# INTERVENCIÓN MILITAR DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS EN CENTROAMÉRICA Y EL CARIBE: UNA PERSPECTIVA SOCIO-VOLUNTARISTA

## UNITED STATES MILITARY INTERVENTION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: A SOCIO-VOLUNTARISTIC PERSPECTIVE [1]

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**Resumen**: ¿Por qué las intervenciones militares extranjeras son efectivas para establecer la estabilidad política en algunos casos pero no en otros? El presente estudio responde a la pregunta a través de un análisis histórico comparativo examinando nueve casos de intervención militar de Estados Unidos en Centroamérica y el Caribe: Panamá (1903-1925), Cuba (1906-1922), Nicaragua (1909-1933), República Dominicana (1912-1924), Haití (1915-1934), República Dominicana (1965-1966), Granada (1983-1985), Panamá (1989-1994) y Haití (1994-1997). El estudio propone una teoría holística de la estabilización política a través de la intervención militar extranjera que toma en consideración tanto las precondiciones sociales en el estado objetivo como los factores voluntaristas pertinentes a la potencia interventora, uniendo así enfoques divergentes de los campos de la Política Comparada y las Relaciones Internacionales, respectivamente. El estudio encuentra que la intervención militar extranjera es más eficaz para establecer la estabilidad política en los estados objetivo que experimentan un proceso de construcción nacional antes de la intervención y en los estados objetivo donde el régimen posterior a la intervención no es tan de bajo poder como para ser incapaz de realizar las funciones políticas que la nación o un poder tan alto espera de él que reprima a amplios sectores de la

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sociedad que desempeñan un papel influyente en la nación. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones importantes tanto para la comunidad académica, que puede ampliar esta línea de investigación aplicando la teoría socio-voluntarista a otros casos de intervención militar extranjera, como para los círculos de formulación de políticas exteriores, que pueden inclinarse a reconsiderar no sólo cómo se realizan las intervenciones. sino también dónde y cuándo es más probable que sean eficaces para establecer la estabilidad política.

**Abstract**: Why are foreign military interventions effective in establishing political stability in some cases but not in others? The present study answers the question through comparative historical analysis by examining nine cases of United States military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean: Panama (1903-1925), Cuba (1906-1922), Nicaragua (1909-1933), Dominican Republic (1912-1924), Haiti (1915-1934), Dominican Republic (1965-1966), Grenada (1983-1985), Panama (1989-1994), and Haiti (1994-1997). The study proposes a holistic theory of political stabilization through foreign military intervention that takes into consideration both social preconditions in the target state as well as voluntaristic factors pertinent to the intervening power, thus bridging divergent approaches from the fields of Comparative Politics and International Relations, respectively. The study finds that foreign military intervention is more effective in establishing political stability in target states that experience a process of nation-building before the intervention and in target states where the post-intervention regime is neither so low-power that it is incapable of performing the political functions expected of it by the nation or so high-power that it represses broad sectors of society that play an influential role in the nation. These findings have important implications for both the scholarly community, which may expand this line of research by applying the socio-voluntaristic theory to other cases of foreign military intervention, as well as foreign policymaking circles, which may be inclined to reconsider not only how interventions are to be conducted but also where and when they are most likely to be effective in establishing political stability.

# 1. Introduction

Writing at the climax of the Cold War, Hans Morgenthau (1967) observed the historical prevalence of military intervention as an instrument of foreign policy. "From the time of the ancient Greeks," he noted, "some states have found it advantageous to intervene in the affairs of other states on behalf of their own interests against the latters' will. Other states, in view of their interests, have opposed such interventions and have intervened on behalf of theirs" (425). Since the end of the Cold War, the use of foreign military intervention has undergone several challenges. On normative grounds (Chomsky, 2016), as well as with respect to international law (Bellamy, 2008), foreign military intervention has been criticized as a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the target state. On empirical grounds, critics have

questioned the effectiveness of foreign military intervention in achieving the intervening power's long-term objectives of establishing political stability in the target state. Though normative concerns should not be dismissed, the fact that foreign military intervention continues to be employed by powerful states despite controversy surrounding its practicality makes further investigation into its effects a priority for scholars and foreign policymakers alike.

The controversy surrounding the practicality of foreign military intervention is made evident by observing the puzzling variation in the United States' record of political stabilization through military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. During its first wave of military interventions in the early 20th century, the United States failed to establish stable regimes in Panama, Nicaragua, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti as all five states promptly returned to political instability after the withdrawal of intervening forces. However, the second wave of military interventions conducted in the late 20th century succeeded in establishing political stability in Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Grenada that has been maintained until the present day. Haiti, however, remains an outlier in which both waves of intervention failed to establish political stability. Given this variation, why are foreign military interventions effective in establishing political stability in some cases but not in others?

The present study aims to address the research question by combining approaches from both Comparative Politics and International Relations scholarship into a holistic theory of political stabilization through foreign military intervention. Existing hypotheses that tend to emphasize structural and institutional sources of political stability in the target state are commonly associated with the field of Comparative Politics and include claims that parliamentary regimes are more stable than presidential ones (Przeworski *et al.*, 1996), previous experience with democracy determines future political stability (Dobbins *et al.*, 2003), and recently independent states are more likely to return to civil war (Levy & Thompson, 2010). Instead, the present study draws on theories of state formation to propose a social hypothesis that identifies nation-building in the target state as a necessary pre-condition for effective political stabilization through foreign military intervention (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Wendt, 1999). Hypothesis 1 of the present study thus states that there exists a positive linear relationship between pre-intervention nation-building and political stability. The study finds that, as demonstrated by the failure of the United States to establish political stability in Central America and the Caribbean during its first wave of military interventions, the experience of nation-building is a necessary pre-condition for a society to legitimize the rule of a common political order.

Meanwhile, alternative hypotheses commonly ascribed to the field of International Relations tend to be more voluntaristic in that they examine variables pertinent to the actions of the intervening power in determining the effectiveness of establishing political stability through foreign military intervention. Such hypotheses argue that multilateral interventions (Pei & Kasper, 2003; Shashenkov, 1994), long military

occupations (Bellin, 2004; Dobbins *et al.*, 2003; Pei *et al.*, 2004), and efforts to create indigenous police forces (Chivvis & Davis, 2011; Perito, 2008) are positively associated with political stability in the target state. The present study, however, draws on theories of regime strength and legitimacy to propose a voluntaristic hypothesis that identifies the level of power that the foreign military intervention bestows upon the regime in the target state as a determinant of long-term political stability (Andersen *et al.*, 2014; Burnell, 2006; Fjelde & de Soysa, 2009). Therefore, hypothesis 2 of the present study states that there exists a curvilinear relationship between post-intervention regime power and political stability. Once again, the failure of the first wave of United States military interventions to establish political stability in Central America and the Caribbean shows that, in order to maintain stability, the regime installed in the target state through intervention can be neither so weak that it is incapable of performing the political functions expected of it by the nation nor so strong that it represses broad sectors of society that play an influential role in the nation.

Though holistic approaches to theory-building have their precedents in political science (Brownlee, 2007; Stinchcombe, 1965), the socio-voluntaristic perspective proposed in this study has broad implications for both the scholarly community engaged in research on military intervention as well as foreign policymaking circles faced with the dilemmas of conducting such interventions. For the former, it reveals how the strengths of distinct research traditions can be combined to address questions of perennial interest in novel ways. For the latter, it urges a reconsideration not only of how foreign military interventions should be conducted to establish political stability, but also where and when political stabilization through foreign military intervention is even possible given the social pre-conditions of the target state. Before addressing these implications in greater detail, however, the study first proceeds with an outline of its theoretical framework in the context of the extant literature before presenting an overview of its methodology and research design. The following section of the study reveals its empirical findings, and the study concludes by further addressing its implications as well as suggesting avenues for future research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Despite drawing on two distinct research traditions to investigate why foreign military interventions are effective in establishing political stability in some cases but not in others, this study nevertheless positions itself firmly within what Pickering and Mitchell (2018) identify as the literature on the outcomes of intervention. The authors' comprehensive review of existing empirical knowledge on the topic of foreign military intervention divides the extant literature into the study of causes and the study of outcomes. Like the study of causes of interstate conflict more generally, the study of causes of foreign military intervention has been approached from three different levels of analysis: domestic (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 1999; Uzonyi *et al.*, 2012), interstate (Schram, 2021; Wiegand *et al.*, 2021), and systemic (Abramson & Carter, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2001). Like the study of causes, the study of outcomes of

interstate conflict generally and foreign military intervention specifically has also been approached from three different directions: democratization (Dobbins *et al.*, 2007; Pei *et al.*, 2004), human rights (Carnegie & Mikulaschek, 2020; Lyall, 2019), and civil conflict (Duursma, 2020; Peksen & Lounsbery, 2012).

Although this study of how foreign military intervention affects political stability inevitably takes into consideration the causes of intervention, its aim is to make an original contribution to the literature on outcomes. In doing so, this study understands political stability to be theoretically distinct from democratization, human rights, and civil conflict. Firstly, although democratization can represent one potential path towards political stability, the democratization literature is not generalizable to authoritarian interventions, which also aim to establish political stability in the target states albeit by installing nondemocratic regimes (Baev, 1997; Huntington, 1965; Lepingwell, 1994). Secondly, the literature on human rights is limited to examining instances of genocide or ethnic violence, whose absence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the establishment of political stability, as operationalized in greater detail in the subsequent section on methodology (Eli Margolis, 2010; Hurwitz, 1973). Thirdly, while civil conflicts are oftentimes related to political stability, the literature on civil conflict is strictly focused on the effects that foreign military intervention has on domestic warfare in the target state rather than on other indicators of political stability like regime continuity (Watts *et al.*, 2021).

Following a realist interpretation of United States foreign policy, the present study assumes that the primary political objective of United States military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean has historically been to establish stable regimes that are conducive to its national interests. During the Cold War, the United States covertly supported the destabilization of politically unfavorable regimes in order to replace them with favorable ones. Examples of such instances include the CIA's tacit support for the 1954 coup against Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala and the 1973 coup against Salvador Allende in Chile, two leftist presidents who were subsequently replaced by right-wing authoritarian regimes. Although this realist approach to foreign policy analysis is not limited to the Cold War period, it was perhaps best captured in the words of President John F. Kennedy following the assassination of the Dominican Republic's right-wing dictator, Rafael Trujillo, in 1961. Upon hearing news of the assassination and the political instability that ensued, Kennedy concluded that "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 for the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure we can avoid the third" (Yates, 2015, 14).

## 2.1 Existing Explanations of Political Stabilization Through Foreign Military Intervention

The extant literature on political stability as an outcome of foreign military intervention has produced several structural and institutional hypotheses. While Przeworski *et al.*'s (1996) argument

that parliamentary regimes are more stable than presidential ones is commonly echoed in the literature on foreign military intervention, the empirical record illustrates why it is theoretically fallacious to conflate outcomes of democratization with outcomes of political stability. Although the Australian military intervention in the Solomon Islands attempted to bolster the latter's democratic parliamentary regime, the Solomon Islands promptly returned to political instability shortly after the Australian withdrawal, while the Russian military intervention in support of Tajikistan's nondemocratic presidential regime produced lasting political stability. However, assuming that democratization is indeed intended to be the specific outcome of foreign military intervention, rather than political stability more broadly, Dobbins *et al.* (2003) suggest that the target state's previous experience with democracy is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of foreign military intervention in either maintaining or re-establishing it. While this argument may explain the United States' failure to democratize Afghanistan through military intervention, it nevertheless cannot explain the crucial case of Japan, where United States intervention established one of the world's most stable democracies in a target state with very limited prior democratic experience. Finally, Levy and Thompson (2010) observe that recently independent states are more likely to return to civil war, thus posing an obstacle to interventions aimed at establishing political stability. The Chinese intervention in Vietnam, however, is just one example of a case in which foreign military intervention established political stability in a recently decolonized, war-torn target state.

Alternatively, there also exists a noteworthy literature of voluntaristic hypotheses to explain political stabilization through foreign military intervention. While Shashenkov (1994) notes the positive effects that multilateralism has on establishing political stability in a broad sense, Pei and Kasper (2003) argue that multilateral military interventions are more effective at producing not only political stability but also stable democracy. In spite of its unilateral military intervention in Germany, however, the United States was nevertheless effective in establishing lasting democratic stability, while the coalition intervention in Iraq failed to produce comparable results. Another common hypothesis is that longer foreign military interventions are more effective in establishing democratic stability (Bellin, 2004; Dobbins *et al.*, 2003; Pei *et al.*, 2004). This logic may apply to cases like the Australian-led intervention in East Timor, which took seven years to stabilize the target state's democratic regime, but it does not explain others like the South African-Botswanan intervention in Lesotho, which effectively stabilized the democracy of the target state in a matter of months. Lastly, still others argue that the key to post-conflict political stability lies in the intervening power's creation of an indigenous police force in the target state to maintain security after intervening forces withdraw (Chivvis & Davis, 2011; Perito, 2008). Though it is common practice for the United States to establish indigenous police forces following military intervention, there is considerable variation in outcomes, with positive cases like the successful post-intervention police force created in Bosnia as well as negative cases like the ultimately unsuccessful one created in Somalia.

While none of the aforementioned explanations of political stabilization through foreign military intervention claim to be deterministic and therefore cannot be falsified by a single or even several contradictory cases, the negative empirical examples listed above suggest that there may be explanatory variables absent from the extant literature on foreign military intervention and political stability. Therefore, the following section aims not to reject existing theories but rather to propose how the social variable of nation-building and the voluntaristic variable of state-building, as discussed below, could contribute to developing a theory of foreign military intervention and political stability that fills a gap in the extant literature.

## 2.2 Towards a Socio-Voluntaristic Theory of Foreign Military Intervention and Political Stability

Besides conflicting hypotheses regarding why some foreign military interventions are effective in establishing political stability, one of the main theoretical debates within the pertinent literature revolves around the concepts of nation-building and state-building. Berger (2006) positions himself among those who make no distinction between the two and defines "nation-building (or state-building) [as] an externally driven, or facilitated, attempt to form or consolidate a stable, and sometimes democratic, government over an internationally recognised national territory", adding that "nation-building and state-building can encompass formal military occupation, counter-insurgency, peacekeeping, national reconstruction, foreign aid and the use of stabilisation forces" (6). Hussaini (2021), on the other hand, avoids treating the concepts interchangeably and explains that "nation-building is used in line with creating and developing [...] sustainable national identity, pride, integrity, and national solidarity" as well as "links among ethnic and linguistic groupings" in a given society while "state-building has some fundamental components such as increasing and developing political potentials [...], developing national and functional potentials [...], and developing the institutional and bureaucratic potentials" of a given state (530-531).

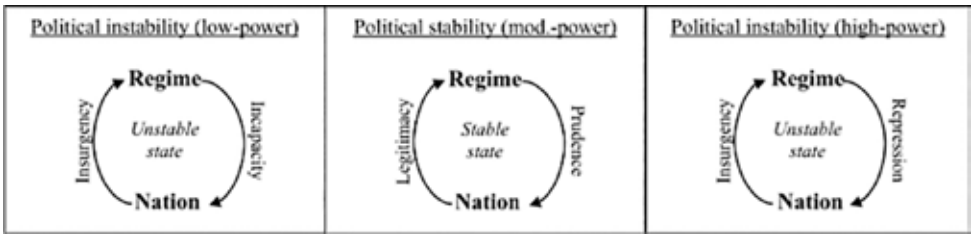
Acknowledging the difference between nation-building and state-building is essential for developing a clear view of state formation, which is then necessary for developing a holistic theory of political stabilization through foreign military intervention. Drawing on the works of Anderson (1991) and Gellner (1983), respectively, Wimmer and Feinstein (2010) observe that classic theories of nation-state formation are either bottom-up, meaning that nascent "nationalism leads to nation-building and eventually a nation-state", or top-down, meaning that "nationalists form nation-states that then build their nations" (767). Likewise, Wendt (1999) distinguishes between the two prevailing conceptions of the state—"state-as-society", which corresponds to the bottom-up view of state formation, and "state-as-actor", which corresponds to the top-down view—but expands on the classic dichotomy with a third conception, which he calls "state-as-structure" (199-202). This conception of the state is neither bottom-up nor top-down but rather constitutive, meaning that it views the state as the structure that binds the

nation and the regime into a single and interdependent whole.

While some scholars like Brownlee (2007) contend that regime endurance can be achieved when ruling parties create coalitions of political elites without necessarily taking into consideration the legitimacy of the nation, such regimes are only stable so long as elites are satisfied with the status quo and tend to destabilize when elite rivalries begin to emerge. The present study therefore concedes with the constitutive view that a stable state is dependent on a relationship of mutual reciprocity between the nation, which supports the regime by providing legitimacy, and the regime, which supports the nation by performing political functions. Hence, foreign military intervention is effective in establishing political stability in target states that undergo a process of nation-building before the intervention, since nation-building creates a sense of cohesion within society that serves as a necessary foundation for legitimate political order. Rather than attempting to perform nation-building on behalf of the target state—a usually lengthy task that is difficult to conduct successfully within the limited timeframe of a military intervention—the intervening power is instead more likely to be effective in establishing political stability where indigenous nation-building has already occurred. State-building through foreign military intervention is therefore a top-down effort on the part of the intervening power that relies on prior indigenous nation-building for its success.

Once the military intervention's short-term objective of regime maintenance or regime change in the target state is achieved, the intervening power must support the resulting regime until it is able to consolidate sufficient legitimacy from the nation to uphold political stability independently. Figure 1 illustrates a constitutive conception of the state and proposes an original typology of political stability that is based on the nature of the regime-nation relationship. On one extreme, foreign military intervention can produce political instability that results from excessively weak low-power regimes, which lack legitimacy due to their incapacity to perform the political functions expected of them by the nation. Finding that a regime's capacity to efficiently deliver public goods and services, particularly in cooperation with broad sectors of society, is the most significant marker for its stability, Fjelde and de Soysa (2009) conclude that "where government is organizationally weak, it invites sub-national actors to use force to further their agendas and challenge state authority through violence", adding that "administratively weak states reduce the relative cost of organizing rebellion" (8). In target states where a low-power regime loses its legitimacy due to incapacity, the national reaction is an insurgency to replace it with a higher-power regime in order to restore legitimacy and stabilize the state.

Figure 1: Typology of political stability in target state of intervention




Source: original figure created by author

On the other extreme, foreign military intervention can also produce political instability that results from excessively strong high-power regimes, which lack legitimacy due to their repression of broad sectors of society that play an influential role in the nation. Understanding that a regime is most stable when its strength does not exceed the nation's threshold of tolerance for the state's coercive capacity, Andersen *et al.* (2014) observe that "states with high degrees of monopoly on violence can temporarily create public order by containing anti-systemic forces or by enforcing martial law. But if regime stability only hinges on repressive means—rather than on some form of legitimacy—it may trigger mass-based uprisings against the regime" (1307). In target states where a high-power regime loses its legitimacy due to repression, the national reaction is an insurgency to replace it with a lower-power regime in an effort to restore legitimacy and stabilize the state.

While foreign military intervention can produce political instability by installing either excessively weak low-power or excessively strong high-power regimes, it can also produce political stability by installing moderate-power regimes, which earn the nation's legitimacy by acting prudently to fulfill their functional expectations like providing services and maintaining security in a way that is compatible with the national tolerance for the state's coercive capacity. Arguing that the stability of both democratic and nondemocratic regimes is primarily determined by their ability to earn the legitimacy of the nation, Burnell (2006) concludes that "many autocracies can—do—enjoy some measure of legitimacy among social groups or strata even while they may possess no legitimacy at all among other subjects, a fact that is conveniently overlooked by much present day talk about democracy as a world value" (548). In other words, regardless of the type of regime that the intervening power aims to install in the target state, its primary preoccupation must be to ensure that the regime is neither so weak and low-power that it is incapable of performing the political functions expected of it by the nation or so strong and high-power that it represses broad sectors of society that play an influential role in the nation.

## 2.3 Hypotheses

This study draws primarily on system-level approaches to the causes of foreign military intervention. Such approaches

follow the offensive realist understanding that regional powers have a rational interest in maintaining political stability within their spheres of influence and so view instances of instability as motives for military intervention with the goal of establishing long-term stability in the target state. Though the short-term objective of a foreign military intervention is to bring an end to the immediate source of instability, typically a domestic conflict between the regime and an insurgency within the target state, the long-term objective is to establish lasting political stability. For this reason, intervening powers must choose either to support the existing regime in an effort to maintain it in power or to support the insurgency in order to change the regime and then maintain the new regime in power. While achieving the short-term objective depends primarily on the military capabilities of the intervening power, achieving the long-term objective is the result of the post-conflict process of political engineering referred to as state-building. During this process the intervening power must install a regime that is neither so weak and low-power that it fails to perform its political functions nor so strong and high-power that it represses broad sectors of the nation and loses its legitimacy. However, the intervening power's ability to install a regime that is able to maintain political stability independently after the withdrawal of intervening forces is dependent on the pre-intervention experience of nation-building, a lengthy process that produces the social cohesion necessary for the legitimation of a common political order. Thus, the holistic theory of the present study is built, firstly, on a social hypothesis that explains the effect of national preconditions in the target state on the outcome of foreign military intervention and, secondly, on a voluntaristic hypothesis that explains the effect of actions taken by the intervening power:

*H1: There exists a positive linear relationship between pre-intervention nation-building and political stability.*

*H2: There exists a curvilinear relationship between post-intervention regime power and political stability.*

# 3. Methodology

The following section addresses several methodological considerations necessary for conducting the present study. The section begins by operationalizing the dependent variable of political stability and conceptualizing foreign military intervention as a scope condition for case selection. It then proceeds to outline a research design that is most compatible with the ontological assumptions of the study. The section concludes by addressing the sources of data used in the analysis of the selected cases.

## 3.1 Variables and Case Selection

As previously mentioned, to operationalize the dependent variable of this study it is important to recognize the distinction between the outcome of political stability and the related yet ultimately different outcomes of democratization, human rights, and civil conflict because each outcome must be measured according to theoretically appropriate indicators. This study adopts a broad operationalization of political stability based on a set of indicators first introduced by Hurwitz (1973) and

further developed by Eli Margolis (2010): peacefulness (absence of violent conflict), structural continuity (absence of regime change or irregular transformation of government), patterned political behavior (absence of geopolitical realignment), and control (ability to exercise sovereignty over the whole of state territory). By treating the presence of all four indicators as necessary and sufficient conditions for observing political stability in the target state, the present study proposes a robust measurement of the dependent variable that is triangulated to include indicators pertinent to the three outcomes commonly studied in the literature on foreign military intervention (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). Therefore, cases will be coded as experiencing political instability if any of the aforementioned indicators are violated. For instance, the occurrence of a violent coup in a target state would violate the indicators of peacefulness and structural continuity while a bloodless coup would only violate the indicator of structural continuity, but in either case the country would be coded as having experienced political instability.

After operationalizing the dependent variable of political stability, it is also necessary to conceptualize foreign military intervention as a scope condition for case selection. In her study of how "foreign subversion" affects political stability, Lee (2020) considers only covert instances of foreign intervention like the intervening power's use of proxy forces in the target state. Conversely, Pei and Kasper (2003) provide a much broader definition of foreign military intervention by essentially defining it as any use of a state's military power abroad. In their study of foreign military intervention, they include engagements like one-time retaliatory strikes, the defense of allies under attack, the rescue of citizens abroad, humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping missions, covert operations, proxy wars, and conventional wars. Such a broad definition is inadequate for the purposes of the present study because it includes military operations that may not require the official involvement of the intervening power and whose objectives may be other than establishing political stability. This study, therefore, adopts a more limited conceptualization akin to the one proposed in Sullivan and Koch's (2009) Military Intervention by Powerful States (MIPS) dataset, which describes military intervention as "a use of armed force that involves the official deployment of at least 500 regular military personnel (ground, air, or naval) to attain immediate-term political objectives through action against a foreign adversary" (709). The conceptualization of this study thus excludes cases of one-time retaliatory strikes, covert operations, and proxy wars from consideration as cases of foreign military intervention as well as cases whose primary objectives are military, like territorial conquest, rather than political, such as the stabilization of a sovereign state. One notable departure from Sullivan and Koch's conceptualization is that, while it includes cases of intrastate military intervention conducted in secessionist territories, this study only examines cases of strictly foreign military intervention.

The aforementioned conceptualization of foreign military intervention significantly restricts the number of cases of United States military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean available for study. Since the case selection criteria exclude covert interventions, operations like the CIA's involvement in the overthrow

of Salvador Allende in Chile are excluded from this study. Moreover, because the United States' war against Mexico was an irridentist campaign waged to conquer Mexico's northern territories rather than a military intervention conducted to establish political stability in a sovereign state—and because the military campaigns conducted in the Caribbean in the 19th century were either aimed at non-state actors like pirates or the colonies of rival European powers—the first cases of United States military intervention that fit the aforementioned selection criteria appear in the 20th century following the end of the Spanish-American War. Therefore, in order to maintain internal validity and avoid concept stretching, this study identifies the following universe of nine cases of United States military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean: Panama I (1903-1925), Cuba (1906-1922), Nicaragua (1909-1933), Dominican Republic I (1912-1924), Haiti I (1915-1934), Dominican Republic II (1965-1966), Grenada (1983-1985), Panama II (1989-1994), and Haiti II (1994-1997).[2] Here, it is important to note that the most recent United States military intervention in Haiti, conducted in 2004, is not included in the study, as it was immediately followed by a United Nations peacekeeping mission that maintained political stability until the end of its mandate in 2019, thus obscuring the effects of the United States military intervention.

## 3.2 Research Design

Since the study of foreign military intervention has traditionally been conducted within the field of International Relations, previous research has strongly emphasized external validity and nomothetic theory-building, as reflected in the proliferation of statistical regression analyses that take what Goertz and Mahoney (2012) describe as an "effects-of-causes" approach to testing correlations between variables across large numbers of cases irrespective of their geographic contexts (41). Such an approach, however, is based on certain ontological assumptions—namely unit homogeneity and case independence—that are not always appropriate in the study of long-term historical processes (Hall, 2003). The reasons for this are illustrated by Ragin's (2014) example of why the Russian revolution of 1917 was successful whereas the revolution of 1905 was not, as "one obvious key difference between Russia in 1917 and Russia in 1905 is the simple fact that 1917 Russia had already experienced 1905 Russia, whereas 1905 Russia had not" (38). Reasoning by analogy, and considering that this study examines cases of intervention that occurred within the same target state at different points in time, the present study cannot assume that target state contexts remain homogenous after periods of several decades or that a target state's experience with one foreign military intervention has no effect on its experience with a subsequent intervention.

Such an ontological break with the research cultural traditionally dedicated to the study of foreign military intervention requires a more compatible

2. For a complete list of United States foreign military interventions accompanied by pertinent dates, descriptions, and objectives, see Congressional Research Service (2022).

methodological approach in the form of a small-N qualitative research design akin to what Moore (1966) and Skocpol (1979) refer to as "comparative historical analysis" and what Hall (2003) calls "systematic process analysis", which "examines the processes unfolding in the cases at hand as well as the outcomes in those cases" and in which the "causal theories to be tested are interrogated for the predictions they contain about how events will unfold" (393-394). Having identified a universe of nine cases that fit the conceptual criteria for case selection outlined above, this study examines the entire universe to maximize the number of observations and so avoid issues of selection bias like cherry-picking or selecting on the dependent variable (King *et al.*, 1994). While the idiographic nature of the present study inevitably results in what George and Bennett (2005) describe as the "tension between achieving high internal validity and good historical explanations of particular cases versus making generalizations that apply to broad populations", the fact that this study is exclusively focused on Central America and the Caribbean—the region that has historically constituted the United States' most direct sphere of influence and the one in which the United States has the longest record of conducting military interventions—means that the sample of cases includes a balanced mix of three target states in which the United States conducted only a single intervention and three target states in which the United States conducted a second intervention after a period of several decades (22). Therefore, while the research design of this study may not be appropriate for determining the average effect of numerous explanatory variables on the dependent variable of political stability, its inferential advantage lies in the combination of cross-case comparison and within-case analysis, an approach that is better suited for uncovering causal variables that are both necessary and sufficient for an outcome to occur (George & Bennett, 2005, 18; Goertz, 2017, 89).

## 3.3 Sources of Data

With regards to data collection, this study adopts Skocpol's (1979) strategy to conducting comparative historical research, which draws its empirical evidence "almost entirely from 'secondary sources'—that is, from research monographs and syntheses already published in book or journal-article form by the relevant historical or culture-area specialists". This is because the task of comparative historical analysis "lies not in revealing new data about particular aspects of the large time periods and diverse places surveyed in the comparative study, but rather in establishing the interest and prima facie validity of an overall argument about causal regularities across the various historical cases" (xiv). Examining the hypothesized relationship between pre-intervention nation-building, post-intervention state-building, and political stability requires, firstly, data about the development of nationalism in the target states and, secondly, data about how the interventions were conducted in terms of military execution and political engineering. Records of both nation-building in the target states as well as detailed accounts of United States military interventions are made available by various sources in the historical literature, but it is particularly noteworthy to highlight the work of the Federal Research Division

of the United States Library of Congress, which publishes comprehensive *Country Studies* based on both primary and secondary source material, as well as the Congressional Research Service, which compiles descriptive lists of all United States military deployments abroad.

## 4. Findings

The subsequent comparative historical analysis examines the effectiveness of foreign military intervention in establishing political stability. To test this study's social hypothesis that predicts a positive linear relationship between pre-intervention nation-building and political stability and the voluntaristic hypothesis that predicts a curvilinear relationship between post-intervention regime power and political stability, the historical analysis examines each case of foreign military intervention with a particular focus on the presence of nation-building in the target state before intervention as well as the level of power bestowed upon the regime in the target state through intervention.

Figure 2 presents an overview of the universe of nine cases of United States foreign military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. The table lists each target state and proceeds to identify the indicators of political stability that were violated before the intervention. Although the present study includes patterned political behavior (absence of geopolitical realignment) and control (ability to exercise sovereignty over the whole of state territory) as indicators of political stability, the persistent violation of structural continuity (absence of regime change or irregular transformation of government) and peacefulness (absence of violent conflict) reflects the region's

Figure 2: Cases of United States Foreign Military Intervention and Effects on Political Stability

| Target State | Indicator of Political Stability Violated Before Intervention | Intervention Year | Indicator of Political Stability Violated After Intervention | Instability Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Panama I | Patterned political alignment, peacefulness | 1903-1925 | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1931 |
| Cuba | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1906-1922 | Structural continuity | 1933 |
| Nicaragua | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1909-1933 | Structural continuity | 1936 |
| Dominican Republic I | Structural continuity | 1912-1924 | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1930 |
| Haiti I | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1915-1934 | Structural continuity | 1946 |
| Dominican Republic II | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1965-1966 | - | - |
| Grenada | Patterned political alignment, structural continuity, peacefulness | 1983-1985 | - | - |
| Panama II | Peacefulness | 1989-1994 | - | - |
| Haiti II | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 1994-1997 | Structural continuity, peacefulness | 2004 |

Source: original figure created by author

proclivity for coups and political violence. After listing the years in which the United States military intervention occurred, the table also reveals which—if any—indicators of political stability were violated after the intervention and in which year the instability occurred.

The findings of the historical analysis reveal three distinct pathways in terms of political stability as an outcome of foreign military intervention. First, Cuba and Nicaragua both experienced interventions that failed to establish political stability during the first wave of United States military intervention in the early 20th century. Second, Panama and the Dominican Republic also experienced interventions that failed to establish political stability during the first wave, but both states along with Grenada nevertheless experienced interventions that did establish political stability during the second wave in the late 20th century. Finally, Haiti is an outlier in which United States military intervention failed to establish political stability in both the first and second waves.

## 4.1 First Wave Failures: Cuba and Nicaragua

Both Cuba and Nicaragua experienced failed United States military interventions that did not establish political stability during the first wave in the early 20th century. After defeating Spain in the war of 1898, the United States occupied Cuba militarily before granting it independence in 1902, when Tomas Estrada Palma was elected as the country's first president. Although prominent nationalists like Jose Marti had tried to unify the country by promoting a shared Cuban identity, the newly independent country was deeply divided along ideological and racial lines. Thus, when accusations of electoral fraud sparked controversy around Estrada Palma's re-election for a second term in 1906, the result was a period of partisan violence known as the August War, in which Estrada Palma was overthrown and replaced by members of the liberal opposition. In response to the violence

Figure 3: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in Cuba

| CUBA | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1906 Coup*<br>**1906-1922 US Intervention**<br>1922-1933 Democracy<br>*1933 Coup* | |
| **High-Power Regime** | 1933-1959 Dictatorship<br>*1959 Coup* | 1959-present Dictatorship |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | | |

Source: original figure created by author

and instability, the United States first intervened militarily in Cuba between 1906 and 1909 to oversee the election of president Jose Miguel Gomez in 1908, whose administration was challenged by a racial uprising led by the Independent Colored Association, resulting in a subsequent dispatch of United States forces to oversee the election of president Mario Garcia Menocal in 1912 (Hudson, 2002). However, yet another liberal uprising in 1917 prompted the United States to respond with a longer occupying force that would remain in Cuba until 1922. Shortly before its withdrawal, the United States oversaw the election of president Alfredo Zayas y Alonso with the aim of leaving Cuba under stable democratic rule, but the regime's apparent corruption and economic mismanagement, combined with "the inability of Cuban society to absorb all university graduates accentuated the feelings of frustration in a generation that found itself with little opportunity to apply its acquired knowledge" (Hudson, 2002, 39). A series of student protests from 1922 to 1930 posed a direct challenge to the government, and frustration eventually spread to other sectors of society, culminating in a bloodless military coup in 1933.

As shown in Figure 3, the dictatorial regime of Fulgencio Batista that replaced the weak low-power democratic regime established through United States military intervention was significantly higher-power and ruled through considerably more repressive means, ultimately leading to its overthrow by Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement in 1959. A fervent Cuban nationalist, Castro made it the mission of his own high-power regime to overcome the country's ideological, racial, and class divisions. As Hudson (2002) writes, "like Marti had done years earlier, Castro lectured the Cubans on the evils of their society and the need for profound and rapid changes. The overwhelming majority of the Cubans accepted his leadership enthusiastically" (64).

Unlike Cuba, which remained a Spanish colony until 1898, Nicaragua had first separated from Spain as part of Mexico, later from Mexico as one of the United

Figure 4: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in Nicaragua

| NICARAGUA | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1909 Coup*<br>**1909-1933 US Intervention**<br>1933-1936 Democracy<br>*1936 Coup* | |
| **High-Power Regime** | 1936-1979 Dictatorship<br>*1979 Coup* | 1979-present Authoritarian |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | | |

Source: original figure created by author

Provinces of Central America, and finally from the union as an independent state in 1838. Like Cuba, however, any meaningful nation-building was obstructed by partisan fighting between conservative and liberal factions throughout the 19th century. Despite the country's perennial political instability, United States interest in Nicaraguan politics only emerged in the early 20th century amid growing economic connections and the construction of a transisthmian canal in neighboring Panama. Thus, when a multiparty coalition overthrew the authoritarian dictatorship of Jose Santos Zelaya in 1909, the United States intervened militarily to restore order, but due to continued instability it occupied Nicaragua almost continually from 1912 until 1933 (Merrill, 1994). During the intervention, the United States oversaw several elections, the last of which took place in 1932 and resulted in the victory of Juan Bautista Sacasa. In the meantime, United States forces established and trained the Nicaraguan National Guard to maintain domestic security amid constant challenges from partisan militias and armed guerrilla groups, finally transferring command to the Nicaraguan government shortly before their withdrawal. Although the National Guard was intended to be a nonpartisan security force under government control, Merrill (1994) observes that when president "Sacasa's popularity decreased as a result of his poor leadership and accusations of fraud in the 1934 congressional elections", chief director of the National Guard "Somoza Garcia benefited from Sacasa's diminishing power" (25). Having lost considerable public support as well as the loyalty of the National Guard, Sacasa was overthrown by Somoza Garcia in a bloodless coup in 1936.

As shown in Figure 4, the dictatorial regime of Somoza Garcia that replaced the weak low-power democratic regime established through United States military intervention was significantly higher-power and ruled through considerably more repressive means, ultimately leading to its overthrow by Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista National Liberation Front in 1979. Like Castro in Cuba, the Sandinistas—themselves named after the nationalist leader Augusto Cesar Sandino—pursued a policy of nation-building that enjoyed broad popular support in its early years. Although president Ortega lost the election of 1990, the party remained influential in Nicaraguan politics throughout the turn of the century, finally returning to power and re-establishing its authoritarian rule in 2006.

## 4.2 Second Wave Successes: Dominican Republic, Panama, and Grenada

Like Cuba and Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic were also targets of failed United States military interventions during the first wave in the early 20th century, but both states along with Grenada nevertheless experienced interventions that did establish political stability during the second wave in the late 20th century. In response to Colombian opposition to the United States' plan to construct a transisthmian canal across its province of Panama, the United States intervened in support of the Panamanian independence movement, which achieved its goal of complete secession from Colombia in 1903. The subsequent United States occupation of the nominally independent country gave Panama no

time to develop a common national identity. As Meditz & Hanratty (1989) observe, "a two-party system of Liberals and Conservatives was inherited from Colombia, but party labels had even less precise or ideological meaning in Panama than they had in the larger country" and so politics "remained the exclusive preserve of the oligarchy, which tended to be composed of a few wealthy, white families" (24). Growing public resentment of United States control of the canal even after the end of its occupation of the country in 1925 resulted in growing opposition to the pro-American democratic regime established through the intervention. Unable to maintain domestic security without United States military support, the regime was deposed in 1931, beginning a new era in Panamanian politics that was largely dominated by Arnulfo Arias and the nationalist Panamenista Party.

As shown in Figure 5, the new nationalist democratic regime that replaced the weak low-power democracy established through United States military intervention also came to be seen as largely ineffective in meeting public expectations of national development in spite of its initially successful effort to unify Panamanians against United States control of the canal. In 1968, Arias was overthrown by National Guard commander Omar Torrijos, whose nationalist New Panama Movement "worked on building a popular base for his government, forming an alliance among the National Guard and the various sectors of society that had been the objects of social injustice at the hands of the oligarchy, particularly the long-neglected campesinos" and initiated a wave of popular reforms in the areas of agriculture, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989, 45). Despite the stability of the military dictatorship, a skirmish between Panamanian and United States forces around the canal zone in 1989 prompted a military intervention that deposed Torrijos' successor Manuel Noriega. The United States intervention replaced the strong high-power dictatorial

Figure 5: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in Panama

| PANAMA | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1903 Independence*<br>**1903-1925 US Intervention**<br>1925-1931 Democracy<br>*1931 Coup* | 1931-1968 Democracy<br>*1968 Coup* |
| **High-Power Regime** | | 1968-1989 Dictatorship<br>*1989 Violence*<br>**1989-1994 US Intervention** |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | | 1994-present Democracy |

Source: original figure created by author

regime established by Torrijos with a moderate-power democratic regime, which has remained stable to the present day.

After gaining initial independence from Spain, the Dominican Republic was first conquered by neighboring Haiti and then requested to be reincorporated into the Spanish empire before becoming a fully sovereign state in 1865. The lack of a common national identity eventually polarized the country into two personalistic factions: the supporters of Juan Isidro Jimenes, known as jimenistas, and the supporters of Horacio Vasquez, known as horacistas. Economic underdevelopment prompted the Dominican Republic to seek financial assistance from the United States, but as chronic political instability continued between the two groups, the country became increasingly incapable of paying its foreign debts (Metz, 2001). After the first dispatch of United States forces in 1912 proved insufficient to quell the ongoing political violence, the United States increased its military presence and occupied the country from 1916 to 1924. During this time, intervening forces were tasked with maintaining order and training a new Dominican National Guard. Shortly after Vasquez was proclaimed the winner of the 1924 election, United States forces withdrew from the country, leaving the National Guard under the control of the Dominican government. However, "the aging Vasquez governed ineffectively and corruptly, dramatically expanding public employment and extending his term in office by two years" (Metz, 2001, 39). Having lost public support and the loyalty of the newly established National Guard, the democratic regime was deposed in a bloodless coup by commander Rafael Trujillo in 1930.

As shown in Figure 6, the dictatorial regime of Trujillo that replaced the weak low-power democratic regime established through United States military intervention was significantly higher-power and ruled through considerably

Figure 6: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in the Dominican Republic

| DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1912 Coup*<br>**1912-1924 US Intervention**<br>1924-1930 Democracy<br>*1930 Coup* | |
| **High-Power Regime** | | 1930-1961 Dictatorship<br>*1961 Coup*<br>1961-1965 Provisional Gov.<br>*1965 Coup*<br>**1965-1966 US Intervention** |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | | 1966-present Democracy |

Source: original figure created by author

more repressive means, ultimately leading to its overthrow and replacement by a short-lived provisional government. An ardent nationalist, Trujillo used his right-wing Dominican Party to create a sense of national identity and cohesion around traditional Hispanic and Roman Catholic values, often using Haitians as scapegoats for the country's past social and economic problems (Metz, 2001). When the United States intervened again in 1965 amid fears that the recent coup against the provisional government and resulting civil war could provide an opportunity for communist infiltration, it did so with the support of a small contingent of Central and South American allies known as the Inter-American Peace Force (Yates, 2015). In effect, the United States intervention replaced the strong high-power dictatorial regime established by Trujillo with a moderate-power democratic regime. Although the democratic regime was initially dominated by President Joaquin Balaguer and other remnants of the Trujillo era, the election of 1978 resulted in a peaceful transfer of power to the opposition, thus consolidating the democratic regime that has remained stable to the present day (Conaghan & Espinal, 1990).

A British colony until 1974, Grenada was led to sovereignty under the rule of Eric Matthew Gairy and the Grenada United Labour Party. Although independent, Grenadians had yet to form a cohesive national identity, as "the most successful electoral challenge to Gairy between 1951 and 1979 was posed by Herbert Blaize's Grenada National Party (GNP) in 1962, mainly on the issue of union with Trinidad and Tobago", which cost Blaize "a large measure of prestige and credibility when Trinidad failed to follow through on the proposal" (Meditz & Hanratty, 1989a, 348). Blaming Gairy's government for economic stagnation and underdevelopment in Grenada, Maurice Bishop and his followers in the New Jewel Movement staged a coup while Gairy was on a visit to the United Nations in 1979 (Kinzer, 2006). Inspired and supported by the Castro regime in Cuba, the New Jewel Movement initiated a process of nation-building, propagating the revolutionary

Figure 7: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in Grenada

| GRENADA | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1974 Independence*<br>1974-1979 Democracy<br>*1979 Coup* | |
| **High-Power Regime** | | 1979-1983 Dictatorship<br>*1989 Coup*<br>**1983-1985 US Intervention** |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | | 1985-present Democracy |

Source: original figure created by author

ideals of black power and anti-imperialism while simultaneously introducing "social reforms such as free secondary education, a free milk program for children, adult literacy programs, increased trade union rights, equal pay for equal work, promotion of non-traditional work for women, and public health care" (Sharpe, 1993, 50). By 1983, however, ideological differences within the regime led to the ouster of Bishop by a more radical faction of the New Jewel Movement, a series of violent purges, and the imposition of martial law. Fearing that the regime's radical faction would consolidate power with support from Cuba, the United States and a contingent from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States intervened in Grenada from 1983 to 1985, removing the New Jewel Movement from power, replacing the army with a civilian police force, and overseeing democratic elections.

As shown in Figure 7, the dictatorial regime of the New Jewel Movement that replaced the weak low-power democratic regime established under British rule was significantly higher-power and ruled through considerably more repressive means, especially after the ouster of Bishop by radical party rivals. The moderate-power democracy established through United States military intervention saw the return of Herbert Blaize, whose New National Party recognized the effects of nation-building in Grenada and abandoned its previous proposals to forfeit Grenadian sovereignty, thus becoming the first ruling party in a democratic regime that has remained stable until the present day.

## 4.3 Second Wave Failure: Haiti

Sharing the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, the history of Haiti is closely tied to that of its neighbor. After gaining its independence from France in 1804, Haiti conquered the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo in 1822 and ruled over a unified Hispaniola until the Dominicans successfully revolted in 1843. The loss of Santo Domingo constitutes a decisive turning point for Haiti, as "the period between 1843 and 1915 was marked by a pattern of political instability and struggle in which a succession of incompetent or brutal leaders came and went rapidly and violently. Of the twenty-two heads of state between 1843 and 1915, only one served out his prescribed term in office" (Metz, 2001, 276). During this time, the primary source of division in Haitian politics and society was ethnic rivalry between the Liberal Party, which represented the country's mulatto population, and the National Party of black Haitians. Like in the Dominican Republic, underdevelopment in Haiti made the country largely dependent on foreign aid from the United States, but chronic instability hindered its ability to pay pending debts. Thus, after a wave of political violence and another coup in 1915, the United States began an intervention that would last until 1934. During this time, United States forces established and trained the Haitian National Guard and oversaw elections, which were consistently won by light-skinned mulatto candidates. After the United States' withdrawal, continued mulatto dominance of the political system combined with corruption and economic underperformance resulted in the loss of support from the National Guard, which took power in a bloodless coup in 1946

and called for new elections, finally opening the political system to black Haitians.

As shown in Figure 8, the new democratic regime that replaced the weak low-power democracy established through United States military intervention also came to be seen as largely ineffective in meeting public expectations of national development despite being inclusive to Haiti's black majority. Thus, when Francois Duvalier was elected president in 1956, he promised to end the country's problems with weak government by dismantling democratic institutions and establishing a high-power personalistic dictatorship. However, as Metz (2001) notes, "the social and economic liabilities of the Francois Duvalier government far outweighed its marginal benefits [...] Religious and racial tensions increased as a result of Duvalier's endorsement of voodoo and his support for the black urban middle class at the expense of the mulatto elite" (289-290). Thus, when the Duvalier regime was overthrown in a bloodless coup in 1986, Haiti was just as divided and underdeveloped as it had been before the dictatorship, resulting in a short-lived democratic government that also succumbed to a coup in 1991. News of widespread violence against protesters prompted the United Nations to authorize the United States to intervene with the assistance of Poland and Argentina in 1994 (Beardslee, 1996). During the intervention, the United States demobilized the Haitian military and replaced it with a civilian police force before overseeing new elections that restored the country's previous democratic

Figure 8: Chronology of Nation-Building and Regime Power in Haiti

| HAITI | Nation-Building (NO) | Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Low-Power Regime** | *1915 Coup*<br>**1915-1934 US Intervention**<br>1934-1946 Democracy<br>*1946 Coup*<br>1946-1956 Democracy<br>*1956 Coup* | |
| **High-Power Regime** | 1956-1986 Dictatorship<br>*1986 Coup* | |
| **Moderate-Power Regime** | 1986-1991 Democracy<br>*1991 Coup*<br>**1994-1997 US Intervention**<br>1997-2004 Democracy<br>*2004 Coup*<br>**2004-2019 US Intervention**<br>2019-present Democracy | |

Source: original figure created by author

government. In 1995, the United States transferred command of the operation to a United Nations peacekeeping force, which remained in Haiti until 1997. Still unable to unite the country under a common political order, the democratic regime was once again deposed by armed rebel groups in 2004, this time prompting a brief United States military intervention that was immediately replaced by a United Nations peacekeeping mission, which remained in the country until the end of its mandate in 2019.

## 4.4 Discussion

Figure 9 situates the empirical findings of this study within the socio-voluntaristic theoretical framework on which the study is based. The findings support the theory that foreign military intervention is effective in establishing political stability if nation-building in the target state occurs before the foreign military intervention (*hypothesis 1*) and if the intervening power installs a regime that is not too weak and low-power to perform its political functions (*hypothesis 2*). Indeed, the five cases that experienced no pre-intervention nation-building and the establishment of a low-power regime through intervention (Panama I, Cuba, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic I, Haiti I) as well as the case that experienced no pre-intervention nation-building and the establishment of a moderate-power regime (Haiti II) resulted in the shortest periods of political stability following intervention. On the other hand, the remaining cases that did experience pre-intervention nation-building and the establishment of a moderate-power regime (Dominican Republic II, Grenada, Panama II) resulted in considerably

Figure 9: The Socio-Voluntaristic Theory of Intervention and Empirical Findings[3]

| HYPOTHESES | Pre-Intervention Nation-Building (NO) | Pre-Intervention Nation-Building (YES) |
|---|---|---|
| **Post-Intervention Regime (Low-Power)** | Panama I *(6)*<br>Cuba *(11)*<br>Nicaragua *(3)*<br>Dominican Republic I *(6)*<br>Haiti I *(12)* | |
| **Post-Intervention Regime (High-Power)** | | |
| **Post-Intervention Regime (Moderate-Power)** | Haiti II *(7)* | Dominican Republic II *(56+)*<br>Grenada *(37+)*<br>Panama II *(28+)* |

Source: original figure created by author

3. Numbers in parentheses indicate the years of uninterrupted political stability that each country experienced after the intervention, with addition signs (+) signifying that political stability continues uninterrupted to the present day.

longer periods of political stability that continue to the present day. While these findings confirm the social hypothesis that there exists a positive linear relationship between pre-intervention nation-building and political stability and support the voluntaristic hypothesis that moderate-power regimes established through foreign military intervention are more stable than low-power regimes, the lack of any high-power regimes established through United States intervention makes it impossible to completely confirm the initially hypothesized curvilinear relationship between post-intervention regime power and political stability (i.e. that moderate-power regimes are more stable than both low-power and high-power regimes).

The findings of this study also challenge existing explanations from the extant literature, at least in their application to cases of United States foreign military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. For example, the aforementioned structural and institutional literature suggests that parliamentary regimes are more stable than presidential ones (Przeworski *et al.*, 1996), previous experience with democracy determines future political stability (Dobbins *et al.*, 2003), and recently independent states are more likely to return to civil war (Levy & Thompson, 2010). However, the case of Grenada, which had an unstable parliamentary regime prior to the United States intervention, shows that the types of democratic institutions in a target state are not primarily responsible for its political stability. Previous experience with democracy is not an adequate determinant of political stability either, as all the target states experienced some degree of democratic rule prior to the first wave of United States intervention, and all subsequently returned to instability. As for the association between recent independence and civil war, Grenada did not return to domestic conflict after the United States intervention in spite of its relatively short history as a sovereign state, while the Dominican Republic fought a civil war a century after gaining its independence.

Similarly, existing voluntaristic hypotheses argue that multilateral interventions (Pei & Kasper, 2003; Shashenkov, 1994), long military occupations (Bellin, 2004; Dobbins *et al.*, 2003; Pei *et al.*, 2004), and efforts to create indigenous police forces (Chivvis & Davis, 2011; Perito, 2008) are positively associated with political stability in the target state. Although the multilateral interventions in the Dominican Republic II and Grenada did establish political stability, multilateralism nevertheless failed to produce the same effect in Haiti II. Interestingly, the length of military occupation actually appears to have a negative effect on political stability in the cases examined in the present study, as the failed first wave interventions of the early 20th century tended be much longer than the successful second wave interventions of the late 20th century. Finally, the creation of indigenous police forces, which was a common practice in the first wave interventions that created National Guards in the target states, also failed to establish political stability in the absence of regimes strong enough to maintain control over them.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study and its findings challenge the structural and exclusively

voluntaristic approaches to understanding the effectiveness of foreign military intervention in establishing political stability. Instead, the socio-voluntaristic perspective of the present study suggests that the effectiveness of foreign military intervention is dependent on both pre-existing social conditions in the target state as well as actions taken by the intervening power during the intervention. Specifically, foreign military intervention is effective in establishing political stability in target states that experience a process of nation-building before the intervention and in target states where the post-intervention regime is neither so low-power that it is incapable of performing the political functions expected of it by the nation or so high-power that it represses broad sectors of society that play an influential role in the nation. These findings come with implications for both scholars of military intervention and foreign policymakers. Firstly, while the fields of Comparative Politics and International Relations have produced distinct approaches to studying foreign military intervention and political stability, this study shows why some questions require researchers to bridge the theoretical and methodological gaps between the two fields. Secondly, while foreign policymakers may have an innate tendency to be directed by voluntaristic approaches to planning and conducting foreign military interventions, taking social considerations into account is also crucial for understanding not only how but also where and when foreign military interventions are likely to establish political stability.

Although idiographic in its focus on United States foreign military intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, this study prioritizes maintaining deep internal validity over broadening external validity. Of course, this is not to say that more generalizable findings cannot be pursued in future research on foreign military intervention and political stability. By maintaining the same case selection criteria and the same set of indicators of political stability, the theoretical framework developed in this study can similarly be applied to cases of United States intervention in other regions as well as to cases of foreign military intervention by other great powers. Indeed, it should be taken for granted that the final objective of any theory of foreign military intervention is not only to explain United States military intervention or democratic military intervention, but to explain the phenomenon as broadly as possible. While this study admittedly falls short of achieving that objective, it hopefully makes a step in the right direction by proposing a holistic theoretical framework around which future research can be designed.

Although United States foreign policymakers have shifted their focus away from Central America and the Caribbean since the end of the Cold War (Grass, 2022), the second administration of President Donald Trump has decidedly renewed interest in the region. Prompted by transnational issues like mass migration and illicit drug trafficking, the current Trump administration has assumed a more active role in Latin American politics. Notably, it has ordered a series of military strikes against alleged drug smugglers in the Caribbean Sea as well as approved "covert CIA actions inside Venezuela and threatened to carry out military strikes inside the country, escalating tensions between Caracas and Washington" (CFR Editors, 2025). With the possibility of

foreign military intervention apparently on the table, the current administration should exercise caution and learn from history before conducting any operations that may satisfy short-term policy objectives at the expense of undermining long-term political stability in the region.

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