Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong
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Supplementary Materials for Chapter 1

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In her book *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*, Lindsey O'Rourke compiles a list of 64 cases in which the United States attempted to overthrow the government of a foreign country from 1946 to 1989. Of these 64 cases, 25 (39 percent) succeeded in displacing the targeted regime. In Table 1.1A below, I list these 25 cases and explain why I include or exclude them from the dataset of foreign-imposed regime changes in my book *Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong*. As is evident from the table, I exclude all but seven. Please note although I list *six* covert regime changes in note 317 on p. 338 of the book, the correct number is seven; I inadvertently omitted the Dominican Republic in 1961.

The most common type of excluded case consists of interference in target states' elections. Election interference constitutes the most successful form of covert regime change, succeeding in 12 out of 16 cases (75 percent). O'Rourke defines electoral interference as attempts by a state to "influence foreign elections by covertly providing funding, advisory assistance, and propaganda to help its preferred candidate win their elections."[1] Equating successful electoral interference with regime change as defined in my book, however, is not possible for two reasons.

First, the connection between the intervener's actions and regime change is most tenuous in cases of electoral interference. O'Rourke cautions against interpreting these successes too literally, writing that "in many of these cases, it is difficult to determine whether US actions were responsible" for the victories of its surrogates. As she goes on to note, "Many of the parties supported by Washington might well have won their elections without US help. For instance, in France, Italy, and Japan, the parties supported by the United States already had a steady advantage over their opponents in the polls, raising the question of whether the covert mission played any role in their victory."[2]

Second, many such interventions were undertaken not to *change* a regime by sponsoring opposition candidates but rather to consolidate or protect a friendly government already in power from the prospect of defeat by hostile (often leftist or communist) parties. In Europe and Japan, O'Rourke points out, "the United States worked to consolidate anti-Soviet strongholds" out of fear that "a surplus of frustrated workers might pave the way for Communist victories in postwar democratic elections."[3]

A second type of covert regime change I exclude is democracy promotion. As with electoral interference, the key reason for excluding these cases is that the connection between U.S. efforts

[1] O'Rourke 2018, 66.
[2] O'Rourke 2018, 78.
[3] O'Rourke 2018, 109-10.

to promote democracy in Nicaragua (1980-89), Poland (1981-89), the Philippines (1983-86), and Chile (1984-89), and subsequent regime changes in those countries, is unclear at best. Democratic transitions in these cases were primarily a function of domestic developments rather than foreign intervention.

I omit five additional covert regime change successes for other reasons. In Brazil (1964), for example, the Brazilian army received no U.S. aid when it toppled left-leaning President João Goulart. Although President Lyndon Johnson had been prepared to intervene, Brazilian military officers took matters into their own hands, thereby obviating the need for U.S. intervention.[4] In Afghanistan (1979-89), the United States ended its covert support for the Afghan mujahideen in 1989 but President Mohammad Najibullah was not ousted until 1992. In Nicaragua (1980-89), the Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega was not overthrown by U.S.-supported Contra rebels; he was defeated in an internationally monitored democratic election after the rebellion had mostly ended.[5] In Bolivia (1971), although the Nixon administration agreed to send $410,000 to coup plotters in July, and some funds were passed by the CIA on August 19, the *putsch* took place two days later, strongly suggesting that U.S. aid was of little importance in causing it. Moreover, according to a U.S. government account, the purpose of the money was to fund non-violent activities, including "organizational expenses and a propaganda campaign utilizing Bolivian print and radio news media."[6] Finally, I exclude the case of British Guiana (1961-71) because the key events preceded the country's independence in 1965.[7]

After excluding these cases, only seven remain: Iran (1952-53); Guatemala (1952-54); Democratic Republic of Congo (1960); Dominican Republic (1961); South Vietnam (1963); Chile (1962-73); and Chad (1981-82). To be sure, the extent of foreign responsibility for regime change in these cases is contested.[8] However, I believe that in almost all of these cases the weight of the historical evidence supports counting them as cases of foreign-imposed regime change according to my definition.

The most difficult case is probably Chile. There is no doubt that the United States attempted to dissuade the Chilean Senate from ratifying Salvador Allende's election after he won the popular vote in 1970. U.S. officials also sought to foment a military coup to prevent Allende from taking office, a policy that resulted in the botched kidnapping and murder of General Rene Schneider, the anti-coup commander-in-chief of the Chilean military. Efforts to destabilize the regime and encourage a coup persisted after Allende took office, however, culminating in the Chilean military seizing power on September 11, 1973.[9] Accounts disagree regarding the precise U.S.

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[4] Grow 2008, 79.
[5] And, as noted above, attributing Ortega's defeat to U.S. democracy assistance is a stretch.
[6] "Editorial Note," in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76*, Vol. E-10, *Documents on the American Republics, 1969-1972*, Doc. 76a. President Nixon had previously approved $1 million in military aid as part of a three to four-year program totaling $7 million, but it is unclear if any of those funds were disbursed prior to the coup since they were predicated on an improved "political climate." See "Memorandum from Arnold Nachmanoff of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 17, 1971," in ibid., Doc. 102.
[7] See Grow 2008, 57-66.
[8] On Iran, for example, see Takeyh 2014; and de Bellaigue and Takeyh 2014. On Chile, see Kornbluh and Devine 2014.
[9] Kornbluh 2003, Chapter 2.

role in Allende's ouster.[10] Although it is true that, as Kornbluh writes, "the United States did not directly participate in the coup," direct participation is not the key threshold in my definition; rather, it is whether an external actor is "primarily responsible for deposing the targeted leader"—a criterion that can be met without an outside power doing the physical removal.[11] In this case, U.S. responsibility lies in the policies and actions it pursued to make a coup possible and persuade Chilean military officers to topple Allende. Excluding this (or any other) case, however, does not substantively affect any of the book's empirical findings.

[10] Compare, for example, Kornbluh 2003 and Gustafson 2007.
[11] Kornbluh and Devine 2014, 170; and Downes 2021, 25.

Table 1.1A. Comparison of Successful Covert Foreign-Imposed Regime Changes Identified in O'Rourke (2018) and Successful Covert Cases Included in *Catastrophic Success*

Target	**Years**	**Type**	**Tactics**	**Included in *Catastrophic Success*?**	**Notes**
France	1947-52	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Italy	1947-52	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Italy	1972-73	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Iran	1952-53	Preventive	Coup	Yes	Wilber 1954; Kinzer 2003
Japan	1952-68	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Guatemala	1952-54	Hegemonic	Coup; dissidents	Yes	See pp. 132-38 of *Catastrophic Success* and associated endnotes.
Lebanon	1957-58	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Congo (DRC)	1960	Preventive	Assassination; coup	Yes	Eisenhower administration directs CIA to eliminate Lumumba but assassination attempt fails. U.S. and UN support Mobutu's ensuing coup but I code Belgians as primarily responsible based on De Witte 2001, Chapters 1-3. On the U.S. role see Weissman 2014.
Dominican Republic	1960-61	Hegemonic	Coup (inadvertent assassination)	Yes	CIA provided weapons to plotters who may have used them to assassinate Rafael Trujillo (O'Rourke 2018, 244-52; U.S. Senate 1975).
British Guyana	1961-71	Hegemonic	Coup; election interference	No	U.S. engineered Jagan's defeat in 1963 elections, all while BG was still a British colony (Grow 2008, 57-66).
Dominican Republic	1961-62	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Chile	1962-73	Hegemonic	Coup; election interference	Yes	Kornbluh 2003, Chapters 1-2.

Bolivia	1963-66	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
South Vietnam	1963	Preventive	Coup (inadvertent assassination)	Yes	See pp. 187-91 of *Catastrophic Success* and associated endnotes.
Brazil	1964	Hegemonic	Coup	No	USG prepared to move, but Brazilian military acts on its own; no US forces or supplies ever reached Brazil. "Brazil's generals took care of the problem on their own" (Grow 2008, 79).
Dominican Republic	1965-68	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
South Vietnam	1967-71	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Bolivia	1971	Hegemonic	Coup	No	USG sent $410,000 to coup plotters but coup happened two days after money was sent. USG thought the coup was going to happen anyway; its proposal was just a way to structure what was going to happen on its own.
Portugal	1974-75	Preventive	Election interference	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to the result; goal was to preserve the rule of U.S.-friendly leaders or parties, not remove hostile ones.
Afghanistan	1979-89	Offensive	Dissidents	No	Operation ended in 1989, but Najibullah not overthrown until 1992.
Nicaragua	1980-89	Offensive	Dissidents; democracy promotion	No	War ends in negotiated settlement; in ensuing elections, opposition (non-Sandinista) candidate Violeta Chamorro wins. Unclear whether or how much U.S. efforts contributed to her victory.
Chad	1981-82	Preventive	Dissidents	Yes	U.S. support key to Habré seizing power (Foltz 1987, 4; Human Rights Watch 2016, 2-3).
Poland	1981-89	Offensive	Democracy promotion	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to regime change
The Philippines	1984-86	Preventive	Democracy promotion	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to regime change
Chile	1984-89	Hegemonic	Democracy promotion	No	No threat or use of force; unclear whether or how much U.S. actions contributed to regime change

Note: Data compiled from O'Rourke 2018, 103, 109, 117. Years, type, and tactics of covert regime change are as coded by O'Rourke 2018.

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