would likely embolden more support from

²⁸³ Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, October 23, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 76.

²⁸⁴ Memorandum from the Director of the Strategic Warning Staff, Central Intelligence Agency (MacEachin) to the National Intelligence Officer for Warning, Central intelligence Agency (Lehman), October 26, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 77; Intelligence Information Cable Prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency, December 13, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 84.

²⁸⁵ Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Reflections on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” December 26, 1979, in *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979: Not Trump’s Terrorists, Nor Zbig’s War Water Ports*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no. 657, eds. Tom Blanton and Svetlana Savranskaya, document 8. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/18120-document-8-georgy-kornienko-was-top-deputy>

²⁸⁶ Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no. 657, doc. 8.

²⁸⁷ Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no. 657, doc. 8.

²⁸⁸ Summary of Conclusion of a Special Coordinating Committee Meeting, December 26, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 95.

countries like Pakistan.²⁸⁹ Officials also reiterated that the overall goal was to either force a Soviet withdrawal or impose severe costs on the intervention.²⁹⁰

The expanded American response to the Soviet intervention took shape over January 1980. In addition to greatly expanding the covert action program in Afghanistan and worldwide propaganda efforts, the United States issued sanctions and embargoes on the Soviet Union, generated diplomatic pressure through the United Nations and other channels,²⁹¹ and even announced the “Carter Doctrine,” which warned the Soviet Union of a military response in the event it intruded on American interests in the Persian Gulf.²⁹² Some officials, particularly Brzezinski, saw the Soviet intervention as an opportunity to assert American leadership domestically and among allied states. Brzezinski further noted that the intervention could not be dealt with quickly, as it was “a test of the balance of power between East and West.”²⁹³ It is worth noting that by the middle of January, American intelligence concluded that the Soviet intervention was likely not part of a strategic offensive into the Indian Ocean or wider hegemonic design, and that there was a risk of the conflict spreading to Pakistan if Soviet counterinsurgency efforts stalled.²⁹⁴ In his memoirs, Carter also noted that he viewed the Soviet intervention as a miscalculation and sought to make it “as costly as possible.”²⁹⁵

Overall, the preceding analysis suggests that the United States responded to the Afghan upheavals and Soviet intervention by engaging in risk-acceptant *extensive cooperation* with the

²⁸⁹ Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 107.

²⁹⁰ Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, December 28, 1979, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 107.

²⁹¹ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to Vice President Mondale, Secretary of State Vance, and Secretary of Defense Brown, January 2, 1980, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 136.

²⁹² Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 201.

²⁹³ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, January 2, 1980, *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 134.

²⁹⁴ Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Turner to President Carter, Vice President Mondale, Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Brown, and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), *FRUS*, vol. XII, doc. 168.

²⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 482.

Afghan insurgents. Although there is much historiographical debate regarding whether initial covert activities were intended to lure the Soviet Union or provoke an intervention,²⁹⁶ the preceding analysis nonetheless indicates a strong willingness for escalation among American officials. Indeed, American officials recognized that the situation in Afghanistan posed a serious dilemma for the Soviet Union and that there would be much reluctance for a military intervention. At the same time, officials recognized that the prospects of an intervention would greatly increase if the situation in Afghanistan greatly deteriorated because of the growing insurgency. More importantly, the analysis shows that American officials understood that a successful policy in Afghanistan could address the other challenges facing the United States, such as perceptions of American weakness, domestic challenges, and setbacks in the Persian Gulf. American officials were also aware that an anti-Soviet insurgency could lead to further strategic losses or problems. Indeed, officials were aware of the real prospects of a Soviet victory, as well as the eruption of a wider regional conflict that would further test American commitments to Pakistan and other countries. Overall, the American policy is generally congruent with prospect theory.

Alternative Explanations

American policy towards Afghanistan between 1979 and early 1980 is somewhat consistent with structural realism. Depending on one's interpretation, American policy can be viewed as an instance of either the "bait and bleed" or "bloodletting" strategies described by Mearsheimer.²⁹⁷ However, as Mearsheimer explains, the baiting strategy is still quite rare in history mainly since it is often a very difficult and risky strategy to pursue.²⁹⁸ Additionally, given

²⁹⁶ Conor Tobin, "The Myth of the 'Afghan Trap': Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan, 1978-1979," *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 2 (2020): 237-239.

²⁹⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 153-155.

²⁹⁸ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great power Politics*, 153-154.

that the “bloodletting” interpretation would emphasize American efforts to prolong the conflict,²⁹⁹ it would overlook the evidence of American willingness to provoke the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, as well as the various perceived risks. Although it may be a peculiar case, one could conclude that there is compatibility and complementarity between the explanations offered by structural realism and prospect theory.

For obvious reasons, American cooperation with the Afghan insurgency is inconsistent with the ideology-focused arguments. Despite the shared anti-Soviet and anti-communist sentiments among the United States and the Afghan insurgency, the latter was still of a strongly anti-Western and Islamic fundamentalist orientation. American officials clearly did not find such ideological differences to be a problem, and even viewed them as an advantage in rallying Muslim states against the Soviet Union. For these simple reasons, the ideological distance arguments are strongly weakened in relation to those offered by structural realism and prospect theory.

²⁹⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 154.

7. The United States and Ukraine after the Euromaidan, 2014-2024

Historical Background

As one of the largest post-Soviet states, Ukraine was and still is a country of special interest to Russia. Indeed, the two countries share strong historical, cultural, and economic links, with Ukraine even being home to a large Russian population. Prior to the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine also hosted an important Russian naval base. In addition to being vital to Russian security interests, Ukraine also serves as an important economic bridge between Russia and the rest of Europe.³⁰⁰ Nonetheless, Ukrainian foreign policy was rather inconsistent prior to the Euromaidan, and oscillated between Western-oriented and multi-vector policies.³⁰¹ Ukraine pursued a pro-Western policy during Kravchuk's presidency between 1991 and 1994,³⁰² while his successor Kuchma pursued a multi-vector orientation until the Orange Revolution of 2005.³⁰³ Ukraine attempted another westward shift during Yushchenko's presidency between 2005 and 2010, after which his successor Yanukovich returned to a multi-vector orientation.³⁰⁴ Changing domestic interests, identity politics, and external pressures are among the factors that can explain Ukrainian foreign policy shifts.³⁰⁵

The major rupture in relations between Russia and Ukraine began with the Euromaidan protests, which began in late November 2013 and culminated in early 2014. As part of their broader efforts to expand their respective regional integration projects, Russia and the European

³⁰⁰ Paul D'Anieri, "Ukrainian Foreign Policy from Independence to Inertia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, no. 3 (September/December 2012): 451.

³⁰¹ Karina Shyrokykh, "The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 5 (2018): 832-833.

³⁰² Shyrokykh, "The Evolution of the Foreign policy of Ukraine," 832-833.

³⁰³ Shyrokykh, "The Evolution of the Foreign policy of Ukraine," 832-833.

³⁰⁴ Shyrokykh, "The Evolution of the Foreign policy of Ukraine," 833.

³⁰⁵ Fillippos Proedrou, "Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Accounting for Ukraine's Indeterminate Stance between Russia and the West," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 447-452; D'Anieri, "Ukrainian Foreign Policy from Independence to Inertia," 450-454.

Union increasingly competed for influence in Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan.³⁰⁶ The immediate trigger of the rupture was Yanukovich's decision to postpone signing the Association Agreement with the European Union.³⁰⁷ Protests grew over time with demands ranging from signing the Association Agreement and respecting the rule of law to early elections and Yanukovich's removal from office.³⁰⁸ Although initially peaceful, cycles of increased protest and government repression eventually led to violence. The Euromaidan was notable for the prominence of far-right organizations that played a major role in the instances of violence and ensuing radicalization of the protests,³⁰⁹ most notably the sniper attacks in Kiev's Maidan Square.³¹⁰ Indeed, such violence was a major factor contributing to Yanukovich's overthrow.³¹¹ Despite negotiating a compromise with the political opposition, Yanukovich fled Ukraine in late February 2014, likely out of fear of abandonment and for his own safety.³¹²

After Yanukovich's overthrow, Ukraine was thrust into even more chaos. The violence and nationalist rhetoric in Kiev helped trigger pro-Russian protests in parts of eastern and southern Ukraine. Eventually, Crimea was annexed by Russia following a local referendum, while conflict later erupted between local pro-Russian and Ukrainian forces in the Donbas region.³¹³ These developments helped shift the domestic balance of power in favour of pro-

³⁰⁶ Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 185-187.

³⁰⁷ D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 200-201.

³⁰⁸ D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 207-208.

³⁰⁹ Volodymyr Ischenko, "Far Right Participation in the Ukrainian Maidan Protests: An Attempt of Systematic Estimation," *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 4 (2016): 453-472.

³¹⁰ Ivan Katchanovski, "The 'Snipers' Massacre' on the Maidan in Ukraine," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2023): 24-29; Ivan Katchanovski, "The Far Right, the Euromaidan, and the Maidan Massacre in Ukraine," *Journal of Labor and Society* 23, no. 1 (2020): 14-15.

³¹¹ Serhiy Kudelia, "When Numbers are Not Enough: The Strategic Use of Violence in Ukraine's 2014 Revolution," *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 4 (July 2018): 510.

³¹² D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 212-214; Andrew Higgins and Andrew E. Kramer, "Ukraine Leader was Defeated Even Before he was Ousted," *New York Times*, January 3, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/world/europe/ukraine-leader-was-defeated-even-before-he-was-ousted.html>

³¹³ Nicolai N. Petro, *The Tragedy of Ukraine: What Greek Tragedy Can Teach Us About Conflict Resolution* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 213-215; D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 217-225.

Western parties.³¹⁴ Indeed, elections in May 2014 brought to power a resolutely nationalist and pro-Western government committed to Euro-Atlantic integration.³¹⁵ Hostilities in eastern Ukraine were briefly stabilized after the signing of the Minsk Agreements between September 2014 and February 2015, which among other things called for a ceasefire, greater decentralization of Ukraine, and a special status granted to the restive Donbas regions.³¹⁶ Nonetheless, until 2022, hostilities in Donbas effectively constituted a frozen conflict.

American Domain

Around the time of the Euromaidan and throughout the middle of the 2010s, the United States was likely framed in the domain of losses in terms of both status and material power. With regards to foreign policy, the Obama administration understood that the United States was overextended, and that the country needed to preserve yet reinvigorate its international leadership.³¹⁷ However, by the end of 2014 this apparent pursuit of both primacy and retrenchment proved to be fraught with dilemmas. In the Middle East for instance, American influence was strained by an inconsistent response to the Arab Spring, as well as the chaotic aftermath of the NATO intervention in Libya.³¹⁸ Additionally, American policy towards Syria led to a protracted civil war as well as further losses of credibility and influence, particularly after the Russian intervention of 2015 and earlier American failures to enforce “red lines” against the Syrian government.³¹⁹ Even the agreements pertaining to the Iranian nuclear weapons

³¹⁴ D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 255-257.

³¹⁵ D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 231.

³¹⁶ D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 237-241.

³¹⁷ Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 44-47.

³¹⁸ Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 75-91; Fawaz Gerges, “The Obama Approach to the Middle East: The End of America’s Moment?” *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 305-312; “President Obama: Libya Aftermath ‘Worst Mistake’ of Presidency,” *BBC News*, April 11, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36013703>

³¹⁹ Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 85-88.

program caused much apprehension among longstanding American allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.³²⁰

American international standing was further challenged by the resurgence of Russia. Between 1999 and 2015, Russian economic, military, and other material capabilities grew and significantly reduced the power gap with the United States and other Western countries.³²¹ Moreover, Russian policy became drastically more assertive towards the United States after Putin returned to the presidency in 2012. Indeed, Russian policy now emphasized features such as civilizational identity, social conservatism, and Eurasian integration, all of which signalled a clear shift away from liberal-democratic values and Atlanticism promoted by the United States.³²² These developments only added to the other persistent disputes that strained the futile American attempt to “reset” relations with Russia, most notably the disagreements about American missile defense systems in Europe, NATO expansion, as well as regime change and democracy promotion in the Middle East and former Soviet Union.³²³ In her memoirs, former secretary Clinton explained that she viewed a resurgent Russia as a threat, and that she wrote a memo to Obama in early 2013 advising him to pause the “reset” and prepare to adopt a hardline stance against Russia.³²⁴ Practically identical sentiments are present in the memoir of former defense secretary Carter.³²⁵

³²⁰ Gerges, “The Obama Approach to the Middle East,” 318-323; David Unger, “The Foreign Policy Legacy of Barack Obama,” *The International Spectator* 51, no. 4 (2016): 7-8.

³²¹ Simon Saradzhyan, “Is Russia Declining?” *Democratizatsiya* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 417.

³²² William Hill, *No Place for Russia: European Security Institutions Since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 341-345.

³²³ Richard Sakwa, *Russia Against the West: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 77-99; Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 225-229, 235-238, 247-250.

³²⁴ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 210-215.

³²⁵ Ashton B. Carter, *Inside the Five-Sided Box: Lessons from a Lifetime of Leadership in the Pentagon* (New York: Dutton, 2019): 273-277.

As one might expect, the resurgence of Russia also had important ramifications for American standing within Europe more broadly. One major concern of the United States was the growing dependence of Europe on Russian energy, and how such a relationship would affect the foreign policies of major European states.³²⁶ In general, energy competition in Europe intensified during Obama's tenure. The United States increased shale energy exports to Europe while Russia increased its own share in the European energy market, especially after the completion of the first Nord Stream pipeline in 2012.³²⁷ Another issue facing the United States was the growth of populist, illiberal, and broadly anti-establishment forces in Europe after 2013.³²⁸ Given their ideological character, sympathy towards Russia, and skepticism towards the United States, it is easy to see how the growth of such movements signalled a decline of American influence in Europe. Indeed, Russia supported such developments and even began positioning itself as a politically conservative great power.³²⁹

Finally, American primacy and overall international position became increasingly strained by the rise of China. Although a longer-term development, China's rise and challenge to the American-led world order became particularly noticeable in the early and mid-2010s with the announcement of ambitious projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.³³⁰ Although the Obama administration initially responded with caution, the incoming Trump administration quickly adopted a more competitive stance against China and viewed such initiatives as a major challenge to the liberal international order.³³¹

³²⁶ Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 196.

³²⁷ Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 197-198.

³²⁸ Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony: The Unravelling of the American Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 138-139.

³²⁹ Glenn Diesen, "Russia as an International Conservative Power: The Rise of the Right-Wing Populists and their Affinity Towards Russia," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 28, no. 2 (2020): 182-196.

³³⁰ Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 99-100.

³³¹ Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 103.

Domestically, the Obama administration was somewhat under strain prior to the Euromaidan uprising. Although public approval ratings remained relatively stable with regards to domestic policy, polls indicated a drop in approval of Obama's foreign policy after the summer of 2013,³³² as well as a wider drop in overall job approval throughout 2013.³³³ The immediate cause of this shift was likely Obama's handling of the conflict in Syria.³³⁴ Although the public approved his refusal to use military force, Obama's behavior still left many with the impression that he was weak and indecisive internationally.³³⁵ Polls conducted over the following months indicated that growing numbers of Americans perceived that the power, prestige, and respect of the United States were all in decline,³³⁶ while later polls indicated that Obama's foreign policy ratings still did not recover by the middle of 2014.³³⁷ It is also worth noting that Obama lost majorities in the House and Senate in 2010 and 2014 respectively.³³⁸

Overall, the United States was likely framed in the domain of losses in the period prior to the Euromaidan and throughout the mid-2010s. Obama's initial political goals translated into inconsistent policies that negatively affected American standing in various parts of the world. Most importantly, these developments occurred in conjunction with the resurgence of Russia and the rise of China, both of which challenged American primacy in various ways. Indeed, based on the remarks and behavior of senior American officials, there was much dissatisfaction with the status quo particularly with regards to relations with Russia. For these reasons, prospect theory expects risk-acceptant American policies toward Ukraine.

³³² Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 114.

³³³ Lydia Saad, "Obama's Job Approval Declined Steadily Throughout 2013," *Gallup*, January 3, 2014, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/166727/obama-job-approval-declined-steadily-throughout-2013.aspx>

³³⁴ Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 114-115.

³³⁵ Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 115.

³³⁶ Pew Research Center, *America's Place in the World 2013* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, December 3, 2013), 4-7. <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2013/12/12-3-13-APW-VI-release1.pdf>

³³⁷ Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine*, 115.

³³⁸ Unger, "The Foreign policy Legacy of Barack Obama," 3.

American Response

Prior to the Euromaidan, the United States had varying levels of interest in Ukraine. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, American policy towards Ukraine developed in the wider context of Russian-American relations, with a major development being the signing of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum that provided some formal multilateral security assurances to Ukraine in exchange for its denuclearization.³³⁹ Although Ukraine signed the Partnership for Peace Agreement with NATO in 1994,³⁴⁰ the United States viewed Ukrainian assertiveness towards Russia as unhelpful and provocative.³⁴¹ Throughout the following decade, American policy focused further on democracy promotion in Ukraine, with a major development being the Orange Revolution that unfolded between late 2004 and early 2005.³⁴² Although the United States sought NATO membership for Ukraine, Russian pressure and reluctance among certain NATO members led to a vague promise of eventual membership issued during the Bucharest Summit of 2008.³⁴³

Although detailed records of decision-making are unavailable as of this writing, American policy towards Ukraine during and after the Euromaidan was broadly in line with the category of *extensive cooperation*. In particular, American policy had three general elements, with the first one being open support for the Euromaidan protestors and facilitating the emergence of a pro-Western government. Some American officials, most notably Victoria Nuland and John McCain, openly participated in the protests and provided encouragement, with the latter notably meeting with leaders of far-right organizations and addressing crowds with

³³⁹ Eugene M. Fishel, *The Moscow Factor: US Policy Toward Sovereign Ukraine and the Kremlin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022), 113.

³⁴⁰ D'Anieri, "Ukrainian Foreign Policy from Independence to Inertia," 448.

³⁴¹ Fishel, *The Moscow Factor*, 115-116.

³⁴² Michael McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External influences on the Orange Revolution," *International Security* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 48-49.

³⁴³ Stent, *The Limits of Partnership*, 167.

messages of American support.³⁴⁴ During a leaked telephone conversation Nuland and the American ambassador even discussed the composition of a new Ukrainian government, as well as their ongoing efforts to broker a power transition and find “someone with an international personality” to “midwife” the process.³⁴⁵ Additionally, Obama made public remarks holding the Ukrainian government responsible for the tensions and violence, while a State Department official explained that the administration considered the notion of spheres of influence to be “outmoded.”³⁴⁶ These and other ensuing activities effectively escalated longstanding American efforts to cultivate influence in Ukraine, such as those pursued via organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy.³⁴⁷

The second broad element of the American response consisted of economic and political support to the new Ukrainian government. After the annexation of Crimea and outbreak of hostilities in Donbas, the United States provided various forms of substantial economic assistance to stabilize the Ukrainian economy.³⁴⁸ Interestingly, policy documents mentioned that the annexation of Crimea “constituted an unusual and extraordinary threat” to American security and interests.³⁴⁹ American policy also included economic and political sanctions on Russia. Although some might question their effectiveness, the sanctions nonetheless coincided with the economic difficulties Russia faced after international oil prices fell in 2014 and 2015.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁴ “Analysis: US Cozies Up to Kiev Government Including Far Right,” *NBC News*, March 30, 2014, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/analysis-u-s-cozies-kiev-government-including-far-right-n66061>

³⁴⁵ “Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of Leaked Nuland-Pyatt Call,” *BBC News*, February 7, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>

³⁴⁶ Josh Gerstein, “Obama Condemns Ukraine Violence,” *Politico*, February 19, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/ukraine-obama-remarks-103680>

³⁴⁷ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 114; McFaul, “Ukraine Imports Democracy,” 77-78.

³⁴⁸ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: US Assistance to Ukraine,” November 21, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/21/fact-sheet-us-assistance-ukraine>

³⁴⁹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order—Blocking Property of Certain Persons Contribution to the Situation in Ukraine,” March 6, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/06/executive-order-blocking-property-certain-persons-contributing-situation>

³⁵⁰ Emma Ashford, “Not-So-Smart Sanctions: The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 1 (January/February 2016): 114-117.

Additionally, the United States did little to discourage the provocative Ukrainian policies that further antagonized Russia and the Russian population in Ukraine, such as those aimed at cultivating Ukrainian identity, decommunization, and marginalizing the Russian Orthodox Church.³⁵¹ Another unaddressed issue was the growing prominence of far-right groups, some of which were trained by American or other NATO military personnel and even formally incorporated into the official Ukrainian security apparatus.³⁵² Overall, American efforts helped further consolidate the new pro-Western orientation of Ukraine, and had the effect of further eroding Russian political and even cultural influence in the country.

The final major element of the American response was the substantial amount of security assistance provided to Ukraine. Between 2014 and the start of the 2022 intervention, the United States alone provided Ukraine with billions of dollars in security assistance, and worked to improve the interoperability of the Ukrainian military with NATO.³⁵³ Although it refrained from providing lethal military aid,³⁵⁴ the Obama administration initiated a long-term effort to train Ukrainian personnel and even familiarize them with American armaments such as the Javelin missile.³⁵⁵ Interestingly, former German, French, and Ukrainian leaders later explained that the Minsk Agreements were partly an attempt to give Ukraine time to develop its military in order to retake Donbas and defend itself against Russian attacks.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, American assistance

³⁵¹ D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 248-250.

³⁵² Teemu Saressalo and Aki-Mauri Huhtinen, "The information Blitzkrieg- 'Hybrid' Operations Azov Style," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 31, no. 4 (2018): 431-433

³⁵³ Cristoph Trebesch, Arianna Antezza, Katelyn Bushnell, Andre Frank, Pascal Frank, Ivan Kharitonov, Bharath Kumar, Ekaterina Rebinskaya, and Stefan Schramm, *The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which Countries Help Ukraine and How?* (Kiel: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, February 2023), 17-18. https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/fis-import/87bb7b0f-ed26-4240-8979-5e6601aca9e8-KWP_2218_Trebesch_et_al_Ukraine_Support_Tracker.pdf

³⁵⁴ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 253.

³⁵⁵ Zach Dorfman, "Secret CIA Training Program helped Kyiv Prepare for Russian Invasion," *Yahoo! News*, March 16, 2022, <https://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-secret-cia-training-program-in-ukraine-helped-kyiv-prepare-for-russian-invasion-090052743.html?guccounter=1>

³⁵⁶ "Putin: Russia may have to make Ukraine Deal One Day, but Partners Cheated in the Past," *Reuters*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-russia-may-have-make-ukraine-deal-one-day-partners-cheated-past->

continued despite the Ukrainian government's repeated efforts and remarks regarding retaking Donbas militarily, as well as its apparent tolerance of far-right groups sabotaging attempts at negotiations.³⁵⁷ Regardless of possible ulterior motives and whether the Minsk Agreements were signed in bad faith, it is nonetheless very clear that Western governments were complicit in and actively contributed to the militarization of Ukraine in the long term. In doing so, Western governments were essentially reducing or trying to reduce Russia's ability to militarily dominate Ukraine.

It is worth noting that security cooperation with Ukraine developed in tandem with wider American efforts to strengthen the eastern flank of NATO and deter Russia. One example is the European Reassurance Initiative that began in 2014, which involved increasing the number of American and NATO forces and exercises in Eastern Europe, while also building the defense capacities of non-NATO states such as Georgia and Moldova.³⁵⁸ Additionally, the American missile defense system in Eastern Europe became operational in early 2016.³⁵⁹ Such developments intensified throughout the decade and became part of a kind of arms race between Russia and the West.³⁶⁰

Overall, the United States, finding itself in the domain of losses, exploited the rupture in Russian-Ukrainian relations and ultimately pursued risk-acceptant *extensive cooperation* with

[2022-12-09/](#); Theo Prouvost, "Hollande: 'There Will Only be a Way Out of the Conflict when Russia Fails on the Ground,'" *The Kyiv Independent*, December 28, 2022, <https://kyivindependent.com/hollande-there-will-only-be-a-way-out-of-the-conflict-when-russia-fails-on-the-ground/>; John Reed, "Ukraine's ex-President Petro Poroshenko: 'The Army is Like My Child, and I Am Very Proud,'" *Financial Times*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/39356ee4-a505-4391-a7a9-998252cb67ee>

³⁵⁷ Petro, *The Tragedy of Ukraine*, 224-232.

³⁵⁸ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other US Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners," June 3, 2014. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support->

³⁵⁹ "US Activates \$800m Missile Shield Base in Romania," *BBC News*, May 12, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36272686>

³⁶⁰ Sakwa, *Russia Against the Rest*, 196-197.

Ukraine. Alarmed by foreign policy setbacks as well as the resurgence of Russia and the implications of its growing leverage over Europe, American officials exploited the Euromaidan and facilitated the consolidation of a pro-Western Ukrainian government, while also promoting the militarization of Ukraine. In facilitating the emergence of a pro-Western government and the ensuing domestic political reconfigurations, American policy greatly reduced the hitherto immense Russian influence over Ukrainian domestic and foreign policies. In addition to tangible gains in natural resources and manpower, such a policy carried the potential for major gains in the sense that a pro-Western Ukraine could obviously help contain a resurgent Russia and counter the increasingly widespread notions of American weakness. At the same time, it is practically certain that American officials were aware that such policies could greatly inflame relations with Russia and ethnic tensions in Ukraine, especially since their efforts helped empower far-right groups and threatened important Russian strategic assets in the country.

American Domain and Response to the Russian Intervention of 2022

Although the conflict is ongoing, prospect theory could provide insight into the American response to the Russian intervention of early 2022. In simple terms, it is virtually certain that the United States fell deeper into the domain of losses given the persistence and acceleration of the global processes discussed previously. With regards to Russia, the United States faced additional problems. By 2018 the overall strategic balance and stability between the United States and Russia became increasingly unfavorable to the former, particularly after the latter's deployment of hypersonic and other advanced strategic weapons.³⁶¹ Additionally, it also became apparent that American-led measures actually strengthened Russia in certain ways, especially after the

³⁶¹ Dean Wilkening, "Hypersonic Weapons and Strategic Stability," *Survival* 61, no. 5 (2019): 143; Justin Williamson and James J. Wirtz, "Hypersonic or Just Hype? Assessing the Russian Hypersonic Weapons Program," *Comparative Strategy* 40, no. 5 (2021): 479.

country withstood initial economic shocks. In addition to further stimulating the pursuit of Eurasian integration, Western sanctions drove Russia to vigorously harden its financial system, diversify its economy, and pursue further industrialization, import-substitution, and self-sufficiency in key sectors.³⁶² Increased pessimism and dissatisfaction is also reflected in certain American policy documents. For example, the National Security Strategy from 2015 mentions the strain brought upon by Russian activities towards Ukraine and Europe,³⁶³ while the 2017 strategy of the incoming Trump administration explicitly referred to Russia and China as “revisionist powers.”³⁶⁴ Further losses were also present within Europe.

Within Europe the United States faced more challenges. The populist wave in Europe continued to grow, with a very prominent development being Britain’s exit from the European Union. Long opposed by the Obama administration and American establishment, Brexit threatened to reduce American influence over European affairs and encourage similar processes that would have potentially further undermined the European Union and even NATO.³⁶⁵ Such developments naturally challenged American efforts at containing Russia and China. Indeed, Germany, Britain and other European states showed a willingness to accommodate China by participating in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,³⁶⁶ while energy cooperation between

³⁶² Likhacheva, Anastasia, “Russia and Sanctions: The Transformational Domestic and International Effects of Unilateral Restrictive Measures,” *Russian Politics* 6, no. 4 (2021): 489-500.

³⁶³ Obama, Barack, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: The White House, 2015): 23.

<https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/NSS2015.pdf?ver=TJJ2QfM0McCqL-pNtKHtVQ%3d%3d>

³⁶⁴ Trump, Donald, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington DC: The White House, 2017): 25.

<https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/NSS2017.pdf?ver=CnFwURrw09pJ0q5EogFpwg%3d%3d>

³⁶⁵ Wyn Rees, “America, Brexit, and the Security of Europe,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2017): 558-559, 566-569.

³⁶⁶ Tim Oliver and John Williams, “Special Relationships in Flux: Brexit and the Future of the US-EU and US-UK Relationships,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (May 2016): 563.

Germany and Russia developed further with the completion of the second Nord Stream pipeline in 2021.³⁶⁷

Prior to 2022, China continued to rise and further expand its various integration projects. As mentioned earlier, the American *National Security Strategy* of 2017 explicitly identified China as a revisionist power and explained the need to counter the various Chinese infrastructure development initiatives around the world.³⁶⁸ Although published after the Russian intervention began, the *National Security Strategy* of 2022 stated that China is “America’s most consequential geopolitical challenge,”³⁶⁹ and that the United States must maintain a “competitive edge” over the rising country.³⁷⁰ Naturally, China’s continued rise went in tandem with the growth of various international organizations within Asia. For example, in 2017 India and Pakistan became full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while Iran Joined in 2023.³⁷¹

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the biggest challenge to the United States came from within. In simple terms, the election and presidency of Donald Trump demonstrated that there was deeply rooted polarization within American society as well as the political establishment at large.³⁷² As a political outsider who among other things sought better relations with Russia and questioned the value of NATO and other pillars of liberal hegemony, Trump naturally posed a challenge to the foreign policy consensus among the American political

³⁶⁷ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 131-132.

³⁶⁸ Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 38.

³⁶⁹ Biden, Joseph, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: The White House, 2022), 11.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

³⁷⁰ Biden, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: The White House, 2022), 23.

³⁷¹ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 309.

³⁷² Robert Y. Shapiro, “Liberal Internationalism, Public Opinion, and Partisan Conflict in the United States,” in *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Robert Jervis, Francis Gavin, Joshua Rovner, and Diane N. Labrosse (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 104-109.

establishment.³⁷³ As one might expect, prior and during his presidential term, Trump faced intense opposition and pressure from multiple directions. For example, many Americans took issue with Trump's positions on immigration, while significant elements of the political establishment aimed to discredit Trump in various ways, most notably by accusing him of colluding with Russia.³⁷⁴ As Trump's term concluded, various domestic issues and instances of social upheaval continued to mount, with notable examples being the protests against racism and police brutality in 2020 and the riot at the American Capitol in early 2021. Indeed, many issues would only persist into Biden's presidential term.

American domestic losses persisted and even intensified into Biden's presidency. In addition to persistent polarization and the various public controversies surrounding the 2020 election, the Biden administration faced worsening economic conditions,³⁷⁵ as well as declining public approval ratings.³⁷⁶ Additionally, the administration also faced significant declines in public confidence and trust in American government and institutions, which notably reached record lows by July 2022.³⁷⁷ Interestingly enough, the Biden administration even showed heightened concern for security threats within the United States. For instance, the *National Security Strategy* published in 2022 identified domestic terrorism as a major national security issue and challenge to American political institutions.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 115-118.

³⁷⁴ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 119.

³⁷⁵ Ben White, "Inflation Accelerates at Lightning Pace in new Setback for Biden," *Politico*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/12/10/consumer-prices-surge-biden-setback-524075>

³⁷⁶ Pew Research Center, *Biden Loses Ground with the Public on issues, Personal Traits, and Job Approval* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, September 23, 2021), 4-8. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/09/PP_2021.09.23_biden-economy_REPORT.pdf

³⁷⁷ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Confidence in US Institutions Down; Average at New Low," *Gallup*, July 5, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394283/confidence-institutions-down-average-new-low.aspx>

³⁷⁸ Biden, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: The White House, 2022), 16.

American cooperation with Ukraine grew in the years prior to the 2022 intervention. Indeed, in a departure from Obama-era policy, the Trump administration provided Ukraine with lethal military aid and implemented enhanced sanctions on Russia.³⁷⁹ These measures were followed by a hardening of Ukrainian policy toward Russia. For example, the goal of NATO membership was enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution as Poroshenko's presidential term concluded in 2019.³⁸⁰ Furthermore, after facing intense opposition and even threats of overthrow from the far-right for his initial efforts to implement the Minsk Agreement and settle the conflict,³⁸¹ Zelensky issued a decree in 2021 affirming the retaking of Crimea as a goal of Ukrainian policy.³⁸² This decree followed earlier remarks from Ukrainian military officials regarding a planned offensive into the Donbas region.³⁸³ These developments were part of a wider escalatory cycle among Russia, Ukraine, and the United States and its allies that would continue into the following months.³⁸⁴

Cooperation between the United States and Ukraine grew even more throughout the months prior to the Russian intervention. Between September and November 2021, the Ukrainian and American governments affirmed the growth of their strategic partnership, which now further emphasized security cooperation between the two countries and the former's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.³⁸⁵ Prior to meeting with Putin in early December 2021, Biden even remarked that he would not recognize any Russian "red lines," and that he would make an attack

³⁷⁹ Ruth Deyermund, "The Trump Presidency, Russia, and Ukraine: Explaining Incoherence," *International Affairs* 99, no. 4 (July 2023): 1604-1607.

³⁸⁰ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 262.

³⁸¹ Sakwa, *The Lost peace*, 250.

³⁸² Sakwa, *The Lost peace*, 256.

³⁸³ Alan Cafruny, Vassilis K. Fouskas, William D.E. Mallinson, and Andrey Voynitsky, "Ukraine, Multipolarity, and the Crisis of Grand Strategies," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (2023): 10.

³⁸⁴ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 255-257.

³⁸⁵ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 257-258.

on Ukraine “very, very difficult.”³⁸⁶ By the end of January 2022, the United States offered limited concessions regarding security treaties proposed by Russia during the prior month, especially with regards to the Russian request for guarantees that Ukraine would not join NATO.³⁸⁷ Interestingly, a few days before the intervention, Zelensky even made a credible threat to develop nuclear weapons.³⁸⁸

As the Russian intervention began in late February 2022, the Biden administration drastically increased all pre-existing elements of American policy toward Ukraine. With regards to security matters, between 2022 and 2024 the United States and its allies provided Ukraine with intelligence support and substantial amounts of materiel including various munitions, small arms, artillery, armored vehicles, air defense systems, and aircraft.³⁸⁹ Additionally, the United States and certain NATO states even deployed special forces to Ukraine.³⁹⁰ The United States and its allies showed practically no interest in the Spring 2022 negotiations between Ukraine and Russia that nearly produced a settlement affirming Ukrainian neutrality.³⁹¹ On the contrary, Western officials showed more interest in supporting Ukrainian efforts to defeat Russia militarily. Indeed, according to some Ukrainian officials, British Prime Minister Johnson encouraged Zelensky to abandon negotiations and continue fighting Russia.³⁹² Given that

³⁸⁶ “Russia Ukraine: Biden Warns Russia Against Ukraine ‘Red Lines’,” *BBC News*, December 4, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-59528864>

³⁸⁷ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 260.

³⁸⁸ Cafruny et al., “Ukraine, Multipolarity, and the Crisis of Grand Strategies,” 1.

³⁸⁹ US Department of State. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “US Security Cooperation with Ukraine,” May 10, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/> ; Jonathan Masters and Will Mellow, “How Much US Aid is Going to Ukraine?” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 9, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-us-aid-going-ukraine#chapter-title-0-1>

³⁹⁰ Paul Adams and George Wight, “Ukraine War: Leak Shows Western Special Forces on the Ground,” *BBC News*, April 11, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65245065>; Elise Vincent and Phillippe Ricard, “Ukraine’s Western Allies Already have a Military Presence in the Country,” *Le Monde*, March 1, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/03/01/ukraine-s-western-allies-already-have-a-military-presence-in-the-country_6575440_4.html

³⁹¹ Samuel Charap and Sergey Radchenko, “The Talks that Could Have Ended the War in Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/talks-could-have-ended-war-ukraine>

³⁹² Charap and Radchenko, “The Talks that Could Have Ended the War in Ukraine,”

American and other Western officials even made remarks about regime change in Russia being a policy goal,³⁹³ it becomes clear that they intended to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia.

In addition to substantially increased security assistance to Ukraine, American officials also intensified their efforts to rally likeminded states and isolate Russia politically and economically. Biden characterized the conflict in Ukraine as a “battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force.”³⁹⁴ Furthermore, in addition to providing more financial support to Ukraine, the United States and its allies increased their economic sanctions on Russia, froze Russian foreign assets, and even removed several Russian banks from the SWIFT international payment system.³⁹⁵ American officials also viewed conflict in Ukraine as an opportunity to further discipline European allies and disrupt their ties to Russia. For example, during a meeting with German Chancellor Scholz a few weeks before the intervention, Biden plainly stated that “there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2” in the event of a Russian intervention.³⁹⁶ Indeed, as the intervention began, German *ostpolitik* efforts effectively ceased,³⁹⁷ while the Nord Stream pipeline was destroyed in September 2022.³⁹⁸ Furthermore, NATO gained two new members, while military spending increased throughout Europe.³⁹⁹ Interestingly, the wider anti-Russian

³⁹³ Lauren Gambino and Joanna Walters, “‘I Make no Apologies’: Biden Stands by ‘Putin Cannot Remain in Power Remark’,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/28/biden-vladimir-putin-power-russia-ukraine>; Dylan Robertson and Sammy Hudes, “Regime Change in Moscow ‘Definitely’ the Goal, Joly says, as Canada bans Russian Steel, Aluminum Imports,” *National Post*, March 10, 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/regime-change-in-moscow-definitely-the-goal-joly-says>

³⁹⁴ The White House, “Remarks by President Biden on the United Efforts of the Free World to Support the People of Ukraine,” March 26, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/26/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-efforts-of-the-free-world-to-support-the-people-of-ukraine/>

³⁹⁵ D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 296.

³⁹⁶ The White House, “Remarks by President Biden and Chancellor Scholz of the Federal Republic of Germany at Press Conference,” February 7, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/02/07/remarks-by-president-biden-and-chancellor-scholz-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-at-press-conference/>

³⁹⁷ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 217.

³⁹⁸ Sakwa, *The Lost Peace*, 215.

³⁹⁹ D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 326.

efforts even spread into the cultural sphere, as the United States and other likeminded countries worked to marginalize and even ban various manifestations of Russian culture, with many referring to such efforts as the “cancellation” of Russia.⁴⁰⁰

Overall, as it fell further into the domain of losses, the United States escalated *extensive cooperation* with Ukraine shortly before and during the Russian intervention of 2022. Most importantly, it becomes clear that American officials clearly perceived that the successful defense of Ukraine could offer major gains and recoup the various losses the United States was facing, most notably those posed by the resurgence of Russia, rise of China, and developments in Europe. Given that American and other Western officials framed the conflict in highly ideological terms, they also likely understood that success in Ukraine could reinvigorate Western unity and the liberal international order, while concurrently rendering a large blow to illiberal and anti-establishment movements throughout the world.⁴⁰¹ At the same time, American policy carried the potential for further losses, such the loss of a Western foothold in Ukraine, possible Russian territorial expansion, and further loss of credibility and support for the liberal world order. Given further economic hardship, domestic tensions could also increase regardless of the outcome of the conflict.⁴⁰² Akin to the Soviets in Cuba, the United States placed itself in a position to either achieve a major victory or face a devastating defeat with serious international and domestic consequences. For these reasons, American policy is congruent with prospect theory.

⁴⁰⁰ Kevin M.F. Platt, “The Profound Irony of Cancelling Everything Russian,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/22/opinion/russian-artists-culture-boycotts.html>

⁴⁰¹ Lucan Ahmad Way, “The Rebirth of the Liberal World Order?” *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 2 (April 2022): 5-14.

⁴⁰² D’Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia*, 327-328.

As of this writing, it is certain that the United States and its allies have fallen further into the domain of losses, as many setbacks have become apparent. For example, American efforts to rally support and isolate Russia are having negligible effects beyond core Western states while deepening divides with non-Western ones.⁴⁰³ Such measures and developments are further eroding American-led neoliberal globalization while giving impetus to major non-Western initiatives, such as the expansion of BRICS and international de-dollarization efforts.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, the conflict is revealing major deficiencies in the military doctrines, capabilities, and industrial capacities of the United States and other Western countries.⁴⁰⁵ Contrastingly, in addition to competence in large-scale warfare, Russia is demonstrating a remarkable ability to adapt and expand its military and industrial capacities.⁴⁰⁶ Furthermore, while Putin has further consolidated his position within Russia, American and other Western leaders are facing growing domestic issues.⁴⁰⁷ Considering growing fears of a Ukrainian defeat, one should be surprised neither by the recent calls for increased Western troop deployments to Ukraine,⁴⁰⁸ nor the

⁴⁰³ Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, "A Critical Juncture: Russia, Ukraine, and the Global South," *Survival* 66, no. 2 (2024): 20.

⁴⁰⁴ Kutlay and Öniş, "A Critical Juncture," 29-32.

⁴⁰⁵ Alex Vershinin, "The Attritional Art of War: Lessons from the Russian War on Ukraine," *RUSI*, March 18, 2024, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/attritional-art-war-lessons-russian-war-ukraine>; Katie Crombe and John A. Nagl, "A Call to Action: Lessons From Ukraine for the Future Force," *Parameters*, 53, no. 3 (Autumn 2023): 21-32, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3240&context=parameters>; Seth G. Jones, *Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the US Defense Industrial Base* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2023), 2-8.

⁴⁰⁶ Mick Ryan, "Russia's Adaptation Advantage," *Foreign Affairs*, February 5, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russias-adaptation-advantage>; Ott Tammik, "NATO has Been Underestimating Russia's War Machine, Estonia Says," *Bloomberg News*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-24/russian-ability-to-sustain-war-was-underestimated-says-general>; Vershinin, "The Attritional Art of War."

⁴⁰⁷ Jon Henley, "How Europe's Far Right is Marching Steadily Into the Mainstream," *The Guardian*, June 30, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/30/far-right-on-the-march-europe-growing-taste-for-control-and-order>; John Kampfnier, "Right-Wing Populism is Set to Sweep the West in 2024," *Foreign Policy*, December 26, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/26/right-wing-populism-are-set-to-sweep-the-west-in-2024/>

⁴⁰⁸ Helene Cooper, Julian E. Barnes, Eric Schmitt, and Lara Jakes, "As Russia Advances, NATO Considers Sending Trainers Into Ukraine," *The New York Times*, May 18, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/16/us/politics/nato-ukraine.html>

approval given to Ukraine for directly attacking Russia with Western weapons.⁴⁰⁹ Indeed, given such circumstances, further escalation of the conflict is practically certain.

Alternative Explanations

American reactions to the ruptures in Russian-Ukrainian relations in 2014 and 2022 are inconsistent with the predictions of structural realism. Although still limited in a military sense, American policy during and after the Euromaidan nonetheless managed to greatly reduce Russian political influence over Ukraine, at least beyond the restive Donbas region. As shown above, American officials were certainly aware that their policies would disregard Russian limits and accordingly invite a strong counter-reaction, especially given the circumstances surrounding Yanukovich's overthrow and the policies of the new Ukrainian government. Similarly, American support to Ukraine before and during the 2022 intervention intensified the existing dynamic between the two countries, and now had the aim of further dislodging Ukraine by contesting Russian dominance in military terms.

The effectiveness of the ideology-focused theories in this case depends on how one interprets the ideological relationship or compatibility between the United States and Ukraine. Such explanations encounter difficulties if one posits an American-Ukrainian ideological homogeneity based on liberalism and democracy. While it is certainly true that a significant part of the Ukrainian population had and still has pro-Western and liberal-democratic aspirations, this likely had little effect on American policy. American officials supported the Euromaidan despite the significant role of the violent far-right in ousting Yanukovich, as well as the fact that public support for the Euromaidan was polarized and amounted to about half the Ukrainian

⁴⁰⁹ David E. Sanger and Edward Wong, "Under Pressure, Biden Allows Ukraine to Use US Weapons to Strike Inside Russia," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/30/us/politics/biden-ukraine-russia-weapons.html>

population.⁴¹⁰ American-Ukrainian cooperation grew despite the persistently poor quality of democracy in Ukraine,⁴¹¹ as well as the anti-democratic, anti-liberal, and authoritarian tendencies of Ukrainian politics, such as provocative nationalist policies; the mainstreaming of the far-right;⁴¹² attacks on media; human rights abuses; and heavy-handed measures against Donbas.⁴¹³ Evidently, American officials were bothered neither by the Ukrainian government's vulnerability to pressure from the far-right, nor by the numerous instances of high-ranking Ukrainian officials directing dehumanizing and violent rhetoric towards Russians and political opponents in Ukraine.⁴¹⁴ Although Western support came with conditionalities related to further democratization, Ukrainian non-compliance was increasingly tolerated as the geopolitical significance of the country grew amidst renewed tensions between Russia and the West.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Keith Darden and Lucan Way, "Who are the Protesters in Ukraine?" *Washington Post*, February 12, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/12/who-are-the-protesters-in-ukraine/>

⁴¹¹ Yulia Yesmukhanova, "Ukraine: Nations in Transit 2020," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/nations-transit/2020> ; Henrik Larsen, "Dilemmas of Aiding Ukraine," *Survival* 63, no. 1 (2021): 161-178.

⁴¹² Andreas Umland, "The Far Right in Pre- and Post-Maidan Ukraine: From Ultra-Nationalist Party Politics to Ethno-Centric Uncivil Society," *Demokratizatsiya*, 28, no. 2 (Spring 2020):247-256; Petro, *The Tragedy of Ukraine*, 106-115.

⁴¹³ US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2016-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ukraine/>; US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ukraine/>; Andrew Roth, "Ukraine Used Cluster Bombs, Evidence Indicates," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/21/world/ukraine-used-cluster-bombs-report-charges.html> ; Petro, *The Tragedy of Ukraine*, 119-120.

⁴¹⁴ Petro, *The Tragedy of Ukraine*, 115-119, 210-211.

⁴¹⁵ Larsen, "The Dilemmas of Aiding Ukraine," 163-164.

8. Conclusion

General Discussion and Theoretical Implications

This thesis explored when and why great powers pursue or refrain from pursuing risky and extensive contestations of the spheres of influence of rival powers. More specifically, this thesis used insights from prospect theory to explain the puzzling variation in great power responses to restive states in rival spheres of influence. In simple terms, the guiding question was why do great powers sometimes offer much support to restive states defying a rival power, and why do they sometimes refrain from doing so, even when more gains could be attained at a reasonable level of risk? In pursuing an answer to this question, this thesis sought to fill a research gap in the rather scarce literature on spheres of influence in international relations. In addition to being an understudied yet common and potentially increasingly relevant element of international relations, spheres of influence are worth studying because, as this thesis has shown, much of their workings are puzzling from conventional international relations theory. Indeed, contrary to realist imperatives, contestations of rival spheres of influence have occurred on various occasions and nearly ignited conflicts between great powers. Similarly, contrary to explanations focused on ideology or identity, there are also cases of great powers coming to the aid of ideationally distinct restive states.

Overall, the thesis demonstrated the plausibility of the argument derived from prospect theory, namely that great powers facing or seeking to recoup international or domestic material and ideational losses are likely to extensively support restive states, and thereby greatly contest a rival sphere of influence. Conversely, great powers generally refrain from doing so when facing or pursuing gains. In addition to offering support for the argument, the case studies offer insight into certain general patterns. In each case, great powers considered wider favourable or

unfavourable domestic and international trends when responding to developments in the restive states. As shown in the cases of contestation over Cuba, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, policymakers understood the fates of the restive states to be linked to broader international and domestic trends, and that losses could be recouped or forestalled by supporting such states in their defiance of the rival power. Conversely, the lack of contestation over Hungary and Chile demonstrated that great powers facing gains or favorable circumstances refrain from extensively supporting restive states even when more influence could be reasonably secured. In some cases, great powers regarded support to restive states as being detrimental to an otherwise favorable status quo.

Another pattern emerging from the case studies pertains to the role of ideational variables. Interestingly, apart from the case of American policy towards Hungary, every case showed how great powers exercise a degree of ideological flexibility depending on their domain or framing of a situation, and accordingly exaggerate the ideological similarities or differences with the restive states. This flexibility poses some analytical issues for the ideological distance theories, particularly with regards to determining the content and active elements of the ideological relationship between a restive state and great power challenger. Indeed, one could encounter ambiguity when interpreting the possible ideational variables involved in the American policies towards Afghanistan and Ukraine. Such ambiguity may also pose problems for the falsifiability of such theories, at least with regards to the research question at hand. These findings could also be relevant for constructivist theory, mainly in the sense that domain and risk propensity could affect actors' construction and projection of identity narratives or discourses, as well as their inclinations to enforce relevant norms.

With regards to competing explanations, structural realism generally performed better than the ideological distance theories, as the former's explanations and predictions could not be entirely ruled out when explaining the lack of contestation over Chile and presence of such over Afghanistan. The ideological distance theories encountered difficulty in every case except that of Soviet policy towards Cuba. Nonetheless, when they could not be ruled out entirely, the alternative explanations had much compatibility and even complementarity with prospect theory. Still, prospect theory appears to offer more leverage in that it can explain cases that deviate from the expectations of the other approaches.

Limitations

Evidently, this thesis is not without limitations. One limitation pertains to the methodological and analytical issues common in many studies employing prospect theory, namely the longstanding problem of identifying the framing and domain of a given actor. This thesis used a common albeit less rigorous approach to address the issue. Although resolving the problems of prospect theory is well beyond the scope of this thesis, it is still very important to acknowledge this issue. This thesis is also limited by the fact that it did not consult non-Anglophone sources. Indeed, in some cases the difficulty of completely ruling out alternative explanations is linked to the availability of data. Another clear limitation pertains to how only cases involving two different states and historical periods were selected. A more substantive limitation is that this thesis only considered the initial decisions to support a restive state, and gave little attention to the role of strategic interactions among great powers. Finally, another limitation is how the thesis viewed the actual causes of sphere of influence ruptures as being exogenous to the explanation. Although most ruptures in this thesis were relatively

unambiguous, in some cases it is easy to imagine certain ruptures being effectively caused by rival powers.

Policy Relevance

Notwithstanding its limitations, this thesis has some policy relevance and may even yield some general albeit intuitive advice to relevant policymakers. The first is that great powers with a sphere of influence should set unambiguous limits to foreign interference in their satellite states, and vigorously counter unacceptable restiveness and foreign interference. If not adequately countered, with the passage of time the defiant leadership of a restive state may further consolidate its domestic position and become more difficult to re-subordinate. Additionally, a rival power with a growing foothold in a restive state may eventually begin perceiving it as an important ally and be less willing to compromise with the rival power. In simple terms, a restive state that defies its influencing power and/or obtains foreign support for a longer period of time will be more difficult to re-subordinate and likely become a source of instability. If the United States was more resolute in opposing Castro's government after 1959, it is unlikely that ensuing events would have culminated in the crisis of 1962. Similarly, if Russia countered Ukrainian defiance and Western interference more vigorously during and after the Euromaidan, the currently escalating conflict with Ukraine and the West could have been averted.

Another policy-relevant finding pertains to the role of small restive states. In particular, great powers pondering an intrusion into a rival sphere should be considerate of the behavior of the restive state in question. This is because a great power may be prone to manipulation and reputational costs imposed by restive states or adjacent allies. This appears to be the case especially if the great power is facing losses. One could recall how Castro gradually revealed his

ideological orientation as part of his effort to obtain Soviet support, or how fear among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran (prior to the Islamic Revolution), and other countries played a role in the American decision to challenge Soviet influence in Afghanistan. Similar dynamics are likely present in the current relationship between the United States and Ukraine amidst the ongoing conflict with Russia.

This thesis also offers some modest albeit intuitive insights into the effectiveness of spheres of influence as elements of international security. In particular, the findings suggest that spheres of influence do not automatically promote international security, and that their effectiveness in doing so depends on the agency and strategic interactions of relevant actors. In other words, spheres of influence must be actively upheld and maintained if they are to promote security among great powers. In addition to material and technical imperatives, great powers should also consider the normative aspects when maintaining a sphere of influence, as the stability of such arrangements may be negatively affected by perceived injustices among subordinate populations and states. Overall, while it may be easier said than done, both material and ideational imperatives ought to be considered when maintaining and evaluating the effectiveness of spheres of influence as elements of international security.

Areas for Future Research

Considering the scarce literature on spheres of influence, this thesis offers some general directions for future research. One direction is to focus on the relationship between dominant great powers and subordinate small states. Studies might explain variation in great powers' tolerances of foreign interference, or perhaps the varying degrees of dominance and control they pursue over their own spheres of influence. Other studies could attempt to address a limitation of this thesis, and consider when, why, and how great power challengers disengage from large

contestations of a rival sphere of influence. Another worthwhile area of inquiry could be the agency of restive states and their strategies of obtaining foreign support. As shown in the cases of Cuba, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, great power challengers can only challenge the influence of their rivals if they are permitted to do so by the restive states. Future research can also focus on different possible outcomes of sphere of influence contestations, or perhaps the conditions under which great powers agree to the neutrality of relevant states. Such research could add to scarce literature on buffer zones, which has recently seen some renewed interest.⁴¹⁶ Future studies could and should also draw upon the extensive literature on hierarchies in international relations.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis explored only a small aspect of an otherwise large, complicated, and everchanging aspect of international relations. Given their historical and contemporary relevance, it is clear that spheres of influence warrant more consideration among academic and policy circles. Furthermore, while the various debates and controversies surrounding spheres of influence will evidently continue, it is important that one does not abuse the concept or approach it with apprehensiveness. Spheres of inference are only one among the many phenomena evolving together with the transforming international order. Given ongoing international developments, it becomes clear that understanding such phenomena is of great importance in the pursuit of security and prosperity in the new multipolar era.

⁴¹⁶ Boaz Atzili and Min Jung Kim, "Buffer Zones and International Rivalry: Internal and External Geographic Separation Mechanisms," *International Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March 2023): 645-665.

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