

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Managing our SOBs: Washington's response to friendly dictators in trouble

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Abstract

Why does the United States either continue to support or turn its back on a friendly dictator once that dictator is faced with internal uprisings? This study argues that a US president's decision to either remain loyal to or abandon dictators when they are in trouble ultimately depends on the preservation of acquired influence (PAI). This argument is tested by considering three crises in which the White House was faced with a choice between prolonging support or abandoning established alliances with Batista in Cuba (1956–1959), Mobutu in Zaire (1990–1991), and Mubarak in Egypt (2011). In all three case studies, the PAI argument is found to account for observed variations in US foreign policy toward friendly dictators in trouble.

KEYWORDS

acquired influence, diplomatic support and abandonment, friendly dictator, internal control loss, US foreign policy

“[He] may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch.”

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt's alleged remark about the ruthless
Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Garcia (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2005, p. vi)

INTRODUCTION

From the Cold War to the Arab Spring, what accounts for US foreign policy positions of support or repudiation of dictators friendly to the United States and facing an internal uprising? On the one hand, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Fulgencio Batista in 1959, Bill Clinton and Suharto in 1998, and Barack Obama and Hosni Mubarak in 2011 are all examples of abandonment. By contrast, the

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White House has, in analogous crises, provided ongoing support to similar autocratic leaders in trouble, as illustrated by George H. W. Bush in the case of Mobutu Sese Seko in 1990–1991, Barack Obama in the case of Hamad bin isa al-Khalifa in 2011, and Donald Trump in the case of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in 2019.

One could argue that these uprisings differ in terms of intensity and that those dictators who were not abandoned by US presidents were able to remain in power by effectively suppressing the revolt. Therefore, it might appear that the decision to support or push for the replacement of a friendly tyrant in trouble depends on the tyrant's capacity to maintain control over his regime. However, a number of empirical cases indicate that a theory based solely on this variable fails to capture the full spectrum of presidential behaviors in the event of such crises. Eisenhower, a Republican president, did not abandon the Shah of Iran in 1953 when Mohammad Mosaddegh overthrew him, and the same president behaved similarly with Syngman Rhee in 1960 when the latter was forced to leave Seoul and seek exile in Honolulu. Similarly, Jimmy Carter, a Democratic president, did not abandon his Cambodian friend Lon Nol when the Khmer Rouge removed him from power in 1975; nor did he lay off Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979 when the Sandinista junta in Nicaragua ousted him. The support given to these fallen rulers indicates that US presidents do not always sever ties with friendly dictators after they have lost internal control. Thus, their capacity to sustain control over their respective regimes cannot account alone for the United States' loyalty or repudiation in the midst of a crisis.

This article argues that the decision by the United States to abandon a dictator in trouble is primarily shaped by the *preservation of acquired influence* (PAI) argument. A realpolitik-based calculation induced by systemic pressures posits that, as a coherent pattern of decisions, the PAI argument asserts that a US president's main objective during this type of exogenous crisis is to maintain American ascendancy over a regime during and after an uprising. An uprising can take the form of a popular revolt, a general strike, or a massive student strike. In such instances, American influence can be preserved through inertia (by prolonging the support given to a dictator) or change (diplomatic abandonment).¹ In the next sections, I begin by reviewing the literature on the topic and explain why this article helps fill an important theoretical gap. Second, I present in detail the PAI argument and its variables. Third, I set out the qualitative framework based on process tracing used to test the validity of my argument. Fourth, I test my model empirically using cases taken from three different moments in time: the case of Batista in Cuba during the Cold War, the case of Mobutu in Zaire during the 1990s, and the case of Mubarak in Egypt in the 2000s. Finally, the conclusion discusses the results and the implications of the PAI argument.

What does research say about our puzzle?

Although the question of US repudiation of friendly dictators has received occasional attention in the literature, no existing research provides a systematic theory that satisfactorily addresses the question. Most studies devoted to American amity with dictators have focused on the factors that gave rise to marriages of convenience between the White House and dictatorships (Adesnik & McFaul, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 1982; Schmitz, 2007), and all fail to address the causes of the breakdown in the relationship. Furthermore, for many critics, the support or abandonment of dictators is driven solely by their “utility” and their ability to retain control of their regime (Chomsky, 1998) or the “economic and political interests” (Sharp, 2012) protected through

¹There are well-known political quotes to support this intuition. First, there are Lord Palmerston's three golden rules: “We have no permanent allies, we have no permanent enemies, we only have permanent interests” (Brown, 2002, pp. 82–83). Second, there is John F. Kennedy's quote that followed Rafael Trujillo's assassination in 1961: “There are three possibilities in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime, or a ‘Castro’ regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid the third” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 769).

imperial sponsorship. Although the internal control variable is included in my theoretical model, these claims may be true in many cases given the vagueness of the terminology, that is, the dictator's perceived usefulness and US interests, both of which are difficult to quantify and falsify. In addition, assuming that economic and political interests create a *sine qua non* condition to secure (and maintain) American support, how would Chomsky and Sharp account for the fact—as set out in the introduction by Pahlavi in 1953, Rhee in 1960, Nol in 1975, and Somoza in 1979—that the United States sometimes continues to support fallen dictators who have lost all political authority and therefore have no *utility* left to offer?

Furthermore, few studies have directly addressed the issue that this article aims to clarify, and none have been able to unravel all the cases addressed here. By focusing only on the “succession crises” that he distinguishes from revolutions from the outset, Pastor's argument (1991) is too narrow to encompass all the different types of uprisings involved in my research puzzle, which includes internal turmoil that often leads to revolutions. Aside from being unable to account for ongoing US support granted to fallen dictators, by only taking into account cases where successions have been effective, Pastor's argument cannot predict *when* a dictator will be abandoned by a US president, which is one of the main contributions of this article. Using a neo-Marxist approach, Robinson (1996) argues that US support is given to an autocratic ruler so long as the latter continues to embrace the hegemonic liberal polyarchy promoted by global capitalist elites. On the one hand, this argument fails to explain why the United States has sometimes sided with dictators who were not inclined to support the hegemonic polyarchy, as was the case of Eisenhower with Castro in early 1958. On the other hand, Robinson's theory cannot explain why the White House sometimes presses a dictator who continues to embrace the capitalist polyarchy to hold democratic elections, as illustrated by the case of Carter and Hugo Banzer in 1978.

Moreover, according to a number of scholars, the decision made by the United States in the event of an exogenous crisis is governed by internal domestic variables. Exploring US foreign policy in Latin America over the last century, Schoultz observed that the American national security agenda was primarily shaped by the “differing beliefs [of decision makers] about the causes and consequences of instability” (1987, p. 308). Pipes and Garfinkle (1991) argued that American public opinion plays a determining role in decision making during external crises. However, the weight of public opinion on US foreign policy should not be overstated. Although a poll conducted in 1974 found that nearly three quarters of Americans considered Washington's support for military dictatorships to be “morally wrong” (Pastor, 1991, p. 81), in the same year Gerald Ford's administration nevertheless overwhelmingly supported such regimes. General Augusto Pinochet's becoming the new president of Chile is a case in point. Peceny (1999) explains the event as a domestic deal between a form of presidential power that favors “non-liberalization” policies with military intervention and a congress that may press for democracy. However, since my puzzle focuses only on crises involving no official direct US military intervention, Peceny's domestic bargaining theory is irrelevant for the purposes of solving this puzzle.

By also using domestic variables, Walldorf argues that lobbying of Congress by activists or nongovernmental organizations can generate pressure, which may explain why US presidents sometimes abandon a friendly dictator: “Washington ended numerous military and economic assistance pledges like those at the center of the war on terror amidst the insecurity of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. American support commitments to [autocratic] partners such as Turkey, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, and many others were terminated” on the grounds of human rights violations (2008, p. 2). Although Walldorf is right to point out that US presidents may sometimes distance themselves from autocratic partners for humanitarian reasons, terminological clarity matters hugely in this context. Although military embargos, diplomatic sanctions, or economic aid withdrawals are measures used by the United States to press them to take steps toward democratization or compliance with humanitarian norms, there is a “quantum leap” between a distancing strategy and diplomatic abandonment. By comparison with actual diplomatic abandonment, distancing measures are “slaps on the wrist” for Washington's remote friendly dictators. Estrangement is used to press an abusive partner to adopt

reforms while abandonment aims for the immediate and definitive removal of a dictator without even the option of ending his days on US soil. For example, although Congress cut military aid to Ernesto Geisel in 1977, Carter and his wife nevertheless went to Brazil in 1978 to meet with him at an official state dinner. It was clear at the time that no presidential abandonment was on the cards, despite budgetary distancing measures.

Finally, for Lake (2009), the White House tends to support democracy in a contested dictatorship if there is a perception that median voters' preferences are compatible with its own. However, by focusing on American support for democratic transition, Lake does not consider cases in which Washington has transferred its support from one dictator to another without pushing for democratization, which has often happened since the beginning of the Cold War. For their part, Owen and Poznansky (2014) argue that the United States favors democratic elections over a friendly tyrant remaining in power if two conditions are met: (1) an internal crisis must threaten the tyrant's tenure and (2) the internal pro-American model of free markets and liberal democracy must have no alternatives (e.g., "Communism or Islamism") in the region, with elections taking place after his proven ousting. However, at an empirical level, this approach cannot explain why a US president would sometimes choose to risk pushing for democratization in a regime even if there is a fair chance that the outcome of elections could bring to power an alternative Islamist leader. For example, although the United States maintained its influence in Indonesia following Suharto's departure, the Clinton administration pressed for democratization even though the National Awakening Party, an Islam-based political party, had a chance of winning the 1999 presidential elections—which is precisely what happened. In the same way, albeit with more mixed results, the Obama administration pressed for democratic elections in Egypt after Mubarak's fall, even if it seemed likely that the Muslim Brotherhood would gain power in the summer of 2012 (Hamid, 2012)—which is indeed what happened with the election of Mohamed Morsi. Furthermore, following Lake's argument (2009), by focusing only on US support for democratic elections after a friendly dictator's removal from power, this argument overlooks a significant number of cases where Washington has favored the replacement of a dictator by another without considering a democratic transition. Finally, Owen and Poznansky (2014) applied their hypotheses to three cases that only arose during the Cold War, which potentially limits the external validity of their analysis.

In the following pages, this article aims to demonstrate that the exclusive attention given by these studies to either succession crises, the implementation of democratization, or domestic pressures overlooks the bigger picture by ignoring the systemic pressure related to the struggle for influence gain. In addition, to provide a more systematic and broader explanation of the US decision-making process in this type of exogenous crisis, the PAI argument integrates both systemic pressure and external domestic variables. Furthermore, by approaching the subject from the perspective of a systemic zero-sum game in which influence can be either lost or preserved during this type of crisis, this article proposes—and puts to the test—a novel theoretical argument that sheds new light on the topic. In a broader way, this article aims to investigate how great powers manage client dictators' troubled states and achieve influence on the international geopolitical stage.

THE PRESERVATION OF ACQUIRED INFLUENCE (PAI) ARGUMENT

Simply put, the PAI argument posits that a US president's decision to abandon a friendly dictator in trouble occurs when two conditions are met: (1) the latter loses control following the aggravation of a crisis affecting his regime and (2) a leader comes to the fore who is perceived by US government officials as capable and willing to sustain US influence. In addition, the PAI logic allows for temporal flexibility in that even if an internal crisis had previously been effectively mitigated by a friendly dictator, a subsequent

reversal of fortunes could happen if the worsening internal crisis leads to a loss of control in the medium or longer term.

First, as regards its theoretical roots, the PAI argument follows in the footsteps of Blasier, according to whom systemic pressures play a significant role in this type of US decision. As Blasier concludes in *U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Changes in Latin America, 1910–1985*, the White House was mostly seeking to avoid the “interference of rival Great Powers [Germany before World War II and the USSR during the Cold War] in the hemisphere” (1985, p. 302). Second, the PAI argument relies on the classical realist idea of a never-ending systemic struggle for influence gain between powerful states that can be theorized by a zero-sum game. This conception of a never-ending struggle for influence is inspired by Wolfers, who wrote: “nations, like nature, are said to abhor a vacuum, one could predict that the powerful nation would feel compelled to fill the vacuum with its own power” (1962, p. 15). Third, from an ontological standpoint, the PAI argument borrows from the core agenda of the school of neoclassical realism, which aims to build a causal bridge between variables at both systemic (*realpolitik*) and domestic (*innenpolitik*) levels.² In that regard, like the neoclassical realist school, the PAI argument works on the basis of an outside-in logic that permits “a focus on foreign policy as well as systemic-level phenomena” (Schweller, 2018, p. 28).

However, the PAI argument differs from the three types of schools of neoclassical realism identified by Ripsman et al. (2016). First, unlike Type I neoclassical realism, the PAI does not seek to explain anomalies in decision making through intervening internal prisms, but rather aims to unravel the optimal decision calculus behind similar presidential decisions relating to these crises. Second, unlike Type II neoclassical realism, the PAI argument does not take into account the “unique domestic circumstances” (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 31) that act, for the former, as decisional prisms by which systemic stimuli are perceived and dealt with. Third, while Type III neoclassical realism focuses on four main internal intervening variables—(1) leader images that interfere with their perception, (2) the strategic culture, (3) the relations between the state and society, and (4) national political institutions—the PAI argument relies on two exogenous (intervening and condition) variables. In sum, the ontology of the PAI differs from neoclassical realism inasmuch as it holds the strong belief that when external crises occur—with their own domestic stakes and possible turnovers—exogenous considerations will greatly impact US presidents' decisions. Once an external crisis arises, as the systemic pressures for influence gain increase and become worrisome when the latter worsens, the PAI argument posits that a US president's decision will be primarily shaped by the answers given to the following questions: Will this external crisis topple our benevolent dictator at the head of a partner regime? And, if the latter gets removed internally, who will be next in line to replace him, and will he then become a friend or a foe of the United States? So, while neoclassical realists provide idiosyncratic explanations based on “country-specific ‘baggage’” (Schweller, 2018, p. 27), the PAI argument aims to transcend the latter to provide a more systematic explanation based on both systemic and exogenous independent variables.

The systemic struggle for influence gain

Acquired influence matters to those who have it. Viewed as both a cause and a consequence of power status, acquired influence implies an asymmetrical relationship between a stronger entity and a far

²When he coined the term “neoclassical realism” in 1998, Rose described how the new framework was serving to revitalize both classical and structural realist schools: “[Neoclassical realism] explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables. [...] Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical” (Rose, 1998, p. 146).

weaker entity. On a systemic level, since influence can be acquired, lost, or preserved, great powers constantly pressure each other to acquire the influence that they do not yet have while seeking to preserve the influence that they consider theirs.³ If constant systemic pressure is negligible when the tenure of a friendly tyrant continues without disruption, it becomes worrisome when the latter loses control in the wake of a worsening grassroots uprising. The PAI theory argues that when influence is lost by a powerful state, as a token of a systemic zero-sum game, that loss will then result in a gain for a rival. Therefore, it is legitimate to postulate that the great powers wish to keep their acquired influence while trying to increase it when the influence of others is in jeopardy in another autocratic state in crisis. However, loss of influence can be prevented by the United States if, on the one hand, a friendly illiberal leader manages to hold on during an internal crisis; on the other hand, if he is unable to do so, the White House is able to transfer its acquired influence to the new ruler(s) of the regime.

The PAI intervening, condition, and dependent variables

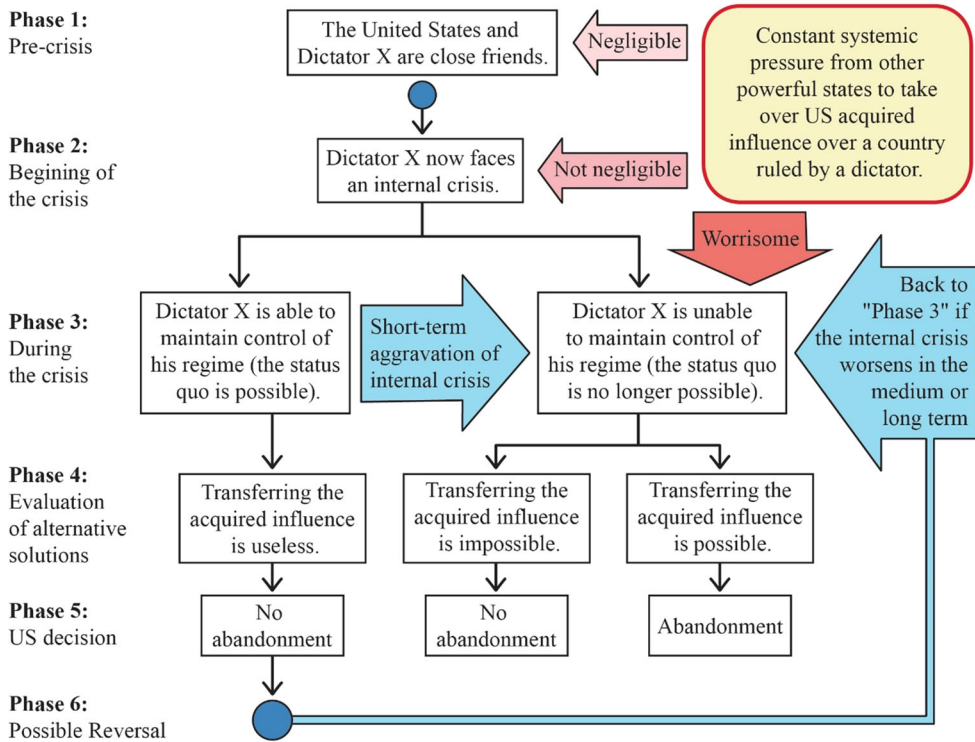
While it argues that systemic pressures for influence gain (independent variable) maintain causal primacy, the PAI argument is also built on three other interrelated variables: (1) an external intervening variable (the loss of internal control by a friendly dictator over his regime: yes or no?), (2) an external condition variable⁴ (the possibility for the United States to transfer its acquired influence to the new ruler(s) once its autocratic friend has lost control over his regime: yes or no?), and (3) an internal dependent variable (the US presidential decision to abandon a friendly tyrant: yes or no?).

Precision is key to correctly measuring qualitative variables. Therefore, the PAI argument must define the main concepts of its intervening, condition, and dependent variables with observable indicators. For the external intervening variable, *control loss* refers to the precise moment when the status quo is no longer possible because political leaders—in this case, dictators—alienate themselves from their winning coalition, without which they cannot remain in power. Coined by Bueno de Mesquita et al., “the winning coalition is a group that controls the essential features that constitute political power [...] and other instruments of power to keep the leader in office” (2005, pp. 7–8). Here, for the purposes of measurability and out of concern for parsimony, this article argues that dictatorships will be subject to control loss once their army and police officials begin turning on them. For the external conditional variable, *transfer of acquired influence* refers to the feasibility for the White House of quickly switching its acquired influence to the new ruler(s). More specifically, this study posits that the transfer of influence will be successful if three conditions are met: (1) if previous ratified treaties are honored by the new ruler(s), (2) if strong economic and military ties that existed before the beginning of the internal uprising are maintained, and (3) if there is a clear openness in the official declarations issued by the new ruler(s) to maintain good relations with the United States. In the case of the internal dependent variable, *U.S. presidential abandonment* refers to the moment when a US president decides to either officially or unofficially (1) ask for a dictator's immediate departure, (2) press for his replacement by either autocratic or elected successors, and (3) refuse him asylum on US soil after his or her fall. Below is a diagram summarizing the logic of the PAI:

³Rose summed up the struggle for influence gain in the following terms: “[S]tates respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment and as it falls their action and ambition will be scaled back accordingly. [...] [States] are likely to want more rather than less external influence, and pursue such influence to the extent that they are able to do so” (1998, p. 152).

⁴A condition variable is “a variable framing an antecedent condition. [...] In the hypothesis ‘Sunshine makes grass grow, but only if we get some rainfall,’ the amount of rainfall is a condition variable” (Van Evra, 1997, p. 11).

The PAI logic



RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses process tracing (Collier, 2011, p. 343), which enables the thread of decisions made in each of the three case studies to be compared. To do so, the study draws on a qualitative framework designed to compare the theoretical predictions with the series of decisions made by an administration in office during five stages of a crisis: 1: pre-stage crisis, 2: during the crisis, 3: evaluation phase, 4: the decision, and 5: the outcome. More specifically, for each case study, the chronology of the decision-making process at each stage will be compared to the theoretical predictions set out above. Furthermore, the level of analysis is presidential decision making, in which a bottom-up logic operates from the insights provided by the bureaucratic apparatus of foreign policy. These insights will be analyzed by drawing on official and unofficial declarations issued by concerned members of relevant administrations during the three crises selected for the purposes of this article. Our case selection includes three crises that triggered three presidential decisions relating to the abandonment or maintenance of an alliance between the United States and friendly dictators: (1) Eisenhower's abandonment of Batista in Cuba (1959), (2) H. W. Bush's continued support of Mobutu in Zaire (1990–1991), and (3) Obama's abandonment of Mubarak in Egypt (2011).

First, the sample was selected to be representative of the 45 identified crises that occurred in US-backed dictatorships between 1948 and 2012 and in which the White House was forced to assess and take a stance on the continuation of its support (Béliveau, 2020, pp. 38–42). Second, the three cases were chosen for the variations in their respective time spans and the temporal distance between them: a slow fall in the case of Batista (1956–1959) during the Cold War, an unsuccessful removal in the case of Mobutu (1990–1991) during the post–Cold War era, and a speedy revolution in the case of Mubarak (January and February 2011) during the Arab Spring. Third, since an uprising does not always lead to a revolution, it is also worth noting that the second crisis was selected to test that possibility. Fourth, to

gain more external validity, the selection of the cases is premised on a geographical difference between the Caribbean, Central Africa, and Northern Africa. It should be noted that the sample includes a bureaucratic variation between decision makers in Washington: two cases under Republican administrations (Eisenhower with Batista and H. W. Bush with Mobutu) and one under a Democratic administration (Obama with Mubarak). Finally, since the selected exogenous crises involved no direct American military intervention, this article assumes that US support or interference will remain constant across multiple cases.

EISENHOWER AND THE SLOW FALL OF BATISTA (1956–1959)

Pre-crisis stage

Despite not always holding the title of president, Batista was either *de jure* or *de facto* the “shot caller” in Cuba for almost 25 years, making him Cuba's longest-lasting friendly tyrant for Washington during the first half of the century. Batista's subservient relationship with Washington was best summed up by Spruille Braden, the ambassador to Cuba from 1942 to 1945: “We can ask for things and get them practically over the telephone [...] the American Ambassador here is in a completely unique position, and if I breathe out of one nostril harder than the other it may provoke a political crisis” (Schoultz, 2009, p. 33). In other words, Batista's long reign was a positive for the United States since he was seen as a fierce anti-communist and a benevolent advocate of US interests.

During the crisis

Batista's loss of control over his regime occurred gradually after Castro's return to Cuba in 1956. Conflagrations with the regime occurred in 1957 following the success of guerrilla operations such as those of January 16 in La Plata and May 28 in El Uvero, allowing Castro to enlist more soldiers. Even when the rebels were led by the army, such as during the attack on the presidential palace on March 13 or during the uprising at the Cienfuegos naval base on September 5, Batista was further weakened as a result of losing the support of the moderate majority. By late 1958, it was clear that the revolutionary movement had become uncontrollable. As noted in a cable issued from the US Consulate in Santiago on February 21, 1958: “Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement seemed to have grown from an annoying thorn in the side of the Batista Government to a slowly spreading cancerous tumor” (Office of the Historian, Doc. 18, p. 33). A telegram from Washington to the Cuban Embassy on March 12, 1958, clearly addressed the issue:

Department would appreciate soonest your estimate Batista regime's ability survive present crisis and for how long. Also need your best estimate whether military junta, mixed military-civilian groups, or individual might emerge as head of Government in event Batista abdicates or otherwise removed from scene. Especially important is role Castro would play in any changed political situation. Has he achieved sufficient personal prestige, if not respect, to be dominant factor in Cuban political scene if Batista removed? (Office of the Historian, Doc. 33, p. 56)

Despite the fact that he was losing ground, it is clear that until the summer of 1958, Batista's maintenance in power—that is, the status quo—was Washington's preference. In another telegram sent on June 16, 1958, the US Embassy in Cuba expressed concern that the arms embargo was harming Batista and suggested that it was preferable to help him rather than risk “losing” Cuba to a rival power:

"If the Cubans cannot get these planes from the United States, they will get them from another country" (Office of the Historian, Doc. 66, p. 110).

At that stage, the increased weight of the systemic pressure felt by the United States was clear to see, and their concern was wholly justified as Moscow was seeking to forge closer ties with the Cuban revolutionaries by supplying them with weapons via Czechoslovakia (Fursenko & Naftali, 1997, p. 12). However, Washington remained hopeful that Batista would be able to restore calm in Cuba. Ten days later, Roy Rubottom, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, sent this message to Robert Murphy, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs:

[T]here is increasing evidence that the Batista regime, through more restrictive controls on freedoms and increasing military and police repression, is becoming more disliked while, on the other hand, there is every likelihood the present Government, which has a record of friendly cooperation with the US, will continue in power and hold elections in November to establish a successor. (Office of the Historian, Doc. 68, p. 113)

Castro's stubborn guerrilla warfare, along with incessant student and trade union revolts, a long-running agricultural strike, and the growing defection movement within the army and the police finally caused Batista to lose control of his regime after three years of ongoing crises. The memorandum from the meeting of the White House National Security Council dated December 6, 1958, read as follows:

Mr. Dulles felt that the revolutionary situation in Cuba was rapidly becoming more critical. The Batista government was steadily losing ground in its struggle against Castro's rebels. Businesses were under serious threat and many services had been suspended. In short, it was becoming increasingly unlikely that Batista could regain control of the situation. (Office of the Historian, Doc. 171, pp. 279–280)

The result was that by the end of 1958, the United States found itself at a crossroads in its decision to either continue supporting or abandon its partnership with Batista.

Evaluation phase: Castro was the only real option

Despite Washington's official support for Batista, the Eisenhower administration had begun to doubt his ability to maintain power as early as 1957. As a result, Washington began to explore alternatives. The dispatch of a CIA mission led by Lyman B. Kirpatrick Jr. in Oriente the same year to gather information from Fidel Castro's relatives is indicative of a growing skepticism in the White House toward Batista's capacity to remain in power. The conclusion of the investigation was nevertheless positive about Castro, who was presented as a nationalist leader of bourgeois origins and an anti-imperialist rather than someone favorable to communist discourse (Fursenko & Naftali, 1997, p. 6). Notwithstanding Castro's arrival, the White House was already confident that it could remain on friendly terms with the new Cuban government. As indicated in a transcript of a document presented to various officers of the US Department of the Navy by Allan L. Reed, the Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, on December 17, 1958: "Whatever government emerged in Cuba, however, would attempt to maintain friendly relations with the United States." The document concluded that Castro was "aware of the strategic importance of the US Naval Base, Guantanamo, and of US desire to avoid political eruptions in its own 'backyard'" (Office of the Historian, Doc. 183, p. 297). At this point, the Eisenhower administration agreed to wipe the slate of Castro's history clean, which included an incident involving the kidnapping of 30 American soldiers a year earlier. In seeing the glass half full, on December 23, 1958, John Foster Dulles stated in a classified memorandum delivered to President Eisenhower that the Cuban leader's Communist propensity was overstated: "[T]here is insufficient evidence on which to base a charge that the rebels are communist-dominated" (Office of the Historian, Doc. 189, p. 305). Moreover, in front of a Senate

subcommittee in late December 1958, Roy Rubottom added: "There was no evidence of any organized Communist elements within the Castro movement or that Senor Castro himself was under Communist influence" (Congressional Record, Vol. 107, A2823–A2824). As a result, on the eve of Batista's departure, in a State Department conference, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John N. Irving II raised a question that summed up the US position at this point: "No matter how anti-Castro we might be, shouldn't we be careful not to completely alienate him?" (Office of the Historian, Doc. 201, p. 327).

Eisenhower's decision

Although Batista remained in Cuba until December 31, 1958, the White House had unofficially abandoned him on December 14. In his memoirs, Earl T. Smith, the then US ambassador to Havana, reportedly told Batista on that date that "[i]t is my unpleasant duty to inform the President of the Republic that the United States will no longer support the present Government of Cuba and that my government believes that the President is losing effective control" (Smith, 1962, p. 170). In line with predictions, following a congenial relationship with Batista lasting 25 years, the White House denied him political asylum, and the ousted dictator fled to the Dominican Republic on January 1, 1959. The very next day, Castro's troops entered Havana, sending a message to the world that the revolution had been successful. To ensure that the White House did not fall too far behind the changing of the guard in Cuba, Dulles advised President Eisenhower to speed up recognition of the new Cuban government. His exact words were:

On January 6, 1959, our embassy in Havana received a note from the [Cuban] Ministry of State that the provisional government has complete control of the Republic, the conditions for peace have returned to Cuba and all existing international commitments and agreements will be maintained. I believe that the declarations of intent of the new government have been made in good faith and that it is in our national interest to recognize without delay the provisional government of Cuba. The provisional government appears to be free of Communist influence and it would appear that it intends to establish friendly relations with the United States. I request your authorization to take the necessary steps to recognize the present Provisional Government of Cuba. (Office of the Historian, Doc. 217)

Although Castro was not the ideal option for the White House given his previous anti-imperialist rhetoric, the Eisenhower administration promptly recognized the new government primarily because Castro was considered a nationalist with strong popular support. A classified White House Staff note dated January 13, 1959, commented:

[T]here is no present firm indication that Castro is a Communist-sympathizer or that the Communists hold a dominant position in his organization. Castro seems to be nationalistic and somewhat socialistic; and although he has criticized alleged US support for Batista, he cannot be said to be personally hostile to the US. Whether this is through conviction or expediency remains to be seen. Castro says he wants only to return Cuba to the path of democracy. It is difficult to believe, however, that he will be satisfied with any political solution in Cuba which does not assign him a prominent position. (Office of the Historian, Doc. 224)

Determined to view matters in a positive light, three days later, Allen W. Dulles, the first director of the Central Intelligence Agency, made the following statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "We do not think that Castro himself has any Communist leanings. We do not believe

Castro is in the pay of or working for the Communists” (*New York Times*, 1982). Moreover, as noted in a telegram sent from the US Embassy dated April 14, 1959, the State Department was optimistic and believed that it could transfer US influence to Castro:

If on the other hand Castro remains in power and carries on his “revolution”, we will have many opportunities of discreetly influencing choice of courses of actions and of bringing him to a closer understanding of political and economic conditions to which he is subjected. I respectfully submit that some slight progress has already been made and I am convinced that Castro can recognize and be guided by facts. (Office of the Historian, Doc. 277, p. 457)

With historical hindsight, one could argue that this was wishful thinking, but while it may be true that the initial support granted to Castro was a risky bet, it was not—at this point—a lost cause. Furthermore, although the relationship between the Eisenhower administration and Castro was hardly love at first sight, it could hardly be said to have got off on the wrong foot either. It is important to recall in this regard that in March 1959, the *leader Maximo* was received with due honors at the White House by Richard Nixon, and as the Vice President put it in summing up his meeting with Castro: “My own appraisal of him as a man is somewhat mixed. [...] But because he has the power to lead to which I have referred, we have no choice but at least to try to orient him in the right direction” (Office of the Historian, Doc. 287). Without going so far as to use the term “transfer of influence,” Philip Bonsal, the acting US ambassador in Cuba from February 1959 to October 1960, made the following observation in his memoirs:

[The State Department] accepted the Cuban reality as it then appeared and were determined to develop productive relations with the government. [...] US officials had no enthusiasm for Castro, only a determination to be in the best possible position to deal effectively on behalf of American interests with the new ruler whose people appeared united in idolizing him. (Bonsal, 1971, p. 22)

Here, both the Eisenhower administration's initial willingness to side with Castro and the administration's quick recognition of his newly formed government (once it was clear that Castro would assume the crown after Batista's debacle) cohere with the PAI's third hypothesis. Although cordiality between the two governments was short-lived, Washington remained consistent in attempting to maintain influence over Castro, as they had previously with Batista. The conditions for further financial assistance to Castro's regime reported in a diplomatic cable written in May 1959 by Daniel Braddock, Counsellor at the US Embassy in Havana, are also compatible with the indicators for the PAI described above: “Castro [must] (1) cease his anti-American rhetoric, (2) curb growing Communist infiltration of the government, and (3) modify his radical socio-economic measures, such as a highly unrealistic rent control law” (Falcoff, 1994, p. 117).

In short, the chronology of the decisions taken by the Eisenhower administration during this crisis is consistent with the theoretical predictions of the PAI argument since, first, Washington supported Batista until it became clear that he had lost control; second, it welcomed Castro's arrival in power while under the assumption that the White House could transfer its influence to him. It should be said that although the White House responded in accordance with the PAI argument toward Batista's removal and Castro's rise to power, the United States has not always been infallible in picking winners during exogenous crises.

BUSH FAVORS CONCILIATION WITH MOBUTU

Pre-crisis stage

With the onset of the Cold War and the prospect of Congo's independence in the 1950s, Washington's interest in the former Belgian colony grew. Moreover, the appointment in 1960 of Patrice Lumumba as

prime minister—whom many in the West believed to be the target of courting by the USSR—did not augur well for the White House (ADST, Interview with Rossi, 2007, p. 12). The United States nevertheless “won” Congo in the mid-sixties with their “Mobutu ticket.” As President John F. Kennedy put it to Mobutu in May 1963: “General, if it hadn't been for you the whole thing would have collapsed and the Communists would have taken over” (Kelly, 1993, p. 247). From then on, the stage was set for a long-lasting friendship between Mobutu and Washington. Victor Comras, a US diplomat in Kinshasa in the late 1960s, summed up the friendship with the dictator during the Cold War in the following terms: “Mobutu was our perfect ally. This was a very good period in the relations between Mobutu and the United States” (ADST, Interview with Comras, 2002, p. 21).

In the ensuing decades, the temporal elasticity of Mobutu's tenure was a blessing for Washington given the dictator's support on a wide range of regional stability issues. Brandon Grove, the US ambassador to Zaire from 1983 to 1987, later said in an interview that “[Mobutu] had become one of our strongest allies in Africa. [...] He was viewed by us as the powerful and enduring leader of a large country surrounded by nine smaller countries which he helped keep in the Western orbit” (ADST, Interview with Grove, 2012a, p. 558). In August 1989, President George H. W. Bush also praised the friendship when he welcomed Mobutu to the White House:

One of Africa's most experienced statesmen, President Mobutu has worked with six Presidents. And together, they—and we—have sought to bring to Zaire, and to all Africa, real economic and social progress and to pursue Africa's true independence, security, stability as the bases for that development. [...] And we look forward to continued cooperation between our countries. Mr. President, the strong ties of friendship between Zaire and the United States endure and prosper. And we are proud and very, very pleased to have you [Mobutu] with us today. (Schraeder, 1994, p. 51)

During the crisis

After almost three decades in power, Mobutu's regime was beginning to show signs of fatigue in the early 1990s, as William C. Harrop, the acting US ambassador to Zaire from 1988 to 1991, pointed out:

The domestic political situation [in Zaire] was unraveling rapidly. There were demands for democracy. He was under a great deal of pressure as the economy came apart, particularly after 1990, with the breakdown in Eastern Europe, when there was a call for democracy everywhere. It was clear that the “Cold War” elements in our relationship were going to become much less important. The winds of democracy were sweeping across the whole world. He had to respond to them—had to feel them. Things became very, very tense in Zaire after 1990. (ADST, Interview with Harrop, 1993, p. 128)

In fact, Mobutu's troubles began in May 1990 when a group of students from the University of Lubumbashi publicly expressed their exasperation at Mobutu's deliberate procrastination in announcing the date of an election, which he had previously promised. Mobutu's response through his Presidential Special Division corps resulted in the death of dozens of protesters. The message was now clear: Mobutu would do anything to remain in power.

Moreover, the exasperation with Mobutu was not limited to students, and, by late September 1991, it could be felt even among members of the Zairian Army. On September 23 and 24, unpaid soldiers supported by a mob of rioters looted the capital. Naturally, Washington took note and, as Melissa Wells, the former US ambassador to Zaire, later put it in commenting on the uprising:

Now, going back to the troubles of '91, September '91, what happened was that with all the economic problems in Zaire, the army was very irregularly paid. They were late in

being paid or only some of them were paid, but early in the morning on a day in September '91, we heard that a unit had mutinied out by the airport and that they had ransacked the international airport at Kinshasa, and that they were moving down the main road towards Kinshasa and, of course, the population was just joining them and looting everything in sight and burning cars and so forth. (ADST, Interview with Melissa Wells, 2012b, p. 602)

However, Mobutu had not yet thrown in the towel. First, to rebuild his army's loyalty, he relied on a financial board to distribute significant funds, all with the aim of paying the disgruntled soldiers (Kelly, 1993, p. 253). Second, to mitigate internal and external criticism of the lack of democracy in his regime, Mobutu agreed to reinstate a multiparty system. In giving hope that the democratization of Zaire had begun while retaining exclusive control over military power and political stability, Mobutu alone truly wielded the power to restore order during these troubled times.

Evaluation phase: Choosing Mobutu or chaos...

To ensure that he was the only credible option on the table in Zaire, both in the eyes of his people and in the eyes of foreign powers, Mobutu silenced all forms of dissent and expelled credible political opponents through skillful maneuvers.⁵ From the perspective of the White House, candidates who could potentially replace the “leopard of Zaire” and that would maintain a smooth transfer of influence remained scarce in 1990 and 1991. It should be noted that after allowing the multiparty system to be reestablished, the Mobutu regime had seen no fewer than 200 political parties swarming, raising concerns in Washington about the future stability of a regime without Mobutu in power. The words of US Ambassador Harrop, who was in Kinshasa at the time, speak volumes:

The feeling in Washington—and this was finally articulated fairly clearly by the National Security Council and people near the top levels of the Department of State—was that you don't lightly work to get rid of a leader without knowing who's going to replace him, particularly in a volatile situation. Mobutu was the devil that we knew, and so forth. Washington would challenge me to specify what would come after Mobutu. My answer would be that there were several possible formulations and several competent leaders who could step in. I could not predict which would prevail. I didn't know. (ADST, Interview with Harrop, 1993, p. 129)

Speaking anonymously, a member of the State Department's African Bureau noted: “Regardless of the fact that we are no longer faced with a communist threat, the destabilization of Zaire—which borders nine other African countries—could have a tremendously negative impact on regional stability. [...] Zaire without Mobutu could entail a Zaire engulfed by chaos” (Schraeder, 1994, p. 107). Because there was no firm basis for determining what would happen without Mobutu in the picture, the Bush administration ultimately opted to not make any moves.

Bush's decision

The strategy adopted by the George H. W. Bush administration during the beginning of the end for Mobutu can best be summarized as silent consent. Thanks to the firm grip he retained over his army

⁵As Ambassador Brandon H. Grove, who served in Zaire from 1984 to 1987, put it: “At that time, no one in Zaire could directly challenge Mobutu. Like N'guza Karl-i-Bond, opposition leaders such as Etienne Tshisekedi and members of his UDPS party were living in exile in Belgium. Our embassy in Brussels maintained basic contact with these personalities, arousing the suspicion and anger of Mobutu” (ADST, Interview with Brandon Grove, 2012a, p. 559).

through ethnic nepotism and financial payoffs, Mobutu was able, in early 1990, to maintain the support of the US administration. Washington's official position was stated on November 6, 1991, by Herman J. Cohen, the State Department's Delegate for African Affairs: "We feel that he still has a role to play in Zaire until their election takes place" (Kelly, 1993, p. 254).⁶ Since Mobutu was able to manage his domestic troubles through 1990–1991, despite gentle pressure from the United States for a more democratic Zaire, Americans were ultimately unwilling to sabotage their friendship with him by officially withdrawing their support. Moreover, as Ambassador Wells put it in summing up America's wait-and-see strategy toward Zaire in 1991: "You Zaireans have to develop a transition plan which includes President Mobutu. Nobody is going to take him out. I'm not going to carry him out. He's a bit overweight. [Come up with] a transition plan which includes President Mobutu and we will support you" (ADST, Interview with Melissa F. Wells, 2012b, p. 601). As my first hypothesis argues, as long as a friendly tyrant maintains domestic control—which Mobutu managed to do in 1990–1991—the United States will (and did) remain allied to Mobutu until 1997. Further evidence of that undying support is provided by the fact that in September 1992, having criticized Mobutu in an official statement by stating that "we hold him responsible, and we've said that he must effectively give up power to someone else, preferably from the opposition, so that a transition to a free and fair election can take place." Herman J. Cohen, the then Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs, retracted the statement the very next day by publicly announcing that "[w]e are not asking him to leave. We feel that he should remain President [Mobutu] so that he can control the military forces until there's an election" (Kelly, 1993, p. 254). Despite being shaken by the upheavals of 1990 and 1991, Mobutu nevertheless retained America's support, with the mantra "Mobutu or chaos" (Schatzberg, 1991, p. 15) still echoing loudly in Washington. Subsequently, the Clinton administration's strategy during the internal uprising in Zaire in the early 1990s was to ultimately promote the status quo and remains consistent with the PAI's first hypothesis.

Therefore, despite the Clinton administration publicly stating that it wanted to distance itself from Mobutu given his human rights abuses, its pious intent did not result in actual measures stigmatizing the Zairian leader. The differences between the diplomatic positions toward Mobutu adopted by the H. W. Bush and Clinton administrations were purely rhetorical, with US support continuing until Mobutu completely lost control of his regime in 1997. Here, it should be noted that in accordance with the PAI argument, while Washington was seeking to distance itself from Mobutu during his last years in power, Paris was doing exactly the opposite in seeking to forge closer ties with him. France did so by welcoming him for medical treatment in 1993, by allowing him to make use of his luxurious house on the French Riviera in 1996, and by covertly giving him \$5 million for defense purposes in 1997 (Bonner, 1997). Ultimately, this rivalry between longtime allies—the United States and France—shows that there is no such thing as genuine friendship in the systemic struggle for influence gain.

OBAMA ABANDONS MUBARAK AFTER A QUICK FALL

Pre-crisis stage

When Hosni Mubarak came to power immediately after Anwar el Sadat's assassination in 1981, he quickly became one of Washington's closest friendly tyrants in the Arab world. From that point on, the

⁶In less diplomatic terms, Harrop summed up the Bush administration's continuing support for Mobutu as follows: "During the last year and a half of my time there I had become quite frustrated because I could not get much of an ear in Washington for repeated recommendations that we disassociate ourselves from this man. I was convinced that it was not in our interest any longer to be so closely identified with him. I thought that we should not give him the kind of American support he had been getting. He used his American connection with great skill in domestic politics. The view he cultivated was, 'You can't dispense with Mobutu. He's the American man.' I wanted to get that view set aside but could not get cooperation at home for all of the reasons that I mentioned. Plus, I guess, another argument that was most commonly voiced in Washington. For instance, I put into our 'Goals and Objectives Plan' for the following year, 1991: Primary Objective—Gradual disassociation from Mobutu. This came back crossed out, with the comment, 'We can't do that, be serious. It's out of the question'" (ADST, Interview with Harrop, 1993, p. 129).

deal was simple: in exchange for US aid amounting to a quarter of Egypt's annual defense budget, Mubarak contained Islamist elements within his regime while maintaining cordial relations with Israel. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the democratization of Egypt was not foreseen in Washington's plans and, as Teresita C. Schaffer, the former Director of the Office of Egyptian Affairs, put it in an interview: "We talked about democratic development in Egypt. We didn't push it very hard; we didn't want to upset Mubarak" (ADST, Interview with Schaffer, 1998, p. 98). Furthermore, despite his refusal to send troops to Iraq in 2003, Mubarak remained a cherished friend of Washington and, as Michael W. Coulter, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Political-Military Affairs Bureau, put it in 2006:

Our security partnership with Egypt is one of the pillars of our foreign policy, [...], and our military assistance is a key element of that strategic partnership, totalling \$1.3 billion in FMF and approximately \$1.2 million in IMET funds each year. The United States military assistance has helped to modernize the Egyptian military, creating a defense force that is capable of supporting US security goals in the region. (DeYoung, 2011)

Remaining almost 30 years in office, Mubarak aged while in power. Despite this, by the end of the 2000s, he continued to maintain a strong grip over Egypt, retaining total control over its military and political institutions. From Washington's perspective, before the beginning of the Arab Spring, Mubarak's possible death or his succession plan was more of a concern than his potential fall as a result of an uprising. In May 2009, the ambassador to Egypt, Margaret Scobey, sent the following message to Washington:

The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2011, and if Mubarak is still alive it is likely he will run again, and, inevitably, win. When asked about succession, he states that the process will follow the Egyptian constitution. Despite incessant whispered discussions, no one in Egypt has any certainty about who will eventually succeed Mubarak nor under what circumstances. (Khalifa, 2015, p. 9)

In sum, by the end of 2010, no one other than Mubarak himself knew what would follow in the wake of his tenure.

During the crisis

The Arab Spring started in Egypt with the huge protest known as the "Day of Wrath" on January 25, 2011. Following this first day of crisis, the White House responded with caution. Addressing the crisis, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued official statements that continued to support Mubarak: "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people" (Khalifa, 2015, p. 35). In a televised interview on January 27, Vice President Joe Biden's comment reflected his administration's unease with the rapid fall of an old friend such as Mubarak:

Look, Mubarak has been an ally of ours in a number of things and he's been very responsible on, relative to geopolitical interests in the region: Middle East peace efforts, the actions Egypt has taken relative to normalizing the relationship with—with Israel... I would not refer to him as a dictator. (PBS Newshour, 2011)

However, by January 29, 2011, the problem for Mubarak was not only that he was unable to discourage protesters using his own methods. His army was also starting to refrain from using force to quell the protests. With Mubarak having publicly lost the support of his own army, the Obama administration was walking on even thinner ice. In response, Obama urged Mubarak to adopt deep

reforms, but stopped short of pushing him to resign. As Hillary Clinton later recalled in a warning to Obama in a private discussion: “If Mubarak falls, it all may work out fine in 25 years, but I think the period between now and then will be quite rocky for the Egyptian people, for the region, and for us” (Clinton, 2015, p. 285). Once Mubarak had publicly lost the support of his army, the Obama administration was forced to rapidly evaluate a potential option with regard to the PAI following his possible removal.

Evaluation phase: The Egyptian army was the key player

Faced with the imminent fall of Mubarak while stopping short of officially abandoning him, Washington turned its attention to the potential contenders for succeeding Mubarak. On the one hand, the White House had begun discussions with new Vice President Omar Suleiman on January 29 to gauge a relationship that Washington sensed would begin shortly (Landler et al., 2011). On the other hand, to avoid alienating the opposition, 2 days later Ambassador Margaret Scobey also spoke to one of the longtime leaders of the anti-Mubarak movement, Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohamed El-Baradei. The many people who felt that these discussions were an indication that Obama was publicly planning for the post-Mubarak era were ultimately proven correct in their assumptions. The main strategy at that point was nevertheless to maintain close contact with Egyptian army generals, with the understanding and belief in Washington that the Egyptian army would remain in command after Mubarak had stepped down. Since the Egyptian army was still respected by most of the protesters and highly dependent on US funding, a typical Egyptian military takeover (as had happened previously after Nasser and el Sadat) had the potential to restore order without jeopardizing Washington's influence in Egypt. Since Egypt's most senior army officials had been the key players in the previous crisis, Washington set out to cement an alliance with them. On January 30, Captain John Kirby summed up the cordial discussions held between the Secretary of Defense and Sami Enan in the following terms: “Gen. Enan gave the chairman an update on events in his country, and the chairman expressed his appreciation for the continued professionalism of the Egyptian military [and] both men reaffirmed their desire to see the partnership between our two militaries continue, and they pledged to stay in touch” (Cloud, 2011). Moreover, in a bid to strengthen existing ties with the highest Egyptian military authorities, between January 27 and February 3, three telephone discussions took place between Robert Gates and the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Hussein Tantawi, in an effort to reaffirm their ongoing collaboration (Mulrine, 2011) despite Mubarak's loss of internal control.

Obama's decision

Despite the gradual hardening of the Obama administration's official rhetoric toward Mubarak, the octogenarian continued to turn a deaf ear. In an effort to make him see reason, the abandonment of Mubarak was officially pronounced by Obama on February 1 during a televised speech in which he announced the following: “What is clear, and what I indicated tonight to President Mubarak is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful and it must begin now” (Koring, 2011). On February 2, a senior Obama administration official who wished to remain anonymous told a *Washington Post* reporter that “[t]he way the military conducts itself over the coming days is going to be critical in determining whether this situation can be brought under control” (DeYoung, 2011). The fact that it was not yet clear which military leader would replace Mubarak was of little importance at this stage since the White House knew that the next Egyptian president—whoever that might be—would need US financial assistance to get the country back on track. Regardless, as had been true before Mubarak's fall, US financial assistance accounted for around 80% of Egypt's annual defense budget. Therefore, Washington knew that Egypt's new government would still need the funds. As one Obama administration official put it on February 3 in response to the questions he was constantly

hearing from his Egyptian counterparts: “[W]here is the United States in this process [?], and where are we going to be [?]... We are a very important relationship to them” (Idem). The terms of US leverage over Egypt were clearly stated by Robert Gibbs. Speaking on behalf of his administration, he emphasized during the same week that US financial assistance would not be provided unconditionally to the next Egyptian government: “We will evaluate the actions of the government of Egypt in making and reviewing decisions about aid” (Idem). Having been left completely isolated after being abandoned by both his army and Washington, Mubarak abdicated and left Cairo on February 11. Because he was not unanimously supported by high-ranking officers in the Egyptian army, Vice President Suleiman soon lost his new presidential powers and, as foreseen by the White House, Tantawi inherited the title. Just as the Clinton administration had answered Suharto's forced departure in 1998, by remaining confident in ongoing US ascendancy—which would allow for a smooth transfer of US acquired influence, in line with my third hypothesis—over the next post-Mubarak government in Cairo, the Obama administration wanted Egypt to first pacify itself under the aegis of the military before then pressing them to become fully democratic. Although the situation was a temporary fix for the White House, the key point for Washington was that the transfer of influence had been successfully achieved, as Tantawi publicly put it: “The State is committed to implementing all international treaties and covenants to which it is party” (*New York Times*, 2011).

During the 16 months that Tantawi held the presidential office, despite some tensions on occasion, he kept his promise to hold free elections, while the Obama administration granted financial assistance to Egypt, as it had done the previous year. At the elections, although it was clear that the outcome had never been the White House's first choice (since it had originally favored Mohamed El-Baradei), the Muslim Brotherhood party ultimately prevailed. However, confident that the leverage provided by their financial assistance and their close ongoing relationship with high-ranking Egyptian army generals would guarantee the transfer of their influence after the elections, US officials and diplomats opted for a strategy in which “the United States supported only the democratic process, regardless of the election's result” (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

CONCLUSION

By shedding new light on the concept of influence, the predictions of the PAI argument were found to be empirically consistent with the chronology of US decisions relating to the support for or abandonment of friendly tyrants during three key crises. First, after having supported Batista from 1956 to 1957, the Eisenhower administration officially abandoned him and quickly recognized Castro's takeover to transfer US influence in Havana. Second, because Mobutu was able to stifle insurrections in 1990 and 1991, he was able to retain the support of the Bush administration because the long stretch of his dictatorship was the best option for the United States to preserve its influence in Zaire. Third, as Mubarak rapidly lost control in Egypt after January 25, 2011, the Obama administration promptly dropped him to transfer its support to General Tantawi, seen as the best alternative for preserving Washington's 30-year influence in Cairo. Given its intervening variable “loss of internal control,” which can happen rapidly or slowly (or not at all), the PAI's explanatory validity works on either short-, medium-, or long-term crises that lead to a successful revolution but can also still occur in a restrained uprising. For reasons of space, I was not able to dig deeper into the potential secondary cases found within the three main case studies, but it should be noted that US decisions in these possible within-case analyses (King et al., 1994) nevertheless appear to validate the PAI argument. Among them, the view that Lumumba was perceived to be under Soviet influence and the immediate support provided to Mobutu in 1965 are consistent with the arguments set out in this study. In addition, Mobutu's reestablished control in 1991 to some degree affected both variables of the PAI argument. It quelled instability and prevented the emergence of a viable opposition alternative. Besides that, the fact that the Clinton administration ultimately abandoned him in 1997 also corroborates my third hypothesis since the abandonment was only recognized once the debacle in

Zaire became obvious and only after Laurent-Désiré Kabila emerged as the potential new US partner capable of restoring peace in Zaire. Finally, in Egypt, the positive reception given to Mubarak in 1981 and to Morsi in 2012 is consistent with my predictions since Washington believed that their rise to power would allow for the preservation of US influence in Cairo. In addition, this study shows that a causal bridge between systemic and domestic-level variables can provide a better explanation for variations in US foreign policy toward friendly dictators in trouble. Furthermore, by including in its theoretical model an intervening variable and a conditional variable of an *exogenous domestic* type, the PAI model opens a promising new avenue for future research. It should also be noted that with causal primacy given to the systemic pressure for influence gain, the argument was also able to extend beyond the particularities of all three of the exogenous crises examined in this article regardless of their respective differences in terms of time span, geographical location, the polarity of the systemic conjuncture, and the political party in power in Washington.

In addition, once seen as a stable enabler on both systemic and regional levels, the weight of influence issues in the decision-making calculus would also apply to other powers competing with the United States. Although these would require further investigations well beyond the scope of this article, a number of empirical examples can be provided in which the PAI argument appears to have the explanatory power to account for the behavior of powerful states toward friendly dictators in trouble. First, China abandoned its longtime friend Robert Mugabe after his forced departure and welcomed the arrival of the obliging Emmerson Mnangagwa in 2017. Second, Russia abandoned Omar el-Bashir in 2019 when he was toppled in 2019 by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the new Sudanese leader who was prone to maintaining friendly relations with Moscow. Third, the uprising that took place in 2019 in Algeria against Abdelaziz Bouteflika prompted the Quai d'Orsay to repudiate its long-standing friend once it became clear that Ahmed Gaid Salah would be taking command without dismissing France's influence in Algeria. In the zero-sum game of acquisition, retention, or loss of influence, the only rule for states capable of exercising it is that there are no rules. Thus, if powerful states are subjected to the same systemic pressures faced by Washington in external crises, the results of this investigation indicate that their behavior will also reflect the PAI logic. This observation paves the way for further research that could explore the external validity of the PAI argument outside the realm of US foreign policy.

In a broader sense, whether because of *raison d'état* or more broadly because of human nature, tomorrow's world will favor powerful states that nurture close diplomatic relations with sometimes contested dictatorships. In other words, it is unlikely that great powers will quench their thirst for influence, and since it is a fact that democracy has globally regressed over the last 16 years (Freedom House, 2022), the relevance of the argument developed in this study should continue long after these concluding lines.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Victor A. Béliveau, upon reasonable request.

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